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Learner-centredness, Gender and English Language Acquisition

In Omani Higher Education

Mahmoud Sid Ahmed AbuOaf

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield

in partial fulfilment of

the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Education and Professional Development

The University of Huddersfield

June 2020

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Acknowledgements

By the Grace of Almighty Allah, I have been blessed to complete this research.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof Ann Harris for her excellent support, guidance and encouragement over the course of this research study. Her constructive feedback and tutorials have been highly appreciated. I also extend my gratitude and appreciation to my second supervisor, Prof Pete Sanderson for his helpful comments and support all over the time of this research study. A special mention and thanks to Dr Wayne Bailey for his support, discussions and guidance when I was in need.

My thanks must go to all my colleagues and friends in the research office for their discussion, arguments and sharing their experiences, which have been informative and useful. My sincere thanks are also extended to the staff in the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield for their academic and technical help without which this thesis would have been difficult to finish.

My deepest gratitude is to my brothers, sisters and all extended family for their unconditional support and encouragement to pursue my study. Thanks are also extended to my wife and children for their patience during the period of this research. I am also deeply grateful to the Omani educational authorities.

Finally, I am very grateful to all participants for their help and contribution to this study in the difficult times of the data collection process.

Abstract

This study develops an analysis of gender performativity in an Omani higher education learner-centred English classroom. Its premise is that the aim of education is to foster personal growth, development and equality of all students, including females, and that the classroom should be the site where this aim is fulfilled. Gender⁶ research has provided evidence of inequalities of female participation in this domain, particularly in non-Western environments. This thesis addresses the classroom context to analyse students' discursive practices and the challenges and struggles they experience in classrooms. The study draws on the theoretical contributions of Butler and Foucault to illuminate the experiences of these learners. One class provides a detailed case study, and data was triangulated by using: semi-structured interviews with both males and females; students' reflective diaries; classroom observation and participant observation field notes. The thesis explores how reiterations of specific discursive practices produce classroom gender inequalities, rooted within the wider Omani society and patriarchal cultural mores, and then goes on to analyse the effect of a classroom tailored intervention designed to support female students' participation. This involved both female and male students being encouraged to challenge behaviour and interrogate practice in order to address daily classroom issues that arose when students interacted either with each other or with their teacher. The intervention comprised explicit teaching sessions of metacognitive strategies that facilitated students' transformation even when female students, affected by constraining social norms, were rendered 'unintelligible.' The research indicates that it is this

very 'unintelligibility' which enables their transformation. The thesis adds depth to an understanding of how students' identities are performatively constituted in the classroom, and how gendered behaviour might be confronted even within a traditional patriarchal society.

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List of Abbreviations

CoP	Communities of Practice
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
IT	Information Technology
L2	Second Language
MOE	Ministry of Education
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TL	Transformative learning
F	Female
M	Male

Chapter One: Introduction to the study

1.1. Introduction

This study addresses the issue of female learner identities in an Omani tertiary learner-centred English language classroom as its substantive area. My concern is to build bridges between classroom discursive practices, the sociology of education and the theorisation of participants' identities. Butler's (1997a) performativity theory and Foucault's (1988) theory of disciplinary power are used to guide the analysis process. Some of the conceptual categories that are focused on are: gender, female, learner, Omani, Arab, Muslim, patriarchal power, culture, metacognitive ability and 'thinking outside the box' (see section 4.5). A key feature of this study is to explore and understand the discursive practices of such categories and their effects on the participants' learning.

This chapter aims to provide a description of the context in which this study has been conducted. It highlights the key concepts that are included in the study and outlines the specific characteristics of the Omani context.

1.2. Origin of study

My interest in this study sprung from my concerns and worries as a teacher within a higher education environment about unequal gendered power relations and the unequal learning opportunities that female students encounter in their classroom daily life in Oman and similar contexts. By conducting this study, I aimed to address these issues and also to investigate whether an intervention can be designed to deal transformatively with such gender issues and other emergent learning

problems. While involved in this doctoral study, I explored different aspects related to the domain of education in general and to English language teaching (ELT) in particular. This spurred my interest in the study even further, and I became increasingly engaged in the sociology of education and issues associated with students' learning, classroom discursive practices and discourse analysis, gender identity and the ways in which students' discursive agencies emerge.

The topics that this first chapter introduces are:

- o Background of the study
- o Wider Omani social and cultural context
- o The Omani educational context and educational system
- o English language teaching in the foundation programme at the College of Distinction (the pseudonym of the study context)
- o Purpose and questions of the study
- o Significance of the study
- o Rationale

1.3. Background of the study

There are two approaches to the teaching/learning process generally identified in the literature: learner-centredness and teacher-centredness (Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor, 1994; Tudor, 1992). On the one hand, teachers who adopt a teacher-centred approach tend to view teaching as an information-transmission process and depict students as passive recipients of knowledge. On the other hand, teachers who consider themselves as organisers and facilitators of learning take a more learner-centred approach, motivating and nurturing students. Learner-

centred teachers put learners and their needs at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Learner-centredness is adopted by different schools and by educators and teachers because it encourages learner participation in classroom discursive practices and hence contributes to learner identity construction (Au, 2009; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011; Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Learner-centredness as an approach has gained currency in today's English language teaching (Williams, 1996; Smith and Kolosick, 1996).

1.4. Wider Omani social and cultural context

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab country that is located in the south east of the Arabian Peninsula with a population of about four million. While the official language of the country is Arabic, and it is the first language of the majority of Omanis, English is the only foreign language that is taught in Omani governmental schools. It is also the medium of instruction in all higher education institutions.

Oman is a Muslim country, and the vast majority of Omani people are Muslims. Islam, guarantees autonomy and free will (in spite of the fact that these terms can be defined differently in different contexts), as a fundamental principle. According to Islamic rules, all people are born free and equal. Islamic laws maintain and sustain different types of 'autonomy,' whether it is personal, political, educational, intellectual or social. In Islam, people are free to take their decisions as far as they are adults, wise and can bear the consequences of their decisions. They can even change their religion, and choose the religion that they think is the true religion. A verse from the Holy Quran materialises this right, Allah almighty says:

There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error.

(Chapter 2, verse 256)

The terms 'autonomy' and 'free will' remain relative and practised differently in different religions and cultures according to context.

Having said this, I would also like to state that religious laws can sometimes be misinterpreted and misunderstood. Different people can understand the holy verses in different ways. That was why, for example, Omani society is patriarchal. In spite of the fact that patriarchal and social rules dominate Omani society, the government has espoused different strategies to empower Omani females' roles in fields like education, labour power and in society in general. For example, in Oman, there is no difference in salary scales between men and women. In the College of Distinction (the site where this study takes place), the present head of the English department is a woman, as was the previous head. The current head of the English department is the manager and 56 different staff members from all over the world work with her as their line manager. She holds meetings with internationally diverse staff members, with different genders, cultures, customs, and colours, without difficulties. She is a PhD holder from a UK university and deals with all people in a respectful way. Today, it is normal to find Omani women working as teachers, doctors, university teachers, members of parliament and ministers. This means that at the level of the governmental rules, there is no problem, and Omani females have proved to be reliable and have demonstrated they are doing their jobs properly. There are tens of young Omani female teachers

in the College of Distinction, working with mixed-gender international staff members generally without difficulties. Omani females work in mixed-gender environments in different jobs in public and private sectors. It is clear that when the Omani Ministry of Higher Education decided to adopt a mixed-gender education policy in higher education institutions, its purpose was to qualify both females and males for the mixed-gender civil service environment, and to strike the normal balance between both genders in the domain of the workforce.

When it comes to society and social norms, things are different. The society is patriarchal and, in this regard, it may take decades until social norms transform and change. There is a scarcity of research in the field of gender issues in Oman. Dariel et al. (2017) conducted research to explore gender attitudes towards competition in the labour force in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE is adjacent to Oman (and was historically part of it), and is also a traditionally patriarchal society, but recently adopted new rules to empower Emirati females. The study shows that both genders compete hard to get jobs. Emirati women competed more than men. The study concluded that both women and men do not 'shy away from competition' (Dariel et al., 2017, p.121), giving evidence that females compete hard either when it is exclusively a competition against women or when it is in mixed-gender groups. Although the study was experimental and does not provide in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, it indicates that Arab and Muslim females are willing to compete and take the responsibility in a similar way to males.

1.5. Context of the study

This study focuses on the effects of learner-centred teaching and learning on first year foundation learners in the College of Distinction in Oman.

This study encouraged learners to voice their experiences and to highlight the contextual factors that positively or negatively shaped their learning experiences. It deploys Foucauldian principles (1977, 1980, 1982) of transformative education, which focuses on power relations, classroom discursive practices and identity construction. This is combined with Butler's (2000, 2004, 2006) performativity theory of gender, which is concerned female/male relations, to investigate classroom discursive practices and their effects of female learners' identities. The study also explores my personal and professional transformation as I have studied and applied a learner-centred approach in my teaching practice.

With respect to English language status in Oman, it can be viewed in relation to the global status of the English language in today's world. Nowadays English is the international lingua franca. It is the language of business, the technology industry, diplomacy and the internet. In Oman, English is valued as a tool for achieving personal, social and national ambitions. The Omani government has allocated 'huge budgets and resources for implementation through education' (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012, p.141).

First year Omani foundation learners, who study in the College of Distinction in the sultanate of Oman, participated in the study. The college offers three different degrees and specialisations: bachelor's degrees in international business administration, information technology and English language teaching.

1.6. The Omani educational context and Omani educational system

According to the Omani Ministry of Education (MOE 2006, p.25), there were only three primary schools in Oman in 1970, comprising 909 male students; however, education in Oman has significantly developed and extended in the last fifty years. The Ministry of Education has three key strategies with respect to Omani education:

- a. Universal education
- b. Diversification of education
- c. Female education (MOE, 2006)

The Omani Ministry of Education introduced the Basic education system in 1998-1999 in order to establish an ambitious reform plan in the field of general education. The project comprises ten years of schooling (grades 1 to 10) between the ages of 6 to 16, and introduced what seemed to be a real change in school administration, curriculum development, teaching methods and teacher training (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012, p.144).

This is followed by a two-year Post-Basic education (grades 11 and 12) which aims to equip students with basic skills such as: communication skills, personal and social skills, mathematical skills and information technology literacy. To achieve these, the Ministry advocates a learner-centred approach which helps prepare the learners for the development of employability skills (MOE, 2008).

The Ministry of Higher Education has tried to diversify higher education in the country in order to produce citizens that can contribute to the growth of the

country's economic and social development (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012, p.145). As a result of this policy, higher education institutions have witnessed an expansion in number and quality. The main university in the country is Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). It is the only public university and has nine colleges and nine research centres with more than 15,000 students who study for various bachelor's, master's and PhD programmes.

There are also six Colleges of Applied Sciences, which offer bachelor's degrees in four major programmes: English language teaching, international business administration, communication studies, information technology and design, chemical and mechanical engineering, however, English language teaching courses are taught at the College of Distinction only.

In addition to the above tertiary institutions, there are seven Higher Colleges of Technology which are distributed across the regions of the country. They offer bachelor's degrees in the fields of oil and gas, networking, human resources and surveying. There are also 16 institutes for health sciences in different towns throughout the Sultanate. They offer a variety of programmes in health related sciences such as medical records, nutrition, physiotherapy, nursing and laboratory sciences. Furthermore, there is a College of Financial Studies which offers bachelor's degrees in business, banking, accounting and insurance.

There are also a number of private tertiary institutions in Oman. For example, there are eight private universities and 19 colleges with over 40,000 students. Most of these colleges and universities are affiliated with internationally-recognised institutions in countries like the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia. Since

English is the professional and international language of most of these majors (Nunan, 1992, 2001, p.27), the Omani Ministry of Higher Education decided that English should be the medium of instruction in all of these higher education public and private institutions in order to strengthen the employability of Omani nationals and to make them ready for both the local market needs and global networks.

1.7. English language teaching in the foundation programme at the College of Distinction

New learners who have completed 12 years of general schooling, start their foundation year programme at The College of Distinction. In the foundation year, the learners sit a placement test in order to classify them according to their level in English. According to their performance, they are categorised into four levels, A, B, C and D, with A being the highest and D being the lowest. This means that, for level A learner, their foundation programme is only one semester; while for level D learners, the foundation programme is four semesters. Level A learners study New Headway Plus students' book and class book (intermediate level) in addition to the study skills book. Level B learners study New Headway Plus (pre-intermediate level), the class book and the study skills book. Level C learners study New Headway Plus students' book and class book (elementary Level) and level D learners study New Headway Plus Beginners. There is also a separate writing course which aims to improve learners' writing skills. Only after passing their foundation programme, can learners move on to their degree programme. They then study for four years in order to graduate with bachelor's degrees in their specialisation. In the Omani tertiary classrooms, the students study in mixed-

gender classes. Males wear white dishdashas (male dress), while females wear black abayas (female dress). Males sit at the front; females either sit at the back or on the other side of the classroom. It is not standard practice to find a male speaking to a female or vice versa, especially at foundation level.

1.8. Aim and research questions of the study

This study aims to investigate three converging issues of classroom transformation. First, students' transformation as a result of classroom gendered discursive practices; second, students' transformation as a result of using metacognitive strategies; and third, my transformation (as a teacher and researcher) as a result of adopting a learner-centred approach and dealing with the participants of this study.

This study is by its nature interdisciplinary, as it draws from the fields of education, sociology and critical theory. This reflects the complexity, inter-operational and synthesising nature of the classroom discursive practices in particular and the teaching and learning processes in general. The argument I am putting forward by conducting this research is that, in the context, there is a link between the three fields mentioned above, and that insights gained from the data through this Omani classroom case study can be illuminated and informed by using specific and relevant theoretical frameworks (see section 2.1.1. for the theoretical framework) in order to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom discursive practices.

In doing that, this study addressed interaction between young Omani female and male students in an English language learner-centred classroom in the College of Distinction as its main area of investigation. The study aims to investigate how

gendered classroom discursive practices materialise gender inequalities in an Omani learner-centred tertiary classroom. The study is shaped by my interest in student identity theorisation and the underpinning methodologies that are used to investigate gendered classroom discursive practices.

In addition to investigating classroom gendered practices, I explored the effects of teaching metacognitive strategies to enhance students' reflection on different classroom discursive practices. I explicitly introduced and taught my students how to use and develop the concept of metacognitive strategies. My intention was to raise students' awareness of their emotional status when they were wrestling with problem-solving associated with the discursive and social problems that emerged as a result of studying in a mixed gender classroom. In relation to the metacognitive strategies, I designed different types of classroom transformative interventions to deal with emergent classroom problems. Two different aspects of metacognitive strategies were addressed in this study. The first aspect dealt with metacognitive strategies that aimed to empower and raise female students' awareness about their sense of identity and to propose methods for responding to and defending themselves against male students' unfair practices in the classroom (see sections 4.2.1, 4.3.1, and 4.5.1). The second aspect dealt with metacognitive strategies to help students to use their higher order thinking skills when monitoring their learning and to evaluate their behaviours in dealing with learning issues and reflecting on their learning (see sections 5.2 and 5.3).

The third strand of the study focused on the effects of teacher/student discursive practices on teacher transformation and therefore is closely linked to my own identity as a teacher.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are:

1. In what way are Omani female student subjectivities done or undone through discursive practices in a tertiary learner-centred classroom?
2. How might the use of students' metacognitive strategies affect their learning, reflection, participation and transformation in the Omani tertiary classroom? Two different features of metacognitive strategies emerged in the data:
 - a. students developed transformative learning and reflected on emerging mixed-gender classroom problems.
 - b. students fostered transformative learning and reflected on how they learn while studying in a classroom.
3. In what ways does my interaction with students impact upon my transformation?

1.9. Significance of the study

This study is significant because it bridges a gap in the Omani context with regard to research in the field of gender and education, as there is a scarcity of studies on this topic. It highlights the ways in which young female and male Omani students interact with each other in a mixed gender classroom in Omani tertiary education, and how this might develop and/or change. An in-depth understanding of how both genders deal with each other is especially revealing and significant in

a patriarchal society like that of Oman. By discussing gender relations in the classroom, the study contributes to our understandings of the sociology of education in a Middle-Eastern, Arab, Moslem country like Oman.

The structure of the classroom also adds to the significance of this study as it comprised of four male and 21 female students. In spite of the fact that gender-wise, there is a clear numerical imbalance in favour of females, the patriarchal power of the wider Omani society was able routinely to shape the daily discursive practices of the classroom. Despite the minority status of the male students in the classroom, they were able to perform classroom activities through which power was exercised, and hence materialise gender inequality. More importantly, the analysis of the research data shows that, in a constructive environment, female students were able to face these patriarchal norms and materialise power that traverses and produces (Foucault, 1980). The notion of power is a significant element in the theory of gender performativity (Butler, 2004; see Chapter Two on theoretical framework). This study is also significant as it addresses the issue of gender gap in classroom participation. It investigates the barriers in a patriarchal society that silence and undermine female students' voices.

1.10. Rationale

Applying a learner-centred approach played a vital role in the learners' study programme at the Colleges of Distinction. Learners completed class 12, where Arabic is the medium of instruction, and then went into the foundation programme where English is the medium of instruction. In spite of the fact that these learners had studied English for 12 years in their school general education, they still

encountered difficulties in the new challenging and competitive tertiary education context. In this new environment, these learners are asked to perform complex literacy tasks related to the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, in addition to complex grammar and subject specific vocabulary; as a result, they feel the gap between general and tertiary education. In an Omani context, there has been little research about foundation learners' experience especially when they study in a learner-centred environment (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012, p.143).

1.11. Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter Two explores relevant literature and the theoretical framework of the study, including issues around student identities. Butler's theories of gender performativity, her formulation of discursive agency, and the constitution, interpellation and reinscription of identities are discussed (Butler, 2004). Then Foucault's theories of disciplinary power and resistance, technologies of the self and subjection are explored (Foucault, 2002/1969, 1980).

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study, including how the data collection and analysis relate to the research questions. There are then sections which explore the qualitative approach adopted, followed by consideration of case study, sampling and participants, and ethical concerns. There is also a section addressing myself as researcher and the notion of transformation, and one on the Metacognitive Strategies Intervention and the dictogloss task. This chapter is concluded by triangulation and data analysis.

Chapter Four introduces the data through a series of classroom gendered incidents. The following gendered confrontations are presented: Bushra/Khalid; Hiba/Salim; Jokha and the secretary; then, finally Bakheet and the rest of the class.

Unlike Chapter Four, Chapter Five materialises the classroom as a learning community. In doing so, it introduces mixed gender participants interacting with each other, and explains their uses of metacognitive strategies. Then four students give presentations about their use of reflection as a component of metacognitive strategies and share their thoughts with their classroom peers.

Chapter Six deals with my transformation as a teacher and researcher, and provides classroom episodes which show the transformation in my identity as a result of conducting the study and the classroom discursive practices.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis, drawing together the theoretical and empirical strands. It considers the implications of the study and offers recommendations as well as indicating the limitations of the research.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework and the literature review.

Chapter Two: The theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Introduction

This study unfolds an analysis of gender performativity in an Omani higher education learner-centred English classroom. Since progressive education aims to foster equality to all students, regardless of their gender, classrooms should also pursue this. This chapter reviews literature in the field of gender and education and hence contextualises this research inquiry. The chapter starts by exploring poststructural feminism as a theoretical framework. Poststructural feminism views gender as an unfixed and changing entity. In doing that it explores the notions of gender and power theorised by Butler (2004) and Foucault (1972) in addition to the notion of learner-centredness. Then it will address the notion of power and how it is theorised by Butler (2004) and Foucault (1972). Learners' discursive identities and agencies were the focus of this research; therefore, issues that impact Omani female students' identity formation and agency emergence will also be addressed. The next section addresses the performativity theory of gender, followed by learner-centredness. The relationship between performativity theory and learner-centredness is that both are emancipatory concepts. Butler's (2004) performativity theory calls subjects (in this study female learners) to be themselves, to be proud of their femininity and to face the social and educational challenges; similarly, learner-centredness prioritises students' differences and situates them and their needs at the centre of the teaching-learning process. In a learner-centred

classroom, students are called to build on their own experiences in order to accomplish the required learning outcomes (Tudor, 1992; McCombs, 1997; Wagner and McCombs, 1995). The next section discusses poststructural feminism as a theoretical framework that underpins this study.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Introduction

This research addresses the issue of gendered discursive practices in the classroom. The study views gender as fluid rather than fixed (Butler 2004,1999,1990). This section outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the study. It begins by addressing poststructural feminism. The section also highlights Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse. Then Butler's perspective of constituted identities is discussed, and finally, the notion of gendered agency is considered.

2.2.2. Poststructural feminism

This study falls within poststructural feminism approach, which is based on five main notions: gender, language, subjectivity, discourse and power (Weedon, 1987). Poststructural feminism views language as incomplete and unstable, and recognises that it is through language that social norms are not only produced, but also contested and subverted. In poststructural feminism (Butler 2004), the gendered subject or individual is fluid, dynamic and can be produced and challenged within social practices rather than being autonomous or independent. In this regard, for poststructural feminism, structures do not have stable centres,

or foundations, rather they are unstable, situational and historical. Poststructural feminism, therefore, does not close up the signifier, but tries to open it up and to enable differences in meaning to be active and at play. As a result, truth is not a single fact but rather has many faces. Accordingly, centres can at any time be margins, while the margins may also become centres. As a result, language constructs and produces meaning, rather than reflects it. This study incorporates poststructural feminist principles to investigate how gender, subjectivity and power are constructed. It combines theoretical perspectives from both Butler (1999, 1997a, 2004) and Foucault (1972, 1980, 1981). Discourse is one of the components of the theoretical framework; it is to that the attention is now turned.

2.2.3. Discourse

Ball (1990, p.2) explains that discourse, which is a key notion within Foucauldian scholarship, is considered to encapsulate 'what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority.' In addition, Mills (2003, p.55) defines discourse as 'a system which structures the way we perceive reality.' Foucault's conception of discourse includes various ways of structuring knowledge, social relationships, and, fundamentally, context. Foucault's discourse, therefore, forms both subjectivity and power relations. Here, it is important to mention that discourses are not merely descriptive or symbolic of social practices, but they actively include these practices. In the same vein, Foucault postulates that discourses are:

... practices that systemically form the objects of which they speak ...
discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute
them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention.

(Foucault, 1981, p.49)

Walshaw (2007) points out that discourses might be seen to handle the possibilities of thought; this is because they order and combine words in certain ways. It is added that discourses exclude or displace any other combinations. They have power which can read reality. Ball (1990, p.3) mentions that discourses also express the 'historical specificity of what is said and what remains unsaid.'

Foucault, (1977, p.49) adds that discourses consist of signs, however, what is done is more than using these signs to designate things. It is this move that makes them irreducible to language and to speech. It can be considered as a move which we should reveal and describe. Foucault (1980) also mentions that any existing discourse is constituted by its own borders, as a result of the language which is used for its description; it stands on the opposite side and is sometimes hostile to other discourses. Foucault's 'principle of discontinuity' is as follows:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable powers whereby
discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a
hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for
an opposing strategy.

(Foucault, 1980, p.101)

Foucault (1977, p.27) adds that there is an issue of the main relevance within his conception of discourse which is why, when and from what might discourse have been expressed during the given time: 'how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?' According to Ball (1990):

The world is perceived differently within different discourses. Discourse is structured by assumptions within which any speaker must operate in order to be heard as meaningful. Thus, the concept of discourse emphasises the social processes that produce meaning.

(Ball, 1990, p.3)

When we consider educational systems and individual establishments, in particular, which are both subject to discourse, and are involved in the controlled selection and sharing of discourses as well, we should mention: 'Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them' (Foucault, 1981, p.46). Based on that, Foucault's notion of 'power and knowledge' is being inextricably bound up in these institutions. Foucault asked: why are we compelled to use discourses, what are the effects of power and what knowledge arises from their use? Allan (2013) argues that it was clearly certain that Foucault was fundamentally interested in how discourses produced certain 'truths.' On the other side, Walshaw (2007) opposes this, saying that the notion of 'power and knowledge' can be a preoccupation with the derivation of discourses or with whose interests they might serve.

This study investigates gendered classroom power relations, which are a generator of discourses, and are subjected to discourses at the same time. In the same vein, Foucault (1972, p. 46) notes that educational institutions are able to control the kinds of discourses which their students will be able to access and other kinds which they cannot access, however, social differences, conflicts and struggles might participate in deciding what can be permitted and what should be prevented. So, every educational system can be considered a political means of maintaining the appropriateness of discourses, bearing in mind the knowledge and power which will be brought with them.

Foucault (1998) and Butler (2004) mention that discursive practices define what normal, acceptable behaviour is in any education system. That is because the main target of any system is to control its populations. So, wherever the students are, they are caught up in discursive practices, however, at the same time, Foucault (1981) argues that discursive practices are themselves always in a state of constant flux.

Discourses participate in shaping the experience of being a particular gender. Female and male students experience learning and education in the ways permitted by the gendered discourses to which they are exposed. It is also worth mentioning that not only does this discourse impact both spoken and written language, but also non-verbal means of self-representation, for instance, posture, dress sense, body language, and so on. In addition, subjects can produce discourses both knowingly and unknowingly.

Similarly, Butler (1997a) observes that discourses that are shared in an international context may gain unexpected meanings because they are disseminated, or they spread beyond the intention of those who share them. It is clear that Foucault's writing linked discourse and power. As Walshaw (2007, p.27) states: when discourses transmit they produce power. And Walshaw adds that they work in order to form our thinking, viewpoints, beliefs, and practices. The following section discusses gender performativity theory.

2.3. Gender performativity theory

Butler's theory of gender performativity is particularly useful in this study, as it helps us to understand what made or unmade these young Omani female women with regard to their gender and their learning of English in a learner-centred, mixed-gender classroom. The theory is helpful in making visible how these students experienced social pressure and were conforming to or challenging it. According to Butler (2004), by conforming to social norms, they become 'intelligible.' Butler defines intelligible genders as 'those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among gender, social practice and desire' (Butler, 2006, p. 79).

Intelligible in this sense means the social recognition that people confer on other people because they comply and obey the social norms. Butler also describes when some people become 'unintelligible,' when she identifies: 'those that are more subversive or counterhegemonic' (Butler, 2006, p. 77) as unintelligible and outside the norm within their cultural matrix. She points out that 'the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of

'identities' cannot 'exist'" (Butler, 1990, p.24). Butler here refers to those who challenge the norms and work outside them, in particular when the norms constrain the originality of the female learner, (Chapters Four and Five of this study discuss these concepts). For Butler (2004), Althusser's (1980) concept of interpellation is essential. She theorises how interpellation and iteration work together not only to reproduce, but also to contest the norms. For Butler, norms:

are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly deterritorialised through the citation. They can also be exposed as non-natural and non-necessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation.

(Butler, 2004, p.218)

In the 1940s, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) pointed out that gender can be used to index, mark out and differentiate some people as 'others.' De Beauvoir's analysis is relevant for this study because, for her, the notion of gender was observable in the ways female students were treated in English language classrooms. De Beauvoir (1949) stated that for males, women as 'others' had been and continued to be so. De Beauvoir's (1949) claim is:

Woman has often been compared to water because, among other reasons, she is the mirror to which the male, narcissus-like, contemplates himself: he bends over her in good or bad faith. But in any case what he really asks of her is to be, outside of him, all that which he cannot grasp inside himself.

(de Beauvoir, 1949, p.196)

De Beauvoir (1949) believes that by positioning females as 'other,' men demonstrate dominance. She argued that the notions of 'man' and 'woman' are the product of social norms and that gender is a process of culture. She states this in the following argument:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole which produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

(de Beauvoir, 1949, p.281)

De Beauvoir's (1949) formulation of women as 'others' is significant for this study as the idea of analysing the 'other' as different has penetrated the domain of education and classroom settings and is fundamental to Omani society. Tyler (2005) identifies two types of 'otherness': the first type involves some degree of equality with the other; while, in the second type, the other is made through inequality. In the second type, mutual recognition is not available, and the other has no choice but to submit. In this regard, Tyler goes on to argue:

It is not then merely woman's Otherness but her subjection – the nonreciprocal objectification of what it means to be a woman – that de Beauvoir is concerned with.

(Tyler, 2005, p. 565-566)

Tyler (2005) is concerned because women are classified as others, but, more importantly, she is concerned by the power relations that hierarchically divide men and women. In this regard, Butler (2004) through her theory of gender performativity highlights the significance of the notions of mutual recognition, intelligibility and visibility. In the next section, a performative understanding of identity is explored.

2.4. Identity: a performative understanding

Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity describes how a subject is constituted within an event or deed and, as a result, emerges as an effect of that deed, not as the cause of it. According to Butler (1990), gender identity therefore can be contextualised as follows:

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.

(Butler, 1990, p.25)

In both of her publications *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993a), Butler discusses and adopts the poststructuralist notions of the self and meaning, and how they are produced. Pavlenko (2002) defines poststructuralism as 'an attempt to investigate and to theorise the role of language in construction and reproduction of social relations, and the role of social dynamics in the processes of additional language learning and use' (Pavlenko, 2002, p.283). Pavlenko points out that poststructuralists view language as an area where people construct their identity and produce social relations. They also see language learning as a social

process, and L2 learners as agents with dynamic, fluid and multiple identities (McKay and Wong, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko, 2000). Poststructuralists also view L2 learners as constituted and reconstituted while they are learning and using L2.

Butler's theory of gender (2004) explains how gendered identities are 'done' or 'undone' as a result of reiterative discursive practices within specific contexts such as historical events, power relations and/or cultural practices. Performativity theory criticises the gender binary of man/woman and continues to deconstruct and unsettle normalising gender categories that try to shape people and regulate them. Butler emphasises that gender identities come into existence as a result of repetition or iteration. Iterative practices reproduce gendered subjects and constitute them, and hence create room for conflicting subjectivities. She also points out that a subject's agency emerges as a result of this constitution in a form of performative acts that contest and challenge the original identity category, and reproduce new conditions that allow the emergence of a new 'livable life' (Butler, 2008, p.141). Commenting on the requirements of a livable life, Butler goes on to explain:

The difference between *Undoing Gender* and *Gender Trouble* probably has to do with my sense that a livable life does require recognition of some kind and that there are occasions in which names do sustain us, that there's a sustaining function of the name.

(Butler, 2008, p.141)

In relation to this study, the emergent identity categories of Section One, Level B participants, were examined and the discursive and power relations that regulated them and make them 'intelligible' or 'unintelligible' are discussed. The research data gives evidence of different identity categories such as Omani, male, female, foundation learner, teacher etc. and the implications of these. In the following section, the topic of constituted identities will be discussed.

2.5. Constituted identities

Butler's (1997a, 2004) thoughts are affected by and draw from Foucault's theory of subjection (1972, 1990) and Althusser's theory of interpellation (1980). Building on these two philosophers, Butler (1997a, p.32) theorises how subjects become 'self-incarcerating.' Butler's theory of self-incarcerating stretches Foucault's theory of 'body imprisoned.' When the subjects unintentionally limit their own thoughts, abilities, aspirations and dreams, they live inside an illusionary box, a prison without walls. These unreal walls exist in their minds and constrain their aspirations and sabotage their plans. Performativity theory helps us not only in understanding such notions, but also in explaining how the subjects, or (for this study) some of the participants, were able to go beyond these self-incarcerating thoughts and ideas. This is supported by materialising and giving examples of participants who were perplexed and trapped in one situation, and who could emerge, transform and think differently and rid themselves of that difficult situation (see sections 4.2.1 and 4.3.1). In this study, performativity theory works to illuminate transformative moments in participants' lives while interacting and learning English in Section One, Level B. The adoption of performativity theory enabled me as a researcher

to interpret the generated data and to unsettle these gendered identity categories in such a way that illuminated the effects of patriarchal ideology and helped to see reality through different lenses. The following section addresses the notion of agency.

2.6. Agency

Foucault categorises the theory of agency through its role in power relations. Agency is a core concept in understanding power relations alongside performativity and the construction of identities. It fundamentally relates to the individual and the extent to which he/she is able to act for him/herself in controlling their surroundings. Foucault (1979, p.95) emphasises that 'where there is power, there is resistance.' In the same vein, Hoffman (2014) refers to Foucault's argument when he comments that subjects are exposed to forces that are self-inflicted as well as external, and, in addition, he distinguishes between the techniques of domination, government and those of the self.

Foucault (1999, p.162) explains that we should not understand the practices of power as being pure violence or being strict coherence; however, power consists of complex relations. We should realise that these kinds of relations actually involve a number of rational techniques, and those techniques might be efficient when they subtly integrate coercion-technologies and technologies of the self. Foucault clarifies this point and defines technologies of the self as:

... techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on

their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let's call this kind of technique a techniques or technology of the self.

(Foucault, 1999, p.162)

Based on the above discussion, Foucault argues that subjects can be considered the recipients of external and self-inflicted forces. These actually depend on Foucault's previously discussions of the conception of power. He mentions that power cannot be seen as a top down force, but instead should be seen as permeating all social relations, which can, in turn, be seen in, and through, all people. The main core of agency is the ability to self-regulate, where the subjects can resist the power which is exerted over them.

Foucault (1988, p.50) shows that 'the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty.' When Butler explains her account of agency, she describes it as very much reliant on the aforementioned Foucauldian idea of subjectivation, where it draws on this dialectical aspect of identity construction.

Butler's formulation of the notion of performative agency is based on the understanding of temporality not as a process of materialisation. She explains that, in concept of the performative, a possibility for agency can be outlined when one realises that gender, in a subjective way, is constrained but not fully (pre-)determined. McNay (2013, p. 34) similarly asserts that 'the performative

construction of gender identity causes agency in that the identificatory processes, through which norms are materialized, permits the stabilization of a subject who is capable of resisting those norms.'

Butler's text, *Excitable Speech* (1997b), is based on the central tenet that speech cannot be planned or controlled in a full way, and different susceptible interpretations are left due to the excitable nature of discourse. In the same vein, McNay (2013, p. 48) remarks, it is open to 'unauthorized appropriation, and, hence, resignification.' This leads McNay (2013, p. 48) to offer her potential form of agency: 'a counter-discourse that acknowledges its emergence from a dependency upon structures of constraint.' This matches with what Butler (1997b) asserts:

... agency begins where sovereignty wanes. The one who acts ... acts precisely to the extent that he or she is contained as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset.

(Butler, 1997b, p.16)

Forming my theoretical framework, which is based on poststructural feminism, students' agency is taken into consideration while collecting data and discussing classroom discursive practices. These guide me to the reasons behind the students' behaviour and enable me to interpret their reactions. In addition, these concepts of agency and discourse are used to show and supply perspective on the collected data, in order to investigate how and why students construct their gender identities in particular ways. Based on this theoretical framework my position as a

researcher forms a part of the study and this work makes a significant contribution to the field. Section 2.7 discusses the notion of honour-based societies.

2.7. Honour-based societies

Baxter (2007) examines the concept of honour in the West Bank, in Palestinian society. He defines honour as an ideology that linked to sexuality and gender among families. Baxter (2007, p.737) believes that honour is a significant ideology that does not recognise the 'significance of the individual and obscures the rights and strengths of women and the obligations, vulnerabilities, and anxieties of men.'

He argues that Palestinian women and men achieve their 'subjectivities and agency' through compliance to the patriarchal and structural configurations, not by resisting them (Baxter, 2007, p.737).

Baxter is looking at honour from a Western perspective. In Islam, there are rules that organise the social relations among people. For example, in Islam, sex is only practised within marriage; sex outside marriage is not allowed according to Islamic rules. It can be difficult for non-Muslims to understand this. In Islam, it is considered a sign of purity, that females and males are supposed to practice sexual intercourse only after marriage. If this rule is violated, then the person who violates it is considered dishonoured. Both males and females who violate honour rules suffer, however, females who do the violation suffer much more than men. It could be a sign of social hypocrisy, but it is a reality and practised in Arab and Muslim societies. It could also be a sign of social bias against women. The current study does not deal directly with honour ideology, but female parents worry about their daughters' honour when they send them to universities and colleges. That was

why for example, many new students who come to study at these tertiary institutions feel worried about the gendered relations between females and males (see Chapter Five, section 5.2).

2.8. Foucault's power relations

The theoretical underpinning of this study is represented by Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), and Butler's (2005) gender performativity theory. Such a theoretical framework is valuable in that it helps to account for how power relations work in mixed-gender Omani classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language.

Foucault (1972) highlights the operation of power within groups, and states: 'Power is in the relation. It is not exercised in a repressive sense from outside the individual' (Foucault, 1972, p.83). He states that it is through language that knowledge and power work, and that, as people learn to speak, they pick up the basic knowledge and rules of their culture. Moreover, Foucault suggests that, as human sciences describe human beings, they actually define them.

Foucault (1972) believes that relationships are shaped by the institutions within which people work together. In this regard, power is generated by the interactions of members of the group. This point is central to this study as it investigates power relations between Omani female and male learners within the Omani sociocultural context.

Foucault claims that power exists in every social interaction, and a classroom is a site of social interaction in which three different entities interact: the learners, the

teachers and the college as an educational and social institution. In this respect, what goes on between these three entities in terms of power provides a basis for an examination of the range of actions and reactions extant within the classroom.

Foucault's theory runs against the belief that power can be possessed by certain people and not by others. In this regard, Omani participants can also possess and practise a type of power in the classroom that helps empower them to think about their learning and to express their feelings towards what goes on in the classroom. Foucault's thoughts about power in its social context reveal his awareness that the process of learning as a socialisation is complex. According to him 'governing people is not a way to force people to do what a governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assume coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself' (Foucault, 1993, pp. 203-204). Within such context, power relations can be implemented in a way to empower learners to do many different things, including, express themselves, disclose their feelings about what is happening and critically think about themselves as learners, their teachers and their learning processes.

In addition to Foucault's notion of power, and in order to encourage a deep learning pedagogy, learner-centredness is used as the teaching and learning approach in this study. The instructional materials used in this study are intended to put into operation notions of students' identity, the effects of gender on learning and the ways in which students' agencies emerge in a classroom where power relations work within an educational context which is, at the same time, a social institution.

In this respect, learner-centredness may serve as an adequate vehicle through which to examine and understand the potential benefits of utilising Foucault's notion of power relations, in which learners can be positioned differently and act autonomously in the classroom.

Foucault (1981) conceptualises discourse in a way that incorporates structuring knowledge and social relationships. In the context of the statement given by Foucault, power relations and subjectivity can be established. Significantly, discourses are not purely symbolic or descriptive but rather establish some social practices. Foucault (1981) elaborates the term discourse as:

Practices that systemically form the objects of which they speak ... discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention.

(Foucault, 1981, p.49)

Moreover, it has been considered that discourse can apply some limitations on the thoughts of one individual, as various combinations are present in which the words are designed and delivered.

Foucault (1972) states that:

Discourses are composed of signs, but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this move that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this move that we must reveal and describe.

(Foucault, 1972, p.49)

Foucault's (1980) argument relies the concept that every discourse is established by a person having his or her own boundaries. On the other side, he highlighted the language used for discourse, which also plays a noticeable role in elaborating that discourse. Additionally, language can play an opposing role for the person, and the relationship can be associated with various discourses.

Foucault's (1972) 'principle of discontinuity' states that:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable powers whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

(Foucault, 1972, p.87)

Moreover, Foucault (1972) also determines that a discourse is something which can be said in any span of time and can be expressed at the desired time. He states that one dialogue can differ from the statement given by any other person:

The world is perceived differently within different discourses. Discourse is structured by assumptions within which any speaker must operate in order to be heard as meaningful. Thus the concept of discourse emphasises the social processes that produce meaning.

(Foucault, 1980, p.67)

It is of particular relevance in the educational system and educational establishments that both of these elements are associated with the discourse itself, as well as with the subject who is sharing the discourse made. Educational

systems may be based on some political means, which is associated with the power of knowledge brought to these educational systems.

The current study focuses on how the implementation of learner-centredness may enhance and promote the acquisition of English as a foreign language in foundation classes in one of the colleges of applied sciences in Oman. Foucault's work on power relations provides a tool for understanding this discursive field, as it circulates within and among the practices of the participants in their learning context. According to Foucault (1972) 'Power is in the relation.' He believes that people's relations are shaped by the institutions within which they work together. In this regard, power is generated by the interactions of members of the group. Foucault's theory of power relations is central to this study, which seeks to investigate and understand power relations between the participating learners, as they try to construct their identities and while they are dealing with each other and with their teachers in the college. In doing so, the researcher looked at the learners' practices of power/knowledge. He investigated how they might struggle with others' practices (the college administration, students and teachers), hence gaining an in-depth knowledge of the Omani sociocultural and educational context. According to Foucault:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply that fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.

(Foucault, 1972, p.199)

The above comment suggests that power does not always mean a repressive and prohibitive act; Foucault calls us to study the deployment of power through sociocultural practices and social relations. He wants us to understand and examine power as it reaches 'into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives within the social body rather than from above it' (Foucault, 1980, p.39). Foucault asks us to think about the production of power relations and the knowledge formulated as a result of unstable and unequal practices.

According to Dornyei and Csizer (2002) females outperformed males with regard to learning English (Henry and Apelgren, 2008, Williams et al., 2009, Wright, 1999). Dornyei and Csizer studied five languages in Hungary. Their study revealed that females' motivation to learn foreign languages was higher than males' with regard to English, French, German, Italian and Russian.

Performativity theory has been developed in a way in a way that has brought the concept of 'making' of women and men within the contextual framework of 'doing genders.' West and Zimmerman (1987) in their article 'Doing Gender' consider the process of categorising genders while examining their performativity and behaviour in classroom. The concept of 'doing gender' is important for carrying forward the studies that will indicate the practices, process and performances in educational contexts.

West and Zimmerman (1987) were widely attributed with presenting the concept of 'doing gender' to the field of gender studies, and 'doing gender' was carried

forward by Butler (1990 to 2004). Butler (2004) transformed the idea of 'doing gender' and gender theory through her concept of 'performativity of gender.' Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) was considered one of the most persuasive books regarding feminism of that time (Lloyd, 2007), however, it was also thought to have 'rocked the foundations of feminist theory' (Segal, 1999). Some feminists disagree with Butler's (1990, p.25) ideas about identity as of anti-foundational entity. Moreover, Butler (2004) emphasises theories of genders as repetitive and iterative practices through interrelation:

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.

(Butler, 2004, p.1)

Butler argued that gender studies are required to be assumed as 'a kind of doing,' instead of conservative categorisation. Butler argued that gender performativity is different; it differs from one person to another, and it differs according to different contexts. Therefore, in order to discuss gender, it is necessary to study processes of articulating this difference. The interrelationship between the differences in gender and doing gender can be linked directly to de Beauvoir, which was significant in developing the concept. For feminism, Butler's noteworthy contribution is considered to be her performativity theory, however, while, initially, the conceptualised theory of performativity was introduced in *Gender Trouble*

(1990), Butler developed this further in *Bodies that Matter* in 1993b. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler provided a subsequent explanation of performativity:

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.

(Butler, 1993b, p.95)

The above explanation of the concept of performativity confronts the criticisms that rose in the responses to *Gender Trouble*; however, it also further outlined the main elements of Butler's gender theory; she outlined the three key elements of the theory of performativity. Firstly, that performativity works with repeated discursive practices that should be rectified in social relations. Secondly, those iterative practices must not be performed simply by an individual or a subject. Lastly, such discursive practices are executed within the norms of constraining regulatory environment, but those norms are not completely determined. The next section addresses the concept of learner-centredness.

2.9. Learner centredness

Learner-centred education exemplifies a major paradigm shift from teacher-centred education because it focuses on learner outcomes (Nunan, 2013; Weimer, 2002; Doyle, 2008). Cannon and Newble (2000, p.16) define learner-centredness as 'a way of thinking and learning that emphasises student responsibility and activity in learning.' Although this does not mean that learners are left in a do-it-yourself mode of study, learners are required to show some elements of self-dependence and promote sustainable change (Pillay, 2002, p.94). Law and Glover (2000, p.133) state that change can occur for different reasons such as: personal status, attempts to fulfil social needs or endeavours to meet unmet needs. Teachers' role in the change process seems to be a key one as they are the agents who implement change. By conducting this intervention research, this study tries to initiate and manage a positive educational change that meets learners' needs in the Omani tertiary context.

Light and Cox (2001, p.33) identify four main aspects of learner-centredness: first of all, learners should be active and take responsibility for their learning. Here, learners are required to be engaged and to take part in classroom activities. Teachers play a decisive role in leading them through the learning path. The second aspect is that, learners need to manage their learning experience. For example, they need to set goals for their learning and handle the challenges that they might face. Again, here also help must be available when needed. The third aspect is that, they need to engage themselves in productive learning and construct knowledge by themselves. Thus, they develop their understanding and

fulfil their learning goals. The fourth aspect is that, teachers should play the role of a facilitator and try to meet learners' needs by designing, and organising an appropriate curriculum and encouraging interaction between learners and their learning context. In this regard, learners might be able to have a say in what goes on in the classroom. For example, if they are to deliver a presentation in the classroom, then they can choose the topic for themselves rather than having it imposed on them by the teacher.

According to Tudor:

Learner-centredness is not a method, nor can it be reduced to a given set of techniques or activities. Rather, it represents, in the first instance, awareness of learner variability and of the contribution which learners can potentially make to the development of their learning programme, and then an openness to accommodate learner input as far as the human and pragmatic constraints of the target learning environment can comfortably allow.

(Tudor, 1992, p.89)

As can be understood from this definition, Tudor, (1992) highlights the importance of learner differences as it focuses on learners' potential and their contribution to their own learning when they are aware of each other's subjectivity. This definition is relevant to this study as it tries to change the Omani tertiary current classroom practices by highlighting learner-differences and raising students' awareness of their identities, and those of others, and by encouraging them to collaborate and accept other learners who might be different. Applying learner-centredness in the

classroom is likely to enable Omani learners to participate and to take an active role in their learning process. In a language classroom, the outcome of activities might be linguistic, pragmatic or grammatical, and, by participating in such activities, learners will be able to express themselves and speak their mind while socialising and engaging with other learners. As a result of dealing with each other, they come to know and understand themselves as well as the other learners.

Donato (1994) conducted a study to show that when learners work collaboratively to do a specific task, they can help and scaffold each other and thus foster appropriation of linguistic knowledge. When these learners work individually, they are incapable of performing the same task. The participants in Donato's study were L2 learners of French and the objective of the study was to examine the way they co-constructed language knowledge as they communicated within the classroom setting. The research question was: whether learners can exert a developmental influence on each other's interlanguage system in observable ways (Donato, 1994, p.39). While learners collaborated, the sessions were audio-taped and then transcribed. The findings reveal that there were 32 instances of scaffolded moves. Then later, when the participants were asked to perform the task individually, 24 out of the 32 instances of the scaffolded actions were used by the participants while they were working without help. This study shows that learners can help each other purposefully. Donato's work is significant because it provides evidence that second or foreign language learners can be individually novices but collectively experts. In the current study the Metacognitive Strategies Intervention (see section 3.14.2) required learners to collaboratively help each other while they were doing

different tasks, such as dictogloss, picture description and feedback to each other after correcting each other's writings.

Some researchers and scholars in language teaching have expressed their reservations about learner-centredness. For example, Holiday (1994, p.9) expresses his concerns that learner-centred principles ignore teachers' role in the classroom. On the contrary, Holiday believes that the teacher's role is crucial, in that they possess a great deal of knowledge about the subject and about learners' needs, however, the learner-centredness strategy in this study does not ignore the role of the teacher who is instrumental in a process which equips learners with the necessary tools to construct knowledge, and which creates the classroom environment that is conducive to learning. In learner-centred classrooms, learners can formulate knowledge and express their feelings about what goes on in the classroom. Added to that, learner-centred classrooms are suitable places to reveal and disclose the discursive fields of gender, power and discourse especially, as in this thesis, in the Omani complex classroom learning contexts.

Barr and Tagg (1995) propose that the focus in the classroom must be on what the learners are doing rather than on what the teacher is doing. The current study recognises the significance of the teacher in managing the pedagogical process but also that the students are the focus of learning and of interaction.

To examine and change classroom practices that inhibit learners and limit their actions and replace them with practices that empower and emancipate them, this study will utilise and apply Bar and Tagg's (1995) work in *From Teaching to Learning*. They formulated and contrasted two competing paradigms: the learner-

centred paradigm and the instructional paradigm. Their formula highlights the issue of how to direct higher education towards greater learner-centredness. This can be achieved by creating ‘environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves.’ Here, Barr and Tagg (1995, p. 17) view learners as active participants who build their abilities, by spotting, thinking and recognising their accomplishment in the classroom.

Barr and Tagg explain how a shift towards a ‘learning paradigm’ may liberate institutions from a set of difficult constraints. They propose that the focus in the classroom must be on what the learners are doing rather than on what the teacher is doing. Learners’ behaviour is the indication as to whether something is learned or not. The teacher’s role is very important as he/she designs and puts into practice what goes on in the classroom, but the learners are the ones on whom attention is focused.

As can be seen in the research questions section, the current study focuses on how the implementation of learner-centredness might enhance and promote the female learner identity in one college. Foucault’s work on power relations and learners’ power as a tool for emancipation and empowerment in the classroom setting is supported by Barr and Tagg’s shift from an instructional paradigm to a learner-centred one. In the next section, the metaphors of learning are discussed.

2.10. Metaphors of learning

According to Sfard (1998, p.6) there are two significant ‘metaphors’ about learning: one is the ‘acquisition metaphor,’ which focuses on students’ learning the course content. The other metaphor considers ‘learning as participation,’ in which learners

become members of a learning community and become able to discursively participate in that community. In spite of the fact that Sfard advocates for learning as participation and learning as acquisition, she warns of the dangers of adopting one metaphor and ignoring the other. Within the participation metaphor, identity becomes active and comes into play. According to Sfard and Prusak (2005, p.14) identity is 'a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person. These stories, even if individually told, are products of a collective storytelling.' Sfard and Prusak (2005) explain that stories are not only a representation of identities, but rather stories constitute identities. In conducting this study, I echoed Sfard and embraced learning as participation and as acquisition as they both complement and complete each other, and in order to be able to answer the research questions mentioned in Chapter One. For this study, the classroom (Section One, Level B) is the learning community in which the participants discursively interacted their learning and their identities within the wider Omani society norms.

Bearing in mind the complexity of the relationship between learning, identity and social context, I adopted data collection methods that enabled me to focus on students' identity transformation while performing their learning in the classroom. In the next section, the concept of metacognitive strategies is explored.

2.11. Metacognitive strategies: knowing what, when, and why

In adopting a learner-centred classroom, and in an attempt to understand students' learning experiences, this study focuses on two main strands of transformation. Firstly, the transformation that occurred in students' identities, and secondly, the transformation that took place in their learning of the course content. Learning

strategies in general and metacognitive strategies in particular play important roles in this regard. Based on Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) model, I explicitly taught and explored with the participants how to use metacognitive strategies.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.1) define learning strategies as 'special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to comprehend, learn, or retain new information.' There are different types of learning strategies such as cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies. In spite of the fact that all these strategies are important, this study focuses on metacognitive strategies and incorporates other types when necessary. The study focuses on metacognitive strategies because it helps students to draw mental images, reflect, monitor and evaluate their behaviour, and hence alter it when needed.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.83) outline and give examples of different types of learning strategies: cognitive strategies such as analysing, rehearsing and translating; and metacognitive strategies such as planning, drawing mental links and organising. They also explain that when learners combine or use more than one strategy, often better results are obtained.

One of the aims of this study is to investigate transformation in participants' identities and learning and, since metacognitive strategies incorporate an aspect of reflection that leads to transformation, then metacognitive strategies were chosen as one of the strands to focus on throughout this study. According to Flavell (1976, p.252) metacognition means 'active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of cognitive process to achieve cognitive goals'. It is important that learners monitor their learning and have sense of ownership, autonomy and

self-awareness. They also need to monitor and evaluate their learning progress to achieve better results. Metacognition is also defined by Anderson (2002, p.1) as 'thinking about thinking.' This means that students need to think and reflect on what they already know, and what they want to know, then what they have learned and what they still need to know. Anderson (2002, p.1) points out that when learners use metacognitive strategies, this leads them to perform better and score better results and enable them use higher thinking abilities.

Metacognitive strategies have five components, as offered by Anderson (2002) which include:

1. Monitoring strategy use: students monitor their strategy use, if they feel it is not useful or needs to be improved. They have the chance to enhance it. The data in this research shows some examples of such monitoring strategies, which allow students to reflect and think about the problem and then think about how to remedy the problem.
2. Preparing and planning for learning: here students need to set specific goals and determine ways to fulfil these goals. The teacher can help students to set realistic goals. The process of setting challenging but also clear and genuine goals is important as it helps students to monitor their progress and evaluate their adopted strategies. When the students see that they have progressed, they become motivated and thus improve their learning process.
3. Orchestrating various strategies: students who know how to do this can easily explain the type of strategies they are using and in what way each is appropriate

to the task they are working on. It is an important and useful metacognitive tool that enables learners to combine more than one strategy in a skilful way

4. Selecting and using strategies: students need to be able to think and take a decision that is appropriate to their learning. Teachers need to encourage students to choose the strategies that are most suitable for the task and learning context.

5. Evaluating strategy use and learning: this is an important skill in which students reflect on their use of strategies and ask themselves about the benefits, evaluating the usefulness of components. In order to be able to evaluate their strategy use, they need to monitor and take notes of the way they act and discuss and explain to other students what they have found out about their use of the strategies (adapted from Anderson (2002, pp. 32-33)).

According to Anderson, different types of metacognitive strategies can work together at the same time as the student working on the activity. Sometimes, they combine cognitive and metacognitive strategies; this is what happens when different strategies are orchestrated by EFL learners who inevitably face a range of challenges in their teaching and learning environment. For example, in vocabulary learning strategies, the student might employ a cognitive strategy, trying to determine the meaning of a new word from the context. Thinking of the meaning is a cognitive process, but the ability to vary the process of thinking is a metacognitive process. Raising students' awareness about metacognitive strategy use in this research, I organised sharing sessions in which groups of students discussed the type of strategy they could use and analysed the ways they thought the strategy might be useful for them. This process of sharing their experiences

raises student awareness and enables them to construct knowledge and learn from each other. The next section discussed the topic of strategy training.

2.12. Strategy training

Nunan (1991, p.179) highlights the importance of enabling students to select the right strategy for their learning activity. In order to do that successfully, students should know different types of the available strategies. In this regard, teachers need explain the significance and purpose of different strategies and to be aware of the implications and benefits of their use. Cottrell (1999) notes that it is important for teachers to explain and model specific strategy use. When teachers ask their students to practise using these strategies in different classroom activities, students can automatise the process and do it effortlessly. The notion of strategy training is relevant to this study, as some students give presentations explaining their use of metacognitive strategies. In the following section, the topic of transformative learning is discussed.

2.13. Transformative learning

Different factors affect students' learning experiences in any context. Such factors have been investigated according to different perspectives of learning theories. For example, behavioural theorists such as Hupp, Reitman and Jewell (2008) believe that the notion of stimulus and response is the basic aspect of learning. They claimed that learners can be seen as empty vessels that can be filled with knowledge. This knowledge can be recalled by using the appropriate stimuli (Maillot, Perrot and Hartley, 2012; Hinton, 2007). According to behaviourists,

learning can be understood through scrutinising the various factors that influence the individual student learning experiences such as learning strategies and motivation, especially in higher education. Sociologists (e.g. Kember and Kwan, 2000; Lea and Stierer, 2000; Solomon, 2007; Trowler, 2009) generally regard learning as a social phenomenon that is influenced by different social aspects, such as identity, power relations, gender, social class and ethnicity. Thus, they argue that learning is relatively uncontrolled by students, and it is influenced by structural social issues, such as race, gender and social class, rather than individual learning strategies and motivation. Therefore, learning should be understood and investigated in relation to social structures and factors associated with educational institutions that influence teaching (such as the curriculum and academic disciplines) and the context of the teaching (i.e. the department and the university) should be taken into consideration since it can affect students' learning experiences.

Wenger (1998) also provided a different view of the impact of the social structures on teaching and learning producing the notion of 'Communities of Practice' (CoP). 'Communities of Practice' describes the way in which 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and they learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). Following this, learning was conceptualised by Becher and Parry (2005) as social activities that take place in everyday life through daily interactions. Thus, the students' learning experience is shaped according to the type of interaction between the different social agents in certain communities. This implies that learning is a collective practice that is

established and progressed in a community, rather than being an individual practice. Hence, these communities have a powerful impact on changing the individual's practices since they are involved in a discourse that controls various aspects of their learning by imposing certain practices of particular institutions (Lave and Wenger, 2001, 1991; Barton and Hamilton, 1999, 1998; Barton et al., 1999).

Psychological and sociological understandings of learning experiences respectively, often present learning as an individualistic practice that is determined by extrinsic/intrinsic motivation or by purely structural issues influenced by social class, race and gender; however, this study discusses learning slightly differently from those views. This research focuses on the associated dominant power structures within general society and the impact of the participants' individual lives on their learning practices and experience. Similar to Jenkins, Canaan, Filippakou, and Strudwick (2011), I focused on students' reflection on the effect of capitalist and oppressive practices within society on their lives and experiences. Initially, one of the main focus areas of the research is to investigate power structures within society, with particular reference to class and gender issues, and how they affected the students' learning experiences. This led me to discuss the issue of gender and power in Omani society, and its effect on students' experiences.

Originally, transformative learning (TL) was built upon Mezirow's (1978) constructivist theory, which is the base of TL from thirty years ago. Mezirow (2000, p.5) defined learning as 'the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to

future action.’ Mezirow distinguished between the education of adults and children. He considered children’s learning as a formative process of assimilation through socialisation, and adults’ learning as a transformative process reframing new perspectives from formative roles and understandings, and achieving a greater degree of self-determination (Moore, 2005).

Since then, Mezirow’s theory has been expanded by many scholar-practitioners. Recently, more ‘holistic’ (Cranton and Roy, 2003; Dirkx, 1997 etc.), ‘integral’ (O’Sullivan, 1999; Robinson, 2004) and ‘integrative’ (Illeris, 2004; Miles, 2002) perspectives have emerged as a new focus in the field by many theorists. Accordingly, transformative learning reflects a holistic and conceptual change in a person’s experience or understanding, and relates to some significant aspect of his or her world.

In order to foster transformative learning, learners would have to get out of their comfort zone of cognitive ability and their role after being given sufficient support. Mezirow (1991) stated that the main role of educators is to help learners to develop their practices and become more critically reflective, and to integrate perspectives and experience. Effective transformative learning stages, processes and levels should be integrated in education, in order to have positive effect and allow the phases and processes of perspective transformation to occur. Firstly, the process should begin with the transformation of perspective, and this should follow through all stages of change. Mezirow stated that individuals experience a disorienting dilemma while changing perspectives, such as an acute internal or external crisis, experience of uncertainty for a change in individuals’ beliefs, or having a sense of

disillusionment believing that the previous approaches are no longer effective (Taylor, 1998). This dilemma motivates individuals to consider self-change on different levels (DiClemente and Prochaska, 1998).

Then, there is the determination/preparation stage, where individuals experience self-examination and critical assessment with similarly situated people and begin to think about new options, relationships, skills, competencies and roles that the individual formally or informally designs and implements. This stage then becomes the action stage. As learners adapt new characteristics, relationships, and competencies, a new attitude and identity begin to emerge. The completion of this marks the end of the change or transformation process. These processes need to be completed under the supervision of a teacher through this transformational change framework in order to help students by making suggestions, and to adapt functional processes to corresponding stages of learning and development.

Clark (1993) and Merriam and Caffarella (1999) argued that the structures of transformational learning change can be dramatic or developmental in producing enhancing and developmental change. Efficient self-transformative learning change, or other type of changes such as the guided and the assisted change all depend on implementing the right things (processes) at the right times (stages or phases; DiClemente, and Prochaska, (1998). These stages help us understand the nature of a particular shift in intentions, attitudes and/or behaviours. The processes enable us to achieve the best effective shifts. The phases of perspective transformation assist us to understand how these shifts occur and experientially appreciate them when they do take place. Therefore, educators aiming to enhance

transformative learning should incorporate theory and practice of these models and prescribe the implementation of the right intervention (process) in proper sequence (stage).

Mezirow (2009) identifies ten stages of the learning process that establish the transformative learning experience. Through these stages, the learner potentially develops a critical thinking about their location and context in terms of belief and attitude. These stages are:

1. Recognise the details of the dilemma
2. Examine oneself and experience feelings of guilt and shame
3. Critically reflect on one's assumptions
4. Recognise one's discontent and discuss it with those who experience similar change
5. Explore new roles and new behaviours
6. Design a course of action
7. Acquire knowledge, strategies and skills to put one's plan into action
8. Experiment with new roles, actions and approaches
9. Develop competence and confidence in one's abilities
10. Reintegrate oneself into society with new world views and perspectives

(Adapted from Mezirow, 1991, pp.168-169.)

According to Taylor (2008), transformative learning processes take place within a pre-existing frame of reference. Frames of reference consists of norms and structures of expectations and assumptions. These assumptions and expectations shape learners' personal world views and form their perspectives and actions.

Taylor (2008) believes is difficult to change invalid assumptions and the behaviour that springs from them. He also states that to achieve effective reflection on one's own experience and transform one's internal frames of reference is a difficult step (Taylor 2008).

The next section discusses my personal transformation.

2.14. My transformation

The standard way of organising lecture halls in educational institution is a vital aspect of teaching methodology and techniques. For instance, halls, with chairs facing the lectern may signify the philosophy of essentialism, where education focuses more on 'injecting content into students' brains.' Different classroom designs and interaction reflect different philosophies. The factors of the nature of classroom design and interaction can either enable or inhibit different styles of teaching and learning (Park and Choi, 2014). Accordingly, classroom design has changed over time following the reform in educational methods and purposes. For example, an active, collaborative teaching and learning philosophy demands a rhetorical instructional style where students surround their teachers during educational dialogues. Supporting this philosophy, Astin (1993), and Carmean and Haefner (2002) argued that involvement in active peer interactions are the most significant factor enhancing the students' achievement and retention. Those writers considered deeper learning as active, social, engaging, contextual and student-centred practice that emphasises the importance of cooperative learning. Beichner and Saul (2003) confirmed that student-centred learning classrooms lead to improvement in the students' ability of problem-solving, dramatic reduction in

failure rates, particularly for women and minorities, promotion of conceptual understanding and better learning attitudes. Transformation of learning would also need to be supported by the availability of the necessary support, space and personal professional and emotional resources for reflection on concrete and small changes in the surrounding environment.

In this thesis, I contend that pedagogical transformation is not about moving from one static, fixed form to another; rather, it involves bringing equity to pedagogical practices, which implies in turn a dynamic perspective of the world. Hence, it was important for this research project to understand how learners transform from being controlled, constrained and teacher-led into independent learners, and what type of interactions enhance their language learning. For teachers to build on the tremendous potential of transformative learning in EFL classroom, they need to go beyond the process of providing only technical skills and suggesting teaching materials. Pedagogical transformation should be placed in a specific educational context, in which the need for transformation arises and is carried out. The reason for this is that the pedagogical transformation can be prompted by several converging factors. I have two turning points in this regard, personal and professional factors. Situating a teacher in local, personal, national, global and cultural settings are also important in analysing learning transformation. Particularities, oddities, individualities, contrasts and discontinuities need to be responded to in order to analyse the connectedness of the transformative agents to their environment and surroundings. That connectedness is not free of change but is nonetheless real.

While analysing and theorising the collected data in this thesis, I have used the concept of transformative learning theoretically. In this regard, effective transformation is indicated by major or dramatic changes at both a subjective and an objective level. The subjective level involves experienced identity and pedagogical thinking. The objective level involves changing, altering and enhancing the teaching process (Mezirow, 2009, p.23). Mezirow argued that transformation is a process in which individuals critically reconsider and reconceptualise their fundamental beliefs:

Transformation refers to a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives ... We transform frames of reference – our own and those of others – by becoming critically reflective of their assumptions and aware of their context – the source, nature, and consequences of taken-for-granted beliefs.

(Mezirow, 2000, p.18)

I agree with Jenkins et al (2011), that transformation has cultural, social and other affective scopes, which might remain unrevealed from an exclusively task-oriented perspective. Therefore, this thesis does not focus on the pedagogical changes that took place in context-specific practice. Instead, it focuses on the emotional, personal and dialogical processes that occurred, enabling pedagogical changes. Working as transformational teachers, Jenkins et al. (2011, p.7) argue that critical pedagogy, underpinning learning and teaching practices, should seek to prompt the overcoming of injustices faced in economic, social and institutional life. This

chapter has presented the literature review. The next chapter addresses methodology.

2.15. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed poststructural feminism as a theoretical frame work that underpins this study. It has explored gender performativity theory, and the notions of constituted gendered identity and gendered agency; it also has explored Foucault's power relations. Then it discussed learner-centredness and highlighted the importance of learning strategies and learner and teacher transformation. The next chapter is methodology; it discusses among other issues, the methods used to generate the data for this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction to research context

This chapter presents the methodological approach used in this study. It starts with my ontological and epistemological position. Then the research aims and research questions followed by a discussion on qualitative research and a review of the case study as a research strategy and its link to the methodological orientation of the study. After that, the chapter outlines the participants and considers the ethical considerations. This is followed by a section on the intervention used in the study, which describes both the overall intervention and the tailored instructional interventions that deal with the explicit teaching of gender issues and metacognitive learning strategies. This includes specific aspects dealing with students' participation and identity issues while they participated in classroom discursive practices. The final section of the chapter is on research methods and triangulation. It has four parts: interviews, learner diaries, classroom observation and learner documents, and includes some discussion of data analysis. Section 3.2 addresses my ontological and epistemological positioning.

3.2. My ontological and epistemological positioning

Cohen et al. (2007, pp. 5-6) define ontology as 'the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated.' They also state that epistemology is 'the very bases of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how it is communicated to other human beings.' People hold subjective realities, and these subjective realities guide their social interactions. Hence, it is important to

study these guiding subjective realities. I started this study with the aim to understand how gendered classroom discursive practices influence learning, and to investigate students' and in particular females' perceptions of such practices. Ontologically, participants have their own subjective meanings of reality based on their personal experiences. As an interpretivist researcher who put himself on the participants' shoes, I was able to appreciate how they operated within their structural circumstances. Moreover, by viewing the participants as experts on their personal experiences and on various gendered classroom realities that involved power relations, I was able to gain a better understanding of their responses.

The concept of epistemology is also related to the ontological standpoint. Epistemology is the knowledge that we gain by investigating the truth, and the type of the truth that we communicate with others (Creswell et al, 2007). The moment I started this research, I believed that by talking to the participants I would be able to explore their classroom views and experiences. As a teacher and educationalist, I had my own set of ideas, which were influenced by my personal viewpoints about classroom discursive practices; however, I have experienced a shift in my positionality throughout the PhD journey, due to the changes that challenged my internal framework and as a result new ways of thinking and new insights unfolded. By exploring the participants' experiences, and how they view realities (Robson, 2002), and by constructing and developing the themes based on how they saw them, I tried to carefully and accurately make sure that the participants' generated data was not influenced by my subjective judgements. Having said that, I am aware that I need to be reflexive about the different positions that I played, and that

interpretive researchers cannot eliminate their bias in such circumstances (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Choosing both an interpretative approach to analyse the generated data, and adopting poststructural feminism as a theoretical framework to illuminate the classroom gendered incidents played a role in shaping my feminist methodology. Poststructural feminism reflects my own understanding of the world. Viewed in this way, my ontological and epistemological positioning comes within the paradigm of an interpretivist qualitative approach. I was concerned with some classroom discursive practices that were structured by Omani social and patriarchal norms, and particularly when these norms influenced the paths the participants took in order to establish their own social realities.

By adopting a feminist methodology (Weedon 1987) I was aware that my subjective and reflexive positioning in the study (Reid 1984), played a role in processing the participants' experiences of classroom gendered incidents. In doing so, I was careful to centralise their voices and to balance it reflexively with my own (Butler, 2015; Hemmings, 2012).

By combining interpretivism with poststructural feminism as a theoretical framework, I ensured that my research engaged the participants, not only talking to them, but also interacting with them as allies (Ahmed, Hundt and Blackburn, 2011). The next section addresses my positionality as insider/outsider.

3.3. Insider/outsider positionality

According to Bonner and Tolhurst (2002), inside researchers share commonalities, interests and characteristics with the researched individuals or groups. Rooney

(2005) suggests this commonality can improve and foster trustworthiness and results in greater understanding of the data. Researchers as insiders can get easy access to marginalised groups. They can also have the chance to establish rapport with the researched (O'Sullivan, 1999).

Outsider researchers' status, however, enables a degree of anonymity and privacy between the researcher and the researched, keeping the distance between the two, such that the participants feel more comfortable (Couture, Zaidi and Maticka-Tyndale, 2012). Rooney (2005) also states that outside researchers can avoid using their personal bias to influence the research process. Having said that, this might also be a barrier for the researcher to access and to get in-depth understanding of cultural and pivotal incidents that insider researchers can share with the researched in a particular culture or context (Green and Thorogood, 2004).

It is important to clearly justify my own circumstances within this research project (Rodham et al. 2013). With regard to my own positionality, the binary of insider-outsider does not fit well. My methodology is Butlerian and interpretative; and grounded in poststructural feminism. Here I consider myself an insider (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Additionally, I am a teacher of English in the College of Distinction, where the researched participants studied, which enabled my insider positioning as a feminist, interpretivist, Muslim, Arab, researcher who has lived in Oman for more than 20 years. This helped me to know the participants and their learning environment. On the other hand, there were some other commonalities that I did not share with the participants, for example being male and Sudanese could classify me as an outsider. My male gender in particular, was sometimes a

strong disconnect; for example, I saw myself as an outsider when I faced some difficulties while conducted my pilot interview with the participants, (see section 3.17).

It is important to consider my role as an insider teacher/researcher of the current study, and the types of transformative tailored interventions that I designed to address classroom emergent issues. As a teacher and researcher, I played different types of roles. For example, in addition to teaching the class, I played the role of tension diffuser when I sometimes reminded the students about classroom rules and regulations and the need to think about the Other and about their feelings and rights, however, at other times, I play the role of a motivator to support and encourage my students to step out of the norm and think outside the box, to take risks and to give presentations in front of the mixed-gender class. I play the role of a community organiser when I encourage peer acceptance and classroom collective efficacy. This research focuses on learner identity formation, Classroom participation, inclusion and equal opportunities for both male and female students.

3.4 The importance of being reflexive

My stance as a poststructural feminist teacher and researcher requires me to understand how the participants of this study constructed knowledge and made meaning through gendered classroom discursive practices (Smith et al., 2009). As a researcher, I was aware that my philosophical stance, my cultural perspective and my cognitive processes would have an impact on the research process (Clarke, 2009). In order for my interpretation of the generated data to be authentic and trustworthy (Finlay, 2011), I had to be aware of my role and illuminate my

standpoint (Khawaja & Morck, 2009), and to be aware of my values and biases (Pillow, 2003). Moreover, I had to become aware of the way my values and teaching experiences could shape the study process (Finlay, B, 2002). I was able to achieve this through the process of being reflexive. In this regard, Jasper (2003) explains reflection as a means to achieve insight, by processing views and beliefs through a dynamic and deliberate examination of conscious thinking and self-speech, and the result is that we as teachers and researchers transform and change by learning from our experiences; this process leads to transformative change (Mezirow, 1990; Schon, 1983). The term 'reflection' is usually used interchangeably with 'reflexivity' (Finlay, 2011), but in order to explain the ongoing reflexive practices throughout this poststructural feminist research, I stick to the term 'reflexivity'.

Archer (2003) defined reflexivity as a practice of internal speech that can be used to interrogate ourselves and question our values and beliefs, in order to personally advance and develop through 'diagnosing our situations, deliberating concerns and defining our own practices' (Archer, 2003, p.103). Researcher reflexivity is important for this research, as I used it to as a hermeneutic interpretive process within which I have two roles: as a teacher who closely interacted with the participants, empowered them, and allowed a space for them to voice themselves and to speak their minds; and as a researcher who consciously applied reflexive strategies to interpret the generated data without being over-interpretive and at the same time, without skewing the data.

Being reflexive enabled me to value the participants' knowledge and not to evaluate this knowledge in comparison to my own. Reflexivity led me to recognise that my participants did not operate in a vacuum, they were able to exercise power to assert their standpoint when they not only positioned me but also transformed me and my behaviour in the classroom (Willems, 2007; see Section 6.1.1, 6.1.2, and 6.1.3). Reflexivity made me aware of how my participants exercised power when they decided the extent to which they opened up and contributed to knowledge construction, and when they agreed to share with me their ideas, thought and emotions (Nencel 2005) via their diaries and interviews.

3.5. A feminist poststructural reflexive stance

As a feminist researcher who seeks to interrogate power relations between me and the participants and among the participants themselves, it was important to be reflexive. For me as a researcher, it is not enough to only recognise and acknowledge my positionality as a poststructural feminist teacher who taught English to the participants. Rather, I needed to pay close attention to the nuances and subtleties of culturally structured power relations and discursive practices in the classroom. DeVault and Gross address the relationship between the researcher/researched:

Research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power. Rather, they are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance

(DeVault and Gross, 2012, p. 215)

In order to be reflexive about my role, I actively interrogated my positionality and the operating power relations by discussing power relations with the participants. I also sought to hear other voices, and stopped at different stages of the research to check whether my assumptions had influenced the research process (Reay, 1996). Being a male researcher who was interviewing Omani female participants in the Omani socioculturally conservative context, I was mindful of the structures that might constrain the interviewing process (see section 3.21 and 3.21.1), and was able to find a suitable solution. Methodologically, I was also mindful that by interviewing the participants and teaching them how to use their reflective diaries, I was giving them spaces to control the research by leaving them to speak and to write about the issues that they thought were of importance.

At earlier stages of the research process, I used my researcher diary to record how my teaching progressed, and some classroom emergent problems. I realised that I did not record any reflections about these problems, for example, the first Bushra/Khalid confrontation (see section 4.2):

Khalid (male student) was rude to Bushra (female student). Bushra kept silent and did not respond. I warned Khalid and asked him not to do that again, and he nodded his head.

(Researcher's Reflexive Diary, Bushra/Khalid confrontation)

About a month after this incident, I decided to use my diary to record classroom problems and how I thought about solving them, and call it the researcher's reflexive diary. I started using this diary to reflect on my research process.

In reflecting on the research process, I wrote reflective questions such as:

I have some unanswered questions about my classroom:

- ☐ What to do with rude behaviour in the classroom?
- ☐ What are the best methods of collecting valuable data?
- ☐ How can I start my research?
- ☐ What kind of topics should I investigate?

I think I need to work on these questions one at a time, for example I need to observe classroom talk, then to monitor rude behaviour, I also need to read about research methodology, and talk to the students and establish stronger rapport with them.

(Researcher's reflexive dairy (8), on reflection)

It was clear to me that the questions and issues mentioned in the diary required time to solve. Three of the questions were important because they were about the research process. And I felt that I had to read more about such areas (data collection tools and research topics). I had to address some of the problems, like rude behaviour, slowly and systematically. Then, because classroom management problems sprang up again, the idea of developing transformative interventions came to my mind.

I am reading about research types, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, Denzin and Lincoln (2011). I need to decide what to do and which approach to choose. I like the concept of diary writing by students. Today, Khalid was singing in the class, and when I looked at him, he kept silent. Salim violently snatched a book from Bakheet (2 classroom management

problems). I think I need to design an intervention to address the problem of rude behaviour in the classroom, particularly Khalid and Salim.

(Researcher's reflexive dairy (11), on reflection)

In the above diary, I wrote about reading Denzin and Lincoln (2011). My ideas about qualitative paradigms started to take shape. I expressed my preference of using students' diaries as a research tool. I also recorded two classroom behaviours in the classroom, and, more importantly, I wrote for the first time about developing classroom interventions.

3.6. Research aims

This study aims to explore identity formation and transformation among Omani female learners in relation to their learning experiences within a learner-centred classroom. It explores the complex relationships between female students with male students and staff within the learning environment. In doing so, Butler's performativity theory of gender (Butler, 2004) and Foucault's theories of disciplinary power and technologies of the self (Foucault, 1980, 1988) are called to illuminate and clarify the collected data. The study also addresses the emergence of learners' performative and/or discursive agency processes which show how they were sometimes prone to change during interaction within classroom activities. In this research context is one of the Omani governmental tertiary colleges, the College of Distinction (for more information see Chapter One, 1.5 The context of the study).

3.7. Research questions

Rather than completely being shaped in advance, the design of this research developed and took its shape concurrently with the data collection. Janesick (2003) points out that this developmental process is commonplace in the field of qualitative research. When I started this research, I was aware of the importance of gender issues in classroom mechanisms, and their effects on female students' participation. As I started reading the relevant literature, different issues emerged in this regard, such as: masculinity and femininity in the classroom; female participation and classroom equality; classroom atmosphere and power; student empowerment strategies and student transformation; and the emergence of the concept that for students to 'think outside the box' in the classroom, there needed, in an Omani context, to be more investigation.

The research questions of this study are informed by the theorisations outlined in Chapter Two. In what follows, the research questions and the data sources and methods are linked:

Table 3.1 Research Questions and Methods of Data Collection

Research Questions	Data sources and methods
1. In what way are Omani female student subjectivities done or undone through discursive practices in a tertiary learner-centred classroom?	1. Interviews 2. Analysis of students' reflective diaries 3. Classroom observation 4. Participant observation

<p>2. How might the use of students' metacognitive strategies affect their learning, reflection, participation and transformation in the Omani tertiary classroom? Two different aspects of metacognitive strategies emerged in the collected and analysed data:</p> <p>a. students developed transformative learning and reflected on emerging mixed-gender classroom problems.</p> <p>b. students fostered transformative learning and reflected on how they learn while studying in a classroom.</p>	<p>1. Interviews</p> <p>2. Analysis of students' reflective diaries</p> <p>3. Classroom observation</p> <p>4. Participant observation</p> <p>5. Students' presentations</p>
<p>3. In what ways does my interaction with students impact upon my transformation?</p>	<p>1. Interviews</p> <p>2. Researcher's reflexive diary</p> <p>3. Analysis of students' reflective diaries</p>

As can be seen from Table 3.1, the study uses interviews, students' reflective diaries, classroom observation, participant observation and students' documents in order to understand the complex and performative interrelationships between

female students and the educational and social structure in which they learn and live in the Omani cultural tertiary context.

For the first time in their lives, the participant students (see Table 3.3) found themselves in a mixed gender class. Classes are 'mixed' but not in the literal sense of the word. They are 'mixed' according to the Omani social and cultural context but the class is divided into two separate halves. Either male learners sit at the front of the class and females sit at the back, or they sit in two parallel halves with males sitting on the right and females sitting on the left or vice versa. For the students, this is the first year of their college study, and, according to Omani social norms, males and females rarely speak or interact with each other. They do this only when the teacher asks them to act a role-play or read a dialogue. Females in particular are concerned about their reputations. If a female learner speaks to a male colleague every now and then, other members of the class might stereotype her in a way which could be damaging to her reputation in the conservative Omani society. This is an example of how behaviour can be moulded and framed by the institutionalised societal norms and conventions (Deters, 2011, p.49). Such social roles and positions justify gender behaviour and give it meaning. These social roles and positions can also play a role in shaping and reproducing traditional sociocultural contexts in Omani society.

3.8. A qualitative approach

I adopted a qualitative approach because this study is concerned with the experiences of students and their perceptions, their identity formation and agency and its emergence and enactment in relation to classroom processes while

learning English as a second language. The study draws on poststructural principles which challenge the dichotomy between females and males and that view learning English as a foreign language as a social process, where participants are engaged as dynamic and changing learners. It also views classroom discursive practices as critical and constitutive. Such complex relationships need to be understood and interpreted by using qualitative research because of its multifaceted nature which embraces various disciplines, methods and interpretations. Denzin and Lincoln offer a working definition that identifies the components of qualitative research:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relation between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, pp. 4-5).

This definition is relevant to the current thesis because it highlights the importance of experiences within a social context. Richards (2003) highlighted two fundamental misconceptions about qualitative research; because it does not deal with numbers, a) 'it is not research at all,' and b) at best it is 'a soft option.' He refutes these, by arguing that 'qualitative research is anything but a soft option – it demands rigour, precision, system and careful attention to detail' (Richards, 2003, p.6). Brown (2004, pp. 486-487) displays a table of qualitative and quantitative paradigms summarised by Reichardt and Cook (1979, p.10). In doing so, he points

out some of the characteristics of qualitative research such as observation. Brown (2004, pp. 486-487) describes these as 'often well planned and structured in their own ways,' or a 'well-designed interview schedule,' a 'classroom observation check list' and 'carefully planned discourse coding scheme' as components of qualitative research. This study utilises a similarly disciplined approach in order to understand students' discursive practices, actions and experiences in a learner-centred classroom.

When planning for this case study, I had an informal meeting with the head of the English Language Department and the foundation programme coordinator at the College of Distinction. The meeting was with two of the leading figures in the College who were directly involved with foundation students. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: to inform them about the research study and its aims and to get approval for conducting the study. Some of the study aims were to gain an in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning processes with more focus on learner performance in the classroom and the aspects that foster or constrain learner participation during the teaching/learning process. By the end of the meeting, the head of the English Language Department promised to discuss the issue with the dean of the college and to get his approval. A week later, the approval was granted. The next section addresses the case study as a research approach and why it was chosen for this study.

3.9. Methodological design

This research adopts a case study strategy (Yin, 2009), to investigate classroom discursive practices and the processes through which students' identities get done

or undone in the classroom context. It is an intrinsic single case study because it focuses on the participants who study in Section One, Level B, which is an English classroom at the College of Distinction. As a case, Section One with its gender proportion structure (25 students/participants, comprising four males and 21 females) represented a unique context that interested me, both as a teacher and as a researcher. The case study involved an in-depth investigation of this mixed-gender classroom, the participants and their discursive practices, and addressed their struggle while dealing with each other and with their learning challenges. The data collected from Section One, Level B formed the basic unit of analysis in this research. The study draws on theoretical contributions of Judith Butler (1990, 1997a, 1999, 2004), Michel Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980) and Louis Althusser (1980). The analytic process demonstrated the ways in which classroom discursive practices of female and male students (in addition to those of mine) performatively constitute 'intelligible' and 'unintelligible' students' subjectivity. It highlights instances of identity transformation at the level of both participation in the classroom and acquisition of knowledge (Sfard, 1998).

A case study was chosen as the main research strategy (Yin, 2009), because it allowed the research to locate Omani female learners in their educational and sociocultural context. It is significant in the Omani context to understand how sociocultural constraints are embedded within interaction, and the ways in which gender power relations might affect female learning opportunities. Case study design enabled me to investigate in depth and detail how these learners underwent transformation at two levels: their identity development as learners and their

academic performance and acquisition of course content. The purpose of the research was to understand how students' identities were constructed and the ways in which their discursive agencies were enacted as they participated in this innovative educational project at the College of Distinction. In this regard, students' discursive agency was considered as an entity able to transform and change (Butler, 2006). This study focuses mainly on female students' identity formation because I am interested in understanding the ways these female learners coped with classroom challenges and obstacles. Male students' identity formation was also dealt with, as they studied in the same classroom, but to a lesser degree.

The study used an embedded case design and analysed data that was collected from a foundation classroom (Section One, Level B), to describe and understand the prevalent discursive practices, struggles and dilemmas of the classroom context. The case is being analysed at two levels: firstly, the way these students (in particular) females negotiate their identities through participation; and, secondly, the way they use metacognitive strategies and reflexive practices to enhance their learning in the classroom. Single case study was adopted because Dyer and Wilkins (1991, p.53) believe it is better to use this approach; it enables the researcher to infuse theory into the collected data and generate theoretical understanding of the studied phenomenon. Moreover, a single case study provides the researcher with a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

This case study comprised a teaching intervention and was based on data collected from Omani female and, to lesser degree, male learners who studied at the College of Distinction. This was because I taught one of the four classes who

studied at this level. It is an exploratory and explanatory case study (Yin, 2009, p.9). It is exploratory because it addresses the issue of learner identity in a learner-centred approach in an Omani educational and sociocultural context. It is explanatory because it deals with 'operational links needing to be traced over time' (Yin, 2009, p.9). This study is original because it examined gender relations in the classroom context. Moreover, it researched an alternative theory to the dominant, restricted domain of the teacher-centred classroom in the field of language teaching and learning (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2010), and promoted a learner-centred approach as a new pedagogical practice in the Omani educational context (Al-Issa, 2012, p.16). The data was collected from the participants by using the following research tools: interviews, students' reflective diaries, classroom observation, participant observation and learner documents.

3.10. The participants

All participants were Omani learners: 25 in total who studied in the foundation year (Section One, Level B) at the College of Distinction, one of the Omani Colleges of tertiary education. Before they started their degree study, they had to pass their foundation programme, which was an intensive language course that aimed to improve their command of English. Since English was the medium of instruction at the college, the foundation programme also aimed to prepare them for their fields of specialisations. These learners (21 females and four males) came from different regions of Oman (see Table 3.3. for details). This gender imbalance is of particular importance as it seems also to be an under-researched area. I have not found any published research study on this issue, and as such this study represents a

previously missing element in the research literature. It is worth mentioning that this gender imbalance is prevalent in most Omani tertiary institutions and specialisations. For example, in the Faculty of Medicine, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), female learners would outnumber males if the admission percentage were to be based on merit and left without interference. The Omani Ministry of Health is in need of both female and male doctors in a society where no female patient will go to a male doctor to ask for a medical check-up and treatment (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012, p.144). In order to strike a gender balance, male learners can enter the Faculty of Medicine even when their percentage score is lower than that of females in the General Examination Certificate (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012).

In this study all of the participants' first language is Arabic and their ages ranged between 19 and 21. All of them had studied English as a foreign language for 12 years. None of them had been to an English speaking country. They are identified in the thesis account by the use of pseudonyms.

After young people have completed 12 years of general schooling, the Omani Ministry of Higher Education distributes the learners to higher education institutions where they sit placement tests in order to rank them according to their ability English. Students are distributed to their fields of speciality by the Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry decides who studies what according to their levels and desires. There are three major specialisations in the College of Distinction: English language teaching, information technology, and business administration. After arriving at the college and starting their studies, some learners express their

dissatisfaction with their specialisations, but it is not easy to change once they are distributed to their majors.

In spite of the fact that Butler (2006), and Foucault, (1980) use the terms ‘subjects,’ this thesis uses the terms ‘participants,’ ‘learners’ and ‘students’ interchangeably because the context of this study focuses on classroom discursive practices.

Table 3.2 Section One, Level B participants’ gender, number and the teacher

Section	Males	Females	Total	Teacher
1	4	21	25	Male

This study lasted for two academic semesters. One group of level B students participated, and, when they finished semester one, they moved to semester two, level A. The field work for this study started in September 2012 and finished in June 2013. Learners studied general English, the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in addition to grammar and a Study Skills book. The syllabus contained a course book, a workbook and an exercise book, the latter being used by learners to write their tasks, list new vocabulary items and incorporate diary entries. These students studied English, maths and information technology. They studied English for 18 hours per week, Maths for three hours and Information Technology for three hours, with a total number of 24 hours classroom time per week. I taught Section One ten hours a week and saw them four times a week. On Tuesdays, Section One studied four hours of English.

In spite of the fact that students were classified as pre-intermediate according to their performance in the placement test when they first came to the college, they had varied abilities. It is normal to find some students with a good command of English sitting next to less able students or elementary level students. Some less able students seemed to struggle a lot in order to successfully proceed with their studies, because English is the medium of instruction at the college, and they found it difficult to score the 50% pass mark in order to proceed to the next level. This could be due to their weaker performance or it might be due to the mode of instruction which is dominated by teacher-centred approach (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012). The next table shows the structure of Table 3.3. which gives detailed information of the students' code names, gender, age, major, proficiency, status, and their signature of consent forms.

Table 3.3 A profile of students in Section One, Level B

No.	Name Code	Gender	Age	Major	Status	Proficiency	Signed Consent
1	Ameera	F	20	English	Single	Good	Yes
2	Anwaar	F	19	English	Single	Good	Yes
3	Arwa	F	19	English	Single	Good	Yes
4	Awadh	M	19	Information Technology	Single	Average	Yes
5	Badiya	F	20	Business	Single	Average	Yes
6	Bakheet	M	20	English	Single	Good	Yes
7	Basma	F	19	English	Single	Good	Yes

8	Bushra	F	20	English	Single	Good	Yes
9	Ghada	F	19	Business	Single	Average	Yes
10	Hiba	F	19	Business	Single	Good	Yes
11	Intisar	F	20	Information Technology	Single	Good	Yes
12	Jokha	F	21	Business	Single	Average	Yes
13	Juhaina	F	20	Information Technology	Single	Average	Yes
14	Khalid	M	20	English	Single	Average	Yes
15	Khawla	F	19	English	Single	Average	Yes
16	Ola	F	19	English	Single	Average	Yes
17	Rahma	F	19	Business	Single	Good	Yes
18	Saleema	F	20	Business	Single	Good	Yes
19	Salim	M	20	English	Single	Average	Yes
20	Shrouq	F	19	Business	Single	Good	Yes
21	Sameera	F	19	Information Technology	Single	Average	Yes
22	Suad	F	19	English	Single	Average	Yes
23	Suha	F	21	Information Technology	Single	Average	Yes
24	Zahra	F	20	Information Technology	Single	Good	Yes
25	Zainab	F	19	Eng	Single	Average	Yes

3.11. Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were always of great importance during all the various stages of the current study, and so the role of values was initially considered and accounted for throughout the research process in line with Bryman:

How should we treat the people on whom we conduct research? And what are the activities in which we should not engage in our relations with them.

(Bryman, 2008, p.13)

Once permission was granted from the college to conduct the research, I arranged a meeting with the 25 participants at the beginning of the first semester. He described his role and introduced the study, explaining its significance and what it aimed to achieve, and describing the vital role they could play in conducting the study. Students were then given the option of participation if they were interested. Diaries, classroom observations, audio-recorded interviews and students' documents were also discussed and illustrated before students who wished to participate in the study were asked to sign the consent forms. They were assured that participation was purely voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons.

When dealing with ethical issues, The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2011) were used while introducing the study and collecting and analysing the data. BERA (2018) were also subsequently reviewed. Before the consent forms were given to participants (see Appendix A), I made sure that the participants understood the research process and their rights to withdraw

and the roles they might be asked to play throughout the study. I informed them that each one would be given a pseudonym to make sure that their names and identities remained confidential. They were also assured that the collected data would be used only for research purposes and kept securely with password protection. When they agreed, the consent forms were given to and signed by the participants. For me, it is important that the participants should trust me and feel secure that their opinions would be respected and the collected data from and about them would not cause any harm to them in any way.

Throughout the empirical part of this study, unequal power relations between me and the students and also among students (both males and females) were a great concern to me. For that reason, I attempted to reduce the power differential between myself and the participants, and between the males and females. With regard to the power difference between me and the participants, I adopted an informal teaching approach that created a positive classroom atmosphere. This helped the participants to feel sufficiently secure to speak their minds, but also challenged them academically. With regard to power relations among the participants, I designed what was planned to be a transformative and behavioural intervention to deal with specific issues as they emerged in the classroom. As I adopted a learner-centred approach, I situated the participants and their needs at the centre of the teaching and learning process and allowed the students to express themselves and their opinions without over-domination. I was also concerned with power relations among the students and I tailored and designed interventions to address this issue (see section 3.14). At the same time, I varied

my own positions while teaching: organising, motivating, encouraging and sometimes working as a conflict diffuser, when needed, especially when there are any classroom conflicts.

Other ethical issues were also taken into consideration while conducting this study, including, for example, when I sought permission of those who were in charge of the college, and, in doing so, informed the head of the department and the dean of the college about the study, its significance and its aims. All relevant permissions were granted (see Appendix G).

According to BERA (2011), confidentiality is another important ethical issue. I informed the students that all the information about them would be kept securely on his hard disc and saved with a password. Nobody else except I as the researcher would have access to it. I also assured them that the information gathered about them and Section One, Level B would be used only for doctoral purposes and not be published without their permission, and that, when the study was over, any recordings would be destroyed (BERA, 2011). I assured the participants that their anonymity would be carefully protected, and that, the participants, the section and the college would be given pseudonyms to assure objectivity and protect their privacy. For example, the participants would be given code names and the group would be identified as Section One, and the college would be called the College of Distinction. While interviewing the participants (in both scheduled and follow-up interviews), the importance of anonymity was emphasised to encourage the participants to feel secure, be themselves and to speak their minds.

3.12. My background

I am a Sudanese male teacher of English. I hold an advanced certificate in TESOL and a master's degree in applied linguistics and TESOL from the University of Leicester. As a result of my initial experiences in the UK, I am interested in learner-centredness and gender studies, and in the work of Judith Butler (1999, 2004, 2006) as a means to examine discourse and behaviour in the classroom and in order to gain an in-depth understanding of power relations, identities, constraints and aspirations, as described by the students themselves. I have been a teacher of English for more than 20 years. My experience in Omani general and higher education is more than 15 years. Although I am Sudanese, I share with the students the first language, Arabic, the Middle Eastern Culture and the Islamic religion (with some minor differences).

My long experience in Oman has equipped me with a deep understanding of Omani cultural, social and educational contexts. I believe that when students are encouraged to voice themselves, to be their true selves, they can participate and take an active role in classroom activities; this belief has imbued my role as researcher. For this reason, I felt compelled to consider the participants' identities and classroom power relations when I designed the interventions. This is in line with Foucault (1980) who defines power as 'a characteristic of both individuals and groups, a force, implicated and implemented by discursive practices' (Foucault, 1980, p.18). In this definition, power is conceptualised as an entity that is possessed by participants as well as by groups. It takes the form of actions and discourses. I believe that Foucault (1980), and Butler's (2004, 2006) theorisations

are relevant to this study because they can be applied in the classroom to empower students, to encourage them to express themselves and to raise their awareness about participation, power relations and unequal classroom practices. For example, when teachers distance themselves from their learners and stand at the front of the class and start lecturing, they are in fact depriving learners of their right to interact. By doing that, they are inhibiting students' creativity. Foucault's (1980) notion of power encourages participation and co-operative learning. Co-operative learners empower themselves, voice their thoughts and maximise their role, and at the same time minimise teachers' and other students' dominance and power.

The data suggest that students' and in particular female students' performative agencies were constrained by classroom discursive practices that draw on and reflect the Omani wider society. The analysis process shows how female students' identity categories are constrained and rendered intelligible or unintelligible. It also presents instances of performative constitution of female students' identities, which led to reinscription and sometimes transformation of their constituted identities. In this study, the term 'reinscription' is used in instances where the classroom discursive practice is reiterated and thus resulted in an emergence of the performative agency of the constituted student. The analysis contributes to our existing understanding of how students' identities are constituted and sometimes transformed in the classroom context. It highlights the processes that result in educational inequalities and manifests tailored interventional plans to address such classroom constraints, articulating the ways in which some students experience reflection and self-transformation.

Inspired by the prominence of social perspectives in the field of second language acquisition, the study views education as a means of social transformation that encourages students' development and empowerment. Education supports students to participate in unequal discursive classroom practices and thereby to take part in transforming the classroom into a more equal and inclusive domain. More importantly, their experiences in the classroom add to their lifelong learning repertoires and contribute to wider society transformation.

In doing so, the study describes the practices and experiences of these learners and how their identities were transformed to incorporate their discursive agencies. I designed an interactive overall tailored intervention module to affect learners' behaviours and generate positive attitudes towards classroom participation, social interaction and accepting the different 'Other.'

3.13. Researcher's reflexive diary

Borg (2001, p.157) defines a reflective diary as a 'form of reflective writing which researchers engage in during a project and through which they document their personal experience of the research process.' Finlay, A. (2002) highlights the importance of keeping records throughout the research process by pointing out that:

Ideas that emerge from the research process should be documented. The construction of analytic or methodological memoranda and working papers, are of vital importance. It is important that the processes of exploration be documented and retrievable.

(Finlay, A. 2002, p. 539)

I used the reflexive diary throughout the research process. The data was collected in a developmental way in which I recorded thoughts, reflections and insights and personal experiences. I recorded notes about the participants and their responses and reactions and sometimes facial expressions. Keeping the diary helped me to be reflexive and to reflect critically on his practices as well as studying the participants. The reflexive diary helped in the different stages of the analysis process.

3.14. The transformative interventions and interventional tools

Different and multi-faceted types of transformative tailored interventions were designed for this study, to address specific classroom learning problems and specific students. Tilly and Flugum (1995, p.87) define an intervention as ‘a planned modification of the environment made for the purpose of altering behaviour in a pre-specified way.’ This definition is useful as one of the behavioural tailored interventions used here aimed to alter and change students’ (particularly males’) behaviour in the classroom with regard to gender stereotyping.

After talking to students about their expectations and from what me and students wrote in their respective reflective diaries about classroom discursive practices and learning difficulties, I identified two general themes for the interventions. Accordingly, I designed two general transformative interventions. He called one of them the ‘Gender Equity Intervention’ and the other the ‘Metacognitive Strategies Intervention.’

Under the Gender Equity Intervention, I started by asking two questions to activate the students’ prior knowledge and to identify gaps in students’ knowledge, if any.

The questions were: 1. What do you know about gender effects on classroom participation? 2. What does 'gender-inclusive classroom' mean? The topic was completely new to the students, and although some females complained that they were unable to speak and to express their minds (as they said when I interviewed them) none of them were able to answer these questions. Having reviewed responses to the questions above, I introduced the topic of gender inequity and explained the effects of gender on participation in the classroom, and I also explained the meaning of gender-inclusive classroom, highlighting the importance of such classrooms (when I was sure that they did not know the answer). I gave examples of sexist language of jobs, like policeman/policewoman, steward/stewardess and actor/actress. I asked the students about the disadvantages of these job and classifications. The students were silent for some time; when they did respond, their answers seemed underdeveloped. Then Jokha said, 'Sometimes women are not given the jobs because they take maternity leave.' I thanked her and based on Jokha's answer, I introduced the concept of gender inequality in the workplace, and demonstrated how some women are paid less than men just because they are women, in spite of the fact that they do the same jobs as men. In the workplace, sometimes men are given priority in getting appointments while women are rejected, again simply because they are women.

More specific and tailored transformative interventions were designed to address specific classroom problems that were related to participation, the effects of gender and power relations. For example, the interventions directed at Khalid and Salim were specifically designed to raise their awareness of power relations, patriarchal

discourse and the effects of masculine discursive practices. As part of the intervention, they were asked to reflect on what they had done and the effect that their actions might have had on their female peers, by reflecting and putting themselves in their shoes.

The Metacognitive Strategies Interventions were specifically tailored and designed to address, transform and solve the learning problems and the need for reflective learning. The interventions focused on students' ability to build mental images about their learning, for example, when they had to give presentations, they needed to rehearse and practise their presentations and to imagine themselves giving their presentations. In doing so, they needed to explore their topics and anticipate problems that may arise while giving the presentations. They also needed to think of possible solutions to those problems. For example, if they went blank, what should they do? Or if they did not know an answer to a question raised by one of the audience, how could they respond effectively in such situations (Negretti, 2012, p.142)?

For some other students, I needed to introduce the concept of metacognitive strategies and the notion of reflection to help participants to improve the way they studied and adopt new study methods that incorporated metacognitive strategies and reflection in their learning. In order to do that, they needed to discuss their lessons with other peers and to share their knowledge.

To be able to participate effectively in English in the classroom, the students required relevant vocabulary, useful and interactive phrases and to be prepared to participate in games and interactive tasks, varying their learning strategies and

engaging with metacognitive strategies. I supported this endeavour by developing a group of useful phrases such as phrases for asking for repetition and clarifications, which were needed by most of the students (see Appendix E)

The intervention aimed to promote gender equity in the classroom and create a positive, collaborative and inclusive classroom atmosphere where all students could participate and speak their minds. It was designed and developed by utilising various tools. It set the scene and encouraged learners to work collaboratively in classroom activities, promoting their negotiation and collaboration. Moreover, the intervention introduced the notion of mutuality and equality and created a collaborative learning environment. Collaborative learning encourages learning to have 'a transformative potential for all the participants' (Iborra et al., 2010). With regard to classroom practices, Wiersema (2001) differentiates between co-operative learning and collaborative learning:

Collaborative is more than co-operative. I would say that co-operation is a technique to finish a certain product together: the faster; the better; the less work for each; the better. Collaboration refers to the whole process of learning, to students teaching each other, students teaching the teacher, (why not) and of course the teachers teaching the students too.

(Wiersema, 2001, p.19)

By having learners adopt these ideas, acquire them and apply them in the classroom, for example, sharing their knowledge and learning from each other, giving presentations and negotiating meaning, I implemented a collaborative intervention. As teachers, we when we value our students and cherish their

thoughts and ideas, we help them to be themselves, to speak their minds and we also learn new things from them.

A communicative syllabus was developed based on learner-centred principles to enable the intervention study. The core idea that underpinned the intervention (and the whole study) was that priority must be given to learner identity in the classroom, as it is embedded in the experiences of learner participation in classroom interactions. In this regard, Butler's (2006) and Foucault's (1972) theorisations provide a useful spectrum of identity conceptualisations. Therefore, the tailored interventions were informed by Butler's (2006) notion of social intelligibility and Foucault's (1972) notion of disciplinary power. Other theories, which consider identity as deeply embedded in activity and as part of social practice, also informed the study (Holland et al., 1998), as did those that perceive identity construction as recognition (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999; Gee, 2000; Taylor, 1994). Careful consideration was given to getting students to work in pairs and to interact collaboratively in groups. The topics of the intervention were developed to match those in the Headway Plus course book for level B. They addressed personal themes such as family, food or hobbies; they also addressed sociocultural themes such as customs, cultures or education, or addressed professional themes such as employment, labour market or jobs and salaries. The main feature of the syllabus was that it was task-based. It combined tasks such as dictogloss, information gap, detecting picture differences, tasks such as 'Find someone who...' and cooperative writing. Explicit teaching, modelling learning strategies

and learning and negotiating for meaning through teaching were the basis of the syllabus.

Learners were given a handout that contained a number of prepared questions, phrases and sentences that they might need while they negotiated meaning. A weekly plan of the intervention was provided (see Table 3.4). I explained the concept of learning strategies as part of the syllabus. I modelled strategy use with the learners. For example, in vocabulary learning strategies, I linked the English word ‘guide,’ which is Arabic in origin, with the Arabic word ‘gaed,’ and encouraged them to reflect on their learning and say what type of strategy they used in order to accomplish the task. In this way, the students shared their knowledge and became aware of their own learning as well as their classmates.’ The intervention gave learners a chance to reflect on their learning and to interact with their peers as well to engage in an activity that was new in Omani higher education.

Table 3.4 Weekly timetables of the intervention

Topic	Skills	Learning strategies	Learners’ role	Teacher’s role

Gender equity sessions	Students' perceptions	Social strategies, interactions	Voice their ideas	Organiser Awareness-raiser
Video dictogloss A song or video	Negotiating For meaning	Agreeing, disagreeing, Social strategies, cooperative skills, asking for clarification, asking for repetition	Speaking, listening, writing, note-taking, correcting other's work	Organiser, monitor, assistant when needed
Presentation skills	Public speaking, eye contact, self confidence	Metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, planning Rehearsing	Prepare their topic, rehearse it, present it	Help with planning and rehearsing, and mental imaging Gives feedback

		Mental imaging		
The game 'Find someone who'	Asking and answering, reporting	Cognitive, social and metacognitive Ask and answer questions, lexical phrases, pair work	Learning by doing, moving around the class	Prepares and explains tasks, gives handouts, gives assistance when needed
Interactive reading	Sharing information	Scanning, skimming, reading for details, guessing meaning Vocabulary strategies, sharing ideas	Learning by doing, checking vocabulary	Prepares tasks, explain tasks, monitors and helps when needed

Picture description	Describing pictures	Describing pictures, asking/ answering	Negotiating for meaning, agreeing, disagreeing	Prepares tasks, monitors, gives help when needed
Interactive writing	Discuss and write drafts	Using mind map, bullet points, correcting writing	Brainstorm topics, ideas Order, classify	Explains tasks, gives feedback, monitors

3.14.1. Gender equity intervention

The aim of this gender-focused intervention was to increase the gender awareness of the participants and to undermine the socio-cultural prejudice of male students towards their female peers in the classroom. Research literature has shown that gendered interventions in Omani higher education remain sparse. These gender-focused interventions provided students with information about gender and about wider hegemonic practices. The intervention aimed to apply classroom inclusive education, where all the students, males and females, could express their opinions and voice their perspectives and participate freely in classroom discursive practices. Some classroom gendered incidents suggested a need for such gender-focused interventions. Section 3.14.2 introduces metacognitive strategies intervention.

3.14.2. Metacognitive strategies intervention

The concept of metacognitive strategies helps students think about their learning raise their awareness about what strategies they use while studying. Metacognitive strategies can be used to support students to learn different types of their courses. They can use these strategies to learn vocabulary, to learn to plan for their writing, and to evaluate their learning. The next section elaborates on the dictogloss task as one of the main aspects of the metacognitive intervention, as it required the participants to plan, think, reflect, and negotiate to do the task. When the students reflect on their learning and share their reflections loudly, they can evaluate their learning and regulate themselves, and change (Negretti, 2012).

3.14.3. Dictogloss task

This section explores the dictogloss task and the four stages that form its components. A dictogloss task (Wajnryb, 1990) is by nature a collaborative activity. It engages learners in cooperative interaction as they work collaboratively to reconstruct a text that they have listened to, either by hearing it read by the teacher or from an audio or video CD. Thornbury (1999, p.85) values the benefits of the dictogloss task and believes that it 'provides a useful means for guiding learners towards noticing the gap between their present competence and their target competence.' When learners produce the target language, they could discover such a gap. According to Wajnryb (1990, p.7), a dictogloss task has four stages: preparation, dictation, reconstruction and analysis. It is different from the traditional dictation in that, rather than write what was exactly dictated by the teacher, learners collaboratively reconstruct and then rewrite a version of the original text.

Students work in groups, helping each other and working to reconstruct a copy of the original text. This is called the reconstruction stage. Groups consisting of three or four learners are ideal (Thornbury, 1999, p.86), because in groups with five or more learners, some of the group members might feel reluctant to participate. The importance of the reconstruction stage lies in getting learners to produce output, and this leads them to 'consciously recognise some of their linguistic problems; it may bring to their attention something they need to discover about their L2' (Swain and Lapkin, 1995, p.375). In this regard, dictogloss seems to foster noticing, which is considered as a first step in acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). During the reconstruction stage, learners communicate, interact and collaborate, and thus become responsible learners. In general, in these Omani classrooms, learners reconstruct their dictogloss texts, they negotiate for meaning, and, as the researcher observes them, he discovers some of the problems that could hinder target language production, such as lack of instrumental language that helps in completing the task. This can result in excessive use of the mother tongue. Moreover, sometimes the participants do not know how to manage conflicts among group members, and some group members are reluctant to cooperate and take active roles as team members and prefer to work individually or not work hard.

During the analysis stage, learners compare and check the reconstructed texts written by different groups against the original text. This stage is a discussion and correction stage where learners highlight other learners' mistakes. Thornbury (2001, p.73) considers feedback and error correction as part of the input-output cycle. The analysis stage also generally raises Omani learners' awareness about

the gaps in their interlanguage and motivates them to discover and correct mistakes in other groups' texts. While Omani learners are involved in dictogloss tasks, they enhance their communicative fluency and increase their socialisation abilities.

Conducting the dictogloss task in the classroom provides me with a tool to minimise my role, and speech, and maximise learners' roles, and speaking time. Through engaging in the dictogloss task, learners actively participate and have their voices heard.

3.15. Evaluating my interventions

When I evaluate my tailored interventions, and how they developed; I think of how I used my reflexive Butlerian methodology to encourage the participants to be themselves, speak their minds and undo the stereotypical normative behaviours enacted on them by their other. Bearing in mind that as a teacher and a researcher, I did not have a control on the participants' reactions to the normalising behaviours by those other, (see section 4.2.1, and section 4.3.1). Unlike the participants' reactions', when I reflect on the incidents between me and the participants, I was able to be reflexive, control my emotions and behave like a tolerant teacher when interpellated by the participants (see section 6.1.2, and 6.1.3; see also section 5.2, and section 3.12.2 male students). To conclude my tailored interventions enhanced the mutual understanding between the participants and their Other; they spoke their mind, and enacted their agency, and transgressed. At the same time, the tailored interventions played a vital role in enhancing the mutual understanding between me and my participants. They encouraged them to speak naturally to me,

and even to criticise me (see sections 6.3 and 6.5). Transgression can be traced by interpreting participants' behaviours while they are constructing their identities and exercise their agencies

3.16. My voice and writing in the first person

My approach to this study utilised a qualitative style, while reporting my research. I therefore organised my data thematically and presented it in the first person. In the methodology chapter, I have detailed my feminist methodology. Throughout the thesis, there is no chapter specifically titled 'Discussion'. In the chapters on my research findings (Chapters Four, Five and Six), I have combined my findings with my analysis and discussion because I see findings and discussion as intertwined. In my view, it is not possible to separate the findings from their interpretive meanings.

The use of first person in reporting research is a controversial issue. Kirsch (1994, p.382) uses the phrase 'the authorial I', and argues that unrestricted use of the authorial I in academic research 'can easily lead to self-indulgent, parochial, or confessional writing ... or to writing that forgets its subject.' On the other hand, Raymond (1993, p.480) demonstrates that the authorial I does not necessarily mean the private or superior status of the writer; according to him, 'not all authorial I's are equal.' Tierney (2003) campaigns for the use of the first person and recognises the multiple ways writers and authors can employ a first-person voice (Tierney 2003, pp. 310-311).

I believe that developing my personal voice is more than using 'I' and 'my' in the research report. It means I need to express my personal opinion on the topic under investigation. I also believe that in order for my research to succeed, I need to show a sense of ownership of my arguments and thoughts. Having said that, I think it is important to strike a balance between being decisive and following academic rigor. I think that using first person can strengthen my academic argument if I use it appropriately. In spite of the fact that, sometimes I need to identify my own ideological standpoint by employing first person, it is not always the case. To exemplify this, I employ the first person 'I', but, not always to express my opinion, my uniqueness, or more importantly, my privileged status over the participants as their teacher. In many instances I used 'I' to show my vulnerabilities, dilemmas and difficult choices (see Sections 6.1, 6.2., 6.3, and 6.4),

So, to conclude, I am a male poststructuralist and feminist researcher who believes in equity and social justice between males and females, and I am a qualitative reflexive researcher who is interested in understanding the nuanced and fluid intersection between gender, power and other identity categories. I believe that social transformation can take place as a result of feminist qualitative methodologies in research, and, in line with this, I believe that employing the first person to present my research is a means for showing that subjectivity (without being biased), and it is important in doing social research that contributes to social transformation.

3.17. Piloting the interview questions

Piloting interview questions is an important and desirable research skill. A pilot study saves researchers' time and efforts and helps them to address any unanticipated issues before they start the actual data collection process (Beebe, 2007). In addition, by checking that the interview questions function well, piloting plays a role in making sure that the data collection methodology is effective (Bryman, 2012). Before conducting the real interviews, the interview questions were piloted with two randomly selected learners, a female student (Arwa) and a male student (Salim). (For more information about the interviewing process and other research tools see Table 3.6.)

3.18. Mobilising a reflexive Butlerian methodology

Premised upon the aims of this study, and the poststructural feminist theoretical framework that underpins this study, I want to find out how the participants in this study negotiated their subjectivities and sought social recognition as viable learners while experiencing classroom gendered discursive practices. This section is an attempt to develop a reflexive Butlerian methodology that supports the process of data generation. My Butlerian methodology draws on Butler (2004, 2005) and on Riach, Rumens and Tyler, (2016). Riach et al (2016) developed an 'undoing' Butlerian methodology that is based on three characteristics: first, a narrative-based method of data generation and analysis; second, a reflexive 'undoing' premised upon a performative ontology; and finally, a reflexive, recognition-based ethics of openness to the Other. The three characteristics are illustrated below. While doing this, I draw on my own experience while engaged in

one mixed gender Foundation classroom encounters and also while analysing the generated data in the setting of Omani tertiary education at the College of Distinction. By using this reflexive Butlerian methodology, I am taking Butler (2005) to another planet, away from gender and sexuality-based domains to the domain of gender and education.

3.18.1. Adopting a narrative research method

Butler's (2005) conceptualisation of narrative is illustrated in her book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) in order to explain her performative lens on the role narratives play in formulating and shaping our subjectivities. According to her, narratives are formulated as a way to convey how people can struggle to live liveable life when they seek social recognition of themselves as liveable subjects. Butler states 'I come into being as a reflexive subject only in the context of establishing a narrative account of myself' (2005, p. 15). Riach et al (2016) state that narratives are not 'simply telling a story about oneself, but rather the response we are compelled to provide when being held to account for oneself' (Riach et al 2016, p. 8). This occurs when people find themselves entrapped in social power relations in social and educational institutions like colleges and classrooms. Butler (2005) affirms:

Giving an account thus takes a narrative form, which not only depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority, being directed toward an audience with the aim of persuasion.

(Butler, 2005, p.12).

Butler (2005) frames narrative as a process through which people's desire for recognition to live liveable life is compelled and constrained. The Butlerian methodology approaches narratives as an ontological principle rather than an epistemic scheme (Riach et al, 2016, p. 9); and accordingly, the data from a narrative perspective views participants in this study as viable subjects who struggle to gain social recognition in gendered classroom settings and to give an account of themselves as intelligible subjects. The study does not try to produce coherent narratives of the participants' subjectivities; it tries to describe how the participants were constituted while they were struggling to gain recognition as viable learners in the classroom setting. The methodology is narrative in the sense that it does seek to present a coherent narrative of the self by combining a group of events in a coherent linear plot, it also generates the self as subject to reflexive critique (Riach et al, 2016, p. 9). The methodology is narrative-based and reflexive because it seeks pivotal moments and it 'undoes' the classroom gendered discursive practices, and seeks to critically unravel and expose them and show the extent to which they are flawed and weak. The Butlerian methodology creates a space for the participants to reflect on their struggles and confrontations in order to become recognisable and viable learners. When seeking pivotal moments, the participants' identities are first blocked, and then emerged, transformed and transgressed as a result of the encounter that blocked their subjectivities. The next section discusses the second characteristic, reflexive undoing.

3.18.2. Reflexive undoing

Butler (2005) theorises how our constrained agencies can give accounts of ourselves and disrupt and undo the constraining structures. 'If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility'. Butler wants to say that when we are structured and normalised by the social worlds in which we live, this rendered us undone, threatened and unrecognised. People need to feel that they are recognised by their social worlds; without this sense of recognition, we cannot live. The paradox is that, when our agency is threatened by the normalising structures, it becomes active and starts to undo these normalising structures. Hence, these normalising structures become the conditions of our existence; and only by undoing these normalising structures our lives become viable. This discussion is significant because some classroom episodes in this study I found my position as a teacher who is a knowing figure was threatened and exposed by the male participants (see section 6.1.4). As a teacher, I was undone by the male students' behaviour. Instead of dealing with issue as a moment of confrontation and disruption, I thought about cultivating the discursive behaviour behind the encounter and gain more understanding by constructing knowledge from within the experience. At the beginning, the encounter with the male students contained a process of reciprocal undoing; this opened up a space for a narrative-based practice, as I tried to fix them at the beginning when I asked them the questions about the collective nouns. Then I quickly reflected on the encounter, and changed

my position and took the position of the teacher who tried to explain the point and give examples. The incident involved the risk of ravelling the male participants, and by doing that I might replicate the position that I was trying to critique. At the same time the encounter was threatening because it undid me. In this regard, however, (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) stress that people cannot exist without the Other, they emphasise that everyone of us is responsible for the Other. This otherness signifies an ethics of mutual vulnerability. Our need for the Other renders us all vulnerable. The next section discusses the issue of mutual vulnerability and its relationship to the above-mentioned third characteristic of recognition-based ethics of openness to the Other; it is to that the attention is now turned.

3.18.3. Recognition-based ethics of openness to the Other

Butler (2005) asserts that people are rendered vulnerable because of their need to the Other. Our need to be recognised by the Other exposed us to that Other. Sometimes we propose a claim to recognition, but we might get misrecognized. Yet without this claim, we cannot live viable life. Butler (2004, p. 23) weaves it 'we're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something'. When we open ourselves to the Other, we confirm ourselves' materialisation, but at the same time, we render ourselves vulnerable when our materialisation is denied. Butler calls us to be reflexive and deal with the issue of ethics by being open to the constraints that control the conferral of recognition, and what might happen if people deny recognition. By being aware of our mutual interdependency we can exchange reciprocation and mutual recognition.

By analysing this classroom encounter, I explored a methodological reflexive space that was opened up premised upon a Butlerian ontology that recognises a need for mutual vulnerabilities. There were some key episodes where the participants were interpellated by rude classroom behaviour, such as Bushra/Khalid's episode (see section 4.2), Hiba/Salim's episode (see section 4.3.1), Bakheet and the female students (see section 4.5.1), in addition to my episodes with Salim (section 6.2) and Zahra (section 6.3), and then with male participants. There were also some smaller incidents such as Ola and the patriarchal ideology (see section 4.5.2), my dialogue with Sameera (see section 6.4); When Suad quelled her thoughts (section 4.2.8). I mobilised the reflexive Butlerian methodology to observe and analyse the classroom discursive practices, being aware of the pivotal moments, and then used simple questions in follow-up interviews such as 'Tell me about your experience' or 'How did you feel after the encounter?' or 'What do you think about the behaviour of X?' I encouraged the participants to move forward and backward, while they were giving accounts of themselves. This process of moving forward and backward created a reflexive space for the participants to reflect and construct.

3.19. Methods and triangulation

According to Richardson (2011), triangulation increases the internal validity of study. Yin (2009, p.114) states 'one of the major strengths of case study data collection is the opportunity to use different sources of evidence.' According to Yin, when researchers use multiple sources of evidence, they 'can address a broader range of historical and behavioural issues,' and develop a 'convergent line of

inquiry' and thus their findings are likely to be more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2009:116). Yin (2009, p.102) identifies five sources of evidence that researchers use in case studies:

1. Documentation
2. Direct observation
3. Archival records
4. Interviews
5. Participant observation

Table 3.5 Triangulation of research tools

Research tools	Implementation
1. Students' interviews	First set at the beginning of the first semester Second set at the end of the first semester Third set at the end of the second semester
2. Students' reflective diaries	Throughout the two semesters
3. Classroom observation	First observation at the beginning of the first semester Second observation at the end of the first semester Third observation at the end of the second semester
4. Teacher/researcher diary	Throughout the two semesters

Of the above five instruments, this study uses three: interviews, direct observation and participant observation but, in addition, to these it also uses the documentation of learners' diaries. These four sources of data collection are relevant for this study and will be addressed next.

3.20. Cultural issues during interviewing

It is not easy to be a male researcher and to conduct cross-gender interviews in the Omani patriarchal sociocultural context, where gender segregation is the dominant norm. My gender as a male researcher who is interviewing female participants expanded the social distance between the interview parties. According to Ahmed et al. (2010), social and religious norms of Islamic societies do not allow a female to stay alone with a male researcher in a closed room for lengthy periods of time. Thus, by conducting cross-gender interviews, I faced a cultural barrier that female researchers may not encounter if they were in my place.

Before calling Arwa for the pilot interview, I was aware that the process of conducting cross-gender interviews may negatively affect the obtained data in the interview. I anticipated some obstacles, but I did not know what type of obstacles they would be. While conducting the interview with her, I became aware of the depth of the problem. I was a non-Omani male teacher, interviewing a female student alone in the Jawda Hall. Jawda Hall is near my office. It is a big room, 10 metres long and five metres wide. It is used for staff meetings and teacher development sessions. Arwa was nervous and could not answer the questions properly. She gave abrupt and sometimes one word answers. She avoided direct eye contact with me throughout the interview. While I was planning a 60-minute interview, it finished after 35 minutes. Later on, after two weeks, she told me that she did not do well in the pilot interview because she was shy and nervous because she was alone in the room with me, and it was the first time in her life that she had been interviewed.

For me, although I recognised that the interviewee was nervous, what concerned me was the way she answered the questions, since I felt she was constrained. This made me worried about my data collection strategies and tools. I was aware that if I did not explore the implications of this, this problem might recur later with other female participants during the real interviews. As a male Muslim and Arab interviewer, I could understand the sensitivity of the issue. I had to figure out how to address this problem.

I thought about three problems that might sabotage interviewing female students. The main problem was that, according to Islamic culture, a woman or a man (in particular, young people who have not much life experience) is not supposed to stay alone in the same place with another (unfamiliar) man or woman. It is not the norm. So Arwa was presumably worried because she was doing something beyond the acceptable cultural norms. Another problem was that, as a researcher, the relationship between me as an interviewer and my female student Arwa was not yet well established. A third problem was that these young students had not experienced being interviewed before. They had no idea about what would happen, for example, the types of question, answers, duration etc.

To find a solution to the first problem, I suggested that female interviewees came to Jawda Hall in twos rather than individually for the interviewing process. The student being interviewed sat facing me, while her friend had a seat in the other part of the room, where she could see us while we conducted the interview. This seemed to have soothing and relaxing effects on the interviewee. For the second problem, I sought to establish a researcher rapport with students, by being

informal, joking and laughing and creating a more relaxed atmosphere than is typical in the classroom. The aim was to ensure that they could be themselves, and open up during the interviews. For the third problem, I was more explicit and actively familiarised them with details of the interview process. I explained to them what would happen, their roles, and mine as well, and modelled the types of questions and answers. I also told them about the duration of the interview, and the importance of being relaxed, normal and truthful, and gave them the freedom to speak their minds. I reminded them of the ethical position of the research and the difference between my role as teacher and as researcher. More details about the interviewing process will be presented in section 3.21.

3.21. Interviews

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) define interviews as:

A two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.349)

Interviews were the main research tool to generate data for this study. This choice was informed by Kvale and Brinkmann, who state:

Interviews are particularly well-suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-

understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspectives on their lived world.

(Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 116)

Moreover, Kvale (1996) points out that: 'the interviewer must establish an atmosphere in which the subject feels safe enough to talk freely about his or her experiences and feelings.' The tension in this study was between the roles as a teacher and a researcher, and also the gender issue. The aim was to encourage the students to open up and to talk about what was significant to them. This mutual respect and empathy echoed the positive classroom atmosphere.

With regard to collecting data through interviews, two types of interviews were conducted in this study: scheduled interviews and follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews usually took place after specific classroom gendered incidents and were intended to explore students' perceptions, opinions and feelings about what had happened. The researcher audio-recorded these follow-up interviews soon after the relevant incident took place. With scheduled interviews, ten subjects were interviewed three times, the first set of interviews began at the beginning of the study, the second before the end of semester one and the third at the end of semester two (see Table 3.6 for more information).

Robson (2011) points out that there are three types of interviews: 'structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews' (Robson, 2011, p.278). In structured interviews, the researcher controls the interviewing process and sticks to a list of questions in order to produce standardised responses (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are relatively flexible in addressing a specific

topic and they give the interviewee a chance to elaborate on what they think is important to them. In unstructured interviews, a general topic in which both parties (interviewee and interviewer are interested is discussed. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main research tool in this case study in order to collect data about learning experiences and classroom gendered practices. By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to ask for clarification as necessary and request more information regarding unclear responses (Kvale, 2007). Although there were some key issues, the interviewer held a line of thought, and the learners were free to express their ideas, feelings and attitudes. This enabled the researcher to gain insights about the topic under investigation.

The interviews lasted for approximately one hour and were recorded on a small Philips recording machine. When the interviews were completed, they were first transcribed in Arabic, and then translated into English. The transcription and translation processes were carried out by a specialised company. After that the researcher listened to the interviews and checked the translation and transcription processes. Both the recorded data and the transcription were then checked again by an Omani doctoral researcher at the college. The recorded data was then stored in a locked folder in my secure cupboard.

There were only two male interviewees given that there were four males and 21 female learners in the class. The first set of the interviews was in October 2012. The first interview questions focused on family members, classroom practices and how they felt about the teaching and learning process, as well as discussing their attitudes towards English, whether they have any difficulties or problems with

regard to their gender and how they found the mixed gender class as a new experience. The second set of interviews was in December 2013 (see Table 3.6). These questions focused on classroom practices and whether they had changed the students' perceptions with regard to mixed gender classrooms and learning strategies. The third set of interviews took place on 22/5/2013 (see Table 3.6). The questions focused on learning experiences, and any difficulties with regard to the learners' participation in the classroom. The second and third sets of interviews were conducted after the classroom observation sessions.

Interviewing the two male students went on without problems. As noted, previously, however, being a male interviewer interviewing females was a challenge for these female learners as well as for me. In spite of the fact that two of the eight female interviewees (Bushra and Hiba) were ready to come to the Jawda Hall to be interviewed in a one-to-one mode – Bushra said, 'Yes, normal' and Hiba said, 'No problem, easy' – the other six female interviewees were hesitant, shy and conservative. These two answers are also sometimes used when the speaker actually feels or means that it is not normal, or that it might be a problem.

3.21.1. Conducting interviews

After the insights gained from the pilot interview about problems that may occur, I was mindful of the impact of being a male teacher/researcher who was interviewing my female learners. As a researcher, therefore, I attempted different methods to reduce such negative effects; for example, I built on the rapport already established with students (both males and females) in the English classes.

Moreover, before starting the interview, I reminded the interviewees of the consent form that they had signed, and read it to them, reminding them of their rights. I also attempted to address the power imbalance by formulating the questions in a non-judgmental way and by maintaining eye contact, being friendly, smiling and by ending the interview in a positive way by thanking the interviewees. This proved effective and appropriate, in particular in the second and third interviews. During the first interview, the female interviewees were not so relaxed; they were to some extent apprehensive; however, in the second and third interviews, they felt relaxed and were able to answer the questions appropriately.

Table 3.6 A profile of the student interviewees

No.	Name code	Gender	Nationality	Major	Age	Proficiency
1	Arwa	F	Omani	English	19	Average
2	Bakheet	M	Omani	English	20	Good
3	Bushra	F	Omani	English	20	Good
4	Hiba	F	Omani	Business	19	Good
5	Jokha	F	Omani	Business	21	Average
6	Juhaina	F	Omani	IT	20	Average
7	Khalid	M	Omani	English	20	Average
8	Khawla	F	Omani	English	19	Average
9	Ola	F	Omani	English	19	Average
10	Zahra	F	Omani	IT	20	Good

The issues around the interviews emphasised the significance of triangulation by supplementing interviews with data generated through other research tools such

as observations, learner-diaries and learner documents. Triangulation raised the researcher's awareness of the participants' opinions about gender issues and enhanced the analyses and interpretations of the data. The previous section focused on the interviewing process. The next section addresses learner diaries.

3.22. Learner diaries

Learner diaries allow learners to speak reflectively and at leisure and, as such, in this research, the diaries allowed an investigation of learners' perceptions of language learning, their reflections on classroom experiences, preferences, difficulties, and any relevant learning strategies (Bailey and Nunan, 1997). Diaries display the participants' inner perceptions of their learning context. Alaszewsky explains the usefulness of diaries:

Diaries can be used not only to identify patterns of behaviour but also to provide greater insight into how individuals interpret situations and ascribe meanings to actions and events and therefore, how actions that may appear irrational to outsiders are rational to the diarist.

(Alaszewsky, 2006, p.37)

Diary logs were collected, sorted and classified under thematic categories and used for identifying patterns of learners' perceptions.

Researchers use diaries not only to gain a deeper insight into their learners' preferences but also to help learners reflect on their learning and their feelings about classroom processes. Bailey describes a diary as:

A first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events.

(Bailey, 1991, p.215)

Porter et al. (1990) and Simard (2004) consider diaries as a valuable longitudinal record of interaction between an individual and his/her learning process. In this research, learners were informed of the diary writing procedures and benefits, for example, I explained that it gave learners an opportunity to reflect on their learning. Allwright and Bailey's (1991) guidelines about diary writing were followed with some adaptations. Learners were asked to write their diaries in the classroom after the class was over. This was because specific events were fresh in their minds. To assure anonymity, they were asked to identify themselves using numbers, along with specifying the date and the topic of the lesson. Learners' diaries were given pseudonyms, classified and kept in custody for easy access, and then used during the process of analysis and reporting. I afforded five minutes at the end of the lesson for the purpose of writing diaries and time at the beginning of the next session for any further reflections.

Any out-of-class learning experiences that the learners encountered could be detailed if learners thought that they deserved reporting. English was used in the diary writing; however, if they could not express themselves in English, learners could switch to their first language and use Arabic where necessary. They were reassured that they should not worry about mistakes in spelling, grammar, or vocabulary. The material was not being assessed and the teacher could seek

direct clarification from the writer in the event of uncertainty. They were asked to write about their experiences and to express their feelings about what went on in the classroom without fear. In order to engender a trusting environment, the researcher emphasised a list of principles that created a positive learning environment such as respect, trust and concern for one another. Moreover, I asked learners to reflect on the classroom atmosphere and to give their opinions on negative factors that might hinder learning and how to address them. This led me to develop a rapport with the participants as, evidence suggests, they felt that they could naturally express their feelings on classroom issues.

Learners could also suggest any new ideas which they thought might improve the teaching and learning situation in the classroom. They were reassured of the confidentiality of what they wrote and that no one would be harmed or suffer as a result of what they had written. At an early stage, I asked the following questions to guide the learners with their diaries:

Did it go well? Why? What did you learn?

Did it go badly? Why? Why did you have trouble/difficulty learning?

What can you improve next time?

Do you have any suggestions about the teaching and learning methods?

The aim behind such questions was to enable participation and to give students a sense of recognition, making them feel that their opinions were valued in the classroom context. For example, when learners had the sense that they were recognised and acknowledged, this made it easier for them to maintain a sense of belonging and to position themselves purposefully in the classroom.

Some disadvantages of diary writing were the amount, quality and randomness of the recorded data. I found that a considerable amount of the data was arbitrary, irregular and unsystematic; however, at other times, unsystematic data proved to be significant when I followed a thread, and it helped in grasping some first-person learning experiences. Overall, diary logs proved to be very useful, in that they revealed what learners consider as useful, significant or sensitive (Bailey, 1991, p.85).

3.23. Classroom observation

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.305), describe classroom observation as a useful tool for investigating classroom-observable behaviour such as cross gender interaction. It also provides an objective external research tool rather than relying only on learners as a source of data. According to Allwright (1988, p.19), observation studies take place in order to suit specific research purposes. One type of observation, according to Punch (1998, p.77), is less structured observation where the observer 'neither manipulates nor stimulates the behaviour of those whom they are observing.' He states that, in less structured observation, the recorded data is broad and general. The other type of observation is structured observation, where researchers detail and prepare observation timetables. According to Robinson (1993, p.33), researchers decide in advance what to observe in structured observation. In this study, the focus of the three classroom observation sessions was on 'cross gender interaction,' 'learner/teacher interaction' and the 'classroom atmosphere.' This study adopts two different types of observation. The first type was my direct observation of learners' engagement

processes (Cohen, 1998, p.193). With regard to the second type, a structured observation timetable was arranged, where lessons were tape-recorded and transcribed and then later analysed.

I asked an experienced Omani teacher who is a PhD holder in applied linguistics and TESOL to observe his classes. Three classroom observation sessions were scheduled. The first classroom observation session was carried out on 1/12/2012. The second classroom observation was carried out on 1/3/2013. The third classroom observation was carried out on 8/5/2013. After each observation session, the observer submitted a brief report about what he had observed in the classroom. The three observed lessons were audio-recorded. In addition, other lesson stages and procedures such as date, topic, number of learners, classroom layout, tasks and lesson stages were all noted (see Table 3.1). The observation process was meant to be simple. Directly after the observed lessons, the observer and the observee discussed the points raised by the observer. The discussions were useful in the sense that they enabled me to reflect on classroom events and think about solving the problems raised by the observer. What unfolds from the three observation sessions is summarised in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 Classroom diagnostic observations

Observation	Cross gender interaction	Classroom atmosphere
First classroom observation (1)	Did not exist Teacher-student interaction Females answered teacher's questions more than males	Friendly Informal
Second classroom observation (2)	One classroom activity of cross gender interaction (the hot seat) Same gender group and pair work	Changing Friendly, but sometimes anxious and troubled Teacher corrects sexist language, e.g. stewardess to flight attendant Nurse (for both males and females) Teacher explains the concept
Third classroom observation (3)	Bakheet, raised the issue of female higher education	Changing Friendly Students quietly challenge each other

Classroom Observation Report One took place in semester one, in December. Learners had not yet tuned into the notion of a learner-centred approach. The report showed that the classroom was mostly traditional, and teacher-centred. When the teacher asked easy questions, this was an indication that these questions were display questions, not referential. Although the classroom atmosphere was safe, and the learners were asked to work in groups, cross-gender interaction never occurred, learners 'hardly cooperated' and they 'worked individually most of the time.' When they interacted, they just exchanged 'few and short sentences.' All of these were the features of traditional teacher-centred classroom where learners seemed to be inhibited and did not participate in classroom activities and learning processes. There was no social interaction, and little student/student engagement, only limited communication even in same sex groups.

Classroom Observation Report Two showed an example of cross gender activity with Bushra and Bakheet performing in the hot seat game. Bakheet, however, was nervous and could not easily answer an apparently simple and easy question. When the I queried this with Bakheet, he said:

This is the first time in my life to be questioned by a female. I was not focusing on her questions. I was worried about what other males in the class might say about me.

(Bakheet – Follow-up Interview)

The cross-gender communication took place but, it was not fruitful. Bakheet was nervous and stressed because, Bushra, his female classroom peer, asked him

questions in front of the class. This classroom incident reveals the complexity of the gender relations and its impact on classroom atmosphere and interaction.

3.24. Data analysis

According to Gibbs (2007) data analysis involves different procedures and stages through which the researcher starts by generating the data and then explains and interprets it. Creswell et al state:

Qualitative data analysis consists of preparing and organising the data (i.e. text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion.

(Creswell et al, 2007, 148)

Data analysis is the process of analysing and interpreting the quality and relevance of data. This includes preparing, inspecting, transforming and discovering patterns. The collected data from the research instruments: learner interviews, learner diaries, classroom observations and learner documents were processed according to Creswell et al's methodology (2007).

3.24.1. Thematic analysis

Since thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87) is a flexible approach and has been used in different descriptive and exploratory conceptual frameworks, the researcher applied it in this study. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis can produce different, insightful interpretations of data. Thematic analysis

is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) as a method for ‘identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data. It minimally organises and describes your rich data set in rich detail.’ The researcher has adopted the five stages of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), visible in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Phases of thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke

Phase	Description of the process
1-Familiarisation with data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2-Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systemic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3-Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4-Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5-Defining and naming Themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

3.24.2. Familiarisation with data

This phase is about transcribing the interviews and other informal conversations with the participants. I started transcribing the recorded interview data by myself, as this helped me in familiarising myself with the data and in helped to gain a holistic understanding of the type of the collected data. By transcribing the data myself, I also fulfilled my promise to the participants in keeping the data private and secured. Throughout this stage, I transcribed data and reread it, in order to immerse myself in it. I wrote notes and thoughts in my reflexive diary and in the margins (see section 3.10.). This process read the of moving back and forth helped me in producing themes and codes and sub-codes.

3.24.3. Generating initial codes

Phase two of the data analysis process was the coding phase. Gibbs (2007, p.38) defines codes as ‘a way of indexing or categorising the text in order to establish framework of thematic ideas that capture something of interest and importance in relation to research questions.’ In this regard, codes are words, sentences, phrases or paragraphs, and researchers need to find links between these codes and the phenomenon that they investigate. The process of generating the codes of this study started after careful repetitions and reading and rereading of the collected data.

Then I rewrote and defined the codes to make sure of their relevance. Table 3.9. gives example of the codes and their relevance to pieces of collected data.

Table 3.9 Codes and their relevance to segments of data

Data extract	Coded for
All the boys in this class are rubbish. (Bushra/Khalid confrontation)	1. Lack of gendered mutual recognition 2. Retrieving intelligibility
Zahra: Teacher, we are up here. (Diary)	Claiming a place
Khawla: ... then why should we feel afraid [of talking to males]? I don't know! Sometimes, I see females at upper levels speak naturally to males. They are confident, and I wonder if I can do something like this. I hope so ... (First interview)	Students' dilemma
Khawla: It was good; at the beginning I was a bit nervous, but later, I was able to gather my courage and continue speaking. After a while, I enjoyed it. I was happy and proud of myself. You like it when people listen to what you are saying. I hope to explain other things in the future. When I finished, I felt happy and I feel like I want to do it again. (Third interview)	1. Cross gender interaction 2. Students speak their mind 3. Creating classroom as a learning community

The process of code generating was significant because it helped in data reduction (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10). This process involved choosing some segments of data that were relevant to the chosen topics for the analysis process, and leaving out others that were not significant. The codes were identified and then

reproduced in coding tables that contain the codes and sub-codes. Table 3.10 shows the emergent codes and sub-codes:

Table 3.10 Codes and sub-codes

Emergent selective codes and core categories are:
1. Gender and classroom inequality
2. Gender and resistance
3. Gender and thinking outside the box
4. Gender and identity development
5. Gender and participation
a. Gender participation and silence (Sub-code)
6. Metacognitive strategies and reflection
a. Metacognitive strategies building a mental image (Sub-code)
b. Metacognitive strategies and awareness (Sub-code)
c. Metacognitive strategies and reflection (Sub-code)
7. My transformation
a. My transformation and reflectivity (Sub-code)
b. My transformation and reflexivity (Sub-theme)

It is important for researchers to familiarise themselves with the generated data. The familiarisation process helped me in identifying and assigning the codes and sub-codes.

3.24.4. Searching for themes

To be able to identify themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that researchers need to read the generated codes and reread them again and again:

Identifying themes involves sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded extracts within the identified themes. Essentially, you are starting to analyse your codes and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.89)

In order to search for themes, it is necessary to understand the relationship between codes, sub-codes and themes. This is done by rearranging, sorting out and categorising the coded chunks. For example, we might consider the ways in which participants' identities emerged. The quotations and data segments that were relevant to the themes were and remarked referenced in order to check their significance. I was interested in female learner subjectivity, for example. This is related to the first research question: in what way are Omani female student subjectivities done or undone through discursive practices in a tertiary learner-centred classroom? Then the analysis process continued. Specific issues were selected in order to do the 'data reduction' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10). It is an important stage, as some of the data was selected, while others were left out, depending on the relevance of the data to the chosen topics.

3.24.5. Reviewing and defining themes

The process of reviewing themes requires the refinement of these themes. Braun and Clarke identified two main principles to be considered in the refinement phase: to make sure that the data is coherent and meaningful, and that I should be able to identify and differentiate the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.91). To check the coherence of the themes in this study, I made sure that they were coherent and sufficiently appropriate to form the analysis units. Then I checked and refined the themes by reading them many times. I made sure that the themes framed the thematic map, and I then returned to the data again to check any missed codes in the previous phase. When it was clear that the themes coherently coalesced, I materialised the analysis process in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Defining the themes is the fifth phase of the thematic analysis, it is aimed to 'define and further refine the themes you will represent for your analysis, and analyse the data with them' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.92). I defined the themes and the relevant segments of data that the themes capture. I went through the data reading and reorganising the classroom events in a transformative and developmental mode that answers the research questions. The process of naming the themes came to an end by having three themes and seven codes and five sub-codes.

3.25. Credibility

Merriam (1998) states that 'internal validity' is concerned with the question: 'how congruent are the findings with reality?' Internal validity in this regard can be compared to credibility. In this study I ensured credibility by adopting specific techniques such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation,

triangulation, classroom observation by an outside observer, and I used participant observation and the reflective diary, peer scrutiny and assurance of honesty (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I used these strategies to ensure the credibility and to foster confidence. Some of these strategies will be outlined hereafter.

3.25.1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.301) define prolonged engagement as 'spending sufficient time to achieve certain purposes, learning the culture, testing of misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust.' I had spent substantial and sufficient time with the participants in the classroom and outside it. The aim was to establish trust and rapport. In qualitative research, if the researcher is informal and decreases the distance between the him/her and the participants, this will result in increasing the worth of the findings (Krefting, 1991, p.217).

3.25.2. Triangulation

Yin (2009) states that by using diversity of data resources researchers can enhance their credibility. This research study used interviews, participants' reflective diaries, classroom observation and participant observation to collect data. By using different data methods, I decreased the potential distortion that can occur when adopting one source; it also promotes credibility through triangulation. According to Crowe et al.:

The use of multiple sources of data (data triangulation) has been advocated as a way of increasing the internal validity of a study (i.e. the extent to which

the method is appropriate to answer the research question). An underlying assumption is that data collected in different ways should lead to similar conclusions, and approaching the same issue from different angles can help develop a holistic picture of the phenomenon.

(Crowe et al., 2011, p.6)

In this study I used more than one research tool, to build confidence in the data. I was also able to get different views of the researched topic. Then I analysed the collected data with greater understanding.

The process of data analysis and coding includes the investigation data collection and data coding. The study applied rigorous procedures during the analysis of the collected data.

3.26. Conclusion

This qualitative interpretive study investigates Omani female learners while they studied in learner-centred classroom in the College of Distinction. Different methods were used to generate data such as interviews, learners' reflective diaries, classroom observation and participant observation. With regard to the sampling of the study, the study focused on a small sample from one section which include four male and 21 female students. The classroom and the participants met the sought diversity requirements. Since students' identities were the main issue of investigation, I believe a detailed focus on a small but diverse number of participants was a judge suitable for the purpose of the study. The class was mixed-gender and their ages were between 19 and 21. Their age was significant because at this age they provided specific research opportunities.

Chapter Four: Classroom gendered discursive practices

4.1. Introduction

This chapter employs a careful analysis of data to argue that Omani female students are subjected as females not only because of their biology. More importantly they become femaled, moulded and subjected as a result of masculine discursive practices, acculturation and corporeal behaviours. These are constantly reiterated, sedimented and congealed throughout the structures of subjection. Structures of subjection include among other things: the family, the community, the school or college, and governmental institutions. In this regard, Butler (1997b) argues that social and discursive practices 'gender' people as a consequence of hermeneutic processes. People seek recognition and social intelligibility in order to live liveable lives. Social reiteration practices reproduce human subjectivity. Butler (2006) argues that reiteration produces unpredictable and sometimes subversive outcomes. She also asserts that subjectivity is attained through the reiteration of cultural norms rather than prior determined human agency (Butler, 2006, p.14)

Through its data presentation, this chapter therefore sets out to display and discuss some classroom gendered discursive practices, acts and settings through which students come to be themselves. In particular, it focuses on how female students were subjected and constituted as subordinates, and how they were able to control and subvert classroom gender roles, and consequently transform themselves. The findings indicate that classrooms are essential places where the

execution of gender practices unfolds, and where students are formed and framed as an effect of gendered and hierarchical discourses. Students also experience how femininity and masculinity are dynamic and interdiscursive. They experience different ways in which their subjectivities are reproduced as a result of these classroom discursive practices (Davies, 2004).

This chapter answers the following research question (see section 3.4): in what way are Omani female student subjectivities done or undone through discursive practices in a tertiary learner-centred classroom?

Attention now turns to classroom gendered incidents. The first one is the Bushra/Khalid confrontation. Bushra/Khalid's confrontation comprises two scenes. This incident took place between Bushra (a female student) and Khalid (a male student). Scene 1 cites a classroom injurious constitution by Khalid, and Scene 2 cites an oppositional constitution. The confrontation represents a type of gendered classroom reiterated discourse that demonstrates how female students were gendered and subjected. More importantly, however, it shows how they can subvert the whole setting and reinscribe their foreclosed intelligibility. In Scene 1, Khalid insulted Bushra, but she was not able to respond and kept silent. Then in Scene 2, Khalid reiterated his insult, but this time Bushra's response was subversive.

This analysis section addresses the following research question: in what way do discursive practices in an Omani tertiary learner-centred classrooms produce student female subjectivities?

4.2. Episode 1, Scene 1 Bushra / Khalid confrontation

This classroom episode took place in a 12:00 class. Many of the students had had previous classes like Math or IT. The lesson was on 'study skills' and dealt with learning and education. The episode took place about 20 minutes after the lesson had started. Both the students and I were discussing the meaning of education and the role education plays in changing people's lives and developing societies. The discussion moved on and Bushra spoke about parents and their responsibilities in educating their children. Other students expressed their ideas; sometimes they code-switched to Arabic.

M: (male, the researcher)

Bushra (Section One, female student)

Khalid (Section One, male student)

Bushra: I think mothers' role is very important. And, if we need a future well-grown up generations, we need to educate mothers.

Khalid: *(Surprised, then in a mocking tone.)* Future generations! Kitchen, kitchen, kitchen.

M: *(Loudly, in a reproaching tone.)* Khalid!

Khalid: *(Silently smiled and put up his both hands, without saying anything, showing his compliance to the classroom rules.)*

Bushra: *(Silent, looked at her paper and smiled, then she whispered something to the female who sat next to her.)*

M: *(Talking to Bushra.)* Would you like to finish?

Bushra: *(Silent, showed a shy and embarrassed smile.)*

The discursive practices of masculinity and femininity are evidenced within the scene. There were some bodily practices inscribed this. For example, Khalid's surprise when he listened to Bushra talking about 'future generations,' and the way he repeated the phrase, materialised his surprise. This seems as if he wanted to sarcastically say to Bushra 'You are talking so big.' Then he used the rule of three by repeating the word 'kitchen' three times. It seems that Khalid deliberately used the rule of three to give power to his words and to make them memorable. His repetition of the word 'kitchen' and his mocking tone appeared intended to injure Bushra. His sentence can be read as an incomplete, masculine insult to Bushra.

The complete sentence could be read as, 'You are talking about future generations! You are talking so big! After all, your place is in the kitchen.' The sentence might have the potentiality to performatively constitute Bushra. It can also suggest the 'imagined' female role as someone who is busy with kitchen work, cooking, cutting onions and washing the dishes. The performative perlocutionary force of Khalid's sentence rendered Bushra unintelligible. This is enforced by her silence and her look at her papers. Bushra's smile could be understood as a masquerade. Her smile was not authentic, she smiled to hide her embarrassment. Her whispering to her friend could also be evidence of this masquerade. Khalid's words seemed to trivialise Bushra's participation and thus her whisper to her neighbour was again inauthentic, and she seemed to do it to hide her sense of being insulted.

My reproachful tone to Khalid prevented him from continuing his insult. It seemed that Khalid knew that he was violating classroom rules, and he did not want to get

in trouble. His smile and his hand movement demonstrated his compliance. Khalid seemed to interpellate Bushra's denigrated femininity. In Scene 2, Khalid reiterated his hegemonic discursive practice, which created a space for Bushra to oppose and to reinscribe her intelligibility.

4.2.1. Episode 1, Scene 2: (Bushra /Khalid) an interrupting laugh

The following excerpt explores the confrontation between Bushra and Khalid (see their profile in Table 3.3). The next section illuminates Bushra's emerging subjectivity. Bushra, Khalid and other subjects' readings of what happened and how their perceptions about gender roles in the classroom consequently changed will be addressed through the analysis and interpretation process.

In analysing and interpreting Scene 2, I considered classroom power relations as a productive aspect of Bushra's performative subjectivity. Her emerging gendered subjectivity was a result of her using her metacognitive skills. She monitored Khalid's behaviour in Scenes 1 and 2, and was able to observe, plan and evaluate males' and females' discursive classroom practices, and react accordingly. Khalid's repetitive, insulting behaviour was a performative act that constituted Bushra and produced a space for conflict between Bushra and Khalid. Interestingly, Bushra's agency was driven from within this constitution. Her performative, influential response to Khalid's insult reproduced her identity category as a powerful female student in her mixed-gender classroom. Bushra's new becoming, and her performative enactment, were not anticipated by me as a teacher and researcher. Neither was it anticipated by Khalid nor even Bushra herself. Bushra's new subjectivity is '*performative*' according to Butler's (1990, p.

25) definition of that term. The repetition of Khalid's insulting behaviours in Scenes 1 and 2 produced Bushra as an unfinished outcome of classroom gendered discursive practices and power. Bushra's emerging subjectivity could also be seen as a materialisation of the power of teaching practices (College of Distinction and learner-centred approach). It suggests the capacity of this teaching machine to deconstruct classroom gendered power relations, change inherited power structures and eclipse hierarchies. Teaching is an apparatus to support the marginalised female Bushra (and other females), and to enable her to use metacognitive strategies and thus to develop an empowered position.

Context: 8:00 in the classroom, two minutes after the beginning of the lesson. I had started the lesson by greeting the students. Then he asked a referential question:

M: How about your weekend? Did you spend a nice weekend?

Students: *(Silent for about 10 seconds.)*

Bushra: *(Without raising her hand and without asking for permission.)* My weekend was nice and special. My sister got married, there were lots of guests, and...

M: *(Nodding and raising his eyebrows as a sign of interest.)* {Ehuh.}

Bushra: Everybody, everybody was happy, and after dinner we had a party and heheh we...

Khalid: *(Interrupting Bushra in a high intrusive and ridiculing tone, he drawled his vowels.)* {Heh, heh, heh.}

Students: *(Silent for about 10 seconds, the classroom atmosphere became tense.)*

Bushra: *(Was silent for about 10 seconds. She turned towards the males' side, frowning and staring fiercely at them, then angrily banged on the desk with her fist.)* All the boys in this class are rubbish.

Khalid: *(Was silent, his eyes widened, his mouth opened and his jaw dropped.)*

Other students: *(Silent for about 15 seconds.)*

Males: *(Inaudible speech.)*

Females: *(Some rejoiced, others shocked.)*

Males: *(Murmuring angrily.)* Why is this ... No! ... What! ... How come ...?

Ali (A male learner): We will go to the dean.

M: *(Puzzled by the quick pace of events.)* Please, please, let's end this now.

Everybody keep silent please, there is no need to make it an issue.

Salim (A male learner): Why did she generalise? What have we done to her?

M: Salim, please not now, let's stop talking about this issue, at least for the time being.

Males: *(Started whispering in inaudible speech but with defensive bullying tones.)*

M: Right now, everybody, please open your books to page 26, our lesson today is about passive voice. *(Students started opening their books.)*

(Researcher's Diary – Bushra/Khalid Confrontation)

The issue here is not only that the laugh hurt Bushra's feelings, it is about how males insult females, socially dismissing them and how females come under pressure and are objectified by males. Khalid's laugh is a representation of the wider society outside the college.

From the performative point of view, Bushra's reaction was a result of reiteration. In the first scene, when Khalid injured her by repeating the word 'kitchen,' she was constituted and kept silent. In second scene, the repetition of Khalid's interpellation performatively constituted Bushra for the second time; however, this constitution is the condition that produced room for Bushra's discursive agency to emerge. Bushra's response destabilises gender categories that tried to normalise and regulate her. Her discursive agency emerged from within the constitution, not before it. Bushra/Khalid's incident materialises Butler's theorisation of gender not as performance, but as performative:

Gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. There is neither a prior intention nor a 'doer behind the deed' of performativity.

(Butler 1995, p. 134)

In what follows, some excerpts from interviews with Bushra, Khalid and some of the other learners are analysed with reference to Bushra/Khalid confrontation. In the following excerpt, Bushra's diary considers how she understood Khalid's behaviour.

4.2.2. Bushra's emergent subjectivity

The following excerpt, taken from her diary, highlights how Bushra viewed the confrontation:

I was answering a question about my weekend. In my answer I said that we had a party and my family spent a nice time, and everybody was happy because my sister got married. While I was talking, I gave a very short laugh for about two seconds. Suddenly, at that moment, I heard and also the and the rest of the class heard, one of the males repeatedly laugh, and tried to imitate me in a bad way. I felt so embarrassed, angry and overwhelmed. I tried to control myself, but I couldn't. I turned towards the males, I looked at them, I was so angry, I tried to know the one who laughed, but all of them were looking at me in silence. I couldn't know who imitated me. I was silent for some seconds, then suddenly I found myself saying, 'All the boys in this class are rubbish.' Then the four males got angry. They started threatening me. But the teacher asked them to keep silent. He opened the book and the lesson started, but later, it became a big problem.

(Bushra's Diary – Confrontation)

The confrontation between Bushra and Khalid represents a gendered classroom conflict. Khalid's interrupting laugh interpellated Bushra, hurt her female identity and threatened her to her face in public. Bushra's comment, 'And also the teacher and the rest of the class heard,' means that she was concerned that the interpellation took place in public. That was why she was 'overwhelmed' and she

could not ignore the threat. It was not possible to control her anger. For her to defend her pride was an imperative.

Bushra's reaction subverted classroom gender roles – Khalid was shocked by the unpredictable outburst. In fact, Bushra's performative acts – the way she turned and the way she looked at the males – her silence, and finally, the way she banged on the desk, accompanied by her performative utterance: 'All the boys in this class are rubbish,' are performative because they destabilised the established identity categories. They were courageous actions performed by a brave female in a patriarchal and conservative society like Oman (Soedarwo, 2014; Osaaji, 2009), a society with well-established patriarchal norms – norms that make what Khalid did a privilege, and what Bushra did a taboo. Such norms are difficult for anyone to contravene, yet that was what Bushra did. From this perspective, Bushra's actions could be seen as an inauguration of her new-born identity.

4.2.3. Khalid's perlocutionary force

Bushra continued to explain how she felt when the researcher interviewed her after the incident:

What he did was an indication of disrespect; he wanted to judge me in a bad way. At that moment, I thought that it was a nightmare, and soon I would wake up and find that it was over. Unfortunately, it was not a dream. He thought that I would not respond, and I would accept what he did, and let it pass. He was threatening my reputation. I haven't done anything wrong. I am not what he imagined, and this is something very dangerous. I am a female living in a Muslim society; my reputation is the most valuable thing

that I own. I am a female, Allah has created me like that, and I am happy and proud of who I am. I must show him that I am strong. I have encountered similar cases before and used to keep silent, but not anymore. I think this is my class the same way as it is his class. This experience taught me to be hard-working and to study every day to prove myself academically. If the males want to take the issue to the dean, I will also go to the dean and explain everything to him.

(Bushra – Follow-up Interview)

Bushra mentioned the word ‘reputation,’ which is a very sensitive word in Muslim culture and in Omani society (Latreille, 2008). In Omani society, ‘reputation’ is connected to the honour of the family. If the reputation of a female is ‘contaminated,’ then the female, her father, her family and even her whole tribe will live to endure public shame and lose dignity. The word ‘shame’ in this context is not the same as ‘shame’ in the Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, or its meaning in Western culture. In the West, shame is associated with blame and generally a relatively minor mistake or offence. Phrases like ‘What a shame’ or ‘Shame on you’ reflect this usage. In Arab and Muslim culture (Latreille, 2008), however, it is related to the honour of the family and its members. Bushra defended herself by reminding us that speaking in the classroom is not a crime, and that laughing is not a crime. She had not done anything wrong. In spite of the fact that she felt vulnerable when she knew that other males might go to the dean (as she disclosed to me in the follow-up interview), publicly, she announced that she was not afraid of meeting the dean of the college and explaining everything to him.

The above excerpt from Bushra's diary represented Bushra's struggle as a new female student who found herself, for the first time in her life, in an unfamiliar context of a mixed gender classroom. In such a context, specific behaviours were expected from male and female learners. These behaviours stem from the Omani patriarchal and traditional society. In this regard, Bushra's practices are considered as responsive, not intentional, because they arose as a reaction to Khalid's interrupting behaviour. Bushra explained how she felt demoralised, disrupted and humiliated as a result of the interrupting laugh. Bushra's choice of words and phrases, such as 'disrespect,' 'threatening my reputation' and 'I am not what he imagined,' show Bushra's views and perceptions of Khalid. Khalid's laugh represented an ideologically infused interpellation that positioned (as he explained later) Bushra as a vulnerable and powerless female, who would not be able to defend herself; however, Bushra did not respond in the way Khalid expected, that is 'being interrupted and silenced.' She rejected his positioning and spoke up.

Bushra's wording also showed that Bushra was interpellated. Purvis and Hunt (1993, p. 483) states that the interpellation process not only calls individuals, it also positions them within the social and discursive context. Khalid was behaving according to Omani traditionally normative structures. In such a context, when women are hailed, they keep silent. In this regard, the interpellated individual needs to be aware of this positioning so that he/she can counterattack; and this was what Bushra did. Bushra again expressed how she felt in her diary:

I felt that he wanted to keep me inside the *box* and to silence me. In fact, yes he hurt me and I felt great *pain*. But I will not let him identify me and shape my life. It is unfair.

(Bushra's Diary – Confrontation)

Bushra's reaction seems to subvert classroom gender roles, because her behaviour was an 'out of the box' action. Her behaviour was unexpected and came as a surprise to all those who were in the class, including myself and Khalid. Khalid's laugh vocally 'othered' Bushra and publicly 'singled' her out in the classroom.

The above excerpt depicts how the Omani patriarchal society positions females as others, vulnerable and powerless, and identifies what Khalid did as a repetition of the wider social dominated gender norms. It also provides some traits of Bushra's newly emergent identity. Bushra is thinking 'outside the box'; Khalid's laugh made her see things from a different and new perspective. Moreover, Bushra's words represent her emergent inner strength and discursive agency. The phrase 'to silence me' shows how she sees Khalid as someone who tried to stop her from expressing herself, and 'I felt great pain' refers not only to her vulnerability, but also her refusal to be identified and shaped by Khalid, and her determination to show her resistance to Khalid's attempts to restrict her abilities.

The gendered reiterated practices in the wider Omani society were evident in the confrontation and it seems that, by uttering his interruptive laugh, Khalid tried to insult Bushra. He took advantage of the social and the patriarchal power of the

male in the wider Omani society, to undermine Bushra's right to speak and to express herself; however, through her counter-interpellating performative act, she was able to confront Khalid. In this regard, agency is not only seen as resistant acts of hegemonic discourse, but also a reproductive force that enables subjects to transform and reconstruct their subjectivities. Thus, Khalid's hegemonic behaviour allowed and enabled Bushra's new subjectivity. Butler (2004, p.345) formulates gender performativity, not as free will, but rather, as a will that is constrained by 'norms that constitute, limit and condition me; it is also delivering a performance within a context of reception and I cannot fully anticipate what will happen.'

The phrase 'in the box' highlights Bushra's feeling of being constrained and limited by social and cultural norms. Butler theorises:

The performance of gender is also compelled by norms that I do not choose
... the norms are the conditions of my agency, and they also limit my agency
... What I can do is, to a certain extent, conditioned by what is available for
me to do within the culture and what other practices are and by what
practices are legitimating.

(Butler, 2006, p.345)

In spite of the fact that Bushra's performative act was seen by Khalid as illegitimate, for me, it aligned with Butler's perspective above. Her discursive practice was legitimate, and, therefore, supported by me. The reaction of the male students took the form of a resistance at the beginning, but later they accepted their teacher's argument and started to reflect on the episode, and gradually started to tune in.

4.2.4. Performativity and constitution

In this incident, Bushra felt constituted, humiliated and compelled to attack the norm – the norm was to remain silent. When Bushra turned around to respond and confront Khalid's interruption, her subjectivity emerged and she had inaugurated a new classroom reality, after which the classroom was not the same as it was before. It was a moment in which Bushra was performatively and linguistically constituted without being aware of this taking place. In spite of the fact that Bushra troubled the classroom gender binary, she did not attribute this process to herself:

I didn't mean to change our Omani customs and traditions, as Jokha and the other females in the class think. I didn't mean to teach him [Khalid] a lesson, as he looks at it. It all happened unintentionally, as a result of his sarcastic laugh. It wasn't me! It was his laugh.

(Bushra – Second Interview)

What Bushra said is in line with Butler's (1993a) notion that there is no doer who performed the action, 'no doer behind the deed.' This does not mean that there is no subject, but it means that the concept of intentionality does not exist in advance and the subject emerges as a result of the deed. The 'I' exists only after the performative identity, not before it. Bushra used many of the indexical 'I's': 'I am happy and proud of who I am,' 'I am a Muslim female,' 'I must show him,' 'I will go to the dean,' 'I think ...' This plethora of 'I's' are the effects of the confrontation. Bushra is constituted and, as a result, all these acts are a condition of discursive agency and freedom that emerge within discourse in Butler's (1995, p.135) words. It is within this iterative process that discursive agency emerges.

There are only sequences of actions that are sedimented and congealed over time to produce the stable powerful agent. This is evidenced in her last phrase: 'It was not me, it was his laugh.' It is the deed through which Bushra's prohibited and repressed subjectivity emerged and came into existence as an assertive subject. Here, Bushra explained that her reaction to Khalid's laugh was not planned. Bushra's emergent subjectivity is the effect of Khalid's hegemonic discursive practice – 'his laugh.' Bushra attempted to resist the normalising discourse from a male colleague who tried to force her to comply with the norms and to obey the rules.

To illustrate this further, Bushra's new subjectivity was not reproduced by Khalid's hegemonic discourse; she was reproduced by the reiteration process of Khalid's discursive act. Bushra was 'undone,' to use Butler's (2004, p.2) words. Butler (2004, p.2) explains this through what she calls the 'schemes of recognition': 'if the schemes of recognition that are available to us 'undo' the person by conferring recognition ... then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differently produced.' Bushra was undone by Khalid's reiteration and interrupting laugh. According to the norms of speaking in the classroom, when a student speaks, other students and the teacher should listen. In a learner-centred classroom, Bushra was supposed to be recognised by her classroom peers and teachers as a student who is fully entitled to speak, to answer and to ask questions like any other student, regardless of their gender; however, while she was doing this, she was rendered unrecognisable by Khalid's interrupting laugh.

Bushra was forced to seek survival and public recognition in the classroom. She was interpellated and pressured to 'give an account of herself' (Butler, 2004) to confront Khalid's unintelligibility. It is in that sense that her response was performative. Bushra's confrontation made her into a new subject. She did not intend to rebuke her male colleagues in the classroom, but her *performative* act of refusal emerged as a rejection of the hegemonic male norms. She resisted complying with these unfair structures, and her discursive agency was produced from within the incident. Bushra found herself in a social world that she did not choose, as she entered power relations with Khalid, who accused her of violating the Omani cultural norms, and paradoxically, she was constituted and recognised by all when the confrontation was resolved. The performative act in the Bushra/Khalid confrontation is not that Bushra uttered the phrase, 'All the boys in this class are rubbish,' but that the utterance of this phrase made Bushra into a new person and her identity emerged as a result. Bushra/Khalid's conflict affects other students also. The next section shows the way Khalid transformed

4.2.5. Khalid's transformation

Interviews with other students yielded useful insight. I interviewed Khalid after the incident, and asked him why he imitated Bushra's short laugh. He replied:

She was speaking loudly about her sister's wedding; and she was laughing. You know the Omani customs and traditions. Women should not laugh in public. She was not at her home or among her family. I know that some females support her, but some of them are happy with what I did. All the males and most of the females did not like what she said. She was

mischievous and badly behaved. A daughter of real men who comes from a good family did not do that.

(Khalid – Follow-up Interview)

Khalid assumed and adopted a hegemonic conservative ideology, in which not only was he committed to cultural norms, but he also wanted to impose them on Bushra. He did not want to hear a woman's voice in public. He viewed the classroom as a place that is supposed to be dominated by males. Females should sit at the back and be voiceless. According to him, a well-brought-up female should not speak loudly and laugh in front of strangers. According to him, such behaviour is allowed only at home among close relatives such as fathers and brothers. The ideal female in his perspective is that traditional, voiceless and submissive woman. Females who do not meet these criteria are mischievous and do not come from respected families.

As a result of the transformative intervention (see section 3.11), which comprises of classroom pedagogical discursive practices with me and peers, and responding to the reflection processes about gender and identity, Khalid seemed to undergo some transformation. In this regard, Butler's (1997a) theory of performativity offers a heuristic process through which the students transform their view and attitudes about gender and its role in the classroom:

I learn lots of things, insights; at least I learn not to judge others' actions. That is not my responsibility. Now I accept others as they are. I am not an inspector; I am not a judge or a policeman, I must focus on correcting my own flaws, not others. We are in the same class; I respect my class peers,

so that they also respect me. Now I am more sensitive about others' feelings and emotions. People have different opinions, but we need to know how to disagree.

(Khalid – Fourth Interview)

Khalid's comments were different by the end of the second semester. They were still affected by religious values and teachings, e.g. 'I must focus on correcting my own flaws.' He seemed to watch his words and was aware of their effects; and his last sentence reveals the extent to which he had become a different person; he was more tolerant and open-minded than he used to be. This can be seen as a link between learning and transformation, or learning as transformation (Mezirow, 2000).

4.2.6. Hailing Bushra

Bushra had a friendship with Jokha, in which they were comfortable accompanying each other to and out of class. This did not last long. The relationship between them became tense after the confrontation with Khalid. Losing Jokha as a friend negatively impacted Bushra and rendered her vulnerable and uncomfortable. The researcher interviewed three female learners who rejected what Bushra did, Jokha, Sameera and Shoruq. They were not happy with Bushra's reaction to Khalid's laugh. I asked Jokha:

Teacher: What do you think of Bushra/Khalid confrontation?

Jokha: As far as I know, what she did is not acceptable. She is a female! Even if Khalid was wrong, she should have not spoken to him like that. As females, we must be careful and watch our words when we are in the class.

Otherwise, we will be negatively stereotyped. It is a sensitive issue. It is a matter of reputation.

(Jokha – Follow-up Interview)

It was clear that Jokha represented a traditional Omani female. Up to the present time in Omani (and Muslims') sociocultural norms, it was positive for women to be submissive and low-voiced. Jokha viewed Bushra as a sharp-tongued learner who should have not uttered that phrase 'All the boys in this class are rubbish.' For Jokha, females are supposed to think carefully about what they say, especially when in public. Otherwise, word of the confrontation may spread and people who did not know about the incident would come to know. Although she was not part of the confrontation, Jokha was worried about its consequences. She was worried about the additions that people may create while telling and retelling the incident. Bushra suffered as she disclosed to me because Jokha was her close friend. The two other females interviewed were of the same opinion. Bushra had not expected that some of her female peers would be unsupportive and she was disappointed because of this. She told:

I am disappointed as some females [Jokha, Sameera and Shoruq], especially Jokha, she saw what Khalid did and not only kept silent, but now they see me as someone who misbehaved. I haven't done anything wrong. I am not comfortable, they want me to apologise, but what about me and my feelings? They dislike what I did, but this means they actually support Khalid.

(Bushra – Follow-up Interview)

For the three females, Bushra's utterance rendered her socially unintelligible, as females are not supposed to speak like that. For Jokha and the two other female learners, Bushra had transgressed the norm. They put pressure on her to apologise in order to turn intelligible. For them Bushra must linguistically and corporeally *cite* and *do* like other women in order to retain her foreclosed intelligibility. Bushra was upset because they did not think of her injured feelings as a victim of Khalid's perlocutionary force. Bushra was hurt because the three females judged her transgression as socially perverse, improper and wrong.

Butler (1993b) theorises how females are discursively constituted and 'femaled':

To the extent that the naming of the 'female' ... initiates the process by which a certain 'femaleing' is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a 'female,' however, who is compelled to 'cite' the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject.

(Butler, 1993b, p.232)

Bushra expected Jokha to support her because she was a close and trusted friend to her, but Jokha let her down. Bushra's uncomfortable feeling seems to be caused by three different types of interpellation: from Khalid, from the three other males who threatened to go to the dean and from the three females. They wanted her to meet *their* needs, while she felt that they did not think about *her* needs. It seemed that the divide between Bushra and Jokha was due to difference in their perspectives. On one hand, Bushra was able to think outside the box and to challenge the unfair patriarchal values. On the other hand, the three interviewees

who criticised Bushra, Jokha, Sameera and Shoruq, had internalised these values and imprisoned themselves, to use Foucault's (1980) paradigm. Butler (1997a, p.32) also theorises this notion and used the term 'self-incarceration.'

Jokha, Sameera and Shoruq's views can be analysed in line with what Foucault (1980, p.25) described as a case of 'internalisation of oppression.' Such individuals were marginalised and treated as inferior by a dominant other, so they adopted and internalised the other's negative image, acting in a way that affirmed this negative image. As a result, they generated their own oppression.

4.2.7. Tailored interventions

In this regard, I activated four different types of tailored interventions. The first intervention was a tailored empowering intervention to support and stand by Bushra. My intervention was to provide supportive feedback on how she behaved in the incident and to encourage her to overcome her obstacles by assuring her that she did not do anything wrong. The intervention worked by enhancing her self-efficacy beliefs and changing her sense of vulnerability to a sense of mastery.

The second tailored intervention focused on Khalid. It aimed to help him become a responsible language user. I explained to Khalid that his behaviour in the classroom was unacceptable. They discussed the impact of both verbal and non-verbal language, and I explained that Khalid had to be sensitive to the effects of his utterance on other's feelings. I also told Khalid how his laugh was loaded with hidden messages about gender inequality in the classroom, and expressed the importance of contributing to creating a positive classroom environment that was

inclusive of all students regardless of their gender. I asked Khalid to reflect on what had happened.

The third intervention was to deal with the three males who threatened to appeal and go to the dean, and the fourth intervention was to speak to the three females, and ask them to reflect on their judgement of Bushra's utterance. This encouraged her to continue to resist and not to 'fold.' Jokha, Sameera and Shoruh's attitudes represented the power of the social structure. Bushra was alarmed to find that, instead of supporting her, the three females let her down and supported Khalid; by doing that, they solidified and confirmed Khalid's negative stereotypical notion of Bushra as a mischievous student. Butler theorises stereotyping as a form of interpellation (Butler, 1997a). In this regard, Bushra was interpellated by Jokha's reaction. Butler (1997a, p.39) describes stereotyping as categorising others in a negative way, in which the categorised others will be influenced by what is negatively said about them. This incident comprises different subjectivities that were differently constituted. Bushra is constituted as resisting but also vulnerable, while Khalid as patriarchal and an inhibitor. The rest of the students identify as either supportive of Bushra or of Khalid. The whole classroom, therefore, was categorised into a masculine and feminine gender binary.

In this moment, the class was constructed through gendered, hierarchical opposition, where males seemed to dominate; however, following Foucault (1972), Butler refers to power as something that 'traverses and produces.' Bushra's discursive practice represents a non-conformist response (see Butler, 1997a: 61, on non-binary performativity).

In the next section, students' comments on the incident and what they learned from it are addressed.

4.2.8. Students' opinions

I interviewed Suad about her opinion of Bushra/Khalid's incident; her answer also reports a change in perspective:

This is inspiring! It was fascinating to see Bushra winning a confrontation with a man. At the beginning, when Bushra said what she said, I said to myself 'There is no need for Bushra to trouble herself. She will lose, she will be defeated.' But, on the spot, I quelled that idea and blamed myself for thinking like men. Men think that women are inferior and can't win.

(Suad – First Confrontation, Follow-up Interview)

Quickly Suad quelled her thoughts and doubts. She castigated herself for adopting a masculine mind-set that claimed only men could win. For Suad, it was a moment of deep reflexivity, self-interpellation, change and transformation. Suad's excerpt discloses the discourse through which transformation occurred in how she viewed things, as a result of Bushra's confrontation. Suad's new views were in a process of reformation and amelioration.

The transformative process went on, and in the third interview Suad was delighted because females and males understood each other in a better way and the classroom was a better place after confrontations:

Al hamdu lillah [Praise be to Allah, thank God] now we [males and females] know each other better, and the problems we encountered at the beginning are over now.

(Suad – Third Interview)

By using the word ‘problems’ in the plural form, Suad was referring to the Bushra/Khalid and Hiba/Salim confrontations, in addition to some other smaller issues related to gender.

In what follows, Badirya expressed cautious thoughts about how she viewed the confrontation:

When I think about how the problem was solved, I felt happy and said to myself, it is not something impossible then. Bushra has done it. Other females can do it too. And the classroom is OK now. I think it is because of that problem, we [females and males] see each other in a different way now. We respect each other.

(Badirya – Third Interview)

Badirya’s words are transformative in the sense that she attributed the change in the way both genders viewed each other to Bushra, to the way she reacted to Khalid’s interpellation. Badirya’s words might also be transformative in the sense that she may be able to do like Bushra herself, and defend what she saw as the right thing. Bearing in mind the complexities of the situations, and the sensitivities of the contexts in which these females might find themselves, her phrase: ‘Other females can do it too’ could be seen only as a hesitant step forward, as she did not

say 'I will try to do it myself,' or 'why not me?' She might be hesitant, but potentially, she might take the necessary step.

Bushra wrote about her relationship with me:

Every student in the class thinks that her/his relationship with the teacher is personal and special. Every one of us thinks that the teacher deals with us as if she or he is the best student in the class. That is why we all love English. I always work hard to meet his expectations. He always reminds us that fear takes us backward, and that we must speak up and be assertive. Being a student in this classroom, I have understood new things about myself and also about males. I have understood things and see them in a different way. Now I am a different person, different from me before I joined this class.

(Bushra's diary - Relationship With Teacher)

The last lines of Bushra's diary reveals that she was aware of the change that happened in her identity, by this point she was empowered and could think differently. She had new perspectives about English, herself, her male peers and the class as a whole.

4.3. Resisting heteronormative masculinity, reinscribing femininity

This study gives evidence of participants who were helpless and self-incarcerating in difficult learning situations, and gives examples of other participants who were able to liberate their thoughts and think outside the box and came out victorious from the same overwhelming situations.

Episode 2 materialises a moment of resistance to hegemonic masculinity. The discursive practices discuss how the femininity of Hiba and 15 other female students was first rendered unintelligible, as a result of Salim's (a male student) discursive practice. Then Hiba was able to reinscribe the disavowal and subjugation of their intelligible femininity.

At the end of the first semester, students were expected to give presentations on a relevant chosen topic of interest to them. The presentations were examined by two teachers – one of them was the class teacher (me researcher), the other, Miss Salma, was a female teacher from the Department of English Language and Literature. The students were supposed to give presentations for about ten minutes. Before they concluded, they had to invite questions from the class. According to the marking criteria (for presentation marking criteria, see Appendix B), if they did not invite questions, they lost a mark.

Academic presentations were scheduled to take place during the lesson times, and to finish in two or three sessions, depending on the number of students in each section. Presentations were marked out of 10. 15 out of the 21 females in Section One (for more information about the class, see section 3.7) had finished giving their presentations. Salim asked questions every time a female presenter finished her presentation and invited questions. The 15 female presenters got confused, intimidated and felt uncomfortable because Salim's questions were continually lengthy and unclear. The women were irritated by Salim's behaviour and instead of answering the question raised, they replied in a hesitant, vulnerable voice by asking questions like: 'What?' Then they tried to give short answers, and quickly

slipped back into their seats. The following is Scene 1, taken from my reflexive diary notebook.

4.3.1. Episode 2, Scene 1: Hiba/Salim confrontation

M (the teacher and researcher, male, internal examiner)

Miss Salma (female teacher, external examiner)

Hiba (Section One, female student, presenter)

Salim (Section One, male student, audience)

The two examiners sat at the back of the class to evaluate the students' presentations. Hiba stood at the front of the class and gave her presentation. When she had finished, she invited questions. Salim put up his hand to claim the floor. The way he put up his hand depicted his sense of his own power and his self-confidence. Hiba looked at him anxiously and she started sweating; her hands and legs were shaking. Immediately, Salim started his question. The following dialogue took place between Salim and Hiba:

Salim: In order to prepare for your exams, you said you start getting ready at an earlier time, you also said you study with your friend, fine, then you spoke about 'mood.' Could you please explain what do you mean by 'mood'?

Hiba: *(Perplexed, thinking, her eyes looked in different directions, trying to understand Salim's question, then in a low hesitant voice.)* What? Mood! What is mood?

Salim: *(Smiled and started repeating the question.)* You said you usually get ready in advance and start ...

Hiba: *(Thinking, then suddenly became aware of his incorrect pronunciation of the word 'mode,' she interrupted him.)* You mean 'mode?!' *(She pronounced 'mode' with a high pitch and raised her eyebrows.)*

Salim: Yes, yes, mode.

Hiba: *(Unexpectedly looked directly at his eyes, suddenly her eyes became bright and her response turned confrontational.)* I never said 'mood.' *(Then she switched to Arabic. She spoke in a loud and powerful voice and pointed with her hands.)* If you don't know a word, then why do you insist on asking such meaningless questions? *(Other female students burst into loud laughter, enjoying Hiba's response. One female clapped.)*

Salim: *(His face turned red, feignedly smiled, used code switching too. Speaking hesitantly in Arabic.)* You said, ah, ... errrm *(in English)* 'If you have any questions plea...'

Hiba: *(Interrupting him in English.)* Yes, but I didn't say 'moo...'

Miss Salma: *(In an attempt to go back to presentations.)* That's OK, Hiba.

Please answer the question.

Hiba: I explained in my presentation 'my mode' is my style, my way *(in Arabic)* but I would never try to harm my peers and cause them to lose a mark. *(Angrily, she went and sat on her chair, Salim looked embarrassed. He looked at his papers and did not ask more questions.)*

When the class was over, I addressed Salim and Hiba in particular, and the whole class, and asked them to reflect on what had happened, and to write their opinions in their diaries. I told them that I would speak to them later about the incident and that I was interested in knowing what they thought about it on reflection.

4.3.2. Emergence of Hiba's subjectivity

The episode started with a sequence of response patterns, which indicate how Hiba and Salim were constituted as a result of their performative discursive practices. Hiba's perplexity, her distracted looks and hesitant voice inscribed her vulnerability, while Salim's lengthy question, his smile and the way he put up his hand, indicated his provisional mastery. Then Hiba's sudden awareness of Salim's incorrect pronunciation of the word 'mode,' and the way she interrupted him, her high pitch, her raised eyebrows, her direct look and the brightness in her eyes – all these performative acts paved the way for the potential confrontation and reinscribed the foreclosed intelligibility of her and her female peers. The loud laughter of other females, the rejoicing and the clap by one of them, reinscribed and assured this regained intelligibility. Salim's red face, his hesitation and the way he switched to Arabic represented his vulnerability, while his feigned smile can be interpreted as a masquerade to hide his embarrassment, inscribing his submission and loss of power, and how he was rendered unintelligible. Hiba's final interruption reassured her emergent strength, self-confidence and mastery.

The intervention of Miss Salma can be understood as an attempt to save face for Salim and to regain control by returning to the presentation process. This reading suggests that it seems that Miss Salma adopts and internalises the patriarchal

values. These values prohibit for a female to challenge a male or to embarrass him. That was why Miss Salma tried to help Salim out of his uneasy situation caused by Hiba's question. Hiba's response and her angry walk to her seat represented her powerful status. Salim's look at his papers can be seen as another masquerade to hide his humiliation and awkwardness. The whole episode exemplifies Butler's (2006) notion of discursive agency, which emerges from within, and as an effect of the performative action, and not before it.

The episode includes Salim repeatedly asking questions. In this regard, for Salim to ask questions was something required by the class task, however, the problem was in the way he asked his questions (lengthy, intimidating and perplexing). Butler (1993b) argues that discursive agency emerges as a result of the repetition of performative and hegemonic practices. Butler (2004, p.61) asserts that reiteration compels hegemonic ideologies to reflect and evaluate their discursive practices, as it exposes inequality and prejudicial practices and shows their falsehood. As such, Hiba and Salim's practices inscribe femininity and masculinity and the confrontational relationship between them.

The 15 female presenters were entrapped in Scene 1 because they were required to invite questions at the end of their presentations, which therefore, they could not easily refuse to answer. They invited questions to comply with presentation criteria. Salim's way of asking questions inscribed his provisional masculinity and temporary assertion. The 15 females were variously upset, ambivalent and furious, which inscribed their vulnerability and submission. Hiba, was different to the other 15 females, because she was able to get rid of her vulnerability and performatively

act in a new way. Hiba was able to performatively reproduce herself as an intelligible female learner in the classroom. The question she asked Salim, and her gaze and her assertive body language, helped her retrieve her foreclosed intelligibility. By doing this Hiba moved herself outside the classroom's sedimented and gendered context. Through her performative act, her discursive agency emerged and was enacted.

When I spoke to Salim, and suggested that he ask short and direct questions without lengthy comments, Salim verbally agreed, but then continued to ask lengthy questions, which can be understood as an indication of his deliberate intention to intimidate his female peers. When the class was over, I made a record of the incident in my notebook and interviewed Hiba, Salim and the other students. Hiba explained what happened from her own point of view:

My topic was 'How I prepare for exams.' Before going to the front of the class, I spoke to you [the teacher] and asked you to tell him [Salim] not to ask questions. You asked him to ask good questions, and he [Salim] said 'OK.' But I was worried. I went to the front, and before giving my presentation, I approached him [Salim] and said to him in a low voice, 'Excuse me, please give chance to others to ask. I will lose marks.' He [Salim] did not respond, he looked at his papers with a smile.

(Hiba – Follow-up Interview)

Salim had a reputation for being difficult and obstructive so Hiba came to me and said, 'Teacher, please tell him to let others ask'; but because it was a formal presentation, I could not prevent him from asking questions, but I reminded him

that he had agreed to ask shorter questions and I asked him to stick to being specific in his words; he replied positively. From the back of the class, where the two examiners were sitting, I could see Hiba when she went to the front of the class. She went to Salim and spoke to him. She looked vulnerable and worried. Later, she told me that she indicated to Salim that, if he asked the type of questions he had asked to other females, she would not be able to answer, and would lose marks as a result. I saw Salim smiling, however, later, when the moment came for Hiba to invite questions, Salim put up his hand and claimed the floor.

The course of events demonstrated that Salim was domineering and controlling the scene, and Hiba was undermined and perplexed:

I started giving my presentation. I looked at him, and saw him writing something, and I got nervous. By the end of my presentation, I said, 'That's the end of my presentation; thank you for your time. Now if you have any questions, please ask.' When he [Salim] put up his hand, my heart beat very fast and I was anxious. I didn't like the way he put up his hand. I tried not to look at him, maybe he will put down his hand, but he didn't. I looked at him, and before I gave him the permission to speak, he started asking his question.

(Hiba – Follow-up Interview)

While Hiba was giving her presentation, Salim represented a source of danger, and that was why she looked at him. She tried to avoid giving him permission to speak, but he claimed the floor by keeping his hand up. Before Hiba could acquiesce, he asked his question. When he asked his question, she was

intimidated and apprehensive. The scene shows the framework in which masculinity and femininity come into play in the classroom context of this Omani educational institution. On one side, there was Salim's smile at the beginning and then the way he made notes and dogmatically put up his hand, demanded to speak, and spoke without getting permission; on the other side, there was Hiba's concern, when she saw him writing, her nervousness, her rapid heart rate and her attempt not to look at him. These behaviours apparently represented a dominating masculinity and an undermined femininity respectively, but, in reality these practices created the necessary conditions for the emergence of Hiba's discursive agency.

4.3.3. Tailored interventions

Immediately after the incident, I developed and activated the tailored multi-faceted intervention described in Chapter Three. For this specific incident, two different tailored interventions were developed for Hiba and Salim. Both interventions comprised reflective practice. The aim of the intervention was to reduce hegemonic prejudice against females. This had already been started after Bushra/Khalid's confrontation and continued for Hiba/Salim's.

The intervention was presented to the whole class as a form of gender intervention. On the surface, the male students seemed to accept what I said in this regard, but whether they internalised it or not, I could not be sure of at this stage of the study however, generally, their behaviour was less hegemonic, and they showed respect to their female peers. This was clearer towards the end of semester two (for more

information about the change in the male students' behaviour and the classroom context see Chapter Five, section 5.2.

Hiba was encouraged to reflect on her behaviour and to think about the difference between her and the other females. Later, when I asked her, she said, 'I was able to stop him, he was mischievous.' For me (the teacher), this was not enough, so I asked her to reflect again in more depth. Then, after some time, she said, 'I was able to think and behave differently.' Then I introduced her to the concept of 'thinking outside the box' (see section 2.5). She smiled and felt confident. She also started searching for information about the meaning of thinking outside the box. Later, she expressed her fascination that she had learnt a lot of new ideas about thinking outside the box. Hiba's intervention aimed to empower, support and encourage her in the face of what she perceived initially as Salim's disabling behaviour.

Salim's intervention aimed to raise his awareness about power mechanisms in the classroom and the importance of creating an equal classroom that is inclusive of all students. I asked Salim to reflect and think about the effects of his behaviours, and to share his thoughts with me. About a month later, Salim expressed new ideas about what he did, saying: 'Now I am wiser than before.'

The two examiners discussed Hiba's grade. I gave 7.5 out of 10 while the external examiner gave 4 out of 10. I defended Hiba, as she rejected Salim's inappropriate behaviour. I tried to convince the external examiner that Salim's behaviours were childish and constraining, and he meant to confuse his female peers. After some discussion, the external examiner added one mark. I called for a moderator (a third

examiner), and after discussing the issue, Hiba was given 5.5 out of 10. When she saw her mark, she was furious, and frankly expressed her anger and negative feelings about Salim by saying, 'Please let him know that I lost marks, and I was hurt, I wish I understand why! How does this make him feel now?'

The way Hiba expressed her anger reveals one side of her identity. She is frank and she didn't want to repress her emotions and store them. By sending that message to Salim, she was asking him to reflect on and evaluate his behaviour and to change and fix it. When I told Salim about Hiba's message, his face turned pale, and he did not say anything. This might be interpreted that he felt guilty, and he was thinking about and evaluating the effects of what he did.

4.3.4. Hiba's discursive agency

Before analysing what Hiba and Salim said in follow-up interviews, it will be suitable to analyse the incident and explain how Hiba's discursive agency emerged as a result; how she was able to subvert the whole discursive scene and to reinscribe herself and Salim.

Salim's behaviour can be interpreted as a type of gendered interpellation which rendered most of the class population unintelligible (the class has 21 females and four males). Salim's repeated questions, and more importantly, the way he asked these questions, cannot be seen as innocent and unintentional. The significance of these questions goes beyond the act of merely asking questions; they not only signify masculinity domination in the classroom and the wider Omani society, but they also reify feminine vulnerability and submission; however, Hiba was intentionally able to stand up and face Salim and put an end to his games. Her

significant question in Arabic to Salim can be read as a powerful performative act that not only subverted classroom power relations but also altered and repositioned gender roles in the classroom. She was able to defy Salim's expectations and position herself as a result of Salim's citational practice.

This was one of the rare moments when the class was dominated by females, while male students were silent and subdued. Before Hiba's subversion, Salim's questions constituted Hiba and the other 15 female students as 'unviable,' to use Butler's (1993b) term. Salim's behaviour represented a constraining norm, a form of unrecognition of the 15 females who were unable to stop him. Their behaviour echoes Butler's rejection of the self as a self-contained and homogeneous subject: 'When the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration' (Butler, 2005, p.7). The females did not like Salim's behaviour, but they were not able to stop him, because the social constraining norms inhibited them. It is in this sense that Hiba's behaviour becomes significant – she was able to interrogate the taken-for-granted norms. This process of interrogating the norms, paved the way for Hiba's identity emergence and transformation; this is the crux and core of Butler's performativity theory. When the participant is able to interrogate taken-for-granted norms, their discursive agency is fulfilled. In this regard, Hiba did not reject the norms as a whole. When she invited questions, she was complying with college norms of giving presentations. In fact, we all need norms. Some good norms are ways of organising life, but some other norms are unjust, inappropriate and foolish. We need to differentiate between

norms that help people to be tolerant, accept others who might be different, protect privacy and help peace to be everywhere. At the same time, norms that advocate aggressiveness and hatred must be rejected. When Hiba did not adhere to the norms and exposed their foolishness, she regained her intelligibility. Her female peers welcomed her transgression, and laughed and clapped. Hiba was able to prove that her 'capabilities' were not constrained by social norms. When Bushra did the same thing, in her confrontation with Khalid, the results were that she was considered by the males and three of the females as unintelligible and they saw her behaviour as something that threatened the social norms, because in Omani social norms it is not acceptable for a female to shout at a male (see section 4.2.1, Bushra/Khalid confrontation).

At the same time, Hiba's response represented her desire for recognition and reproduced a performative act that constituted her and her female peers. The females were interpellated by Salim's regulatory questions. Salim's questions were regulatory in the sense that they called the female learners into the 'specific order of social existence' (Butler, 1993b, p.23). Salim and his female co-learners were part of this social existence; however, Hiba's performative act signifies not only her non-conformation to this social existence, but also her ability to alter it. By doing so, Hiba created the conditions that produced her subjectivity and rendered her and her female peers viable, recognisable and intelligible subjects who can 'live a livable life' (Butler, 2004, p.3). Thus, Hiba's performative question transformed her and asserted her and her female peers as socially intelligible and recognisable

female students. The excerpts that reflect the effects of Hiba's performative act of challenging Salim will be analysed hereafter.

In a follow-up interview, Hiba commented on the incident:

I just wanted to finish my presentation calmly and to score a good mark. I know that I invited questions, but you saw the way he asked his question. And you saw the way he raised his hand. I didn't know why I behaved like that; maybe because I was bewildered and at a loss. But there is a big question mark here! I didn't know why he did what he did? Did he really want to know the answer [to his questions]? Or was it because we are females?! Why didn't he do it [keep asking questions] with males when they presented? Does he take us for granted because we are females?

(Hiba – Follow-up Interview)

For Hiba, asking questions was not the problem, the problem was in the way Salim asked the questions, and the way he put up his hand. Salim's linguistic and physical discursive practices perplexed Hiba and constituted her, temporarily, as unintelligible.

Hiba's interrogation of Salim's behaviour echoes Butler's (2006) notion of the discursive agency (explained in section 2.6.) that emerges from within discursive practices. Hiba's excerpt gives an account of Butler's notion of distancing herself from the concept of prior existence of the subject. Butler (1999) argues: 'that there need not to be a 'doer behind the deed', but the doer is variably constructed in and through the deed' (Butler, 1999, p.142).

Hiba herself was surprised by her own forcefulness in the face of Salim's questions, which is evidenced in her words: 'I don't know why I behaved like that, maybe because I was bewildered.' This sentence negates any suggestion of prior determination or planning. Hiba's emergent subjectivity is an effect of the reiterated discursive practice. For Butler (1990, p.380), gender is 'not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express.' Butler believes that rather than thinking of the subject as doing the action, the subject is made and produced by the action. She (1990, p.25) asserts that: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.' This means that in formulating her gender performativity theory, Butler (1999) clearly distances herself from the notion of identity, and presents her formulation as an anti-foundationalist thinker. In line with this, Hiba's performative identity is not a result of a prior and determined self that controls the events; rather, it emerged from within the events and as a result of them. Moreover, Hiba's words also reproduced Butler's concept of the paradox of discursive agency. Butler affirms:

If we have agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never choose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility.

(Butler, 2004, p.3)

By using the pronoun 'us' in 'take us for granted,' Hiba clarified that Salim's method of questioning perplexed not only her, but also her female peers who had given their presentations before her. Here, Hiba referred to the social world that female students find themselves in, a world that is not of their choice; however, what makes them 'viable' subjects is their existence in this unchosen world (classroom). These female learners turned into viable subjects and their lives were made livable by living in a classroom where educational and learning practices helped them to face their challenges, to reflect on their experiences and to develop new ideas. Hiba acted out something new, which rendered her and her female peers socially recognised. Therefore, their existence in the classroom signifies a development of new understanding.

Butler theorises life as livable by drawing on Foucault and Hegel and constitutes her theory of recognition as:

The Hegelian tradition links desire with recognition, claiming that desire is always a desire for recognition and that it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings.

(Butler, 2004, p.2)

Hiba's first sentence shows that she did not plan her confrontational behaviour in advance. She was not expecting to get into a dispute with Salim. She was undermined. Her worries were demonstrated by her concerns about receiving a good mark, and her determination to finish her presentation without problems. Hiba's words also tried to deconstruct binary terms and categories such as 'females' and 'males.' She does not intend to deconstruct them, but the effects of

her discursive practice reproduced a deconstructive moment that forced Salim and his male peers in the classroom to think of not only redefining the terms 'females' and 'males' but also (as discussed in section 2.5) to gain some recognition of some discursive practices that render their female peers unintelligible, showing that these discursive practices were wrong, unjust and unnecessary.

Hiba's use of the phrase 'take us for granted' reveals that she considers Salim's behaviour to be a sign of non-recognition. All 15 female students out of 21 in the classroom including Hiba, who gave their presentations, were perplexed by Salim's questions and rendered unintelligible by his behaviour. Her unpremeditated and sudden subversive response could be seen as not only a scream of catharsis, or an attempt to relieve herself and her female peers from a range of emotions, including the anger and frustration (represented by female holistic laughs and a clap), caused by Salim's reiterated behaviour, but also to force Salim to show some appreciation, respect and recognition of her and her female peers. Hiba's question in effect turned her and her female peers into human beings who seek to live an equally livable life (Butler, 2004).

In the next excerpt, Hiba reveals her sense of vulnerability:

It was so difficult. I had no choice, but to invite questions. If I didn't, I would have lost marks, but when I invited questions, Salim jumped in with his absurd and tricky questions. I just wished that he could put himself on my shoes.

(Hiba – Follow-up Interview)

Hiba's vulnerability is evident here, when she expresses her concerns about losing marks. On one hand, as a student, she tried to comply with college academic procedures by inviting questions. On the other hand, when she did, she did not want Salim to ask his 'absurd' questions. She had had experience of other females being unable to answer, and possibly losing marks as a result; however, her sense of vulnerability did not limit her subjectivity. In fact, it was the condition that made her subjectivity possible. This echoes Butler's concepts of mastery and submission:

The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. Where one might expect submission to consist in a yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself ... the lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility for the subject itself.

(Butler, 1995, pp. 45-46)

4.3.5. Classroom as a female domain

I interviewed Salim and asked him about his behaviour during presentations. It transpired that Salim behaved in this way as a result of chatting with a male friend:

A friend of mine did the same thing, and it was funny. My friend enjoyed frightening the females during interviews. So I tried to do the same thing. At the beginning it was really funny, but later Hiba took it seriously and ... I

thought about it. It was not something good. I have thought about it, and I will not do it again.

(Salim – Follow-up Interview)

In this instance the males not only repeated the process, but they also boasted to their friends about how they confused the females and frightened them; however, the effect of repetition was different this time, as it created room for Hiba's rebellious outrage. This confirms Foucault's (1977) formulation of power. Foucault believes that power does not simply prohibit or repress people, rather it produces things:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.

(Foucault, 1977, p.21)

This incident represents a process of struggle in which power not only strengthens but also transforms and reverses the male/female relations. The Hiba/Salim incident represented a rare moment in which female students dominated the class. In fact, females dominated the class in number (21 female students versus four male students), but the four male students dominated the class socially and culturally because they represented the social norms of wider society; however, Hiba's reaction reshaped gender roles in the classroom, and gave the female students an opportunity to rejoice having their own voice and speaking their mind.

Applying Butler's theorisation of simultaneous mastery and submission in subject formation to what Hiba and Salim said in their follow-up interviews enables an in-depth understanding of the whole incident. According to Butler (1997b), reiterative discursive practices result in submission to discourse. Submission to discourse allows more mastery of discourse by the dominant ones, and this could result in more submission to it. Interestingly, discursive agency emerges as a result of such submission. Butler (1997b) goes on to explain the notions of simultaneity of mastery and submission:

The more practice is mastered, the more fully submission is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. Where one might expect submission to consist of yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself ... the lived simultaneity of submission and mastery, and mastery and submission, is the condition of possibility for the subject itself.

(Butler, 1997b, pp.116-117)

Butler's (1999) description of discursive agency can help in understanding that the dominant male in this incident (Salim), was not aware that discursive agency stems not from the dominated female subjects themselves, but from the process of reiteration. It is the reiteration that produces the resistance and 'new' forms of power. The 'new' occurs as a result of interpellating the female as 'other' in this

incident (Hiba). The way Hiba interpreted Salim's reiteration and behaviour provided the opportunity for the creation of her emergent discursive agency.

4.3.6. Students' opinions

I asked some female students what they thought of Salim's behaviour:

Jokha: I don't know why he [Salim] did that, it seems that he enjoyed frightening us.

Rahma: Why are we bewildered by Salim's behaviour? Most of the males are thick-skinned, numbed and envious.

Sameera: Hiba did it for me. I was presenting, I looked at him [Salim], my heart fell to my stomach, and I went blank when I saw him write something. I struggled a lot to retrieve the information. He is a man with a brain of a child.

Jokha and Sameera expressed their surprise about his behaviour, Rahma stereotyped not only Salim, but the entire masculinised discourse as insensitive and distrustful, while Sameera depicted him as malicious and unkind. She also depicted him as a man and a child, an interesting and contradicting duality. For the three females, Salim was a cruel person, as his behaviour undermined their presentation skills and caused them to lose marks. They rendered him unintelligible and having misbehaved.

I asked male students in the class their opinions about the incident:

Awadh: I always advised Salim to be fair, but he didn't listen to me.

Bakheet (*expressed his dissatisfaction with what Salim did and said*): He deserved it.

Khalid kept silent. His reply was 'No comment.'

A comparison between the males' responses after this incident and the Bushra/Khalid confrontation revealed that there is some positive development in the way in which male students considered their female peers. In the first confrontation, they all supported Khalid, whereas in the second confrontation, they were ambivalent, some seeing Salim as unreasonable and unfair, and suggesting that he was deserving of the penalty assigned by Hiba. Khalid's response might be seen as ambiguous and did not reveal much of what went on in his mind at that moment. His 'no comment' phrase might be seen as an indication of flexibility, which could commence a transformative learning step that has the potential of change.

4.4. Identity emergence

4.4.1. Episode 2, Scene 2: Classroom oppositional constitution

One of the main aims of this study is to address how learner identities might emerge from classroom discourses and practices. To illustrate further, classroom discourses and practices may create learner subjectivity by valuing students as human beings, addressing their needs and helping them to become the persons they are supposed to be. However, they also have the potential to hide their subjectivities by failing to recognise such essential educational needs. As teachers, we need to understand the complexities of how subjects are made and

formed in the classroom and the way in which our actions and words in the classroom affect the formation of learner subjectivities.

Butler (1996, p.30) embraces the idea of the effects of repeated processes or iterabilities. She defines iterability as 'a ritualised and constrained repetition of norms ...a ritual reiterated under and through constraint' Butler (1996, p.16). Butler (1996) adopts Althusser's (1980) concept of interpellation. To interpellate someone means to call them to comply with the social conventions of a specific context. Butler (1997b) argues that the expected outcome of interpellation of people and turning them into subjects is not always conformity, and that interpellation can be disobeyed and undermined, and subjects may respond in an unexpected way.

4.4.2. Classroom gendered episodes

This section displays some classroom gendered episodes that show the way female and male students behaved in the first few months after they started their study in Section One, Level B. The episodes shed light on the effects of gender on students' behaviour. The first episode is a short skirmish about mixed-gender class as a new domain; it was between Juhaina and Salim, followed by the hot seat game, a classroom activity between Bushra and Bakheet, this lesson was observed by the another teacher (Outside Observer, see Table 3.7)

4.4.3. Mixed gender class, a new domain

Juhaina is a female student, who, on her first day at the college, went to her classroom for the first time. There was only one male (Salim) sitting on his chair,

and looking at a book in front of him. Juhaina went in and sat on a chair. The male looked at her and said, 'This is our class.' Juhaina looked at him and said, 'Yes, it is our class.' The male said 'No, it is '*our*' class. I mean males' class. Go and find your females' class.' Juhaina did not move. Salim's subsequent behaviour startled her. He stood up and came towards her. She felt afraid and quickly moved out of the classroom. The male chased her to the door of the class. She quickly joined a group of females standing in the corridor outside the classroom. Salim went back to his seat.

I asked Juhaina:

M: Why do you think Salim behaved like that?

Juhaina: I don't know. I think because he came from secondary school where the education system is based on single sex education.

M: Do you think he might have hit you if you didn't move?

Juhaina: I don't know. I felt very afraid, and it was a frightening start, on the first day.

When I spoke to Salim, he laughed and said: 'It was the first day and we came from males' school. Everything was new to me.'

The incident represents how gender is an issue for these young female and male students who find themselves studying in the same classroom. Salim knew that the college followed a mixed gender education system, but he did not imagine himself right from the first day being in a classroom with females. When he said, 'our class,' he meant that this is a males-only class. But Juhaina was more aware that the class was mixed-gender and she expected some male students to be

there. When she said, 'Yes, it is our class,' by 'our' she meant both females and males. Unlike Salim, she was expecting herself to be studying in a mixed-gender classroom. The incident revealed how mixed-gender classroom was something new to both of them, but to Salim more than to Juhaina. The skirmish also signified hegemonic masculinity and showed how males dealt with females. Salim's behaviour might be the norm that was practised at home. For him, it seemed normal to shout, threaten and frighten his female peers, as he may do with his sisters at home. Juhaina's fear was also significant, she grew up in a patriarchal society in which males are the guardians who dominate not only the classroom but all other domains.

The next episode was another gendered classroom activity. I invited Dr Hamood to come and observe the lesson. He arranged with some females in the class to prepare some classroom interactive tasks that could materialise mixed gender activities.

4.4.4. The hot seat activity

Speaking activity (Mixed-gender interaction): The hot seat game

M (The teacher and researcher, male)

Dr Hamood (Male teacher, Outside observer)

Bushra (Section One, female student, game presenter)

Bakheet (Section One, male student, participant)

A group of four females (Bushra was one of them) had prepared their activities and came to the front of the class. Part of what was presented was 'The hot seat' game.

It was prepared by the four females but presented by Bushra. The presenters cut out 21 slips of papers and wrote on them numbers from (one to 21) and distributed them to the learners in the class. Bushra explained the rules of the game to the class, that she would distribute numbers to all the students. Then she would call one number randomly, and the one who held that number had to come and sit on the hot seat and answer the set questions. The game started and Bushra called the number 12. When Bakheet heard the number, he was astounded and loudly said, 'No, not me.' At that moment all the class laughed, including Bakheet, and everybody knew that Bakheet was the one who held the number 12 and that he had to go and sit on the hot seat. At first he refused, but when I asked him to go, he hesitantly went to the front and sat down. Although the classroom atmosphere was generally positive and all learners seemed interested and were paying attention, Bakheet was nervous as he explained later. Then Bushra started asking the questions:

Bushra: Do you speak English well?

Bakheet: Yes, no, I don't know. (*Whole class laughed, Bakheet smiled and seemed anxious, showed a withering look and avoided direct eye contact with Bushra and the class.*)

Bushra: (*Smiling.*) What are your hobbies?

Bakheet: I don't know.

Bushra: What do you do in your free time?

Bakheet: I don't know.

Bushra: Who is your favourite singer?

Bakheet: I don't know.

Bushra: Do you miss your family?

Bakheet: I don't know.

The class laughed every time Bakheet answered 'I don't know.' Bakheet was embarrassed kept repeating the same answer. He could not participate properly, because such types of exercises were new to him. In the foundation classes, it is not the norm for a female learner to ask questions of her male peer, publicly in the classroom. Bakheet was forced to take part in the activity, and because it was the first time he had been asked questions by a female, he was perplexed and confused, as he explained to me later. Bakheet's masculinity was threatened by Bushra's questions. For him to be questioned publicly by a female, in front of the whole class was uncomfortable. There was another factor that Bakheet raised when he was interviewed by me; he said that he was nervous because he was unfamiliar with the type of questions. But the questions were simple and an elementary level student would be able to answer them; Bakheet's level of English was higher than this. This suggests that, mainly, it was *gender* that caused Bakheet to feel nervous.

After the lesson, I and Dr Hamood reflected on the episode, and Dr Hamood submitted a brief classroom observation report (see Table 3.7). Dr Hamood and myself discussed the reasons that undermined Bakheet's answers and constrained him from answering the easy and simple questions raised by Bushra throughout the game, agreeing that gender was the main reason. Gender caused Bakheet to see the whole game as a matter of power relations, and this seemed

to cause the tension and stress he felt while answering Bushra's questions. Both teachers agreed that classroom context needed to be changed, and that a transformative gender intervention should be designed to address gender issues in the classroom, and classroom atmosphere in general. The aim of the intervention was to make both males and females deal with each other without barriers, tension or stress and to move them from power relations to collaboration. After the class, I interviewed Bakheet about his experience in the hot seat game. Bakheet's words showed his feelings:

This is the first time in my life to be questioned by a female. I was not focusing on her questions. I was worried about what other females and males in the class might say about me. When the students laughed, I became stressed more and more. I did not want to sit on the hot seat, but you forced me. If someone had told me the questions, then I would have got ready. It was embarrassing and I was helpless. I couldn't answer her questions properly. She was happy and smiling, and I was worried and anxious. When she called my number, I didn't want to go, and then you insisted on me to go and sit. I was nervous because all the learners in the class were looking at me.

(Bakheet – Follow-up Interview)

Bakheet's words explained the extent to which gender is present in classroom episodes; he was worried because it was the first time in his life to be asked questions by a female in public. This perplexed him and he could not focus on answering the questions. He was worried about how other females and males

would think of him. Moreover, he mentioned the word 'females' before 'males'. This signified that the presence of the females was of paramount importance to Bakheet. Being asked questions by a female, in a class that was dominated by females, posed a threat to Bakheet. His troubles were clear in the way he sat on the hot seat, his eye contact, his smile; all of these body movements revealed the extent to which he was annoyed by the situation. Added to that was the laughter from the other students. This proves that gender is an invisible but crucial issue in everyday classroom practice. Hence the gender equity intervention was of paramount importance (see section 3.14).

4.5. Female status in higher education

4.5.1. Bakheet's masculine ideology

This section of classroom gendered incident represented Bakheet's masculine ideology. Bakheet is a male student who thought that there was no need for females to study at university level.

Bakheet: In my village, females study up to grade 12 only, and then they get married or stay at home. Up to grade 12 is quite enough, I think.

(Silence.)

(Students code-switch to Arabic.)

Suha: Now we are studying at this college, what is wrong with us?

Bakheet: No answer.

(Silence.)

Saleema: No, of course no, this is a wrong decision. Because when you educate females, you are actually educating future mothers. When mothers are well-educated, kids will grow up in an educated family and the reverse is right. If mothers are not educated, how will they grow up their kids properly? I think we need to change such old-fashioned ideas.

Basma: I think there is no difference between males and females nowadays. Sometimes females are more successful and useful than males.

Jokha: No, I disagree of course. This is wrong. Do you know that the first word in the Holy Quran is 'Read?' Allah almighty did not say 'Tell the males to read.' The Quranic verse comes as general and the addressees both males and females. Moreover, can you tell me from where you get this? Who said it? Any reference? For example, prophet Muhammed (PBUH) or a verse from Holy Quran? If you can reference your words, then we would agree, otherwise, you need to think again of what you have said.

Suad: I want to add another important point here: non-Muslims attack Islam and think that all Muslims think the way you think. They attack us and generalise such negative ideas about Islam and Muslims. Muslims are suffering from such negative generalisations all over the world, and sometimes help in this negative stereotype.

Zainab: I think you have studied the saying of prophet Muhammed (PBUH) when he said, 'It is a must that all Muslim males and females seek learning.' There are lots of dos and don'ts, we are under pressure. I want to study, to go to university and to do my Master's degree. I want to have a good job

and to be independent, I am talking about myself, myself, it is me, not anybody else, I am the one who decides, not anybody else! Why do some people appoint themselves guardians? Why do they shape and decide the future of others? Why? Let the others decide for themselves. These are their lives after all.

Coming to this college and learning and gaining knowledge plays a role in who we are. Now we are confident, and we can think and decide for ourselves. My family plans for me were to get married and to be a housewife, but now I study in the college. This is totally different from my family plans. Now I will graduate after five years and nobody knows what will happen at that time.

The discussion of this topic represented a development in the classroom context. It is not like Bushra/Khalid's confrontation; it is also different from Hiba/Salim's confrontation. In spite of the fact that gender dichotomy was clear in this episode, but the two parties were calm and there was no that kind of rude discourse seen previously. The patriarchal ideology was clear in Bakheet's opening sentence, and in spite of the fact that other male students in the class may not have agreed with what Bakheet said, and in spite of the fact that Bakheet's patriarchal values might represent a far, rural and isolated village in the country, his sentences are still significant. In that rural village there are females who are deprived of their rights to higher education and other rights like opportunities for a good job; however, the female students counterattacked; they asked Bakheet to think again about what he had said and tried to convince him of his wrong ideology. They mentioned

religion, and in their rebuttal one of them, Suad, mentioned the devastating impacts of such patriarchal thoughts on Islam and Muslims. Suad's argument was significant, in that she said that Muslims' wrong patriarchal and traditional values, which do not represent true Islam, give reasons for non-Muslims to attack Islam and to stereotype both Muslims and Islam with backwardness and abnormality.

4.5.2. Ola and patriarchal ideology

Butler (1993a, p.95, and 1997a, p.33) is interested in reiteration or the idea of forcing people to comply with norms. She links reiteration to identity formation and identity constraining. In what follows, two examples of reiterated gendered discourse are presented and analysed. Two female learners exemplified how Omani females are interpellated with regard to their gender, sometimes from families or mothers. An example of reiteration by family from Ola's diary: 'I hope that in the future I will be able to go to UK to do my master's degree, but my family will not agree, and I don't want to write more about this'. I followed this up in the second interview with Ola, from which the following excerpt is taken:

M: Why did you write 'I don't want to write more about this?'

Ola: Just like that. It's my family and ... (*She was silent.*)

M: And what? Go ahead ...

Ola: It is not allowed. They know what is good for me, and ...

M: Did you speak to your family about the issue?

Ola: No.

M: Then how do you know that they will not allow you to go to UK?

Ola: My older sister had an MA scholarship to UK, but my family said no, and ... (*She was silent.*)

(Ola – Second Interview)

Ola's diary represented the emergence of a new subjectivity and demonstrated how this subjectivity was constrained. But at the same time, it revealed her dichotomous and conflictual identity. Ola lived the tension between how she felt towards her beloved family, and that she did not want to disobey or criticise them, and her desire to turn her dream of going to the UK into reality. She saw how her older sister was deprived of the chance to do her MA in the UK and was upset because she might face the same problem. Ola's dichotomy is related to the tension between the constructed and the subjective. The constructed Omani patriarchal norms are that females are not supposed to travel alone for a long time and long distances. The subjective aspect is evident in Ola's performative act of writing her thoughts and speaking her mind, which indicated that her new subjectivity was in process. Her family loves her and in return she loves them. The discrepancy occurred when her dreams of travelling to the UK to do an MA clashed with the patriarchal social norms. Ola's diary represents a personal desire, which is hindered by the patriarchal cultural norms that lead to its failure. This hindrance seems to impact Ola's identity. Insistence on applying the patriarchal ideology by the family may limit Ola's aspirations and ambitions.

4.6. Conclusion

The abovementioned gendered classroom episodes highlighted the importance of the classroom gender equity intervention. Bushra's performative phrase, 'All the

boys in this class are rubbish' placed Bushra in a vulnerable position (see section 4.2.1) and the phrase materialised her ability to think 'outside the box'. The incident proved that for Bushra to think outside the box was not as easy as it seemed to be. Bushra was able to face three different types of attacks (interpellations): from Khalid, from other males in the class when the three males threatened to go to the dean, and also from Jokha, Sameera and Shoruq; however, this vulnerability also proved that Bushra was ready to bear the subsequent sufferings, to pay the price and to stand for what she believed to be insulting and inappropriate behaviour. As a result, Bushra's vulnerability was a condition of her discursive agency to emerge. Hiba's performative question to Salim was another reason to the transformative intervention to be designed and implemented. Salim's behaviour during the presentation session represented a hegemonic masculinity that had to be addressed through the transformative gender equity intervention.

Chapter Five: The classroom as a learning community

5.1. Introduction

Chapter four focused on classroom gendered discursive practices, addressing male-female confrontations. This chapter focuses on the classroom as a learning community, where the students, both males and females, collaborated to enhance their learning context. The chapter comprises three main parts: the first part is an episode of classroom collaborative discursive practice between Khawla and Khalid. The second part analyses classroom episodes of participants' use of learning strategies and metacognitive strategies, in which they explain how they were able to think differently and go beyond the obstacles they had faced. In doing this, the data suggests the transformation and development of their identities as learners and as individuals. The third part discusses male and female students thinking outside the box.

In this second part, the students also discuss metacognitive strategies that they have studied as part of the tailored intervention, which I designed. The classroom episodes have been taken: from interviews with students; from students' presentations recorded as part of classroom participant observations; and, finally, from parts of informal exchanges or 'conversations' between the participants and me. The following account reveals how students' identities emerged as fluid, developmental and adjustable 'Identities are ... not the so-called return to roots but [rather should be understood as] a coming-to-terms with our 'routes'' (Hall, 1996, p. 4).

5.2. The classroom as a learning community

In what follows, Khawla, a Bedouin female student who came from a small conservative village, answered interview questions about classroom interaction. Khawla's traditional social values do not allow a female or a woman to speak to a man who is not a father or a brother unless he is in a specified role and she is in the company of others, for example, in this interview; however, entering higher education, Khawla found herself in a mixed gender classroom and sometimes she had to speak to males:

I don't know, when **we** came to college as new students, our families warned us not to talk to males. You know I am a Bedouin. They told us that, when we speak to males, males will go and tell their friends, 'That female loves me.' Of course this is something sensitive and that is why all the females are afraid of rumours and gossiping. **We** are worried about **our** reputations.

(Khawla – First Interview)

As has been discussed previously, in Omani society and Muslim societies in general, there is often a binary schism based on the perceived dichotomy between the two genders. This division is apparent both in the classroom and within wider society. The dichotomy is clear in the way men and women look; for example, in Oman, most male Omanis grow beards; it is socially unacceptable for a man to shave his beard, because he would be considered to look like a woman. It is also clear in men's and women's clothes. There are some religious teachings, for

example, that it is a taboo for men to wear gold; in Islam only women can wear gold. That is why no Muslim man in Oman, or in other places of the Muslim world, wears any form of golden jewellery. In this regard, men can wear silver rings only. For Khawla and her family, if their reputation is undermined and brought into disrepute, this could have adverse effects on the whole family. In Omani and other Muslim societies, reputation is linked to two antithetical concepts: pride and public shame. In these societies, people are concerned about what their community might say or think about an individual, in particular a female's conduct. For this reason, Khawla and the other females were very aware of the consequences of speaking with males and how such interaction might be viewed by wider society.

In the above excerpt, Khawla mentioned the phrase 'rumours and gossiping' and emphasises the implications of such rumours as far as the females were concerned. Females might want to interact in class and speak to the males, but, as Khawla later explained, at the same time they were worried about how it might be misconstrued; however, they saw other older students interacting and discussing learning issues, and wanted to behave similarly by finding a socially accepted way of engaging. Males, of course, would also benefit from interaction especially in female dominated group, but, while being conscious of their pride, they are also well aware that, if they do so, males do not suffer from reputational damage. Khawla went on to explain more taboos in the Omani society:

As you know Omani society is very conservative, for example females, and in particular young females, are not supposed to open the door when someone rings the bell. If my brothers or my father are at home, they must

open the door and welcome the guests. If they are not at home, my mother opens the door.

(Khawla – First Interview)

Khawla speaks here about another social practice in her community that also constrains the behaviour of women and females and which is evident in the wider Omani society and reflects Omani sociocultural values (Al-Issa, 2006, p.197). If a woman repeatedly opens the door, and the visitors are men unrelated to the family, then the reputation of the family is at risk. Such social values disadvantage females and affect the way they look at themselves. In this regard, sociocultural values seem to disempower them, undermining their self-worth and depriving them of self-confidence.

The Section One Level B classroom at the College of Distinction is affected by wider Omani sociocultural values. When the students sit in two segregated groups of males and females, their separation is not only in the seating arrangements and in the choice of clothes but, most importantly, it is apparent in the way they deal with each other. The Omani hegemonic and patriarchal culture and its sociocultural system privileges males and accordingly, regulates and influences the power relations of male-female daily interactions and governs the everyday life of the Omani people.

Khawla elaborated more about the topic and voiced the dilemmas she encountered in the mixed gender classroom as a result of the way she was brought up:

I think this (prohibiting females from answering the door) is good, but it also has its disadvantages, because now, I am studying at the college, and many times I want to answer and to speak and to give my opinion, but, because of the males, I find myself remaining silent. I am not so comfortable. I don't have the confidence to do this. In fact, I already know what our teacher repeatedly tells us many times that, by expressing our opinions, **we** are not doing anything wrong. **We** are talking to our classroom peers, about learning English. The teacher is here, other students are here, but still ...

(Khawla – First Interview)

Khawla seems to contradict herself. She says that the convention of prohibiting females from answering the door is both good and bad. This represents what might be appropriate tradition and education in the Omani society. Khawla's state of fluctuation, the tension between her comments is an articulation of Butler's concept of the paradox of agency. According to Butler:

If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility

(Butler, 2004, p.3)

According to Butler the state of perplexity that Khawla lives in is the condition for her agency to emerge and to be enacted; if not now, it could be in the future.

Khawla's conflicting subjectivity is reproduced by the fact that she is constituted by the performative act of remaining silent. According to Butler (1997b, p.11), the act

of silencing Khawla constituted her and marginalised and limited her freedom. This constitution allowed room for her agency to be created, and the production and contestation of her identity occurred as a result. To her, it seemed that it was good to be protected because, according to Omani and Islamic rules, females are not supposed to expose themselves to strangers; however, at the same time, it is bad because one of the effects of this convention is that she did not feel comfortable or confident to speak in front of the males in the classroom. This awareness demonstrated in her comment indicates Khawla's development of her identity as a student who wanted to speak her mind and express herself in the classroom, but, as yet, she was not able to do that; however, her ability to express this to me, the teacher, could also be seen as part of her journey to construct her social and learner identity. She admitted that she lacked the self-confidence to express her opinion in front of males in the classroom.

Khawla's comment showed the two different social worlds in which she lived (the family/home, and the classroom/College of Distinction), both of which are environments that mould her subjectivity, and in which she is, to an extent, in a subservient position; however, despite their structural similarity these two worlds that gave meaning to her life, were in conflict. When Khawla sought recognition of her individuality in these two worlds, her identity was 'either done or undone' (Butler, 2004, p. 19). Her identity is 'done' when she goes to her family. There her subservience is absolute and, in her acceptance, she did not perceive any tension, but, when she came to the college, she felt the sense of being silenced; here her identity was 'undone'. In the classroom, she recognised and seemed to

acknowledge the sociocultural values that reinforce gender segregation. When she went to her family, she was committed to the family values and rules, but, when she was in classroom, she spoke openly to the male teachers and dealt purposefully with male students, but she did not always feel at ease doing so. The phrase 'many times ... I find myself remaining silent' is revealing and an example of 'reiterative practices' (Butler, 2004, p.4) that took place in the classroom and made her uncomfortable. She 'could not answer, speak and say her opinion'.

By using the word 'bad' Khawla seems to criticise the dominant sociocultural values that inhibited her and denied her right to speak. This aligns with the theory of gender performativity (Butler 1990, 1995, 1997b) that seeks to unsettle normative categories and to expose the irrelevance of the rigid structures that regulate people's lives. Butler's (1997b) theory of gender performativity teaches us not only how people's gender identities are shaped or unshaped within the reiterative practices of daily discourse, but also how people can go beyond these shaping structures and be their true selves. Khawla's problematic relationship with males affected her participation in the classroom. The presence of the males seemed to silence her. She knew that she was not doing anything wrong, 'but still...'. her unfinished sentence was loaded with unspoken issues. Khawla recognised that, by speaking in the class, she was not doing anything wrong, but still she still could not always voice her thoughts. She was afraid of speaking freely, yet aspired to do so. Khawla concluded by expressing her wish to be able to speak normally to the males in the classroom:

... then why should **we** feel afraid [of talking to males]? I don't know!
Sometimes, I see females at upper levels speak naturally to males. They are confident, and I wonder if I can do something like this. I hope so.

(Khawla – First Interview)

The question ...'then why should we feel afraid [of talking to males]?' was an indication that the performativity had started to work. Khawla started interrogating the rationality of the phenomena and looking at it through a different lens. By doing this, she was opening up for herself new ways of seeing and new horizons of thinking. She started 'to think outside the box', and free herself of some of the traditional norms that compelled her silence and limited her abilities. She dreamt of speaking naturally and confidently to the males. Khawla's uncertainty was also ongoing, however, and her emergent subjectivity appears when she expressed her desire to be confident like 'females at upper levels' who, she thought, seemed to speak naturally to the males, she ended by saying 'I hope so.' Her hope to be like the 'females at upper levels' suggests that she believed that education empowers, enables and gives her access to this development.

Add to this, Khawla used the pronoun 'we' which suggests that means she and her other female classroom peers all felt uneasy talking in the class in front of the males. Khawla's perspective here was certainly shared by Suha; when she too commented about being silenced:

We want to speak but sometimes there are some conditions that prevent us from talking and participating. It is not my habit to speak in the presence of men. I feel that people might ridicule me or neglect my opinion.

(Suha – Diary Data)

For Suha, it is unusual for a woman to speak while men are silent. It is not the norm. For her, as well as Khawla, the presence of men prevented the females from talking and taking an active part in the classroom. She was worried that other people (in particular, the males) might be sarcastic and criticise what she said as superficial. Another student, Suad, also commented on the difficulty she encountered when she was required to give a presentation:

I want to present in front of the females, I don't want to stand in front of the class and speak in front of the males. It's a scandal to speak in front of the men especially those who wear turbans. The males must be absent when we give our presentations. If **they** are allowed to be absent, they will be happy, and **we** will also be very happy.

(Suad – Informal Conversation)

Suad uses three strong phrases here: 'It's a scandal to speak in front of men,' 'males must be absent,' and 'we ... be very happy.' In the comment above, Suad's male classroom peers turned from '*males*' in the first sentence to '*men*' in the second sentence as she indicated, the shift from the specific i.e.: 'males' to the general, i.e.: 'men'. This alludes to the hegemonic patriarchal power in Omani society. In particular, she seemed to see the male students who wear Omani turbans as serious, steady and solemn. For that reason, she considered talking in front of them as 'a scandal.' The word scandal is significant in that it expressed her anxiety and reputational concern if she were to give her presentation in front of a mixed-gender class. She also used another forceful and assertive modal 'males

must be absent' to emphasise her point and show her determination in talking to me (who is male), that the male students should be excluded during the females' presentation sessions. She reinforces this by indicating that not only she, but also other females feel similarly: '**we** will also be very happy' expressing what she sees as the group's contentment and satisfaction if they were to present in front of females only.

What is expressed here, despite being in the majority, is the peripheral and marginal status females feel in the classroom, but also their conflicted insistence that this should be the case, however, it also depicts the Omani classroom as an alienating space for female students. Yet, this classroom reflects the wider Omani society and shows the rules and regulations that represent the patriarchal hegemony. It is important to note here, however, that, at the level of the government and legislations, Omani laws do not differentiate between males and females. For example, in jobs, salaries, and other domains, equality rules are applied. But when it comes to society in general, then convention is different. Nevertheless, in general, women are compliant and accept these rules, conforming because they think this is the order of things. Here, however, Khawla sees a role for education, to indicate and inform people of their rights and to reinforce the value of being heard, despite traditional rules and socio-cultural convention.

It also seems important here to note that not all norms are bad. People need norms to organise their life, but when they limit their freedom of speech and/or subjugate others because of gender, religion, or race, norms turn people's lives into unliveable lives and render them unintelligible. Butler (2008) states:

The difference between *Undoing Gender* and *Gender Trouble* probably has to do with my sense that a livable life does require recognition of some kind and that there are occasions in which names do sustain us, that there's a sustaining function of the name.

(Butler, 2008, p.141)

In Butler's (2008) terms, livable and recognised life is the opposite to unintelligible life. All people want to live a livable life, but some norms constrain this process and sabotage it and turn people into docile subjects. Moreover, this showed the effects of the enacted male-biased and dominant patriarchal values on women's inner psychological status.

At a later stage, towards the end of the academic year, Khawla was able to change and subvert her evolving subjectivity into a process of practising her subjectivity. This was evidenced in the next excerpt:

When we were new, we used to be hesitant while speaking to males, but now, we respect each other and the issue is not intimidating as it used to be. Sometimes when males and females find themselves in the class and the teacher is not there, they discuss things about English vocab, and other things like learning strategies. For example, last Monday, when Mr Ali [Maths teacher] was absent, Khalid asked a question about the meaning of 'mnemonics.' I know the meaning of the word; I was hesitant for a moment. Then I found myself answering Khalid's question. I explained the meaning and told the whole class how I use mnemonics to remember the meaning

of a new word or the spelling of some words. For example, the word 'bicycle.' When I finished, Khalid said, 'May Allah bless you.'

M : Did you stand at the front of the class?

Khawla: No, I was sitting on my chair, but I spoke loudly so that everybody could hear me.

M: Did you speak in English?

Bushra: (*Gave a short laugh*) I used both Arabic and English.

M: How do you feel about it?

Khawla: It was good; at the beginning I was a bit nervous, but later, I was able to gather my courage and continue speaking. After a while, I enjoyed it. I was happy and proud of myself. You like it when people listen to what you are saying. When I finished, males and females asked me questions and I answered all their questions. It was good. Everybody learnt something new. I myself became aware of things I was not aware of before. I hope to explain other things in the future. When I finished, I felt happy and I feel like I want to do it again.

(Khawla – Third Interview)

Khawla's performative acts represented a turning point in her academic identity construction. It showed how Khawla was able to break the barrier of fear and intimidation when interacting with her male classroom peers. Khawla's subjectivity seemed to develop beyond her shy, silent self and reified a bolder self and a more confident, assertive identity. The action of answering the question after a 'moment' of hesitation demonstrated Khawla is a risk-taker, who is keen to seek recognition

form her peers and willing to be visible to others for her knowledge and intelligence. By answering Khalid's question, Khawla positioned herself as someone who, because she knew the meaning of 'mnemonics'; therefore, had the right to speak. She not only explained the meaning of the term, but also gave examples of how it could be used to remember unfamiliar vocabulary meanings and the spelling of words that might seem tricky like 'bicycle.' Khalid's response 'May Allah bless you' could be interpreted as an acknowledgement that he was grateful for her answer. He also realised that he had learned something new from her. Khawla seemed to rejoice in the incident. It was not only a seminal moment in her education and development, more importantly, it is a pivotal moment in her identity construction. She felt proud of herself and expressed her desire to do something similar in the future. Other students also listened to her explanation carefully. And when she finished, they asked questions, and she naturally answered all the questions. This issue of asking questions publicly in the classroom represented a real challenge for these young learners (see section 4.3.1); however, in this classroom episode, other students asked authentic questions, and Khawla was able to answer without problems.

By answering the question about mnemonics, Khawla's voluntary act could be interpreted as an attempt to fulfil a hidden desire. It could also be viewed as an outcome of my transformative intervention. Throughout the academic year, I had encouraged my students to voice themselves and to speak their minds, and in the above example Khawla was able to materialise that. Moreover, one of the aims of the transformative intervention was to create a classroom collaborative and

collective identity that was able to generate knowledge. This took place naturally in Khawla/Khalid incident, and, in an unintended manner, it was additionally a good opportunity for cross-gender interaction and learning. Khalid's discursive behaviour reflected the extent to which his identity developed. By comparing the Khawla/Khalid incident with the Bushra/Khalid incident, we can read the degree of transformation that took place on Khalid's identity. In the Bushra/Khalid episode, Khalid's masculinity was rude, oppressive and inhibiting, while in the Khawla/Khalid episode, he showed a modest socialising identity. Khalid did not see it a problem with publicly admitting his ignorance, by asking a question and listening carefully to the answer from a female peer in the class. He also showed his appreciation to Khawla, and his appreciative response 'May Allah bless you' indicated that he has learnt something new from Khawla.

Khawla had faced a dilemma which seemed to be caused by the antithesis between the cultural norms of her community and the institutional norms of the College of Distinction. At home, she might conform to the conservative social norms, but, at the college, a different identity emerged. This is evidenced in Khawla's informal conversation with me which took place by the end of the second semester:

I feel like I am two different persons, in my village, I am Khawla who is not supposed to talk to strange men, but, here in the college, I can easily speak to my male teachers and male classroom peers, and discuss things with them.

(Khawla, Informal Conversation)

Khawla could easily play different roles in different settings. At home, she might conform and stick to the conservative social norms, but at the college, a different identity emerged. This was an identity in which she found no difficulty in voicing herself and negotiating learning issues with the other gender, (teachers and classroom peers). She had accelerated her progress to becoming one of the upper level females whom she admired in her first interview. Butler (1990, p.25) theorises this dualist identity, and describes it as a performative and iterative process of 'making and unmaking subjectivity' that produces the subject as an unfinished product of power and discursive practices. When Khawla undertook these two different roles, she was not performing, but her subjectivity was produced by the particular context in which she found herself (her conservative community or the College of Distinction), and the type of subjects she was dealing with, (her family or her male teachers and classroom peers).

A holistic look at Khawla's transformation as a result of her existence in Section One, Level B reveals how her discursive agency emerged. A comparison between what she said in the first interview and in the informal conversation has shown how her performative identity emerged, and how her discursive agency was enacted. In the first interview, she was afraid of talking to her male peers, while in the last informal conversation, she could easily and effectively negotiate and enjoy with her male teachers and peers. As a result of existing and studying in the Section One, she had become one of the upper level females whom she had admired in her first interview.

In spite of the fact that the participants of this study used learning strategies, they were unaware that they were doing so. This became clear when I introduced the phrase 'learning strategies'; no participant in the class knew the meaning of it. I explained the term and gave examples, to make things clear for them. When they grasped the idea, they became aware of it and were able to give me examples of the learning strategies they used. Many of them spoke about rote learning and memorising their lessons in order to get ready for exams. I explained the difference between memorising the lesson and understanding the lesson and asked them to understand rather than to memorise. However, this was an initial stage; later I was able to explain in more detail the benefits of understanding and the flaws of memorising the lessons. The next section explores students use of learning strategies and metacognitive strategies.

5.3. Learning strategies and metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies or metacognitive awareness is the act of self-speech, Archer (2003, p. 15) calls this process reflexivity. According to Archer, this reflexivity is a 'generative ability for internal deliberation upon external reality (Archer, 2003, p. 20); she explains that deliberations support agency and change. I developed a metacognitive strategies intervention in which I scaffolded the students by raising their awareness about the theory and practice of learning strategies and metacognitive strategies. I gave examples and modelled the strategies for them and asked them to think and reflect about their learning. If students learn how to learn, they can perform better in the classroom and when doing their exams. I trained them to do a dictogloss task as a communicative task

through which they can collaborate and construct meaning in the classroom (see section 3.14.3).

This following section analyses participants' reflections while using learning strategies and metacognitive strategies. In the initial quote Khawla demonstrated a noteworthy ability to reflect and to use and draw mental images about giving presentations:

When I practice my presentation at home, I need to sit alone, in a calm room, and imagine myself standing in front of the class, and I see myself welcoming the teacher and the students. I also see the two examiners sit at the back and take notes. I imagine myself looking at more than 50 eyes focusing on me while I am giving my presentation. When I draw this image in my mind one day before giving my presentation, my real presentation becomes easier, and I score good marks. I enjoy drawing such images, it is easy, you just need to focus more. I think many people do this.

(Khawla – Mini-presentation, on reflection and metacognitive strategies)

Khawla's quotation is significant reflective practice. She is aware of her own thinking and the clarity of the strategy she uses. She knows how and when to use the strategy (sitting in a calm room, and focusing while rehearsing her presentation, one day before presenting). She has the ability to imagine what may happen while giving a difficult and intimidating speech for her and her class peers. This kind of mental image facilitates the difficult task of giving a presentation. She mentions two scenes that cause other presenters go blank: the scene of the examiners taking notes, and the scene when she is the centre of the class. Khawla

has a significant ability that helps her outperform other class peers. Usually, students become perplexed and go blank because they think the process of the examiners taking notes is a process of recording their mistakes (as I was told). She also prepares herself to exchange eye contact with the other 24 students in addition to the two examiners, in total making 52 eyes looking at her. Khawla enjoys drawing these mental images, and considers it helpful, easy and fun. When students are asked to give a presentation as part of their course evaluation, they find this task difficult and intimidating; however, for Khawla, it is 'easy and fun' because she uses metacognitive awareness. Thus metacognitive awareness transforms Khawla, and helps her to be a good learner. By sharing this mini presentation with her class peers, Khawla practised giving presentations in a form of learning by doing. She also shared knowledge with other students.

Sometimes when I am facing a difficult learning situation, such as writing an assignment or giving a presentation for 10 minutes, it looks difficult, but usually I do not delay the action, and I do not suffer alone. I seek help. And usually I found other students whom I talk to facing the same problem, and when we sit and discuss, and ask our teacher to explain difficult issues for us, things become easy, and we solve the problem by cooperating and by doing something, even if it is a small step forward, but it is so useful in solving the problem.

(Khawla – Mini-presentation, on reflection and metacognitive strategies).

It is clear how this participant tries to solve her problem. She creates practical solutions and does not stop when faced with difficulties. She became satisfied

when she managed to solve her problem, especially when she realised that the solution was easy. She does not feel shy about asking for help from her teacher, and she realises that by effective cooperation and interaction with target people, she can solve her problem.

Now I think and reflect on many things. I discover that lots of these things were not useful, so, I stopped doing them. I think after coming to the college, the way I think and look at things has changed. I stopped wasting my time, I am using a strategy of bullet points diary, I write the important things that I need to do, and when I finish doing something, I tick it on the diary. By the end of the day, I find I have done all the activities on the list. If I do not use the bullet points diary, my day will just pass, doing nothing useful. So, I am always careful to start my day with the bullet points diary. I suggest you try it; I am sure you will like it.

(Jokha – Mini-presentation, on reflection and metacognitive strategies).

Here is another example of self-awareness and how the learner discovers the importance of doing something which reminds her of what she needs to do, through writing a diary and taking notes. She taught herself how to evaluate her progress by ticking the achieved tasks in her diary. She feels that the day would be useless if she does not write any activities to be achieved during that day. This activity increases her self-awareness. The participant highlighted the necessary conscious reflection required during her college studies, suggesting that she is now able to do this better than before.

‘Metacognitive strategies’ was a new phrase for me, first, I did not like it and thought that it was difficult to understand, but now, I love these two words, ‘metacognitive strategies’. They help me to manage my time properly. Now I stand back and look at what I am supposed to do and force myself to do difficult things that I used to escape from.

(Salim – Reflective Diary, on reflection and metacognitive strategies).

The participant here realises the importance of taking notes and how that helps him arrange and manage his time. He can evaluate his achievements daily. His attitude has completely changed; he previously thought that the terminology was too difficult to understand, but he comes to find that it was easy and very helpful. He learned how to challenge himself to achieve more.

Now I reflect on my learning difficulties, for example, I don’t like grammar rules, and I was not clever in answering grammar exercises. But now I am aware that, in order to understand about grammar rules, I need to discuss them with my friend Khalid. And to know them well I need to explain them to him and we discuss and give examples. I discover that grammar rules are not very difficult as they used to be.

(Salim – Mini-presentation, on reflection and metacognitive strategies).

Here, we can see another example of self-awareness and overcoming difficulties. The participant highlights specific skills gained as a product of self-reflection, mentioning that he now is aware that grammar is not that difficult. He found that

when he explains the grammar point himself, it helps him understand more. He knows his strengths and weaknesses and he could find a way out of a challenge.

Reflection makes me realise my mistakes, I noticed that I used to say 'comfortable' and pronounce the /r/ in a similar way like in Arabic, but in a listening lesson, I heard a speaker on the CD pronouncing it very fast as 'comfortable' without saying the /r/. When the teacher repeated the listening activity again, I asked for a third time, I focused on the word 'comfortable.' Then I repeated it to myself many times, and now I can use it and say it correctly like English people.

(Arwa – Mini-presentation, on reflection and metacognitive strategies).

It is clear that the participant here learned from her mistakes. She also did her best to be sure of the target pronunciation of the word, by comparing her L1 with L2 to focus on the differences between the two languages. She repeated and imitated the unfamiliar word as said by a native speaker; which helped her to improve her pronunciation.

I used to study new vocabulary items in isolation, but came to know that this way was not very useful, and I changed the way I study them. Now I use collocations strategies. I also study new words in chunks, their meaning is clear in my mind, look for example at 'get in,' 'get out,' 'get up' and 'get around.' I am fond of collocations and I have hundreds of them in my vocabulary notebook.

(Khalid – Mini-presentation, on learning strategies)

This is a good example of the learner independently selecting and trying new learning strategies. He changed the learning strategy which he had been using for a long time and started trying a new one, by writing down in his notebook many collocations, which seems to help him.

In the past, when I wanted to write a paragraph, after I wrote the first two lines, I did not find ideas or things to write about. Now I use brainstorming. It is very helpful when I brainstorm the topic at the beginning, then I can easily finish my paragraph without problems.

(Salim – Reflective Diary, on reflection).

The participant indicates that he could solve his problem with his writing skills. Following certain learning strategy in writing called 'brainstorming', he was able finish writing his paragraph. The participant feels self-satisfaction achieving the target task without any problems.

I will tell you about my experience with how I become a fast reader who can score good marks in reading questions. I was a slow reader, and I did not like reading as it was a difficult task for me. Now I don't read every word in the text. I just look at the title, and then move to the questions. I start by reading the questions, for example question one, I read it carefully, then I go back to the text, and quickly look for the answer, and write it, then I move to question two and do the same. My advice to you is: don't read every word in the text, this will make things difficult for you. Start with the questions,

and then scan the text to find the answers. This way you can finish fast and get a good mark.

(Bakheet – Mini-presentation, on reading strategies).

Compared with his classmates' reflections, the participant wrote a longer response. He showed the long-term effects of his new strategy in answering the reading questions. That was based on his own experience. After he solved his problem, he passed the result of his learning strategy to his friends as advice. This indicates the degree of awareness the participant had developed.

I used to study alone. This was not so good, because I used to spend hours and hours studying and memorizing my lessons, and I did not like sitting for hours studying things by myself. Then I and my friends tried the 'learning by doing' strategy, in which we explain and discuss things together in pairs or groups. We usually agree and disagree, we give examples and tell stories, but we understand things better and we do not forget them easily. We save time and effort. Try this strategy, you will like it.

(Ghada – Mini-presentation, on learning strategies)

Here another example of changing the learning strategies before and after joining the college. The importance of 'learning by doing' proved to be effective. The cooperation between the participants gave them self-confidence and allowed them to express their opinions without being shy.

I use a mind map to study new vocabulary items. I find it very useful. It helps me to remember the meaning and the part of speech and the other words

that go with the new vocabulary item. Sometimes I can see the mind map in my mind and I remember all the information about that new word.

(Awadh – Reflective Diary, on learning strategies).

The participant here started to use 'mind maps', when studying vocabulary. This strategy helps him to study the vocabulary or to remember words when he imagines the mind map. The following section explores four students' mini presentations while thinking outside the box.

5.4. Male and female students thinking outside the box

Two female and two male students gave mini presentations that lasted for about two minutes in front of the class. The topics they discussed were thought provoking and controversial. Other students asked the presenters questions or expressed their agreement or disagreement. The topics were related to gender roles and job stereotyping. The two female students gave their presentation on two different days in the first semester, while the two male students gave their presentation by the end of the second semester. The four students stepped out of the norm, and expected other students to comment on their presentations positively or negatively. It was clear that the females were ready to change and respond to comments more than the males. The males expressed their disapproval of what the females had said; however, sometime later, two of the male students (Khalid and Awadh) also changed, and declared new identity roles. They found no problem in doing activities that were traditionally done by females. This could be seen as a process of transformation.

Intisar was the first presenter; the following quotation is taken from her presentation:

During weekends, when we stay at the hostel, we usually play football. Last week we won, and I scored a goal. I think football is a good sport for all ...

(Intisar – Mini-presentation)

When Intisar finished her presentation most of the comments came from male students:

Salim: You play football! Are you boys or girls? (*Other male students laughed.*)

Intisar: Of course I am a girl. I am a good player; I can score goals.

Bakheet: Can you run fast? I think football is sometimes a violent sport.

Intisar: Yes, we all run and pass the ball and everything.

Khalid: The doomsday is approaching.

Intisar: ... (*Silent, then she said:*) No comment.

Bushra: These are traditional ideas and now life has changed.

Intisar showed a well-constructed identity. She found no problem in declaring that she played football, while in a mixed-gender classroom in a conservative and traditional context of the wider society.

In spite of the fact that the classroom atmosphere was advocating poststructuralism, diversity and multiplicity, the gender binary was clear in students' discursive practices. Gender stereotyping dominated the discussion between Intisar and her male peers. The male students' comments depicted female football players as some ones who cannot run fast, and cannot bear the violence of the football sport. Khalid's comment represents a very traditional view which can be interpreted as implying 'we have lived until we see Omani females play football. This is the end of all time.'

The second presenter was Sameera. The following excerpt is taken from her mini presentation:

Last week I fixed the incense burner in our room. I like the smell of the Omani *Bakhoor* [*incense*], but the burner did not work. So I brought a screwdriver and dismantled it. I found a loose wire, and I tightened it, and when I tried it again, it worked well.

(Sameera – Mini-presentation)

The comments came from both males and females:

Intisar: Now there is no difference between men and women. Life has changed.

Salim: A woman can be a housewife, a teacher, or a nurse, but this is the first time to hear that women can be electricians.

Khalid: This is a dangerous job, you might get an electric shock, be careful.

Sameera: I know, but when I fixed it, it was not connected, and I usually switch the socket off before I start.

Sameera also showed a well-constructed identity. She has no problem in declaring that she fixed the incense burner. It is clear that Salim and Khalid still believe in traditional gender roles. They saw females as incapable of performing such job such as electricians. Salim still viewed a female as a housewife. He wanted to reply to Intisar's opinion that life has changed and these traditional roles are part of the past.

The next mini-presentation was given by Khalid. Khalid declared his love to cooking:

I know that people look down at men who cook, but I don't mind. I live away from my family and I don't like restaurant food. Restaurant food is expensive, not healthy, and not delicious. That is why I decided to cook for myself. You might see cooking as something that women do, but let me tell you that I am a man and I cook. I like cooking.

(Khalid – Mini-presentation)

The comments came from two male and one female student:

Salim: If I were you I wouldn't say this.

Khalid: Why? I am not doing anything wrong. Can you tell me what's wrong in my presentation?

Awadh: Good job.

Juhaina: This is excellent; we can see that by now Khalid is a different person.

Khalid's identity has transformed. His mini presentation reveals a solid identity that does not care about what other class peers say about him. His phrase 'I am a man and I cook' represents his strong personality. By comparing the Khalid who interpellated Bushra at the beginning of the study, to the Khalid who gave the above presentation, I can recognise the extent to which he has transformed. Khalid declares in front of his class peers, both males and females that he is a man, but he likes cooking. For someone like Khalid, this is a dramatic change. Salim expressed his disapproval, while Awadh gave a short comment praising Khalid's transformation. Juhaina also realised this, and expressed her approval.

The last presentation was given by Awadh:

Awadh: I am the eldest son in my family, my sisters are too young to help. They can't help my mother with household chores. I always wash the dishes when I am home. I have to do that. I feel happy and satisfied when I do it.

Bushra: Thank you Awadh. I think men and women should divide the household chores.

Zahra: I don't see anything wrong with that. You are doing a good job Awadh. Thank you.

Khalid: Yes, I agree with you. Real men help their mothers.

Awadh is different, as he is the eldest son, and he believes that his duty is to help his mother. Awadh's comment in the previous presentation was also supportive of

Khalid as he displayed his new transformed identity. Bushra and Zahra supported him and gave positive comments. Khalid also supported Awadh, and praised him.

The four participants were able to think differently, and they think loudly in front of a mixed-gender classroom. They were able to go beyond the social stereotyping, not all students in the classroom agreed with what they said, but their ability to give their presentations represented their transformation and transgression.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter explores classroom as a learning community. The male and female students interacted with each other, they shared their knowledge and spoke in a mixed-gender environment. A phenomenon that was new to both of them. While doing this they gave presentations and declared their standpoints. For example, when Intisar loudly declares that she plays football, and Sameera declares that she has fixed the incense burner; for me as a reflexive researcher, these two female students declare a shift in their epistemological stance. For a female student to stand at the front of a mixed gender class in the Omani conservative society and tell their class peers that they play football or fix incense burners, this is a significant step forward. It also told me as a teacher and researcher that the tailored interventions worked well. These two female students were confident, and they could initiate a change in the way the Omani society views females and the job they can do. What they present is totally different from the traditional Omani social perspective about traditional females who usually stay at home or take care of their children and family.

Khalid and Awadh also stepped out of the norm; and for me as a researcher they are pioneers of social change. Both of them declared that at their homes they do jobs that Omani society views as women's jobs. Khalid declared that he is a man, but he likes cooking. Awadh declared that he feels happy when he helps his mother by washing the dishes. When Salim said that he would not declare such a thing, Khalid rebutted and challenged him and asked him to explain the wrong side in his behaviour. Salim could not reply. The same thing could be said about Awadh. In my perspective as a reflexive researcher, the four presenters declare shifts in their epistemological stances. They also exhibit well-constructed identities, and practise their agency. Before giving their presentations, they knew that their class peers might not accept their new dispositions; however, they did not hesitate to announce their new stances.

This chapter has addressed three different learning topics; the first topic is Khawla's transformation, the second topic is participants' use of learning strategies and metacognitive strategies, and the third topic is four students stepping out of the norm and thinking differently. The three topics have materialised classroom as a learning community and participants' transformation as well.

Chapter Six: My transformation

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the transformation of myself as a result of adopting a learner-centred approach with my students. The chapter presents four classroom episodes, in which I have learned to be reflexive and tolerant: the first was when I was tolerant and responded calmly to Salim's blaming words; in the second episode, I learned some new insights from a female student. Zahra was a female student, she used her diary to speak her mind and express how she felt in the class. In the third episode I encouraged Sameera and other students to speak their minds. In the fourth episode, I learned to be tolerant while discussing things with my male students. The following episode was the first, with Salim.

6.2. My transformation: a dialogue with Salim

M: (Teacher, male)

Salim (Male student, Section One)

Students (Whole class)

I taught the students using two Headway books, Headway Plus Students' Book and Headway Plus Class Book. Usually they used one book in class, and I would then remind them to bring the same book or the other book for the next class. On this occasion, in the previous lesson, I forgot to tell the students to bring the Students' Book.

M: Ok class, open your students' book to page 19.

Students: *(Some of them brought the students' book, others did not.)* We haven't brought the students' book.

Salim: *(Loudly and in a firm way, and he also used his index finger.)*

Teacher, you must have told us.

M: *(Was silent for some time, furious but kept calm.)* Ok Salim, I am sorry, I forgot to tell you last lesson, but look at the other students, they have the two books with them!

In this incident, I was annoyed by Salim's blame, and for a moment I thought of telling Salim to behave himself, but then, suddenly, I stopped. I thought that I had been telling the students all the time to be themselves and to speak their minds. At that moment, Salim was doing just that, although his approach was not very polite, and irritated me. I decided to respond in a calm way and to protect Salim, because I would be contradicting myself if I reproached Salim. That was why I was silent for some time, then I spoke to Salim in a different and more calm style. The classroom context gave me the right to stop any disrupting behaviour or discursive practice from any student, behaviours against females or other males are not acceptable. At that moment, I could inhibit Salim and embarrass him, but I did not. By doing that, I was sending a message to students that: 'When I told you to speak your minds I meant it, so please don't remain silent, speak up, say what you think'. The next episode was with Zahra.

6.3. My transformation: a dialogue with Zahra

Teacher: (M, male)

Zahra: (Female student, Section One)

The following is another diary that expressed personal dissatisfaction with my behaviour in the classroom. In it, Zahra uses the phrase 'We are up here. Is this class a males' nest?' which interpellated me. The use of 'we' represents a collective identity that all other 20 females welcomed. The diary is an attempt by Zahra to claim a place for herself and the other female learners and a site of belonging. The phrase 'males' nest' highlights Zahra's feeling that females are rejected by the classroom environment. Her diary is a silent scream for regaining their lost place.

I reflected on my own reasons for behaving in this way in this episode; it could be a cultural issue. The dominant culture is that men are not supposed to look and stare at strange women. I might be worried of being accused by my students of staring at the females and focusing on them more than I did on the males. Zahra wrote in her diary: 'We are up here.' I read the diary, but I did not understand what Zahra meant. So I asked her about what she meant. Then Zahra clarified more:

You always look at the males, and when you look at us, you quickly shift your gaze and look at the males again. For you we are invisible! I feel I need to tell you that 'We are up here!' We realised this right from the beginning, but we were silent. But now there are marks, and we put up our hands to answer but sometimes you do not see us, males get more chances because

you look at them and give them a chance to answer and to get marks! I don't know but I am saying this because I know that you like to listen to students and ...

(Zahra – Diary, We are up here)

This thought, expressed in a diary, would have been impossible in face-to-face interaction. Zahra would not feel free to say all that goes on in her mind directly to me.

When I understood what Zahra meant, I gained new awareness from this phrase. It was eye opening. This female was claiming a place not only for herself, but by using the pronoun 'We' she was also speaking on behalf of the other 20 females in the class. Her phrase meant 'we exist but you [the teacher, I] are ignoring us.' This diary shows that I was unintentionally contributing to silencing the female students in the classroom. I reflected on this incident, in spite of the fact that I did not mean to silence or inhibit female students in the class. To Zahra, the whole incident represented a reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and worked to maintain and reify female silence. The incident also shows the complexity of gender issues, and that teachers should not simplify things, rather, they need to pay more attention to what they do and say in the classroom.

Diary writing provided Zahra with a tool to resist my behaviour in a way that did not undermine her relationship with me. Foucault (1988) uses the phrase 'technologies of the self' to theorise how the subject is constituted through the daily give and take processes of different technologies. He formulates four main types of technologies of the self: 1. Technologies of production, 2. Technologies of sign system, 3.

Technologies of power, 4. Technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988, p.17). Foucault points out that technologies of the self enable individuals to use their own means to transform themselves by using a number of operations on their souls and bodies, conduct, ideas and the way of being. He also defines technologies of power as technologies that 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, and objectivising the subject' (Foucault, 1988, p.18).

Two types of these technologies are active in this incident: Zahra's technologies of the self, interplayed with my unintentional technologies of power. Zahra was encouraged because I showed a mode of flexible identity in the classroom and can 'listen to students.' For me as a teacher, listening to students is not a favour that I confer upon them, I think that if students' voices are encouraged, their identities will grow and develop; at the same time, if students are silenced, their identities will be inhibited, oppressed and may even wither.

According to Butler (2004) reiteration comes in a new form every time it takes place. This time the reiteration came from me. I was the one who designed an intervention plan to encourage female students to speak their minds and to have their voices heard; was now unintentionally muting them. When I reflected on the incident, I found that Zahra's diary informed me and opened my eyes to my behaviour. My behaviour, from Zahra's point of view, was a reiteration that contributed to silencing the female students and reproduced a form of hegemonic masculinity that maintains and reifies female silence and muteness.

Zahra's diary provided me with a clue to reflect on her behaviour. As a result, new means for understanding the self and others became possible. I reflected on this

and tried to find an explanation for it. It is a cultural and religious issue. According to Islamic culture, a decent man is not supposed to gaze or stare at 'strange' females (strange here means that the female is not his daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, niece or aunt). I was concerned about what my students (both males and females) would think of me if I looked at the females and paid more attention to them. For me, it was the beginning of the semester, and I did not know my students well yet. That was why I felt it was more comfortable to exchange eye contact with male students. Later on, when the rapport was established, and I and my students would come to know each other well, then it would be natural to exchange eye contact with both males and females without feeling uncomfortable. The students would come to know what type of a person their teacher was, and they would not misinterpret my behaviour. In spite of the fact that Zahra wrote in her diary 'we were silent for some time' she did not wait for the rapport to be established. This may be because the factor of marks came into play. When I said that I would give marks to active students who participated more, this made the issue intolerable for Zahra. Consequently, she wrote her performative diary. I started to be aware of my behaviour in the classroom, and therefore started exchanging eye-contact with both females and males.

As a result of this episode, both myself and Zahra transformed. I told the episode to the students, and Zahra felt proud of her diary, and her new discursive agency emerged among her classroom peers as a brave student who speaks her mind and expresses her thoughts. The next classroom episode took place between me and Sameera, another female student.

6.4. My transformation: a dialogue with Sameera

I was teaching research methods as part of the syllabus. The students in the foundation class are required to submit a research assignment of about 700 words, which followed the standard of research, including in text citations and page references. The lesson was about page references. The college adopts the APA Referencing Style. I was explaining on the board how to list the reference on the reference page. I started:

M: (Teacher, male)

Sameera: (Female student, Section One)

M: First in case of one author, you need to use family name for example 'Richards', then you put a comma after the family name, then the first letter of the first name, then you open a bracket and write the date, then close the bracket, and then the title of a book italicised ...

Sameera: (*Seemed annoyed by the meticulous details.*) Mr, I have a book about referencing at home. It shows a different way.

M: Yes, maybe you are right, but it must be a different style. Like Chicago or Harvard System.

Sameera: No, it is APA Styles.

M: OK, how does the book explain the list of references?

Sameera: We write the first name in full.

M: Then that is not APA ...

Sameera: I am sure it is APA.

M: OK, bring the book tomorrow, and let me see it.

Sameera: OK, will do.

That afternoon, I received an SMS message from Sameera, apologising and admitting that she was wrong:

SMS: Hi teacher, I am sorry, I checked the book and discovered that you are right.

I replied:

Hello Sameera, lots of thanks for your message, I like the way you were assertive in the class. I always ask you to speak your minds.

The next morning, I told the story to the whole class. Sameera, was happy and smiling, but to some extent she was shy. When I shared my stories with my students, I meant to send them a message that, if speak your mind in the class, even if you argue with me, you will learn something new, and you become yourself. By sharing the story with the students, I declared that I was open and ready to listen to students' opinions, and that I value these opinions, even if they were wrong. I was open-minded and welcomed any dialogue with students. Having said that, I always emphasised that the all parties must respect and value other parties.

6.5. My transformation: a dialogue with male students

The following incident demonstrates how the tailored interventions helped in shifting the classroom relationships between me and the participants from power relations and lack of trust to mutual recognition (see Section 2.3. and 2.5). Moreover, the analysis of the incident that I encountered demonstrated how I moved between the insider and the outsider perspectives. The incident took place

three weeks after the study commenced. I was teaching the class some present simple grammar exercises and students were supposed to put the verb in brackets in the correct form. The sentence read as:

The committee..... to postpone the meeting. (agree)

The students worked in groups and helped each other. The four male students were forming one group and there were six more groups of female students. I timed the task for them and when time was over I started eliciting information. A female student completed the above sentence; she said the answer was 'agrees', and read the sentence, 'The committee agrees to postpone the meeting'. I thanked her and approved her answer. Then suddenly before moving to the next question, Salim interrupted me and said:

Salim: Mr. how about 'agree?' I think 'agree' is correct.

M: Yes, Salim, you are right, thanks.

(The four boys burst into a loud sarcastic laugh. The whole class looked at me and waited to see how I would react to their laugh.)

For a moment, I felt that I did not understand their behaviour, and that I was an outsider. I was astonished by their behaviour, their behaviour meant: you are the English teacher, and you are not sure of the answer, that is why you agreed that both answers are correct, and because I thanked both of the students who answered the question correctly, they seemed to interpret this as a sign of weakness and vulnerability from my side. (The dominant sociocultural context does not deal with phrases like 'thank you', 'please' and 'excuse me' in the same way as in UK and the West, and people do not usually say 'thank you' for minor

favours. Sometimes, in Oman, when the phrase 'thank you' is said many times, it is considered to be a sign of putting barriers between the one who thanks others a lot and those who receive the thanks.) When I knew what they meant, I was furious, but calm and even, I said to them:

M: Why are you laughing?

The whole class was silent. All of them were looking at me, and the gazes of the male students were cynical. I asked them a question:

M: Can anybody explain the two answers to this question?

Students: Silent. (No answer.)

M: Does anybody know the meaning of the phrase collective noun?

Students: Silent. (No answer.)

M: Who can give the class an example of a collective noun?

Students: Silent. (No answer.)

M: OK, that's all right. Let me tell you then. (I explain the concept of collective noun).

I started explaining the concept of collective noun, and that it can be considered as singular or plural according to the context. I gave examples and used the board to explain the point and spent considerable time to make sure that they understood why the above sentence accepts two answers.

As a teacher, I was undone by their behaviour. Instead of dealing with the issue as a confrontational and disruption moment, I thought about cultivating the discursive behaviour behind the encounter and gain more understanding of its

reasons. At the beginning, when I felt undone by their behaviour, my encounter with the male students seemed to be a process of reciprocal undoing; this opened up a space for a narrative-based practice, as I was about to fix them when I asked them the questions about the collective nouns. Then quickly and silently as a form of self-speech, I reflected on the encounter, and changed my mode and discourse and took the position of the teacher who was supposed to be tolerant, wiser, and sager. I explained the point and gave examples.

The incident involved the risk of ravelling the male participants, and by doing that I might replicate the position that I was trying to critique. At the same time the episode was threatening because it undid me. In this regard, however, (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) stress that people cannot exist without the Other, they emphasise that everyone of us is responsible for the Other. This otherness signifies an ethics of mutual vulnerability. Our need for the Other renders us all vulnerable (Butler and Athanasiou 2013).

I wrote this in my diary, and reflected on it.

Today, in the present simple lesson, the male students challenged me and tested my knowledge and patience, but I was calm. For a moment, I thought about using my teacher authority and reproach them, but quickly I regulated myself and thought that by reproaching them, I would undo them. I did not want to replicate their behaviour. By the end of the incident, I felt (by reading their facial expressions and body language) that they came to know that

they misbehaved. They did not apologise, and I was not waiting for them to do so.

(Researcher's reflexive diary (1) – from power relations to collaboration)

I reflected on the incident, trying to derive some meaning from it. I wrote the following questions in my reflexive diary:

1. Why did they do that?
2. What did their behaviour mean?
3. Was my response appropriate?
4. How can I prevent such behaviour in the future? May be because we do not know each other well yet! Maybe! But, no clear-cut answers!

(Researcher's reflexive diary (2) – from power relations to collaboration)

After some time, I returned back to my reflexive diary and wrote one phrase.

Lack of trustworthiness!

(Researcher's reflexive diary (3) – from power relations to collaboration)

The next day I added the phrase:

Researcher trustworthiness! Lack of recognition!

(Researcher's reflexive diary (4) – from power relations to collaboration)

Then I reflected on the incident and tried to acknowledge and interrogate participants' behaviour as well as my actions and decisions in the classroom, taking account of the way they might impact the study and the data that they were supposed to generate in collaboration with me as a researcher. At that time, I had

no idea about how the study would unfold. I thought about my need to produce intelligible research and decided that I did not need to go into power relations with the male students, as this might activate their resistant agency, while I needed to activate their active and collaborative agency, as this was the agency that could help me in generating genuine data for my research.

I thought in-depth about the incident and came to recognise that there was no problem for Salim to suggest a second answer to complete the sentence, the problem was with the cynical laughter. I became aware of the discrepancy and the dissonance between my pre-existing expectations and the actual encounter that happened in the classroom. According to Ben-Ari and Enosh (2010, p.158) pre-existing expectations are the preconceptions that researchers hold as they start their research; it may refer to programme evaluation, or a number of new interviewees, or a new research context. Patton (2002, p. 262) echoes this when he writes: 'We would never have understood the program without personally experiencing it. It bore little resemblance to our expectations, what people had told us, or the official program description.' Experiencing such dissonance between our pre-existing expectations and the real incident drives researchers to interrogate the discrepancy between the two and the result may be new construction of knowledge that can take research to a higher level of sophistication.

My pre-existing expectations as a teacher in such situations were that when a student answers correctly and I give feedback that the answer is correct, then other students would normally accept what I said, and check their answers against it, and correcting their answers if they are wrong. What happened was that the four

male participants did not meet my pre-existing expectations and loudly challenged me when they burst into that cynical laughter. For me, there were two issues in this classroom incident: first, as a teacher I encountered a contrast between what I was expecting from my students and the actual encounter; and second, as a reflexive researcher, I started questioning the meaning of this dissonance, and its impact on researcher/participants' existing and future interpersonal relationships. In spite of the fact that I was not comfortable with the incident, I was aware that I might be able to generate new meaning from it, which might result in higher level of conceptual understanding (Ben-Ari and Enosh, 2010, p.158). As a researcher, I reflected on the source of the encounter, why it occurred, and the conveyed message behind it. By reflecting on these dilemmas, I was trying to make sense of the incident and gain new insight about its source.

When analysing the classroom encounter, there seemed to be two issues: lack of trust and lack of recognition. The lack of trust was represented by the cynical loud laugh by the four of male participants. They did not trust my knowledge, and hence, they did not recognise me as an intelligible teacher. Their laugh 'undid' me in Butler's (2004) words (see sections 2.5). There were also two poles in the encounter, me and the male participants, the female students were not part of the encounter as they kept silent and watched. This polarisation might lead to a shift in power relations between me and the male students. My experience of this encounter was a turning point that created a space for me to reflect and to think about how I was perceived by my students and how I perceived myself. It was not a comfortable moment, in spite of the fact that I was undone, but I did not feel

offended, because I was sure of my own knowledge. I was able to remain calm and even because of this self-perception. I subsequently considered how I could retain the lost recognition. I was able to regain recognition, and this was demonstrated in the final presentations that participants gave as part of the course assessment. In their final presentations many students, both males and females, referred to me. Both the other examiner and I heard phrases like:

As Mr. X [my name] said, metacognition is learning how to learn.

We heard Mr. X [my name] explain that scanning is reading the line in three eye shifts.

According to Mr X [my name], we do not need to read every word in the reading text.

These phrases demonstrated their acceptance of me, and they represented the mutual recognition, the established trustworthiness and the rapport between me and the male participants.

In conclusion, this section demonstrates how I was able to transform the class from power relations to trustworthiness and mutual recognition.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter explores my development and transformation, personally and professionally. I am able to advance in the domains of qualitative research, particularly in being reflexive while dealing with others, including my family, friends,

students, and colleagues. I developed as a researcher, who is able to understand and conduct research methodology, analysis and theorisation.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

When I outlined the aims of this thesis, I mentioned that my concern was to understand classroom inequalities and to design tailored methodologies that enabled the participants to reflect, evaluate and transform on two levels: their social identities and their learning processes. In Chapter Two, I presented data analysis that exposed the dilemmas that these participants faced when they moved from general education to higher education. These dilemmas can be summarised in two themes: their struggles with their gender issues and their struggles with their learning issues. The tailored interventions were designed to address these two dilemmas, and how to go beyond them. In this concluding chapter I will pull the threads together, to show the way in which gender and learning were performed in the particular context studied within Omani higher education. First, I will discuss the contributions of the study, then I will review adopted analytical approaches, then the three overarching themes of the thesis will be discussed: the transformation of students' identities, the transformation of students' metacognitive abilities and the transformation of me as a teacher and a researcher. Then I will explain the implications of these conclusions and propose further research in the field of female students' positive transformation in gender and learning issues.

7.2. Contributions

This thesis has explored issues of gender and learning in Omani tertiary education. My argument was that, in spite of governmental support that is granted to female

education in Oman, the Omani teaching and learning context is affected by the wider patriarchal and social power, and it therefore marginalises and dominates Omani female learners. This marginalisation has its effects on their social identity and their learning processes. In my analysis, I explain the current situation, in which female learners' participation is sometimes devalued. I discuss how change and transformation may occur, by giving examples of classroom atmosphere that enables the emergence of these female learners' discursive agency, and their ability to develop and transform to ensure a liveable life and better learning outcomes. In doing so, I draw together Butler's (1997a) performativity theory and the notions of interpellation, performative or discursive agency, together with Foucault's (1988) theorisation of discourse, power relations and technologies of the self. I have used these theorisations to offer an interpretation of the collected data and showed their usefulness in understanding the ways in which participants' identities were constituted.

7.2.1. Classroom gendered practices

The data generated in this study provides evidence that the female (and some male) students who were able to challenge the classroom and social norms were those ones who were able to reflect, and think outside the box. At the same time, the data shows some other female and male students who were constrained and imprisoned themselves and were unable to step outside that illusionary prison.

Chapter Four is mainly about classroom gendered practices. My analysis of the collected data in this regard has shown that the performative practices of the participants inscribed and grounded gendered discourses that are constructed by

binary oppositions. These grounded discursive practices do not work in a vacuum and they are not isolated, rather, they demonstrate the entrenched patriarchal norms and the complexities of gender issues in the Omani society. The male students in Section One, Level B, based on these patriarchal values, use technologies such as gendered discourses, heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity to subordinate their female peers.

My analysis has shown the way in which patriarchal authorised practices constituted the female students and devalued and limited their participation in the class, however, my analysis has also showed that, these patriarchal practices are not impenetrable, sealed or fixed. On the contrary, the analysis showed how these constitutions are vulnerable, feeble and can be challenged, resisted and altered.

My analysis has offered a number of classroom episodes that represent key terms of the performativity theory (Butler, 1997b, 1999, 2004). I have suggested that the concept of 'intelligible and unintelligible' participants was significant for understanding the patriarchal and hegemonic practices in the class; it showed the participants constituted themselves and others. The concept of intelligibility was used by some male students to marginalise and intimidate their female peers. Interestingly, the same concept of intelligibility was used by these marginalised females to resist and to reinscribe these patriarchal practices, and materialise the possibility of challenging and altering these patriarchal values through discursive practice.

My analysis has shown that participants' masculinities and femininities can be constituted by binary oppositions and heteronormativity, which are governed by

patriarchal society. The analysis process not only explained some examples of constrained femininity by the male/female dichotomy, but also pinpointed some examples of how these patriarchal values can be constrained and how practices of hyper masculinity can be entrapped and discursively risk the male participants. My analysis has shown how heteronormativity constrains and inhibits female identities. Heteronormativity in this study is a means to impose and enforce gender norms and to police and notice if people comply with the dominant norms or not. Examples of heteronormativity in this study include when Khalid tried to impose gender heteronormativity on Bushra twice, the first time, when he said 'kitchen' three times, and the second time, when he produced his interrupting laugh. Bushra suffered from exclusion practised by some males and females in the class. In the face of these challenges, she was able to empower herself and other students, and to promote diversity, tolerance and inclusivity in the classroom. The next section sheds light on me as I become a reflexive researcher.

7.2.2. Becoming a reflexive researcher

As a feminist reflexive researcher, I have conducted this reflexive research to interrogate and question power relations between me and the participants, and among the participants in the classroom. I learned how to reflect on my role and to actively question my position and the power asymmetry. I reflected on power and voice and I encouraged other voices and supported interaction and diversity. Reflexivity enabled me to understand the social constraints that face the participants in general and the female ones in particular. For example, I was able to value Zahra's diary when she criticised me and my behaviour in the classroom

and consider it as a space for me to develop and to actualise my identity as a teacher and researcher. My dialogue with the male students and their loud laughter left me in dilemma (see section 6.5.), and I was taught not to rush; and to think well before I take a decision, but it created a transformative space for me through which my identity as a teacher emerged. Reflexivity allowed me to see, and interrogate misuse of power, and to support the oppressed ones (see Bushra section 4.2.1 and Hiba section 4.3.4) I was able to understand Bushra's shock when she heard Khalid's laugh; and then later when the male students saw and heard Bushra's response. I also understood the presenters' reiterated step forward, and their agentic actions that can change social norms. Reflexivity allows me to think of reflexivity as a *reflexive methodology* and implement it to empower my participants. I empowered both Bushra and Khalid, and Hiba and to some extent Salim. The identities of three of them positively emerged and constructed, whereas Salim's identity needed more time and training to learn how to reflect properly and to think about others' emotions. The next section sheds light on students' reflexive practices.

7.2.3. Students' reflexive practices

In order to investigate and understand the male/female dichotomy and the ways in which gendered identities are constituted, and are able to resist patriarchy and heteronormativity, I designed the tailored classroom interventions that encourage students to be themselves, speak their mind and to use metacognitive awareness of reflecting, monitoring, evaluating and then transforming. Reflexive practices in particular were useful because they lead to processes of transformation. (Mezirow,

2000, p.16) points out that challenges cause individuals to critically reflect and transform themselves before they challenge hegemonic practices. The analysis process showed how students use reflection to think critically and hence to develop.

The analysis process has shown that some female learners were able to self-reflect and self-interpellate as a result of reflexive thoughts (see Suad section 4.2.8). They blamed and interpellated themselves, because they think like males. And quickly, they got rid of these thoughts, and were able to communicate and explain such reflexivity in their diaries. For a learner to self-interpellate demonstrates their ability to think deeply and monitor and evaluate their thought, and shows that they control their cognitive ideas, embracing the good ones and getting rid of the bad ones.

This research has materialised some female and male students who were able to think outside the box, and initiate social change (see section 5.4). For example, male students stood in front of the mixed-gender class and spoke about how they enjoy cooking, and how they helped their mothers in washing the dishes. It also showed some females telling the class about playing football and fixing incense burners. Presentations given by two females and two male students were significant, when they stepped out of their traditional views about jobs and declared that they enjoy doing other gender activities. At the same time, the analysis process showed that some of the females were self-incarcerating. These females were constituted by patriarchal discursive practices and became self-surveillant. Jokha, Sameera and Shoruq limited themselves and unintentionally lived inside

the box. Not only that, they were ready to put pressure on those who think and behave outside the box.

7.3. Limitations of the study

This study gains significance because it addresses gender issues in the field of education. It describes how Omani Foundation learners struggle to participate and to acquire knowledge while moving to higher education. I am aware that as research is usually carried out, it is subject to limitations of procedures, design or context. More specifically, I am aware of a number of limitations that can occur in other research that is conducted using a similar method, framework or design. Some of the major limitations are highlighted below.

1. In this study, the data is assembled from one class in an Omani tertiary education college. As a result, the findings cannot be considered as necessarily representative of other Omani tertiary students' experiences. Nevertheless, the study provides a general account of Omani tertiary students and their subjective experiences with regard to gender issues and how they lived it while participating and learning in the classroom. Moreover, the collected data represented the experiences of the subjects and their personal perceptions while their individual identities were constructed, and their agencies were activated and reproduced. As such, it is not representative. The study put emphasis on female gender experiences because they emerged in the early stages of the data collection process (classroom observations and students' interviews). It also engaged male students who shared the same classroom with their female counterparts.

2. Although the study incorporated the use of different tools, techniques and strategies to reduce any negative effects on data generation (see 3.8.1) the conducted interviews were not free from limitations. In addition to this, the study used students' reflective diaries as a data collection tool. Diary writing was a new skill to the students, and although they were given models and instructed on how to write diaries, some of them did not master the diary writing process. Having said this, some other students were able to produce some significant thoughts and ideas through their diary writing (see Zahra, section 6.3). Furthermore, as the study falls within the poststructuralist interpretive approach, it presents reality from a subjective perspective which suggests that reality has many faces, and as such it cannot be judged as true or false.

3. The study required students to use metacognitive strategies and to reflect on how metacognition helped them to improve their learning. Some subjects found difficulty in doing this, as metacognition is a kind of unseen and implicit learning tool. On the other hand, some students were able to grasp the concept of metacognitive strategies, and they provide a description of how were able to reflect on their learning problems and think about new strategies to help them overcome these problems (see Bakheet (section 4.5.1) and Awadh (4.3.6)).

7.4. Further research

Although many research studies have been conducted using gender theories in different societies, there is still a dearth of this research in honour-based societies, including the study context. More research studies are needed to interact collaboratively, in order to examine the wider effect of gender in such contexts and

cultures. Therefore, if this study is replicated elsewhere in The Middle East, that would be of great value to generate more understanding and insight into the research phenomenon. Although this study was among the first to present empirical data regarding gender representation in higher education in this particular context, collecting more data regarding the representation of gender in wider cultural aspects and education policy would be of great benefit.

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Appendices

Appendix A: First interview questions

Student Id No: Date:

General Information

- a) Number of years at current school:
- b) Age:
- c) Nationality:
- d) Grade:
- e) Gender:
- f) School:

About your family:

- 1. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- 2. What is your birth order in your family (are you the oldest one, second, youngest child, etc.)?
- 3. Does your father work?
- 4. If yes, what is his job?
- 5. Does your mother work?
- 6. If yes, what is her job?
- 7. What is the nationality of your mother?
- 8. Does your father have more than one wife?
- 9. What is your father's highest level of education?

10. What is your mother's highest level of education?
11. Do your parents expect you to do your homework every day?
12. Do your parents help you with difficult homework that you cannot do yourself?
13. Do your parents read to/with you?
14. How often do your parents come in for parent-teacher meetings?
15. Do your parents expect you to graduate from secondary school?
16. Do you have to take care of any of your siblings on a daily basis?
17. Has anyone in your family ever been in trouble with police?
18. Do your parent get upset when you fail a subject?
19. Has any of your siblings left school before finishing grade 12?
20. How many schools have you attended since grade 1?

About your school

21. Why do you go to school?
22. Do you like school?
23. Do you think you are a good student?
24. On a scale of 1 to 4, how hard do you work at school?
25. Do you generally like your teachers?
26. On a scale from 1 to 5 how would you describe the style of teaching in most of your classes?
27. Do you receive private tuition after school?
28. Is it from your school teachers?
29. How many hours a week do you have a private tuition?

30. What do you normally do when you go home from school?
31. What do you do on the weekend?
32. Has a teacher ever hit you?
33. Have you ever been asked to leave the classroom for poor behaviour?
34. Have you ever repeated a year?
35. How many times have you repeated a year?
36. Do you plan to graduate from secondary school?
37. Do you have any friends your age who don't go to school?
38. What do they do?
39. Why do think some students leave school?
40. Why do you think is more likely to drop out of school?
41. What do you think will most help you get a job?
42. What might prevent you from getting a job?
43. If you would like to be interviewed to answer some of the questions in more detail, please leave your or relative's telephone number:

Appendix B: Presentation criteria

Name: Section:

A. Criteria for presentation (Out of 15)

	Aspect	G	1	2	3
1	The presentation is organised (standard structure).	1			
2	The presentation is well-planned and timed. (10 -12 minutes)	1			
3	The colours and backgrounds match the font.	1			
4	The language is clear and understandable.	1			
5	The presentation benefits from modern technology.	1			
6	The presentation covers all the standard components.	1			
7	The presenter understands what s/he is presenting.	1			
8	The presenter produces only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors.	1			
9	The presenter shows clear evidence of independent study, able to effectively answer any question on topic.	1			
10	The presenter uses transitional words and phrases aptly.	1			
11	The presenter speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar.	1			
12	The presenter does not read his/her presentation word to word.	1			
13	The presenter uses useful examples for helping the audience to better understand the subject.	1			
14	Conclusion: The presenter reiterates key points: pulls the entire presentation together effectively.	1			
15	The presenter invites questions.	1			
	TOTAL	15			

B. Presentation summary (Out of 5)

	Aspect	G	1	2	3
1	The summary covers the key components of the presentation (introduction, main body & conclusion). (One page)	1			
2	The main body clearly highlights key features / bullet points.	1			
3	The summary is well organised and there is a logical flow of information.	1			
4	The summary reflects on points of strength and points for improvement.	1			
5	The summary uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision.	1			
	TOTAL	5			

Appendix C: Conference papers

1. Abu Oaf, M. (2017) Helping on probation students: Adopting a transformational approach, Paper presented at the Academic Advising Practice Symposium, Is it worth it? 21st -22nd of Nov 2017 Rustaq College of Education.
2. Abu Oaf, M. (2016) Self-regulated learning and identity construction: do we need another approach? Oman 16th International English Language Teaching Conference, 21st of April 2016, Sultanate of Oman.
3. Abu Oaf, M. (2014) Dictogloss tasks as a vehicle for Classroom interaction, First CAS ELT Symposium: Beyond Methods, The Department of English Language and Literature, Rustaq College of Applied Sciences, Rustaq, 20th of March 2014.

Appendix D: Vision, mission statement and values

Vision

The Colleges of Applied Sciences aspire to be among the finest institutions in Oman and the Gulf by the year 2015, focused on practical education in the core technologies and applied arts and sciences of the global era.

The Centers of Specialization in the six Colleges of Applied Sciences will be equipped with state-of-the-art resources and will be fully responsive to the changing requirements of Oman's economy and society. Centered in teaching, they will also engage in applied research at an international standard; and will have made substantial progressing toward achieving the status of Centers of Excellence.

While achieving an appropriate level of autonomy in their separate responsibilities as regional colleges, the six CAS are to function as an interdependent and integrated system, laying the foundations for possible future development as a university.

Graduates of the CAS will be well-skilled in the linguistic, technical, professional, personal and interpersonal competencies required to perform effectively in the dynamic national and international environments of the early 21st Century.

Mission Statement

The Colleges of Applied Sciences provide high quality programs grounded in problem-based learning methodologies that prepare students for employment in a global world, for graduate studies and as required for the on-going development of competent citizens who contribute to Oman's economy and society. Graduates will possess the skills necessary to integrate and apply knowledge in the workplace. Student outcomes are enhanced through active and productive partnerships in both higher education and employment.

Values

Since values underpin the assumptions, standards and ethical principles on which organisational behavior is founded, it is imperative that they are clearly articulated, recognized and acted upon.

As a central component of the developing culture of the CAS, values signal what is considered important, worthwhile and desirable. Strong and worthy values in harmony with the Vision and Mission are the foundation of quality in higher education institutions. Hence the CAS values should guide all activities, whether formal or informal, and whether those activities are internal or external to the colleges.

The central value of the CAS is a strong commitment to respect and enhancing Omani culture and identity. This value, a component of the main strategic goals, is a theme running through the CAS Strategic Plan.

The Colleges of Applied Sciences will be guided by the following core values:

Loyalty

Service

The Advancement of Knowledge

Creativity

Professionalism

Partnership

N.B. To know the College Executive bylaw of the Royal decree 62/2007 regulating the Colleges of Applied Sciences, staff can find the full official text, both in English and Arabic, at the following link.

**[https://drive.google.com/a/cas.edu.om/?usp=chrome_app#folders/0B1fNrs
m1iXAUSzhCM25KN19Rckk](https://drive.google.com/a/cas.edu.om/?usp=chrome_app#folders/0B1fNrs
m1iXAUSzhCM25KN19Rckk)**

Appendix E: Language of negotiations

I. Negotiation of hearing and mishearing

1. I hear you
2. I'm listening
3. Say again
4. I'm sorry, I didn't catch that!
5. Sorry! Pardon! What's that word?
6. Speak up
7. Oh sorry! Say it again!
8. Could you repeat that please?

II. Asking for clarification

1. I don't get it
2. Please explain more
3. I don't understand
4. What do you mean?
5. What's the meaning of.....

.6. How do you spell that?

7. In other words...

8. I am not sure about.....

9. Let me clarify it.....

III. Comprehension check

1. Are you with me?

2. Do you think so?

3. Can you remember....?

4. Is that so?

5. Is that OK?

6. ...Right?

7. Got me?

8. Is it clear?

9. You following?

10. Are you following here?

11. Is that clear? No? Yes?

IV. Agreeing and disagreeing

1. OK
2. Yeah, you're right, but...
3. I don't agree with you
4. No, no, no, no that's wrong
5. I'm not sure.
6. I do agree with.....
7. I agree with you.
- 8 It's not a matter of.....
- 9 Am I right?
10. OK. Done. It was a useful discussion.

V. Negotiation of procedure

1. How to begin?
2. Let's start....
3. Let's begin
4. We're running out of time.
5. Wait a minute!
6. The second sentence is.....

7. Let's look at it...

8. I'd like to begin....

9. So, the next step is....

10. We are done 11. All right, that's all 12. Good, we've finished.

Appendix F: Participant consent form

Title of research study: *Learner-centredness, gender and English language teaching in an Omani tertiary education*

This research is part of a doctoral study that is currently being undertaken at the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield, UK. The study seeks to elicit information from foundation students and their discursive practices. This study intends to investigate Learner-centredness, gender and English language teaching in an Omani tertiary education. You may be assured that your responses will be regarded as confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

You are kindly requested to take part because of your role in English language teaching in Oman will provide valuable insights for the research phenomenon in Oman. Your participation in this research is entirely your decision and voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason. In line with the Data Protection Act, UK, the consent form, any information about participants such as recordings and taped interviews will be securely stored and archived by me during the research. You may access the materials I collect from you at any time during the research. I will dispose of the recordings, taped interviews, learners' dairy, and my research notes after the conclusion of this research. To ensure your anonymity, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym during

interviews so that if I make any reference to you in the research your identity will be protected. All identifying details will be changed in any publication resulting from this research.

Please sign this consent form as evidence for your participants in this research project.

Participant name (optional):

Signature:

You are welcome to contact me at any time for any further clarification

Researcher name: Mahmoud Abu Oaf

Email address: u0976123@hud.ac.uk.

Contact Address:

University of Huddersfield,

School of Education and Professional Development

Appendix G: Request to access the site of the study



1st May 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

THE RESEARCH OFFICE
THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD
QUEENSGATE
HUDDERSFIELD
HD1 3DH

MAHMOUD SID AHMED ABDULLA ABU OAF
STUDENT NO: 0976123

Dear Sir/Madam

This is to confirm that Mr Abu Oaf is registered as a part-time research student in the School of Education and Professional Development, undertaking a programme of work leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

The programme of research is entitled:

Investigating classroom learner-centredness in an Omani context: how does it address foreign language acquisition?

Mr Abu Oaf first registered on this programme on 01/Oct/2010 and has an expected end date of 30/Sep/2016

Part-time students are required to spend on average a minimum of at least two weeks per year at the University of Huddersfield. Mr Abu Oaf is preparing to make a visit to the UK to meet with his supervisors and develop his research programme further. I would be grateful if you would issue Mr Abu Oaf with the appropriate visa for his visit to the UK.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Carol Doyle
PGR Administrative Officer
Research Office

Tel: 01484 472516
Email: c.m.doyle@hud.ac.uk



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