



Investigating Teacher Professional Learning: A Case Study of the Abu Dhabi
New School Model

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Abstract

The broad objective of the current study is to contribute to the understanding of teacher professional learning by focusing attention on practices and policies in the local context of Abu Dhabi New School Model. The study adopted a situated and social-cultural theoretical approach to teacher professional learning which maintains that teachers learn in their social context as they interact with other teachers, school leaders and students. The three learning theories, which build the conceptual framework of the present study, are (a) socio-cultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990).

For the purposes of the study, a mixed-method design was used for collecting and analyzing the study data. The major aim of using both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools is to illuminate the way teachers construct both their individual and collaborative learning realities in their context, and how they use and understand these learning opportunities in relation to student learning and school improvement. Data were collected sequentially according to the explanatory sequential design. In the first phase of the study, a questionnaire was used to survey the whole teacher population. This was followed by a focus group interview to feedback the questionnaire results to the teachers and school leaders. In the second phase, two semi-structured interviews were conducted (i.e., teachers' interview and school leaders' interview).

Findings of this study revealed that teacher professional learning inside the school lacked coherence, focus and strategy. The qualitative data also suggested that teachers lack agency regarding their professional learning, as many constraints seemed to hold them back from engaging in further

professional learning opportunities. These constraints included lack of administrative support, lack of time as well as lack of choice in the school's professional development programmes. Finally, recommendations and implications for policy and practice were drawn based on the findings of the study.

Dedication

To the soul of my father

To my beloved mother

for their commitment towards my education

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADEC	Abu Dhabi Educational Council
AMT	Arabic Medium Teachers
BERA	British Education Research Association
CBT	Centre for British Teachers for Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPL	Continuing Professional Learning
EMT	English Medium Teachers
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDEAS	Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievement in Schools
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NSM	New School Model
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
PL	Professional Learning
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PPP schools	Public Private Partnership schools
SIP	School Improvement Plan

TDA	Training and Development Agency
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Much of the importance given to teacher professional learning (TPL) is attributed to its impact on student learning, teacher practice and school improvement. In the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), TPL is gaining more recognition owing to the fact that it is perceived as a potential lever to support recent education reforms, the most significant of which was Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) New School Model (NSM). Set in this educational reform context, the current study intends to investigate the practices and policies of TPL in the local context of ADEC New School Model. The introduction chapter is comprised of three main sections. The first section starts by explicating the rationale of the study. The second section explores the context of the study. This includes an overview of the UAE and its educational system. Narrowing the focus, the subsequent part presents a description of the NSM and ADEC professional development policies. The chapter proceeds with explaining the significance of this research and presenting the research questions underpinning this study. Finally, I conclude with outlining the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Situating the study in an international context, there is a global interest in teacher learning, which was reflected in the second international teacher report

(2012) published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The report put demands on teachers to constantly update their knowledge, to lead innovation and to be change agents inside their schools (McLaughlin, 2013). In the same context, Day and Sachs (2004) contended that continuing professional development is not optional for teachers. Wong (2012) explained that teacher learning activities carried out inside the school are important in three ways. First, they enable teachers to be potential change agents inside their schools. Second, they lead to the creation of shared knowledge. Third, they enable teachers to cooperate in order to meet emerging practice-related challenges. The focus on teacher learning in current educational systems was underpinned by views considering learning at the heart of teacher's job. Fullan (2007), for example, pointed out the need for considering the teaching profession a learning profession.

Teachers of today and tomorrow need to do much more learning on their job, or in parallel with it –where they constantly can test out, refine, and get feedback on the improvement they make. They need access to other colleagues in order to learn from them. Schools are poorly designed for integrating learning and teaching on the job. The teaching profession must become a better learning profession. (p. 297)

The need to investigate teacher learning has also been motivated by current insights from international professional development research, which show that TPL could improve student learning, develop teachers' classroom practices and contribute to school improvement. The results of these research studies have indicated that improving classroom learning for students hinges on the quality of teacher professional learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Hargreaves, 2000; Pedder & Opfer 2013). Pedder, James and MacBeath (2005) argued that classrooms “need to become crucibles of learning for teachers as much as for their students” (p.237). In the

same vein, making an analogy between student learning and teacher learning, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) asserted that teacher learning is similar to student learning. Like students, teachers learn by collaborating with each other, by examining student work, and by sharing what they notice and see. It is also argued that teacher learning makes teachers aware of the learning challenges and problems that students might encounter. By serving as learning models, Barth (2001) explained, teachers have the opportunities to experience “the joys and the frustrations of learning,” which are a useful reminder for teachers of the complexities of the process they are constantly encouraging pupils to undertake” (p.93). Lieberman and Miller (1990) went even further to consider learning and teaching as inseparable tasks for teachers:

Teaching and learning are interdependent, not separate functions. In this view, teachers are primarily learners. They are problem posers and problem solvers; they are researchers; and they are intellectuals engaged in unraveling the learning process both for themselves and for the young people in their charge. (p. 112)

According to Beijaard, Korthagen and Verloop (2007), there are two reasons why we should investigate teacher learning. First, it yields suggestions and recommendations to improve current teacher education programmes. Second, it provides insights informing workplace professional development and learning plans. According to them, this requires raising teachers’ awareness of assuming new “dual roles” (p.2) of teachers and learners.

One final argument for the urgency of investigating TPL is the view that teaching is considered a complex process, and that there is an “untapped knowledge already existing in schools,” which needs to be explored (Toole & Louis, 2002). A better understanding of the knowledge and the learning activities teachers are engaged in and their consequences in terms of cognitive

and behavioural outcomes is crucial to providing relevant opportunities for professional development to teachers (Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009). It was also argued that teaching has become “increasingly complex and demanding” (Donaldson, 2011, p. 12), and that "initial preparation programmes" (Hulme, 2013, cited in McLaughlin, 2013, p. 59) could not by themselves attend to teachers' needs and demands.

At the organizational level, in view of the fact that TPL is at the very heart of any educational reform and change, schools are now more aware of the importance of making real changes in their professional development programmes to meet their teachers and students' needs as well as the school improvement priorities. Writing about school reform in an American context, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggested that teachers are required more than at any other time to reconsider their roles by unlearning old practices and acquiring new ones, in order to contribute to the success of the American reform agendas. McLaughlin (2013) explained that great overhauls have recently taken place in the field of education. These have led to remarkable changes in many education systems around the world. One aspect of these changes is the “demise of local authorities” (p.xv), and the emergence of schools as self-managed organizations. With respect to teacher professional learning, these have led to the creation of "the school-based teacher education" (ten Dam & Blom, 2006, p.647) which became common in most countries in the world. For example, Netherlands Education Council recommended that all schools in the country take over their continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes. This measure was consistent with the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science vision of school, which "emphasized the importance of the school as the starting point for teacher education, in-service training and research" (ten Dam & Blom, 2006. p, 647). In line with this global trend of educational decentralization, some Gulf countries, such as the UAE,

also relaxed the local districts' grip on schools by encouraging school autonomy and decision-making (Al-Taneiji & McLeod, 2008). The following section explores in detail this local context where the study is situated.

1.3 The Context of the Study

1.3.1 The Context of the United Arab Emirates

Before presenting an overview of the educational context, it is worthwhile to present some information about the UAE, where the current study was conducted. The UAE is a federation of seven Emirates –Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah and Um Al Quwain. Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, is the largest Emirate, comprising 87% of the total land area of the country (“Abu Dhabi Emirate: Facts and Figures” n.d.). The official figures reported recently state that the country’s population reached 9,121,167 in 2016 (“UAE Fact Sheet” n.d.), 80% of which are expatriates (UAE population and statistical trends, 2016). With respect to TPL, the UAE is considered one of the largest economies in the Middle East and Central Asia (Macpherson, Kachelhoffer & El Nem, 2007). Thanks to its massive oil resources, the UAE has grown into one of the most developed countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report, released in 2016-2017 (Augustine, 2016) placed the UAE in the first position in the region, outperforming the other five Gulf countries (i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.)

Framed in this local context, the current study was conducted in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, which is the wealthiest and fastest growing Emirate in the UAE. Since 2005, the government of Abu Dhabi has embarked on economic reforms with the purpose of reducing their dependency on oil as the major revenue resource. Concomitant to these economic reforms was

educational reform, which essentially aimed to support the government of Abu Dhabi in achieving a knowledge-based economy (ADEC, 2015). As part of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, education is perceived as the key driver for economic growth and development of the Emirate. To this end, policy makers declared educational reform a priority and created ADEC in 2005 to oversee education in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015). At a broader level, the council aimed to reconstruct the education system in the Emirate (Kadbey, Dickson, & McMinn, 2015) by implementing innovative educational policies and programmes in line with the objectives of Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030.

1.3.2 The Educational System in the United Arab Emirates

The UAE educational system comprises three major phases with a total of twelve years of compulsory education. (a) Cycle one covers the first five years of primary education, (b) Cycle two runs over grade six to grade nine, and (c) cycle three, also called high school, covers grades 10, 11 and 12. Education for local students is considered a public service as free education is provided to all Emirati students from primary, secondary to higher education. There are different bodies overseeing education in the UAE; they are the Ministry of Education, ADEC and the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in the Emirate of Dubai. Underneath these bodies, each emirate has an education zone helping with the implementation of the ministry and education council regulations and standards. Abu Dhabi has a centralized education system comprised of about 113 public schools and 117 private schools, employing around 11,399 teachers, 60% of whom are females and 40% are male (Ridge, Kippels & ElAsad, 2015). The teacher population in Abu Dhabi is considered one of the most diverse teacher populations in the world as teachers come from over 118 nationalities. With respect to gender, Badri, Alnuaimi,

Mohaidat, Yang & Al Rashedi (2016) mentioned that the education system in the UAE is unique in that segregation between boys and girls starts as early as grade 5.

With regard to TPL, policy-makers in the UAE acknowledge the importance of teacher professional learning in improving teaching and learning (Atwi, 2016). For this purpose, millions of dirhams were invested to develop teachers and to hire external developers and education consultants. However, despite investing heavily in education, recent reports revealed serious gaps in the UAE education system. Evaluative reports undertaken by the ministry of education and ADEC, for example, highlighted the poor performance of UAE students in international tests and exams, such as TIMSS, 2007 and PISA, 2009. Although the UAE outperformed other Gulf countries in these tests, UAE students were far behind the international OECD averages. At a broader level, quoting Al-Ittihad (2004), a local government newspaper, Macpherson, Kachelhoffer and El Nem (2007) highlighted eleven areas where the UAE education system needed reform. These areas included inappropriate curricula, ineffective teaching methods, unsuitable assessment methods, lack of use of ICT, low levels of professionalism, short school days, ineffective school system, ineffective school culture, under-resourced libraries and learning support, poor facilities, and finally inadequate budgets. In the context of Abu Dhabi, Al-Taneiji (2014) reported that according to ADEC evaluation of Abu Dhabi schools in 2009, most of the Emirate schools were underperforming and that 35% of students could not pursue graduate studies. It was also reported that more than 95% of students needed to attend “remedial preparation programmes” (p. 99). In response to this situation, ADEC launched the New School Model in 2010 aiming at a comprehensive school reform (Kadbey, 2015).

1.3.3 ADEC New School Model

The New School Model (NSM) is so far the most important and recent educational reform inside the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Being an improvement of the old model school system, the NMS is a comprehensive vision for teaching, learning, and managing schools that aim to develop and reform K-12 schools curricula as well as all aspects of school life, such as teacher professional development, the school leadership, the school environment and the school community at large. Recently the MoE and ADEC have decided to spread the NSM across the UAE in order to improve the education system in the U.A.E (MoE, 2017). The following are the main aspects of ADEC NMS reform:

1. The decentralization of the education system.
2. Empowering schools by giving them more autonomy and independence.
3. Adopting a learner-centred approach to learning and teaching.

The NSM ambitious project aims primarily to standardize resources, curriculum, pedagogy and PD programmes across Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain and the Western Region public schools (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015). The NSM was gradually introduced in 2010 in KG –grades 1-3 in some public schools in Abu Dhabi city– and was expected to be fully implemented in the rest of the Emirate schools over a three-phase period:

- Phase 1: (2010-2011) covering KG and grades 1-3.
- Phase 2: (2011-2012) covering grades 4-5.
- Phase 3: (2012-2016) covering grades 6-12.

As a long-term strategy, the objectives of the New School Model project as articulated by the ADEC formal policy document (ADEC, 2012) are to:

- Improve the curriculum to meet the emerging socio-economic developments.

- Develop teachers and school leaders.
- Overhaul the assessment and evaluation system and implement new assessment methods based on international standards.
- Introduce a new school inspection system for monitoring both private and public schools.
- Overhaul the school facilities to meet the students' needs.
- Attract international private schools to open branches in the emirate (GEMS, Cranleigh, etc.) (ADEC, 2012).

The immediate short-term objectives driving the reform agenda are to:

- Develop teachers and school leaders.
- Enhance students' English language and math skills.
- Prepare students for universities.
- Implement a new attendance and discipline policy (ADEC, 2012).

However, implementing the NSM has not been without problems. In a comprehensive study about the implementation of the New School Model, Buchler-Eden (2012) highlighted several challenges. These barriers include absence of clear goals, language challenges, inadequate involvement of teachers in the implementation of the NSM, rapid pace of change, lack of time due to prioritising formal assessment, lack of communication, lack of training and finally lack of organizational support.

1.3.4 Professional Development Programmes in the NSM School

The results of ADEC routine Teachers' satisfaction surveys showed that many teachers have never participated in any kind of professional development (Survey of Abu Dhabi Public School Teachers, 2011/2012). For this purpose, ADEC created a continuing professional development division inside the council to improve leadership, teaching and learning skills of school teachers and leaders. According to ADEC policy manual (Abu Dhabi Education

Reform: The Road to 2030), the council is responsible for providing and designing professional development programmes to support teaching and student learning, and to meet the organizational needs and priorities of schools. At the micro-level, the schools are partially responsible for planning and administering their PD programmes in line with ADEC educational policy and in accordance with the school organizational needs. In this context, ADEC identified five types of these organizational needs:

1. System initiatives: The professional development related to system initiatives are comprehensive, and it targets the system-wide priorities and it comprises activities that focus on developing ADEC's workforce, including teachers, school leaders and staff.
2. Targeted initiatives: The activities related to targeted initiatives are occasional and they usually focus on certain programmes, policies or organizational procedures.
3. Performance improvement: This includes PD needs identified through the results of the annual performance evaluations.
4. School Improvement Plans: The staff is required to work on the individual identified needs to develop school improvement plans.
5. Professional qualifications: Staff, including teachers and school leaders, will be supported in improving their credentials and qualifications, if they are willing to, through scholarships and grants.

To support this reform, ADEC provides two types of professional development: (a) PD delivered by external providers, and (b) job-embedded PD activities. Teachers are also expected to work with either the principal or the headteacher (also called head of faculty) to develop individual PD plans, which are expected to be aligned with ADEC professional standards for teachers as well as the pedagogical goals of ADEC curriculum. Tamkeen is the formal

ADEC PD programme aiming to develop teachers working at ADEC schools. It relied on external PD providers including Cognition Education, Nord Anglia Education, the University of Florida, Vanderbilt University, GEMS Education Solutions of Premier Schools International and the Centre for British Teachers for Education (CBT) (Al-Taneiji, 2014). ADEC usually provides guidance to schools regarding the PD topic areas to be covered during Tamkeen workshops. ADEC also developed a professional development programme for school leaders called *Qiyada*, which means leadership in Arabic. The programme was launched in 2012 to prepare around 800 principals, vice-principals as well as faculty heads to implement the NSM across all school levels (i.e., kindergarten and cycles one, two and three) (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015).

1.3.5 The School Context

The school in which the current study was conducted is a public primary school located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. All public schools in the United Arab Emirates are government-funded and free of charge for all UAE nationals. The school admits children from grade one to grade 5. All the students come from monolingual family backgrounds. English is the medium of instruction for the major subjects (i.e., Maths, Science and IT), whereas Arabic is the medium of instruction for the other subjects (i.e., Social Sciences and Islamic Education). The school follows the ADEC Curriculum, which is adapted from the Australian New South Wales curriculum. According to a recent ADEC research office survey measuring parent satisfaction with the school, higher levels of confidence in the school, exceeding 90%, have been reported, with parents' overall satisfaction levels reaching 89%. The satisfaction measure was based on eight aspects of school life, including academic achievement, quality of learning, parental engagement, school safety, school health, school code of conduct and school leadership.

Teachers range from a mix of expatriates (i.e., Western and Arab teachers) and local Emirati teachers. The major subjects in the current school (English, math and science) are taught by English Medium Teachers (EMTs), who are also known as licenced teachers, and who are recruited from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs), on the other hand, teach Arabic language and Islamic Education, as well as other subjects like social sciences, art, music and physical education. The teaching workload varies from one teacher to another, but EMTs usually teach 30 periods a week since they teach three subjects (i.e., English, math and science). Regardless of speciality or discipline, all teachers hold a graduate degree and only a small number of teachers hold post graduate degrees (e.g., Masters or PhD degrees). Recently, the National Qualification Authority (NQA) has decided that all teachers across the UAE should go through a uniform licensing system, which aims at standardizing education qualifications for local and expatriate teachers, in both private and public schools. Teachers are evaluated on four areas in their individual reports:

1. The Curriculum (i.e., planning and preparation, knowledge, assessment and learning resources).
2. The Classroom (i.e., classroom management, effective teaching and learning and safe learning environment).
3. The Profession (i.e., self-reflection, collaboration, leadership and performance development).
4. The Community (i.e., communication and relationships with parents).

Based on these evaluations, the school principal and the headteacher provide formative feedback to teachers and work with them to develop individual development plans.

As mentioned in section 1.3.4, professional development for teachers in the current school is provided through Tamkeen, which is the Arabic name

of ADEC's PD programme benchmarked against international standards. Apart from Tamkeen, teachers have another PD session during the week (i.e., two hours at the end of the school day on Monday), which is often used for joint planning and committee meetings.

1.4 Personal Interest in Teacher Professional Learning

Having worked in primary and secondary schools for more than 15 years, I was always passionate about professional development (PD). In terms of Joyce & McKibben (1982), I was a PD 'omnivore,' who engaged in all sorts of PD either inside or outside the school. These PD opportunities were further developed through joining an MSc in TESOL programme in 2006 and Cambridge DELTA in 2009. In 2010, I started working for a higher petroleum institute, where I served as a PD coordinator. I also joined a local PD organization, providing PD opportunities to teachers of English and other teachers using English as a medium of instruction. The potential of these PD opportunities to improve my pedagogic practice and so enhance the quality of learning opportunity I could open up with my students fuelled my interest in exploring teacher professional development in this local context in Abu Dhabi.

My own experience of working for the Ministry of Education and Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC), both as a teacher and as a PD coordinator, convinced me that teacher professional learning (TPL) was overly restricted to external PD programmes and interventions, usually organized by the Ministry of Education and the education zone supervisors. Besides, I noticed that schools, teachers and headteachers had little input in the design and focus of these PD interventions, and that the only feedback they could provide on the programmes was in the form of tick-box surveys distributed at the end of these PD workshops to evaluate their effectiveness. As a professional who used to

attend these events, I felt dissatisfied and at times disappointed at these restricted, de-contextualized and imposed PD programmes.

Despite the large number of PD activities I attended inside the school, which were organized by the Ministry of Education, ADEC, and also the external conferences, workshops, and events I used to attend outside the school, I felt that a more bottom-up approach to PD, where teachers take the lead and have input on their own professional learning, would be more beneficial. Reading the literature, I noticed a conspicuous lack of research in this area. I also became aware of other PD opportunities, which were not available at the schools for which I used to work. This interest in how teacher learn effectively, either formally or informally in their schools, motivated me to embark on a doctoral study exploring TPL in the context of the Abu Dhabi New School Model.

1.5 Significance of the Study

As discussed earlier, the thesis is set in an educational context emphasizing urgent reform of the UAE education system, which is considered one of the “most-understudied public sectors” (Litz, 2014, p.2). Ayouby and Mahmoud (2016) pointed out that the need for conducting research on areas related to teaching and learning in the UAE is perceived as a priority. With respect to teacher learning, studies in this field remain embryonic as very few studies have been conducted in the UAE to investigate TPL in the context of the New School Model. The dearth of qualitative studies addressing teacher professional learning in the UAE has resulted in a lack of deep understating of how teachers learn in their particular contexts. This gap is reflected in the call of ADEC research director to conduct more research to support ADEC strategic plans (Badri et al., 2016). Furthermore, Badri, Alnuaimi, Yang, Al Rashidi & Al

Sumaiti (2017) pointed out that there is a need to conduct “more rigorous methods of assessing professional development” (p.2).

Al-Taneiji (2014) also reported that little research has been conducted on teacher professional learning in the the UAE, most of which was done on the Ministry of Education schools (Al Neaimi, 2007; Alwan, 2000; Alwan, 2001). In the context of Abu Dhabi Education Council, only two studies were carried out, the first of which is an MA research project conducted by AlHassani in 2012 in Al-Ain on primary English language teachers’ perceptions of Public Private Partnership schools (PPP) (initiative launched by ADEC to improve Abu Dhabi schools before NSM). The second study is a case study investigating teachers’ perception of PD needs, impacts and barriers in Abu Dhabi schools conducted by Badri et al. (2016). Having previously worked with ADEC and being aware of the lack of research on TPL has motivated me to conduct this study, which could contribute to a better understanding of teacher professional learning in ADEC New School Model. Findings from this study could therefore be very significant in providing insights into the challenges facing teacher professional learning in this local context. Finally, at the policy level, and considering that TPL is at the very heart of ADEC educational reform and change, the current study could contribute to reform initiatives by informing the council’s existing as well as future PD policies and practices.

1.6 Research Questions

The aim of the current study is to explore how a group of teachers learn and conceptualize their learning in the context of a local NSM school in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The study also aims to investigate the organizational structures, processes and settings within which teacher learning is situated. By exploring these practices, experiences and school policies, it will then be possible to draw

conclusions about the factors either supporting or hindering teacher learning. As reflected in the four research questions, the main objectives of the study are:

- To understand the current teachers' learning practices and values.
- To elicit and elaborate teachers' views on the level of organizational factors affecting and supporting teacher professional learning for NSM teachers.
- To understand how teachers conceptualize their learning both at the local and regional contexts.
- To understand from teachers the available learning activities and opportunities as well as the different barriers and challenges to their learning.
- To contribute to the research base and literature by exploring a topic which is considered understudied.

Such an understanding of the different aspects of TPL might help inform and improve teaching learning practice and policies in ADEC schools. Based on the previous objectives, the following four research questions were formulated.

1. What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?
2. How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?
3. What are the challenges and barriers to teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools?
4. How do teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?

Having so far described and presented the context of the study, the rationale and the research questions, the following is a description of how this thesis is organized.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The current thesis is structured around six chapters. The following is a description of how this study proceeds. The first chapter provides a brief introduction of the context in which this research is done. It also presents the aims and the rationale of the study. Chapter two reviews the literature and offers insights into TPL both in the international and local contexts. Chapter three explores the methodology of the study. Chapter four presents the quantitative and qualitative findings yielded from the questionnaire, the focus group discussions and the interviews. Chapter five reports the key findings in relation to the four research questions, by integrating both sets of data in an informative process, where qualitative findings provide insights into the questionnaire data so as to deepen the understanding of TPL in the context of the New School Model. Chapter six presents the implications and recommendations and highlights the different limitations encountered by the researcher. It also provides suggestions and possibilities for future research building on the findings of the study. The final part of the conclusion is a reflection on my personal learning experience by being involved in this research project.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The current study investigates the policies and practices of teacher professional learning in the UAE in the context of the Abu Dhabi Education Council. Accordingly, the focus of this literature review is to critically examine empirical research studies and relevant conceptual frameworks related to TPL. In developing this critical review of literature, I draw on a range of international and local literature. Firstly, the major terms that are recurrent in the study will be defined. Secondly, the conceptual framework of the study will be discussed in relation to a number of learning theories I have found useful. After presenting the conceptual framework of the study and defining related constructs, effective teacher learning activities will be summarized. Then, the importance of TPL in relation to school improvement and reform as well as the policies which support TPL will be discussed. Following this, the constraints and limitations to promoting effective TPL will be explored.

2.2. Parameters for the Literature Review

In selecting literature for inclusion in this review, I identified five major thematic headings related to my research focus (a) continuous teacher professional learning, (b) organizational learning, (c) professional learning communities, (d) teaching and teacher education, and (e) school reform and improvement. It was important to combine this range of thematic headings in my review on the assumption that teacher learning is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon, and therefore it is hard

to attend to its different aspects without approaching it from different “strands of research” (Opfer & Pedder, 2011, p. 377) with reference to multiple literatures.

2.3. Terminological Issues

For the purposes of this research, it is very important to define the two major recurrent terms in this study: teacher professional development and TPL. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) noted that the two terms, professional learning (PL) and professional development (PD) are used interchangeably in the literature. However, it has been argued that *learning* and *development* have deeper differences which underpin profound implications for how learning is approached and designed. For instance, Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010) distinguished between formal PD, which is synonymous with the term ‘professional development’, and informal PD, which is referred to as professional learning. Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) differentiated between the two terms by contending that professional development is only “a subset of the range of experiences that may result in professional learning” (p. 2). Pedder and Opfer (2013) also found deep dissimilarities between the two terms that go beyond surface dictionary levels to reflect deeper conceptual differences. Professional development, Pedder and Opfer (2013) argued, reflects an approach to teacher development, which accentuates individualism, privacy and isolation. By contrast, professional learning carries a conceptualization that emphasizes collaboration, context and situatedness of learning. Finally, as a long-term process, extending from teacher education at university to in-service training at the workplace, Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke and Baumert (2011) pointed out that professional learning is wider in scope than professional development.

Two other terms that warrant definition here are teacher beliefs and values. A belief is defined by Borg (2001) as “a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held” (p. 186). Borg (2001) also identified three characteristics related to beliefs. They are evaluative and often taken for granted by people; they

are usually characterized by emotional commitment; they guide and control behaviours and thoughts. As for values, in this study, they refer to the importance teachers place on particular professional learning practices for enhancing the quality of their students' learning (Pedder et al., 2005; Pedder & Opfer, 2013). It is widely argued in the literature that teachers' beliefs and values are important factors for TPL. These beliefs and values are a vital component of teachers' learning orientations, influencing both teachers' learning and engagement in specific learning activities (Opfer, Pedder & Lavicza, 2011):

Teachers bring beliefs in the guise of values that impact their own decisions about learning. The intersection of these values, their learning practices and their specific experiential contexts creates a powerful combination that determines not only the teaching decisions that teachers make (Richardson, 1996), but also, we would argue, determines what they themselves are willing to learn. (p.445)

For a deeper understanding of TPL, it might also be useful to define the word *learning*. The following section provides a definition of learning in relation to the four learning metaphors (i.e., learning as acquisition of knowledge, learning as construction of knowledge, learning as participation in the practices of a social group, and finally learning as becoming).

2.4. Understanding Teacher Learning

The reviewed literature abounds with many definitions of the term learning, each of which underlies distinctive approaches to learning. According to Greeno, Collins, and Resnick (1996), learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills thought to be useful in a wide variety of settings. In the teaching context, learning is defined as a change in different aspects of teachers' cognition, such as beliefs, attitudes and knowledge, which inevitably relates to a change in teacher's practices (Fishman, Marx, Best & Tal, 2003; Meirink, Meijer & Verloop, 2007). Learning is also

viewed as a process of being engaged in activities related to change in cognition (Meirink, Meijer, Verloop & Bergen, 2009). On closer examination of these two definitions, the first definition uses the term *acquisition*, which reflects a transfer model to professional learning (Greeno et al., 1996), whereas the second definition uses the word *change*, which acknowledges that change is intrinsic to the learning process (Meirink et al., 2009).

Meirink et al. (2009) stated that teacher learning is often used with terms like *acquisition*, *construction* and *participation*, each term, as will be discussed in the following section, reflects a different approach to teacher learning. First, the metaphor of acquisition, reflecting a cognitive approach to learning, conceptualizes learning as a process of “passive reception of knowledge” (p.89) leading to changes in learners’ skills or knowledge, which are often acknowledged as a proof of learning (Meirink et al., 2009). Second, the metaphor of participation (Sfard, 1998) advocated by situated learning theorists, emphasizes collaboration and considers context to be inseparable from teacher learning (Meirink et al., 2009). In this context, Mulcahy (2014), for example, conceived learning as a continuous participation in the practices of a social group. Third, the term construction reflects a different approach that understands learning as a socially situated process of knowledge building, constructed by learners in meaningful contexts. This understanding finds an echo in Hardy’s (2010) definition of teacher learning as teachers’ co-construction and reflection on their knowledge by working collaboratively and building on current research.

In addition to these three metaphors of learning, Hodkinson, Biesta, and James (2008) added another metaphor, which they call “learning as becoming” (p. 40). According to Hodkinson et al. (2008), this metaphor helps explain the hybrid combination between participation and embodied construction. Learning as becoming takes place through participation in the learning process, as well as through the construction and reconstruction of the learner’s own habitus

(Hodkinson et al., 2008). More importantly, learning as a shared construct can also be modified by the individual learner who develops his/her own idiosyncratic understanding of what is learnt.

Even when learning is enhanced through social processes, individual activity as well as reflection still play a crucial role. Individual activity might, on the one hand, build on collective questions and insights. However, it might also need to resist the collective illusions created by a group (Damon, 1991, cited in Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p, 17). For the purposes of this study, I construe TPL in relation to teachers' formal and informal opportunities, activities and experiences aimed to support and promote teaching and student learning, as well as school improvement. I draw this definition from my extensive review of the literature and also from more than 25 years experience in professional practice as a teacher. This was not my definition at the beginning of my teaching career, as I used to conceptualize TPL in terms of training courses and workshops that were often delivered by external experts. This definition has matured over the years as I have engaged in an increasing range of learning activities, which included formal and informal, in-house and external, individual and collaborative forms of learning. As I availed myself of those professional learning opportunities, my understanding of professional learning has become more comprehensive and holistic. After providing definitions of the key terms in relation to TPL, the next section aims to establish the theoretical framework of the study.

The study adopted a situated and social-cultural theoretical approach to TPL, which maintains that teachers learn in their social context as they interact with other teachers, school leaders and students. The three learning theories, which build the theoretical framework of the present study, are (a) socio-cultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978), (b) situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and (c) organizational learning (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990). This chapter explores these three theories, which informed the current research study.

2.4.1 The Social-cultural Theory

One major assumption of learning as a socio-cultural activity is that teacher learning is contextual, situational and experiential. Highlighting the socio-cultural aspect of TPL, Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010) argued that teacher learning is “a social-cultural phenomenon” (p.268), and that in order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to examine teachers’ discourses, which both describe and sustain learning. Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010) defined teachers’ discourses as types of social activities with their own social implications. These discourses take place in meso-contexts, such as subject departments and schools, as well as in micro-contexts, such as teachers’ meetings and informal conversations in teachers’ rooms. According to Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010), by attending to these conversations, which convey meanings, social actions, interactions and reflections of teachers’ tacit knowledge, it is possible to understand how teacher learning is conceptualized:

To observe and understand how teacher learning is constructed, sustained, or changed we need to observe teacher conversations as they learn, in the places they learn, and ask them to talk about their learning. To understand what we see and what they say requires interpreting their discourses in relation to various social and political contextual conditions. Through this lens, we can view the relationships between moment-to-moment occurrences and political and social conditions in departments, schools and countries. (p.268)

Central to socio-cultural understandings of teacher learning is the proposition that learning is mediated by signs, symbols, artefacts, and people. Vygotsky (1978) differentiated between *stimulus-objects* and *stimulus-means*. Stimulus-objects refer to people informing others how to do things, whereas stimulus-means refer to the cultural artefacts used by people to mediate things that are culturally significant. These artefacts include people in the environment, language, school policies, teaching and learning resources, through which learning

is mediated. Salomon and Perkins (1998) distinguished socially mediated learning from solitary learning, arguing that socially mediated learning has more advantages, which include objectivization of participants' thoughts. The process of objectivization, Salomon and Perkins (1998) explained, takes place as the result of collective discussion, analysis, and examination of thoughts and ideas. Criticizing the cognitivist view of learning, Mulcahy (2014) argued that it is too limiting because it fails to understand teacher knowledge and learning beyond the individual teacher. Teacher knowledge, as advanced by the cognitivist view of learning, lies with the individual teacher. Furthermore, knowledge, according to this approach, has two major components (a) theory, and (b) standards of professional practice, which are viewed as independent of the individual professional. According to Leander, Phillips and Taylor (2010), learning does not reside within individual minds; it is rather distributed across tools, people and learning settings.

Useful to my developing understanding of learning as a social phenomenon are Salomon and Perkins' (1998) six distinctive meanings of social learning:

1. Socially mediated individual learning: a social form of learning "in which a person or a team helps an individual learn" (p. 4). This form of learning involves two parties (a) a facilitator (i.e., teacher) and (b) a learner, who form what Salomon and Perkins (1998) called a "joint learning system" (p.4).
2. Learning as active, participatory construction of knowledge: learning inherently takes place in sociocultural context in which a group of people interact, learn and construct their understandings of social realities and events (Wertsch, 1991).
3. Social mediation through cultural scaffolding: learning takes place as a result of sharing artefacts (i.e., books, videos, other learning resources). Salomon and

Perkins (1998) explained that being historically and culturally situated, artefacts establish a learning system with the learner.

4. The group or the social entity as a collective learning system: learning is achieved through processes of joint construction and distribution across contexts of collective practice.
5. Learning to be a social learner: learning to learn in a social context by developing strategies that facilitate social instruction as an important aspect of learning.
6. Learning social content: the focus here is on the development of a set of skills and dispositions that help learners learn “how to get along with others, how to maintain reasonable assertiveness, how to collaborate in reaching decisions and taking collective action.” (p.6)

Central to socio-cultural theories of learning is the constructivist approach, which contends that both the learner and the context are crucial to the learning process. From a Vygotskian theoretical perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is a scaffolded process, socially mediated by a more knowledgeable peer or adult through the zone of proximal development. Salomon and Perkins (1998) explained that social scaffolding involves two major processes: internalization of knowledge and understandings and active knowledge construction. It is also argued that TPL and cognition are distributed across different locations and mediated through different tools and artefacts. Based on these insights, TPL can include all mediated opportunities that occur as a result of teachers’ interactions and engagement with all persons, including pupils, colleagues, school leaders, coaches and mentors, as well as with all artefacts in the school environment, including staff room, meeting rooms and classrooms. Within a socio-cultural framework, headteachers, teachers, students, school leaders and school resources are also considered artefacts that can support, mediate and facilitate teacher learning as an inherently social process. For

example, invaluable professional learning can take place through a spontaneous unplanned encounter with a colleague in the corridor.

2.4.2 Situated Learning

Rooted in socio-cultural theory, situated learning maintains that knowledge is created in the context of teachers' practices as they interact with each other and with their students (Hodkinson et al., 2008). Learning from a situated perspective is considered a process of change that results from participation in social activities (Greeno, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to this approach, knowledge is no longer understood as located in individual minds. Rather, it is stretched across minds in daily contextualised practices, through which professionals as agents actively engage in collective and individual processes of knowledge construction and re-construction of this knowledge. Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that knowledge and knowing-in-practice are distributed among all teachers and students as part of their participation together in shared activities in specific contexts of joint enterprise. Gherardi and Nicolini (2002) also pointed out that learning does not essentially take place as a result of an individual effort, but rather as the outcome of participation of certain individuals in social activities. In the same vein, Borke (2000) contended that situated learning reflects the social aspect of learning:

To understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants. As in the case of student learning, situative perspectives provide a powerful research tool, enabling researchers to focus attention on individual teachers as learners and on their participation in professional learning communities. (p. 4)

Situated theorists (i.e., Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Webster-Wright, 2009) also pointed out that learning as an activity cannot be disassociated from both the physical and the social contexts where it takes place.

According to them, what we learn and how we learn are integral parts of the learning context. Following a situated approach to professional development, Borko (2004) and Fullan (2007) argued that classrooms are powerful contexts for teachers' learning. This is consistent with a significant body of literature, which considers the workplace as an important factor in successful professional learning (Billett, 2001; Gold, 2002). Likewise, Boud and Walker (1998) described context as the most significant factor in teachers' learning and reflection.

Teachers of today and tomorrow need to do much more learning on the job, or in parallel with it –where they constantly can test out, refine, and get feedback on the improvements they make. They need access to other colleagues in order to learn from them. (Fullan, 2007, p. 297)

Situated learning perspectives resonate well with findings from many research studies into teachers' learning. The Training and Development Agency Schools and Teachers' Continuing Professional Development report concluded that most teachers at their different career stages favour continuous, practice-based, situated and collaborative learning (Pedder et al., 2008). Little and Horn (2007) argued that school-based learning enables teachers to enhance their expertise and engage in collective inquiry. In the same context, Kelly (2006) explained that contextual learning is deeply rooted in Schon's (1983) idea of reflection-in-practice, in which teachers "engage in a continuing dialogue with the permanently changing situation of their practice, and in so doing, draw on both their knowledge-in and their knowledge-of-practice" (p. 510). Wong (2012) argued that school-based learning provides a framework through which teachers exchange and share their classroom experiences, not only with each other but also with the whole school community. Finally, highlighting the role of the school in TPL, Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010) described two contexts for effective informal learning, the first involving teachers in collaborative research, and the second involving professional communication between teachers and educational leaders at school.

2.4.3 Organizational Learning

Emphasizing the importance of teacher learning in school improvement and reform plans, some researchers portray schools as learning organizations. The learning organization concept was developed by Senge (1990) in a business context, and was then used in different settings and domains, including health, education, industry, etc. The underlying assumption behind such a concept was that organizational improvement is only possible when there is a commitment to learning at every level of an organisation (Garvin, 1993). Hargreaves (1999) argued that each organization has three kinds of capital: (a) financial capital, (b) intellectual capital and (c) organizational capital. He defined intellectual capital as the knowledge, skills and abilities of the working force. According to Hargreaves, an understanding of this capital is very important to encourage and sustain the creation and utilization of knowledge inside the school. The role of this organizational capital is to facilitate knowledge creation, dissemination, sharing and utilization. Hargreaves (1999) compared schools to high technology firms, for which knowledge creation, undergirded by powerful critical processes of organisational learning, is crucial. He also contended that the success of schools in the knowledge economy depends on their ability to generate knowledge and create better learning practices.

School reform and improvement efforts depend to a great extent on the readiness of schools to work collaboratively so as to understand, process and apply knowledge about learning and teaching (Marks & Louis, 1999; Schechter, 2008). It is also believed that organizational learning would help corporations and organizations increase their effectiveness and their competitive edge. Garvin (1993) defined the learning organization as “one which is skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect

new knowledge and insights” (p. 80). Schools as learning organizations often have explicit structures, frameworks and routines that facilitate joint work among staff and empower them to collaborate, learn and find ways of putting their learning into practice (Silins, Zarins & Mulford, 2002).

At the heart of the learning organization are cultures and structures that promote and support organizational learning. Garcia-Morales, Lopez-Martin, and Llamas-Sánchez (2006) defined educational organizational learning as the organisation’s capacity to improve the knowledge, performance and conditions of learning of its teachers and other staff members. This incorporates three major processes. The first one is knowledge acquisition, which means developing understanding as well as certain skills and experiences. The second process is disseminating and sharing knowledge among the professionals inside the educational organization. The third process is called knowledge utilization (p. 479), which refers to the incorporation of knowledge and then the generalization of this knowledge to new settings. Establishing a link between the learning organization and TPL, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) noticed that the term professional learning first appeared in the 1990’s with the concept of the learning organization. Insights from the learning organization literature show that, like individuals, organizations can also go through the same learning processes. Salomon and Perkins (1998) described this interactive learning process and its reciprocal influence as follows:

When individuals enter a social learning situation, they take away from it not only knowledge about the topic at hand but knowledge about how to manage such situations. Likewise, the team, group, classroom, teacher, or tutor changes as well, affected by the other members of the interaction. Or consider the example of a research team; while its members enter the team’s planning meeting with their own knowledge, dispositions, preferences, attitudes, and preconceived notions about the research question and methodology, the team’s

deliberations might well result in an agreed-upon agenda, focused questions, division of labor, and even a team's uplifting spirit. (p.19)

Senge (1990) distinguished between two modes of organizational learning: double-loop learning and single-loop learning. Single-loop learning is defined as a process of “accomplishing refinements in conduct without a change in the underlying belief systems” (Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p.15), whereas double-loop learning is perceived as the deep examination of “tacit theories-in-use” (p.15). The concept of double-loop learning, which originated from the work of Argyris and Schon (1978), involves different processes: (a) detecting errors, (b) correcting errors, and finally (c) generating new knowledge and standards to guide upcoming actions (Wong, 2010).

Organizations engaging in single-loop learning have a narrow perspective and approach to learning. Conversely, double-loop learning utilizes deeper analysis of the underlying factors and reasons governing school behaviour. Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell and Valentine (1999) argued that double-loop learning is more effective for complex organizations like schools because it aims to increase organizational effectiveness at three levels—cognitive, practical and behavioural—by utilizing multiple strategies, such as knowledge acquisition, capacity building, knowledge dissemination, sharing and interpreting (Scribner et al., 1999). According to Salomon and Perkins (1998), the transfer from single-loop learning to double-loop learning takes place when individuals inside the organization are able to “air and test tacit assumptions publicly, avoid unilateral protection of themselves or others, and come together in collective problem-solving processes that deal with large-scale tacit issues, not just surface technical issues” (p.15).

From an organizational learning perspective, knowledge creation is only effective when the whole school engages in school-based professional development and research. School leaders, therefore, become knowledge engineers, whose main role is to encourage and help teachers learn as well as enhance “the processes that

are central to the dynamics of professional knowledge creation and dissemination” (Hargreaves, 1999, p.133). In a study investigating transformational leadership and teacher learning in the local context of Abu Dhabi Model Schools, Al-Taneiji (2006) emphasized the importance of leadership and organizational dimensions of teacher learning:

From research findings referenced earlier in this study, it seems that teacher learning is a significant element in the improvement of teaching in successful schools. Moreover, school leaders regardless of their gender play a vital role in fostering a school culture that promotes an environment conducive to teacher learning. School leaders may hold the key to the process of change in their teachers’ attitudes towards learning by providing them with different human and financial resources, the opportunity to lead, and the time to reflect and work collaboratively. (p.23)

As part of their professional responsibilities to their schools, teachers have not only an individual responsibility to learn for themselves and for the improvement of their own practice, but also a duty to support the learning of their peers by, for example, sharing their learning with other teachers. Furthermore, teachers need to make sure that their learning is aligned with the organizational learning and priorities of their school. In this sense, the individual and collective learning of teachers are vital organizational resources that contribute to the successful achievement of school improvement and development priorities, which in turn supports the educational council or authority in achieving their strategic goals and plans. With reference to the school effectiveness literature, there is evidence from the current literature review that effective and high-performing schools have applied the principles of the learning organization (Fullan, 1995; Silins et al., 2002). In their study on CPD pilot scheme for teachers, early in their careers, Moor et al. (2005) reported that CPD contributed to the development of a professional learning culture, which has also led to implementing new school

systems. According to Ofsted (2006), high-performing schools often have a balance between their organizational priorities and the CPD individual needs of their teachers.

After discussing the main three theoretical strands underlying much of the thinking and assumptions behind my research into TPL, I now turn to discuss the conceptual framework of the study.

2.4.4 The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of this study draws on the three aforementioned theoretical strands as well as on my personal understanding of TPL. Teacher learning, as I understand it, is context specific, constructed in the context of the school as teachers interact with their students and colleagues. Yet, there are important individual dimensions to learning. Having a “propensity for personal and self-directed growth and development” (Webb, 1996, p. 54), teachers engage voluntarily in learning. During this learning process, teachers draw on their prior experiences and schemas to create new learning and understanding of their practice. This study was partially planned in recognition of the importance of experiential and reflective aspects of teachers’ learning; teachers are considered as reflective practitioners disposed to examine and research their classroom practices in order to find authentic solutions to emerging dilemmas. For a full understanding of teacher learning, I strongly believe that TPL should be approached from the perspective of teachers, and that teachers as reflective practitioners, should be given the opportunities to talk about their own learning. Schon (1983, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003) noted that teachers can “bring about fresh and fruitful perspectives to the complexities of teaching that cannot be matched by experts who are far removed from classroom realities (p.10).”

I have also found Pedder and Opfer’s (2013) four learning orientations helpful; these orientations reflect different individual and social aspects of learning,

discussed in the learning theories in previous sections. Providing a more comprehensive view of teacher learning, Pedder and Opfer (2013) identified internal, external, collaborative and research orientations. These orientations are defined as “teachers’ learning practices, values and degrees of dissonance between them” (p. 540). With the internal orientation, the focus is placed on the individual teacher for changing their classroom practice. Similarly, with the external orientation, the focus remains on the individual teacher but this time the individual goes beyond reflection on their own practice towards a search for external resources and strategies to inform the teacher’s learning and practice. As for collaborative orientation, a shift from the individual to the collective with an emphasis on joint learning and exchange of ideas and practices with colleagues is reflected. Finally, with research orientation, as the term suggests, the emphasis is placed on research as a source of learning and modifying practice; this orientation involves a mixture of both social and individual aspects of learning. These learning orientations, as Pedder and Opfer (2013) argued, are an essential part of a school’s professional learning ecology. The following table illustrates the different aspects of learning in relation to the learning theories as represented in the four learning orientations:

Table 2.1
Teacher learning orientations

Orientation	Definition	Learning theory	Examples of Learning Activities
1. Internal Orientation	“Learning realised as private individual activity undertaken by teachers working fairly independently and privately with their classes.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual learning ▪ Reflective practice ▪ Situated learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-evaluations of classroom practice ▪ Experimenting with practice ▪ Consulting pupils about how they learn

	(Pedder & Opfer, 2013, p.12)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflecting on practice
2. External Orientation	<p>Learning “open to an expanded pool of ideas, resources and sources of support through school-to-school and school-to-university networking.” (Pedder & Opfer, 2013, p. 24)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual learning ▪ Reflective practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using the web as one source of useful ideas ▪ Feedback about classroom practice ▪ Drawing on good practice from other schools
3. Collaborative Orientation	<p>“Learning accomplished as a public collective activity.” (Pedder & Opfer, 2013, p.12)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social learning ▪ Situated learning ▪ Organizational learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint research or evaluation ▪ Collaborative teaching and planning ▪ Reflective discussions of working practices with colleagues ▪ Carrying out joint research or evaluation
4. Research Orientation	<p>Engaging in individual and collaborative research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual learning ▪ Social learning in the case of collaborative research ▪ Reflective practice through action research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading research reports ▪ Relating what works in practice to research findings ▪ Modifying practice in the light of published research

2.5 Effective Teacher Professional Learning

A review of TPL literature reveals that there is little consensus among researchers about assessing the quality of CPD (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008). Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi and Gallagher (2007) noted that prior to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon's (2001) study about what makes professional development effective, there had been no empirical research base identifying the key features of effective professional development. Garet et al. (2001) identified six features of effective CPD. First, effective CPD should focus on different aspects of the teacher's work, ranging from teaching and assessing to observing and reflecting. Second, it should encourage teacher-driven activities, such as reflection, inquiry, and experimentation. Third, it should encourage teachers' collaboration and support the creation of communities of practice. Fourth, it should focus on teachers' work with students. Fifth, it should be continuous and intensive. Sixth, it should be backed and guided by coaching, modelling, problem-based and collaborative practice. Desimone (2009) argued that there is a need to develop a set core of features of effective CPD activities. For this reason, she proposed a framework for studying effective CPD. Citing a number of recent studies (Banilower, Heck, & Weiss, 2005; Borko, 2004; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Jeanpierre, Oberhauser, & C Freeman, 2005; Penuel et al., 2007), Desimone (2009) identified some critical features contributing to CPD effectiveness, which include the content focus of teacher learning, teacher active learning, and coherence (i.e., the extent to which teacher learning is consistent with teachers' knowledge and beliefs, duration and collective participation).

More recently, Pedder and Opfer (2013) wrote that TPL is (a) dynamic, (b) unfolding, (c) ongoing, and (d) embedded in teachers' school contexts. Reviewing an extensive body of research on TPL for more than two decades, Pedder and Opfer (2013) identified three factors which contribute to effective professional

development. According to them, effective CPD should be collaborative; content-focused (i.e., related to teachers' classroom practices); and underpinned by enquiry-based research and experimentation. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) summarized the conditions for teachers' effective professional learning in five points. The learning activities, according to them, should focus on teaching and student learning relevant to the local context; be continuous; allow teachers to work together inside and outside the organization, reflect teachers' preferences and learning styles, and finally, assist teachers in formulating their own views and understandings of the knowledge and skills being learnt. The following section focuses on how teachers learn and presents learning activities that are reported as effective.

2.5.1 Teacher Professional Learning: How Do Teachers Learn?

Reflecting on what was achieved over nearly a decade, from 1999 to 2009, Desimone (2009) contended that much is known now about teacher learning, although more research needs to be conducted.

As a field we have reached an empirical consensus on a set of core features and a conceptual framework for teacher learning, and thus we should use the framework in future studies of the effectiveness of professional development while allowing for individual adaptation. (p. 192)

After reviewing the TPL literature, the following are the major findings in relation to how teachers learn.

2.5.2. Teachers Learn through Formal and Informal Experiences

Teacher professional learning can cover a wide range of formal and informal experiences and activities inside and outside the school. Borko (2004) stated that teacher learning could take different formal and informal forms in different contexts, such as CPD courses, workshops or school communities. Describing some of the learning-on-the-job activities, MacGilchrist, Reed, and Myers (2004) listed different learning activities, such as case study meetings (i.e., where teachers meet to discuss and investigate specific topics), demonstration lessons, lesson observation, team teaching, coaching or receiving coaching from another teacher or a headteacher, collaborative planning, carrying collaborative projects, critical friends, conducting action research, group-focused discussions, mentoring and evaluation (i.e., self-evaluation or whole-school evaluation). Desimone (2009) also described different kinds of TPL, ranging from community-based activities, such as mentoring, co-teaching, joining a club or teacher network, to individual activities, such as online learning or action research.

2.5.3 Teachers Learn through Reflection

In the professional learning literature, reflection has always been acknowledged as the stock-in-trade of teachers and crucial to effective teaching and learning. The literature also suggests that teachers do not come to schools as empty vessels. They rather come with prior knowledge, experiences, values and beliefs, which are usually tacit. These unstated beliefs have strong impact on teachers' orientations and attitudes to learning (Hodkinson, Biesta & James, 2008). Reflection is an important tool for teachers to rethink, question and evaluate their practices. It is defined as a "way of thinking through problematic situations" (Pedder, James & MacBeath, 2005, p.218). Schon (1983) described teachers' reflective practice as a process of thinking and doing that makes them more skilled. Accordingly, Somekh (1993) explained that reflection enables teachers to explore their tacit knowledge,

their values and beliefs, which are often unexplored, and which exercise hidden influences on their classroom practices. By engaging in reflection, teachers are able to make their unconscious knowledge explicit:

Our explanations of what we think we do and say, and why, rarely tally exactly with what an observer sees who observes what we actually do and say. Much of what we do and say is guided by either half-known (what Elliot calls 'tacit') or sub-conscious values and beliefs. (p. 35)

As a consequence of the importance of reflection as a means of learning and development, different models of reflection have been developed in the teaching context. The reflective teacher model, which is influenced by the work of Dewey (1897) and Schon (1983) is characterized by a strong learning element that involves planning, collecting and analyzing data and then executing, evaluating, reflecting, and finally planning (Menter, Hulme, Elliott, & Lewin, 2010). The second model, underpinned by the constructivist approach, is the reflective practitioner. It essentially focuses on teachers' roles as reflective practitioners, who are able to investigate their classroom practices and generate knowledge as a result of this reflection. Finally, the enquiry model is similar to the reflective model, but it has a strong research element by considering systematic enquiry an important component of teacher professional development.

Findings from teacher professional development research confirm the importance of reflection and inquiry. Webster-Wright (2009) considered reflection one of the key elements of continuing professional learning (CPL) because it is related to two other important PL concepts which are *transformative change* and *transformative learning*. Mezirow (1990) defined transformative learning as the process of "reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments" (p. 18). For instance, in more recent research, Meirink et al. (2009) conducted a research study on how teachers learn in the workplace,

which aimed to address two major issues: (a) exploring whether teachers had any preferences for certain learning activities, and (b) determining whether there were any changes in these preferences over a period of one year. The findings of the study revealed that teachers mainly learnt from personal reflection and from consulting colleagues when faced with certain problematic situations. In the local context of the UAE, a group of student teachers participating in a two-year study on reflective practice, acknowledged the importance and value of reflection. The study also established a correlation between teachers' reflection and teachers' development as effective teachers (Clarke & Otaky, 2006).

2.5.4 Teachers Learn through Practice and Experimenting

Drawing on empirical research, Pedder et al. (2005) pointed out that teachers learn when they experiment with their practice as a conscious strategy for improving classroom teaching and learning. Bakkenes, Vermunt and Wubbels (2010) also carried out a longitudinal study, in which they investigated experienced teachers' learning in the context of a national innovation programme in secondary education in the Netherlands. The research project took one year, during which 94 teachers were observed, interviewed and requested to respond to questionnaires. The findings revealed that the most frequent learning activities were considering one's practice and experimenting. In another study, Hoekstra, Brekelmans, Beijaard and Korthage (2009) identified four classifications of teacher learning activities. They concluded that experimenting with new instructional methods, ideas, strategies and techniques inside the classroom was classified the primary activity among all other activities, which included reflecting on one's practice, learning from interaction with other teachers, and finally learning by doing (i.e., preparing and giving lessons and discussing their lessons with their colleagues).

2.5.5 Teachers Learn through Collaboration

Before discussing how teachers learn through collaboration, I will provide a definition of the term. Forte and Flores (2013) noted that the word collaboration, especially when used to describe teachers' practices, is ambiguous and complex, since it is often used in different ways to refer to different types of teachers' interactions. Doppenberg, den Brok and Bakx (2012) defined collaborative learning as "the learning activities that teachers undertake in collaboration with colleagues, which lead to changes in teachers' cognition and/or behavior" (p.899). De Vries, Jansen, and van de Grift (2013) differentiated between two types of teacher collaboration: (a) exchange activities, such as teacher group discussions about school-related problems and sharing of instructional materials, and (b) professional collaboration, such as team teaching, and professional learning communities that are formed to design and review materials, among other joint activities.

Collaboration was reported to impact positively on TPL (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Westheimer, 2008). Successful professional learning, according to a considerable body of research, is essentially a collaborative effort between a group of individual teachers who work together to examine, develop and reflect on their practices in order to find genuine solutions to emerging problems (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Oakes & Rogers, 2007). Comparing between student learning and teacher learning, Meirink et al. (2009) asked two major questions. The first question is: 'Do teachers –like students– have preference for certain learning activities?' The second question is: Are these preferences affected by the participation in the PD programmes? Two main similarities were reported in their study: (a) both teachers and students learn through cooperation; (b) both of them learn within a particular context (Meirink et al., 2009).

In another study, Plauborg (2009) attempted to answer the question what and how teachers learn when they collaborate and how they apply what they have learnt in the classroom. The findings of the study corroborate other findings, such as Richter et al. study (2011), which concluded that collaboration yields informal and formal learning opportunities. Plauborg (2009) also argued that there is evidence in research that teachers' collaboration to analyze and reflect on their practice improves both teaching and learning. In a similar argument, Toole and Louis (2002) also confirmed that teachers learn and improve by working with their colleagues collaboratively in a process of analysis and experimentation. Explaining the inquiry-based TPL model, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) pointed out that teachers serve as critical friends to one another. Critical friendship is defined as "trusted colleagues who ask questions and offer critical and supportive responses to the daily work in the classroom" (Wennergren, 2016, p.261). The purpose of critical friends, Wennergren (2016) further explained, is to meet the teachers they chose to work within their zone of proximal development and provide professional support and assistance that would improve their practice.

This is consistent with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) contention that teachers rely on each other for providing feedback. As they work together, teachers enhance their professional learning when they exchange knowledge, concepts, views and experiences (Meirink, Meijer & Verloop, 2007). This interaction between teachers helps them not only learn from each other, but also generate innovative ideas and new knowledge and extend the existing one as well (Meirink et al., 2007). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) described in detail the benefits of collaboration in the school context:

When whole grade levels, schools, or departments are involved, they create a critical mass for changed instruction at the school level. Teachers serve as support groups for one another in improving practice. Collective work in trusting environments provides a basis for inquiry and reflection, allowing

teachers to raise issues, take risks, and address dilemmas in their own practice.
(p.3)

There is also evidence in the literature that when teachers collaborate and learn together, they meet their own needs (Harris & Jones, 2009); they also meet their learners' needs and they develop leadership skills and multi-perspective thinking (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996, cited in Kilbane, 2009). Moreover, when teachers exchange ideas and engage in collaborative discussion, they develop shared understandings as well as progressive discourse, which is defined as "reaching a situational understanding through collaborative discussion and exchange of ideas based on the intention to explore and study the context" (Bereiter, 2002; Gilroy et al., 2002, cited in Tillema & van der Westhuizen, 2006, p. 53).

2.5.6 Teachers Learn through Professional Learning Communities

Central to the issue of collaboration is the concept of teacher professional learning communities (PLC). The review of the literature reveals that the term PLC is fraught with a terminological vagueness and looseness. More specifically, Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) explained that the term is associated with "nebulous terminology" (p.82), such as learning communities, communities of practice and critical friends groups. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) defined PLC as a group of people sharing concern and passion for a certain issue, and working and interacting together to deepen their understanding and knowledge of this issue. Kilbane (2009) provided a more comprehensive definition. According to him, a PLC is a group of practitioners collaborating, reflecting and inquiring with a shared vision on student learning as well as on their learning process and teaching.

PLCs are based on two major premises. The first is that knowledge resides within and is generated from teachers' daily experiences and practices. This

knowledge is articulated when teachers engage in collective critical reflection of their practices (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003; Vescio et al., 2008). The second premise is that involving teachers in these PLCs could improve teachers' practice and enhance student learning. Reporting on a research study on PLCs, Borko (2004) described teachers involved in communities of practice as a community of learners sharing the same purpose of improving their teaching and learning. Furthermore, Burke (2000) found that teachers' communities of practice empower teachers and help them assume different professional roles at the same time:

Teachers are empowered to make decisions and solve problems related to their own teaching and their students' learning. In this ongoing growth and development process, teachers become researchers, team members, and reflective practitioners. They work in cooperation with their school leaders to improve the quality of their teaching and the quality of education for their students. (p.37)

According to Harris and Jones (2010), developing PLCs contributes to improving student achievement and teachers' practices, as well as distributed leadership. Describing a PLC model in Welsh schools, Harris and Jones (2010) mentioned some of the roles of the involved teachers, such as (a) decision-taking, (b) collaboration, (c) assuming joint responsibility and (d) purposefulness. Elaborating on the effectiveness of the PLC, Harris and Jones (2010) argued that a PLC should have the following four characteristics: (a) shared values, (b) priority for student learning, (c) action enquiry and (d) reflective dialogue. In the same vein, Newmann et al. (1996) identified five main features of PLCs. First, members of PLCs develop a shared vision. Second, they consistently focus on student learning and attainment because members of a PLC pursue a collective approach to student learning (King & Newmann, 2001; Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Third, they encourage teachers' reflection and professional dialogue. Fourth, they promote

collaboration and cooperation. Finally, they deprivatize teachers' practices. Furthermore, Clausen, Aquino, and Wideman (2009) identified ten characteristics of PLCs:

1. Co-constructed understanding.
2. Shared goals and purpose.
3. Shared power.
4. Flexibility in the organizational structure.
5. Long-term commitment.
6. Open communication.
7. Group memory.
8. Continuous work and development.
9. Collegiality.
10. Trust and respect.

Accordingly, an increasing body of research confirms the positive effect of collaborative PLCs on learning and teaching (Vescio et al., 2008). It is argued, for instance, that communities help teachers change their classroom practices (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Hollins, McIntyre, Debose, Hollins, & Towner, 2004; Strahan, 2003). Indeed, the three major research reviews on PLCs (i.e., Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008) reported that student learning is the main factor in effective PLCs. There is a consensus in these reviews that PLCs lead to an increase in student achievement (Bolam et al., 2005; Harris & Jones, 2010; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Vescio et al., 2008; Whitehurst, 2002). Emerging current research on PLCs seems to validate the view that collaborative learning could support student learning and achievement, “even though the teachers did not perceive this as happening” (Sigurðardóttir, 2010, p.406). It was also reported that PLCs have a positive impact on teachers. Stoll et al. (2006) described three processes of teacher learning as a result of being involved with professional

learning communities. These processes are active deconstruction, reconstruction, and co-construction of knowledge in collaboration with other peers. Finally and at the organizational level, it was found that PLCs could also lead to a change in the school culture (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins & Towner, 2004; Strahan, 2003).

With respect to teachers' collaboration, the professional learning community is a powerful tool for teachers to improve and reflect on their classroom practices (Harris & Jones, 2010). Reporting on a PLC in an elementary school in a rural area, Berry, Johnson, and Montgomery (2005) stated that the PLC enabled a group of teachers to collaborate and share their professional practices, such as sharing each others' lessons and exchanging feedback (Vescio et al., 2008). Carrying out a study on a learning community called *Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievement in Schools* (IDEAS), Andrews and Lewis (2002) reported that teachers participating in IDEAS learning community found their participation very rewarding, and consequently their teaching improved considerably.

Vescio et al. (2008) reviewed the PLC literature with two questions in mind. The first question was: "In what ways does teaching practice change as a result of participation in a PLC?" (p.81); the second question was: "Does the literature support the assumption that student learning increases when teachers participate in a PLC?" (p.81). Focusing on empirical research only, Vescio et al. (2008) found that although there were very few empirical studies conducted on the impact of PLCs on teacher practice and student learning, all the studies reported positive impact. Learning communities empower practitioners by considering every teacher a professional with potential expertise that could be very useful if shared with other colleagues (Farrell & Weitman, 2007). In the same vein, professional development communities cultivate shared and supportive leadership, and promote critical enquiry and collaboration. It was also argued that the rationale behind the concept of PLC is supporting a climate of reflection and enquiry inside the

organization, which would lead to the continuous construction of knowledge (Sigurðardóttir, 2010). Finally, Carrying out a case study, investigating a Canadian school project aiming to advocate a PLC approach to teacher professional development, Clausen et al. (2009) concluded that the approach could be very successful if it is supported by the school leadership. Another major finding reported in the study was that the newborn learning communities could not achieve all the aforementioned characteristics.

2.5.7 Coaching and Mentoring

Both coaching and mentoring have been found important for PLC. Cordingley, Bell, Evans and Firth (2005), for instance, considered peer coaching an important element in CPD, in which teacher change is the goal. Cordingley et al. (2005) reported some studies, in which peer coaching resulted in a change in teachers' practice and methods of working with students. In the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) report (Pedder et al., 2008), both mentoring and coaching were identified as effective forms of continuing professional development. Furthermore, in their evaluation of an early pilot professional development scheme, it was reported in a study carried out by Moor et al. (2005) that the support provided by the mentor to a group of second-year teachers had yielded positive results, such as improving teachers' classroom practice, behavioural management, as well as career development. However, it should also be highlighted that these studies found that there was a limited understanding of how coaching and mentoring were practically used in schools. With respect to school improvement, for example, it was reported by Ofsted (2006) that coaching and mentoring correlate with their notion of the strategic school.

Studies carried out in the UAE revealed mixed results with respect to teachers' attitudes to coaching. AlHassani's (2012) study, for instance, reported a

positive attitude among teachers to one-on-one coaching with advisors, whose role was coaching, mentoring, and providing support to teachers. In another study, reflecting on an induction and mentoring programme of novice teachers in the UAE, Ibrahim (2012) concluded that teacher mentors should be experienced school-based teachers and that each mentor should be assigned no more than two new teachers. It was also recommended that mentors as well as mentees should be on reduced teaching schedules to be given the opportunity for learning activities such as observation, co-planning and attending other professional development activities. Finally, a recent study carried out by Stephenson, Dada and Harold (2012), evaluating the development of teacher leadership in UAE schools, revealed some tensions with respect to the relationship between teachers and their mentors. The study revealed a lack of trust, which has negatively impacted collaboration between the teachers and their mentors:

In each school, mentors were only able to observe three times because mentees were initially suspicious of their motives and resented them in their classrooms. TMs [Teachers mentors] were regularly discouraged from drop-in visits and very rarely invited to attend a class. One TM commented that in the initial stages of the project “only a few curious teachers observed other teachers teach.” (p.58)

2.5.8 Networks

Fenwick and Nerland (2014) contended that networks are validated by recent research. They criticized professional learning policies, which continue to emphasize teacher training, isolation and measurement and ignore teacher networks. Bell et al. (2006) carried out a more systematic review of the impact of school networks and found the following:

1. Six out of fourteen studies indicated the positive effect of networking.

2. Half of the fourteen studies showed a positive effect on the school.
3. All the studies showed some positive effect on teachers.

It is also argued that school networks break the isolation and privacy that is characteristic of teachers' practices; they also help teachers improve their practice as a result of collaborating with other colleagues. According to Lieberman (2000), networks such as learning communities are very important structures inside and outside schools. Similarly, building networks outside the school, Lieberman (2000) argued, has a strong potential for improving teachers' practice which, helps teachers develop beyond the narrow and restricted school-based professional development.

2.5.9 Peer Observation

Peer observation of teaching draws on several theories of learning, including reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). In their longitudinal study, investigating what makes professional development effective, Boyle, While and Boyle (2004) found peer observation as one of the most effective CPD activities. In an Australian context, Carbone (2011) identified peer observation as an effective professional learning tool that has an impact on teaching and improving student learning. Dymoke and Harrison (2006) also found peer observation as an important PD activity. However, they also reported that it often involved novice teachers, being observed and learning from experienced teachers, without having the opportunity to observe other lessons and provide feedback. In their large scale survey of more than 1000 teachers, Pedder et al. (2005) also concluded that peer observation was not adequately used as an effective professional learning activity inside schools. Congruently, Sachs and Parsell (2014), reflecting on peer observation in a higher education context, pointed out that in order to be more effective and to become more sustainable, peer

observation needs to be embedded in organizational systems. Similarly, Loughran (2010) argued that peer observation should be part of a school culture of inquiry along with other collaborative professional learning activities.

2.5.10 Lesson Study

Lesson study is a school-based mode of teacher learning, originated in Japan and translated from the Japanese term, ‘Jugyokenkyu’ (Podhorsky & Fisher, 2007). Lesson study is defined as systematic reflection on teachers’ classroom practices carried out through collectively analyzing and investigating lessons (Fernandez, 2002). Rock and Wilson (2005) explained that in a lesson study small groups of teachers work and learn together following eight important procedures: (1) defining the problem, (2) planning the research lesson, (3) teaching the lesson, (4) evaluating the lesson and reflecting on its effects, (5) revising the lesson, (6) teaching the revised lesson, (7) reflecting and evaluating, and finally (8) sharing the results. Citing the example of the lesson study, Podhorsky and Fisher (2007) showed how such classroom-based collaborative professional learning could change a whole school’s culture. They further explained that the lesson study approach has potential benefits for teachers and students as it promotes “collegial conversations” between teachers besides developing critical reflection of their own practice (p. 484). Describing the collaborative aspect of the lesson research model, Tsui and Wong (2010) pointed out that it involves three main steps: (a) collaborative lesson planning and preparation, (b) a group lesson observation, and (c) post-observation lesson. Tsui and Wong (2010) also cited other examples of collaborative learning activities that are incorporated in the Chinese school culture: (a) the lesson research, which is an improved form of the Japanese lesson study, (b) the open lesson (i.e., demonstration lesson), and (c) the mentoring model.

In the previous section, I have described the most effective teacher learning activities with reference to current literature. The following section looks into relationships between teacher learning, school leadership and school improvement.

2.6 The Importance of Teacher Learning for School Improvement and Reform

It is widely discussed in the literature that teacher learning should be supported by a school culture which encourages collaboration and enquiry (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Similarly, it is argued that developing such a school culture supports educational reform (Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex, 2010). According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009), professional learning that tends to be embedded in school reform and that is strongly linked to teachers' classroom practices, assessment, standards and curriculum is more effective than isolated PD programmes disembodied from teachers' professional work. Central to a school's learning culture is the integration of professional learning in school improvement and reform plans. Drawing on the findings of eleven empirical studies on PLCs, Vescio et al. (2008) concluded that all the reviews found that PLCs led to a change in the school culture. Some of the aspects of the school culture that had changed were (a) enhanced collaboration, (b) renewed focus on student learning, (c) continuous professional learning, and (d) growth in teacher authority.

Based on these findings from current research, there are calls from researchers and policy makers to integrate professional learning into the organizational culture of the school. Marks and Printy (2003) noted that there is big interest in the education field in re-culturing schools in order to build their capacity for organizational learning. For instance, a number of researchers argued that learning would "stay at the incremental, single-loop level if it is not incorporated into organizational culture" (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Forss, Cracknell & Samset,

1994, cited in Goh, Cousins & Elliott, 2006, p.291). Similarly, Fullan (2009, cited in Harris & Jones, 2010, p. 175) emphasized the necessity of creating learning cultures which encourage people in the same community to learn from each other, and to display a professional commitment to change and improvement. In the same context, de Vries et al. (2013) argued that there is "a symbiotic relationship between individual and organizational needs." (p.79). By participating in professional learning activities, teachers cater for their individual needs for professional growth and to the school organizational needs for development and improvement, too (de Vries et al., 2013). This is consistent with Fai Pang's (2006) argument that when teachers collaborate and learn together, they give each other the opportunity to share their professional knowledge, and they consequently develop a shared consciousness among the teachers' community.

There is also a consensus in the literature that continuing professional learning contributes to effective and productive school improvement and reform (e.g., Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002). School improvement is defined as a "distinct approach to educational change that enhances student achievement as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change seriously" (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994, cited in Stringer, 2013, p.9-10). Brendeson (2000) also maintained that professional development for teachers is crucial to any school improvement or education reform plans. In agreement with this view, Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010) argued that the success of school improvement depends on the TPL opportunities provided by schools. This argument is also shared by Pedder and Opfer (2013), who believed that the school improvement could not succeed without an effective teacher PL agenda. Finally, Watkins and Marsick (1993, cited in McCharen, Song & Martens, 2011) identified seven components for establishing a learning culture that is supportive of teacher learning. These components include continuous learning, team-based learning, inquiry and dialogue, empowerment, system connection, embedded system and

strategic leadership. In agreement with this, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) contended that CPL contributes to educational change since it serves as a “catalyst for improved pedagogy and practice” (p.4). However, it is also important to note that the relationship between schools and professional learning is interdependent and reciprocal. While TPL supports schools in their reform efforts, schools contribute to the success of TPL by adopting policies that promote and facilitate learning. This is what will be discussed in the following section.

Goh et al. (2006) wrote that school reform was a major concern in the last two decades. To support these reform efforts inside schools, organizational learning has emerged as the major catalyst for successful and effective reform. Central to the development of schools as learning organizations is school support for the development of PLCs as an approach to school reform. Vescio et al. (2008) argued that PLCs are powerful frameworks for school reform both at the school and district levels. More than that, they are considered key elements in the success of any kind of educational reform. Underpinning the power of PLCs for supporting successful school improvement and reform are the opportunities and contexts they create for fostering norms and practices of collegiality, collaboration, joint work and agency for supporting school change and reform efforts (Hord, 1997; Knapp, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Within the PLC approach, Brody and Hadar (2011) also emphasized the individual and communal aspects of TPL. They argued that the professional development community integrates two models: (a) a community of learners and (b) a community of practice, and that both aspects are important. The former model, according to them, focuses on the professional growth of individual teachers in their respective disciplines, whereas the latter focuses on learning as a collaborative endeavour, as it emphasizes collaborative behaviours like caring for one another, mutual support and collegiality. Placing PLCs in the context of school improvement and effectiveness, Harris and Jones

(2010) considered the establishment of PLCs as an effective approach to staff development and a potentially effective strategy for improving schools.

MacGilchrist et al. (2004,) emphasized that teacher learning is crucial to the culture of the intelligent school. They defined the intelligent school as the type of organization that can incorporate various types of knowledge, experiences and concepts with a specific purpose of gaining confidence about the organization's present achievements, and of being able to make informed decisions. According to their model of the intelligent school, MacGilchrist et al. (2004) further theorized that the intelligent school functions in a culture of enquiry and reflection, in which professional learning for teachers goes beyond having appropriate qualifications or efforts of being updated in the field. It transcends this to a journey of ongoing development and a commitment to seek better performance, deeply tied to a school vision of continuous improvement (MacGilchrist et al., 2004). However, it is also worthy of note that the transformation from a traditional school to a learning organization is a hard undertaking. Pedder et al. (2005) noted that in order to be a learning organization, schools should rethink their whole policies, systems and school structures:

This involves a fundamental realignment of school management systems and processes with an orientation to learning at all levels of the school. Such realignment is geared towards the development of the knowledge, practices and dispositions of teachers and their students with the aim of supporting and enhancing their own and each other's learning (p. 215).

It is widely argued that a professional learning community, therefore, is a powerful drive for changing the whole culture of teacher learning inside the school from private, vertical to shared and horizontal learning; from individual professionalism to collective professionalism; and finally from teachers' independent work to inter-dependent work (Harris & Jones, 2010). Most importantly, PLCs were found to support school change in terms of content and

process (Wells & Feun, 2007). At the process level, PLCs engage teachers in profound levels of analysis and reflection (Wells & Feun, 2007); they deprivatize teachers' practices and break their isolation; they encourage teamwork and collaboration; and they focus on improving learners' achievement. At the content level, PLCs help teachers understand best teaching and learning practices as well as learn about group dynamics (Wells & Feunm, 2007).

In the same way, organizational learning is considered an important factor in school effectiveness (Schechter, 2008). Sigurðardóttir (2010) carried out a study on a professional learning community and its impact on school effectiveness, and found that there is a strong correlation between the schools' level of effectiveness and the quality and effectiveness of PLCs. Effective PLCs are identified by Stoll et al. (2006) as those capable of supporting both teachers' and students' learning in the school community. Equally, Researchers like Fullan, (1995) and Silins et al. (2002) linked the principles of the learning organization to school reform (Goh et al., 2006). These researchers argued that if learning is to become an embedded feature of school learning, then, it cannot be the responsibility of teachers only. Embedding learning in organizations involves collective and coordinated activity in addition to endeavour across the school organization, which is why the leadership practices and values of school principals, headteachers and senior leadership teams are so important in activating professional learning as an embedded and sustainable resource for promoting school improvement and reform.

Describing learning in the learning school, McCharen et al. (2011) noted that new knowledge and ideas inside the school could be generated by all members of a school community. They also highlighted that disseminating and sharing such knowledge systematically with all members of the school community “requires connections and permeable boundaries in the organization (p. 680).” Goh (1998) contended that learning with high learning organization capacity has five characteristics: (a) support and clarity of the organization vision and mission, (b) a

leadership model supporting learning, (c) an experimenting organizational culture, (d) effective knowledge transfer, and (e) cooperation. In the same vein, discussing how school policies can be supported by teacher professional development, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggested that school organizational structures should be designed in a manner that supports teacher collaboration. This requires rethinking schedules, timing as well as staffing inside schools. At the administrative level, schools should rethink their traditional institutional structures and advocate new ones (i.e., flexible timetables and less teaching workload) that support learning activities, such as peer observation, peer coaching and mentoring. At the district level, the local educational authorities should provide schools with the financial and human resources needed to manage and support this PL model.

2.7 Constraints and Limitations to Teacher Professional Learning

There is evidence in the professional learning literature that despite this burgeoning interest in TPL, there are still many limitations both at the practice and policy levels. Ironically, although much is known about effective professional development (Desimone, 2009), research reports that teachers are not learning effectively in their schools. The following is a discussion of the policy and practice constraints to TPL.

2.7.1. Policy Constraints

As far as research conducted on professional learning is concerned, the literature reveals that TPL policies are fraught with numerous limitations and misconceptions. For instance, Westheimer (2008) criticized the organizational rules and regulations because they restrict teachers' interaction and collaboration. Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) lamented the fact that school organizational policies seem to discourage teacher learning instead of promoting and encouraging it. This could be the result from schools failing to develop the

appropriate policies and structures to support TPL. For example, some schools still operate as rational institutions, in which communication between members of the staff is linear; supervision is hierarchical; rules and norms are formal, and decisions follow the chain-of-command pattern (Scribner et al., 1999). Hannon (1998, cited in Pedder et al., 2005) also mentioned some of the policy constraints that affect teacher collaboration and involvement in research. The obstacles are prescribed curricula, bureaucratic school structures, tight school inspection policies and attitudes of distrust of the profession. More recently, Westheimer (2008) mentioned four problems that make teacher learning a hard undertaking: (a) teachers' heavy duties, (b) "egg-crate" school structures, (c) tight schedules and (d) "endemic norms of privacy and independence" (p.760) that govern the school system. Some of the other reported issues are rigid standardized systems of assessment, teachers' resistance of collaboration, timing and school architecture (p.768).

Another policy-related factor discussed in the literature is overemphasizing the notion of standards. Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran (2006) argued that teachers more than any time in the past are under the pressure of meeting the community expectations, which is very demanding regarding professional standards. In the same vein, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) criticized the audit cultures and "rituals of verification" (p.4), because they tend to cause pressure on educational institutions, and consequently affect organizational change. Furthermore, Westheimer (2008) criticized the standard-based reforms for their negative impact on both student and teacher learning. In the same context, McLaughlin (2013) critiqued the top-down education systems, which became prevalent in the previous decade, and for being more preoccupied with meeting standards than analyzing and understanding practice. Criticizing education policies as well, Clarke and Newman (1997) noted that the "epidemic of quality" (p. 76), which is part of the international managerial discourses, seems to permeate all modern institutions, including schools, which became more preoccupied with the

quick-fix solutions for both teaching and learning in order to meet standards (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009).

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) also criticized the “audit ideology” (p.5) that characterized Ofsted school inspection system in the UK, which attempts to gauge and quantify educational outcomes. Actually, this ideology overemphasizes teachers’ professional standards over teacher learning. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) cautioned against the policies and professional standards, which instead of supporting teacher learning, they restrict and standardize it. According to them, much of the PD programmes are carried out for accreditation or certification reasons rather than for promoting teaching and learning. This atmosphere of accountability and quality-driven policies promotes a model of one-size-fits-all professional learning that is ‘training’ oriented, quantifiable and easily measured or ‘ticked off’ for quality assurance purposes” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009, p.10). On the contrary, they defended a professional learning model that is based on teachers’ and students’ needs. With respect to the issue of funding, Armour and Makopoulou (2012) posited that the policies regarding PD programmes have changed recently from allocating national funds for these programmes to empowering schools to take care with their own PD programmes. However, Armour and Makopoulou (2012) cautioned that such a procedure could reduce school expenditure on PD. Pedder et al. (2005) also expressed concerns regarding the capacity of schools for supporting teacher learning. In the study carried out in the local context of Abu Dhabi schools, Al-Taneiji (2006) mentioned the following challenges school leaders encounter in trying to facilitate teacher learning:

1. Lack of time
2. Lack of financial resources
3. Lack of human resources

4. Teachers' attitudes and negative experiences

5. Schools location (rural schools versus urban schools)

As discussed in the first chapter, the UAE underwent social, economic and cultural changes, “unprecedented in the history of civilization in terms of scale or speed” (Bashur, 2010, p.253). These changes were motivated by the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, which aims to enhance the Emirate position at the international level as one of the leading economies in the region. In this context, ADEC New School Model was perceived by the policy makers of the Emirate as a significant tool for achieving the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 (Hourani, & Stringer, 2015). However, it is worthwhile mentioning that this ambition to meet international standards is not without challenges. This, for example, created tremendous pressure on schools and teachers to adapt to the new radical reforms of the education system in the UAE (Gallagher, 2011). In a unique narrative of a young local Emirati teacher, Gallagher (2011) recounted the story of Amal, who was a witness of all the recent education reforms and changes. Motivated by her previous school experiences, and aspiring to contribute to the development and improvement of the education system in her country, Amal decided to become a teacher. Read at a more superficial level, Amal's story could be interpreted as the story of a teacher trying to make changes to the education system. But at a deeper level, the story is about a teacher striving to maintain her professional identity in the midst of a hasty reform change process. Despite involving only one teacher (i.e., Amal) in the narrative, Gallagher (2011) contended that she is representative of an entire teacher generation in the UAE:

Although some features of Amal's story are unique to her, many of her experiences are shared with other Emirati teachers of her generation, who have also been interviewed by the author. While there are now many young Emirati women like her with an appropriate initial teaching qualification, there are, however, few to have forged ahead and actively sought out continuing

academic and professional development to the extent that Amal has done. (p. 144)

2.7.2 Practice Constraints

At the practice level, there is evidence from an international body of research that the professional development programmes are ineffective both for teachers and for schools (Borko, 2004; Pedder & Opfer, 2013). As a matter of fact, these programmes were not able to cater for the teachers' professional learning needs; they were not able to contribute to school improvement, either. Wei, Darling-Hammond, Richardson, Andree and Orphanos (2009) conducted a study comparing the professional learning opportunities for teachers in the USA and other countries in the world. It was concluded that the type of professional learning contributing to student learning and changes in teaching practice was very limited. In the UK context, Pedder and Opfer (2013) noted that most of the teacher learning is still traditional in terms of duration and focus (i.e., focusing on content rather than on active learning) and is lacking in coherence, too. Pedder and Opfer (2013) criticized the individualistic approach to teacher PD and reported that individualism rather than collaboration characterizes most of the teacher PD activities.

Furthermore, although research confirms the role of TPL in supporting school reform, some school cultures are still far away from supporting professional learning. For instance, the literature reveals that despite the reform efforts, which do encourage teachers' collaboration, teachers are still working privately and individually. Westheimer (2008) cautioned against the inherent culture of privacy in schools, which threatens both the work and the success of PLCs.

Privacy and unwillingness to share practices on the part of teachers are identified as the major barriers to teacher improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1999).

In agreement with this, Putnam and Borko (2000) argued that schools often promote an individualistic approach to learning at the expense of collaborative forms of learning. Gilroy (1993) and Eraut (1994, cited in Tillema & van der Westhuizen, 2006) cautioned that this individual reflection on practice is local and may result in "idiosyncratic knowledge" (p. 53). In the same context, Tillema and van der Westhuizen (2006) stated that this individual knowledge cannot receive recognition and value unless it is exposed to audiences that might engage in challenging and debating this knowledge. Finally, Webster-Wright (2009) contended that although effective professional learning was extensively researched during the previous decades, the change in the quality of practice is minimal in all the professions including teaching. One possible explanation is the fact that professional development discourse was much more preoccupied with the question how to develop appropriate PD programmes rather than how to comprehend and understand the learning experiences and the implicit assumptions underlying these experiences. This leads us to the following section, which discusses the approaches to TPL.

2.8 Approaches to Teacher Professional Learning

The review of the literature revealed two important professional learning models. The first is the traditional expert model, which was judged by many researchers as ineffective. The second model, which emerged after the unpopularity and wane of the traditional model, is the school-based approach assuming that professional learning takes place only inside the school. Influenced by the situated approach, all external forms of professional learning taking place outside the school are considered decontextualized and therefore ineffective. Looking critically at this, it seems that judging all traditional forms of professional development as ineffective is over-exaggerated. This reductionist view of professional learning was criticized by Opfer and Pedder (2011), Pedder et al. (2011) and McLaughlin (2013). Their

criticisms are premised on the rationale that limiting TPL to classroom activities only is denying the dynamic and on-going nature of professional learning.

We recognise teachers' learning as dynamic, unfolding, continuous throughout teachers' careers, and embedded in the full range and contexts of professional activity. We made sense of professional learning in terms of teachers' participation in multiple contexts, including their classrooms, professional development courses and workshops, research and development collaborations with colleagues in shared networks at their own and other schools, in conversations (formal or informal) with colleagues, students and parents (e.g., Borko, 2004) and when teaching lessons, carrying out assessments and reading professional journals. (Pedder & Opfer, 2013, p. 540)

At a broader level, McLaughlin (2013) disapproved of the 'managerialist' approach to professional development, which views TPL as located inside the school only. This argument puts forward the idea that alienating external bodies, such as universities, from contributing to professional development at schools would be the same mistake of considering them the sole credible provider of professional development. To put it another way, considering this a reductionist view of education, McLaughlin (2013) argued against marginalizing higher education institutions from contributing to TPL inside schools.

In this context, insights from the professional development literature suggest that the traditional model of professional development should be replaced by a new one, in which knowledge is shared between teachers rather than transmitted by training. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), for instance, argued for a learner-centred model of teacher professional development that considers teachers as reflective and active change agents. According to this model, teachers should be given the opportunities to share knowledge, engage in collaborative discussion about the learning content, and link what they have learnt to their particular contexts. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) described

the new model as a departure from the traditional top-down PD as it puts new parameters for effective PD by answering questions, such as what type of PD should be designed, how should PD be delivered, where is it organized, and when should it be organized? Theoretically, this new approach is deeply grounded in the constructivist approach, which views learning in terms of bottom-up processes, constructed by teachers in their local contexts as they interact with their students, colleagues, organizational structures, cultures and curriculum. In light of what has been discussed above, the following section will discuss more specifically how TPL should be re-conceptualized in three areas: (a) PL discourse, (b) PL approach, and (c) PL research.

Drawing on teacher professionalism literature, Menter et al. also (2010) articulated four classifications of professionals: (a) the effective teacher, (b) the reflective teacher, (c) the enquiring teacher, and (d) the transformative teacher. First, the effective teacher is a perfect match with the prescribed curricula and highly standardized assessment systems. The focus in this model of professionalism is on the technical aspects of teaching, as well as on meeting the prescribed standards. Menter et al. (2010) described this model as “the model for an age of accountability and performativity” (p. 21). According to Mclaughlin (2013), this model is the exemplar of what is currently taking place in the UK. Other four classifications of teacher professionals that have strong implications for TPL were put forward by Hargreaves (2000). Highlighting the importance of teacher learning in the post-modern age, Hargreaves (2000) contended that teaching has experienced four chronological periods (a) the age of the pre-professional, (b) the age of the autonomous professional, (c) the age of the collegial professional and (d) the age of the post-professional or postmodern professional. Both the pre-professional and autonomous professional ages were characterized by high levels of individuality, privacy and isolation. During the age of the collegial professional, things started to change with the proliferation of teaching methods

and the wane and unpopularity of external course-based professional development. It was at this age, Hargreaves (2000) explained, that teachers began “to turn more to each other for professional learning, for a sense of direction, and for mutual support” (p.162). The most challenging age is the post-modern age, in which teachers are required more than any other time to learn collaboratively and to interact with their colleagues, their students, and other professional networks (Hargreaves, 2000). Consistent with Hargreaves’ classification, especially the collegial professional and the post-modern professional, de Vries et al. (2013) also differentiated between two types of teachers: (a) traditional teachers, who depended on “intuitive and classroom-based thought and practices”, and (b) modern teachers, who are described as “learning-oriented and adaptive experts” (p.79).

It is clear that one of the arguments that have surfaced at this stage of the literature review is the need to reframe the way professional learning is currently conceptualized in the literature. It is argued that despite the fact that there is an overall consensus about the deficiency of traditional forms of professional learning, there is very little agreement on how TPL should be organized. Bakkenes et al. (2010), for instance, criticized the lack of “a sound conceptual framework for describing processes of teacher learning in professional practice” (p.533). The first rationale for the need to re-conceptualize professional learning, therefore, is that the effectiveness of TPL hinges on the type of theoretical approach being followed (Kwakman, 2003). The second rationale is that TPL has become a misnomer for what is actually taking place at schools as many professional development activities are interpreted as professional learning activities, whereas in fact, these activities reflect a top-down impositional approach to teacher professional development (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009):

Much of what we see packaged as ‘professional learning’ is in effect professional development, where teachers are removed from their school context for short periods of time, engage with ‘experts’ and return to school

with little impetus for changed practice. While we do not dispute the significance of this kind of experience in terms of professional networking and opportunities for teachers to connect and talk with colleagues from differing contexts, authentic teacher learning, which leads to improved learning for students is invariably about more than this. (p.56)

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) also highlighted that although professional development programmes are often introduced with the aim of promoting learning, they disappointingly have little focus on learning. Therefore, the need for re-conceptualizing TPL is so vital. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) explained that the difference between professional development and professional learning is more than being semantic. Teacher learning is a highly differentiated, reflective and reflexive process, which could have a lasting impact on teacher's practice. As discussed in the conceptual framework of the study, new conceptualization of TPL is underpinned by social and situated approaches which regard learning as a social and interactive construct and practice (Desimone, 2009; Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex, 2010). Borko (2004) stated that the situated approach could be a potential research method for studying teacher learning since it takes into consideration both individual and social aspects of learning. Therefore, at conceptual and methodological levels, there is a strong argument for researching professional learning from a holistic, contextual and situated approach (Webster-Wright 2009), which focuses on the learning experiences of the professionals as they engage actively in their practice. In this conceptual paradigm, practice is not treated separately from the professional, but rather as an indispensable part of the professional in the context of the classroom or school. Emphasizing the importance of context, Webster-Wright (2009) argued for a new approach to how teacher learning should be researched and conceptualized. She argued that for a full understanding of CPD, it should be approached from the concerned professionals in their particular contexts. According to Webster-Wright (2009), this new

approach will help researchers “understand professionals' experiences of learning in a way that respects and retains the complexity and diversity of these experiences, with the aim of developing insights into better ways to support professionals” (p.714).

Webster-Wright (2009) explained that the professional development literature is still coloured by assumptions that stem from an objectivist epistemology, which treats knowledge as “transferable object” (p.713). According to this argument, although the theory-practice separation was challenged more than three decades ago by Schön (1983), the divide still exists in professional development literature and research. For example, it is argued that the way knowledge and learning are conceptualized by the objectivist epistemology is very limiting since it views knowledge as a transferrable commodity like all other commodities (Webster-Wright, 2009). This view reflects an atomistic approach to knowledge, which deepens the divide between theory and practice. Webster-Wright (2009) went deeper in her diagnosis of the problem by arguing that the real change could happen when we reconsider the objectivist epistemology and the dualist ontology, which still underpin much of the CPL research. The dualist ontology, Webster-Wright (2009) argued, is used in this particular context to mean the study of professionals outside their professional context, whereas the objectivist epistemology to knowledge refers to viewing knowledge as a transferable commodity or object. Webster-Wright (2009) noted that viewing knowledge as an embodied experience could bridge the divide between the epistemological (i.e., professional knowledge and practice) and the ontological aspects of professional learning (i.e., professional identity).

On the other hand, Hodkinson, et al. (2008) identified four limitations in the literature with respect to learning theories. The first limitation has to do with individual learning, which is not often conceptualized as “embodied and social” (p.31). This Cartesian conceptualization, which tends to separate body from the

mind, risks discrediting the physical and emotional elements of learning. Hodkinson, et al. (2008) explained that the TPL literature failed in recognizing the social nature of individual learning. They also clarified that the first limitation led to the second one, which states that individual learning is usually decontextualised. The literature, namely the cognitive approach to learning, has also focused on two things: (a) the learning activity or situation and its participatory aspect, and (b) the individual learner as separable from the school context.

Another gap in the teacher professional literature was highlighted by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005); it relates to the importance of individual learning, which according to them received insufficient attention compared to social learning. Salomon and Perkins (1998) also cautioned against downplaying the importance of individual learning. Salomon and Perkins (1998) noted that learning is rarely viewed as independent of the social contexts in which it occurs. According to Hodkinson et al. (2008), one of the major problems in the learning literature is the absence of an approach that recognizes the individual aspects as well as the social aspects of learning. Hodkinson et al. (2008) also recognized that research which tends to emphasize social structures in relation to learning fails to give due attention to individual learners and the learning process. Describing the relationship between individual and social learning, Salomon and Perkins (1998) noted that the two aspects of learning (i.e., individual and social) interact and complement each other. Hodkinson et al. (2008) called the structures in considering the different aspects of learning—individual, social, institutional—a partial theorizing. This is due to two main reasons. The first is the lack of a holistic conceptualization of learning and the second is the issue of scale. Hodkinson, et al. (2008) defined the holistic approach as the integration of three dualisms: the dualism between (a) the mind and the body, (b) the individual and the social, and finally (c) the agency and the structure (p.32).

2.8.1 Re-conceptualizing Professional Learning Discourse

A critical review of the terminology used to describe CPL in the literature revealed that many terms reflect a transfer model which treats teachers as subjects of development and training. Criticizing the PD literature, Webster-Wright (2009) contended that the term professional development is fraught with many limitations and misconceptions. One of these limitations is essentially discursive because it depicts the professional as a passive subject of development, rather than an active and self-directed professional. Webster-Wright (2009) went even further to describe it as a “deficiency discourse, where professionals are incapable ingénues needing authoritative shepherding, akin to notions of engagement with third-world communities” (p.724). She argued for the necessity to reframe the way PD is currently conceptualized in the literature. According to Webster-Wright (2009), this will happen through two things. The first is to change the focus from ‘development’ to ‘learning’. This is congruent with an emerging body of literature emphasizing teachers’ agency and responsibility for their professional growth. Day (1999), for example, argued that teachers “cannot be developed passively, they develop actively” (p.2). The second limitation has to do with research, which will be explored in the next section.

2.8.2 Re-conceptualizing Professional Learning Research

Much of the research conducted on TPL is flawed (Hanushek 2005; Pedder & Opfer, 2013; Sykes 1996). Opfer and Pedder (2011) carried out a thorough review of the literature of professional development and found that much of the PD research falls short of expectations. According to Opfer and Pedder (2011), this is due to the fact that researchers employed “simplistic conceptualizations of teachers’ professional learning that failed to consider how learning is embedded in personal and professional lives and working conditions” (p. 376). The other limitation is methodological. A great deal of PL research and practice tend to

dichotomize the relationship between the teacher-learner, the context, and the professional learning content. Webster-Wright (2009) criticized professional development research for its dichotomy approach in dealing with several issues, such as formal and informal learning, individual and group learning, contextualized and decontextualized learning.

Research is required that views the learner, context, and learning as inextricably interrelated rather than acknowledged as related, yet studied separately. The "experience" learning in everyday practice is rarely studied in a way that maintains the integration of all these aspects. There is a need for more research beyond the "development of professionals" that investigates the "experience of PL" as constructed and embedded within the authentic professional practice. (pp. 712-713)

From a methodological point of view, Webster-Wright (2009) advocated a methodology that is capable of studying these complex learning experiences without falling into dichotomies. That is to say, learning should be construed as interaction between the learner, the knowledge and the context (Jarvis & Parker, 2005; Webster-Wright, 2009) rather than as a set of separate factors. Other researchers such as Dall'Alba (2004), Giorgi (1999) and Wenger (1998) argued that using a situated research approach, such as "ethnography or phenomenology", could be appropriate for a holistic approach. Webster-Wright (2009) also argued that the approach to professional learning is problematic and restrictive in terms of its potential for reform and change. Reviewing 203 articles on PD across different professions (i.e., teaching, health, business and social sciences, and science), Webster-Wright (2009) noted that most of these studies were evaluative rather than critical. Evaluative research usually focuses on "evaluating solutions to the problem of learning rather than questioning assumptions about learning" (p.711). This approach is primarily concerned with investigating the effect of individual

factors, such as the learner, the workplace and the content of the PD programme, with less emphasis on the professional learning situated experiences.

According to Borko (2004), any professional development system comprises four major components: (a) PD content, (b) teachers, (c) facilitators, and (d) context where PD takes place. More importantly, Borko (2004) identified three major phases of research on teacher professional development, the first of which focuses on studying the relationship between the PD programme and the teachers, and downplays the two other elements (i.e., the facilitator and the context). The second phase broadens the scope and focuses on studying the PD programmes conducted by multiple facilitators at different sites, and on the relationships between these three elements. The third phase expands the focus further to study the relationship between the four elements (i.e., the PD content, the teachers, the facilitators, and the context) by comparing multiple PD programmes conducted in different contexts. Borko (2004) highlighted that most of the studies conducted on professional development belong to phase 1. She recommended more research on phase 2 and phase 3 for a better understanding of TPL practices and policies.

Given its focus, which is exploring teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools, the current study will follow the fourth phase as an approach to studying teacher professional learning. This will help address a gap in the literature as Borko (2004) explained earlier.

2.9 Local Research on Teacher Professional Learning

Most of the conclusions about TPL reported in major reviews were based on studies carried out either in America, Australia or Europe.. There is a lack of reference to international research outside these areas. With the exception of Pedder et al. (2005), who made reference to Japanese Lesson Study, most of the other major reviews (Guskey, 1986; Borko, 2004; Vescio et al., 2008; Stoll et al., 2007) made no allusions to professional learning experiences taking place outside

America, Australia or Europe. For this purpose, the reference to professional learning experiences, projects and initiatives in some Asian and African countries in this literature review, such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Africa and UAE, is deemed necessary. The rationale for broadening the scope of the review by including other countries from both Asia and Africa is to present diverse experiences from different parts of the world, which would contribute to the reliability of the review conclusions.

One of the major limitations of the literature with respect to local context is that research on teacher professional development (TPD) in the Gulf, including the UAE, is still lacking both in terms of the small number of studies carried out and the narrow contextual range of these studies (AlHassani, 2012). In the Gulf context, several studies conducted on TPD (Alkatabi et al, 2005; Almufaraj, 2006; Alharbi, 2011; AlHassani, 2012; Alhaggass, 2015) pointed to the lack of effective programmes. In the context of the UAE, Al-Taneiji (2014) reported that little research has been conducted on TPL, and of the little that has been conducted, most research has been undertaken in Ministry of Education schools (Al Neaimi, 2007; Alwan, 2000; Alwan, 2001). In what follows, I will first provide examples of the studies carried out in the Gulf context and then proceed with studies conducted in the UAE.

In the Saudi context, Alharbi (2011) conducted a multi-phase study exploring teachers' views and experiences of a CPD programme implemented at Saudi schools. The study findings indicated that teachers felt positive about both the content and their engagement with the mentoring programme. However, several limitations to the success of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme were reported:

1. Lack of time.
2. Lack of resources.

3. Lack of systematic and strategic PD support for teachers and in particular for newly hired teachers.
4. Lack of collaboration between the different CPD stakeholders, mainly schools, universities, teachers, schools leaders and supervisors.

More research, the study concluded, should be carried out to better understand the stakeholders' orientations towards CPD.

Another doctoral study, carried out in Saudi Arabia, investigated the impact of professional learning activities of teachers of physics on students' achievement (Alhaggass, 2015). Utilizing a mixed-method approach, data was collected through an exploratory sequential design. In the first phase, a survey was conducted with 62 respondents from intermediate and secondary schools. In the second phase, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews in order to explore in greater depth the themes identified by the survey. The study concluded that on-the-job professional learning should be complemented and supported by external learning activities and programmes. An additional finding was that PD programmes targeting teachers of physics should attend to three areas of teacher knowledge (i.e., pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge and pedagogical-content knowledge).

In an Omani context, an ethnographic study was carried out exploring the professional development of English teachers in the College of Applied Sciences (CAS). The study findings revealed that TPD in CAS colleges was organized in an ad hoc manner. The study also concluded that TPD programmes and activities lacked variety as they were restricted to sporadic and one-off workshops and sessions, mostly organized during conferences. Although all the study participants showed high levels of motivation and interest in TPD, there were very few opportunities for them to engage in learning. Another finding reported by the study

was that other PD forms, such as mentoring and professional learning communities were very scarce indeed.

Reviewing the few studies that have been carried out in the UAE context, one could conclude that most of them were found focusing on teachers' attitudes and views about PD opportunities as well as teachers' awareness of the importance of CPD (Al Neaimi, 2005). For example, although Alwan's (2000) study seems interesting from the promising title 'Towards Effective In-Service Teacher Development in the United Arab Emirates: Getting Teachers to be in Charge of Their Own Professional Growth', it was mostly descriptive of prevailing PD activities but lacks an explanatory focus on the effectiveness of the programmes described, as the research questions that shaped the study indicate:

1. What is the system of teacher training in the UAE?
2. Do teacher training programmes follow a systematic approach in the various training steps?
3. What self-directed and school-based development activities are practiced?
4. What are the factors that affect the practice of such activities?
5. What can be done to facilitate the contribution of teachers to their own professional development? (p. 14)

In her study, Alwan (2000) made use of two data collection tools: a teacher questionnaire and a supervisors' interview. Although the study attempted to investigate teachers' in-service development, it was limited in scope and depth as the focus of the teacher questionnaire was on only six forms of PD as follows:

1. Journal writing.
2. self-appraisal.
3. peer observation.

4. reading.
5. writing research papers.
6. action research.

Moreover, supervisors rather than teachers were interviewed to seek their views on PD programmes. Such an investigation, I may argue, reflects an approach to TPD dominated by a “lecturing style where teachers are instructed and told what to do without being asked to actively participate and bring in their experience” (Al Banna, 1997; Alwan, 2001; Guefrachi, & Troudi, 2000, cited in Al Neaimi, 2007, p.3).

More recently, and in the context of the Abu Dhabi Education Council, three studies have been carried out, the first of which is an MA research project conducted by AlHassani in 2012 on primary English language teachers’ perceptions of Public Private Partnership schools (PPP) (i.e., initiative launched by ADEC to improve Abu Dhabi schools before NSM) in Al-Ain. Although this study was carried out in the same context as mine, it is limited in scope and depth as reflected by the two research questions:

1. What are the professional development programmes and models provided for English language teachers in PPP schools?
2. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of PD programmes on enhancing their teaching of English and students’ results? (AlHassani, 2012, p. 7-8)

Examining the two research questions, it is clear that the first question restricts the investigation to a focus on formal PD programmes delivered to English language teachers, without making any reference to the teachers’ learning activities or opportunities. However, despite the fact that the second question seems to be broader in scope, it limits the effectiveness of PD programmes to teaching and students’ results. This is very limiting because, although students’ grades or results

could provide some feedback on students' learning, they do not necessarily reflect the full range of students' learning achievements. Furthermore, attributing patterns of students' learning results to the PD programmes of their teachers is problematic insofar as a diverse range of factors and variables beyond the PD programme are likely to account of most of the variation in students' attainment outcomes. As explained earlier when discussing re-conceptualizing TPL discourse, the new approach to TPL is more concerned with understanding how teachers learn in their school contexts, and how to comprehend their learning experiences in relation to both student learning and school improvement.

The second study was a case study investigating teachers' perceptions of PD needs, impacts and barriers in Abu Dhabi schools conducted by Badri et al. (2016). Using the 'Teaching and Learning International Survey' (TALIS, 2013) and focus group discussions about the TALIS survey report, lack of incentives for participating in PD, conflict with work schedule and lack of appropriate PD programmes were reported as barriers to TPD. The following are the study's recommendations:

1. ADEC should make a balance between the teachers' emotional and academic learning needs.
2. ADEC should provide more PD opportunities to allow teachers to choose their favourite professional development activities that are relevant to their students, teachers' experiences and contexts.
3. ADEC needs to focus on developing more effective PD programmes that are carefully planned, implemented evaluated.
4. Teachers should be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of these PD programmes.
5. The content of TPD should focus on classroom management as well as providing cultural training to teachers coming from different cultures.

6- Social networking, either online or through peer-to-peer activities such as mentoring, should be part of the school PD activities.

The third study was conducted on English teachers' PD experiences in private schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi (Atwi, 2016). The study examined teachers' preferences in relation to PD models with respect to motivation and availability. The study used a mixed-method design and consisted of two phases, the first of which was a PD questionnaire of English teachers (PDQET). This was followed by an interview involving 10 instructors. The following are some of the study's recommendations:

1. School leaders should provide incentives to encourage teachers to engage in the school PD programmes.
2. School leaders should rethink PD timing by considering more appropriate and suitable timing for professional development.
3. Schools should consider developing mentoring programmes by encouraging experienced teachers to mentor new teachers.
4. PD content should be differentiated to meet the needs of the different teachers (i.e., teaching experience, disciplines, and learning styles.)
5. More research should be conducted on TPD involving more diverse and large populations (Atwi, 2016).

2.10 Conclusion

Vescio et al. (2008) argued that reviewing literature is an “act of interpretation” (p.88). It is a highly selective work as the reviewer decides which parts should be included and which parts should be excluded. This selective process eventually affects the review’s conclusions (Vescio et al., 2008). To address this issue, theoretical triangulation, defined as a type of triangulation utilizing different theoretical perspectives for a deep and comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon (Denzin, 1978; Hussein, 2009), was used in this literature review by referring to different views and perspectives on TPL. Admittedly, it is the use of the theoretical triangulation in this review that has helped in identifying the first gap in the international TPL literature.

In this chapter, I reported conclusions reached in the literature review on TPL. A summary of effective teacher professional learning activities as well as learning theories underpinning teacher learning was presented. Then, an argument about the need to re-conceptualize TPL was put forward. Insights and implications of this re-conceptualization for policy, practice and research were also considered. Gaps in the TPL were identified, and a critical discussion of the major PL issues was provided. In the following chapter, I will look into the methodology used in this research and explain in detail the methodological underpinnings and assumptions underlying the current study.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter outlines the research design and discusses the method of the study. In the first part of this chapter, I explain the objectives of the study as well as the research questions stemming from it. Following that, I provide a brief overview of the methodological underpinnings and assumptions underlying the current study. I also present the rationale for using a case study strategy for this research. Then, I proceed to discuss how the study was piloted. In the second part, I explain in detail the construction and administration of the quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. Next, I proceed to report and illustrate thoroughly how data were analyzed, approached and processed. Subsequently, I discuss validity and reliability issues pertaining to this study. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the ethical considerations and challenges raised by the design and conduct of the study.

In the current study, I adopted an explanatory methodology with a multi-method approach (Creswell, 2012). The major aim of using both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools is to illuminate how teachers construct both their individual and collaborative learning realities in this context, and how they use and understand these learning opportunities in relation to student learning and school improvement. As mentioned in chapter 2, the main aim of this study is to seek to understand teachers' professional learning in the context of ADEC New School Model. In the light of this broad objective, five research questions were formulated. However, as I treated the research questions as focal points of departure rather than as a preset destination, the questions were modified several times during the study. The

research questions reflect three main foci of interest. First, question 1 focuses on patterns of teachers' practices and values (i.e., orientations). Second, questions 2 and 3 address school support and the organizational aspects of TPL. Finally, question 4 examines teachers' conceptualization of TPL in the local and regional contexts.

3.2 Theoretical and Methodological Assumptions

According to Scott and Usher (1999), ontological and epistemological considerations have significant implications for any research study since they represent researchers' tacit beliefs and philosophical approaches. Therefore, I will first start by clarifying my ontological position. Ontology is defined as "the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social inquiry makes about the nature of social reality – claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other" (Blaikie, 1993, p. 6). According to Cohen et al (2007), there are two established views of reality. The first is the realist position, which maintains that reality is external to the individual. The second is the nominalist approach, which holds that reality is constructed and made by the individual. Given the fact that the current study is predominantly exploratory, I adopted a subjectivist approach by focusing on developing understanding about TPL that builds on teachers' interpretations and accounts of their learning in the context in which they are working.

Since epistemological stances hinge on ontological views, it is also necessary to explore my epistemological standpoint with respect to the current study. Epistemology is defined as "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Like ontology, there are two broad epistemological views, the first of which is

called positivism, and it views reality as stable, which allows for objective, reliable description and observation (Levin, 1988). The second is interpretivism which considers social reality as complex, and the “product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meaning for actions and situations.” (Blaikie, 1993, p.96). The role of the researcher, working within an interpretivist framework and mindset, is therefore to examine and study participants’ interpretations and meanings.

The current study was planned and construed from constructivist and situated perspectives. It is underpinned by social constructivism, which perceives research participants as architects of their own world views and meaning systems (Gabriel, Fineman and Sims, 2000, p.354). Being a cornerstone to a social constructionist approach (Fineman, 1993), interpretive research examines a phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants as a lived social reality or experience. The rationale for advocating an interpretivist approach in this study is that it allows the exploration of contextualized understandings of professional learning grounded in the meanings, the values and the accounts that teachers bring to their interpretations, sense-making and constructions of the various social and individual experiences, processes and local contexts through which they learn.

Inspired by the constructivist and situated approaches, the choices and decisions I made in the development of the research design were shaped by my research questions and the context of the study. More specifically, decisions about selecting the methods of data collection and the modes of analysis were influenced by the consideration of the kinds of data I believed would be most useful in helping address each of the four research questions. In the following section, I briefly describe the theoretical assumptions and understandings on which the different questionnaire sections were based. Section B of the

questionnaire (Appendix 3) reflected four main dimensions of TPL, which are consistent with what was previously theorized in the literature review (see chapter two). The following are the four learning orientations:

- Internal Orientation.
- External Orientation.
- Research Orientation.
- Collaborative Orientation.

Conversely, Section C of the questionnaire (Appendix 3) focused on organizational aspects of TPL, such as intrapersonal and interpersonal processes of learning (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). The section was based on the premise that effective teacher learning is an indispensable part of a school culture, where teachers, students and school leaders should be engaged in learning. Table 3.1 elucidates the link between both sets of quantitative and qualitative questions. It also illustrates these four learning dimensions and the way they relate to both sets of data (i.e., quantitative and qualitative).

Table 3.1 (Pedder & Opfer, 2013)

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Sets (adapted from Pedder & Opfer, 2013)

Questionnaire	Interview
<p>Internal Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I modify my practice in the light of evidence from self-evaluations of my classroom practice. ▪ I experiment with my practice as a conscious strategy for improving classroom teaching and learning. ▪ I consult pupils about how they learn most effectively. ▪ I reflect on my practice as a way of identifying professional learning needs. ▪ I modify my practice in the light of feedback from my pupils. ▪ Teachers are encouraged to experiment with new ideas as a way of promoting professional growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you reflect on your practice as a way of identifying your professional learning needs? ▪ Can you describe the reflective strategies you use?
<p>Research Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I read research reports as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice. ▪ I relate what works in my own practice to research findings. ▪ I modify my practice in the light of published research evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have you conducted any individual or collaborative research? If yes, can you explain?
<p>Collaborative Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I engage in collaborative teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have you participated in a

<p>and planning as a way of improving practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I engage in reflective discussions of working practices with one or more colleagues. ▪ I carry out joint research or evaluation with one or more colleagues as a way of improving my practice. ▪ Staff regularly collaborate to plan teaching. ▪ If members of staff have a problem with their teaching, they usually turn to colleagues for help. ▪ Teachers suggest ideas or approaches for colleagues to try in class. ▪ Teachers make collective agreements with colleagues to test out new ideas. ▪ Teachers discuss openly with colleagues what and how they are learning. 	<p>school committee or a PLC? If yes, describe your experiences with this committee or PLC. Have these experiences helped you grow professionally?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the challenges of working and learning with colleagues? ▪ What are some of the risks or disadvantages of working with colleagues? ▪ Do you prefer working with colleagues or working alone? ▪ Can you give some specific examples of a project where you worked collaboratively with other colleagues from the same school? ▪ What were the goals, challenges and outcomes? ▪ What were the benefits to you and your students?
<p>External Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I use the web as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice. ▪ I modify my practice in the light of feedback about my classroom practice from managers or other colleagues. ▪ I draw on good practice from other schools as a means to further my own professional development. ▪ Formal training provides opportunities for staff to develop professionally. ▪ Teacher-initiated networking is an 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What sorts of formal and informal TPL opportunities have you been involved in this year? ▪ Do you share your practices with other schools through networking?

<p>integral element of staff development.</p>	
<p>School Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The senior leadership team in your school communicates a clear vision of where the school is going. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the senior leadership team communicate a clear vision of the school improvement plan?
<p>Commitment to PL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members of staff have a commitment to the whole school as well as to their department, key stage, year group, or both. ▪ The senior leadership team promotes commitment among staff to the whole school as well as to the department, key stage, year group or both. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do school leaders help teachers at your school understand the implications and values of PL in relation to the organizational development of the school?
<p>School Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members of staff have a good working knowledge of the school improvement plan. ▪ Members of staff see the school improvement plan as relevant and useful to learning and teaching. ▪ Staff development time is used effectively to realize school improvement priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You mentioned in the questionnaire that CPD is determined by the priorities for school improvement plan. Can you explain how is CPD approached strategically at your school?
<p>Evaluation of Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School systems encourage impact evaluation of professional development activities. ▪ Teachers are helped develop skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do school leaders help teachers at your school understand the implications and values of PL in relation to the organizational development of the school? ▪ Can you give one or two examples of dilemmas you

<p>to assess students' work in ways that move their students on in their learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers are helped develop skills to observe learning as it happens in the classroom. ▪ School leaders help teachers become more aware of professional standards. ▪ School leaders help teachers see how their personal professional learning goals relate to school improvement priorities. ▪ School leaders help teachers achieve their professional learning goals. 	<p>have faced between an individual PL priority and preference that you had and an organizational PL priority contradicting it? What happened? How was the dilemma resolved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What sorts of policies exist to encourage teachers to participate in professional learning and implement new strategies in the classroom? ▪ What does your institution expect of you in terms of PD? ▪ How are your needs as an individual teacher balanced with the needs of the school in the CPD planning, ▪ How, and by whom are the CPD activities agreed?
<p>Informal Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff frequently use informal opportunities to discuss how students learn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What sorts of formal and informal TPL opportunities have you been involved in this year?

3.3 The Case Study Methodology

Creswell (1998) defined the case study as “an exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Flybjerg (2004) explained that a case study is an appropriate approach for “context-dependent knowledge”, existing in “real-life situations” (p. 422). These definitions resonate with the aim of the current research, which is to develop detailed contextualized

understanding about TPL from the perspectives of both teachers and leaders, in their organisational and policy contexts. My decision to use a case study approach was premised on the belief that it would optimize the scope of the kind of multi-layered detailed contextualized exploration I wished to carry out. Therefore, I considered an exploratory study, using a case study design, incorporating survey and interview methods to be appropriate for the purposes reflected in the research questions.

The case study design enabled me to combine in-depth qualitative analysis of interview data with the broader scope that was achieved through quantitative analysis of larger scale survey data, developed from the responses of all teaching and leadership staff of the school. Yin (2009) posited that a case study could be the most appropriate research approach if the research seeks to answer “how” questions, which is the kind of questions I was interested in, also, if it addresses a current phenomenon in a particular context, which is teachers’ professional learning in the context of the ADEC New School Model for this research, and finally if the researcher does not have much control of the events, which was the case with my position in this study. The purpose of investigating TPL in the specific context of an ADEC school was to gain a detailed account of how teachers learn—an account that combines the textured multi-layered representations, possible through qualitative exploration with broad representative patterns of differences and similarities in the practices and values of different categories and groups of teachers and leaders.

3.4 Mixed-methods Design

A mixed-methods research methodology is defined as a type of study which uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis so as to answer specific research questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). The current study adopted a two-phase mixed-method research design, in which

qualitative data were used to explore and build a more in-depth understanding of the initial quantitative findings. There are many considerations that led to choose this research frame and approach. As discussed earlier, the aims of the current study are (a) to explore teachers' practices and perceptions of professional learning in terms of their impact on their PD and student learning; (b) to investigate ADEC's TPL policies, and finally (c) to figure out how teachers interpret and engage with the broader regional policy context in relation to professional learning vision and values.

Apart from using semi-structured interviews as an exploratory data collection method to explore teachers' views, beliefs and understandings of their own learning in an open-ended way, the interviews were also used to triangulate and cross-validate the quantitative data. Nunan (1992) pointed out that the case study is a hybrid in that it generally uses a range of methods for collecting and analyzing data, rather than being restricted to a single procedure. The final rationale for using the mixed-method research was following a methodological pragmatism that articulates a complementarity between quantitative and qualitative data grounded in a model of coherence shaped by the clarity of links between the combined use of different methods and the research questions formulated for the study. Punch (2009) explained this pragmatic aspect of multi-method research:

Rather than either-or thinking about the qualitative-quantitative distinction, or tired arguments about the superiority of one approach over the other... the methods and data used (qualitative, quantitative or both) should follow from and fit in with the question(s) being asked. (p.4)

Another rationale for using a multi-method design in this study was the complexity of teacher learning (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). I, therefore, wanted to develop understanding about professional learning that combines breadth and

depth of focus as well as validity. Building in a survey strategy allowed me to generate patterns of professional learning practices and values from a large number of teachers and to make comparisons between different categories and groups of teachers. Adopting an interviewing strategy enabled me to work with a smaller number of teachers and investigate my questions in more depth and from a more detailed personalised perspective than is possible with a survey.

3.4.1 Explanatory Sequential Design

Within the mixed-method design, Creswell (2012) identified six mixed-methods designs: (a) the convergent parallel design, (b) the explanatory sequential design, (c) the exploratory sequential design, (d) the embedded design, (e) the transformative design, and (f) the multiphase design. According to Creswell (2012), the explanatory sequential design is the most popular mixed-method design in educational research. Ivankova et al. (2006) described this design as straightforward, compared to other designs, which enables the researcher to investigate the research questions in more details. As I mentioned earlier, the aim of the study is to explore teachers' professional learning, their assumptions and beliefs, and that required a thorough data investigation as well as a richer and thicker data analysis. Besides, drawing on the best features of the quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2012), the explanatory sequential design seemed the most appropriate for this study. First, analysis of the survey data informed the design, the focus and the selection of informants for participation in the semi-structured interviews. The data obtained from the questionnaire were a starting point for exploring in depth the views of teachers and leaders in the qualitative phase through interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, the patterns of response identified as tending to be more general from analysis of the survey data were much more fully explored

in the semi-structured interviews in relation to the personal perspectives and contexts of learning of teachers and leaders.

3.5 Pilot Study

The pilot study aimed to test the effectiveness of the planned data collection strategies for generating data that served in addressing the research questions. An important part of this test involved working with local colleagues to elicit their feedback about the clarity of items and questions and the way they might be interpreted by participants in the main study. In the light of their feedback both the questionnaire and the interview questions were modified. Another important aspect of the pilot study was to provide contextualized practice opportunities to help enhance practical and fieldwork skills related to administering the survey and conducting the semi-structured interviews. More specifically, the pilot study set out to:

- Examine the clarity and intelligibility of the wording of the interview schedule by identifying language errors which could cause ambiguity for the informants.
- Verify the appropriacy of questionnaire items and response options to the local educational context.
- Check the readability of interview questions and their suitability for informants.
- Check the ordering of questions for the interview and items for the questionnaire.
- Check the suitability of the data collection tools that are intended to be used in the current study (i.e., is the questionnaire short, long or too long?).

- Measure the level of interest and responsiveness of teachers to the interview questions.

The pilot study was also helpful in identifying logistical practical problems such as technology-related issues either in the data collection (i.e., using a recorder) or in the data analysis using SPSS version 22 and NVivo 16.

3.5.1 Questionnaire Piloting

This section explains and discusses the changes introduced after the questionnaire piloting. As a matter of fact, misunderstandings sometimes occur when answering questionnaires due to lack of clarity and inappropriacy to the local context. The difficulty in clarifying these misunderstandings is ascribed to the absence of the researcher during the questionnaire administration. For this reason, careful attention was attributed to the phrasing and terminology of the original questionnaire statements with an attempt to take into consideration all respondents' valid suggestions. For example, it was estimated that some statements and response options could be ambiguous and confusing to the respondents. For clarity and relevance to the local context, some of these statements were rephrased, adapted or removed, and familiar more easily comprehended terminology was used instead. Table 3.2 illustrates all changes to statements or response options.

Table 3.2

Questionnaire statements deleted or replaced in the main study

	Statements Questions or Expressions in the Original Survey	Actions Taken	Reason	The New Used Terms or Expressions
1.	Are you a supply teacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar to the teachers in this local context.	These are replaced with

2.	Are you a peripatetic teacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not used; it is difficult to understand	three categories that are familiar in the local context:
3.	Are you a deputy headteacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar to the teachers in this local context.	
4.	Are you a main-scale teacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar to the teachers in this local context.	1. Full-time teacher
5.	Are you a post-threshold teacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar to the teachers in this local context.	2. Part-time teacher
6.	Are you an advanced skills teacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar to the teachers in this local context.	3. Teacher assistant
7.	Are you an excellent teacher?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar to the teachers in this local context.	4. Headteacher / Head of faculty
8.	What is your race/ethnicity?	Deleted and replaced	The term is not familiar in this local context.	What is your nationality?

Such changes were undertaken to make sure the questions were clear, answerable and most importantly, appropriate to the local context. Refining and reviewing the questionnaire statements also aimed to make them more focused on the topics addressed in this study. With respect to timing, the pilot study had also helped reconsider the duration and time of both the questionnaire and the interviews. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked if the timing mentioned at the beginning was enough to complete the questionnaire. The respondents said the timing was not enough as they could not finish the questionnaire in the pre-assigned timing (i.e., 20 minutes). For this reason, extra five minutes were added to the questionnaire timing.

According to Cohen et al. (2000) the format and appearance of the questionnaire are very important to the respondents:

The appearance of the questionnaire is vitally important. It must look easy, attractive and interesting rather than complicated, unclear, forbidding and boring. A compressed layout is uninviting and it clutters everything together; a larger questionnaire with plenty of space for questions and answers is more encouraging to respondents. (p. 258)

During the pilot study, the respondents also drew my attention to the layout of the questionnaire. One suggestion made by the pilot study respondents was about the dual questionnaire format. The Arab teachers, in particular, expressed some concerns regarding this format, as they felt distracted answering both questions at the same time. They noticed that including the practices and beliefs together (Appendix 3) was confusing and distracting. They thought it would be less distracting if the questions about teachers' beliefs and practices were presented separately.

3.5.2 Interview Piloting

Two weeks before conducting the interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with three teachers from a neighbouring ADEC school. This was helpful in refining the interview schedule and deleting the repeated questions. The pilot interviews revealed that some of the questions caused confusion and misunderstanding. For example, the interviewed participants in the pilot study noted that some of the terms in the interview could be misleading. New words and terms were suggested in order to ensure clarity and intelligibility. The following are the interview questions that were changed or adapted for use in the main study

Table 3.3

The interview questions added or adapted in the main study

	Interview Questions in the Pilot Study	Added, Adapted or Changed Questions in the Main Study	Reasons for the Change
1	Can you describe how your PL experiences have led to changes in your classroom practices in ways that have improved your teaching?	Can you describe how your PL experiences have led to changes in your classroom practices in ways that have <i>improved student learning</i> in your classroom?	<u>Question replaced:</u> This is consistent with what has been discussed in the literature regarding the importance of evaluating teacher professional leaning through its impact on student learning.
2		- Do you prefer working with colleagues or working alone? What are the challenges of working and learning with colleagues? - What are some of the risks or disadvantages of working with colleagues?	Added to the interview questions: There was a need to ask more questions about teachers' collaborative learning.
3	Do you reflect on your practice and how?	- Do you reflect on your practice as a way of identifying your professional learning needs? - Can you describe the reflective strategies you use?	<u>Asking more questions:</u> There was a need to elaborate more by asking more specific questions on reflection.
4		- What sorts of policies exist to encourage teachers to partake in professional learning and implement new strategies in the classroom?	<u>Added to the interview questions:</u> Asking such a question would yield more information about the existing professional learning policies.
5		- You mentioned in the questionnaire that TPL is determined by the	<u>Added to the interview questions:</u> These questions are very

	priorities for school improvement plan, can you explain how TPL is strategically approached at your school? - What does your institution expect from you in terms of TPL?	important as they could inform the study in terms of the balance between individual learning and organizational learning.
6	- Can you give one or two examples of dilemmas you have faced between a PL preference and priority that you have had as an individual and an organizational PL priority that has contradicted your individual preference? - What happened? How was the dilemma resolved?	<u>Added to the interview questions:</u> This could inform the study in terms of identifying both individual and organizational priorities.

3.6 Profile of Participants

Data related to teachers' biographical information, age, nationality and previous experiences were put under an additional category in the questionnaire named profile of participants. As it is going to be mentioned next in the study procedures, 39 teachers out of 45 respondents participated in the first quantitative phase. Generally speaking, the questionnaire respondents were representative of all the teachers working at the school. First, research participants represented different languages and different nationalities (American, Egyptian, Emirati, Irish, Jordanian, Syrian and South African). They also represented different age groups and their experience varied significantly from very experienced teachers (i.e., 25 years) to new teachers (1 year). With respect to gender, 51% of the interviewed teachers were female teachers whereas 49% were male. Table 3.4 provides more information on the

demographic profiles of the questionnaire respondents with respect to three categories, which are gender, age, and nationality.

Table 3.4

Demographic information of the questionnaire respondents

Nb	39	100 %
Gender		
Female	20	51.3 %
Male	19	48.7 %
Age Group		
20-29	9	23.1 %
30-39	19	48.7 %
40-49	10	25.6 %
50-59	1	2.6 %
+60	0	0
Nationality		
Egypt	5	12.8 %
Jordan	4	10.3 %
Syria	2	5.1 %
UAE	16	41.0 %
Ireland	4	10.3 %
South African	1	2.6 %
U.S.A	7	17.9 %

As the table indicates, the number of female teachers (51.3%) is approximately the same as the number of their male counterparts (48.7%). With respect to age, the majority of teachers (48.7 %) belong to the second age group ranging from 30 to 39 years old. However, it is important to notice that about 71% of the teacher population is younger than 40 and only 2.6% of the respondents are older than 50. With respect to the distribution of nationality, the majority of the teachers come from the UAE, the country where the study was carried out (41.0%). American teachers constituted the second major

teacher population in the school (17.9%), followed by Egyptian (12.8%), Irish (10.3%), Jordanian (10.3%), Syrian (5.1%), and finally South African (2.6%).

Table 3.5 reports demographic data with respect to five categories:

1. Position in the School.
2. Experience of teaching in general.
3. Experience as Teacher in this school.
4. Teaching in Current Subject.
5. Leadership roles.

Table 3.5

Demographic Information of the Teachers

Position in the School			
Full-time Teacher	39	100.0	
Part-time Teacher	0	0.0	
Teacher Assistant	0	0.0	
Teaching Experience in General			
Up to 5 Years	15	38.5	
5 - 10 Years	16	41.0	able
10 - 20 Years	6	15.4	3.5
Above 20 Years	2	5.1	sho
Teaching Experience in this school			
Up to 5 Years	16	41.0	ws
5 - 10 Years	9	23.1	diff
10 - 20 Years	9	23.1	eren
Above 20 Years	5	12.8	t
Teaching Experience in the Current Subject			
Up to 5 Years	10	25.6	leve
5 - 10 Years	8	20.5	ls of
10 - 20 Years	12	30.8	teac
Above 20 Years	9	23.1	hers
Leadership Roles			
No Leadership	31	79.4	,
PD Coordinator	0	0.0	
Subject Leader	4	10.2	exp
Headteacher	2	5.1	erie
Other Responsibility(-ies)	2	5.1	

nce in the current school. It is noteworthy that 41% of the teachers have between 5 and 10 years of teaching experience, and 38.5% of them have between 1 and 5 years. Combined, it is obvious that the majority of teachers (79.5%) have served there for less than 11 years, which shows that most of them have relatively little experience in the current school. The same can be said about teachers' general experience. About 79% have taught between 1 and 10 years. Only eight teachers in the school have more than 10 years of teaching experience, two of whom have taught for more than 15 years. Table 3.5 also reports the distribution of teachers' experience in the current subject. Almost 25% of the respondents have taught the current subject up to 5 years and 20% from 5 to 10 years. About 30 % of them have taught the current subject from 10 to 20 years and only 23% for more than 20 years. Finally, with regard to the leadership roles, only four teachers had leadership positions as subject leaders.

3.7 Study Procedure

Data were collected once the approval (Appendix 1) was obtained from the ADEC research department. Following this, I first contacted the school principal and discussed with him the appropriate time for starting the data collection. I also discussed the objectives of the study and its impact on understanding TPL in this particular context. I finally explained the research design and process, which comprised four main stages:

1. Conducting the questionnaires.
2. Conducting the focus group discussions.
3. Conducting the interviews with the schools' teachers.
4. Cross-checking the interviews.

Having worked previously with the school principal, he assisted me in arranging repeated visits to the school so that I could work with the two school vice principals and the headteacher to develop a suitable time schedule for data collection. Discussing how the questionnaire would be administered, the school principal and the headteacher suggested using a paper-and-pencil survey instead of an electronic version. Their rationale was that it would be easier to encourage teachers to participate and follow them up with a paper-and-pencil survey than with a web-based online version. The questionnaire was distributed to teachers along with the approval letter from ADEC, which included a consent form section at the beginning, highlighting two main issues:

1. A short statement ensuring the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of their data, and
2. a statement about the participants' voluntary participation.

I also included my contact details for any possible inquiries about the questionnaire. I turn now to a description of how the data was collected for this study. On June 2, 2014, I visited the school and gave the principal the hard copies of the questionnaire for distribution. A day after, I called him to make sure the questionnaire was distributed. I conducted two follow-up phone calls and one school visit in the following three weeks after distributing the questionnaire. At the end of the third week (June 20, 2014) all responses were collected. Out of the 45 questionnaires, 39 were returned which constituted an 86% return rate. It is important to mention that in the last section of the questionnaire, teachers were invited to participate in the interview; unfortunately, only five responded positively. However, when approached by the headteacher, all of them agreed to participate in the interview. The school principal coordinated arrangements for the interview at the beginning; but later on, he delegated the headteacher to contact all the research participants and arrange the appropriate timings for the various data collection stages. Following

this, the headteacher and I sat together and developed a schedule for conducting the interviews.

3.8 The Study Sample

With respect to the study sample, the participants of the study were 20 female and 19 male teachers. As explained earlier, teachers were the main participants of the study. The school leaders (i.e., the principal, the two vice principals and the head of faculty) were involved on the premise that they are the key people responsible for the professional development programmes and plans inside the school. For the purpose of triangulation, this provided multiple perspectives as it also helped the researcher understand teacher learning from the perspective of the school leaders. Their views were deemed important as they provided valuable data that helped understand how teachers learn in their particular contexts. The following are all the participants in the interviews:

1. Fourteen teachers,
2. the school principal,
3. the student services vice principal,
4. the academic vice principal, and
5. the headteacher for English

3.9 Sampling Methods

The quality of any research study does not only hinge on the suitability of the research methodology, but also depends on the appropriateness of the sampling method. Sampling is defined as identifying a representative group for the whole population which the study aims to investigate. Marshall and Rossman (2011) argued that the rigor of a research study depends on the quality of the sampling

decisions. It is note-worthy, here, that the sample used for the semi-structured interviews in the current study was taken from the same teacher population which participated in the questionnaire. According to Creswell (2007), the homogeneity of the sample should be consistent with the sampling procedures in the mixed-method design:

When the purpose is to corroborate, directly compare, or relate two sets of findings about a topic, we recommend that the individuals who participate in the qualitative sample be the same individuals who participate in the quantitative sample. (p. 183)

A non-probability, convenience sampling method was used in the current research study. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) explained that convenience sampling is usually used for accessibility or expediency reasons. Purposive sampling is defined as one form of non-probability sampling, in which the decisions regarding the inclusion of participants are made on certain criteria, such as the willingness of the participants to participate in the study (Jupp, 2006). Sandelowski (1995) cautioned that the sample size in qualitative research should not be too small, or too large. If it is too small, it fails to achieve data saturation. On the other hand, if it is too large, a deep and detailed analysis of the data becomes difficult. In the current study, I tried to make the interview participants representative of the total cohort of the school teachers by varying the participants according to their nationality, language, gender and the subject they teach.

Table 3.6

Semi-structured interview informant characteristics

	Total	UAE	Egypt	Jordan	USA	Ireland	England		
Nationality	14	3	2	2	3	3	1		
English Speaking	7	-	-	-	3	3	1		
Arabic Speaking	7	3	2	2	-	-	-		
Female	6	3	-	-	2	1	0		
Male	8	0	2	2	1	2	1		
Subjects	6	Arabic	English	Math	Sport	Music	Social Sciences	Islamic Education	ICT
		2	5	1	1	1	2	1	1

3.10 Data Collection Methods

The aim of the current study is to explore how a group of teachers learn and conceptualize their learning in the context of a local New School Model in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. The study also aims to investigate the organizational structures, processes and settings which influence teacher learning and within which TPL is situated. Accordingly, the study research questions reflect three main foci of interest. First, question 1 focuses on patterns of teachers' practices and values (i.e., learning orientations). Second, questions 2 and 3 address the school support and the organizational aspects of teacher professional learning. Finally, question 4 examines teachers' conceptualizations of TPL in the local and regional contexts. To address the research questions, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

More specifically, data collection for this study was conducted in two phases. The first phase lasted for one month (March, 2014), during this period the pilot study was conducted. The second phase lasted for two months from April to June, 2014. During these two months, quantitative data were collected through the teachers' questionnaires. The questionnaire was used to survey the whole teacher population. This was followed by the focus group interview to feedback the questionnaire results. In the second phase, conducting semi-structured interviews lasted for six months, during which the researcher was able to collect all qualitative data. With respect to the study sample, the data were collected from three major groups: (a) school teachers, (b) the headteacher, and (c) the school principal and the two vice principals (i.e., the academic vice principal and the student services vice principal). Table 3.7 is an overview of the methods for data collection in relation to each research questions as well as the methods and approaches of data analysis.

Table 3.7

Summary of professional challenges, methods and approaches of data collection and analysis

Professional Challenges	Research Aims	Research Questions	Data Collection	Data Analyses	Approach to Data Analysis
<p>1. Teacher learning was identified as one of the “black boxes” (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008).</p> <p>2. Little is known about the relationship between how teachers learn and the outcomes of this learning and its impact on students and teachers (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008).</p> <p>3. Lack of literature on TPL in this local context (Al-Taneiji, 2014).</p> <p>4. Much of the PD research falls short of expectations (Pedder & Opfer, 2013).</p> <p>5. Most of the studies carried out in this local context were evaluative rather than investigative and critical.</p>	<p>To contribute to the understanding of TPL in the local context of ADEC New School Model</p>	<p>1. What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?</p> <p>2. How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?</p> <p>3. What are the challenges and barriers to teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools?</p> <p>4. How do teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?</p>	<p>Questionnaire</p> <p>Focus group interview</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>1. The quantitative data in this study was analyzed using the SPSS version 22</p> <p>2. The qualitative data in this study was analyzed using NVivo 16</p>	<p>Questionnaires</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Descriptive Statistics <p>Semi-Structured Interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data analysis of the interviews was carried out both deductively and inductively.

3.10.1 Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from the Schools and Continuing Professional Development Questionnaire conducted by the University of Cambridge and Open University on behalf of the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). It essentially aimed to identify broad patterns of difference and similarity among the values and practices of different groups of teachers and leaders. The questionnaire, reflecting Pedder and Opfer's (2013) model, was used in the current study to develop a descriptive analysis of the entire school teacher population in order to explore their practices and values in relation to different facets of professional learning.

The four orientations, defined earlier as “teachers’ learning practices, values and the degrees of dissonance between them” (Pedder and Opfer, 2013, p. 540), guided a considerable part of the quantitative and the qualitative data analyses. It is also worthwhile to mention that the original survey consists of four sections:

- Section A: Professional practices and values.
- Section B: Continuing professional development.
- Section C: Organizational practices and systems.
- Section D: Teacher background.

For the purposes of this study, the questionnaire utilized in the current study adopted only three sections: (a) professional learning values and practices, (b) organizational practices and systems, and (c) teacher background. For clarity and relevance to the local context, some of the statements in the original survey were rephrased, adapted, or removed, and more easily comprehended terminology was used instead.

It is worthwhile to mention that the questionnaire I developed for this study reflects my interest in individual, social and organizational aspects of learning. It consisted of three parts, the first of which focuses on teachers’ demographic data. This part of the questionnaire also included questions about demographic information (i.e., age, gender, and years of experience). Section B of the questionnaire consists of 14

items and focuses on the professional learning practices and values, reflecting different aspects of TPL that range from individual and social to organizational learning. The participants were expected, in this section, to provide two kinds of responses to fourteen questions. The first response (see Appendix 3) focused on teachers' practices. The statements had a four-point Likert format (i.e., *not true, rarely true, often true and mostly true*). The second response (on the right-hand side) highlighted teachers' values. Teachers were expected to show the importance of the fourteen professional practices by choosing one of the following response categories (i.e., *not important, of limited importance, important and crucial*). The rationale for exploring teachers' values and practices was that the understanding of the patterns of alignment or dissonance between teachers' practices and values is important for understanding teachers' tendency to engage in different activities of learning (Pedder & Opfer, 2013).

The final draft of the questionnaire consisted of eight pages, the first of which was a letter to the research participants explaining the objectives, the scope of the research as well as other ethical issues, such as ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants. Finally, the questionnaire included a statement inviting teachers to take part in the interviews that would follow the questionnaire. This statement allowed to know how willing teachers were to participate in the second data collection phase (i.e., the interviews).

Since the school teacher sample consisted of Arabic-speaking and English-speaking teachers, questionnaires in both Arabic and English were provided. Translating the questionnaire into Arabic was needed as part of the teacher sample was Arabic-speaking only. Bilingual teachers were given the choice to take the questionnaire in English or in Arabic. Most of them preferred Arabic, which I thought was very convenient for me as I wanted them to complete the questionnaire in whatever language they felt comfortable with. It is also worthwhile to mention that the original survey consisted of four sections:

- Section A: Professional practices and values.
- Section B: Continuing professional development.
- Section C: Organizational practices and systems.
- Section D: Teacher background.

The questionnaire used in this study adopted only three sections: (a) teacher background, (b) professional learning values and practices and (c) organizational practices and systems. The first section of the questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, teachers were asked about how often the systems and practices were true for their school; whereas the second part focused on how important those practices and systems were to teachers themselves. The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale ranging from “not important” to “crucial” for teachers’ values. For the practices, the scale ranged from “not true” to “mostly true”.

With respect to the intervention strategy, the questionnaire results were fed back to schools as the researcher met with teachers and school leaders, discussed the results, and sought further clarification from them on the answers they provided. The rationale for feeding back the questionnaire results was, firstly, to elaborate and elicit more data and clarification regarding some of the results. Secondly, feeding back was used in the study as a reflective evaluation tool for schools as well as a means for school improvement (Pedder & MacBeath 2008). This will be explained further in the quantitative data analysis.

3.10.2 Focus Group Interview

A focus group is defined by Anderson (1998) as “a carefully planned and moderated informal discussion where one person’s ideas bounce off another’s creating a chain reaction of informative dialogue” (p. 200). Apart from feeding back the questionnaire results to the school, the aim of the focus group discussion in this study was to understand in more depth the teachers’ learning gaps identified in the questionnaire data

analysis. The use of the focus group interview is consistent with the theoretical framework of the study premised on the assumption that meanings and accounts are socially constructed through social encounters and interaction. It is argued that focus group discussions share much in common with interviews, except that the former involve interviewing a group of informants at the same time. More specifically, Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956) found dissimilarities between group interviews and focus group discussions. With group interviews, several informants are engaged in discussing different topics with the interviewer or researcher. However, with focus group discussions, participants are chosen on the grounds that they are more knowledgeable about the topic being discussed.

However, it is worthwhile to mention that several advantages of using group focus discussions are reported in the methodology literature. On the one hand, they help the interviewer observe the different participants while engaging in discussion of the topic with the other informants. This observation allows the researcher to notice the participants' feelings about the topic (Robson, 2003). On the other hand, such a process could yield further data since participants' responses and views might prompt further accounts and views, which in its turn might enrich the data by generating more unexpected accounts. Comparing focus groups with other data collection instruments such as in-depth interviews, Bryman (2008) argued that focus groups are more naturalistic since they involve people engaging in authentic and real-life social interaction. Another advantage of conducting focus group discussion is the opportunity to elicit a large amount of data in shorter time. However, it should also be highlighted that focus group discussions have numerous limitations, the first of which is time as it is not feasible to raise a wide range of topics in a very short time. For this reason, Bryman (2012) recommended discussing no more than ten questions or topics. In the context of my study, being aware of these constraints and limitations, I tried to overcome them by preparing well for the focus group interview. The following are the questions formulated for discussion.

1. Does the survey data indicate a gap between what you value and what you actually do?
2. How do you explain this gap? Is this a problem? Do you need to take action?
3. What kind of strategy could you adopt to address this problem? (Appendix 6)

3.10.3 Semi-structured Interviews

In the context of the current study, the rationale for using the semi-structured interviews was essentially to explore in more detail the research participants' accounts of their practices and perceptions regarding TPL as well as the organizational aspects of their learning. The aim of combining questionnaires and interviews was to optimise the breadth and depth of the understanding of teachers' learning experiences and challenges. While the questionnaires allowed generating data of the breadth of patterns of practices and beliefs, the interviews afforded the opportunity to develop more detailed, textured, and contextualised accounts. The aim of using individual semi-structured interviews in the current study was to further elicit, clarify and elaborate teachers' views on TPL. Banister et al. (1994) noted that semi-structured interviews “permit exploration of issues that might be too complex to investigate through quantitative means. Moreover, they have the capacity to “document perspectives not usually represented (or even envisaged) by researchers” (p. 51). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) also explained that semi-structured interviews can be used in different ways, such as (a) gathering information that has a relationship with the study research aims, (b) identifying and exploring relationships and variables, and (c) validating other research methods or getting deeper levels of data for a complete and thorough understanding of the research questions.

The second phase of the data collection was conducting the semi-structured interviews. The questions that structured the interviews were informed by themes developed from analysis of the teachers' and leaders' questionnaire data. The semi-structured interviews were used with 14 teachers and 4 school leaders. Apart from the seven teachers who volunteered to participate in the semi-structured interviews, I relied

on the headteacher to identify the other seven interview candidates. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and the interview participants were chosen on the grounds of representativeness of different groups (nationality, experience, age and gender). The school leaders' interview (see Appendix 5) was designed specifically for the school principal, the academic vice principal and the student services vice principal to explore TPL from their leadership perspectives. While the teachers' interviews took place between April and June 2014, school leaders' interviews were conducted three months later. Scheduling the school leaders' interviews was a very challenging task because they had very limited time due to their challenging workloads and commitments. For this reason, it was postponed until the beginning of the next academic year in September 2014. The teachers' interview (see Appendix 4) was structured by four sections organized according to the research questions. This organization helped arrange the major themes according to the four research questions. The new emerging themes were added to the matrix of themes. As regards the school leaders' interview, although it had the same organization as the teachers' interview, some of its questions were different (Appendix 4) as there was more focus on the organizational aspects of teacher professional learning.

As indicated earlier, interviews were piloted to check the suitability of the interview questions to the local context. All their comments were relevant and informative as they reflected a familiarity with the local context and ADEC's education system. Before conducting the pilot study, I translated the English versions of the interviews into Arabic. In order to ensure that the interview questions were translated accurately, the two interviews (i.e., the teachers' and the school leaders' interviews) were also reviewed by two Arab bilingual colleagues. Both reviewers have worked as teachers at ADEC schools for ten years. The first colleague holds a Ph.D in Education, and the second holds a Ph.D in Applied Linguistics. In order to avoid errors, the translation of the transcribed interviews was also checked for accuracy by a bilingual Doctorate Student at Exeter University, who was working with me in the same institute. Finally, Arabic translations were also checked by another researcher from the

department of Arabic specializing in teaching Arabic, and suggestions for clarification and modification were taken into consideration.

The interview questions were conducted in Arabic with the bilingual Arab teachers for the following reasons:

1. Some Arab teachers did not have a good understanding of English.
2. Even the Arab teachers who had a good command of English might feel more comfortable when expressing themselves in their native language.
3. The translation saved the researcher's time as there was no need to explain, rephrase or repeat questions.

Before conducting the interviews, I had a meeting with the school principal and the headteacher to discuss the process of selecting teachers who would participate in the interview. In deciding how many teachers to include, I thought that they had to be sufficient enough to give an interesting range and diversity of accounts. Fourteen teachers and four school leaders were interviewed. The interview candidates were informed in advance about my visit. Meetings with the teachers were held during teachers' free time to avoid any clash with their teaching time.

An interview schedule was developed based on the research questions and questionnaire responses. The rationale for using an interview schedule in this study was (a) to ensure that comparable accounts supported by a common set of questions were articulated by each informant, (b) to make good use of interview time and (c) to keep the interview questions focused. The main questions of the schedule were originally shaped by the questionnaire items with opportunities to probe for further detail and clarifications when appropriate. The semi-structured strategy I adopted for interviewing my informants allowed balancing focus on the pre-determined questions that reflected the research agenda with a focus on informants' agendas –what was important to them in relation to professional learning.

Before conducting the interview, I explicated to all the informants that the duration of the interviews could extend to one hour or longer. This prevented any kind

of interruption and helped disengage the teachers from any other commitments. I started the interviews by debriefing the teachers about the objectives of the research study. I also reassured the informants that the data would be treated confidentially and anonymously. After asking the participant's consent to record the interview, I used my iPad and my mobile phone as recorders, in addition, I used a notebook to write some supplementary questions and notes if the need were to arise. At the end of the interviews, I asked the research participants if they wanted to talk about further issues related to TPL. The rationale for this was to give the interviewees the opportunity to talk about anything of importance to them that was not covered by the interview questions. Informants tended to take the opportunity to expand on different issues related to TPL. At the end of the interviews, I informed participants that the findings would be shared with them following the data analysis for cross checking.

I adopted a conversational approach to the interviews while following the sequence of common core questions. When informants diverged from the core questions, I was interested in pursuing the lines of their personal narrative; I, then, refocused attention on the common spine of questions I had devised for the interviews. This approach seemed to help my informants express their ideas freely and comfortably. I preferred to conduct all the interviews face-to-face, which helped me observe the facial expressions as well as the tone and pitch of my informants. When, for example, an informant placed particular emphasis on some words or phrases, I often probed for elaboration and clarification.

In the context of ADEC, teachers' views about different aspects of their teaching and learning have often been sought mainly through quantitative data collection tools. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) noted that qualitative techniques can go far "beyond snapshots of "what?" or "how many?" to just how and why things happen as they do" (p.30). Accordingly, during the semi-structured interviews, I noticed that some teachers could verbalize and articulate their views and beliefs daringly and boldly. Some of them were even able to communicate a clear personal vision of their learning as well

as the school expectations to support this learning. Probing questions, for example, helped in this respect and led to the emergence of more focused data.

In order to optimise confidence in the authenticity and trustworthiness of informants' accounts, I adopted a deliberate probing strategy. It is defined by Patton (2002) as a skill that requires careful listening to what is expressed and what is not expressed, as well as sensitivity to the needs of the informants. Probing has many benefits, such as (a) offering some guidance to the informant, (b) supporting the informant in maintaining the flow of the interview, (c) providing the informant with cues about the expected level of response and (d) supporting articulation of richer, deeper, more contextualised and detailed accounts (Patton, 2001). The following are the three main types of probes (adapted from Patton, 2001) that were used in this study.

1. Detail-oriented probes

- When do you reflect?
- Who else is involved in the collaborative project?
- What is your involvement in the project?

2. Clarification probes

- You said “the programme is effective.” What do you mean by effective?
- I'm not sure I understand what you meant by teacher leadership. Would you elaborate?
- I want to make sure I understand what you are saying. I think it would help if you could say some more about that.

3. Elaboration probes

- Would you elaborate on that?
- Could you say some more about these challenges?

3.11 Data Analysis

3.11.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data in this study were analyzed using SPSS version 22. In the first part of the quantitative analysis, the descriptive statistics relating to teachers' professional learning values and practices were reported. In addressing the internal consistency of the items, the reliability coefficients indices using Cronbach Alpha (α) were considered for both professional learning practices and professional learning values. However, for a better understanding of these differences, more quantitative analyses were also used, as it was deemed necessary to test the variation between the individual responses of the 14 questionnaire items, either for the professional learning practices or for the values.

3.11.2 Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data

Methods of data analysis are critical to the quality and rigor of any research project. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the semi-structured interview accounts. Thematic analysis is defined as a method of identifying, analyzing and also reporting themes or patterns within qualitative data. The six phases of the thematic analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed in the data analysis of this study. The following is detailed explanation of these six phases as well as a thorough description of their processes:

1. Familiarization with the data:
 - Transcribing data and reading the transcripts more than once.
2. Generating initial codes:
 - Coding data starting with the most important.
3. Searching for themes:
 - Identifying themes.
4. Reviewing themes:
 - Checking the relevance of the themes and comparing them with the transcribed

extracts and coming up with a thematic map of the analysis.

5. Defining and naming themes:

- Refining themes and assigning them names

6. Producing the report:

- Producing a report by selecting appropriate extracts, trying to relate them to the study research questions and the literature

Data analysis of the interviews was carried out both deductively and inductively. The rationale for using a deductive approach was based on the premise that TPL is widely researched in the literature. I wanted the data analysis I developed for this study to be informed by insights from previous research. However, as a researcher, I had also to exercise some caution about considering the risk that such a priori research frameworks, constructs and insights might stifle or obstruct the understanding of the contextualised and personal constructs and the perspectives that informants used in the development of the interview accounts. In order to focus on teachers' personal interpretations of their learning experiences and on the meanings and constructs central to their understandings of professional learning, I adopted an inductive mode of analysis in addition to the deductive approach mentioned above.

The qualitative data analysis involves three major processes, which are data management, coding and data display. Because the data was extensive and messy, I thought of reducing it to a manageable size. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that data reduction is "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions"(p. 10). The data reduction process was not conclusive as I had to do it several times during the data analysis. At the beginning, this meant editing, segmenting as well as summarizing the data. Data reduction was also carried out through coding, identifying themes and patterns. At a later stage, the reduction was done through explaining and conceptualizing data. It is worthwhile to mention that during the reduction process, I was very cautious about two major issues. The first was to try to reduce data without losing substantial

information from the teachers and the school leaders' accounts. The second was to ensure the reduction did not affect data quality by stripping it from its context.

When reporting the findings of the study, qualitative analyses were presented at the beginning in the form of figures, tables or graphs. This was followed by the qualitative findings, which usually included quotes from the interviews. White, Woodfield and Richie (2003) suggested four important criteria to enhance the quality of the qualitative data reporting. The first criterion is ensuring the integrity of the findings, which means that the researcher's analyses, conclusions and explanations should be directly drawn from the data. The second criterion is diversity, which was ensured in the current study by including both recurrent themes as well as emerging ones. A balance was maintained between verbatim quotes and my own explanations. The third criterion is coherence, which I tried to achieve through reporting my data clearly and in relation to the four research questions.

3.11.3 Coding

In the current study, coding helped simplify and organize the data into a more manageable, focused and structured way. Miles and Huberman (1994) described three types of codes: (a) notation summaries, (b) descriptive codes, and (c) summary of the main points or ideas of the data through short forms and abbreviations. The three coding methods were used in the current study. The following is a description of how the codes were developed. By dint of repeated iterations through my data, four major codes and 15 sub-codes were identified. As stated earlier, some codes were predetermined and therefore were assigned to the data. These codes were based on the questionnaire statements as well as the literature review. However, other codes were developed through inductive analysis. The first identified codes and sub-codes were used and applied to all the other interviews. During the coding process, new codes emerged and data were classified into existing codes and new codes using NVivo 16. At this stage, further reduction of the data was carried out and repeated until all irrelevant data were accounted for in the analysis. With respect to data analysis, over-coding was one of the

major and conspicuous issues. I found out during this process that some data were multi-coded and included inferences to different codes. I also detected many sections of teachers' responses in the pilot study that were included in different codes. For this reason, I assigned the same chunk of text to more than one code.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using NVivo16 for qualitative data analysis, the transcripts were uploaded in order to determine the major themes. The interview transcripts were saved separately for each teacher using the following naming method (i.e., Salah, Amy, Christine, Ibrahim, Leila, etc.) The software helped me carry, arrange and sort out faster data classification than traditional methods of content analysis. The software has special features and tools that afford complex and detailed analysis across different themes. Following the importation of teachers' interviews, the data were coded into nodes. The programme allowed to save these nodes, and also to review, to edit and to change them later. I also made use of NVivo16 word frequency features, such as identifying the highly used 30 words. Proximity text search queries were also used to check if some words were used in conjunction with other words. This is explained further in the data analysis chapter.

3.12 Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Data

In order to ensure the transparency, credibility and trustworthiness of the research process, clear accounts of the research methods were presented. These accounts include not only an explanation of how the study was conducted but also the rationale for using the chosen research methods and approaches to address the research questions. Mertens (2003) argued that the acceptance of bias is important as it shows a degree of openness and honesty on the part of the researcher. As regards quantitative validation and reliability, the questionnaire used in this study had both internal and external validity, along with reliability, as it was adapted from a valid and reliable survey (i.e., the Schools and Continuing Professional Development Questionnaire). As for the semi-structured interviews, it is important to note that qualitative research has different criteria for measuring validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that reliability and

validity as concepts used in quantitative research are not applicable to qualitative research, which requires more appropriate criteria, such as credibility, dependability, trustworthiness, transferability and confirmability. The following is a description of these criteria used in the study.

In order to apply validity to the case study, Bassey (1999) suggested using trustworthiness, which he defined as “an ethic of truth in case study research” (Bassey, 1999, p. 75). Validity is checked in the current study by using respondent validation and triangulation. As to the interviews, content validity was measured through different ways. One of these ways was asking experts of the field to evaluate the extent to which an instrument is relevant and representative of the targeted construct. For this purpose, the interview questions were reviewed by two experts in the field of educational research. The first one was my Ph.D. supervisor, who gave me insightful suggestions to refine the interview questions. The second reviewer was my critical friend, who is working as an associate professor in Saudi Arabia. Following their suggestions, I modified some questions, deleted and added other ones.

The term credibility corresponds to internal validity in quantitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained that the aim of credibility is to find “isomorphism between constructed realities of respondents and the reconstructions attributed to them” (p. 237). In order to assure the credibility of qualitative research, I used member checks by sending the interview scripts to the participants to check accuracy. Concerning confirmability, it is defined as the degree to which the research study is free of bias in the different stages of data collection, analysis and interpretation of the findings (Tavakoli, 2013). It corresponds to objectivity in quantitative research, and it is achieved when the research findings and interpretations are rooted in context. Triangulation of methods, reflexivity, peer review and audit trails are some of the strategies used in this study to enhance confirmability. The following are the strategies used to address Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for trustworthiness.

1. Dependability

- External audit through the use of the critical friend.
- Data collection at different times.
- Two-phase data collection.
- Recording interviews.
- Full transcription of interview.

2. Confirmability

- Triangulation of methods, peer review, and reflexivity.
- Self-reflection on one's own biases.

3. Credibility

- Member checks.
- Triangulation to reduce effect of the researcher's bias.
- Peer review.
- Iterative questioning in interviews.
- Reflexivity.

4. Transferability

- Providing thick descriptions of the context and the case study to allow transferability to be made to the local context at least (Shenton, 2004).

Finally, reliability is defined as the extent to which a measurement can be repeated (Hoadley, 2004). A peer review process was used to check the inter-rater reliability of the thematic analysis. For this purpose, two experienced researchers were involved in this task. Both reviewers are established researchers in the field and have good knowledge of coding and thematic analysis. Themes as well as codes were compared for agreement and then discussed. Apart from very few cases where the researcher and the team disagreed, they reached agreement about all the themes and codes with the exception of one, which is professional identity.

3.13 Ethical Issues

Researching in schools could be a challenging task as it involves access to students, teachers and information. Therefore, it is important to clarify some of the ethical procedures, used in this research. Creswell (1998) recommended three ethical steps that need to be considered in any research project. These steps are asking for participants' consent, respecting confidentiality, and protecting the anonymity of research participants. First, and as my research was carried out in one of ADEC's schools, I had to approach the council's research department to seek their approval to conduct my study. It is important to mention that with the arrival of ADEC in 2005 and the creation of a research department inside the council, researchers wanting to conduct research studies about ADEC schools are required to get a research approval from ADEC's research office. In compliance with ADEC ethical guidelines in conducting research inside its schools, I submitted an electronic research proposal form in September 2013. Copies of the questionnaire and the school consent forms were also uploaded along with the application forms. The nature and the purpose of the thesis were clearly stated in the information sheet attached to the survey. In the application, I also explained that teachers would be informed that their participation in the research would not be obligatory. They were also assured that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

In the proposal submitted to ADEC, I had to explain clearly all the ethical issues that might arise during the study, and the procedures to deal with these ethical issues. According to ADEC ethical guidelines, the researcher should not impose an undue burden on schools and school personnel. This was also taken into consideration as convenient times for conducting the questionnaire and the interviews were negotiated with the school principal, the teachers and headteachers. ADEC also recommends submitting a written report about the study to the council as soon as the researcher finishes the study. It took me two months to get the approval and receive a letter from ADEC Research Department to access the school to collect data for one year. Although I explained in the consent form that I had chosen one school to conduct this study, ADEC issued a letter of consent (Appendix 1) to allow me access to all ADEC schools.

Another ethical reference I considered to use in my study was the British Education Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research, which I previously used in my MA research project. However, after using them, I came to the conclusion that they have limitations as they only provide general guidelines, and fail to attend to all the ethical issues, especially those caused by methodological decisions or considerations. Instead, I decided to use the ethical grid (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009), which I found more comprehensive, wide-ranging and very thorough in terms of ethical analysis. Stutchbury and Fox (2009) described the grid as “an explicit epistemology in which moral, ethical decisions can be expressed” (p. 503). The grid covers four frameworks (i.e., external or ecological, consequential utilitarian, deontological and relational individual). Each framework contains guiding and clarifying questions about the possible ethical issues that might arise at any stage of the research.

As for anonymity and confidentiality, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) noted that research participants expect that the data the researcher gets about them will be used securely. Clark (2006) defined anonymity as “the process of not disclosing the identity of a research participant or the author of a particular view or opinion”, and confidentiality as “the process of not disclosing to other parties opinions or information gathered in the research process” (p. 4). In compliance with the ethical guidelines discussed above, I assured the school and the participants that only the researcher, ADEC and the University of Leicester would have access to the data, and that they were required to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity of the school, the staff, and the teachers participating in the study as far as possible. In case the results of this study might be used for teaching, research, publications, or presentations at conferences, the school or the teachers and headteacher’ identities would be protected by using pseudonyms or codes, in lieu of their names or other identifying information. The following are the ethical procedures taken during the study:

1. All the research participants were duly informed about the objectives and the procedures of the research study.

2. Research participants were assured that the findings of the study could be disseminated back to them. They were also assured that it is possible for them to withdraw from the study without the need to give any reason.
3. Before participating in the interview, the research participants received explanation regarding (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the contents and procedures of the study (i.e., a questionnaire followed by an interview), and finally (c) the benefits of the study.
4. Research participants were assigned pseudonyms so that they could not be identified. This is consistent with Bryman's (2008) recommendation that privacy and confidentiality of participants and data should be respected.
5. Since the study was conducted in Abu Dhabi with one of ADEC schools, I was very cautious about revealing the name of the school. The reason for this was that there are only 40 NSM schools in Abu Dhabi and it is easy to identify the school from the background data given in the first chapter.

3.14 Reflexivity and Researcher Status as Insider and Outsider

Researcher reflexivity is a deliberate and conscious effort by the researcher to question and disclose their assumptions, biases, attitudes and beliefs, which might affect the quality of research. Since skills are transferrable from one context to another, nurturing a reflective approach to my own practice had a great effect on my research study. For example, I learnt to look critically at every step and procedure during the study, both during data collection and data analysis. I was also careful about the ethical issues that might arise any time during the research. Pollard (2002) and Ozga (2000) found a strong relationship between the reflective teacher and the reflexive researcher.

Table 3.8

The reflective teacher and the reflexive researcher

Reflective teacher	Reflexive researcher
Concerned with aims and consequences.	Revealing subjective experience and their own positionality (i.e., bias or stance).
Evaluating and revising their own practice continuously.	Examining prejudices, assumptions and preconceptions.
Showing competence in methods of evidence-based classroom enquiry.	Using personal experiences bring in-depth understanding to research.
Showing a responsible, open-minded and whole-hearted attitude.	Involving and working closely with the research participants.
Teaching based on teacher judgment as well as insights from research.	Seeking evidence from quantitative and qualitative sources.
Engaging in reflective dialogue with colleagues.	Being well informed about the work of others and imparting findings with the research participants.
Creative mediation of externally developed frameworks, which involves the ability to interpret external requirements and adapt them to the local context.	Balancing research requirements with the needs of the research participants.

Reflecting on my role in this research project, although I was an outside researcher, as I was not working with ADEC when the study was carried out, I was, to a certain extent, familiar with the educational local context, for the reason that I had previously worked both with the UAE Ministry of Education and ADEC for five years. However, when considering this experience of working in ADEC for two years and being familiar with some of the school teachers and the school principal, I might not consider myself totally an outsider. This gave me a great advantage in having a background and understanding of the teacher professional development. For example, this background knowledge helped me in interpreting data and understanding nuances and context-related information. It was also useful for me as I was fully aware of how and when to interrupt my research participants to ask more probing questions.

3.15 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' professional learning experiences and practices in the context of ADEC new school model. In this methodology chapter, I explained the research questions of this study as well as my rationale for conducting it in this local context. I also demonstrated the theoretical and methodological assumptions underlying TPL. Furthermore, I explained my rationale for choosing a mixed-method approach as well as an explanatory sequential design for the current case study. Reporting the data collection and analysis methods, I described in detail the instruments and the analysis tools used to collect and analyze data. In addition, I discussed the ethical procedures adopted in the study. I dedicated the final part to an overview of the challenges and limitations of the study, such as, validity and reliability issues. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the study.

Chapter Four

Quantitative and Qualitative Findings of the Study

4.1 Quantitative Analyses

In the first part of the quantitative analysis, I report descriptive statistics to compare teachers' professional learning values and practices. The second section summarizes the key findings of the quantitative study. As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, the questionnaire was adapted from the Schools and Continuing Professional Development Questionnaire, which was conducted by the University of Cambridge and Open University on behalf of TDA (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). The questionnaire was administered to all teachers at the case study school in order to find out what patterns of practices and values are reflected in the school's professional learning culture. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. In section A the focus was on background data of teachers such as age, gender, nationality, and previous experiences. Section B of the questionnaire addresses teachers' professional learning practices and values. Section C elicits information about the school's organizational practices and systems in support of TPL.

The quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistic Package of Social Science for Windows) version 22. In Section B of the questionnaire, the participants were expected to provide two kinds of responses to fourteen questions. The first response focused on teachers' practices and included four response categories (i.e. *not true, rarely true, often true and mostly true.*) In the second response (on the right-hand side), which highlighted teachers' values, teachers were expected to show the importance of the fourteen professional practices by choosing one of the following response categories (i.e. *not important, of limited importance, important and crucial.*) The rationale for exploring teachers' values and practices was that an understanding of the patterns of alignment or dissonance between these practices and values is important for understanding teachers' engagement and participation in different activities of

learning (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Table 4.1 illustrates the dual scale format, which allowed for a comparison between teachers' values and practices (for more discussion of the dual format see section 3.5.1)

Table 4.1

Dual scale questionnaire format

About your practices				Section B	About your values			
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Not important	Crucial
				I modify my practice in the light of feedback from my students				

In measuring the internal consistency of the items, reliability coefficients using Cronbach Alpha (α) were computed for both professional learning practices and values. To start with, the overall questionnaire was very reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .934. The results of professional practices indicated $\alpha = .968$ and professional values showed $\alpha = .784$, suggesting that the items have very strong internal consistency. Cronbach Alpha (α) was also calculated for the individual items in both questionnaire sections. The coefficients ranged from .752 to .799 for the professional learning values and from .964 to .970 for the professional learning practices (Table 4.2), suggesting a high degree of reliability; in the second part of the questionnaire, coefficients for items ranged from .873 to .898 for organizational values and from .833 to .925 for organizational practices (Table 4.2), also suggesting that the items have good internal consistency.

4.1.1 Learning Orientations: Comparing Teachers' Practices and Values

Another major objective for conducting the questionnaire was to measure the gaps between teachers' learning practices and values. As argued in the literature, patterns of alignment and dissonance between practices and values are an important factor in understanding teachers' dispositions to take part in different learning activities (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). To this end, I compared all the mean scores of teachers' practices and values as they relate to their own professional learning and to the organizational systems and strategies in place at the school.

The following is a descriptive summary of teachers' learning practices and values. It is worthwhile to mention that in order to clarify understandings of teachers' professional learning practices and values, I adopted the four constructs or dimensions of professional learning developed through factor analysis procedures by Pedder and Opfer (2013) in their large scale national study of professional learning in England, which they referred to as professional learning orientations. As discussed in chapter 2, four teacher learning orientations (internal, research, collaborative and external orientations) were identified (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). These four teacher learning orientations were defined as "teachers' learning practices, values and the degrees of dissonance between them" (p. 540). To start with, the locus of control for changing practice in light of internally oriented learning is with the individual teacher and the site for this learning is his or her own contexts of classroom practice and their experimentation and reflections on such practice contexts. The external orientation to learning reflects an individual locus of control, but unlike internal orientation, external orientation is outward-looking, drawing on a range of searches and resources that are external to the teacher's direct classroom teaching environment such as the web, feedback from managers and other colleagues, and practice developed at other schools. Research orientation, as the term suggests, places emphasis on published research as source of learning and modifying practice. Finally, collaborative orientation reflects a collective locus of control for changing practice in the light of professional collaboration and interaction with other colleagues.

These learning orientations (i.e., values and practices), as Pedder and Opfer (2013) argued, are an essential part of the school professional learning ecology.

In the following section, I describe briefly the theoretical assumptions and understandings on which the different sections of the questionnaire used in the current study were based. Section B of the questionnaire reflected four main dimensions of TPL which are consistent with what was already theorized in the literature review. The following are the components of the learning orientations.

Internal Orientation

- Self-evaluations of classroom practice
- Experimenting with practice
- Reflecting on practice

Research Orientation

- Reading research reports
- Relating what works in one's practice to research findings
- Modifying practice in the light of published research evidence

Collaborative Orientation

- Collaborative teaching and planning
- Reflective discussions of working practices with colleagues
- Joint research and evaluation

External Orientation

- Using the web as a source for improving practice
- Feedback about classroom practice from managers or colleagues
- Networking with other colleagues from other schools

Table 4.2 shows means for values and practices for individual item responses on a four-point scale as well as standard deviations and Cronbach Alpha (α).

Table 4.2

Item comparisons of professional learning practice and value scores

	Values				Practices		
	N	Mean	SD	α	Mean	SD	α
Internal Orientation							
1. I modify my practice in the light of evidence from self-evaluations of my classroom practice	39	3.62	.493	.752	3.54	.600	.965
2. I experiment with my practice as a conscious strategy for improving classroom teaching and learning	39	3.36	.668	.778	3.33	.662	.965
3. I reflect on my practice as a way of identifying professional learning needs	39	3.38	0.49	.799	3.49	.601	.966
4. I consult students about how they learn most effectively	39	3.13	.767	.769	3.00	.649	.966
Research Orientation							
5. I relate what works in my own practice to research findings	39	3.38	1.161	.774	2.90	.718	.965
6. I modify my practice in the light of published research evidence	39	2.95	.647	.782	2.97	.668	.964
7. I read research reports as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice.	39	3.28	.759	.759	3.00	.649	.965
Collaborative Orientation							
8. I carry out joint research evaluation with one or more colleagues as a way of improving my practice	39	3.00	.649	.776	3.00	1.235	.970
9. I engage in reflective discussions of working practices with one or more colleagues	39	3.33	.577	.762	3.46	.682	.966
10. I engage in collaborative teaching and planning as a way of improving practice	39	3.51	.644	.764	3.62	.493	.964
External Orientation							
11. I modify my practice in the light of feedback about my classroom practice from managers or other colleagues	39	3.21	.656	.767	3.31	.694	.967
12. I use the web as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice	39	3.72	.510	.787	3.74	.442	.965
13. I draw on good practice from other schools as a means to further my own professional development	39	3.46	.682	.770	3.36	1.112	.970
14. I modify my practice in the light of feedback from my students	39	3.69	.468	.766	3.51	1.09	.966
Mean Scores	39	3.39	.655	.784	3.13	1.08	.968

Overall and as shown in Table 4.3, it was clear that practices and values are in broad alignment for the four learning orientations (see Table 4.3 below). Teachers placed high value on all four learning orientations, although research orientation is valued at slightly lower levels. Values and practices are also very closely aligned for internal, collaborative and external orientations. The most marked gap is for research orientation with teachers' practices somewhat behind the values they recorded for those practices. These patterns will be interpreted and discussed in chapter 5 in relation to the qualitative data reported in section 4.2.

Table 4.3

Mean value-practice comparisons for learning orientations

Orientation	Values			Practice	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Internal	39	3.44	.376	3.36	.366
Research	39	3.20	.575	2.96	.536
Collaborative	39	3.42	.542	3.54	.504
External	39	3.41	.477	3.35	.542

4.1.1.1 Patterns of Teachers' Professional Learning Practices and Values: Item Level Analysis

To begin with, the most noticeable gaps between values and practices were reported for research orientation:

- Item 5: I relate what works in my own practice to research findings (Values: M=3.38, SD=1.16; Practices: M= 2.90, SD= 0.71)
- Item 7: I read research reports as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice (Values: M=3.28, SD=0.75; Practices: M= 3.00, SD= 0.64)

Values for these two items, reflecting research activities, are significantly ahead of practices, which indicate that what teachers value as important for their development and their student learning is not realized in practice. Conversely, for items related to internal, external and collaborative oriented learning, teachers' practices tend to be in line with or slightly higher than their values. The following three items are an example of these aligned values and practices:

- Item 3: I reflect on my practice as a way of identifying professional learning needs (Values: M=3.38, SD=0.49; Practices: M= 3.49, SD= 0. 60)
- Item 9. I engage in reflective discussions of working practices with one or more colleagues: (Values: M=3.33, SD=0.57; Practices: M= 3.46, SD= 0. 68)
- Item 10: I engage in collaborative teaching and planning as a way of improving practice (Values: M=3.51, SD=0.64; Practices: M= 3.62, SD= 0. 96)

4.1.2 Organizational Learning Orientations

In section C, the focus of the questionnaire shifted from teacher learning orientations to school organizational practices and systems of support for teacher learning. As discussed in the literature review, an understanding of TPL is contingent on both teachers' learning orientations and the school organizational practices and systems supporting that learning (e.g., Opfer & Pedder, 2011). I also argued earlier that understanding patterns of alignment between teachers' values and practices reflects teachers' readiness and willingness to engage in professional learning activities. Likewise, patterns of alignment or dissonance between a school's organizational learning values and practices are an important dimension of the organizational learning culture, especially as that culture supports TPL.

As discussed in the literature review, understanding patterns of organizational learning orientations have implications for teachers' learning practices. More specifically, knowledge of prevailing organizational practices and values can be informative for school leadership to critically evaluate and further develop organizational

processes and strategies to support TPL at their school. Moreover, organizational supports for teacher's learning are important for supporting TPL at school but may involve, for some or even all teachers, encouraging them to learn not only inside but also outside the school. On the other hand, the incongruity between the organizational practices might indicate that at the practice level, the school did not have consistent and strong organizational systems that support teachers' professional learning due to several challenges and barriers preventing them from realizing what they value as important for effective teacher learning. According to Opfer and Pedder (2011), the knowledge of both the individual and organizational orientations is necessary to a full understanding of teachers' professional learning:

Thus, our conceptualization suggests that we cannot understand teacher learning by investigating these influences on teacher learning in isolation from one another. To understand and explain why and how teachers learn, we must consider how a teacher's individual learning orientation system interacts with the school's learning orientation system and how both of these systems together affect the activities. (p.393)

Furthermore, Section C of the questionnaire focused on organizational aspects of TPL , such as intrapersonal and interpersonal processes of learning (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). It was based on the premise that effective teacher learning is an indispensable part of a school culture where teachers, students and school leaders should be engaged in learning. Most importantly, teacher learning was perceived as a catalyst for school improvement. The following are the major areas covered by this section of the questionnaire:

- The senior leadership team communicating a clear vision of the school improvement plans
- The school improvement plan
- Staff development time
- Staff joint-planning time
- Formal training

- School systems
- Teacher-initiated networking
- Supporting teachers to develop skills
- Staff collaboration to plan teaching
- School leaders supporting teachers in sharing practice
- Experimenting with new ideas
- Informal learning opportunities
- Staff supporting each other in their learning
- Performance management processes and professional standards in relation to the school improvement plan

In section C, teachers were also asked to provide two types of responses to 24 items. In the first response, they were asked to express their perceptions of professional learning supports at their school. The second set of responses focused on the values they placed on each specific organizational practice; (i.e., how important teachers considered these organizational practices for creating opportunities for teachers to learn.) Teachers were asked to choose from the following response option related to organizational practices and coded on a four-point scale (i.e., *not true*, *rarely true*, *often true* or *mostly true*). Teachers were also asked to provide a second response about their values, illustrating the importance they attached to the different organizational practices affording opportunities for teachers to learn.

Table 4.4 presents means for values and practices for individual item responses on a four-point scale, as well as standard deviations and Cronbach Alpha (α).

Table 4.4

Organizational learning practices and systems

	N	Values			Practices		
Developing a sense of where we are going							
1. The senior leadership team in your school communicates a clear vision of where the school is going	39	3.79	0.46	.875	3.26	0.71	.841
2. Members of staff have a commitment to the whole school as well as to their department, key stage and/or year group	39	3.79	0.40	.873	3.38	0.63	.837
3. The senior leadership team promotes commitment among staff to the whole school as well as to the department, key stage and or year group	39	3.69	0.52	.875	3.59	1.06	.843
4. Members of staff have a good working knowledge of the school improvement plan	39	3.59	0.54	.898	3.28	0.79	.838
5. Members of staff see the school improvement plan as relevant and useful to learning and teaching	39	3.59	0.59	.895	3.69	3.26	.925
Providing formal supports for professional learning							
6. Staff development time is used effectively to realize school improvement priorities	39	3.82	0.97	.875	3.33	1.24	.842
7. Staff development time is used effectively in the school.	39	3.79	0.97	.876	3.31	0.69	.839
8. Teachers are encouraged to experiment with new ideas as a way of promoting professional growth	39	3.54	0.55	.895	3.13	0.89	.835
9. Formal training provides opportunities for staff to develop professionally	39	3.62	0.59	.883	2.92	0.92	.831
10. School leadership help teachers become more aware of professional standards	39	3.21	0.76	.833	3.36	0.48	.876
11. School leaders help teachers see how their personal professional learning goals relate to school improvement priorities	39	3.23	0.66	.833	3.41	0.63	.875
12. School leadership help teachers achieve their professional learning goals	39	3.13	0.73	.833	3.62	0.49	.873

Auditing expertise

13. Teachers are helped develop skills to assess students' work in ways that move their students on in their learning	39	3.28	0.64	.876	3.15	0.70	.836
14. Teachers are helped develop skills to observe learning as it happens in the classroom	39	3.54	0.50	.873	3.26	0.63	.837

Building social capital

15. Staff regularly collaborate to plan teaching	39	3.46	0.55	.873	3.49	.644	.840
16. If members of staff have a problem with their teaching, they usually turn to colleagues for help	39	3.28	0.72	.878	3.28	0.64	.837
17. Teachers suggest ideas or approaches for colleagues to try in class	39	3.46	0.55	.871	3.41	0.54	.839
18. Teachers make collective agreements with colleagues to test out new ideas	39	3.41	0.54	.873	3.13	0.73	.834
19. Teachers discuss openly with colleagues what and how they are learning	39	3.36	0.70	.877	3.15	0.77	.834
20. Staff frequently use informal opportunities to discuss how students learn	39	3.21	0.57	.875	3.15	0.81	.836
21. Staff offer one another reassurance and support	39	3.41	0.54	.875	3.26	0.75	.836
Supporting networking							
22. The school provides staff joint-planning time	39	3.31	0.69	.839	3.79	0.97	.876
23. Teacher-initiated networking is an integral element of staff development	39	2.67	0.86	.830	3.46	1.12	.873
24. School leaders (principal – head teachers – coordinators) support teachers in sharing practice with other schools through networking	39	2.82	0.88	.833	3.51	0.55	.877

I present here a summary account of the organizational factors that reflect underpinning dimensions of a school's organizational learning culture for promoting professional learning. The first factor, developing a sense where are we going, emphasizes the need for developing a school vision with clear long-term objectives in relation to which teachers can make sense of their professional learning, especially how it relates to the priorities of their school. The school leaders, whose job was to share this vision with all the staff, could also promote a sense of commitment to this vision as well as the school priorities and development plans. The second factor, providing formal supports for professional learning, points to the formal professional learning opportunities available to teachers. It is also concerned with teachers' use of time inside the school to achieve the school improvement priorities.

The third factor, auditing teachers' expertise, consists in schools developing evaluation system to identify teachers' strengths as well as PL gaps. Reflecting the importance of school culture in relation to TPL, the fourth factor, building social capital, focuses on the processes, structures and systems that promote a collaborative and supportive school environment conducive to learning. The final factor supporting networking points to powerful learning opportunities that can arise for teachers through networking either inside the school or between schools.

Examining the individual 24 means of the organizational values, it is noticeable that there is little variation between these means. One interpretation for the relatively consistent means of the organizational values (i.e., all the means were 3.00 or higher) is the fact that teachers might have a shared view about the importance of the organizational values and practices, which they think were crucial for creating opportunities for them to learn. This might also reflect an awareness of teachers' expectations from the school with respect to providing the necessary support to promote their learning.

A closer look at the summary item statistics of the organizational learning practices and systems illustrated in Table 4.5 shows that the levels of values of these organizational orientations were relatively higher than the levels of practices. However, despite these slight differences, both values and practices were closely aligned.

Table 4.5

Summary Item Statistics of the Organizational Learning Practices and Systems

	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Developing a sense of where we are going	39	3.71	.414	3.34	.560
Providing formal supports for professional learning	39	3.59	.344	3.17	.600
Auditing expertise	39	3.41	.511	3.20	.625
Building social capital	39	3.37	.426	3.26	.543
Supporting networking	39	3.59	.593	2.94	.728

More specifically, slight value-practice gaps were recorded for the following factors presented in the following order:

- Supporting networking (Values: M=3.59, SD=0.59; practices: M=2.94, SD=0.72)
- Providing formal supports for professional learning (Values: M=3.59, SD=0.34; practices: M=3.17, SD=0.60)
- Developing a sense of where we are going (Values: M=3.71, SD=0.41; practices: M=3.34, SD=0.56)
- Auditing expertise (Values: M=3.41, SD=0.51; practices: M=3.20, SD=0.62)

The most significant value-practice gap, however, was recorded for supporting networking, which as explained earlier, reflected activities based on external sources of learning. Unlike the other four factors, building social capital recorded the least value-practice gap, which might suggest that the school was consistent in promoting the social aspects of learning as well as the conditions supporting collaboration.

I have so far presented the quantitative data analyses in relation to teacher learning values and practices as well as the school practices and systems. In what follows, I provide a summary of the key findings of the quantitative analyses.

4.1.3 Questionnaire Key Findings

This chapter focuses on the quantitative analysis of teachers' individual learning as well as the school organizational orientations. The analysis yielded interesting data, which are further highlighted and discussed in relation to the qualitative data in the next chapter. The following are the four key findings for this section:

1. Teachers tended to record high levels of both values and practices for collaborative activities and learning orientation, which reflect the importance teachers attach to collaboration as a mode of learning. A closer examination of the differences between the recorded values and practices for the collaborative orientation shows that high levels of practice ($M=3.54$, $SD=0.50$) are ahead of similarly high levels of value ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.54$). These findings are further discussed in the final discussion chapter in relation to the qualitative data.

2. It is also worthwhile to note that apart from teachers' collaborative orientation, which is significantly higher than the other three learning orientations, teachers also tended to score high values and practice scores for external and internal learning activities and orientations. The data showed that the practices means of the internal ($M=3.36$) and external ($M=3.35$) orientations to learning were almost similar. This is consistent with other researchers, who considered links between internal and external orientations as "two distinctive dimensions that need to be held in balance if teachers are to optimise the quality of their professional learning." (Pedder & Opfer, 2013, p.12)

3. Teachers' lowest levels of both practices and values were recorded for activities that use research as a source of learning. These lower values and practices might reflect teachers' uncertainty about the importance, the relevance and the usefulness of engaging in research activities (i.e., either conducting research or reading published research). Such gaps seem to suggest individual as well as organizational challenges teachers encounter in conducting research. This is a real gap in the school's professional learning practices, especially that a considerable amount of research confirmed that teachers'

research is one of the characteristics of effective professional development (Cordingley et al., 2005; Ofsted, 2006; TDA, 2007; Pedder & Opfer, 2013).

4. Similar to the results of teachers' individual learning orientations, which showed that three orientations (internal, external and collaborative) were closely aligned, findings of the organizational orientations also showed insignificant gaps between values and practices, except for the organizational factor, supporting networking. Further discussion of these quantitative results will be presented in chapter 5 in relation to the qualitative data.

4.1.4 Feeding back the Quantitative Results to the School

As mentioned in chapter 3, the quantitative data were fed back to the school teachers and members of the school leadership team. The main objective was to help both the teachers and the school leaders use this data to reflect on their professional development activities, as well as the school's organizational learning cultures. In the following, I explore how this was communicated to the school as part of the feedback report aiming to raise awareness about the dissonance and gaps in the teachers' learning orientations.

In my discussion with the school principal about the purposes of this report, I also explained that such a report could be used in any staff meeting or professional development workshop to help teachers reflect on the implications of the survey. One rationale for such a procedure was that some teachers might lack awareness of gaps in their practices and values. Pedder and MacBeath (2008) suggested integrating tools for identifying teachers' orientations inside the school. Therefore, one of the objectives of my intervention was that by raising awareness about gaps between teachers' values and practices, this would promote discussions and debates among teachers and school leaders for critically evaluating current professional learning programmes, processes and supports as well as for effectively planning improvements.

Turning now to describe the procedures of the intervention, a focus group meeting was held with the teachers to discuss the survey results. Although not all the teachers were able to attend the meeting due to various work commitments, the number of attendees—15 teachers who took part in the workshop— was quite enough for meaningful discussion of the findings. When reporting about the feedback, I tried to focus on the most noticeable gaps in teachers’ values and practices. As explained earlier in the quantitative findings, since the only gaps and low practices were recorded for the research orientation, the discussion with the teachers centered on research. For the sake of a comprehensive discussion and reflection on the survey results, I organized the teachers into trios. I gave each group a copy of the report and asked them to compare the values and practices and then to focus on the results they found most interesting and relevant. Each group was given a handout to record their answers to the questions based on the group discussions.

In response to the question on how they explain that gap, teachers wrote the following reasons:

- The teaching workload is a major barrier to conducting research.
- Conducting research is time-consuming.
- Conducting research involves a lot of effort.
- Lack of training on research skills and methodology.
- Teachers read research but they don’t engage in research.
- Teachers lack awareness about the importance of research.
- Some teachers have some training during college or university, but they have never carried out a real action research.
- Teachers’ believe that their research studies will not be taken seriously.
- Teachers’ research recommendations are not considered as important as what they called tertiary researchers.

- Teacher research has no value.
- Reluctance to carry out research is due to lack of knowledge of statistics.
- Teachers feel it is difficult to apply research.
- Not all teacher researchers are competent in research skills.
- Not all teachers have an understanding of research.

The intervention's main purpose was to open up opportunities for teachers to inform school development of strategies for enhancing support for research-informed approaches to professional learning at the school. For this purpose, in the second part of the discussion, I asked the teachers to provide an account of the strategies and solutions they could suggest to address this gap. The following is a summary of the main suggestions articulated by the teachers in order to address the low levels they recorded for research orientation values and practices:

- Suggesting to include research in the school professional development plans.
- Organizing workshops about using action research in the school context.
- Raising awareness about the importance of research.
- Engaging teachers in small-scale research.
- Putting research in the evaluation criteria.

As mentioned earlier, the causes as well as the teachers' recommendations to address this gap were also reported and discussed with the school leadership, who were responsive, and decided to include this in their future meeting agenda with the teachers. Most importantly, the school principal was very cooperative in this respect as he called for a staff meeting with all the teachers who had taken part in the survey. Results pertaining to the organizational orientations, namely the gaps between the schools' organizational learning values and practices, were fully discussed with the school principal aiming to urge the school leadership to question and reflect on their current practices with regard to TPL. Pedder and MacBeath (2008) pointed out that apart from

being used as a research tool, dual-scale format questionnaires can be used as instruments of self-evaluation as they were used in the research I report here. Reflecting on the different areas raised by the questionnaire could provoke collective reflection on the school's current practices and policies. Without reflection and self-appraisal, learning disabilities would go undetected (Senge, 1990), and prevailing school policy and practice would continue without school self-evaluation or improvement.

4.1.5 Summary of the First Phase of Data Analysis

The aim of the quantitative analysis reported in this chapter is not to establish generalizable inferences from the quantitative data that can then be applied to a larger population. This is because, on the one hand, claims at this stage need to be provisional due to the limited scale of the study. On the other hand, it is premature to make any strong claims about the quantitative data at least before exploring the qualitative findings. The relevance and application of the findings from this study apply with most justification to the teachers who participated in the study and their school. The power of the analysis rests in the combined analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data sets developed for this study. The power of the analysis does not rest in the interpretations I can bring to the data as a researcher. The power of the analysis is rather in the opportunities provided to teachers and school leaders to interpret and make sense of patterns of values and practices developed through the quantitative analysis reported in this chapter when the data was fed back to them.

4.2 Qualitative Analyses

The purpose of the qualitative part of the current study is to probe deeply into professional learning issues already explored by the survey. The qualitative data analysis presents the key themes of the findings, gleaned from the teachers and school leaders' interviews, which were developed on the basis of the research aims and questions. Data collection instruments included the following:

1. Teachers' interviews.
2. School leaders' interviews.

Before proceeding with the data analysis, it is important to highlight two main things: the first, as explained in the sampling strategy, is that teachers were randomly selected to reflect different nationalities, career stages, age groups, years of teaching experience and gender. The other issue is that the semi-structured interviews were used with both groups of the research participants (i.e., the teachers and the school leaders.) Interviews were conducted with fourteen teachers and with four school leaders (i.e., the school principal, the academic vice principal, the student services vice principal and the headteacher). The school leaders' interview was specifically designed to explore TPL practices and policies from the perspective of the school leadership. Table 4.6 summarises the teachers' and school leaders' biographical information.

Table 4.6

Participants' biographical information

Name	Teacher Number	Subject	Years of Experience	Country	Interview Word Count	Interview Length
Abdullah	Teacher 1	Art	12	Jordan	5612	34:52
Amy	Teacher 2	EMT	10	Ireland	5353	38:37
Brian	Teacher 3	EMT	8	UK	5233	45:27
Christine	Teacher 4	EMT	13	USA	4920	31:39
Ibrahim	Teacher 5	Social Science	22	Jordan	4049	26:00
Leila	Teacher 6	ICT	1	UAE	9112	47:14
Monica	Teacher 7	EMT	6	USA	5890	35:19
Paul	Teacher 8	EMT	15	USA	4748	37:12
Richard	Teacher 9	EMT	2	Ireland	6436	46:01
Salah	Teacher 12	AMT	18	Egypt	4454	30:32
Salima	Teacher 11	AMT	11	UAE	4947	33:23
Samir	Teacher 13	Sport	18	Egypt	7057	45:44
Sheikha	Teacher 10	AMT	18	UAE	3476	23:38
Steve	Teacher 14	EMT	4	Ireland	5004	35:15
Headteacher	Headteacher		14	Ireland	7250	48:25
School principal	School principal		23	UAE	6265	35:15
Student services vice principal	Student services vice principal		19	UAE	9595	45:45
Academic vice principal	Academic vice principal		21	UAE	5757	32:48

As shown in Table 4.6, teachers represent different subjects, including English Medium Teachers (EMTs), who teach three subjects (i.e., English, math and science), Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs), who teach Arabic and Islamic Education, as well as other subjects like social sciences, art, music and physical education. The participants of the qualitative study are a group of female and male teachers, coming from six countries– Egypt, Ireland, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, all the school leaders come from the United Arab Emirates. As regards the length of the interviews, a total of 11 hours and 17 minutes were recorded, generating 105.158 words. Following the qualitative data collection, it took the research assistant a total of approximately 125 hours of transcriptions and translations from Arabic into English. The data generated from the teachers and school leaders provided information about teachers and professional learning practices, experiences and challenges, set within the context of ADEC New School Model and focused on the four research questions.

A thorough analysis of the interview transcripts led to the identification of four themes (Table 4.7), each of which was explored in the data analysis chapter. For the purposes of referencing and organization, the findings of the semi-structured interviews are structured by these four main themes:

1. Teachers' learning orientations.
2. Organizational learning practices and systems.
3. Challenges to TPL in the context of the New School Model.
4. Teachers' perceptions and interpretations of their learning in the school and regional contexts.

It is noticeable that the length of interviews varied significantly across the informants as teachers varied in their ability to articulate their ideas (e.g., Brian, Samir, Richard, Leila, Amy and the headteacher). This variability in length did not reflect variability in the richness and quality of informants' accounts. The factors contributing to this variability will be fully explored in the discussion chapter. During the qualitative

data analysis, relevant accounts, in the form of excerpts from informants, were included to provide evidence supporting the four themes. For the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were referred to in the data analysis by pseudonyms.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, some of the themes were informed by the questionnaire and the major themes in the professional learning literature, as well. Other themes were developed from the language, terms and meanings expressed by teachers and school leaders in their accounts, and identified through careful analysis of the interview transcripts. The developing themes were rooted in the data and developed through a rigorous and cyclical data analysis. The themes were compared across the questionnaire and the interviews in order to ascertain that they were consistently supported. Although a deductive mode of analysis, influenced by constructs and terms from the survey and literature, was a key strand of my approach to data analysis and interpretation, I also read through each transcript repeatedly adopting a more inductive attention to the terms and language used by different informants; this way, I was able to tease out important inferences and conclusions with reference to the terms and perspectives of my research participants. Table 4.7 maps the research questions, the themes and the sub-themes across the four sections, which reflect the key organizing constructs for the presentation of the data analysis that is the focus of this chapter.

Table 4.7

Research questions, themes and sub-themes

Section	Research Questions Themes and Sub-Themes	Themes and Sub-Themes
1. Teachers' learning orientations	Question 1: What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internal learning orientation ▪ Collaborative learning orientation ▪ External learning orientation ▪ Research orientation
2. Organizational learning practices and systems	Question 2: How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ADEC Policies ▪ School Improvement Plan ▪ Communicating a clear school vision ▪ Formal training: Tamkeen ▪ School orientation to learning model
3. Challenges to TPL	Question 3: What are the challenges and barriers to teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Culture ▪ The linguistic challenge ▪ Gender ▪ Group Dynamics in relation to TPL
4. Teachers' perceptions of their learning in the school and regional contexts	Question 4: How do teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers' conceptualization of learning ▪ Teacher Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teacher Informal learning

After explaining the qualitative data analysis method and procedures, the following section provides an illustration of the key themes presented in sequence.

4.2.1 Theme One: Teachers' Professional Learning Orientations

As mentioned in the literature review, I adopted Pedder and Opfer's (2013) four orientations to teacher learning: internal, external, collaborative and research. These orientations, defined earlier as "teachers' learning practices, values and the degrees of dissonance between them" (p. 540), guided a considerable part of the quantitative and the qualitative data analyses. It is worthwhile to mention that through my initial reading of the qualitative data I found resonance with the four orientations I utilized in the analysis of the survey data. However, more inductive sweeps were included to allow for the possibility of identifying themes, categories and accounts that fall outside or beyond the four orientations. Pedder and Opfer (2013) argued that these learning orientations are an essential part of a school's professional learning ecology. The pattern of alignment between these values and practices is both useful and informative in comprehending teachers' readiness to engage in a range of learning activities, which might lead to change in teachers' practices (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Working with these orientations could also be helpful to schools as they seek to develop understandings of their particular professional learning cultures further. As shown in Table 4.7, the first research question focused on teacher learning orientations. The following section elaborates these orientations from accounts of participants' interpretations, perspectives and experiences.

4.2.1.1 Internal orientation to TPL

The internal orientation focuses on the agency and responsibility of the individual teacher for changing their classroom practice. Teachers with an internal orientation to learning tended to focus on classroom-based activities, such as self-evaluation of their classroom practice, experimenting with practice, getting feedback from students about practice and reflection. Table 4.8 outlines the different learning activities reflecting the internal learning orientation as reported in the teachers' interviews.

Table 4.8

Learning activities reflecting the internal learning orientations

Internal Orientation	Learning Activities
Modifying practice in the light of evidence from self-evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using reports and grades as evaluation tools (Paul) ○ Comparing groups' performance against a set of outcomes set for the curriculum (Leila, Brian, Monica, Paul) ○ Utilizing lesson plan as an evaluation tool (Ibrahim) ○ Observing students and using surveys as evaluation strategies (Ibrahim, Paul, Sheikha) ○ Parent surveys (Ibrahim)
Teachers learning through practice and experimenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trying new ideas, such as "whole-brain learning" (Paul) ○ Experimenting with differentiation (Samir, Richard, Paul, Amy, Salima) ○ Working on a new curriculum/ modifying it (Samir, Leila, Paul) ○ Conducting a five-year project to enhance the teaching of Arabic (Abdullah)
Consulting pupils about how they learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student surveys in the form of drawings expressing students' levels of satisfaction: (Abdullah) ○ Observing students (All the participants)
Reflecting on practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reflecting on lessons and changing plans from lesson to lesson (Ibrahim, Monica, Amy, Salah, Salima) ○ Using grades and reports (Paul) ○ Reflecting on lesson plans (Ibrahim) ○ Reflecting on surveys/graphs (Ibrahim, Christine) ○ Using action research as a reflective tool (Richard) ○ Using a critical friend (Richard) ○ Developing a kid watching diary (Steve)

In highlighting the importance of reflection, Schön (1983) claimed that teachers are expert practitioners, who have vast repertoires of prior experiences and knowledge. They extensively draw on these previous experiences and use them constructively and creatively in response to the emerging problems and challenges. Osterman and

Kottkamp (2004) also argued that reflection could help teachers develop high levels of self-awareness about their performance. The data gleaned from the interviews revealed that among the internal orientations described above, reflection was identified as an important learning tool, which helped teachers develop awareness about the effectiveness of their practices. All the interviewed teachers in the current study said they reflected on their own practice. They also demonstrated that they utilized different reflective strategies. The following is a summary of the reflective techniques they used.

To reflect on his practice as well as observe students' performance, Steve developed "A Kid Watching Diary" with the purpose of enhancing students' writing and evaluating their performance. Abdullah used a different reflective activity in order to evaluate his teaching. He observed students and developed a simplified survey for them as well as their parents, to have a comprehensive feedback of his teaching practice. Christine elaborated extensively on reflection, considering it an important means of learning and development. She believed that her classroom could be a potential site for teacher learning. For this purpose, she used observation to obtain data on student achievement and then provide feedback to parents through graphic information. In the same context, Samir, a senior teacher who worked in the school for more than 18 years, also considered reflection a daily practice. He reflected on the lesson as a whole as well as on every objective of his lesson. He used this reflection to modify his future lesson plans. The teachers also talked about other reflective tools, such as action research and peer observation. Paul, for example, mentioned that he used peer observation as a reflective tool.

The most important thing in these observations is reflection. Even as the teacher who is giving the lesson, you can sit back and say; look, this went well. This is an area that I can improve. Also the teacher that's doing the observing can give feedback to the teacher as well. So, it works both ways. (Paul)

Central to the internal orientation to learning is experimentation with practice, which is often associated with trying out new ideas, strategies and techniques. When teachers test out their ideas or check the validity of these ideas with their students, they

subsequently attempt to share them with their colleagues. As a teacher who has been in the teaching profession for more than 25 years, I believe that learning takes place when teachers experiment with their practices and engage with the problems and challenges they encounter while teaching. As the qualitative data indicated, most of the informants reported they experimented with their practice in different forms. Some teachers mentioned that they used the ideas and strategies they learnt from their colleagues in the observation sessions to try them out in their classrooms. Some of them used a new curriculum, like Abdullah, Christine and Leila, while others tried new ideas, approaches, strategies, and projects (e.g., Samir, Richard, Abdullah, Leila and Steve). These findings concur with the literature postulating that experimenting is deeply rooted in learning theories such as constructivism and experiential learning (Stoll, Harris & Handscomb, 2012).

Another aspect of the internal orientation to learning includes modifying practice in light of evidence from self-evaluation. Compared to reflection and experimentation, self-evaluation as a learning tool was less frequently used as the qualitative data suggested. As indicated in Table 4.8, teachers used various self-evaluation tools, such as reports, student or parent surveys, student observations and lesson plans. Interestingly enough and from a second reading of the transcripts, I noticed that the word *evaluation* was used in teachers' accounts in different contexts. In order to understand and explore more of the surrounding context and the use of the term by different participants in association with other terms, phrases, ideas and recurring themes, I resorted to NVivo search queries. Running the text search query, I found that *evaluation* was repeated 138 times, predominantly with words like *own* and *personal* in the context of the self-evaluation as highlighted in figure 5.1, which is consistent with the quantitative findings showing teachers both valuing ($m=3.62$) and using self-evaluation in their classroom practices ($m=3.54$).

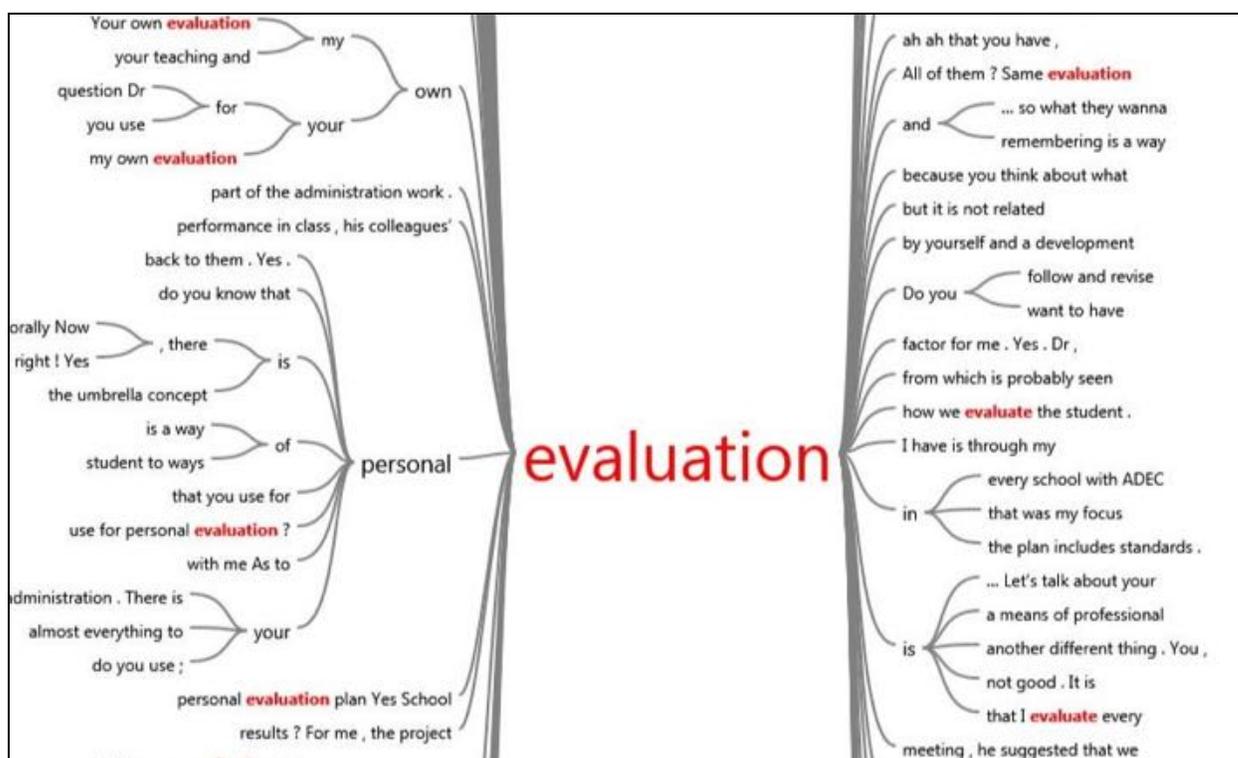


Figure 4.1. NVivo search query of the term evaluation.

Finally, consulting students about how they learn most effectively came as the least frequent learning activity as suggested by the qualitative data. Although some teachers strongly argued for using students as a potential feedback tool in their classroom practices, the data indicated that only a few of them did so.

4.2.1.2 External Learning Opportunities

The external orientation to TPL is defined as a tendency of learning that “is outward-looking, drawing on a range of resources that are external to a teacher’s direct classroom teaching environment” (Pedder & Opfer, 2013, p.11). External orientation in this study took many forms, such as learning from a critical peer from outside the school, inviting a senior teacher or expert, attending external conferences and workshops. In response to the question about PD partnerships or ventures with other schools, the school principal indicated that he had good relationships with neighbouring schools, which enabled him to exchange expertise by sending teachers to attend observation lessons. The headteacher also confirmed that they had visited four schools in the last two years, and that every teacher had the opportunity to visit one school once a term. The headteacher found these partnerships beneficial because they broke the isolation, which was characteristic of schools in the UAE as he reported:

I think these partnerships are very important for a sense of community because unfortunately in the UAE, the ministry isn’t strong and everybody works in isolation. It is very negative. If you have a good idea, you do not want to share it with somebody else because you want yours to be the best. But normally, if you have a good idea you share it with everybody so that all the schools benefit from it.

The interviews also revealed that six teachers attended external PD events organized by ADEC. Table 4.9 outlines the events and workshops attended by the six teachers as well as the areas of development.

Table 4.9

External professional learning opportunities offered to teachers

Teacher	Event Outside the School	Topic or Area of Development	Duration
Steve	Event delivered by ADEC	Literacy programme	A three-day training
Salima	Attending a conference organized by ADEC	Designing exam questions	A two-day training
	Attending a training organized by ADEC	Creative writing	A one-day training
Paul	Attending an event organized by ADEC	Not specified	Not specified
Richard	Attending a training	Teaching English	Not specified
	Studying for a diploma	Education leadership	Not specified
Salah	Attending a conference	Related to subject matter	Not specified
Sheikha	Attending a training	Dealing with students Improving students' levels	Not specified

Elaborating on the external opportunities, Richard stated that the school had sent him for three days of training in 2014. Steve also said that since he was on a reduced schedule (teaching half the number of classes usually scheduled for a full-time teacher), he had the opportunity to attend PD courses outside the school during the year. He remembered that one of the courses he had attended was on literacy programmes delivered by ADEC. The programmes were based on a book published by an Australian publisher for ADEC schools. Later, Steve and his colleague came together and presented back to the staff, which was a very beneficial experience as he affirmed. Salima also talked about another experience, where she attended a professional development workshop about designing test questions. Reflecting on this experience, Salima argued that she learnt considerably from this workshop, and therefore wanted to share what she had learnt with other colleagues.

That is when I attended training about designing exam questions. After probably one or two days, I met Arabic female teachers because the training was from grade 4 to grade 12. So, I met grade 4 and 5 teachers. That is the Arabic female teachers. So I shared what I learnt from this training with the teachers. (Salima)

Another important external activity reported in the data was engaging with a critical friend from a different institution. Richard, a junior teacher, who had been teaching for five months only, used a critical friend from Ireland whom he described as very supportive and helpful. Richard explained that he communicated his practice to his friend on a regular basis, notably from three to five times a week. He was very enthusiastic about the idea and he wanted to see this initiative implemented at school. Elaborating on this experience, Richard said that the feedback he received from his friend helped him improve the quality of his instruction, as well as reflect on his practice.

I think you're reflecting... You're reflecting on what areas you can focus on, on areas of best practice that he might have, he could share with me. He will give me a constructive understanding. He is not someone who is going to agree with me the whole time. He'll disagree and say: look, you were right, you were wrong in this opinion. So, I think a critical friend is essential for the whole staff. And I think if you have one within the staff, it's ah a very positive thing. (Richard)

Richard's account is consistent with the literature, which maintains that working with a critical friend is an interestingly valuable learning tool, as it allows the opportunity to provide and solicit feedback on one's practice. Richard was the only teacher in the school who seemed to have a critical friend. Having worked for a long time as both an elementary and secondary school teacher, I can claim that the notion of critical friendship is not popular among teachers in current context. The lack of these forms of professional learning will be discussed thoroughly in relation to the local context in the discussion chapter. The next section explores the collaborative orientation and its impact on the teachers' practice, the student learning and the school improvement.

4.2.1.3 Collaborative Orientation to TPL

Collaboration was identified in the literature review as one of the four teachers' orientations to learning (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). The qualitative data suggest a variety of modes of collaboration, including co-teaching, joint planning, carrying out joint research, teachers' reflective discussions about their classroom practices and peer-observation. Examining teachers' interview accounts in relation to collaboration, there was consensus among the teacher participants about the importance of working collaboratively. Figure 4.2, presents teachers' perspectives in relation to collaborative professional learning.

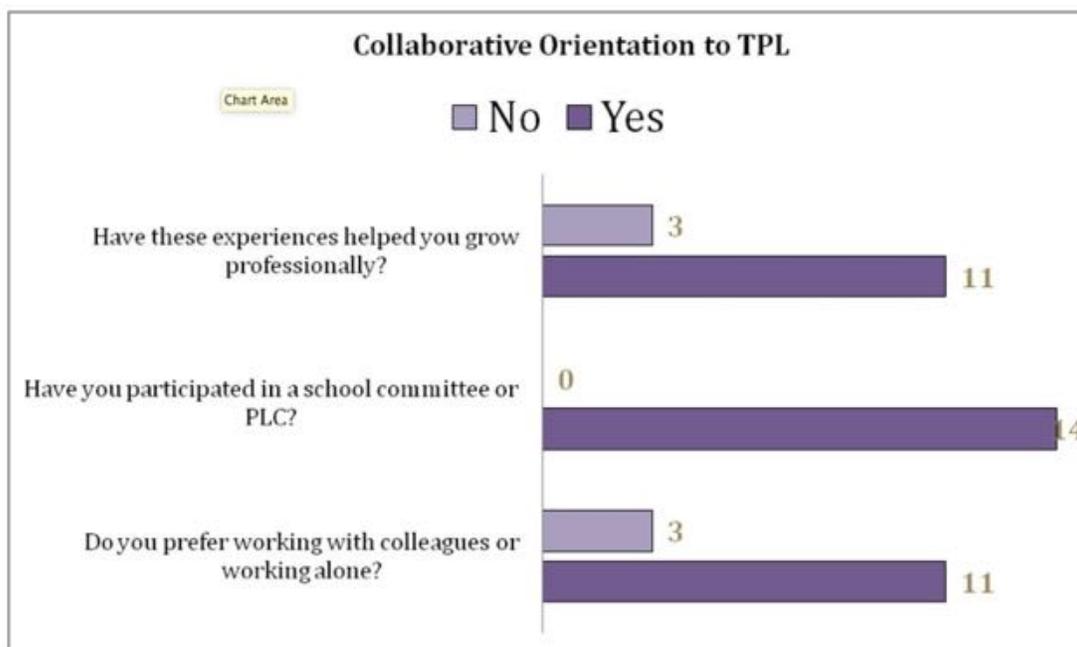


Figure 4.2. Collaborative orientation to TPL.

As Figure 4.2 shows, 11 out of 14 teachers said they preferred working with colleagues to working alone. With regard to the impact of collaboration on teachers' practices and student learning, 11 out of the 14 informants demonstrated that it had a positive impact. The NVivo Word Frequency search—(Figure 4.3)—also revealed that

the word *collaborate*, its derivations as well as other similar words with connotative meaning were recurrent across the data as they were repeated 448 times.

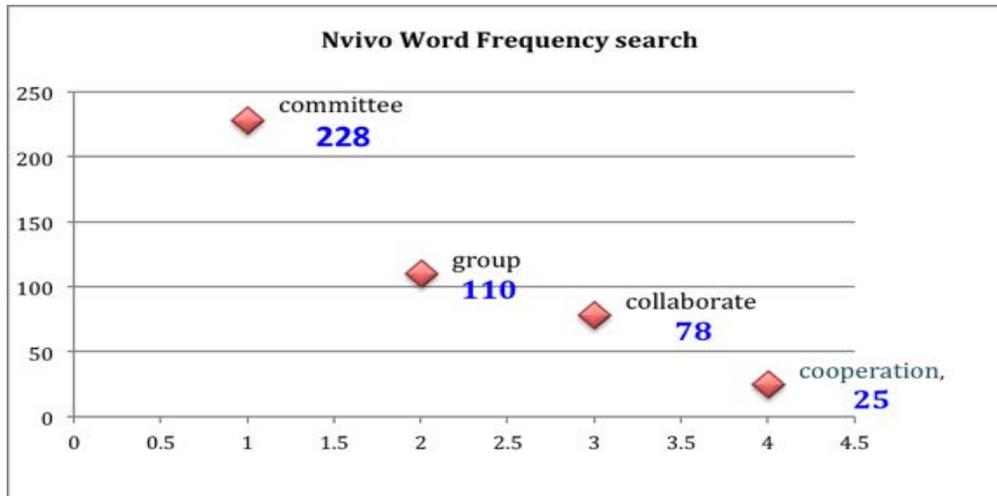


Figure 4.3. Recurrence of the word collaborate and its derivations in the data.

Paul found the collaborative culture inside the school very beneficial. Comparing the current school, where he worked for five years, and the school where he used to work, Paul said he used to work individually like all the other teachers at his previous school. Paul was a teacher from the United States, who had a degree in computer science and another teacher certification. He had taught for fifteen years before he came to the UAE. He had also worked as a computer lab manager, technology coordinator, a home teacher as well as a 3rd, 4th and 5th grade teacher. In the current school, Paul stated that teachers were encouraged to work with their colleagues, not only who taught the same subject but also with those who taught other subjects, such as Arabic teachers. Paul found collaboration particularly useful for teachers coming from the West:

I started working with colleagues. You get more ideas and they can be really (...) really helpful. They may be teaching in one way and that coming across...when you talk to somebody and they tell you a technique to use and you know it is beneficial. So, as teachers especially from the West, you know, I used to close

the door to my own lesson plans to my own. But it's very beneficial in a situation to get input from others. (Paul)

In a similar vein, Paul was engaged in a project with the Arabic co-teacher to develop the writing skills of students in Arabic and English. His collaborative experiences also included working in the safety committee to provide a safe learning environment. Paul also mentioned that teachers of English and Arabic usually met to discuss what they could teach together like choosing stories with similar themes, which was very beneficial to students. As an example of this collaboration between EMTs and AMTs, Monica, an American teacher, stated that she was part of a project aiming to develop the writing skills of students in Arabic and English. She collaborated with another teacher working on the same project, which as she reported, had a positive impact on student learning. Monica also contended that it was motivating for students to see their teachers working collaboratively. The effect of collaborating with other colleagues was succinctly put forth by Brian as following: "I like collaboration and then I like to collaborate and then go modify to my style... what can work for one teacher can work in a different way with another teacher" (Brian).

Teachers also spoke about the positive effects of collaborative projects. In response to the question about whether these collaborative experiences helped them grow professionally, 11 out of 14 teachers said yes. Table 4.10 illustrates examples of these collaborative projects as well as a summary of the informants' other collaborative experiences and their impact.

Table 4.10

Modes of teachers' collaboration

Mode of collaboration	Teachers	Impact of Collaboration	Beneficiaries of this Impact
Formal and informal peer observation	Richard, Salah, Abdullah, Sheikha, and Christine	Exchanging expertise and ideas from colleagues	Samir, Leila, Brian, Steve, Salah, and Christine

Joint lesson planning	Ibrahim, Monica, Paul, Amy, and Steve	Discussing lesson plans	Ibrahim
Formal and informal teachers' conversations	Samir, Ibrahim, Brian, Richard, Monica, Paul, Amy, Steve, Salima, and Christine	Getting more ideas about students and about classroom management	Ibrahim, Monica, Paul, Amy, and Steve
Co-teaching	Amy and Sheikha	Getting new ideas and perspectives from different members or teachers	Samir, Brian, Sheikha, and Christine
Curriculum development	Samir, Leila, and Brian	Clarifying and implementing school vision	Leila and Brian
Strategic plan meetings	Ibrahim, Brian, Richard, Paul, Amy, Salah, Abdullah, and Christine	Finding solutions to problems	Samir
Group planning	Ibrahim, Salima, Christine	Bringing ideas from different subjects	Steve and Salah
Teachers' formal and informal meetings	Samir and Salima	Observing an excellent teacher in action	Richard, Steve, and Salah
Leading joint workshops and presentations	Samir, Richard, and Salima	Growing professionally	Samir, Leila, Brian, Richard, Abdullah, and Christine
Joint projects	Samir, Monica, Paul, Amy, and Salah	Feeling more empowered	Brian
		Providing advice and support	Richard and Brian
		Training and supporting other teachers	Leila
		It was motivating for students to see their teachers work collaboratively.	Monica

Table 4.10 also shows that teachers found these collaborative projects useful for themselves, for the students and for the school. Monica compared these collaborative projects to Tamkeen training and reported that she felt more empowered, both in group planning and in collaborating with her colleagues. Although, she recognized that collaborative work had its limitations and challenges, Monica mentioned that she was lucky working with the two Arab teachers, who, as she described them, were very cooperative. On the other hand, Steve contended that the classroom could be quite isolating for a teacher. Therefore, a supportive team providing advice and support could be very useful.

If you're talking with teachers and you say I had this problem today, it could be with behaviour, it could be with a certain topic you are teaching, they will be able to say: oh I have the same problem or I did it this way. You know the expression "knocking heads". You're helping each other with your ideas. If somebody has a problem, I may have a solution for them. If I have a problem, they may have a solution for me. (Steve)

Steve's use of the expression "knocking heads" provided a strong metaphor to exemplify how things can transpire when a group of professionals put their heads together to collaborate and learn about one another's practice. Steve's statement is consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1991) argument that learning occurs as a result of individuals' interaction and participation in communal and social activities inside the workplace. Like any other learners, teachers are social beings, who learn by interacting with their peers, sharing and receiving feedback about their practices through either formal or informal social encounters inside the school. There was also some evidence from the qualitative data that collaboration was not limited to teachers from the same subjects, but also extended to other subjects. Salima, a social science teacher and subject coordinator, argued that she did not only collaborate with Arabic teachers, but also with other teachers from other subjects. The following two excerpts, which come from two teachers teaching different subjects, provide confirmatory evidence of these collaborative initiatives across subjects.

I am the coordinator of Arabic language. I meet sometimes the Islamic teacher, social sciences teacher and English teacher every week. We set the week plan for next week. That is we meet for this reason. I meet the English teacher, say, once per term. We set a plan for the whole term. (Salima)

I know there should be more collaborative work between Arabic and English staff, because if I have two ways in the morning and the Arabic teacher has two ways in the afternoon, even though they're teaching a completely different language, we're still teaching the same children; I mean the same goals to teach them as we have in the curriculum to deliver whether it be in English or in Arabic. (Steve)

Central to teachers' collaborative work were the school committees. The school principal explained that the objective of forming school committees was basically to achieve the school improvement plan. In response to the question about whether they participated in one of the school committees this year (Figure 4.2), all the teachers responded with yes. Some teachers also reported positive outcomes as a result of their participation in school committees. Table 4.11 outlines the names, aims and reported benefits of these committees.

Table 4.11

Schools committee names, aims and reported benefits

Name of the Committee	Name of the Head(s) of the Committee	Members	Aim(s) of the Committee	Reported Benefits
1. Assessment for Learning Committee	Richard	Six teachers representing different subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To provide students with different forms of assessment ○ To work collaboratively with colleagues in order to address assessment issues at the school 	○ Learning assessment strategies implemented in the classroom

2. Best Practises Committee	Christine	Four teachers (Salima, Amy, Christine, and Abdullah)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To improve the curriculum. ○ To improve assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing best practises among teachers in the school ○ Benefits were reported for both teachers and students
3. Behaviour Committee	Steve	Both EMT and AMT teachers (e.g., Steve)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To improve student behaviour in the school ○ To establish a positive behaviour support system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No benefit was reported
4. Curriculum Development Committee	Abdullah	Six teachers representing different subjects (e.g., Abdullah)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To design courses that meet the curriculum objectives and the school and the school vision ○ To achieve the required outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Weekly beneficial meetings to plan curricular activities and discuss issues related to the committee ○ Sharing ideas, perspectives and suggestions to improve the curriculum.
5. Gifted Students Committee	Sheikha	Three teachers (e.g., Sheikha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To identify gifted students ○ To provide programmes, learning activities and materials for the gifted students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No benefit was reported
6. Safety Committee	Leila, Paul, and Salah	Five teachers (e.g., Leila)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To improve safety and raise students' awareness of the importance of safety in their school ○ To secure a healthy and safe building that is supportive of student learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More collaboration ○ Positive impact on students, as they are regularly provided with information and training on how to keep their school and environment safe
7. Special needs Committee	Amy and Salima	Five teachers (e.g., Amy and Salima)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To support students with learning needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No benefit was reported
8. Student Personal Development	Samir and Ibrahim	Teachers from different subjects (e.g., Ibrahim)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To foster a sense of belonging among students ○ To urge students to participate in national and cultural events ○ To build and improve rapport among students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No benefit was reported
9. Leadership Committee	Monica	Two English teachers and two Arabic teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To follow up policies of school improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No benefit was reported

10. Strategic Plan Committee	Salah	Salah Members representing different subjects	To create school plans in accordance with ADEC strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supporting all the other committees ○ Realizing the school vision
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Recounting his positive experience with these committees, Salah introduced himself as a member of the Strategic Plan Committee, whose main objective was to realize the school vision. Salah considered his committee the overarching committee, as well as the largest one because it included teachers from different subjects, and because it was related and dependent on all the other committees. Sheikha, who talked positively of school committees, reported that she participated in three committees, and that she was very enthusiastic about her work at the head of the Gifted Students Committee, in particular because she felt she was skilful in working with gifted students. But unfortunately, she did not have enough time to prepare materials for them.

Paul was a member of the Help and Safety Committee, which aimed to promote a safe learning environment for all the students as well as to raise awareness about the importance of safety inside the school. Commenting on his involvement with the committee, Paul said it was a very beneficial experience. He also added that he was fortunate to be a member of the committee team, which, according to him, had a “good team of leaders”, with a clear vision. Paul also explained that thanks to one bilingual teacher in the group, his job was made easy with the other Arabic-speaking teachers. Furthermore, Monica mentioned that she was part of a committee that took care of the English and math resources room. She also worked with two Arabic teachers and an English teacher in joint lesson planning. Reporting some of the benefits of collaboration with other colleagues, Monica thought that it was a good idea to work with other teachers because it helped her learn from her colleagues and grow professionally by being exposed to different perspectives, different ideas, as well as enabling her to look at things school-wise.

Another aspect of teacher collaboration is peer observation. The literature review suggests that peer observation promotes an atmosphere of open dialogue and

discussion of teaching practices, especially if the peer observation activity is skilfully planned, structured and carefully focused on specific areas of practice. The semi-structured interviews in the current study revealed that teachers held positive views regarding peer-observation as almost all of them liked to be observed. Steve and Richard, for example, found peer observation an opportunity to access other colleagues' classes and benefit from them.

We don't often get the opportunity to watch other teachers teach and each teacher has a different method, a different way. You'll automatically be sitting watching other teachers, you pick up a few nice simple ideas for your classroom behaviour, for questioning, for you even pick up ah... some technology ideas, you know! (Steve)

For example, if the teacher has a weak point, say, science or art or music, whatever might be your English, maths, they're given the opportunity: look, I'd like to go and see that teacher. That's observing teachers on a continuous basis. It should be the way gone forward. Whether it's easy from an administrative point of view, I guess someone needs to come to your class, if it's not a free period you're observing. (Richard)

Salah, a music teacher, asserted that he was used to attending music lessons with teachers of the same subject, and with teachers of other subjects as well. When asked about the aim of attending lessons of a different subject, Salah said he attended other lessons with the art teacher because he did not see a big difference in how these subjects were taught. Sheikha also explained that she often attended peer-observation classes with other subjects, especially with the teachers of Arabic and ICT. Sheikha believed that peer observation helped her and her colleagues acquire new experiences. It was also an opportunity for her to see how her colleagues evaluate students, how they manage their classes, and how they explain the lesson. In addition, Sheikha indicated that these initiatives, often taken by the teachers themselves had great impact on her students.

Likewise, Richard affirmed that he attended many lessons within the school. Recounting one of his peer observation lessons, he said that he wanted to observe specific teachers because he wanted to learn how these teachers deal with particular issues. Finally, describing peer observation as an effective learning experience, Monica considered it insightful as it gave her the opportunity to know how other colleagues address problems and issues often encountered at school. Bringing these solutions to one's class, Monica maintained, was empowering.

There is a lot of sense when if I would pick up a problem and just try again an idea of somebody else who dealt with that or you know... For instance, last year we had the classroom management issue. I didn't have a formal approach. The positive point is watching another teacher doing that and seeing the success. Then I was able to bring that to my room. (Monica)

Likewise, all the interviewed school leaders showed great support for peer observation. The academic vice principal, who was directly involved in organizing peer observation sessions inside the school, believed that peer observation should be carefully planned. For example, he suggested that teachers should have clear objectives and rationale for peer observation sessions.

The best thing, I think, the best thing is that the teacher particularly knows the motive behind the visit. For what is happening in some schools is that the teachers' visits are aimless. The teachers are not made aware why they are observing the other teacher. (Academic vice principal)

The Academic vice principal further elaborated on the effectiveness of peer observation, and maintained that it should be effectively monitored in a way that could yield real benefits for the teachers, such as exchanging teaching strategies and ideas. The headteacher also emphasized the importance of peer observation, and explained that classroom observation was conducted systematically inside the school. After each observation, "shared meetings", as he described them, were organized in order to discuss what they had learnt and what they could use in their classrooms. He also mentioned that

although this was primarily done with the teachers of English, the teachers of Arabic were sometimes invited. The headteacher explained that the post-observation stage was the most important in peer observation, since what made these observations effective, he elaborated, was teachers' feedback. For this purpose, he explained that during these observation lessons, all teachers used their iPads to take notes and record comments, so as to share them later with him.

It is also worthy of note that peer observation and formal and informal discussions, as ways of sharing ideas and practices, are not the only aspects of collaborative learning. Indeed, collaborative learning also involves engaging teachers in collaborative research, where a group of teachers decides to examine aspects of their practice through small-scale research, such as action research. However, the study findings showed that teachers did not participate in joint research. This lack of teacher engagement in research is reported in the next section.

4.2.1.4 Research Orientation

As opined by Pedder and Opfer (2013), the research orientation includes three learning activities, i.e., reading research reports as a source for improving practice, relating what works in practice to research findings, and modifying practice in the light of published research evidence. Despite the evidence from the literature confirming the effectiveness of research as a teacher learning tool, the qualitative data demonstrated that very few teachers conducted research, which was a real gap compared to the other learning orientations. The student services vice principal also conceded that this was a real concern, as teachers did not meet this expectation. More specifically and according to the analysed data, only two teachers were involved in doing research. Paul, for example, mentioned that he conducted an online research, which he considered a form of informal learning. He also reported that it was on brain learning. For this purpose, he applied different techniques and activities into his classroom, to integrate motion in relation to the brain. Likewise, Richard, a junior teacher, confirmed that he was always doing

research online. During the current year, he carried out action research about formative assessment and emotional intelligence, which was part of his committee work. He indicated that he shared the research reports with his colleagues.

Finally, the qualitative data also suggested that teachers felt a lack of support from the school for conducting teacher research. When asked about whether she conducted research, Sheikha said the school administration did not ask them to do. However, it is important to mention that teachers' views regarding research revealed two issues. The first was connected with the lack of teachers' initiative in researching their practice; the second, with the lack of the school's support for research. These findings seem to corroborate evidence in the professional learning literature suggesting that teachers recorded lower levels of both values and practices for the research orientation to CPD in a UK context (McCormick et al., 2008). All these findings will be further discussed in relation to the quantitative data in the next chapter of this study. I turn in the next section to present a summary of major findings from the first theme.

4.2.1.5 Summary of Findings about Teachers' Professional Learning Orientations

The first part of this chapter presented data about teachers' four orientations to learning: internal, external, collaborative and research. The qualitative data revealed that teachers held positive attitude towards collaboration and engaged in different collaborative learning activities, which took many forms, such as peer observation, group planning, formal and informal teachers' conversations, co-teaching, formal and informal meetings, joint project, etc. There was evidence from the interviews showing that teachers resorted to each other when immediate solutions to problems and challenges (e.g., managing behaviour, teaching strategies, etc.) were sought. This had a significant impact on both teachers and students as indicated in the qualitative data.

There was also evidence in the qualitative data that many teachers engaged with the external learning activities, such as learning from a critical friend from outside the school, inviting a senior teacher or expert, attending external conferences and workshops. With respect to the internal orientation, teachers also reported several examples where they incorporated internal learning activities into their practice. Finally, the qualitative data revealed that teachers were not engaging in research, which constitutes a significant gap in teachers' professional development. Teachers mentioned several reasons, such as teaching workload, lack of time, lack of school support and lack of recognition. Although school leaders seemed to be cognisant of the importance of research as articulated by the school principal and the student services vice principal, they seemed to lack strategies to promote these activities.

4.2.2 Theme Two: Organizational Learning Practices and Systems

This part aims to develop qualitative understandings of organizational policies and structures supporting TPL. More specifically, I will look at the second research question, intended to elicit information on the extent to which ADEC New School Model supports TPL. For this purpose, I will first start by explaining whether or not the school leadership communicated a clear vision. After that, I will explain how school leaders help teachers realize school improvement priorities through the school improvement plan. I will then outline ways the school attempts to link teacher professional learning to aspects of school management, evaluation and reviews. Finally, I will present data related to ADEC's formal PD programme, Tamkeen.

4.2.2.1 Communicating a clear school vision

With respect to PD organizational support and systems, the major assumption which guided this research study was that effective TPL is necessarily supported and advocated by a strong school culture with a clear vision. The literature suggests that the school vision provides clarity of purpose for what the school aims to achieve; it raises teachers' awareness of the school's available resources, as well as the gaps and the strategies to address them. Moreover, having a clear vision of where the school is heading and what it is trying to achieve enables teachers to have a shared sense of direction and a shared mission to accomplish. This would enhance teachers' motivation and awareness of both the relevance and importance of their learning. Accordingly, the data in this section of the chapter demonstrated the extent to which the senior leadership team was trying to communicate a shared vision among teachers to foster commitment to the school development priorities. Whether there was communication between the senior leadership team and teachers to realize the school vision will also be explored.

The frequent visits I paid to the school made me notice a written vision displayed at the school entrance. However, it seems from teachers' accounts that the school leadership was not doing enough to communicate this vision to school teachers. As

Figure 4.4 indicates, only 27% of the informants thought that the school senior leadership expressed a clear school vision.

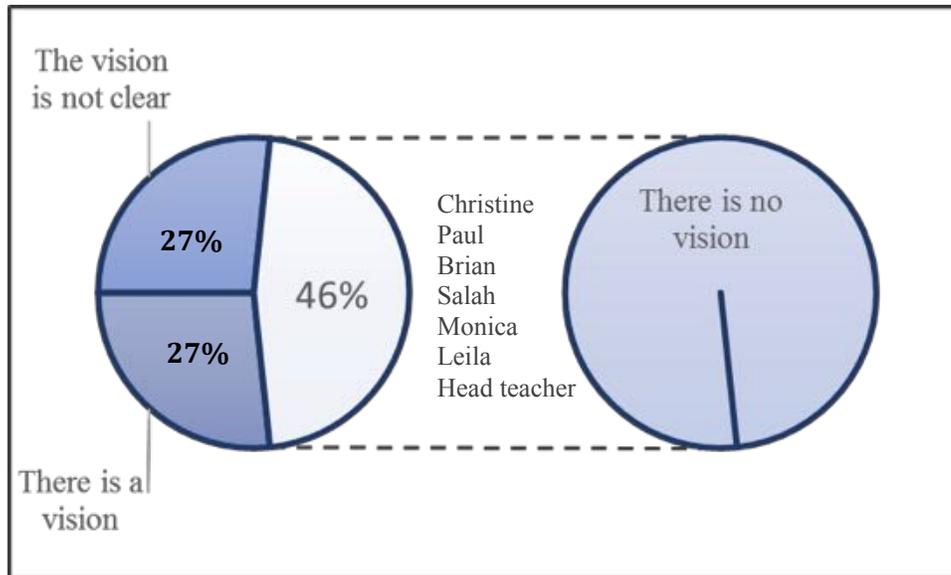


Figure 4.4. Teachers' views about the school vision.

Amy, who thought that the school had a vision, explained that the senior school leaders made them aware of this vision at the beginning of the year, and they kept reminding them of it during the committee meetings they attended. She added that they were trying seriously to communicate a clear school vision, and to convey the importance of achieving the objectives of the school improvement plan. On the other hand, four teachers contended that although there was a school vision, it was not clear enough. Christine, for example, said that she was not aware of the school vision. Then, she contended that there might be a vision on paper, but was not clear enough. Steve also explained that the school leaders communicated a vision, but it was not clear and focused enough:

It is and it isn't. I suppose in small areas, week by week, meeting by meeting, they are letting us know about their plan and how they are going to achieve it. But I don't think it is made clear that it's to fulfil that school improvement. I

don't think... Maybe it's... I don't think it's a document that's focused on too much. (Steve)

As indicated in figure 4.4, the majority of teachers (i.e., Christine, Ibrahim, Leila, Monica, Paul, Salah, Salima, Sheikha, and the headteacher) thought that the school leaders had not communicated a clear vision. Salima argued that the school administration was responsible for explaining and communicating this vision to teachers. She also confirmed that the other teachers of the same subject did not understand the school vision. She attributed this to the lack of time, and of explanation and support on the part of the school leaders. Probably one of the strongest statements came from Sheikha, a local teacher, who expressed her frustration at being misinformed about the school vision:

We have a vision but we don't know anything about this vision. That is to say even at the beginning of the year, the school organizes a meeting for us. Till now, there has been no official meeting in the school to tell us about the school vision, about the things they want. Everything we have is our personal effort. There is nothing from the school itself. And the day of the evaluation, they evaluated us based on the school vision without informing us, without meeting us, without telling us. At the end, we have known that the school has a vision and we have to apply it. (Sheikha)

Comparing the current school with her old school, Sheikha said that in the former school, the principal used to emphasize the school vision, which was posted at the school entrance and in corridors, in every room and in every class. This was not the case in the current school, Sheikha maintained. The headteacher also thought that there was a vision inside the school. However, he argued that neither the teachers nor the school leaders themselves were aware of this vision:

We have a school vision, a mission that is changed two years ago. Its headlines are in our school improvement plan. If I ask all the teachers in my school what is

the school vision, none of them will answer. If you ask the school leadership team in my school, I don't think you will get an answer. (The headteacher)

Central to communicating a shared school vision is the teachers' awareness of ADEC's PD and development plans and policies. It is worthwhile to mention, here, that the school had no written professional development policy and it follows, in this respect, ADEC PD policies. These policy documents are circulated every year to schools via emails or hard copies. As the Figure 4.5 indicates, the qualitative data suggested that only 43% of the teachers were aware of ADEC's PD policies and plans.

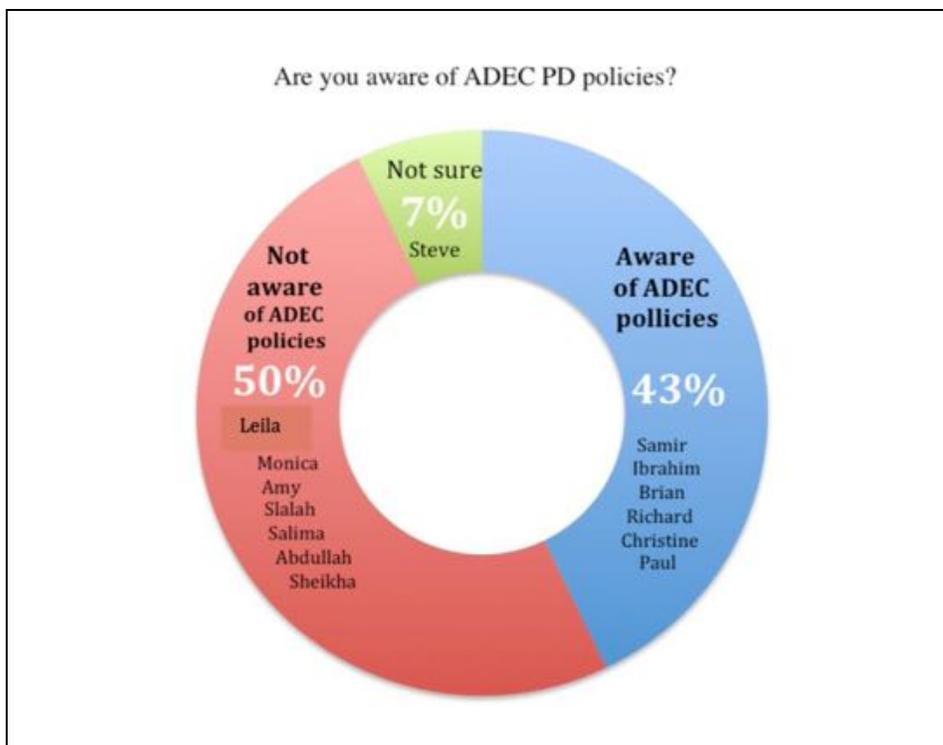


Figure 4.5. Teachers' awareness of ADEC PD policies.

In response to the question about teachers' awareness of ADEC PD policies, 7 out of 14 teachers (Abduallah, Amy, Leila, Monica, Salah, Salima, and Sheikha) said they were not aware of professional development policies. Steve, for example, mentioned that there was so considerable amount of requirements on paper work that he

could not identify the school priorities. On the other hand, Paul indicated that he had a vague idea as he only skimmed the policies document once.

The following section explores another aspect of the organizational learning, which is the school improvement plan (SIP). I will specifically attempt to answer whether the SIP's priorities are taken into consideration in teachers' personal plans.

4.2.2.2 School Improvement Plan

According to ADEC literature, the school improvement plan is defined as a plan aiming to help schools realize ADEC strategic goals by developing its teachers, the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the school resources and facilities. The headteacher asserted that professional development was tightly linked to teacher evaluation. He further stated that teachers were evaluated on four areas in their individual reports. Accordingly, teachers usually picked up the areas in which they were underperforming and used them to develop their PD priorities.

When asked about the school improvement plan, teachers expressed mixed views. Some teachers said they had great knowledge of this plan (e.g., Christine, Paul, and Salah). They also found the SIP relevant and very useful to both teaching and learning. Christine, for instance, thought she was successful in improving the areas she had written on her personal improvement plan:

That [SIP] was one of them that is why I worked. I thought about the data and how to really see and also how to differentiate instruction. I worked really hard on that this year and I think I did an excellent job that's my own opinion (laughing) and based upon the observations. I think they [school leaders] saw that as well. But I did a lot of work. (Christine)

Salah mentioned that both teachers and school leaders worked together to set a plan specifying the areas and activities teachers should improve. Paul also argued that Tamkeen experts spent time with the administration to align their PD programmes with

the school improvement plan. The school senior leaders, as Paul explained, also expected to see evidence of the impact of these professional development programmers on teachers' practices inside the classrooms.

When we work on our professional development plans, then we set goals for expectations that are (...) if I should be struggling to achieve. So by the end of the semester I should have this done. I have evidence of this. I should have proof of this that I am actively involved in the development progress. (Paul)

On the other hand, some teachers (Amy, Brian, Monica, Salima, and Steve) found the school improvement plan vague and ineffective. Monica, for example, seemed to have an unclear picture of the school improvement plan. She was not even aware that there was a document called *School Improvement Plan*. Criticizing the effectiveness of this document, Steve argued that the SIP focused on areas that could not be achieved, whereas, it neglected other necessary areas, which needed more attention and focus, such as improving student discipline and behaviour. Steve confirmed that this did not have a proper follow-up and was often neglected. Amy also expressed her disappointment at the fact that the school improvement plan was not taken seriously neither by the school leaders nor by the teachers. She thought that the school leaders explained the SIP at the beginning of the year, then the energy waned and they stopped talking about it.

In the same vein, Salima, a social sciences teacher, said she did not know what the school improvement plan meant, although she attended many meetings, where she heard the school principal and the vice principal talking about it. Salima found such plans ineffective, because although she worked hard to address some of her weaknesses, she did not improve at all. Commenting on the ineffectiveness of the school improvement plan, Brian also said that much of what was set as objectives in the school improvement plan was not realized. This leads us to the other three related important questions which are:

- Is teacher professional development approached strategically?
- What are the foci of TPL at the school?
- How does the current PD support student learning, the curriculum and the assessment?

In response to the interview question on how TPD was determined, Paul thought that there was sometimes a clash between what teachers wanted to do and the management priorities. However, Amy said teachers normally sat with the school principal to discuss the areas of development and improvement. Monica shared with Brian the same idea regarding assuming the responsibility for her own PD needs. She thought that it was important for her to identify her own PD needs instead of having the school principal or the vice principal decide them for teachers.

Central to the school improvement plan is the balance between teachers' individual needs and the organizational needs of the school. It was argued in the literature review that TPL should attend to the individual teachers' needs, as well as the school improvement priorities. Balancing both needs and priorities had a significant effect on teacher learning and school improvement. When teachers engage in continuous learning in the context of their schools, they are in fact trying to achieve the school objectives of having developed and skilled teachers. Similarly, when the school supports teachers in their learning efforts and initiatives, they are meeting teachers' developmental needs, which will eventually have an impact on the students and the school. In response to the question about whether they thought there was a balance between their professional development needs and the school priorities, very few teachers believed there was a balance. Steve, for instance, thought that although teachers were willing to have such a balance, this was unlikely to happen in the context of the actual school.

Well, I see when you ask me this question using your left and your right hands...
It's interesting. It's a statement I make, a lot of the left hand isn't over the right

hand's doing, I think there is some sense of that. I think there is a willingness to want the two to go together, but there is much going between that, this idea gets lost from this idea because there is just so much expectancies and paper work and different things in the middle that don't allow them to me. (Steve)

Talking about his personal plans, Paul said it was aligned with the school improvement plan, which was taken in consideration from the very beginning of the year, when he started balancing his professional development needs with the school priorities. He gave a concrete example of his practice:

OK, like, say, part of the school improvement plan is assessment and then addressing that based on student performance. So, if I give my students different forms of assessment and then evaluate that and make changes based on that, That may be sometimes needed to work on and we may discuss that and set goals. For I need to do this based on school improvement plan. (Paul)

Paul further explained that they were expected to develop their PD plans, and they had to stay consistent with the SIP at the beginning of every school term. As an area of improvement, Paul focused on developing communication strategies with the parents, as well as the community involvement. These areas, Paul explained, were based on the annual evaluation teachers receive at the end of the year. Paul also said that the school leaders— either the school principal or the academic vice principal—discussed with the teachers the areas of importance in relation to the school improvement plan.

Monica said that professional development should be based on a needs analysis of the teachers' professional development needs, which was not the case of the current school. Monica further argued that it would be more valuable if teachers were involved in the choice of the PD topics chosen and provided by Tamkeen. Another clear example supporting the lack of strategy was reported by Monica, who argued that there were many committees involved in improving the school resources and facilities inside the school. However, many teachers were not aware of these committees. In agreement with this, Brian said that committees were not taken seriously, and that they were just formed

for the sake of organizing committees. Brian mentioned that although he was a member of one of these committees, he personally did not know the objectives and purposes of some of them.

Its work is not successful as it has never been done. The reports required are not translated. It is rather a sort of satisfying formal work by being present and filling in the forms. The purpose of the committee was not understood. (Brian)

On another note, and as far as professional development for Arabic teachers is concerned, Salima criticized the lack of professional development programmes for Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs). Much of the professional development, she argued, was focusing on and targeting English-based subject teachers. She further explained that this exclusion had caused her and her colleagues to feel marginalized as well as disadvantaged.

Really, social sciences and Islamic education subjects can be considered marginalized throughout the last two years. They are basic subjects. Even the teachers themselves ask why. Even the exams have become English, science, math and Arabic. So, the professional development is targeting English, science, math and Arabic teachers. Islamic education and social sciences teachers are marginalized. (Salima)

This issue of absence of strategy regarding TPL is very serious in a school priding itself on having a strategic plan and a strategic plan committee. Failing to give equal PD opportunities to all teachers was a significant gap in the current school's professional development programmes and plans, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Another example of the absence of a clear vision and a strategic planning of teacher professional development was the lack of evaluation of teachers' needs. The school principal argued that there was no evaluation system agreed on or set by the council. The headteacher also lamented the lack of evaluation of PD inside the school. Although, he argued that ADEC usually sends a survey to schools to evaluate different

aspects of the school, including teacher professional development, he found the survey irrelevant. He also argued that ADEC's requirements were too demanding in comparison to teachers' responsibilities and workload.

The headteacher also stated that part of his job inside the school was to lead professional development. His primary focus is to improve the level of English and mathematics and to evaluate and improve the level of teachers and assist them whenever he could. Elaborating on ADEC policies, the headteacher described them as good. However, he thought that the real problem was the lack of follow-up of these policies, which were most of the time ignored and neglected.

Everybody is given at least five documents at the beginning of their work every year. The document is placed. I will be surprised if any teacher reads the document. Also, probably the teacher reads the document but it is not being implemented. There is no truth about that. There is no truth you want to get into leadership; you have to take it seriously. (The Headteacher)

Furthermore, the headteacher criticized an attitude of nonchalance and indifference to ADEC policies, which seemed to characterize the whole school. Teachers did not implement ADEC policies, the headteacher maintained, simply because they knew the rest of the school were not committed to implementing any of them. He denounced what he called the policy-practice gap in regard to teacher professional development.

Unfortunately, ADEC is very good for policy. We have policies. But unfortunately, putting policy into practice is not. So they are very good at advising. They are very good at talking. But they are not good in action. So it's very nice to have a local policy, but not very productive to have a policy that is not put into action. There is no interaction at ground level. The administrations are not putting them into action. (The Headteacher)

At the school level, the headteacher criticized the lack of commitment on the part of the school leaders concerning implementing ADEC policies. At a higher level,

the headteacher blamed the school cluster managers, whose job was to work with school principals to improve school management and administration, and to make sure that ADEC standards and policies were followed. As it will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, this lack of evaluation may have serious effects on professional development programmes and policies inside the school. It may result, for example, in a lack of evidence of the effectiveness of the PD programmes inside the school. Even worse, the school were not be able to identify whether key aspects of PD were implemented or not. This leads to the next section of this chapter, which is about the role of the school leadership in supporting teacher learning.

4.2.2.3 School Support

Insights from the professional development literature indicate that school leadership plays a crucial role in supporting teacher learning at all levels of the organization (Pedder et al., 2005; MacGilchrist, Reed & Myers, 2004). The learning organization literature also suggests that the school leadership plays an important role in supporting teacher learning inside the school. Barth (1996), for example, considered the principal the lead learner. Bredeson and Johannson (2000) also argued that school principals play key roles in promoting professional development:

Within schools, the principal is in a unique position to influence the implementation of these guiding principles and to affect the overall quality of teacher professional development. One of the primary tasks of school principals is to create and maintain positive and healthy teaching and learning environments for everyone in the school, including the professional staff. (p. 386)

Concurring with the same view, Day (2004) pointed out that school leaders assume great responsibility in providing robust professional learning environments at their schools. On the subject of school support to TPL, the qualitative data revealed that about 71.5% of the teachers (i.e., Abdullah, Amy, Brian, Christine, Ibrahim, Monica,

Paul, Richard, Salah and Steve) believed there was school support for teacher professional development (Figure 4.6).

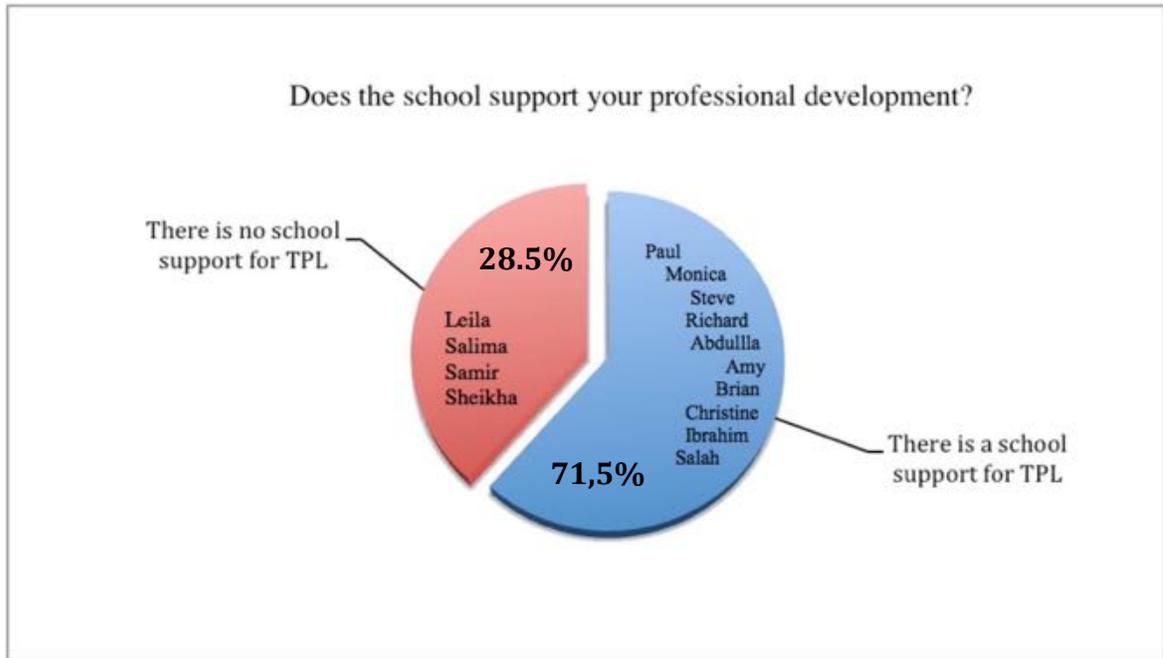


Figure 4.6 School Support for TPL.

The study informants were also asked to indicate whether the school places enough emphasis on TPL. In response, Paul replied with a confirmatory yes. Paul thought the school provided support for teachers at the beginning of the year. This support was sustained throughout the whole year through Tamkeen, as well as other professional development opportunities. Amy thought that the school senior leadership had a positive attitude towards professional development. She added that the school leaders understood the importance of PD, and that they often tried to impart it to teachers. Monica said that the school leaders arranged time for teachers to meet and collaborate with other teachers from different subjects, namely in the free PD hour scheduled on Monday. Monica and Steve also believed that the school senior leadership valued TPL, which was clear from the way they facilitated professional development and encouraged teachers to take responsibility for their own PD.

Richard highlighted another aspect of the school support. He stated that the school provided a total of 30 hours of in-house professional development facilitated by Tamkeen. The school also sent him to attend several PD events with other teachers. In response to the question about how the school supported teachers' professional development, Amy considered the school management very supportive: "If I'd go to management with an idea, they listen to me and do the best of their ability. They would try to facilitate it." For instance, Amy added that the school was trying to change the timetable to allow them to plan with the Arabic teachers. Finding more time slots in the school schedule for EMTs and AMTs to meet and collaborate was definitely one ambitious initiative they were trying to achieve the next academic year, Amy elaborated.

However, 28.5 % of the teachers (Figure 4.6) believed there was no school support for their teacher learning. There was also evidence in the qualitative data that the school support for TPL was not sustained, consistent and strategic. Aside from the administrative routines of calling for meetings, checking teachers' personal development plans and arranging teacher visits to other schools, the school leaders were not proactive in providing extra resources and suggestions that may create new learning opportunities for teachers. With the exception of the headteacher, who organized several professional learning activities for teachers, namely peer observation lessons, there was no evidence in the qualitative data that the other school leaders attempted to lead professional development inside the school.

As a new teacher, Leila felt a lack of support from the school leaders. Recounting her story when she was first hired by ADEC, Leila was disappointed at the level of support she received from the school when she was recruited.

Let me tell you something funny (smiling). I have been recruited for three years. I have received no orientation. No one has taught me (...) no one has shown me ... what (...) what IT. I don't know whether from the school or the council (...) what is important is that I received no orientation in anything. (Leila)

Likewise, Amy cited an example when she and two other teachers wanted to carry out a collaborative project, which aimed to incorporate math and English through physical activity in a bigger environment than the classroom. The three teachers were very enthusiastic about the project, which they thought would be useful and beneficial to their students. Although they spent a considerable amount of time planning and talking about the project, the whole idea was rejected by the school administration simply because it was not possible to make it fit into the school schedule. Summarizing teachers' responses with respect to SIP, it is also worthwhile to mention that some teachers were highly critical of the lack of support from the school leadership. They thought the school had not done much to explain and clarify the school improvement plan. One of the teachers bluntly put it: "Honestly, this is the only thing ... the only standard that I find mysterious."

The qualitative data also indicated that two teachers, in particular, were very critical of the lack of support from the school leadership. Sheikha, for example, argued that the senior school leaders were careless when it came to TPL. Although Paul argued that the school tried seriously to support TPL, he believed they were not doing it strategically. Paul considered this as a big organizational obstacle, which the school and ADEC had to seriously consider. The school did not, for example, ask teachers about their PD preferences and needs. Paul suggested that this should be done through a needs analysis survey, which the school could send at the beginning of the year.

Another organizational challenge raised by the informants in the qualitative data was time. Most of the teachers argued that the organization of the school day lacked flexibility and did not support teacher learning. Sheikha, for instance, mentioned some of the teachers' pressures, such as timetables and substitution classes. Most of the teachers taught an average of 24 periods a week, and some of them taught 30 periods a week, which minimized opportunities for professional learning inside the school. Affording time for professional development during the school day was a hard undertaking as illustrated by the school principal in the following quote.

I mean there is professional development, but in a very confined way. Even if ADEC implements this development by the end of the school day, the teacher is already exhausted. How can he spend two or three hours when he is tired!
(School principal)

The majority of these informants thought that the school timetable did not leave any time for pursuing learning or development. As shown in Figure 4.7, eleven teachers and two school leaders identified time as a major factor hindering their learning and the learning opportunities in the school.

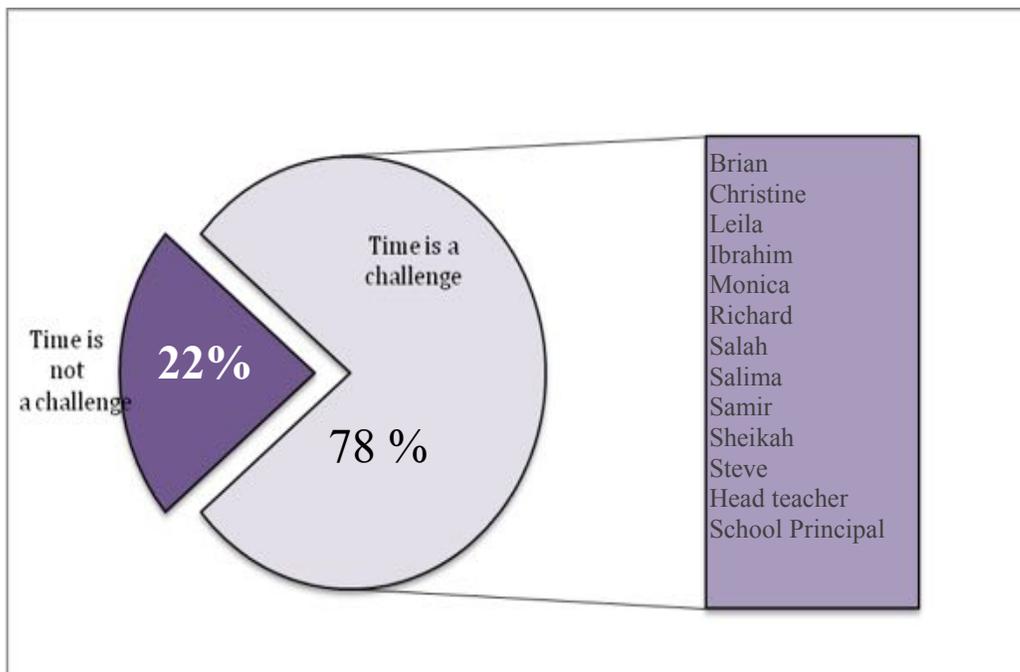


Figure 4.7 Time as a challenge to TPL

The data also suggested that teachers had very limited control over their time inside the school. Not enough time, Steve added, was left to teachers to sit together, meet, plan and cooperate. Steve thought that it was important for teachers teaching the same or different subjects to meet once a week to talk about their students. Likewise, Brian argued that the professional development programmes offered inside the school

were beneficial, but they took a lot of the teacher's personal time and effort, especially with the heavy teaching load and busy schedules.

As Figure 4.8 shows, the overall time devoted to professional development was equal to 2 hours a week. The first period was scheduled on Monday for Tamkeen, and the second one was assigned for planning and committee work. However, it is important to mention that these professional development activities were sustained throughout the whole year.

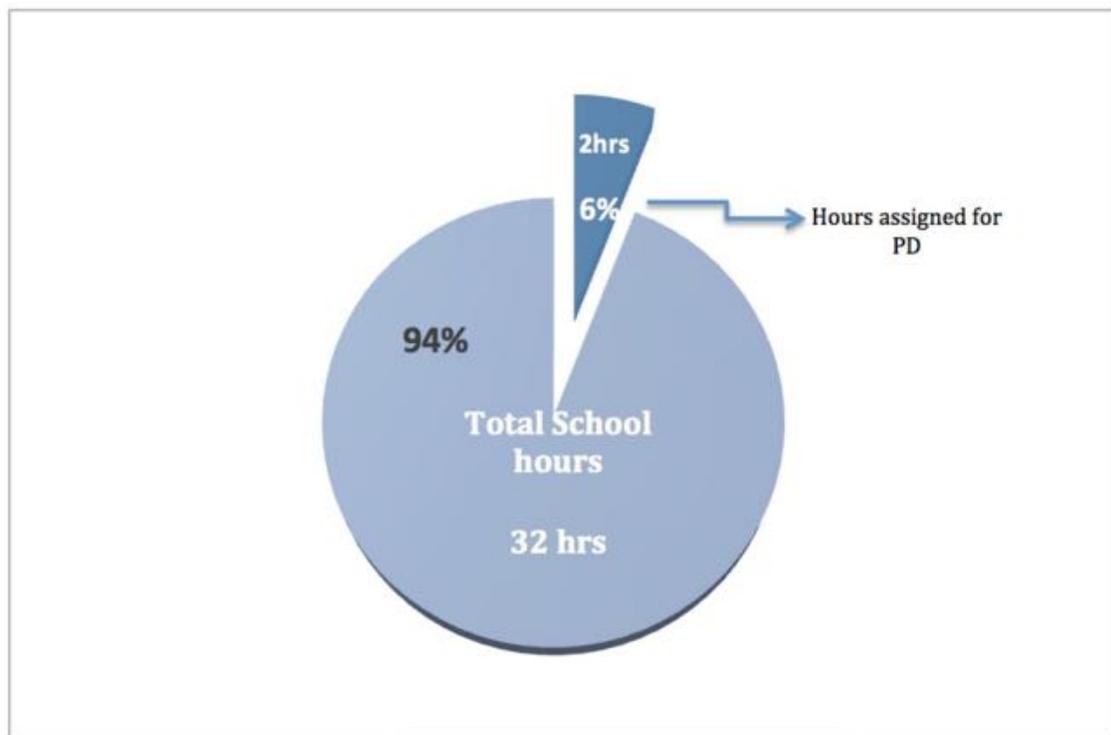


Figure 4.8 Time devoted to PD inside the school every week.

The school principal also agreed that time was a major impediment to teacher development. He added that ADEC wanted them to hold Tamkeen workshops at the end of the day, a time when the teachers feel exhausted. The headteacher seemed to agree with the school principal in this respect.

Do you think it is productive to have (pause) professional development in 35 periods or do you think it is pressure to have 5 periods of rest to recover and refresh the teachers? For me, it is more productive to give teachers a break and allow them time to relax. If ADEC wants professional development, they need to take the pressure from teachers. (The Headteacher)

One final finding, that warrants some attention, was that on many occasions during the interviews teachers associated workload with Tamkeen programme. Tamkeen, according to them, was pressurizing teachers and affecting their professional learning negatively. Brian, for example, believed that the formal professional development activities, usually dictated by the administration, consumed most of the teachers' time and left very little to the informal learning activities. This point will be the focus of the next section.

4.2.2.4 ADEC's Formal Training Programme "Tamkeen"

Before presenting teachers' views about Tamkeen, it is important to explain the role and aims of this PD programme. As I explained in the first chapter, educational policies are decided at the national level by the Ministry of Education and Education Councils (i.e., ADEC and Dubai Education Council). Accordingly, ADEC had a mandate from the Abu Dhabi government to develop schools as part of the Emirates vision. Tamkeen, in this context, is the Arabic name of ADEC's PD programme benchmarked against international standards, which aimed to empower teachers by providing professional development programmes to ADEC schools. The programme aims to develop qualified teachers and school leaders, who can support the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in its efforts to enhance the quality of educational outcomes and expectations. Tamkeen provided training on different PD topics, such as, behaviour management, classroom management, critical thinking, differentiation, ICT, school improvement plan and teacher evaluation.

From the perspective of the school leadership, the vice principal for academic services explained that the school undertook Tamkeen to address some of the professional development needs and some learning issues. He also added, Tamkeen was used to work on developing teachers’ reading, writing strategies and skills to address the students’ literacy weaknesses. However, according to the qualitative data, there is almost a consensus among the teachers, as well as the school leaders that Tamkeen was not effective. As Table 4.12 shows, only two teachers (Richard and Leila) among all the informants talked positively about Tamkeen, both of them were new teachers. Leila thought that Tamkeen, as a formal PD programme, was very beneficial for the reason that it provided new ideas and expands teacher’s knowledge about the teaching context. According to Steve, Tamkeen was aligned with ADEC policies and was focused on School Improvement Plan in many areas.

Table 4.12

Teachers’ views on Tamkeen

Tamkeen is NOT beneficial	Tamkeen is beneficial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I did not benefit from this programme at all.</i> ▪ <i>The information does not include any new content. I did not benefit. (Abdullah)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I have to say I find them very beneficial (Tamkeen) (...) (Richard)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>This is a waste of time for me. I think a lot of this is worthless information. (Christine)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The training I got from Patrick is very beneficial. It expands my knowledge about the child. (Leila)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>It is not beneficial. We already know the things that they present in Tamkeen. (Sheikha)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Tamkeen did not provide me with what I need. (Sheikha)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>That is to say Tamkeen does not inquire about our needs at the beginning of year. (Samir)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Tamkeen is not investing in the human resources available in this context. (Samir)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>We have been surprised with Tamkeen programme that it is imposed on teachers with a particular level.</i> 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>It has started to treat us from scratch. I felt it has wasted a lot of teacher's time. (Ibrahim)</i> ▪ <i>We feel that formal development is about imposed time that we have to spend. It is imposed on us. (Ibrahim)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The topics are not open for us. Tamkeen has an agenda that I think is dictated by ADEC. So it is not what we want necessarily to learn. (Brian)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The formal example is about Tamkeen, which is you know, they're doing it. But to be honest, I don't find it valuable at all. (Monica)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I personally don't think the quality of it has enhanced my professional development. So it's a lot of repetition.</i> ▪ <i>I don't think that any of Tamkeen had an impact on my classroom.(Amy)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I think the design could be given in a better way. I feel may be that and the people who deliver Tamkeen are very good but I feel that their programme is delivered for the sake of delivering it. And the people who attended i.e. the teachers sit there just to fill their time, because you sign in and you sign out. (Steve)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I think Tamkeen is a reminder rather than development. It means that it didn't add a lot to my development, but reminded of previous things. (Salah)</i> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>If Tamkeen changes its policy that is topics and becomes beneficial for us that we, teachers, need particular things. Normally, the council sends a committee to ask teachers about their needs for Tamkeen.(Salima)</i> ▪ <i>Tamkeen ... I mean personally I didn't learn anything.</i> ▪ <i>There is no extra knowledge that we find beneficial. I felt it is a waste of time.(Salima)</i> 	

Furthermore, Salah explained that the professional development programmes provided by Tamkeen did not respond to teachers' needs, as they were not involved in any decision-making regarding the design or choice of these programmes. Salah mentioned that teachers attended over 30 hours of Tamkeen workshops this year. Disappointingly, Tamkeen programmes, he explained, lacked effectiveness because they did not respond to teachers' emerging contextual needs. Moreover, Salah did not see any depth or breadth in Tamkeen training, as he insisted that teachers had not learnt anything new from Tamkeen. Sheikha and Salah also believed that Tamkeen PD programmes were a waste of teachers' time because they were simply repeating the same topics that had been addressed for many years.

Criticizing Tamkeen Western experts, Sheikha said that despite the fact that these experts might have long experience in their countries, and certainly great qualifications, unfortunately they knew nothing about the school context. For this reason, Sheikha explained, their PD programme did not appeal to the teachers' real development needs. Christine also added that it would be more effective if teachers from the school were given the opportunity to learn with and from one another, rather than from experts who "have never been in the classroom." Similarly, Salima suggested that teachers should be consulted regarding Tamkeen's PD programmes:

If Tamkeen changes its policy that is its topics and becomes beneficial for us that we, teachers, need particular things. Normally, the council sends a committee to ask teachers about their needs for Tamkeen. Teachers need this and this, not to impose a programme. (Salima)

Furthermore, Ibrahim described Tamkeen as an imposed professional development programme, which was irrelevant and insensitive to the local context. He further argued that teachers did not benefit from Tamkeen because it had no practical effect on the local context. Abdullah maintained that had he been given the chance to present or lead workshops at the school, he would have been more successful and effective than Tamkeen experts. Monica also shared the same view and explained that she did not find Tamkeen valuable. She thought that most of Tamkeen programmes were

already known. Monica further explained that these programmes were not geared towards teachers who have long experience in the profession and that the presented topics and materials were not covered as thoroughly as expected.

I believe ... I think that the topics are predetermined. I don't I think that they are given a sort of things that have to do with us. I don't (emphasis) think that teachers have ever made suggestions of things that they'd like to learn about... then it could just be the presenter. It could be a richer material, you know, just with something different. (Monica)

Steve explained that there was an emphasis as well as support for TPL. However, he also maintained that PD programmes inside the school could have been much better had they been designed and delivered in a different way. He continued that although Tamkeen experts might be great, their programmes were not geared to teachers' needs. Steve further explained that teachers attended Tamkeen workshops just to fill in their time. He suggested that the school should consider a stronger PD programme that would not waste teachers' time. Steve went even further in his criticism of Tamkeen and accused it of distracting teachers from the real work they should be doing, such as planning and participating in committee work.

It also seems interesting that there was awareness among the teachers and school leaders of the ineffectiveness of Tamkeen. The school principal, for example, mentioned the same factors, time and relevance of content, to account for the failure of Tamkeen. The student services vice principal, too, stressed that the professional development inside the school was not strategic; he bluntly criticized ADEC for hiring external agencies. He elucidated that instead of hiring foreign teachers and experts, the council should have empowered its local teachers by providing quality PD programmes. According to him, there were many teachers with long experience who should be involved in teacher development inside the school.

4.2.2.5 Summary of Main Findings about the Organizational Learning Practices and Systems

The second part of this chapter provided data analysis of the organizational policies and structures supporting TPL. First, there was evidence in the qualitative data that school support was not sustained, consistent and strategic. Although ADEC had a system in place defining and specifying the roles and responsibilities of the school leaders in relation to teacher professional development, findings from the interviews revealed that there was not enough support from the senior school leaders. Second, the qualitative data revealed teachers' dissatisfaction with Tamkeen, as the majority of teachers judged the programmes to be ineffective and irrelevant to their needs. Third, the data also suggested that the school needed to communicate a clearer vision and to raise teachers' awareness about the importance of this vision, especially in relation to their own professional learning and development. Finally, the qualitative data revealed that there was a lack of evaluation of the PD programmes and activities inside the school. Teachers reported that they were neither consulted about their views about Tamkeen nor were they involved in systematic analyses of their learning needs. These data will be further discussed in chapter five.

4.2.3 Theme Three: Challenges to TPL in the Context of the New School Model

Apart from the themes identified by the survey, a set of understandings was developed in this study through the detailed qualitative analysis reported in this chapter. Repeated readings of the teachers' interviews, led to the identification of five major themes as follows: (a) culture, (b) gender, (c) language, (d) group dynamics, and (e) teacher agency. The focus of this section is on the first four themes, which fall under this section (i.e., challenges to teacher learning). The rationale for understanding these cultural, linguistic and gender issues in relation to TPL is important in illuminating and raising awareness about the challenges and barriers, which might affect teacher learning or collaboration inside the school. In the following section, I will present these salient data as articulated by teachers during the interviews. I will do this under four headings: cultural challenges, gender, linguistic issues, and group dynamics. Agency will be presented in the next section as part of teachers' perception and understanding of their learning.

4.2.3.1 Cultural Challenges

Before presenting the data related to the first theme, it is important to define the term "culture". While a variety of definitions of the term culture has been suggested in the literature, culture will be referred to, in this study, as a set of assumptions, beliefs, values as well as policies and behavioural conventions, which are shared by a group of people, and which influence their behaviour, understanding and interpretations of different aspects of life (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). The literature suggests that gender and culture do not only have influence on how we learn, but also on how we interact and behave when we learn from others. According to Wenger (2007), teachers do not learn in vacuum, since their learning and knowledge are socially and culturally constructed. All human activities occur in a cultural context, which includes different levels of interactions, values, beliefs, skills and symbol systems (Hansman, 2001).

Accordingly, teacher learning in the context of ADEC schools takes place in a specific Arab context. Being situated in such a distinctive local setting, teacher learning should, therefore, be interpreted in this specific social and historical context, taking account of all the cultural factors and dynamics, as well as the social interactions and relations of this specific group of learners. As mentioned in chapter 1, the teacher population in Abu Dhabi is one of the most diverse teacher populations in the world as teachers come from over 118 nationalities. Accordingly, the school demographics of the study revealed that teacher population included both local and expatriate teachers from different countries of the world (Figure 4.9).

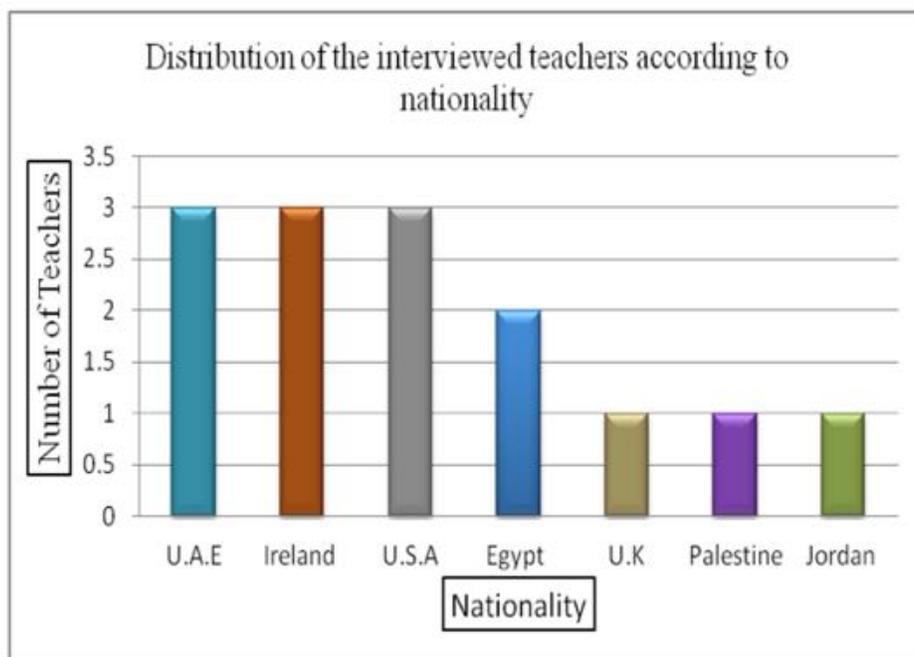


Figure 4.9. Distribution of teachers by nationality

Expatriate teachers came exclusively from the following Arab countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia. However, in the last decade, namely when ADEC took over the Ministry of Education, teachers from native-speaking countries (i.e., Australia, Ireland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States) were hired to teach English and English-based subjects, such as science and

math. This cultural diversity in the school poses several challenges to TPL, and in such a context, the potential for cultural misunderstandings, sensitivities and conflicts were considerable.

In the current study, culture was identified as one of the main themes affecting TPL. During my interviews with both teachers and school leaders, culture seemed to be the thread consistently woven into informants' accounts; nonetheless, teachers differed in the ways they highlighted culture in their accounts. Some of them (Brian, Paul, Salima, and Sheikha) were more direct and daring in drawing attention to the seriousness of these cultural issues and their effect on teacher learning and collaboration, whereas others were less straightforward and made indirect insinuations about these issues.

Brian, for example, criticized ADEC policies on the premise that they were based on international educational projects and concepts, which were alien to the local context. This would cause, according to him, remarkable cultural clashes when implementing them in schools. Brian mentioned that for a Westerner, working in a professional environment like this could raise many cultural sensitivities that affect both communication and collaboration with other colleagues. Brian gave the example of the school committees, where teachers representing different cultures work together:

Ah it's a complex thing for a committee of Eastern and Western to sit down and be able to (...) really (...) you don't really (...) you don't have interaction with them on personal basis and it is hard to sit and do some professional (...) because it is a very different frame of reference. Really a big, it's huge and this is my fifth (...) finished five years and it's bigger than anybody could ever (...) I believe now more than ever (...) It is a very different way of thinking. So collaboration and honest discourse is a huge challenge. (Brian)

Brian's account reflects the level of dissatisfaction and unease he felt while working in a context that had a different frame of reference, as he described it. Brian's previous statement was also interesting as it reflected serious cultural issues, which

bordered on the confrontation between Western and Eastern cultures and discourses. Brian, for instance, classified teachers into Arabs and Westerns, a classification, which was indicative and symbolic of underlying cultural assumptions and beliefs. These classifications were also used by other informants (e.g., Abdullah, Leila, Salah, Samir, Sheikha, and the school principal). Other expressions illustrative of these cultural assumptions used in the interviews were “foreigners” and “teachers from the west”; all consolidated these feelings of difference and dissimilarity. Brian also mentioned an experience, where he had to work with a local Emirati teacher, but due to gender issues, which I will explain later, he declined. Brian is not the only teacher reporting these cultural issues. The following quotes outline all the cultural challenges raised by the teachers.

Table 4.13

Cultural issues raised by the teachers

Teacher	Cultural issues	Teacher
<i>Paul</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I think it's very important especially when we are dealing with a situation with different culture, different community.</i> <p><i>Well you know culturally you have to be sensitive like ah we... for... we have a female co-teacher and this just you know... This kind ah, you know, sometimes comfortable, you know how to approach females that's because you don't know ...</i></p>	<i>Gender</i>
<i>Sheikha</i>	<i>The foreigner himself ... the foreigner who comes is not qualified enough to teach us.</i>	<i>Different culture</i>
<i>Salima</i>	<i>Well, last year honestly ... I worked for 11 years in schools for girls. I'm used to administration with females and so on. So during this year ah ah I felt it was hard.</i>	<i>Gender</i>
<i>Amy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Personally I think it's a cultural thing. It's a personality thing.</i> ▪ <i>They withhold things? Maybe to a certain extent... cultural.</i> 	<i>Group dynamics</i>
<i>Monica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I think I'm really lucky with Arab co-teachers I had. There was maybe more a barrier... of the culture where that I could see.</i> 	<i>Group dynamics</i>

<i>Steve</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>A totally different country Eastern and American and East to me just 3 letters ah and I was not fully trained.</i> 	<i>Different country / different culture</i>
<i>James</i>	<i>You know culturally you have to be sensitive like ah.. we for we have a female co-teacher and this just you know</i>	<i>Gender</i>
<i>Salima</i>	<i>I worked for 11 years in schools for girls. I'm used to administration with females and so on. So during this year I felt it was hard.</i>	<i>Gender</i>
<i>Leila</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>There is a big gap. Look, there are many gaps: a gap between men and women; between Arabs and foreigners; and between the administration and teachers.</i> ▪ <i>In my group. So ah ah such a thing caused me a problem because ah there is someone, especially Arabs, do not accept that someone younger than them dictates.</i> 	<i>Gender</i>
<i>Brian</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The different walls of male and female in this culture.</i> 	<i>Gender</i>

However, there was evidence in the qualitative findings that cultural diversity was perceived as an opportunity for professional learning and collaboration. The data indicated that teachers used these cultural differences to improve certain learning aspects. For instance, it was reported by some teachers coming from individual-oriented school cultures that they had learnt from the school collaborative environment. Paul, for example, found the current school culture very beneficial for a teacher coming from the West, who was used to working individually. Commenting on the need to know more about the local culture, Paul emphasized that those areas require learning and development. On a more positive note, Leila, a beginning teacher, thought that working in such a multi-cultural context exposed her to other cultures.

The school principal also seemed to acknowledge the importance of culture learning and argued that ADEC usually organized a workshop for the non-Arab teachers in order to raise their awareness about the local Emirati culture, local traditions, the school culture and the dress code. These initiatives highlight the role that TPL could

play in raising teachers' cultural awareness. Moreover, by working together in such a multi-cultural setting, teachers do not only hone their instructional practices and teaching skills, but also cultivate an understanding of diversity and develop a culture of dialogue and collaboration, which is crucial to thrive in such a multi-cultural context. As suggested by the literature, this spirit of collaboration and openness has a positive impact on teacher learning:

Evidence suggests that teacher learning is enhanced in school practice contexts as professional communities –where teachers get along and have regular professional dialogue with one another, with strong leadership and adequate teaching resources. Sustained observation and feedback opportunities for student teachers– to observe and be observed, discuss teaching and get feedback on their performance are of paramount importance in providing both instructional and emotional support. (Hagger & McIntyre 2006, cited in Caena, 2014, p.7)

Another salient theme related to culture, which seems to have an effect on teacher professional development, is gender. The next subsection will explore this issue in more depth.

4.2.3.2 Gender as a Barrier

In the current study, gender was identified as a factor inhibiting communication between some male and female teachers, especially local teachers. The reluctance of these teachers, for instance, to cooperate with their peers provided evidence of inherent gender barriers, reflecting deep cultural values and attitudes about female teachers' right to learn and work, some of which were not fully expressed, explained and justified. Hofstede (1991) maintained that although some cultural aspects are physically visible, their meaning remains invisible. In the current study, there was even some caution and reluctance from teachers to touch on these issues. Talking about TPL challenges, Leila mentioned several issues (leaders vs. teachers, Arabs vs. Westerners and men vs.

women.) When asked about gender, Leila was reluctant to talk about it, albeit she was quite vocal about other issues:

Interviewee: There is a big gap. Look, there are many gaps: a gap between men and women; between Arabs and foreigners; and between the administration and teachers.

Interviewer: What do you mean by a gap between men and women?

Interviewee: We are a mixed school.

Interviewer: I know, but what do you mean by that? Can you explain?

Interviewee: There is ah there is ah ... (silent) meaning there is ah ...

Interviewer: You mean there is miscommunication because of ...?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Gender? There is miscommunication?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewee: Not just in the school, not just in the school... There are many Arab teachers, who refuse... You know.

Interviewer: So? (From Leila's interview)

However, although Leila was cautious about raising the gender issue as the above interview excerpt illustrates, she was very critical of her Arab counterparts, whom she described as rigid and unwelcome to her comments. Furthermore, the data also yielded a number of interesting issues with respect to gender. It was reported by some female local teachers that they had a difficulty communicating with both Arab and Western male teachers. This lack of communication, as some of the informants demonstrated, had a negative impact on teachers' collaboration. Likewise, the qualitative findings revealed feelings of tension and frustration on the part of Western teachers, who

were disappointed at how some female Arab teachers reacted to them. Brian, for instance, cited gender as the second challenge teachers faced inside the school. He mentioned that the challenge *per se* did not come from women, but from some Arab male teachers who still resisted seeing women working at schools. Brian also mentioned that he was once involved with an Emirati female teacher in a joint project, but he found some difficulties approaching her as dealing with female Emirati teachers was not easy.

There weren't any women in the school until last year. They were in the library ... my class was right next to the library, I would go and initiate conversation trying to do collaboration in its (...) ah it was very challenged by a lot of Arab men that I was interacting with them. They weren't ready for that. They weren't ready for the women to be in the school. There is a lot of women in the school, but it is still (...) I'm not pretty set (...) I don't feel comfortable in trying to (...) ah to collaborate to have conversation. It is still a taboo. (Brian)

It is also worthwhile to mention that gender was raised not only by male teachers, but also by female teachers, such as Salima and Monica. Giving another example of the gender issue, Salima said that she was a member of the Best Practices Committee, which was made of four teachers from different subjects. She complained that she did not feel comfortable working with male teachers. Salima mentioned that she had worked for 11 years at a girls' school where all the teachers and the administrative staff were females. At the beginning of the year, after moving to a boys' school, she found it hard to integrate, although she felt better afterwards, as she got used to male teachers.

In response to a question about challenges to teacher learning inside the school, the school principal mentioned that Arab female teachers were reluctant to join school committees due to gender issues. The principal explained that female teachers were more timid than males, and this was reflected in their communication during PD events and committee meetings, which he sometimes attended. He thought it is a cultural problem and attributed it to what he called "conservatism", timidity and reservation. In response to the question on who exactly raised those issues, the school principal said

they were raised particularly by Arab female teachers –mainly those wearing the veil niqab– who felt reluctant to work with male teachers. The school principal also added that he often intervened to address this gender issue so that it would not affect teachers’ collaboration, communication and professional development. The school principal further elaborated that although he showed full understanding of these cultural differences and sensitivities; he tried to raise awareness about the importance of communication and collaboration between all the teachers regardless of their background differences. After raising these gender-related issues, I turn to present findings of the next theme developed from the data.

4.2.3.3 Linguistic Challenges

As mentioned in the bio data table at the beginning of section 4.2 of this chapter (Table 4.6), teachers working in the current school come from different countries. Figure 4.10 shows that 50% of the school population speak English only; 36% speak Arabic only, and the rest of the school population are bilingual (14%).

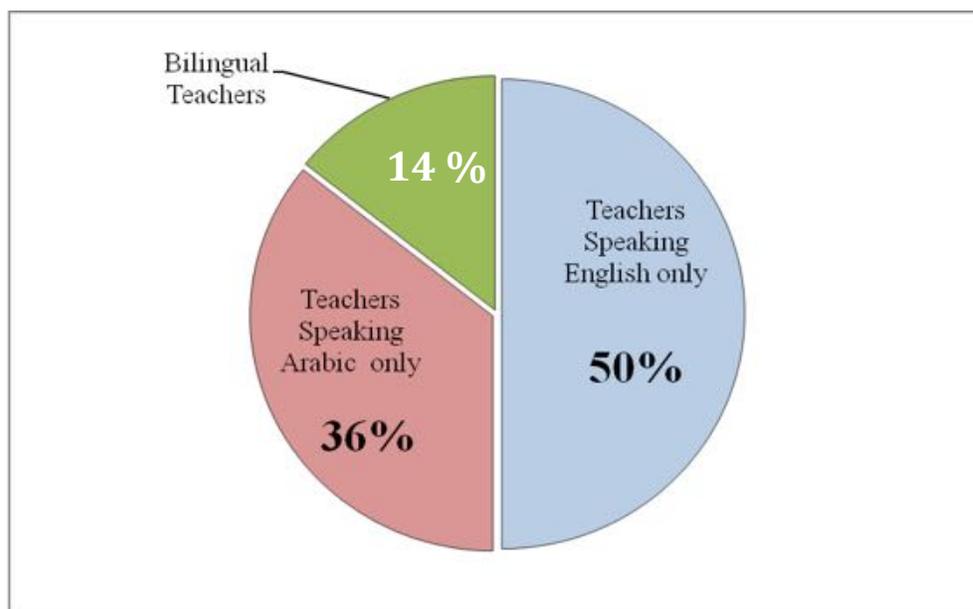


Figure 4.10. Distribution of teachers by the language spoken

This multi-lingual context poses different challenges that could affect communication, between teachers, which is crucial for the work of committees and collaboration. Being aware of this linguistic challenge, language support was provided at Tamkeen PD programmes, where a translator often accompanied Tamkeen trainers. Apart from that, bilingual teachers usually volunteered during meetings and committee work to translate from Arabic to English and vice versa. However, despite this support, the study findings revealed some challenging experiences in relation to translation. The qualitative data showed that the majority of the teachers who raised these linguistic issues came from the West (62%).

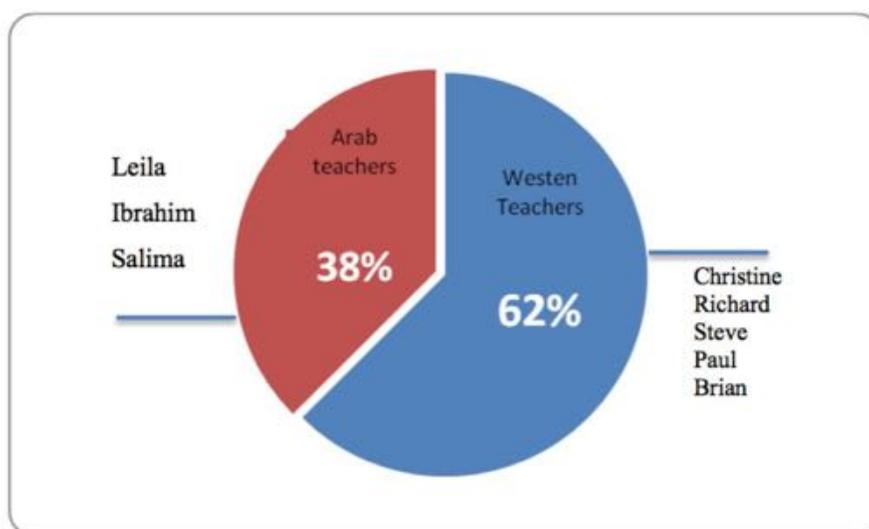


Figure 4.11. Percentage of teachers raising the linguistic challenge.

Commenting on the linguistic challenges, Steve mentioned that in one of the groups he had worked with, the number of Arabic-speaking teachers was more than their English-speaking counterparts. Steve also said that during committee meetings, half of the conversation was conducted in Arabic and that only two or three times in the meeting they got a translation of what was going on. Consequently, Steve and the other

English-speaking teachers felt uncomfortable and ignored. To overcome this language barrier, Steve suggested splitting the committee into two, an Arabic-speaking committee and an English-speaking one, and later the two committees could meet and bring ideas together. Concurring with these comments, Paul added that the major challenges he faced when working with Arab teachers were linguistic. He maintained that the translation was not helpful and was even confusing. In the same context, Brian summarized some of the communication challenges in the context of school committees.

I am on the school committee (...) I honestly (...) if you ask me throughout the year the name of the committee, I wouldn't be able to tell. The committee met, as far as I know two times through the year. I was the only Western English-speaking person. So coming out of the first meeting, I didn't neither know what was discussed, because it was in Arabic. So, and I didn't know what the topic was. So there is (...) it's (...) I know the ambition is good idea that we collaborate with (...) you know Arabic-speaking, but often there is not translation. (Brian)

According to Brian, these differences were not easy to deal with, and they constituted a major barrier to collaboration and communication. However, there was also evidence in the data that some teachers supported each other to overcome this problem. Paul, who acknowledged that language constitutes a serious problem in teachers' work, also stated he was very lucky because he had a good bilingual colleague, who made their job easier and helped him understand what was going on. Abdullah also confirmed that there was a communication problem inside the school between English-speaking and Arabic-speaking teachers. Nonetheless, he affirmed that they tried to learn from each other. This, according to him, had partially alleviated the problem. Finally, Leila stated that because of her good command of English, she served as the go-between for Arab and their English-speaking counterparts to facilitate communication between them. From the Arab teachers' perspective, Ibrahim, for example, considered the linguistic problem the most serious during committee work, especially when committees received

documents in English and had to translate them to the non-English speaking Arab teachers.

In an attempt to understand the effect of group dynamics on TPL in the context of the current school, I turn to present the respective findings in the next section.

4.2.3.4 Group Dynamics

The qualitative data revealed the significance teachers attached to group dynamics for influencing their learning. Some teachers reported negative learning experiences during the collaborative encounters, and particularly during committee work. As suggested by the data, many teachers behaved in an individualistic way as they tended to withhold information, or refuse to share activities or strategies with other colleagues. The following list illustrates these issues in detail:

- There is a lack of motivation on the part of some members (Amy and Leila).
- Some teachers were withholding information from their peers (Amy, Brian and Monica).
- Some committee members made no initiatives (Amy, Ibrahim and Leila).
- The work fell only on one member of the group (Amy and Salima).
- Some committee members were unwilling to work with younger people (Leila).
- There were no regular meetings for the committees (Amy, Brian, Samir, and Sheikha).
- Some members were not team-oriented (Amy, Brian Leila and Monica).
- Some committee members are not pro-active (Leila).
- Some committee members do not assume their responsibilities and do the assigned work (Leila).

Given the multi-cultural context teachers were working in, collaboration was very challenging. Reflecting on her experience when she was involved with the Special

Needs Committee, Amy thought there was unequal share of work, and that some group members worked harder than others. Explaining the reason for the lack of cooperation, Amy thought that teachers had not joined these committees voluntarily. For this reason, they might not feel motivated to meet and work. She also believed that there was no understanding of the benefit and the purpose of the committee work.

In the same context, Salima cited another problem related to group dynamics. She reported that although the work was supposed to be shared, she sometimes did the whole work by herself. Salima argued that she found it shameful to go to the school principal or the student services vice principal to report that her colleagues were not collaborating. Salima also said that apart from Tamkeen, there were other scheduled meetings for teachers to meet, plan and engage in other professional learning activities. Unfortunately, teachers did not meet often and some of them preferred to stay at their rooms. In agreement with this, Brian thought that some teachers were reluctant to cooperate and preferred to work individually:

There are some teachers that I will go to with concerns, or seeking advice, or offer something to them. This works. Ah, but I think more often teachers live in their own world. They wanna get out the meeting. They wanna just close the door and they gonna do their thing. So, ah that's (...) depends on the teachers. But I think ... probably more collaboration is (...) would be beneficial. (Brian)

Highlighting the individualistic disposition, Monica also noted that some teachers tended to work in their rooms, and refused to share ideas with her and other colleagues. Monica maintained that she found this behaviour strange and different from her learning and working style. From the school leadership perspective, the school principal explained that he was fully aware of these issues inherent in group work. The following are some of the initiatives the school took to support teachers' collaboration as described by the school principal.

Yes, yes. We take into account teachers' comfort. We do not oblige them to be involved. For example, when we formed the committees, we told them if they

have any problems or are not comfortable with something, they should inform us. Accordingly, three were changed based on the opinions to which we listened and we respected them saying that there might be a change. (The School Principal)

At the end of this section, it is important to mention that this part of the data has yielded a number of interesting findings with respect to culture, gender, language, group dynamics, which will be further discussed in relation to teacher learning in the context of ADEC schools in the final chapter of the study. The following is a summary of these major issues presented in this section.

4.2.3.5 Summary of Main Findings about Challenges to TPL in the Context of the NSM

This section of data analysis focused on four themes (i.e., culture, language, gender and group dynamics) in relation to teacher learning. Although, there was evidence in the qualitative findings that cultural diversity was perceived as an opportunity for professional learning and collaboration, both culture and gender were identified as the themes affecting TPL. Similarly, the qualitative data seemed to suggest that the school multi-lingual context posed different challenges, which affected communication between teachers. Finally, and with respect to group dynamics, teachers reported negative learning experiences during the frequent collaborative encounters, especially during committee work. Implications of these cultural issues will be further discussed in chapter 5.

4.2.4 Theme Four: Teachers' Perceptions of their Learning in the School and Regional Contexts

Kazemi and Hubbard (2010) pointed out that “professional development and classroom settings are situated in broader social, cultural, and political contexts that bear on what happens and why” (p. 439). Exploring teachers’ conceptualizations and perceptions of their professional learning in relation to these wider discourses and contexts, I shall argue, contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher learning. In the subsequent section of the data analysis, I present teachers’ interpretations of their learning in the school and regional contexts. I do this under three major themes: teachers’ conceptualization of learning, teacher agency and teacher informal learning. In other words, I thought it was necessary from the very beginning, when I started working on the interviews, to include a question asking teachers to define TPL. This is also in tune with the main purpose of the study, which is to understand how teachers define and articulate their understanding and conceptualization of their learning in different ways. The following are teachers’ accounts in response to my question at the beginning of the interview asking them to define TPL.

Table 4.14
Teachers’ definitions of TPL

Perceptions of TPL	Definitions of TPL
<p>TPL as developing teacher knowledge in relation to the subject, curriculum, methodology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It’s where we are provided with the current data, with current research, current tools that we are trained how to do the profession better. So with the current research that’s constantly changing, so methods, techniques, and strategies to work with ah the students. ▪ Professional learning is learning in ... the specialty in your specialty in particular or it can be various trainings that will improve your academic level. ▪ Trainings that we have (...) it relates to the curriculum that I teach. ▪ My definition of professional learning is that it is ah (...) ah (...) It is a set of themes related to education ... and academia,

	<p>because each subject has an educational and academic side. So we should get hold of both of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First of all ah he develops himself in relation to the subject he is teaching. He has to develop it and be updated. Another thing is the teaching methodology. ▪ Professional development is a concept meaning that the teacher is keeping up with the development in learning theories, teaching methodologies. ▪ It relates ah to the curriculum that I teach. ▪ It's about the teacher learning new skills and new methods basically to enhance the learning in the classroom to meet the need of the children they are teaching. ▪ You need, I suppose, to keep up-skilled all of the time to new learning ways and new programmes that are coming on stream and be able to identify different ways of teaching and because every year you will have a different group of children.
TPL as on-going development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers' daily learning all aspects of their school, their class, their students in order to enhance and improve the programme. ▪ You learn all the techniques. You're learning in the classroom with the students. You're learning from another teacher. You're learning, you know, constantly throughout the day. ▪ Teachers' professional learning is just basically on-going education in the area of teaching. ▪ Professional learning as a continuous tool. ▪ You got to become aware of best practice on a continuous learning basis.
TPL as individual development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It stems from follow up, personal development, reading. I do care about this theme, even at the personal level. ▪ But you can't supply anything to the team, if you don't have anything for yourself. And first you first have to, you know, they're going on the plane they say you have to put on the mask for yourself before you can help somebody else. Well it has to first start within from the individual ▪ It comes on to the individual goals. I personally have an appetite for professional development.

As shown in Table 4.14 above three perceptions were identified from the teachers' definitions. The following section explores these perceptions and the insights behind them.

4.2.4.1 Teacher learning as developing teacher knowledge in relation to the subject, curriculum, methodology

As shown in Table 4.14, TPL is defined as learning a set of tools and strategies on how to develop their teaching. The teachers, who advocated this definition, believed that it is important for them to become familiar with new methods and strategies on how to improve their teaching and develop their materials. Some teachers conceptualized teacher professional learning in terms of the competencies and skills teachers acquire in the workplace, which render them more effective and competent. These skills are directly related to different aspects of curriculum, teaching and student learning. Most of these teachers associated learning with teaching theories, curriculum and content knowledge.

According to Amy, TPL enables teachers to learn new teaching methods to enhance learning in the classroom. Leila also thought that PD should be related to the subject itself, and the teaching methodologies that should focus on the context of teaching. Similarly, Ibrahim and Christine confirmed that the teacher should be updated on developments in learning and teaching theories. Taking into account what has been previously said, one common perception of all these definitions is their focus on teaching and the learning context (i.e., curriculum, learning style and methodology). This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that teacher learning that centers on classroom-based activities and focusing on student learning and improving teaching and pedagogy is very effective (Pedder, Storey, Opfer, 2008).

4.2.4.2 Teacher Learning as an On-going Development

Four teachers perceived TPL as an ongoing development. The use of terms like “daily”, “constantly”, “on-going”, “continuous” in the teachers’ definitions of this group seems to suggest that teachers perceive teacher learning as a life-long experience. They also believed they have a responsibility to continuously learn and engage in different sorts of learning. This is consistent with the literature confirming that long-term and continuous

professional development is one of the characteristics of effective PD (Boyle, While & Boyle, 2004; Cordingley, Bell, Thomason, & Firth, 2005; Hargreaves, 2003; Hopkins, Harris, Singleton, & Watts, 2001).

4.2.4.3 Teacher Learning as an Individual Development

Three teachers perceived learning as an individual journey of development. It is also argued in the literature that teachers who perceive TPL as an individual endeavour usually capitalize on internal as well as external leaning activities, such as reading, using the web, self-evaluating, experimenting with practice, reflecting and consulting students. This definition is consistent with the notion of the solitary learners identified by Pedder and Opfer (2013) in their classification of teachers into four groups or types of learners. According to Pedder and Opfer (2013), solitary learners tend to learn individually and privately in their classrooms.

4.2.4.4 Teachers' Conceptualization of their Learning

It is also evident from these definitions presented above that the majority of teachers seemed to have a very clear vision of how professional learning in the school should be organized. Most of the teachers would like to engage in professional development that is embedded in their practices, situated in their classrooms and that has an immediate impact on their students' classroom practices. Significance of these definitions will be further explored in the discussion chapter. These definitions will be also discussed in relation to different learning theories, such as the situated learning and the socio-cultural approach in the final chapter of this study.

It is also worthwhile to note that although most definitions focused on the impact of teacher learning on teaching and student learning, there is an obvious lack of reference to the impact of this learning on school development or the organizational aspects of TPL. This is consistent with other findings from the qualitative data in

response to the question about the impact of their professional learning experiences. As Figure 4.12 shows, the majority of teachers stated that their learning was significantly impactful on their student learning (10 teachers) as well as on aspects of their teaching (8 teachers). Only two teachers believed that their learning had an effect on school improvement. Teachers' responses to this question are summarized in the following graph:

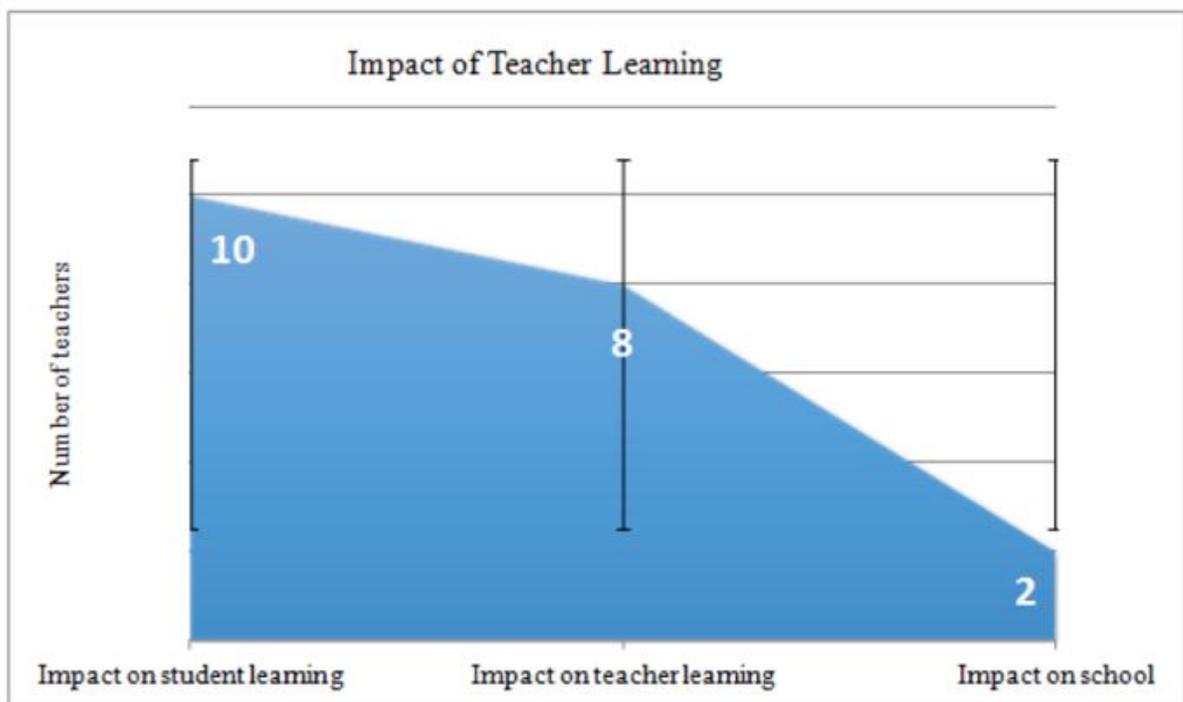


Figure 4.12. Impact of TPL as perceived by teachers

Looking at the qualitative data altogether and apart from these definitions articulated by the teachers, it is worthy of consideration that teachers' perceptions of their learning varied from restricted understandings of learning (i.e., in the narrow context of the classroom) to more comprehensive and wide-ranging conceptualizations. While it is important to contend that these definitions provided insights into how teachers understood and perceived their learning, the data also suggested that teachers seemed to be aware of wider understandings and implications of their learning. This

awareness was reflected in their role as agents of change in an evolving and developing educational context, a significant role, which will be fully explored in the next section.

Apart from identifying its long-term impact on student learning and school improvement, teachers also related their learning to significant educational purposes that go beyond personal development and the confines of their classrooms. The qualitative data, for instance, yielded important suggestions made by teachers to develop the current professional learning programmes in the school. The following is a summary of these suggestions:

- Investing more in professional development by involving experienced teachers (Samir).
- Taking in consideration teachers' concrete needs when developing professional development programmes (Samir).
- Spending time identifying teachers' needs (Ibrahim).
- Categorizing teachers according to different areas of development (Ibrahim).
- Consulting teachers about the professional development programmes. (Monica).
- Conducting a survey on teachers' needs (Paul).
- Developing professional development for teachers according to their needs. (Abdullah).
- Sending a needs analysis survey (Abdullah).
- Avoiding PD sessions at the end of the school day (Sheikha).
- Attending external professional development events (Sheikha).
- Contributing to the professional development programmes (Sheikha).
- Helping and encouraging teachers to be more autonomous (Christine).
- Cultivating more trust and respect for teachers (Christine).
- Structuring the professional development programmes according to the teachers' areas of need (Christine).

- Involving more experienced and senior teachers in developing their colleagues and contributing to the PD programmes inside the school (Christine).
- Involving teachers in the design of the new curriculum and materials (Christine).
- Taking teachers' comments onboard (Christine).
- Providing more professional learning opportunities (Christine).
- Asking teachers about their needs and involving them in Tamkeen (Salima).
- Involving teachers in the curriculum design (Steve).
- Involving teachers in reviewing ADEC policies (Steve).
- Developing a strong professional development programme (Steve).
- Suggesting that teachers should have less workload to have more time for professional development (Leila).

Teachers also exhibited great awareness of the organizational barriers affecting their learning as they recounted numerous examples, where they felt continuously managed, audited and pressurized by ADEC policies and standards. Steve, for example, thought that there was a lot of knowledge inside the school that could be shared. Teachers, he explained, had many different skills and proficiencies, but there was no real motivation to share and exchange these professional experiences. Steve explained that the reason for not finding enough time to share these professional experiences was because much time was given to other areas like committing to Tamkeen and the school committees every week. Steve also mentioned that there was a huge number of requirements on paper work, which distracted him from performing other tasks. Concurring with this, Monica emphasized that teachers had very little control of decision inside the school, and she gave the curriculum as an example. All these accounts tie in with the next section, where data about teacher agency will be presented in relation to TPL.

4.2.4.5 Teacher Agency

In this section, I will explain what agency means in the context of teacher learning, and to what extent teachers are considered agents of their professional learning and development. Therefore, it is important to start by defining the term before attempting to address the second question. Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) considered agency an important aspect of teacher professionalism. Emirbayer and Mische (1998, cited in Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015) defined agency as “the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of a presently evolving situation” (p. 627). Probably, one implication of this definition was that for teachers to be called agentic about their learning, they should exercise choice, agency and initiative on the professional development programmes at their school.

Whether explicitly, implicitly or through teachers’ allusions to this issue, agency was a recurrent theme in the semi-structured interviews. Conducting a comparison between the five themes by the number of study informants, agency was identified as the most salient theme. As the following figure shows, thirteen informants raised the lack of agency during their interviews

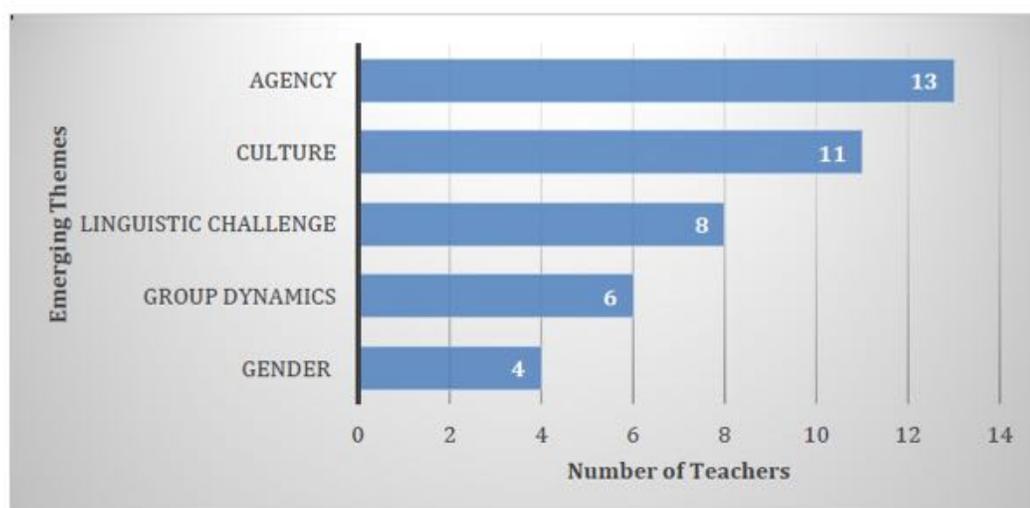


Figure 4.13. Comparison of salience of themes by number of informants.

There is also ample evidence in the data showing that teachers were highly critical of this lack of agency. The following are some of teachers' comments with respect to their learning and development.

There is also ample evidence in the data showing that teachers were highly critical of this lack of agency. Teachers like Brian, Samir, Steve, Monica, Salah and Ibrahim expressed their discontent at the way TPL was approached by ADEC and the school. Samir, for instance, contended that professional development was not a choice and that the PD topics were imposed by Tamkeen. Elaborating on this topic, Brian expressed his complete dissatisfaction with ADEC and the school's approach to teacher PD, which, according to him, tried to marginalize and ignore teachers' experiences, expertise and what he called professional judgment. Brian argued that the topics were not open to teachers and that Tamkeen had an agenda dictated by ADEC:

Everything is tied ... unfortunately to under the year evaluation and... so what they wanna see is you take your evaluation which is... you can say it's not collaboratively but it's more done by administration. It's their decisions. But you know that if you really want ah some other area that it's not it's gonna be changed so you go and find what the administration sees for you and that's the decision on PD plan (Brian)

Salah, Monica and Ibrahim also agree that Tamkeen was imposed on them. Steve believed that PD time could be spent better by delivering a stronger programme that is more focused on the needs of the school and the students.

As illustrated in the quotes above, teachers (i.e., Brian, Samir, Steve, Monica, Salah and Ibrahim) expressed their discontent about the way TPL was approached by ADEC and the school. Elaborating on this topic, Brian expressed his complete dissatisfaction with ADEC and the school's approach to teacher PD, which, according to him, tried to marginalize and ignore teachers' experiences, expertise and what he called professional judgment. During my conversation with Brian, I felt he had a deep

understanding of the major issues and challenges facing TPL. His critical stance during the interview reflected a mature and reflective professional, who was able to provide in-depth insights into TPL at both levels: the school and the wider socio-cultural context. Brian had worked in the school for five years and he has already decided to go back to the United Kingdom because, as he told me at the end of the interview, he could not cope with ADEC's inconsistencies. In response to the question about the ways the school hinders teachers' professional learning, Brian answered:

By not allowing me... They want me to follow a script... So it is kind of putting a whole lot of my experience on the side and I need to do what's on the paper, what's on the script. So, giving me one way to learn that but they really want to take away my professional judgment. I don't agree with a lot of what's on the paper, or I've learnt other things that seem to work better and administration just want you to follow follow the guidelines and that's all. (Brian)

Brian also thought that both the school and the teachers had very little input when it comes to their professional development, because the agenda was already decided by ADEC. Citing the example of teacher development plans, Brian highlighted the absence of agency in teacher's PD decisions. He believed that these decisions were determined by the administration, no matter what teachers' PD preferences were. The reason for this, Brian argued, was that the teachers' professional development plans were deeply tied to the teacher's evaluations, which were carried out by the administration.

Another area where the teachers felt they had no agency was the imposed curriculum and materials. Steve thought that there was a need for a re-evaluation of the curriculum, and how it was delivered to all levels. He also thought that ADEC's expectations and the outcomes were too high. Teachers, Steve argued, should be involved in the design of the new curriculum. He went even further to suggest involving teachers in reviewing ADEC policies. According to him, this could be done through focus groups working on different aspects of the policies. On the other hand, although Steve argued that there were recent changes in this direction as he saw teachers being

involved in curriculum development, he also thought that these initiatives got slowed down, and were eventually stopped by all ADEC “red tape” policies. Brian goes further to suggest that ADEC imposed policies could affect professional identity.

The curriculum is terrible... We have textbooks and we are subscribing to them. The negative part is that the textbook is terrible. They are confusing. I've been doing this for a long time. I'm confused looking at some of this material... There is no sequential methodology and plus the stuff like science is away very difficult academically... Because if you have the materials imposed on you, you are not happy with these materials, you know again, it will affect you and your professional identity. (Brian)

Brian's quote reflected a sense of frustration and lack of agency, which had affected negatively his teaching practices. Such a quote also shows that teachers are highly articulate in their sense of agency as they feel using such foisted materials would affect their identity as autonomous and experienced practitioners. In the same context, Brian explained that dealing with the curriculum was a huge issue, and that every time he tried to use ADEC's materials he decided to put them on the shelf. Monica voiced the same concern, upholding that some curricula, used in the school, were irrelevant to the local context. She argued that the current science curriculum, for instance, was not designed for ESL learners, whose first language is Arabic. She argued that she was not interested in raising this to the school leaders because she knew that these decisions were not even within the school control. For this purpose, Monica used supplementary teacher-made materials to address this gap. Monica also voiced another aspect of this lack of agency. She noted that although the school leaders were sometimes ready to listen to her, the decision by the end of the day was theirs:

So it sounds like a contradictive to what I'm saying. But I do feel heard. I do feel ah... You know that a lot of things are (...) gonna be one way or another in a lot of circumstances. But I do feel like if you want to raise concern or just say I don't agree with that...I get the consideration but at the end of the day the school principal decides (laughing). (Monica)

In agreement with this, Steve thought that the school policies were too much tied down to ADEC's policies and to ticking boxes and fulfilling certain policy objectives. Many teachers, Steve explained, had good ideas, but unfortunately, they went unnoticed simply because they did not fit ADEC's agenda and policies. In the same vein, and reflecting on her experience with the special needs committee, Amy said that it was a useless experience. The reason, Amy explained, was that it was dictated to them.

Imposed PD programmes like Tamkeen compounded this view of teachers' lack of agency about their professional learning. Brian mentioned that Tamkeen carried an agenda dictated by ADEC, which was sometimes inconsistent with teachers' own learning priorities. Most of the informants also thought that Tamkeen was ineffective for the simple reason that it did not seek teachers' views about the topics. Almost all teachers also argued that in-house professional development could be more beneficial than Tamkeen PD programmes. Monica for instance criticized the limited PD opportunities inside the school. As she put it, teachers did not have the opportunity to choose PD activities beyond what was decided for them by the school and ADEC. An implicit assumption from teachers' accounts was that Tamkeen deprived them from the opportunity to exercise choice and agency with respect to their own learning. In response to the question about the effectiveness of Tamkeen, Brian said it had a very little effect.

The only time Salima and Sheikha felt Tamkeen programmes were efficient was when they involved teachers in one of the sessions during the whole year. Sheikha gave an example where she and a group of other teachers presented about evaluation and assessment in one of Tamkeen sessions, which she found very interesting and beneficial. Other teachers (i.e., Abdullah, Samir and Paul) questioned hiring external PD companies to supervise PD programmes. Samir, for example, compared the current situation with how PD was managed before ADEC, under the Ministry of Education. He criticized the fact that TPL under ADEC was run by an external company (i.e. Tamkeen), which according to him did not involve teachers, nor did it seek their views regarding their learning. He also felt frustrated at the school's marginalization of what he called

“teachers’ potential capabilities”. In the same vein, during one of Tamkeen workshops, Samir mentioned an example where he felt more knowledgeable than the presenter.

Teachers also showed a deep awareness of TPL approach and policies advocated by the school and ADEC. Brian, for instance, said that what mattered for the school and ADEC was to provide evidence of your professional development activities. As long as you provide evidence, Brian explained, everything was fine. Brian argued that this evidence-based approach to teacher professional development did not take into consideration teachers' professional needs and preferences. He also noted that whatever ADEC decided, the schools needed to follow. According to him, it was a top-down approach to teacher professional development as Tamkeen decided topics a priori. Brian summarized formal teacher professional development in ADEC schools in the following paragraph:

It becomes clear if you pay attention. You listen and read your emails, OK? That whatever are the burning issues for ADEC that drives the formal professional development. So, ah this is differentiation that was (...) the (...) last year and happened this year. Everything was differentiation and then I watched that subside, OK? Now the new word or phrase “critical thinking”, so I think that’s gonna be the push for next year. So, whatever, if you pay attention to what you hear, what’s integrating from ADEC... ah that and may listen to the content and I talk to the Tamkeen people, and the other organization I had is there they don’t even have (...) They are given their content from ADEC. So this is all. It’s top down rhythm. (Brian)

Steve also mentioned that the school senior leadership expected teachers to develop their own portfolios. In these PD portfolios, the school expected teachers to provide evidence of what they achieved from their PD plans. What was most important for these teachers, according to Amy, was to develop a folder and show it to the administration. That was more important than doing the work and seeing the benefit for the pupils. Furthermore, Monica criticized ADEC’s evidence-based school culture of gathering evidence. She thought that it would be more valuable for her to identify her

areas of need and the strategies and professional learning programmes to address these needs, rather than have the school identify her needs and then try hard to prove to the school leaders that she has succeeded in meeting them.

Amy highlighted another aspect of this lack of agency. She expressed her disappointment at the way the meetings were held in the Special Needs Committee. She stated that they had few meetings at the beginning of the year in Arabic with English translation, usually provided by the school translator. Then the meetings stopped taking place, and one of the committee members told her what they wanted from her. Monica was also dissatisfied with the professional development inside the school because she did not feel there was an opportunity to choose things that she was interested in.

I believe... I think that the topics are predetermined. I don't, I think that they are given a sort of things that have to do with us. I don't (emphasis) think that teachers have ever made suggestions of things that they'd like to learn about. ...Then it could just be the presenter. It could be a richer material, you know, just with something different. I don't know, but I have seen teachers ask questions and were completely shut down and stopped and... almost why are you asking that! So no one wants them to ask questions and to get deeper in something.
(Monica)

In the same context, Sheikha, who was a member of three committees, acknowledged that apart from working with the Gifted Students Committee, she did nothing with the two others. She explained that the other two committees were imposed by the school administration and that she was involved unwillingly. Comparing her current school to the previous schools she worked for, Sheikha asserted the other schools used to involve teachers in their in-house professional development programmes.

Having so far presented all qualitative data related to teacher agency articulated by teachers themselves, it is worthwhile to note that there is a consensus among school leaders and the teachers regarding this lack of agency. The academic vice principal, for instance, seemed dissatisfied with another related issue. According to him, many PD

programmes were repeated and recycled. He also thought that ADEC was marginalizing teachers by not involving them in the PD programmes inside the school. The next quotation illustrates this point:

We are former teachers and competent administrators and there are lecturers among us, but totally marginalized. Meaning, they started with the idea of ah the trainer and so and they exaggerated in that. But we did not see anything. Where are the trainers? I heard about trainers: trainers from the administrations, teachers and so... So we have PhD holders. (The academic vice principal)

At a wider context, the headteacher expressed his disappointment at the state of PD in the UAE, which he thought, lacked a lot of direction and purpose. He criticized ADEC's policies of relying too much on expatriates considering it contradictory to its own vision of preparing national and local trained workforce. Presumably, the school leadership was responsible for teacher professional development inside the school. However, there was evidence from the qualitative data that teacher PD policies were tightly centralized. The data also indicated that neither the school nor the teachers contributed to the TPL policy development since policies were solely prepared, developed and determined by ADEC. This was what Ibrahim seemed to express:

Ah it is honestly (...) First of all, it is, that's to say... The school... in every school there is no full independence in its administration, or in its decisions, or in its evaluation methods. It follows ADEC. We have a high level centrality (...) limited margin. (Ibrahim)

Notwithstanding what was previously presented about the lack of agency and choice regarding professional development inside the school, teachers were eager to engage in many informal initiatives and projects in addition to the regular assigned work-related duties. Brian also explained that the administration usually supported these informal meetings between teachers. However, insisting on record keeping (i.e., they like to see meeting minutes) for the sake of evidence, often makes these meetings formal. While some of them felt frustrated and complained about the lack of

professional development opportunities apart from Tamkeen, some others took a more proactive approach and engaged in informal learning experiences. The next section explores teachers' informal experiences.

4.2.4.6 Informal Learning

For the purposes of this study, it is important to define the term informal learning and understand its various implications. Informal learning is defined as “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill, which occurs outside the curricula of institutions providing educational programmes, courses or workshops” (Livingstone, 1999, pp. 3–4). Informal learning, in which teachers usually engage willingly and enthusiastically, is considered an active mode of learning, as opposite to passive modes of learning, where irrelevant forms of professional development are foisted on teachers. The teachers' interviews revealed several instances where teachers made informal initiatives, such as inviting their colleagues to their classrooms or to joining a project. Table 4.15 illustrates in detail these informal learning activities teachers engaged in.

Table 4.15

Teachers' formal and informal opportunities

Informal Opportunities	Impact of Informal Learning Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using questionnaires to reflect on the teaching practice (Abdullah and Sheikha) ▪ Reading (Abdullah and Leila) ▪ Observing students and using surveys as evaluation strategies (Ibrahim and Paul) ▪ Observing students as an evaluation of one's practice (All the informants) ▪ Doing research online (Leila and Salah) ▪ Reading manuals on classroom or behaviour management (Leila and Paul) ▪ Using reports and assessment as evaluation tools (Christine and Richard) ▪ Using lesson plan as a reflective and evaluation tool (Ibrahim) ▪ Exchanging experiences with other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflecting on the teaching performance and student achievement ▪ Providing feedback to students and parents (Abdullah) ▪ Getting feedback on teaching from parents (Abdullah and Ibrahim) ▪ Evaluating one's practice (all the informants) ▪ Developing student's reading through the curriculum competition among students, (Abdullah and Ibrahim) ▪ Documenting students work (Abdullah) ▪ Improving teaching (Abdullah, Leila, Salah, Samir and Steve) ▪ having feedback from students (Ibrahim,

<p>colleagues (Leila, Salah, Samir, and Steve)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Taking online courses (Steve) ▪ Critical friend (Richard) ▪ Using the internet as a learning tool (Leila, Paul and Steve) ▪ Developing a curriculum (Leila and Samir) ▪ Working individually on a project to enhance students' critical thinking (Amy and Samir) ▪ Designing a website to post students' projects on the internet (Abdullah) ▪ Conducting a project on first grade students (Abdullah) ▪ Designing a curriculum on Microsoft Word and PowerPoint (Leila) ▪ Carrying out a project called Arabic Language Knights aiming to improve student's Arabic skills as well as developing the reading interest for first grade students. (Abdullah) ▪ Trying the <i>whole brain learning</i> in teaching (Paul) ▪ Collecting data on student improvement in the classroom using graphs. 	<p>Paul, Salima and Sheikha)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Different teaching strategies beneficial to students (Paul and Samir) ▪ feedback on teaching and on students' achievement (Abdullah and Paul) ▪ Professional growth through having student feedback (Amy) ▪ Being aware of new teaching methods (Abdullah, Ibrahim and Samir) ▪ Reflecting on the teaching practice (Abdullah Samir, Paul, Salah and) ▪ Improving student learning, providing positive feedback (Richard) ▪ Up-skilling (Richard) ▪ Evaluating teaching practice (all the informants) <p>Enhancing student learning (Paul and Salah)</p>
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Table 4.15 clearly demonstrates that teachers engaged in more different informal learning activities than formal ones restricted to Tamkeen and in attending few external PD events. One of the most frequent informal opportunities reported by teachers was informal conversation. Teacher talked positively and proudly of these informal learning experiences, which, according to them, generated meaningful and impactful learning experiences. Brian, for instance, said he often engaged in conversations with his colleagues. This gave him the opportunity to learn from them, to exchange experiences and ideas on what was and was not working with them. When asked about whether this talk was important for teachers, he explained that sometimes he discussed with his colleagues students' levels and problems, which kept him more informed about his students. Salima also mentioned that teachers themselves sometimes took the initiative by deciding to meet and discuss some specific issues.

Sometimes the initiative comes from a female teacher. That is when I attended training about designing exam questions. After probably one or two days, I met Arabic female teachers because the training was from grade 4 to grade 12. So I met grade 4 teachers and grade 5 teachers. That is the Arabic female teachers. So I applied what I learnt from this training with the teachers. (Salima)

Sheikha mentioned that teachers were known for their informal meetings, in which some of the talk centred on the school, the pupils and teaching. Sheikha explained that some teachers met together in an informal way to discuss some topics, such as classroom management. She also maintained that she often attended informal observation classes with an Arabic language teacher, and that she learnt a lot from her colleague, especially from the way she dealt with her students, her teaching strategies, as well as her classroom management skills. When asked whether the administration asked her to attend these peer observations, she said that she did that voluntarily.

Another informal learning experience is recounted by Samir, a sports teacher, who conducted two PD projects: the first was on developing student creative thinking and fluency of thought with first grade teachers, and the second was a collective presentation with teachers from different subjects. Samir, the project chair, involved both parents and teachers from different subjects, who were supportive and very enthusiastic about the project. Commenting on his project, Samir said that it was an example of relying on teacher expertise, which was successful according to him. Paul also said that he had carried out some joint projects with one Arabic teacher, in which they had to work with students to write greeting cards for Eid celebrations, part of it was in English and the other part was in Arabic. Paul described the project as effective as both teachers and students were involved in discussing it in both languages. Paul had also noticed that the students liked the project very much because they were able to see the outcome, as they were able to produce the cards by themselves.

Talking about her personal initiative, Sheikha explained that she designed differentiated materials and shared them with other colleagues from the same subject. Soon her idea turned into a project and she involved other teachers with her. When

asked if the other teachers had the same opinion about seeing this experience as beneficial, Sheikha confirmed that they all found it very helpful to their students. In response to the question whether she thought of spreading the project schoolwise, Sheikha said that she had not thought of that and that she had not even informed the administration about this project.

Similarly, Monica also recounted numerous informal professional learning experiences she had gone through, both alone and in collaboration with other teachers. Describing these learning experiences, Monica mentioned that she was passionate about math and that she was constantly trying what was coming up in math (i.e., what was new in math; how we could teach something different; and how to motivate students). On the other hand, Steve shared another story about informal professional learning inside the school. He contended that sometimes he had difficulty teaching pupils certain sounds or letters, such as the /p/ and /b/ sounds, which were problematic for Arab learners in the Gulf. For this reason, he asked assistance from other colleagues, who were often willing to provide some suggestions like sharing a good website or some other materials they found useful and helpful. As an informal personal initiative, Ibrahim focused on lesson plans, which he often developed and shared with his colleagues. Finally, Brian also mentioned that he met with other colleagues in informal settings to discuss certain issues or aspects of their teaching, which was an opportunity to share ideas about classroom management. The following two quotations describe these informal experiences.

You know since most of the EMTs we have the same lunch period, so in the lunch time we do a lot of discussion on what's working, what's not working: How do you handle behaviour issue, how do you teach this... Ah I use... that's a good idea, may I... can try it. So ...it's informal schedule but it is ideas being presented at that time. (Brian)

So talking among other staff members just informally, may be in the corridor, in the staff room, or at a planning meeting is very important and it's like you say

it's informal professional development and it's happening every day. I understand it like this. (Steve)

At the end of my analysis of these salient themes, it is important to note that despite the lack of school support, teachers exhibited great responsibility and commitment towards their own professional learning. Their dissatisfaction with the formal professional development programme, Tamkeen, motivated some of them to pursue learning through alternative informal avenues. The following section provides a summary of key findings related to the fourth theme.

4.2.4.7 Summary of Main Findings about Teachers' Perceptions of their Learning in the School and Regional Contexts

This final section of the qualitative data analysis focuses on teachers' perceptions of their learning in the school and regional contexts. One of the important findings was that teachers showed great awareness of the individual, organizational and cultural challenges to their own learning. This was reflected, for example, in their views about agency and effective teacher learning. The qualitative data suggested that most of the teachers reported a lack of agency and decision-making because of the imposed school formal PD programmes. Apart from the informal learning activities initiated by the teachers, the study findings indicated that teachers did not have any input or voice in the development programmes at the school. However, despite this lack of agency, which teachers expressed repeatedly in the interviews, teachers were agentic with respect to the informal professional learning activities. The qualitative data abound with examples, in which teachers volunteered to organize and lead professional development inside the school through teacher-led projects and initiatives. Finally, the data suggested that the school teachers needed a greater degree of ownership and agency over their professional learning and that teachers should be trusted as autonomous professionals, who are capable of leading and creating professional development opportunities in their schools.

4.2.5 Conclusion

The aim of the data analysis chapter was to present the findings organized in four main sections, namely that of teachers' learning orientations, organizational learning practices and systems, challenges to TPL and teachers' perceptions and interpretations of their learning. One major finding in this study was that TPL inside the school lacked coherence, focus and strategy. Although, there was evidence that it was sustained throughout the whole year, the qualitative data showed that it was not embedded or contextualized in teachers' classroom practices. Another key finding had to do with evaluation. There is evidence from the teachers' interviews that the school professional development programmes were rarely evaluated, especially in relation to the planned teacher and student learning outcomes.

The study findings also indicated that most of the teachers did not demonstrate a sense of agency and initiative in terms of their own professional learning, as many constraints seemed to hold them back from engaging in further professional learning opportunities. These constraints included lack of administrative support, lack of time as well as lack of choice in the school's professional development programmes. The data also suggested that teachers were not consulted and their input was at different times ignored and disregarded as school support seemed to be ad hoc rather than strategic, planned or part of a wider comprehensive school teacher professional development agenda. Apart from the informal learning activities initiated by the teachers, the qualitative data provided evidence that the teachers did not have any input or voice in determining their learning at school.

Another interesting finding, developed from the data, was that the focus on implementing ADEC's policies, which favour an expert imposed model of professional development over teachers' initiated PD, had a counter effect, as teachers responded negatively to these formal programmes. This might be a response to the lack of suitable and appropriate professional development programmes, as indicated by the informants themselves. Conversely, teachers have recounted many examples of their professional learning taking place at informal settings that even the school senior leaders were not

aware of. It was noticeable that although the schools did not offer formal professional development structures, these teachers managed to create settings, which offered them possibilities for learning. One possible interpretation, here, is that as soon as teachers felt that the school formal programmes did not meet their own learning needs, they have turned, instead, to informal learning activities.

However, given the small size of the study sample, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Ashmore, (1989, cited in Stomach & MacLure, 1997) noted that researchers should be careful about being conclusive about their data because research participants' accounts are "contextual, defeasible, inconcludable and reflexive in the realities they invoke and address" (p.56). Finally, reflecting on the whole data analysis process, I would agree with the view that if data collection is viewed as boring and monotonous, data analysis is considered an exciting journey (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For me, at least, it was a rewarding learning experience given my personal interest in investigating TPL in this local context. The following chapter will undertake a critical discussion of these findings in light of the literature review, the study methodological approach as well as the context of the study.

Chapter Five

Discussion of the findings

5.1 Introduction

The objective of the discussion chapter is twofold. Firstly, it reports the quantitative and qualitative data in relation to the main research objectives that have shaped the study. To this end, both sets of data were integrated to identify any data dissimilarities or apparent contradictions. Secondly, it provides a discussion of these findings in light of the literature, the context and the four research questions:

1. What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?
2. How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?
3. What are the challenges and barriers to teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools?
4. How do the teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?

The following is a discussion of the main findings in relation to the four research questions.

5.2 Research Question One

What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?

As mentioned in the data analysis chapter, understanding teacher learning orientations is helpful in understanding teachers' willingness to engage in professional learning activities (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) also explained that teachers' values and practices are part of the "symbolic

cultural artifacts” (p. 269) along with other school and organizational systems and values, which are necessary for understanding TPL. This more integrated understanding of teachers’ learning, as an embedded component or process of a wider system of personal and organisational growth and development (Opfer & Pedder, 2011), also helps us comprehend how teachers construe the value of these learning activities in creating opportunities for them to learn. To begin with and as shown in Table 5.1, it is clear that apart from research, there were no significant differences between the other three learning orientations (i.e., internal, external and collaborative) in the overall value means. However, according to the overall practice means, it is notable that collaborative learning activities were more integrated in teachers’ practices than the other three orientations.

Table 5.1
The learning orientations: comparison between the quantitative and qualitative data

Orientation	Quantitative data	Qualitative data	Similarities or Contradictions
Internal Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall, the levels of recorded practices and values are both high for internal orientation ▪ Values (M=3.44, SD=0.37) ▪ Practices (M=3.36, SD=0.36) ▪ Low values–practice gaps 	There is evidence in the data that the teachers incorporated internal learning activities in their practice.	Consistency between the qualitative and quantitative data.
Collaborative Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers recorded the highest levels of practice for this orientation (M=3.54, SD= 0.50). ▪ The only orientation with values ahead of practices. ▪ Low values–practice gaps. 	Teachers talked positively about the collaborative orientation. Teachers also reported several examples, where they mentioned that collaboration had a positive impact on their practice.	Consistency between the qualitative and quantitative data.

External Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Third most highly valued orientation for both values and practices ▪ Values (M=3.41, SD= 0.47) ▪ Practices (M=3.35, SD=0.54) ▪ Low values–practice gaps 	There is evidence in the qualitative data that many teachers engaged with the external learning activities, such as learning from a critical friend from outside the school, inviting a senior teacher or expert, and attending external conferences and workshops.	Qualitative and quantitative data are relatively consistent.
Research Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The lowest levels of values (M=3.20, SD= 0.57) and of practices (M=2.95, SD=.53) recorded by teachers ▪ Fairly high values–practice gaps 	Very few teachers have carried out research or engaged with published research, which is a real gap compared to the other learning orientations.	Consistency between the qualitative and quantitative data.

As shown in table 5.1, teachers attributed higher levels of values to professional learning activities that involved collaborative strategies (M=3.54) and internal orientation (M=3.462). Compared to the other three learning orientations, research orientation was the least valued and integrated within teachers’ professional learning practice as both lower levels of values and practices were recorded for research orientation. One major finding from the quantitative data, therefore, is the high well-aligned values and practices for internal, external; and collaborative orientations and less well-aligned values and practices for the research orientation.

I will first start with the internal orientation, which reflects individual classroom and lesson-contextualised tendencies to learning such as reflection, self-evaluation, experimentation with practice, and consulting students about how they learn most effectively. According to the quantitative data, the questionnaire participants recorded high levels of practice and values that were in close alignment for the following activities:

1. Self-evaluation (Values: M=3.62; practices: M= 3.54)
2. Reflection (Values: M=3.38; practices: M= 3.49)
3. Experimentation (Values: M=3.36; practices: M= 3.33)
4. Consulting students (Values: M=3.13; practices: M= 3.00)

The quantitative data also showed that although teachers tended to place more emphasis on particular learning activities, such as reflection and self-evaluation, they were less likely to experiment with their practice and consult their pupils about how they learn. These data seem to be consistent with the qualitative findings, which indicated that the lowest levels of practice were reported for consulting students. However, unlike the questionnaire findings, the qualitative data showed that teachers placed considerable emphasis on experimentation as a learning tool. As explained in 4.2.1, teachers experimented with their practice in different forms, including trying new ideas, implementing differentiation, conducting projects, designing, and modifying curricula. These findings are in line with Hargreaves' (1999) notion of experimentation or what he called the "tinkering teacher", which he considered an important element of practice-based and, therefore, contextualized knowledge creation at schools. However, Hargreaves (1998, cited in Moon, Butcher & Bird, 2000) also argued that such individual endeavours are limited. Knowledge creation, he contended, cannot be left to what he called the "idiosyncratic tinkering of individual teachers" (p. 237). What is needed, according to Hargreaves (1999), is a collective tinkering leading to collective knowledge creation that involves not only groups of teachers, but also groups of schools networking together through different forms of professional development. This shared tinkering is crucial to breaking the isolation of teachers and schools, as well.

With respect to reflection, a closer look at both the quantitative and qualitative data indicates that there was consistency among teachers in terms of the high value they placed on these practices. According to the qualitative data, teachers reported several examples of reflecting on their teaching, including reflecting on lessons, students'

results, students' feedback, etc. This is consistent with a significant body of literature emphasizing the importance of reflection in teachers' practice. McIntyre (1993), for instance, considered it a skilful practice of critical importance. In agreement, Pedder, James and MacBeath (2005) argued that teachers need to be continuously guided and supported in developing and embedding the skills and habits of reflection in their professional practice. Willis and Willis (1996) also contended that teachers who are able to critically examine their classroom practices monitor and evaluate the impact of methodologies and approaches on their teaching are not at the mercy of policy reforms, shifts and changes. These teachers, Willis and Willis (1996) further argued, are more empowered to either accept or refute approaches and policies imposed on them.

Comparing the quantitative findings of the four learning orientations, it is clear that teachers attributed the highest values and practices to collaboration (Table 5.1). This is consistent with the qualitative findings yielded by the study, which provided strong evidence that collaborative learning was highly valued by teachers who pointed out that they learn from collaborating, sharing experiences, as well as engaging in meaningful discussions about their practice. This positive attitude towards collaboration is consistent with the literature, which maintains that the quality of learning hinges on participatory practices and collaboration in the workplace (Billet, 2002). These findings are also interesting in this context in so far as collaboration and communities of practice are positioned within the conceptual framework of the current study. According to socio-cultural learning theory, learning is social in nature and is built on and achieved through mediated social interaction among individual teachers, colleagues, resources, and the school environment. Likewise, the situative approach conceptualizes learning as a communal activity collectively negotiated and constructed by teachers in their schools as they interact with each other and engage in different learning activities. These theoretical propositions about learning are consistent with Salomon and Perkins' (1998) notion of individual and social aspects of learning as well as Sfard's (1998) participation metaphor already discussed in my review of literature.

In commending school collaborative culture, my intention is not to be understood as an attempt to discredit individual learning. As I argued in the literature review, collaborative and individual modes of learning are both essential, as they complement each other. Although the dominant learning culture in the school, as the qualitative data showed, was one of collegiality and collaboration, there were some voices among teachers favouring individual learning. There was also evidence in the study that some teachers opted for individual learning. Christine, for example, said she found it beneficial; she used a powerful metaphor to show its importance.

But you can't supply anything to the team if you don't have anything for yourself. And if you're going on the plane they say you have to put on the mask for yourself before you can help somebody else. Well, it has to first start within from the individual, let the mastery foundation of confidence in whatever they are doing to present to the team confidently and say "hey listen what I was thinking", now we can have a genuine conversation instead of you dictating this...right! (Christine)

This finding corroborates Huberman's argument (1993, cited in Pedder, James & MacBeath, 2005) highlighting the virtuosity of the individual by arguing that some teachers prefer to "work alone, learn alone, and derive their most important professional satisfactions alone—or, rather, from interactions with pupils instead of with peers" (p. 221). A closer look at the quantitative and qualitative data of the current study shows that teachers engaged in individual learning, reflected on both the internal learning activities, and collaborative learning. Pedder and Macbeath (2008) argued that both orientations reflect a balance between the intrapersonal or private and interpersonal or public processes of learning, which are characteristic of effective CPD.

In the same vein, organizational theory posits that learning takes place as a consequence of participation in situated and social activities. Stoll et al. (2006) considered learning a collective affair, in which all teachers, educational leaders and school learning communities "work and learn together to take charge of change" (p. 222). This approach is premised on the assumption that teacher learning is not only the

focus of individual attention, but also the “object of collective attention” (Horn & Little, 2010, p. 192). As a result of this collegiality and collective agreements, as Hargreaves argues, new knowledge is created and new learning takes place in an authentic context (Wong, 2012). Salomon and Perkins (1998) also argued that the transfer from single-loop learning to double-loop learning takes place when individuals inside an organization have opportunities to “air and test tacit assumptions publicly, avoid unilateral protection of themselves or others, and come together in collective problem-solving processes that deal with large-scale tacit issues, not just surface technical issues” (p.15). Pedder and Macbeath (2008) further contended that double-loop learning takes place when schools utilize critical processes and strategies in their self-evaluation and involve teachers and pupils in these processes. Similarly, Perkins (2003) contended that smart schools utilize self-evaluation to question and challenge their assumptions, beliefs and practices.

Among collaborative learning activities, peer observation was identified in the qualitative data as one of the most highly valued by both teachers and school leaders. It was identified as an opportunity for teachers to provide constructive feedback and reflection on different areas of practice. This is consistent with what was mentioned in the literature that peer observation is considered one of the “key teacher learning practices” (Pedder, James & MacBeath, 2005, p.222). It is also argued that peer observation is grounded in learning theories, such as the constructivist approach, which views learning, in terms of its bottom-up processes, constructed by teachers in their local contexts as they interact with their colleagues, their students, and the curriculum. Teachers learn and develop in their careers when their learning is scaffolded by other peers, as well as when it is supported and resourced by the school organizational structures and culture. The present findings seem to be consistent with other research conducted in a local context. Atwi (2016), for example, found that professional learning activities such as study groups and peer observation have a great impact on English teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs in the context of a private school in the UAE. In the local context of Abu Dhabi, Badri et al. (2016) conducted a study on teachers’ PD needs,

impacts and challenges, and reported that teachers consider peer-observation one of the most effective learning activities.

Concerning external orientation, despite the fact that teachers recorded the highest levels of practice to learning activities reflecting this orientation (i.e., using the web as source of learning: values: $m=3.72$; practices: $m=3.74$), the external orientation was ranked third in the overall ranking of the most highly valued practices (Table 5.1). The qualitative data also indicated that apart from attending PD events outside the school, there was evidence that teachers placed less emphasis on other external learning activities, such as using the web as a source for improving practice, as well as using feedback from school leaders to modify and enhance practice. Pedder and Opfer (2013) explained that low valued practices tend to be less prioritized.

Hence, practices which teachers value highly are practices to which they are more likely to give high priority. Such high priority practices are more likely to be incorporated by teachers as sustained and embedded features of their professional learning and teaching. Conversely, low-valued professional learning practices are less likely to be prioritised by teachers, and so less likely to be realised and sustained in practice. (p.543)

I now turn to discuss key findings of the research orientation. As shown in Table 5.1, the questionnaire findings indicated that teachers recorded their lowest scores for both values and practices in research orientation; practices tended to be further below their values. These results are consistent with the qualitative data, which suggested that teachers were not proactive in conducting research or using extant research. As explained in section (4.1.4) in chapter four, teachers identified different barriers to conducting and using research at their school, including (a) time, (b) teaching workload (c) lack of institutional support, (d) lack of training on research skills and methodology, (e) lack of confidence, and (f) lack of recognition of teacher research. This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that lack of school support, time and inexperience in research are the major challenges facing teachers otherwise willing to conduct research (Hannon, 1998; Pedder, James & MacBeath, 2005). Hannon (1998) mentioned three

factors affecting teachers' professional autonomy and collaboration, required for engaging in research. These factors include increasing workload, prescriptive curricula, bureaucratic and audit policies of surveillance, all of which were mentioned by teachers in the current study as impediments preventing them from engaging in research. This lack of time and institutional support was also echoed in Pedder, James and MacBeath (2005), who argued that teachers' research needs to be supported through the following:

- Raising teachers' awareness about the value of research as both a challenging and practical activity.
- Demystifying stereotypes often held about research as a decontextualized activity, which does not take into consideration classroom and school realities.
- Providing more time and resources for teachers to conduct research and reflect on its implications.
- Helping teachers gain access to current research about their practice to remain updated about recent teaching methods and pedagogies.
- Developing a climate of trust, in which teachers feel more confident to carry out research.

Emphasizing the importance of action research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) described teacher research as an important element in maintaining a critical and transformative inquiry stance, which enables teachers not only to analyse and theorize their practice but also to generate local knowledge. According to Pedder and Opfer (2013), the effective professional learning that supports student learning and teacher development is essentially collaborative and research oriented (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Giroux (2000) also argued that practitioner research contributes to knowledge generation and empowers teachers as agents of change. Similarly, Kincheloe (2005) believed that by conducting research, teachers do not only create knowledge inside schools, they also own, control, and determine decision-making.

The qualitative data of this study also suggested that teachers were reluctant to do research because they felt it was not part of their work. Priority, for these teachers, was given to teaching as well as to developing assessment and curricular materials. As the following quote indicates, research was seen as a task beyond the skill set of most teachers.

Teachers have to have training in research methods. Not everyone has the ability to conduct research and know pre and post studies, sampling, when it is action research, when it is applied... Not all people have this. (Salah)

I will move now to the second research question, where I discuss the findings in relation to the organizational learning practices and systems. The discussion will focus on the clarity of vision with regard to teacher learning, the school support for TPL, ADEC policies as well as Tamkeen.

5.3 Research Question Two

How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?

In section C of the questionnaire, teachers were asked about their beliefs and perceptions about what was actually taking place with respect to twenty-four organizational learning practices. As mentioned earlier in chapter 4, these 24 values and practices were grouped under five organizational factors. The following table compares between these factors as reported by both sets of data.

Table 5.2

The Organizational Learning Orientations: Comparison between the Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Organizational Factors	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data	Similarities or Contradictions
School Vision	Fairly high values and practices Values: (M= 3.71; .SD= 0.41) Practices: (M= 3.34; SD= 0.56) levels of values and practices are aligned	The school lacked a clear vision. The school leadership was not doing enough to communicate this vision to school teachers.	Inconsistent data
Providing formal supports for professional learning.	Fairly high values and practices Values: (M= 3.59; SD= 0.34) Practices: (M= 3.17; SD= 0.60) Low value–practice gaps.	The school tried seriously to support teacher professional learning. However, there was evidence in the qualitative data that school support was not sustained, consistent or strategic.	Inconsistent data

Auditing expertise or Evaluation	Fairly high values and practices Values: (M= 3.41) Practices: (M= 3.20) Low value–practice gaps	The qualitative data revealed that there is a lack of evaluation of the PD programmes and activities inside the school.	Inconsistent data
Building social capital	Fairly high values and practices Values: (M= 3.37; .SD= .51) Practices: (M= 3.26; SD= 0.62) Low value–practice gaps	Lack of support from the school leadership	Inconsistent data
Supporting networking	High values and low practices Values: (M= 3.59; SD= 0.59) Practices: (M= 2.94; SD= 0.72) Fairly high value–practice gaps	Lack of support to collaboration and to building external resources for learning.	Consistency between quantitative and qualitative data

As shown in Table 5.2, the questionnaire findings indicated low value–practice gap for clear vision. This is inconsistent with the qualitative data, which suggested that the school lacked a clear, coherent and strategic vision and approach to teacher learning. One tentative conclusion that could be drawn from these findings is that the school leaders were not doing enough to communicate their vision to teachers. The qualitative data also suggested that the school did not have clear PD plans or policies with clearly defined outcomes. The school professional development policy followed ADEC policies, which as most of the teachers argued, were not relevant to their needs. Moreover, there was very little evidence that teacher professional development was determined by the current school priorities for school improvement, as there was no

balance between the teachers' individual needs and the school improvement priorities (see section 4.2.2.3 in the data analysis chapter).

With regard to evaluation and auditing experience, there was evidence from the qualitative data that the impact of TPL was not systematically evaluated, as the school did not have a mechanism in place for evaluating the school PD programmes. Furthermore, and as explained in the data analysis chapter, the school formed many committees; however, there was no follow-up or evaluation of their effectiveness or utility to teachers. In addition, there was little evidence in the data that the school leadership was trying to link teacher professional development to school improvement plans. More specifically, the qualitative data did not provide much supporting evidence that teacher personal development plans were conducted as part of a coherent and strategic school improvement plan.

The findings of the study indicated that there was a need to use the professional development evaluation at the school level more consistently and more efficiently. Although the informants contended that the school senior management evaluated individual teachers' professional development activities and initiatives, there was little evidence that this was done regularly, consistently or systematically. Interviewed teachers also said that the school did not carry a professional development needs analysis. Taken together, these findings suggested that evaluation was not considered an integral part of the school's vision or approach to PD, and that the impact of these programmes were not used to guide, lead or inform subsequent PD plans, policies and activities inside the school.

With regard to providing formal support for professional learning, levels of practices and values were closely aligned (Values: $M= 3.59$; $SD= 0.34$; Practices: $M= 3.17$; $SD= 0.60$). These results seem to be inconsistent with the qualitative data. Although there was evidence that the school leaders were trying to support teachers in their professional learning, this support lacked consistency and efficiency. Moreover, despite the fact that the school leaders themselves were also dissatisfied with ADEC policies in relation to with TPL, they did not show any initiative to support teacher

learning. Apart from directing school teachers to external PD events or encouraging teachers to attend Tamkeen workshops, school leaders rarely appeared to lead other professional development activities inside the school. Except for the English headteacher, who showed some initiative in terms of organizing professional development activities for teachers of English, the three other school leaders showed little support to facilitate or provide alternative recourses or solutions supporting teacher professional learning. The data also revealed that the school leaders did not attempt to resolve some tensions or challenges reported by teachers in relation to their professional learning.

Another important issue raised by the participants relates to Tamkeen. As the interviews revealed, almost all the teachers and school leaders agreed about the ineffectiveness of ADEC formal PD programme. As shown in the qualitative data, Tamkeen seemed to promote a traditional acquisition model of learning, which did not reflect authentic workplace learning characterized by collaboration and practice sharing. This was compounded by another disappointment, which was the irrelevance of these imposed PD programmes to teachers' needs (see section 4.2.2.4 in the data analysis chapter). As explained in the introduction and context chapter, the teacher sample in the current school represented different nationalities; they came from different cultural and educational backgrounds; they were in different career stages; they belonged to different age groups. Designing a programme, catering to the needs of all ADEC teachers, was not the appropriate approach as most of the teachers expressed in the interviews. This does not mean that formal professional development programmes like Tamkeen are totally ineffective. On the contrary, these programmes could be potentially beneficial to teachers were they more flexible, inclusive and sensitive to the teachers' needs.

As a result of ADEC imposed policies, teachers often expressed frustration and deep concern about ADEC high expectations and unrealistic requirements. ADEC ambitious objectives and reforms to reach a world-class education system as articulated in ADEC literature (Buchler-Eden, 2012) have placed increasing demands on schools and teachers, who are under pressure to prove that they are complying with the new

policies. Apart from handling the administrative school demands, such as taking part in the school extra-curricular activities (i.e., attending meetings, communicating with parents, writing evaluations and reports), teachers have also to commit to the professional development activities provided by Tamkeen. Moreover, ADEC PD policies are too centralized as school policies are too tied up to ADEC policies to the extent that both the school leaders and teachers have no say about the school PD programmes. Despite ADEC laudable claims that it wants the schools to be less dependent and to have more control over their teachers' professional development, the situation that prevailed from the data reveals a different picture.

Furthermore, one interesting finding warranting discussion is that the school PD programmes and activities do not respond to the wide range of teachers' development needs. The study qualitative findings provide evidence that teacher learning is restricted by ADEC narrow vision, which promotes an expert model of teacher development by perceiving teacher learning in terms of the prescribed formal PD activities. This has resulted in a restrictive learning environment characterized by a dearth of learning opportunities. Such a restricted and narrow view of TPL, I would argue, could only produce narrow and limited learning opportunities. In fact, despite ADEC big focal investment in teachers' professional development (i.e., hiring international agencies and experts), teachers' professional learning activities inside the school remained very limited in scope and benefits.

What also emerged as a particularly important finding in this context was the view that Tamkeen restricted teacher learning opportunities and deprived them of the full range of PD types. Instead of contributing to their professional learning, Tamkeen, as most of the teachers argued, took away the time, the energy and the motivation to learn and develop. Teachers, for example, thought that Tamkeen was consuming their time, which, according to them, could have been used otherwise to develop themselves in a more effective way. The only occasion teachers talked positively of Tamkeen was when two of them were invited to present at one of Tamkeen workshops, which is another proof that when teachers are involved in the planning and design of their

professional development, these programmes become more meaningful and beneficial to them.

As articulated by the teachers themselves, the current PD programmes and learning activities are limited to certain learning opportunities, such as peer observation, collaboration and attendance of external events. This is consistent with recent research on effective TPL contending that teacher learning is still characterized by lack of choice in both form and content (Cordingley, et al., 2015). For instance, the qualitative data provided no evidence that other professional learning activities, such as mentoring and coaching, were part of the teachers' learning activities. These findings corroborate results of other studies confirming that mentoring and coaching are considered key learning activities (Da Costa, 1993; Cordingley et al., 2003; Pedder, James & MacBeath, 2005). It was argued, for instance, that mentoring affords the opportunity for the novice teachers not only to learn from their experienced counterparts, but also to have a continuous full-time support, which they could turn to anytime they need assistance. These findings are supported by local research conducted by Atwi (2016) confirming the positive impact of mentoring.

Next, I proceed to the third research question, in which I discuss the challenges and barriers to professional learning encountered by teachers.

5.4 Research Question Three

What are the challenges and barriers to TPL in the context of ADEC schools?

According to Hodkinson, Biesta and James (2008), any learning that focuses only on the workplace and the classroom is bound to fail because it ignores the communal and socio-cultural aspects of learning, such as gender, ethnicity and power relations. Accordingly, socio-cultural theory has often construed the school as a powerful site of interaction between cultural, political and social discourses, where forms of power, resistance and domination are often produced and reproduced. Likewise, TPL is influenced by this complex interplay of these political, social, racial and gendered discourses and practices that are not often easy to identify. In the current study, there was evidence from the qualitative data that teacher collaboration and committee work were affected by cultural factors, such as gender, language, and the teachers' cultural values, beliefs and assumptions. There was also evidence that learning and interacting with other colleagues were seriously hampered by these cultural and gender assumptions and beliefs, which still question women's presence inside schools. The subsequent discussion will then focus on the first cultural issue.

To begin with, gender is perceived by some teachers to be a serious issue in limiting opportunities for communication and collaboration between teachers, namely female Arab teachers. Before presenting these gender issues, it would be interesting to highlight some background knowledge of gender in the local context of the study. Recently, the Gulf News, a local Emirati newspaper released the United Nations Development Program for Human Development, which clearly considered gender inequality a major impediment to human development in the Arab world. An example of this gender issue is segregation at schools. Public schooling in the UAE, for instance, has been segregated by gender for more than four decades, and until a recent time, women in the Gulf have been denied the right to work in male schools. However, since ADEC took over the

Ministry of Education in 2005, the school map has begun to change and female teachers have been allowed to teach in boys' schools.

In the current study, the qualitative findings suggest that gender was identified as a factor inhibiting communication between some male and female teachers, especially local teachers. The reluctance of these teachers, for instance, to cooperate with their peers provided evidence of inherent gender barriers reflecting deep cultural values and attitudes about female teachers' right to learn and work, some of which are not fully expressed, explained or justified. Elamin and Omair (2010) gave a detailed account of these socio-cultural factors contributing to these gendered discourses and stereotypes in a GCC context:

Women in the oil-rich GCC countries, for instance, live in a family-based, patriarchal, strict Islamic society, where gender roles are strictly defined and kinship is highly emphasized. While most policy makers in the GCC countries have exerted tremendous efforts to educate females, there remains a view that education could interfere with a mother training her daughter in traditional tasks. (p.750)

The current study corroborates local research carried by Blaik Hourani (2013), who, in a research study carried out on pre-service teachers' professional development experiences, reported that learning activities such as peer observation, lesson videotaping were affected by "conservatism features in the Emirati community" (p.20) characterized by male-female separation. In this context, the findings of the current study suggest the need to bring to attention these socio-cultural issues (i.e., culture, gender and language), which until recently have remained at the margin of any discussion of teacher professional development. Such cultural factors and stereotypes, as reported in this study, have seriously led to group dynamics problems, reluctance and resistance to learn and collaborate, and in some cases, to burnout and even to a decision to leave the school as in the case of Brian (see section 4.5.2.5).

Another cultural factor that impacted teachers' professional learning was language. The qualitative data suggested that some linguistic issues were reported as contributing to the lack of communication between teachers. These issues included communication and translation problems. It was clear from the teachers' interviews that there was a huge linguistic problem, affecting not only communication but also cooperation between teachers. ADEC tried to solve the problem by hiring translators and interpreters, but this was not all the time effective as this quote from one of the teachers shows:

But ah maybe two of the Arabic staff had good enough English to translate. Then the whole conversation is in Arabic, maybe half an hour and only twice or three times in the meeting we got a translation of what's going on. So we're kind of left. I think I think it's a very hard barrier to break down. (Steve)

Another interesting issue related to language was the unequal opportunities available for the Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs). As indicated in the data analysis chapter, there was much focus on the English Medium Teachers (EMTs) in comparison with other teachers. As a consequence, Arabic Medium Teachers' (AMTs) felt marginalized as they thought they were less privileged than their English counterparts regarding the school support for their professional development. The reason for such imbalance, I assume, is the high value and importance attached to English language teaching, and to all the English-based subjects (i.e., English, math and science), compared to Arabic-mediated subjects. This focus on English has also caused some equity issues regarding the professional development opportunities available at the school. As discussed earlier in the first chapter, since its establishment in 2005, ADEC has given more focus to English, which is the medium of instruction for subjects like math, science and information technology. As one of the researchers put it, there was an insistence by the UAE policymakers on replacing Arabic not only as the medium of instruction for the major subjects but also as the language of communication, professional development and official documents in ADEC. Since English was already

the language of instruction in most of the UAE universities, the policy makers wanted to extend this project to include all the governmental schools:

There is a burning desire among UAE policy-makers to teach all subjects in English, save for Arabic and religious education of course. English is no longer viewed as merely a subject matter in the curriculum, but as a way of accessing the wider world and a passport to economic prosperity in this global era. (Sarsar, 2007, p. 9)

It is clear from the previous quote that one of the objectives of the new reform is to give priority to English and the other subjects taught in English. This policy has been implemented through making English the medium of instruction for the major subjects and also through hiring native speakers from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, as well as through adopting curricula from these countries. As discussed in the first chapter, Gulf countries draw most of their education policies from the West. Curricula in the UAE public and private schools, colleges and universities are substantially American, Australian, British, or Canadian. Besides, except for very few subjects, such as Islamic Education and Social Sciences, all the other subjects are taught in English in UAE public schools. In some private schools, these two subjects do not even exist and Arabic-based content is kept to a minimum. Recently, ADEC has also advocated an Australian curriculum verbatim. To this end, they have imported foreign expertise to oversee the implementation of the new curriculum as well as to provide professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders.

These imported curricula, PD programmes, and expertise often carry with them underlying dominating socio-cultural discourses that could potentially affect the local culture as well as the Arabic language. Writing about the UAE educational system, Mullen et al. (2013) argued that advocating a “mono-culture and mono-language imported education system” (p. 220) often creates a potential conflict with the local language, culture and values. Mullen et al. (2013) considered this process of importing an external education system, a cultural security issue, which does not only undermine

the local one, but in some cases, also destroys it. Tehranian (2004) defined cultural security as “the freedom to negotiate one’s identity” (p. 7). Giroux’s argument of the hidden curriculum (1983) as well as Said’s (2006) notion of “transplanted education systems”, which describe these imported packages of textbooks, syllabi, curricula and the teaching staff, give credence to these previous arguments. In the current study, this cultural issue was seriously raised by some informants like Brian:

Ah they made big mistakes in not saying that this is great in theory, but it’s really poor for their cultural context. I know what they want. They want a world-class education like you can find in the UK; you can find in Canada, you can find in America. The cultural context is extremely different. So you can’t take this thin document, which was producing wonderful students to America, and think you can just put it in place, you got a clash. You got a clash. So there is... that’s gonna be years and years of hard work. (Brian)

Another challenge to teacher learning inside the school is group dynamics. As discussed in the literature, teacher learning is affected by workplace social relations, such as power relations, which are inherent in social interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). It was also argued that social relations play a crucial role in shaping teacher learning and expanding the learning opportunities or restricting them. A full understanding of teacher learning necessitates, therefore, taking account of all these factors as well as their implications. McLaughlin (1993) saw the school beyond the microphysical and formal roles. He situated it within a wider perspective that recognizes the “social and psychological setting, in which teachers and school leaders construct a sense of practice, professional efficacy and professional community” (p.99). In the same vein, Lave and Wenger (cited in Fuller, Hokinson, Hokinson & Unwin, 2005) also emphasized the social structures and relations characterizing teacher learning. They give specific attention to the social aspect of learning, which they define as "an evolving form of membership" (p.53). However, Wenger (1998) also cautioned against idealizing PLCs, since tensions and conflicts are inherent in collaborative work and PLCs:

Claiming that communities of practice are a crucial locus of learning is not to imply that the process is intrinsically benevolent. In this regard, it is worth repeating that communities of practice should not be romanticized; they can reproduce counter-productive patterns, injustices, prejudices, racism, sexism, and abuses of all kinds. In fact, I would argue they are the very locus of such reproduction. (p. 132)

Accordingly, the qualitative findings of the present study showed that group dynamics is an essential factor that could inhibit or encourage teacher learning. The qualitative data abound with examples where teachers held negative attitudes and acted unsociably to each other. Despite the collaborative ethos that seemed to permeate the whole school, some group dynamics issues were recounted by teachers, which had a negative effect on how they interacted with each other. These issues are documented in detail in the data analysis chapter. Reporting the findings of a study they conducted on three schools, Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) mentioned a similar problem, where a school culture characterized by “rituals of interactions and information transfer” (p. 275) was disrupted by the lack of cooperation from one of the group members.

While discussing group dynamics, it is also worth mentioning that socio-cultural and organizational theories, which form the conceptual framework of this study, pay particular attention to how individual teachers interact and operate within learning communities. It is argued, for instance, that since teacher learning tends to be social in nature (Vygotsky, 1978), its success and effectiveness hinges on relaxed relationships, trustfulness, as well as supportive learning culture (West-Burnham, 2000). For effective professional learning, Pedder & Opfer (2013) also suggested that teacher professionals need to “open up more opportunities for mutual engagement and constructive critique from colleagues, pupils and school leaders” (p.563). In the same vein, Flores (2004) cautioned that working relationships lacking support lead to an individual and isolated learning. She further argued that teachers working in a collaborative and supportive

environment should have more positive attitudes and commitment to different aspects of their profession including professional development.

5.5 Research Question Four

How do the teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?

The following is a discussion of teachers' perceptions of their learning in the school and regional contexts. This will include discussion of how teachers position themselves as learners in the school and how they interpret this positioning. I will first start with teachers' definitions of TPL. As explained in section 4.2.4 of the data analysis, although most of the teachers' definitions focused on learning in the narrow context of the classroom, there was evidence that teachers were able to locate their learning within a wider understanding in relation to broad educational purposes and objectives. The data also suggested that teachers exhibited deep awareness of their professional learning challenges inside the school.

An important finding, which should be highlighted here, is that most teachers seemed to be aware of effective TPL. As an example of this awareness, teachers expressed in the interviews that they wanted ADEC to take on a less centralized, micro-managerial role in their professional development. They also wanted their input to be taken into consideration by the school when planning PD activities. One tentative interpretation of this finding is that the qualitative data suggested that teachers tended to prefer a participatory model of learning, in which decision-making is shared between ADEC, school leaders and teachers. Furthermore, by resisting Tamkeen PD programmes, as shown in the data analysis, teachers demonstrated that they could take charge of their own professional development as well as control their learning agenda.

Another aspect of teachers' awareness of effective teacher learning was reflected in their views about agency. The qualitative data suggested that most of the teachers experienced a lack of agency and decision-making because of the imposed school formal PD programmes. Apart from the informal learning activities initiated by

the teachers, the study findings indicated that teachers did not have any input or voice in the development programmes at the school. ADEC PD policies seemed to ignore teachers' learning needs by limiting PD to Tamkeen workshops and other few external school visits. Furthermore, there are numerous examples in the data, showing how teachers' autonomy was restricted by ADEC policies, the most significant of which was this statement, articulated by one of the informants, that the school was trying to undermine his professional judgment.

They really want to take away my professional judgment ... I don't agree with a lot of what's on the paper, or I've learnt other things that seem to work better and administration just want you to follow... follow the guidelines and that's all.
(Brian)

These findings resonate with the literature contending that school performativity policies and agendas could potentially exercise significant pressure on both teachers and schools, and therefore lead to restricted learning environments. In this context, Earley and Bubb (2004) pointed out that some school policies attempt to advance school priorities rather than the individual interests of teachers. In agreement with this, Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) argued that there is pressure on teachers in different places of the world to change and modify their practices in accordance with the requirements of new policies and political agendas. The focus on the school and the council priorities which, in this case, reflect government priorities of target-driven approaches towards achieving a world-class education system in line with Abu Dhabi Economic Vision, might be a disservice to teachers, whose immediate needs and expectations were not being met. This is consistent with Earley and Bubb's (2004) argument maintaining that such policies serve the interests of the school and at a macro-level the education district, while they neglect teachers' individual needs.

In the same vein, Biesta (2010) cautioned that educational policies emphasizing prescriptive curricula, exigent testing systems as well as rigid inspection policies could constrain the exercise of teachers' agency and therefore contribute to their de-skilling. Hannon (1998) also argued that teacher agency could be hampered by

policies characterized by distrust of the teaching profession. Such policies are often expressed through educational policies, which are part of broad economic agendas. Trying to situate this issue in the local context, Mullen et al. (2013) argued that like all other countries, Gulf countries face tremendous pressure to align their economies to the global economy, which consider all societal sectors commodities driven by the market.

The qualitative data also suggested that teachers felt disappointed with formal professional development programmes provided by ADEC and the school. However, while some teachers were content to comply with the new arrangements imposed by ADEC, many others demonstrated resistance by creating new learning opportunities for themselves and their colleagues to learn and develop. Through this resistance, teachers showed that ADEC ineffective policies have not inhibited their motivation or will to learn. On the contrary, they proved to be agents of change as they sought to design and create their own learning spaces at the margin of the school's formal PD programmes. Emphasizing the role of teachers as agents of change, Giroux (2000) positioned them at the heart of the knowledge creation process:

By politicizing the notion of schooling, it becomes possible to illuminate the role that educators and educational researchers play as intellectuals who operate under specific conditions of work and who perform a particular social and political function. (pp. xxxiii–xxxiv)

Although the school formal professional learning activities seemed to support and promote passive forms of learning activities such as attending Tamkeen workshops, teachers resisted these programmes and tended to favour active forms of learning activities, which were contextualized and embedded in their classroom practices. This was evident from the informal professional learning activities and initiatives they created in an organizational context that tends to restrict and constrain teacher learning. By turning to each other, teachers have decided to capitalize on their own resources. One possible implication to consider in this context is that teachers tended to engage in learning activities which they found meaningful, practical and relevant to their own needs. Participating in such informal activities –despite their heavy teaching workload

and other formal commitments— reflected teachers' interest in and commitment to creating their own professional learning spaces.

Being aware of the potential of over-simplification in distinguishing between formal and informal learning, I nevertheless found it a useful analytic distinction between formal professional learning opportunities provided by ADEC and schools and opportunities created by teachers outside these formal structures of provision. The risk in making such analytic distinctions in too straightforward a manner can mask processes and contexts, in which formal and informal modes of learning interact and enhance teachers' development. Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) also found this distinction very problematic:

As a framework for professional learning, it oversimplifies dynamic interrelationships among the time, substance and location of professional growth. Nevertheless, in this early stage of defining the concept of teacher workplace learning and its related issues, this simple binary permits us to explore the cultural dimensions of the phenomenon we refer to as informal learning. (p.267)

By resisting Tamkeen, teachers seemed to argue that learning is an active and reflective process rather than a passive set of one-size-fits-all criteria, processes and requirements. The teachers in the current study seemed to favour a knowledge construction PD model, which was manifested in the different collaborative and informal endeavours as well as professional learning initiatives that teachers created. These results match those observed in earlier studies by Hull and Hord (2001) arguing that teachers are considered key agents in their professional development. In congruence with these studies, Patton and Parker (2015) contended that empowering teachers to take charge of their learning is crucial and that authentic learning takes place when teachers start thinking of themselves as active learners rather than passive recipients of knowledge. In the same context, Bottery (1996) urged professionals to claim a stronger voice and display much agency when it comes to issues related to their profession. Drawing on the notion of participatory citizenship, he argues for viewing the teacher as

“one of several stakeholders in a societal exercise” instead of being “the instrument of managerial strategy” (p.190).

Insights drawn from teachers’ feedback about Tamkeen show that the programme is underpinned by what Guskey (1986) called a training paradigm, which aims to help teachers acquire a set of prescribed skills and professional knowledge through foreign experts. As the literature suggests, professional development programmes built on a transfer model reflects a deficit approach to PD. Haskell (2001) defined the transfer of learning as using “past learning when learning something new and the application of that learning to both similar and new situations” (p. xiii). Salomon and Perkins (1998) differentiated between two types of learning: (a) cognitive acquisition oriented learning and (b) situative and participatory learning. The first type conceptualizes knowledge as a transferable commodity, whereas the second type perceives knowledge as a constructive and participatory process. In the light of this discussion, it seems that ADEC adopted a teacher development approach, which reflects what Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) called “a crude version of learning as acquisition” (p. 111).

What is clear from the qualitative data is that the school teachers wanted a greater degree of ownership and agency over their professional learning. Giving teachers a sense of autonomy could contribute to the effectiveness and relevance of their professional development programmes. Therefore, the school should support teachers in playing more active roles in leading PD inside the organization. The devolution of professional learning to teachers, trusting that they will develop their own practice, can be promoted in a workplace approach to learning where teachers are the center and agents in the creation of learning opportunities and their attendant learning processes. Central to this approach is the view that teachers should be trusted as professionals, who are capable of creating professional development opportunities in their schools. These arguments give rise to numerous implications and recommendations, which will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this conclusion chapter, I start by exploring the implications of the current study and making recommendations for policy and practice. I then discuss the limitations and ethical issues of the study. I also explain the contribution to knowledge and possible directions for future research. I proceed by critically reflecting on different aspects of my involvement in the current research including my personal learning journey as well as the suitability of the research design for the current study. As discussed before, a wide array of issues has been generated for consideration in this research. Therefore, based on these findings and arguments developed in the previous section, I provide the following recommendations and suggestions, which could be considered by different stakeholders and policy makers in the local context of the United Arab Emirates.

6.2 Recommendations and Implications for Policy and Practice

In their interview responses, teachers made some recommendations and suggestions regarding TPL, all of which have serious implications for professional development policies at the school and ADEC. The following are these recommendations:

1. The data reveal that teachers favour a collaborative approach to learning. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the school leaders as well as ADEC to further expand the collaborative learning opportunities inside the school. Both the socio-cultural and the situated learning, which form the conceptual framework of the study, perceive learning as a constructive, contextual and collective process. The school should, therefore, further encourage and promote these professional encounters by affording more opportunities for teachers to meet and interact with each other. Another major implication of these

findings is that collaboration manifested in learning activities, such as peer observation, could not only lead to more empowerment and agency, but could also contribute to a non-threatening group evaluation of learning that could potentially support the school formal episodic and ad hoc evaluations. This is consistent with Hargreaves' (1999) argument considering collaboration a form of knowledge audit, where the members of a learning community socially distribute knowledge among themselves, supported by a school culture, which promotes and encourages professional dialogue and practice sharing.

2. With respect to research and in light of both the quantitative and qualitative findings, teachers should be encouraged to engage in research. The school should focus not only on developing teachers' research skills, but also on raising their awareness about the importance of research. This could involve, at the beginning, urging teachers to conduct small-scale action research. The rationale behind this is that teachers should be encouraged to change their attitudes about research by creating a research culture inside school.

3. One important implication of these findings is that teachers should be encouraged to engage in different learning activities. Depending exclusively on school-based teacher learning programmes may deprive teachers of the opportunities for networking and sharing their practices with other colleagues from different schools. Evans and Kersh (2004) referred to workplace environments that encourage opportunities for workplace learning as expansive environments. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) described these expansive learning environments as ones that have various and abundant opportunities, where teachers can learn in a culture that both promotes and values learning. On the contrary, they describe restrictive learning opportunities as isolating environments, where employees "have a feeling that they are outsiders or mere observers." (p.68). Evans and Kersh (2004) further explained that these restrictive workplace environments are characterized by lack of risk-taking and challenge.

The findings of the study indicate that there is an urgent need for the school to consider other professional learning avenues validated by current research. As discussed

in the literature, coaching, mentoring and the lesson study, for instance, were identified as effective professional learning activities. One tentative recommendation, in this context, is that the school should seriously consider implementing a mentoring programme, in which experienced teachers are paired with new teachers for long-term support. This is beneficial to both parties. In the case of Leila, a new teacher who felt lost and helpless due to the lack of support, the school could have paired her with a more experienced peer to help her adapt to the school system. Reciprocally, this could be beneficial to experienced teachers, who could also learn from the feedback of the new staff by sharing their classroom practices and experiences.

4. Although teachers devoted significant time to attending Tamkeen workshops, the programme failed to live up to their expectations. As reported in the data analysis chapter, teachers thought Tamkeen workshops were not worth the effort and time they invested in them. Teachers did not find Tamkeen beneficial because they did not find it useful to their classroom practices. Therefore, Tamkeen programme needs serious revisiting to be more relevant, flexible and to be tailored to teachers' needs. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) argued that one-size-fits-all approaches to professional development do no longer work. They further argued that promoting more supportive PD environments that cater to teachers' needs is more effective. As repeatedly suggested by the interviewees, teachers need to be more involved and consulted in the planning and the content of the school programmes. Marginalizing them from decision-making about their own learning would only lead to disengagement and demotivation.

5. The results of the study suggest that a systematic evaluation of teachers' PD programmes inside the school is needed. The study informants clearly reported that there was a lack of evaluation of their PD needs. The qualitative data also seemed to suggest that there was a conspicuous lack of strategic policy or approach to TPL in the school. Developing clear evaluation systems could serve as guidance for the school to improve their current professional development programmes. Earley and Bubb (2004) strongly argued that teachers professional development "does not just happen – it has to be

managed and led” (p.80). Therefore, a key policy priority for ADEC is to support teachers and school leaders in developing evaluation systems as well as strategic approaches to teacher professional development.

6. The findings further indicate that a clear systematic and strategic school vision is a priority if the school aspires to have effective professional development programmes. A shared vision and understanding between teachers and school leaders about the organizational benefits of teacher learning is crucial. It is clear from the teachers' responses in the interviews that they were not involved or consulted in developing the school vision and mission. The findings also suggest that school leaders should clarify their vision and communicate it clearly to the teachers and the rest of the staff. This would make the school PD programmes more relevant, motivating and effective by helping teachers see how their professional development links to school improvement priorities. In this way, a clear vision can help both teachers and school leaders work and learn together so as to develop a clear sense of direction towards a common goal.

7. TPL should focus on developing strategies that involve teachers in collaborating, working and learning from and with each other. In this context, the school principals are considered PD leaders in schools, and they should, therefore, assume leading roles in facilitating teacher learning inside the school. Instead of merely asking teachers to attend Tamkeen workshops, which main aim –as one of the teachers described– was to tick boxes to meet ADEC requirements, the school leaders should provide learning opportunities and conducive learning environment for teachers to learn and develop actively and collaboratively. Accordingly, the literature suggests that the organization leadership either promotes or restrains teacher learning (Hargreaves, 1999). School leaders, such as the school principal, the principal assistant or the headteacher are crucial in sustaining and creating learning opportunities in their schools. They also play an important role in supporting teacher engagement in professional learning as well as in creating an optimal learning culture in their schools (Marsick, 2009). In the same vein, Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) pointed out that the school principals “set the

overall tone, pattern, and attitude for teacher learning, as well as organized and stimulated collaborative learning” (p. 269).

8. ADEC and the school leaders need to raise teachers’ awareness about the role of TPL as a means of organizational improvement and effectiveness. The theoretical framework underpinning the current study acknowledges the importance of TPL in improving teachers and school effectiveness, as well as student learning. Failure of teachers to make reference to school improvement in their definition of TPL reflects constructions of learning that do not recognize the impact of teacher learning on improving school effectiveness.

9. ADEC should play a more positive role in supporting schools develop appropriate PD programmes rather than dictating its own policies, irrespective of teachers’ professional development needs. The school PD policies should put increasing emphasis on meeting teachers’ real needs rather than ADEC expectations, which are, as described by teachers in the interviews, irrelevant to their needs. Likewise, ADEC should reconsider its impositional policies of teacher professional development programmes and their suitability to the contexts of teachers' practice and the development needs that emerge in such contexts. Instead of implementing Tamkeen, ADEC could have enhanced the professional learning activities as well as supported the informal PD projects teachers seemed to favour.

10. To overcome cultural barriers to fruitful group dynamics, the school could help nurture a positive atmosphere of collaboration and collegiality, and therefore create positive learning relationships among teachers, which will not only facilitate their own and their students’ learning as well, but also contribute to school improvement. To overcome the language issue, the school should be more careful about forming PLCs. For example, native English teachers could be grouped with bilinguals instead of non-English speaking teachers. Similarly, Arabic-speaking teachers could be grouped together to avoid problems of communication.

11. Time was another important factor affecting TPL inside the school. As shown in the qualitative data, participating in these PD programmes involves compressing teachers' schedules, causing fatigue and exhaustion, especially that the teachers already have heavy workloads. Therefore, the school should consider reducing the teaching load to allow sufficient time for teachers to learn and interact. Moreover, the school should encourage informal opportunities for learning, in which teachers learn and reflect at their convenience and pace. By supporting these informal interactions between teachers, learning time becomes more flexible and the school would be relieved from scheduling teachers' PD programmes, which tend to add pressure to teachers' already challenging workloads.

12. Professional development opportunities need to be distributed equally across subjects. Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs) should be given the same opportunities given to English Medium Teachers (EMTs) irrespective of subject or language. The failure to address equity issues like these might affect the morale and motivation of teachers, which are necessary for a full engagement and commitment to professional development.

6.3. Contribution and Directions for Future Research

Due to the dearth of research on TPL in the ADEC context, this study makes a timely contribution to the current debate on effective TPL. Despite the small size of the research study reported here, findings could be used to inform practices and policies not only for ADEC but also for other neighbouring educational councils like Dubai Educational Council, the UAE Ministry of Education, and also other educational systems in the Gulf Region. Given its theoretical framework, the current study aimed to address certain gaps in the literature. What follows is an account of this contribution to research on TPL.

One of the strengths of the study was that it was driven by teachers and dependent primarily on teachers' accounts and views of their learning, which is consistent with insights from the literature calling on teachers to "verbalize the dispositions and skills required to study their teaching and become better at teaching over time" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 6). As discussed in the literature, most of the studies carried out in this particular context focused on how teachers are developed (Alwan, 2000; Al Neaimi, 2005; AlHassani, 2012), whereas the current study was interested in investigating how teachers learn in their local context. This is premised on the rationale that teacher learning should be approached from the perspective of teachers in the contexts of their work and practice. Interviewing 14 teachers and four school leaders of the overall sample of 39 teachers who completed questionnaires about teachers' learning challenges and concerns reflects this interest and focus.

Furthermore, teacher learning was identified in the literature as one of the "black boxes", since little is known about relationships between how teachers learn and the outcomes of this learning and its impact on students and teachers (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008, p.341). It was also found that the way teachers utilize and interpret various learning opportunities through engaging in professional learning is complex (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008). What adds to this complexity is the fact that teacher knowledge and thinking are tacit (Eraut, 2000). One of the merits of the present study was, therefore, to contribute to the understanding of this complex phenomenon (i.e., teacher learning). Accordingly, teacher learning is approached in the current study through a social construction of meaning by involving teachers as the main research participants. Hence, the methodology is focused on developing understanding about TPL that builds on teachers' interpretations and accounts of their learning in the context in which they are working. It is assumed, therefore, that researching teacher learning from the perspectives of teachers themselves would give a rounded and contextual account of TPL (Jurasaitė-Harbisona & Rex, 2010).

From a methodological point of view, Webster-Wright (2009) argued for advocating a methodology that is capable of studying these complex learning

experiences without falling into dichotomies. That is to say, learning should be construed as an interaction between the learner, the knowledge and the context (Jarvis & Parker, 2005; Webster-Wright, 2009) rather than as a set of separate factors. Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) also argued that studying teacher learning from “conventional de-contextual monolithic perspectives” (p.268) is not effective. From a personal point of view and as a researcher and practitioner, I strongly believe that TPL should be approached from the perspectives of the teachers themselves. Having been working as a teacher for 25 years, I believe that researchers should acknowledge the importance of opening up opportunities for teachers to share their narratives and know-how in order to be able to influence policy and decision-making with respect to professional development and learning. This could only happen if teachers were allowed to describe their realities, views and beliefs through in-depth data collection strategies, such as interviews and focus groups. Emphasizing the role of teachers in student learning and informing school policies, Connelly et al. (1997) pointed out that:

Teachers do make a difference. They do know their situations. They are not mere screens who translate others' intentions and ideologies into practice. Teachers' knowledge is an essential component in improving educational practice. Those concerned with improving education need to be concerned not only with what it is they wish to happen in learning but also with teachers' knowledge and the professional knowledge landscapes in which teachers work. (p.674)

Therefore, one of the main objectives of the present study is to provide an alternative local perspective to TPL in this particular context informed by the articulated perspectives of teachers. The dearth of qualitative studies addressing TPL in the UAE has resulted in a lack of deep understanding of how teachers learn in their schools (AlHassani, 2012). Giving voice to teachers, I believe, involves multiple opportunities for articulating their views about their own learning to school leaders and policy makers. The methodological approach— especially the use of mixed methods— in the current study was inspired by these arguments, which place teachers at the centre of the exploration and research. Different methods enabled elicitation and analysis of different

facets of teachers' knowledge, perspectives and experience. This approach is predicated on the view that teachers are best positioned to take charge of their own learning, develop each other, provide peer support, and inform us about what constitutes effective learning. The study was also an opportunity for the teachers in the current school to reflect on their learning experiences and challenges in a context where teachers are rarely interviewed and consulted.

The qualitative component of the study, therefore, attempted to add depth to the study by giving a voice to teachers to talk extensively and expansively about their learning opportunities, challenges and concerns. The interviews, for instance, were an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on their teaching practice and professional development on many occasions. By virtue of its methodological approach (i.e., mixed method), seeking to understand how teachers learn, this is the first in-depth study in the UAE exploring TPL at a primary school. Having said that, the current study could not pretend to have shed light on all teacher learning issues in this context.

Therefore, future research on TPL is needed as teacher professional development continues to receive a great deal of attention in the United Arab Emirates in general and in ADEC in particular. Other studies are needed to examine and investigate the suggestions and recommendations made in this study. It might be more informative, for instance, to conduct another study that can include more teachers and schools (including different types of schools in private and public sectors, primary and secondary schools, schools with different pupils attainment profiles, etc.) to arrive at more representative findings in relation to patterns of teachers' professional learning values and practices. In order to conduct research at such a larger scale, such studies would require the collaboration of a group of researchers given the amount of time and resources needed. More significantly, a longitudinal study exploring TPL, in public and private schools, is needed to understand more about how teachers' professional learning and classroom practices relate and interact over time in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Further research is needed into the influence of gender, language, and culture on professional learning in light of the emphasis given to these factors in teachers' accounts.

Reporting a study on three different schools representing three different countries, Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) concluded that macro-factors, such as “unique socio-political histories” (p. 275) as well as “traditions, physical environments, leadership styles, and professional relationships” all contribute to shape distinctive and special learning experiences. By raising these cultural issues, the current study has addressed serious gaps in the literature. However, examining relationships between teacher learning and teachers’ and school cultures will remain an ongoing research task. It would be interesting and important, therefore, to shed more light on how these cultural issues impact teachers’ professional learning.

6.4 Ethical Issues and Limitations of the Study

Although the current study succeeded in yielding much interesting data about teacher learning in the local context of the United Arab Emirates, it had several limitations. The first limitation that had a direct relation to ethics was the venue where teachers were interviewed. It is worth mentioning that the school principal suggested that interviews be conducted in the principal’s or the vice principal’s offices. After conducting two interviews in the vice principal’s office, I felt that it would not be a suitable place for the teachers, so I asked if the interviews could be conducted in the teachers’ room. The rationale for this choice was that being administrative spaces, both the principal’s and vice principal’s offices could make the teachers less comfortable and therefore might affect the quality and authenticity of their accounts. Teachers would find the teachers’ room safer and more comfortable to express their opinions freely. In agreement, Jurasaitė-Harbisona and Rex (2010) contended that physical places could either encourage or inhibit teacher learning.

The second ethical issue that emerged from the interviews was that some of the informants were uneasy and hesitant to express themselves during the semi-structured interviews. To address this issue, and as soon as I felt their hesitance, I immediately reassured them of my role as a learner aiming to understand their

perspectives and not to judge what they had to say or report it to others, especially their school leaders; and for ethical reasons, I explained that the participation in this study was voluntary and that any participant could withdraw at any stage. I also tried to reassure them of the confidentiality and the anonymity of the data. With other informants, and despite my reassurance before the study that the data would be treated with utmost confidentiality, I felt that they were sceptical and unwilling to discuss some of the issues, which might, according to them, be reported to their seniors. I noticed this especially with questions and topics related to school support, clear school vision and teachers' experiences and practices inside the classroom. With some questions, I felt the teachers were not comfortable because they might have felt that I was trying to ask questions about their competence inside the classrooms:

1. Can you describe how your PL experiences have led to changes in your classroom practices in ways that have improved student learning in your classroom?
2. How did the formal and informal TPL opportunities influence your classroom practices in ways that have improved your students' learning? Please give examples.

However, being aware of these issues as well as being transparent about my positionality helped me overcome those ethical issues. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) explained that the researcher positionality "...reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (p.71). I tried, for example, to raise teachers' awareness about the importance of the study to them, to the school and the policy makers. For this purpose, I tried to present myself as an insider who shared teachers' concerns and wanted to help them express their views and attitudes. According to Day (1991), establishing a caring relationship with research participants could help the researcher collect "quality data that goes beyond 'hit and run' research traditions" (p. 537). Despite the few encounters with the school teachers inside the school meeting room, I tried my best to establish what Nias (1993) called "a personal intimacy", which was very helpful in making teachers more comfortable and willing to

talk and share their beliefs and concerns. Being bilingual was also a great advantage. For the Arabic-speaking teachers, for instance, I felt that they were comfortable with me as soon as they knew that I speak Arabic and that they would be interviewed in native language.

The third ethical concern, which warrants some attention, is that during the course of the interview some of the Arab teachers were very reserved and suspicious with regard to the reasons and objectives of the research study. At first, I was perceived by these teachers as one of the supervisors that ADEC usually sends to inspect schools. To allay their mistrust, I introduced myself as a colleague who had previously worked for Abu Dhabi Educational Council, which was reassuring to them. Showing awareness and familiarity with the context and teachers' concerns also fostered some kind of trust between the informants and me. This was also enhanced by my explanation that the aim of the study was to understand teachers' professional learning, which could inform ADEC future professional development policies. Showing a personal interest in understanding teachers' concerns and views regarding their professional learning helped me in presenting myself as a member of the community, which according to Miller and Glassner (1997), could have an impact on the quality of the informants' responses.

“[t]he issue of how interviewees respond to us is based on who we are –in their lives as well as the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race– is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one. The issue may be exacerbated, for example, when we study groups with whom we do not share membership. Particularly as a result of social distances, interviewees may not trust us, they may not understand our questions, or they may purposely mislead us in their responses. Likewise, given a lack of membership in their primary groups, we may not know enough about the phenomenon under study to ask the right questions.” (p. 101)

Another ethical issue raised during the study was my relationship with the school principal. Having worked previously with him, I felt this familiarity affected the current research. Therefore, I had to constantly make sure that my previous relationship

with the school principal did not influence my study or affect teachers' accounts during the interviews. Unfortunately, and despite this awareness, there were times when the school principal walked into the teachers' room during the interviews. The school principal's intervention might have constrained teachers from articulating their views freely. To reassure informants, I explained to them that the school principal had no role in the study and that the collected data would be confidential and anonymous in any subsequent written versions of the study. This was reassuring to the teachers after they felt the school might be involved in the research study.

The final ethical issue relates to the organization and planning of the interviews. Despite the headteacher's efforts to organize the teachers' participation in the interviews, there were times when the coordination fell apart and the teacher expected to be interviewed was found to be teaching. In order to sort this out and overcome this embarrassing situation, the headteacher gave a substitution for the teacher and released him to be interviewed. Unfortunately, I only knew about this after the interviews. To my mind, such a decision was unethical, especially that I assured the school principal as well as ADEC that the researcher would conduct his study without disrupting teachers' schedules, or causing any burdens on any research participants. Later on, I told the headteacher that the interview could have been postponed instead of depriving students of their teachers.

Having so far presented the limitations in relation to ethics, I turn now to the discussion of the limitations of qualitative data collection. To begin with, timing was a major concern for me. Since the teachers were always busy teaching, preparing or planning their lessons, I had to visit the school several times. Arranging interviews was, therefore, a challenging task for me, especially that the teachers themselves reported they had busy schedules and workload. Those teachers gave prior notice to the headteacher, who made alternative arrangements and replaced them with other teachers. With respect to the school leaders' interviews, although I tried to schedule the appointments for conducting the interviews with the school principal, the headteacher

and the vice principal, some of these appointments were cancelled several times because they were too busy.

As regards gender and since some of the teachers were females, it was necessary to be aware of some cultural considerations, which were specific to the local context of the UAE. I was primarily concerned about whether I would be allowed to talk face-to-face with the female Emirati teachers. Being aware of the sensitivity of recording in this particular context, especially with Arab female teachers, I was hesitant to ask Emirati teachers for their permission to record the interviews. However, I thought it would be easier and useful for my study to try and ask their consent to record the interviews. To my surprise, all the Arab female informants agreed to be recorded. I must acknowledge in this context that I did not expect this to happen, especially from Emirati female teachers. My experience with another research project a few years ago showed that getting the consent of female participants to record interviews in this local context was not easy.

The final limitation had to do with the small sample size. As explained in the methodology chapter, the current study was conducted in a primary school involving 39 participants. This prevented me from moving beyond the simple description of data using descriptive statistics. With a larger population, I could have used inferential statistics, which would have allowed examining the relationships between TPL and other variables, such as gender, age, and experience. This would increase the chances of extrapolating and generalizing the study findings to other similar contexts either in the UAE, in the Gulf or in the MENA region.

6.5 Personal Learning and Reflections

Robson (2011) contended that all “research involves drudgery and frustration and you need to have a strong interest in the topic to keep you going through the bad times” (p. 48). In this context, I have to maintain that my motivation while conducting this research fluctuated. At certain times, it was high and I was able to achieve more than I expected,

especially at the data collection phase. In the middle and towards the end of the research journey, these high levels of enthusiasm waned, and I had to dredge up more motivation to continue the journey to completion. I had to acknowledge, however, that undertaking such a study has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life as I have benefited from this research on many levels. I embarked on this doctoral programme with one main objective, which was to gain insight into how teachers learn in the context of ADEC schools. As a teacher and as a professional development coordinator in my institute, I was also interested in understanding what constitutes effective teacher learning. I believe I was able to achieve this objective, albeit modestly. I had also many take-aways on the journey as my involvement in the doctoral programme has developed my research skills and my teaching practice.

In the course of this part-time research, I seized every formal or informal opportunity to sharpen my research skills. And since my research involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, I took an SPSS course as well as an NVivo course. I also attended the post-graduate research summer courses organized by the University of Leicester. Being the chair of a local teacher professional development organization was a great opportunity to network with other teachers and researchers carrying out research in the Gulf region. This gave me the opportunity to present my research at local and international conferences as well as the University of Leicester summer school in 2013, 2014, and 2016. In addition to my teaching duties, I was in charge of the professional development programme in my institute, which was an opportunity to implement and impart what I learnt from this experience to my colleagues as well as raise teachers' awareness about effective teacher learning. I also disseminated my findings at local conferences, where I presented several times on effective teacher learning.

At the personal level, the study had profound impact on my own understanding as well as growth as a learner. This fulfilling but challenging learning journey has provided an important opportunity to advance my understanding of teacher learning as well as change my perceptions of what constitutes effective teacher learning.

Before embarking on this research project, I thought that effective teacher learning was synonymous with external professional development activities, conferences and events teachers may attend outside the school. This changed as soon as I started reviewing the literature and conducting the research as I became aware of other learning activities, such as coaching, mentoring and critical friendship, which I began to explore and integrate in my professional practice.

I have also to admit that my professional experiences had a significant impact on my research practices and beliefs. On the one hand, the notion of the reflective practitioner, for example, which is a crucial part of my daily practice as a teacher and as a trainer, motivated me to use the same reflective processes during my research. For example, I kept a research diary, where I recorded all the research challenges, concerns and ethical issues. On the other hand, the communication course (i.e., listening and communication skills) I have been teaching for the past three years was another area of my professional practice as it honed my interview skills, which had an impact on my qualitative data. Another impact of my professional practice on this research was critical friendship. Being a strong advocate of the importance of critical friends in my teaching, I tried to have one since I finished my DELTA in 2008. This has inspired me to think of having a research critical friend when I started the current research project in 2012. Being involved with a local non-profit professional development organization, it was easy for me to find a critical friend, who was also serving as part of the research SIG team I was chairing. He was also familiar with the local context as he was teaching in Saudi Arabia. One of the merits of having a research critical friend was sharing my research concerns, such as discussing the risks and challenges to validity, reliability, and rigor of the research study. My research critical friend, I have to acknowledge, helped me tremendously in this respect as he was continuously reminding me of the need to make my research processes transparent.

6.6 Conclusion

Based on the reported and discussed quantitative and qualitative data, the first part of the chapter developed a set of conclusions and put forward a number of implications and recommendations that might inform policy and practice development at ADEC schools. I proceeded by explaining the significance of the study as well as its contribution to knowledge. The penultimate part of the chapter was a discussion of the ethical issues and study limitations. The final part was a reflection on my personal experience of learning through my development of and involvement in this research project.

It is worthwhile to mention that although teacher learning has been recently receiving increasing attention, there is a significant need to conduct more research about TPL in the UAE, which would be of significant importance to educators, professionals as well as school leaders and policy makers in the region. Elmore and Burney (1997) observed that “while we know a good deal about the characteristics of good professional development, we know a good deal less about how to organize successful professional development so as to influence practice in large numbers of schools and classrooms” (p.2).

In conclusion, the current study offered some valuable insights into understanding teacher learning in this local context. However, despite this effort to explore TPL in ADEC schools, we should always bear in mind that we “can’t really say it all; all analyses, no matter how totalistic their rhetorics, are partial” (Marcus, 1998, p. 37, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 1999). Further studies exploring the different insights, questions and issues raised by this study as well as other studies need to be undertaken for more comprehensive understanding of TPL in this local context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

ADEC Letter of Permission



مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم
Abu Dhabi Education Council
التعليم أولاً Education First

Date: 25 September 2013	التاريخ: 25 سبتمبر 2013
Ref:	الرقم:
To: Public Schools Principals,	السادة / مديري المدارس الحكومية
Subject: Letter of Permission	الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة باحثين
Dear Principals,	تحية طيبة وبعد،،،
The Abu Dhabi Education Council would like to express its gratitude for your generous efforts & sincere cooperation in serving our dear students.	يطيبٌ لمجلس أبوظبي للتعليم أن يتوجه لكم بخالص الشكر والتقدير لجهودكم الكريمة والتعاون الصادق لخدمة أبنائنا الطلبة.
You are kindly requested to allow the researcher/ Mohamed Azaza , to complete her research on:	ونود إعلامكم بموافقة مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم على موضوع الدراسة التي سيجريها الباحث/محمد عزازة
INVESTGATING TEACHER CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT ADEC SCHOOLS	INVESTGATING TEACHER CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT ADEC SCHOOLS
Please indicate your approval of this permission by facilitating his meetings with the sample groups at your respected schools.	لذا، يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحث ومساعدته على إجراء الدراسة المشار إليها.
For further information: please contact Mr Helmy Seada on 02/6150140	للاستفسار: يرجى الاتصال بالسيد/ حلمي سيده على الهاتف 02/6150140
Thank you for your cooperation.	شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم
Sincerely yours,	وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير،،،
 محمد سالم محمد الطاهري المدير التنفيذي لقطاع العمليات المدرسية	

CONSENT FROM ABU DHABI EDUCATION COUNCIL

Dear Sir:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in your school.

I am a doctoral research student at Leicester University, United Kingdom, conducting a study about teacher professional learning at ADEC schools, in view of my PhD thesis, entitled “*Investigating teacher professional learning in the United Arab Emirates: the case study of the Abu Dhabi New School Model*”. I would like to recruit the teachers, the headteachers and the school leaders from your school to anonymously complete a questionnaire and participate in interviews.

1. Objectives of the Study:

1- To investigate current practices and policies of teacher professional learning within ADEC schools?

2- To understand how ADEC schools conceptualize professional learning as a means of improving teaching and student learning.

The researcher will visit the school for the next four months:

1- To ask teachers to fill in a survey.

2- To conduct a focus group discussion.

3. To conduct interviews with the school principal, the headteachers and the professional development coordinators inside the school, arranged at a time to suit the interviewees.

2. Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

3. Anonymity and confidentiality:

Only the researcher, ADEC and the University of Leicester will have access to the data. They are required to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity of the school, the staff, and the teachers participating in the study.

Results of this study may be used for teaching, research, publications, or presentations at conferences. However, the school teachers, headteachers and school leaders’ identities

will be protected by using pseudonyms, rather than their names or other identifying information. Only the name of the country the school is situated in will be given.

All data will be stored on password-protected computers accessible only to the researcher or, in the case of hard copies of documents, in locked filing cabinets in the researcher's office. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher at amelki22@yahoo.com

4. Level of disruption

The researcher will not impose an undue burden on the school and the school personnel. Convenient times will be negotiated with the school principal, the teachers and the school leaders.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mohamed Azaza

As The Director of Research, Planning and Performance Management,

I grant my permission for the researcher named above to attend the school, administer the survey, conduct the interviews and gather information about the professional development programs inside the school.

Name and Signature

Date

Appendix 3

Teacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a doctoral study that seeks to understand teacher professional learning practices and policies at your school. Your feedback will help the researcher understand these learning and professional development activities that you and your colleagues undertake to improve your teaching and student learning. It will take you up to 15 minutes to answer this questionnaire.

If you have any queries about the questionnaire, please feel free to call the researcher at 050-7803988 or e-mail: amelki22@yahoo.com

Confidentiality

All information you provide is strictly confidential, and will be used for research purposes only.

Dear participant:

I may also need your participation in another stage of this project, which includes participating in a focus group discussion or conducting an interview.

There is no compulsion for you to participate and you may withdraw at any stage.

If you wish to participate in the focus group discussion or the interview, please write your contact details below.

Name _____

Email _____

Thank you for your cooperation

Sincerely,

Mohamed Azaza

Section A: Teacher Background

In this section, some of the respondents' demographic information is required for analytical purposes.

Please be assured that your information will not be individually reported and will only appear in aggregated, statistical forms.

In responding to the questions, please mark the appropriate box or write the answer.

1. Nationality: _____

2. Gender:

Male:

Female:

2. Please indicate to which age group you belong.

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

older than 60

3. By June 2014, how many years will you have been working as:

A. Teacher?

B. Teacher in this school?

C. Teacher in your current subject or year-level?

4. Are you a...

A. Full-time teacher?

B. Part-time teacher?

C. Teacher assistant?

5. Which of the following reflects your main role or responsibility? Please cross ONE box only.

A. Little or no formal leadership responsibility

B. Professional development leader

C. Subject leader

D. Coordinator

E. Headteacher

Section B: Professional practices and

- Section A has 14 statements. Each statement relates to an aspect of *your practices and values about professional learning*.
- There are two response columns for each statement:
 - The column on the left-hand side is about your *practices*
 - The column on the right-hand side is about your *values*.

Please cross **ONE BOX ONLY** in **EACH COLUMN** for each statement.

For example:

ABOUT YOUR PRACTICES <i>How true of your professional learning are these practices?</i>					ABOUT YOUR VALUES <i>How important are these practices for creating opportunities for pupils to learn?</i>			
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff participate actively in teacher networks with colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This respondent *rarely* participates in teacher networks with colleagues *but* thinks that such participation is *important* for creating opportunities for pupils to learn.

Please now complete Section B.

B Professional learning practices and values								
ABOUT YOUR PRACTICES <i>How true of your professional learning are these practices?</i>					ABOUT YOUR VALUES <i>How important are these practices for creating opportunities for pupils to learn?</i>			
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. I use the web as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. I read research reports as one source of useful ideas for improving my practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. I draw on good practice from other schools as a means to further my own professional development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. I consult pupils about how they learn most effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B Professional learning practices and values

ABOUT YOUR PRACTICES <i>How true of your professional learning are these practices?</i>				ABOUT YOUR VALUES <i>How important are these practices for creating opportunities for pupils to learn?</i>				
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. I relate what works in my own practice to research findings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. I reflect on my practice as a way of identifying professional learning needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. I experiment with my practice as a conscious strategy for improving classroom teaching and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. I modify my practice in the light of feedback from my pupils.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. I modify my practice in the light of published research evidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. I modify my practice in the light of evidence from self-evaluations of my classroom practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. I modify my practice in the light of feedback about my classroom practice from managers or other colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. I carry out joint research/evaluation with one or more colleagues as a way of improving my practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. I engage in reflective discussions of working practices with one or more colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. I engage in collaborative teaching and planning as a way of improving practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C: Organisational practices and systems

This section focuses on organisational practices and systems. The questions ask you how often the systems and practices are true for your school and how important these practices and systems are to you. (Please complete in the same way as section A).

C Organisational practices and systems								
ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL <i>How often is this true for your school now?</i>				ABOUT YOUR VALUES <i>How important are these practices for creating opportunities for you to learn?</i>				
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. The senior leadership team communicates a clear vision of where the school is going	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Members of staff have a commitment to the whole school as well as to their department, key stage and/or year group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. The senior leadership team promotes commitment among staff to the whole school as well as to the department, key stage and or year group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Members of staff have a good working knowledge of the school improvement plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Members of staff see the school improvement plan as relevant and useful to learning and teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Staff development time is used effectively to realise school improvement priorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. The school provides staff joint-planning time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Teachers are encouraged to experiment with new ideas as a way of promoting professional growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C Organisational practices and systems

ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL <i>How often is this true for your school now?</i>				ABOUT YOUR VALUES <i>How important are these practices for creating opportunities for you to learn?</i>				
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Formal training provides opportunities for staff to develop professionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. School systems encourage impact evaluation of professional development activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Teacher-initiated networking is an integral element of staff development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Teachers are helped to develop skills to assess pupils' work in ways that move their pupils on in their learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Teachers are helped to develop skills to observe learning as it happens in the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Staff regularly collaborate to plan teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15. School leaders support teachers in sharing practice with other schools through networking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16. If members of staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17. Teachers suggest ideas or approaches for colleagues to try in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C Organisational practices and systems

ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL <i>How often is this true for your school now?</i>				ABOUT YOUR VALUES <i>How important are these practices for creating opportunities for you to learn?</i>				
Not true	Rarely true	Often true	Mostly true		Not important	Of limited importance	Important	Crucial
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18. Teachers make collective agreements with colleagues to test out new ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19. Teachers discuss openly with colleagues what and how they are learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20. Staff frequently use informal opportunities to discuss how pupils learn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Staff offer one another reassurance and support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	22. Performance management processes help teachers become more aware of professional standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	23. Performance management processes help teachers to see how their personal professional learning goals relate to school improvement priorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	24. Performance management processes help teachers achieve their professional learning goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 4

Teachers' interview

Research Question 1:

What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?

- What sorts of formal and informal teacher professional learning opportunities have you been involved in this year?
- Can you describe how your PL experiences have led to changes in your classroom practices in ways that have improved your students' learning?
- Do you reflect on your practice as a way of identifying your professional learning needs?
- Can you describe the reflective strategies you use?
- Have you participated in any professional development activities outside the school. If yes, can you describe these learning experiences.
- Have you conducted any individual or collaborative research? If yes, can you give examples of the research activities you have engaged in?
- Which do you prefer working with colleagues or working alone?
- Have you participated in a school committee? If yes, can you describe your experiences working with this committee?
- Have these collaborative experiences helped you grow professionally?
- Can you give some specific examples of a project where you worked collaboratively with other colleagues from the same school? What were the goals, challenges and outcomes?
- In what ways have they influenced your classroom practices and improved your students' learning? Please give examples.

Research Question 2:

How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?

- How important is teacher professional learning in your school?
- In your opinion, does the school emphasize it too much, enough, or not enough? Can you explain?
- Do you think the senior leadership team communicates a clear vision of the school improvement plan? If yes, can you explain how?
- Are you aware of ADEC's teacher professional learning policies?
- What sorts of policies exist to encourage teachers to partake in professional learning and implement new strategies in their classrooms? How has the school supported you to do so?
- How relevant and supporting are these policies to your PD?
- What were the benefits to you and your students?
- Can you explain how CPD is approached strategically at your school?
- In your opinion, what aspects of school support for teachers' PD can be improved and how?

Research Question 3:

What are the challenges and barriers to teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools?

- In what ways does your school support or hinder your professional learning? Can you give two or three examples?
- Can you give one or two examples of dilemmas you have faced between a PL preference and priority that you have had as an individual, and an organizational PL priority that has contradicted your individual preference. What happened? How was the dilemma resolved?
- Have you faced any dilemma between a PL preference and a priority that you had as an individual? Or because of an organizational PL priority that

contradicted your individual preference? What happened? How was the dilemma resolved?

- In your opinion, what are the challenges of working and learning with colleagues?
- What do you think the risks or disadvantages of working with colleagues are?

Research Question 4:

How do teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?

- How would you define teacher professional learning?
- How are your own CPD goals determined? Who helps you determine these goals?
- What does your institution expect from you in terms of PD?
- How are your needs as an individual teacher balanced with the needs of the school in the CPD planning? And how are the CPD activities agreed and by whom?
- How do school leaders help or hinder teachers at your school understand the implications and values of PL in relation to individual and organizational development?
- How do you interpret the broader regional policy context in relation to PL vision and values?

Appendix 5

School leaders' interview

Research Question 1:

What are the professional learning practices and values of ADEC teachers?

- What sorts of professional learning opportunities are available at your school?
- Has teachers' professional learning activities resulted in significant changes or developments to teaching and learning in your school? Can you explain how?
- What kinds of professional learning programmes have recently been implemented in your school?
- Do you have any collaborative PD partnership ventures with other schools in terms of research and teacher education programmes? If yes, can you describe them?
- Do teachers at your school conduct individual or joint research? If yes, can you give details?

Research Question 2:

How does ADEC New School Model support teacher professional learning?

- What are ADEC's teacher professional learning policies?
- How aware of ADEC's teacher professional learning policies do you think teachers are?
- How relevant do you think teachers consider these policies are for supporting their PD?
- In your opinion, to what extent do teachers consider these policies relevant and supporting to their PD?

- How do these policies support teachers' PD in ways that lead to changes in classroom practice and improvements in students' learning? please give two or three examples.
- In what ways do these policies support teachers' PD that leads to changes in classroom practice and to improvements in students' learning? Can you give examples?
- What sorts of policies exist to encourage teachers to partake in professional development and implement new strategies in the classroom?
- How does your school formulate and implement these policies?
- Does the school have a PD committee? How does it work on developing the teaching staff in your school?
- How important is teacher professional learning in your school? Do you think the school emphasizes it too much, enough, or not enough?
- How do school systems encourage impact evaluation of professional development activities?
- How is the school vision conveyed and demonstrated to teachers? Do you feel that your vision is shared by all teachers and the staff in your school?
- Do you think that you share the same vision as all the teachers and staff in your school?
- Can you explain how CPD is approached strategically at your school?
- In your opinion, what aspects of school support for teachers' PD can be improved and how?

Research Question 3:

What are the challenges and barriers to teacher professional learning in the context of ADEC schools?

- In what ways does the school support or hinder teachers' professional learning?
Can you give two or three examples?
- A common leadership challenge is when organizational priorities are seen by some teachers to run counter to their individual preferences and priorities. Can you give some examples where an organizational PD priority was opposed by teachers because they perceived it to be hindering an individual PD priority or preference?
- What does your institution expect from teachers in terms of PD?
- How are the teachers' needs balanced with the needs of the school in the CPD planning, and by whom are the CPD activities agreed?

Research Question 4:

How do teachers interpret and understand their learning in the school and regional contexts?

- How can you describe the level of awareness and commitment of the teachers to professional learning and development?
- How are teachers' CPD goals determined?
- Who determines these goals?
- How are teachers' individual needs balanced with the needs of the school in the CPD planning, and by whom are the CPD activities agreed?
- How do teachers engage in and interpret the broader regional policy context in relation to PL vision and values?

Appendix 6

Focus group interviews

The 'Research Orientation' Factor

This is about the influence of research on teachers' professional learning and development; teachers draw on research ideas for improving their practice and relate their practice to research findings.

	No	A bit	Definitely
Does the survey data indicate a gap between what we value and we actually do?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How do you explain this gap? Is this a problem? Do you need to take action?

What kind of strategy could you adopt to address this problem?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Appendix 7

Profiles of teachers participating in the interviews

Leila

Leila comes from the UAE. She is a qualified ICT teacher. She has a three-year professional experience in teaching. She has no previous teaching experience before being recruited in her current position. Leila is the chair of the school building community and a member of the Curriculum Development Committee.

Ibrahim

Ibrahim comes from Palestine. He teaches social studies. He obtained a Master's Degree and a PhD in education, which has made him specialized in the field. Ibrahim has a long experience in teaching. He has been working in the UAE since 1997 with both ADEC and the UAE Ministry of Education. He is a member of the Student personal Development Committee.

Richard

Richard is an Irish teacher, who taught in his country for 7 years before coming to the UAE. He has the shortest experience in the school as he has been working only for one year. Richard is teaching English language, science and math. Describing his professional development in the school, Richard says that he mainly focuses on assessment for learning and the way to develop this assessment mode for learners and teachers. Richard is a member of the Assessment for Learning Committee.

Monica

Monica is an American teacher, who taught math in the United States for 4 years to Kindergarten, grades 1, 4 and 5. Her experience in the UAE is relatively short as she has taught grades 2 and 5 for only 2 years in the current school. Monica is a member of the Leadership Committee.

Amy

Amy is a teacher from Belfast in North Ireland. She was trained in Liverpool. Prior to teaching in the UAE, she taught for 7 years in her home country. She is currently teaching grade 3. Amy feels excited working and learning from other teachers of different nationalities. She is also keen on imparting her experiences with her colleagues. She is a member of the Special Needs Committee.

Steve

Steve comes from Ireland. He has got into teaching quite late. Having a degree in commerce, he worked in business and sales for three years. He then got the opportunity to do a postgraduate conversion course in teaching for 18 months. Since then he has become a full-time teacher. He worked in Ireland for three years, teaching elementary students aged between six and seven years before he came to the UAE. His experience with ADEC is one year only.

Salah

Salah is an Egyptian Arts teacher. He has a teaching experience of 18 years, 11 of which are in the current school. Some of his initiatives in his profession were integrating some

programmes, like Photoshop, in teaching art as well as designing materials. Salah is the head of the Strategic Plan Committee and a member of the Safety Committee.

Salima

Salima is an Arabic language teacher. She is also the co-ordinator of Arabic language at her current school. Salima worked for 11 years at a girls' school before joining this school. She had many informal initiatives like sharing assessment methods with other colleagues in the school. Salima is a member of the Best Practices Committee

Abdullah

Abdullah is a Jordanian Arabic language teacher. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Arabic language from Amman University, where he also pursued his studies and earned a Master's Degree in business and administration and a PhD in human development. In his current school, he received various awards such as Sheikh Hamdan Award for Educational Excellence (2011), Sharjah Award for Voluntary Work (2013) and Sharjah Award for Educational Excellence (2013). Abdullah is the head of the Curriculum Development Committee and a member of the best practices committee.

Sheikha

Sheikha is an Emirati teacher, who has taught for nearly 18 years. She taught both social sciences and history for elementary and secondary students before she joined the current school. Sheikha is interested in students' behaviour and for this reason she attended professional development on behavior management and on communication skills. She is involved in the Gifted Students' Committee.

Samir

Samir is an Egyptian teacher. He has a Bachelor's Degree in sports and a Master's Degree in creative thinking. He is a senior teacher, who worked in the school for more than 18 years. He conducted research on creative thinking, which helped him work on a project with other teachers to develop student performance. Samir is also interested in developing the curriculum for sport. Samir is a member of the Curriculum Development Committee.

Christine

Christine is an American teacher, with a professional experience of almost 13 years. She has a Master's Degree in counselling. She was trained in behavior management and she was the coordinator of behavior management for the staff at her school in the United States. She was also a team leader coordinator. Apart from these leadership positions, she taught grades 2 and 4. After moving to the UAE, she has taught English, math and science to grade 5. Christine is the head of the best practices committee.

Brian

Brian comes from the United Kingdom. He has long experience in teaching. He taught in different parts of the world, including the Middle East, China, and Japan. Brian also taught many years in England before joining ADEC, where he has been working for five years.

Paul

Paul is a teacher from the United States, who taught for fifteen years before coming to the UAE. He had a degree in computer science and another teacher certification. He worked as a computer lab manager, technology coordinator, a home teacher as well as a 3rd, 4th and 5th grade teacher.

Appendix 8

Sample of a Coded Transcript

The following is a full transcribed and coded interview. The box on the right illustrates the codes assigned to the text. In order to protect the anonymity of the school and the interviewee, their names have been removed.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your teaching background?

Teacher: Teaching background! Ah I got into teaching quite late from my country. I started teaching in ah...I worked in business for 3 years. So I have a business degree, business background first. I worked in business for 3 years in equipment and then sales and then I got the opportunity to go teaching. And I did a postgraduate conversion course for 18 months for teaching. And since then, I've been teaching in Ireland for 3 years, and this is my first year in the UAE

Qualifications and work experience prior to teaching

Teaching qualification

Teaching experience in UAE

Interviewer: What was postgraduate conversion course? Was it a DELTA?

Teacher: Ah it it's.... if you have a degree...I already had a degree in commerce. So if you have a degree, you can do what's called post-graduation. So I did postgraduate 18 months; very intensive course

Teaching qualification

Interviewer: About teaching?

Teacher: About teaching yeah, primary teaching

Interviewer: Ok

Teacher: So I taught then for 3 years in Ireland. I taught generally younger children, ah may be 6-7 years. And I got the opportunity to come to the UAE and this year is my first year.

Teaching experience outside UAE

Interviewer: OK. How do you define teacher professional learning?

Teacher: Teacher professional learning! I suppose the one true thing I see about teaching is that every single day of your teaching career, even every single minute of your teaching career is different and every single child is different. And ah you need, I suppose, to keep up-skilled all of the time to new learning ways and new programs that are coming on stream and be able to identify...different ways of teaching... ah... and because every year you will have a different group of children, a different dynamic. And you have to try different things. So, you need to keep up with what is modern teaching methodologies to help your class.

Teaching experience outside UAE

TPL as on-going development

Interviewer: And how important is teacher professional learning in your particular school? In your opinion, does the school emphasize it too much, enough, or not enough? Can you explain?

Teacher: In the school ah I think it's... there is a good emphasis. Ah it could probably be done a lot better way. Ah we do it... well... There is good time given to it, but I don't think that the time...I think the design could be given in a better way...So we may have 2 hours a week for professional development for the manner in which it is delivered through. The Tamkeen program ah can be quite... I feel may be that and the people who deliver Tamkeen are very good but I feel that their programme is delivered for the sake of delivering it. And the people who attended i.e. the teachers sit there just to fill their time, because you sign in and you sign out Ah I think the time could be spent better by delivering a stronger program, more focused on the needs of the school ah and everybody would benefit from that.

TPL as on-going development

TPL as on-going development

Tamkeen / ineffectiveness of Tammkeen

Suggestion to develop a more effective PD programme

Interviewer: Does your school support teacher professional learning? What sorts of policies exist to encourage teachers to partake in professional learning and implement new strategies in their classrooms?

Teacher: Yeah, I think they encourage us to do it. They encourage us to personally develop all the time. Ah they do ask at different stages of the year everybody who would like to deliver a presentation in a... in a particular area that they

School support to TPL

<p>feel strong on, ah if they would like to present to the staff. So, I think in a big staff like ours, there are many people with many different skills; ah people with music skills, sport skills and different curricular areas, especially from my end would be English and math and science, ah that we would could deliver our expertise on to the whole staff. People don't put their hands up to do it. So we are encouraged but ah maybe it should become, I suppose, compulsory to do this in a certain amount of modules, certain amount of modules each year.</p>	<p>Teachers' expertise /skills</p>
<p>Interviewer: OK. Apart from Tamkeen, What sorts of formal and informal teacher professional learning opportunities have you been involved in this year?</p>	<p>School support to TPL</p>
<p>Teacher: Ah...just I've attended a few outside courses...Ah I've been in a unique situation this year, in that my schedule was a half schedule. So I was teaching 15, 15 set periods a week. For the other 15 periods I was either covering classes or ah helping with administrative things at different stages because I was on a half schedule, I was asked to attend certain courses. So for example, I attended a course in one of the hotels on literacy; a literacy program that ADEC was delivering. Ah and you know it was based on a book that was being published for ADEC and certain program coming from Australia. It was delivered quite well and I attended the... say, the writing part of it and another teacher the... ah the phonics part of it. We now both came together and presented back to the staff and I think if there are are more opportunities for that staff, it would be beneficial</p>	<p>External PD opportunities</p>
	<p>Teaching workload</p>
	<p>External courses organized by ADEC</p>
	<p>Sharing what has been learn with colleagues</p>
<p>Interviewer: So those are what we call formal professional development opportunities, attending conference and workshops outside the school. What about the informal ones?</p>	<p>Informal PL opportunities</p>
<p>Teacher: Yeah!</p>	
<p>Teacher: Yeah, ah I think that happens...</p>	
<p>Interviewer: Can you talk about these experiences?</p>	
<p>Teacher: Yeah, I think that happens in every school for every teacher all over the world. A classroom for a teacher can be quite isolating. You run your own inside the door and you encounter issues and sometimes you can become... and feel</p>	<p>Individual learning</p>

there is no body there to help you. But if you have a strong team, and it worked better in a bigger school for you're working with teachers from other grades. You are from the same grade in a team. If you're talking with teachers and you say: I had this problem today, it could be with behaviour, it could be with a certain topic you are teaching, they will be able to say: oh I have the same problem or I did it this way. You know the expression "knocking heads". You're helping each other with your ideas. If somebody has a problem, I may have a solution for them. If I have a problem, they may have a solution for me. So talking among other staff members just informally, may be in the corridor, in the staff room, or at a planning meeting is very important and it's like you say it's informal professional development and it's happening every day. I understand it like this.

Individual learning

Using a metaphor 'to describe collaborative learning

Collaborative learning

Informal learning

Interviewer: OK. Can you describe how your PL experiences, either individual or collaborative, have led to changes in your classroom practices in ways that have improved your students' learning?

Teacher: Yeah

Interviewer: What about student learning?

Teacher: Student learning! Well, I was the ...

Interviewer: Does it have an effect on student learning?

Impact of TPL on student learning

Teacher: Of course it does.

Interviewer: Can you give some specific examples of a project where you worked collaboratively with other colleagues? What were the goals and outcomes?

Teacher: Yeah because if you're... if you're teaching ah phonetics lesson and you're having difficulty teaching the children ah the sound "p" or if you check the list of all your letters and ah a lot of the children are having problems with certain letters, ah you may say that you wanna...to other grade teachers and they may say: this website is very good, works well for me and you might go back and use that material they used. And ah you'll see benefit from that

Example of collaborative learning

Impact of collaboration

Interviewer: Great! If we turn to the committees inside the school have you participated in a school committee of professional development community?

Teacher: Ahh... Yeah

Interviewer: This year? Last year?

Teacher: Yeah, I was on a committee for behavior ah we...I committees were somehow neglected this year. Ah ah first of all it was my first year teaching here and the idea of committees is new to me. Ah I'd still say now at the end of the year that it's still new to me because I only attended 2 meetings So I can't really speak... for there were worth value because I haven't much exposure to them. But I was on the behavior committee and we met. I remember one meeting in particular, and behavior is a huge issue with the school. And I think it's a huge issue in any other school. Any teaching is very... to complete with, first of all having good behavior systems in your systems school first of all, in your corridor and in the classroom. Ah so being put on a committee for behavior, you'd expect at the start of the year that behavior is no very good. You'd expect that may be a behavior committee would have goals to improve certain areas, but mostly I think the thing hasn't been done

Participation in a school committee: Behavior Committee

Importance of the Behavior Committee

Evaluation of the Behavior Committee

Interviewer: OK. So you said this committee met twice?

Teacher: It was probably 2 meetings. I didn't miss any

Interviewer: There were only 2

Teacher: There were only 2. The ...

Meeting of the committee members

Interviewer: What's the reason? Why there was not, you know, meeting so often?

Teacher: I think too much time was given to other areas like committing to Tamkeen every week ah then other days were to other plans. The few other was left to the main part, was left to planning. So first, our impression about the week was planning and the second was Tamkeen and then may be the committee is lost ...

Lack of time for committee work

Most of the time is devoted to Tamkeen

Interviewer: Are you involved in any other committee apart from this?

Teacher: No just this one.

Interviewer: This one. During those 2 meeting, were there some challenges?

Teacher: Ah it was only myself and one other EMT at the meeting that I remember, and the rest were was ...

Interviewer: Who?

Teacher: Arabic staff

Interviewer: Yeah

Teacher: But ah may be two of the Arabic staff had good enough English to translate. For I think you find in those situations and fully nature that's because there's more Arabic teachers. Then the whole conversation is in Arabic, may be half an hour and only twice or 3 times in the meeting we got a translation of what's going on. So we're kind of left. I think I think it's a very hard barrier to break down. The only solution I could see and I don't know what property is that the committee is split... that's...may be there should b a committee for each section and in English and in Arabic and ah bring ideas together

Interviewer: Yeah. No cultural problems? I mean...

Teacher: I think the only cultural issue I see is ah ha would be expectancies from children. Ahh for I teach I have ah I've different expectancies for what I expect a child regards behavior. Just for example... ah if I'm walking to my school in Ireland and there was a child running at full speed down the corridor with this little bag. Ah it would be unheard of. The children in our schools, they walk around the school. Ah it's sometimes it's like ah ground tree track walking through another school and there is racing all over the place. For there is bags everywhere. There is a lot of leisuring. Ah... so that was a cultural shock for me coming from where I come from and ah I don't think it's obviously not a cultural shock for local teachers because they don't know any different. So ah I expect more from the child as regards ah their manner around the school. Whereas I don't think expectancies are bad habits from local teachers and it's not... it's not their fault. I think you're

Involvement with other committees

Linguistic challenges to TPL

Linguistic challenges to TPL

Suggestions to address the linguistic problems

Cultural challenges at school

asking for a cultural difference. I think it's a cultural difference. I think if there is... there is ah one thing ah English teachers can do when coming here is to help them change that

Cultural challenges at school

Interviewer: Great! At the personal level, you don't have any other problems?

Teacher: No.

Interviewer: So, do you prefer working individually or collaboratively?

Teacher: No, I like working collaboratively. Ah I come from a big school... in Ireland. Also big schools in the UAE are thousands of children, whereas a big school in Ireland is probably one of the big schools would be one thousand children. So my school at home has about the same amount of children here as the same size? The same number of staff, the same number of classes and because of that you have teachers working together at the same grade level. So in Ireland, I worked collaboratively with 2 or 3 teachers. Each year we meet, we plan...ah

Cultural challenges

Collaborative experiences outside UAE

Interviewer: What about here?

Teacher: Same

Teacher: Yeah but ah ah...

Interviewer: What do you think is the difference and what are the risks or challenges of working with colleagues in this context?

Teacher: The difference is ah is that in grade 2, say, you'll have 3 English teachers and 3 Arabic teachers. There is probably I'm sure, administration are trying to change this...Ah... I know there should be more collaborative work between Arabic and English staff, because if I have two ways in the morning and the Arabic teacher has 2 ways in the afternoon, even though they're teaching a completely different language, we're still teaching the same children: I mean the same goals to teach them as we have in the curriculum to deliver whether it be in English or in Arabic. Ah I think it's important that the teachers are meeting at least once a week or once every 2 weeks just to talk about the children in general. That's may be difficult by language also

Importance of collaborative learning

Interviewer: Yeah! You mentioned you were part of formal professional learning community which was the behavior community?

Professional learning communities

Teacher: Yeah!

Interviewer: That's the formal one. Do you work informally with other EMTs ...Do you plan together?

Informal learning

Teacher: Yeah

Interviewer: You sit together and plan

Teacher: Yeah planning! But I'd see that formal. I mean we do...

Interviewer: Informal?

Teacher: Yeah, we do so. We meet at the same time every...to gather plans to gather...

Informal learning

Interviewer: Is it consistent?

Teacher: It is consistent, every week yeah and particularly for the main work part of the year. I suppose in this year's case it is deteriorated a little bit towards the end, maybe because some teachers were leaving ah and ah it's a long school year, particularly some terms are very long. That was it...people all leaving the system but for the main part of the year it was... it was formal and it was well...well-structured and we worked well.

Joint planning

Interviewer: Have you been involved in other projects?

Teacher: Not really! Apart from attending some outside courses.

Interviewer: OK! Do you often reflect on your practice as a teacher? What strategies do you use on reflecting your practices?

Teacher: I suppose really by ah... the most common every day with children would be by key observations ah... I suppose one goal idea, I got this year, about this year, I should do more of it... to do a "kid watching diary" ah

Reflecting on practice / Student feedback

Interviewer: A kid watching observation?

Reflective strategies

Teacher: Yes

Interviewer: Can you explain this?

Teacher: It's... it's just at the start of the year even a notebook. And if you have 23 children in the class, you give each child a page and you just pick up the notebook every once and a while and you make a note. You know you might pick 5 children at random one day and you're doing a writing lesson. You know when you make small observations... ah ok... those children at this moment, on this day and you pick, you know a few days

Reflective strategies

later you pick different children and you keep doing every few days and build up... a catalogue of observations ah for the children. And ah I suppose if you do it for one, if you do it during one section of each day, so if I decided this year and wanted to do it for writing at the end of the year... If I have 10 observations of I will see, you know, I was saying this at the start of the year, but now I'm saying that I can see a progress, you know...

Using student feedback as a reflective strategy

Interviewer: So, this observation is for you or for the student?

Teacher: It's... it's well... it's a good catalogue for me and for my teaching. But it's a good catalogue ...

Impact of student feedback on teaching

Interviewer: I mean the student reflects on his performance on your performance here?

Teacher: No, with this diary, I am reflecting on the child's performance. I am... I am making observations on what the child is doing and it's a catalogue and... you can hopefully within years of teaching... you can see progress

Impact of student feedback on teaching

Interviewer: OK! Do you have peer observations?

Teacher: Yeah, peer observations! Ah I did this year ah... 2 peer observations: one in grade 3 and one in grade 5. Ah just very simply. The great advantage of peer observations is... ah... We don't often get the opportunity to watch other teachers teach and each teacher has a different method, a different way. You'll automatically be sitting watching other

Peer observation

Impact of peer observation

teachers, you pick up a few nice simple ideas for your classroom behaviour, for questioning, for you even pick up ah... some technology ideas, you know!

Impact of peer observation

Interviewer: Great!

Teacher: So it's very good

Interviewer: Are you involved in some kind of research of your practice, any individual or collaborative research even small scale research?

Conducting research

Teacher: Not not at the moment! I'm looking into further study ah for next year, whether into masters or ah up-skilling outside of school

Interviewer: What about school networks outside, online school networks; are you part of one them?

School networks

Teacher: Ah no I don't...

Interviewer: School networks?

Teacher: Not at the moment

Interviewer: So outside of the school, you don't have other professional connections with other teachers from other schools?

Teacher: Apart from my own school in Ireland, I just contact them by email. But it's ...

Interviewer: Great: Now let's move to another thing about ADEC's policies regarding teacher professional development. Are you aware of ADEC's teacher professional learning policies?

Teacher: Ah, I'm sure the document has well... I'm not sure the document has been given to me. I don't I don't know ah...There is huge amount... ah I suppose requirements on paper work and even from the process of coming here and settling things in here and working here, "red tape" and policies and documents and systems and... and a huge amount of you're not adequately trained. I mean, for instance, I would take the Eastern system that we used for American children ah when I came here ah I had an induction. All the induction can really do when you move to this country for a totally different country is give you basic things... like you know helping you

ADEC policies with respect to TPL

ADEC's expectations and the outcomes were too high

The School induction program

set up your apartment and... the basic living things. Induction can't...doesn't induct you into the curriculum and how things are done and then you come to the school and all of the sudden someone talks about Easts, Eastern and American... and East to me just 3 letters ah and I was not fully trained. You have to train yourself on it during the year. You have to... you have to use it, you have to use this and ...play around of it... trying... to get with it. It's... it's American system with all the ...

Individual CPD goals

Cultural issues

Interviewer: At the school level, are you aware of the school policies regarding professional development?

Awareness of the school expectations with respect to TPD

Teacher: Ah aham

Interviewer: What does your school expect from you in terms of PD?

Teacher: They expect you to be at Tamkeen every week. Ah ah... and the requirement coming out of Tamkeen ah... they I mean expect you to fill them. But also...

The school expectations with respect to TPD

Tamkeen

Interviewer: Do you think this is enough?

Teacher: Well, there are other expectancies from you... also from a point of view of planning ah... and your teacher folder and your portfolios, your classroom displays. Ah, you observe a number of times during the year both formally or informally. So you're made pretty well aware of what they expect you

Follow up of the individual TPD plans

Interviewer: What about teacher professional development plan? I think you have one. Other teachers were talking about this teachers' professional development plan...

Awareness of the school improvement plan

Teacher: Yeah

Interviewer: At the beginning of the year

Teacher: Yeah

Interviewer: How are your own CPD goals determined? Who helps you to develop your PD goals??

Teacher: Yeah, I remember doing it this year, but again it was all new to me. Ah you... you pick 2 areas in which you enhance... You want to improve... ah some sometimes I'm told that these come quite vague. And I need to be more challenged. Ah you know, somebody wants to improve their

The school improvement plan

Evaluation of individual TPD plans

classroom environment, it shouldn't take a whole year to do this. You can do this in one week!

Individual TPD plans

Interviewer: Do you show them what you wrote?

Teacher: Yeah...I think...I pick something like ah communicating with parent and classroom environment

Individual TPD plans

Interviewer: That was a follow up...OK

Teacher: Ah it was alluded to in my... ah observations, but ah first as regards solid follow up...did you achieve? Ah...I present this in my evaluation

Follow up of the individual TPD plans

Interviewer: Yeah! Great! So you, yourself, determine these professional development needs?

Teacher: Yeah

Teachers determines their individual TPD plans

Interviewer: Needs?

Teacher: There is a matrix of difference

Interviewer: Are you aware of the school improvement plan?

Teacher: Yes

Interviewer: School improvement plan?

Teacher: I'm aware there is one. Ah speaking very broadly... ah I think that the school improvement plans are focused... are focusing too much on... ah areas that are...that can't be achieved. Whereas having so other specific foundations in place, like... ah behavior being the main. Ah when I say behavior, I don't mean general school etiquette for children ah...I think this is one basic foundational stuff, may be any school has systems and they can't achieve ah...They can't expect to achieve for high level in every area. But what we are having a good basis at very first

Criticizing the school improvement plan

Interviewer: So the school improvement plan isn't introduced to teacher at the beginning of the year and that's it? Do you read the document for example from time to time.

Teacher: I suppose ah during the year with Tamkeen they try to focus on certain areas from the school improvement plan

Tamkeen

Interviewer: Great! Do you think there is a balance, by the end of the day, between your professional development needs and

the needs of your organization, your school, at least in terms of planning...

Teacher: Well, I see when you ask me this question using your left and your right hands... It's interesting. It's a statement I make, a lot of the left hand isn't over the right hand's doing, I think there is some sense of that. I think there is a willingness to want the two to go together, but there is much going between that, this idea gets lost from this idea because there is just so much expectancies and paper work and different things in the middle that don't allow them to happen

Using a metaphor to describe the balance between teacher PD needs and school priorities

Balance between teacher PD needs and school priorities

Interviewer: Great! This is the last part of the interview! So, how does the senior leadership communicate a clear vision of the school improvement plan?

Teacher: Ah well I suppose ...

Interviewer: Can you explain how CPD is approached strategically at your school? Is there a clear vision?

Teacher: Ah... It is and it isn't. I suppose in small areas, week by week, meeting by meeting, they are letting us know about their plan and how they are going to achieve it, but I don't think it is made clear that it's to fulfill that school improvement. I don't think... Maybe it's... I don't think it's a document that's focused on too much... ah and it may be there may be a goal in the background. I don't know!

School vision with respect to TPD

Interviewer: Are teachers involved in the school improvement plan?

School improvement plan

Teacher: Ah...

Interviewer: In developing this plan

Teacher: I'm not sure... I'm... I didn't come until the second or third week of school and that's why I didn't attend a planning week... ah because there is a week planning, yeah!

Interviewer: Can you give one or two examples of dilemmas you have faced between a PL preference and priority that you have had as an individual, and an organizational PL priority that has contradicted your individual preference? What happened? How was the dilemma resolved?

Teacher: Ah aham...

Interviewer: Let me give you an example... some of the teachers mentioned that they want to make a project and they were very enthusiastic about the project and when they put the project to the management, we cannot do this. We cannot fit this into the...Can you give me an example if you have?

Teacher: Ah... I can't but ah... I can't think of anything specific, but I can see how it does happen. Ah and it happens because ah policies and administration are... ah they're tied down too much to ticking boxes and... ah... ah fulfilling certain goals and they're tied too much to ADEC policy that ah if teachers... educators are all about creating and coming up with new ideas thinking as they go... So if somebody has a good idea...ah at a certain point of the year... ah and they go to the administration, but if it doesn't fit ADEC policy, then it gets lost or it doesn't happen. So I don't think of an example. This is how it happens.

ADEC's expectations are too high

Teacher agency

Interviewer: Finally, this is the final question. How do you interpret and understand your learning in the school and regional contexts?

Teacher: Ah I suppose ah... ah in the context of my school, because I don't think my school can change us from the context of ADEC. Ah I think expectancies ah... expectancies are too high...ah outcomes... you know what they expect children at a certain level is far too high. Ah I think a re-evaluation of the curriculum and how it's delivered to all levels ah... is needed. Ah what I'd seen... a glimpse this year, particularly towards the end of this year, there is more teacher involvement in the building of the curriculum because they've drafted now new curriculum guidelines for... ah I saw a draft document for mathematics. And it was broken down very well and it was clear to me that teachers were involved in...actual ADEC teachers... were involved in the creation of this document. Ah they needed to bring more teachers in like focus groups and have them working on policies

Interpreting TPL in the school and regional context

ADEC's expectations are too high

ADEC policies

Involving teachers in curriculum development

The need to involve teachers in work on school policies

Interviewer: So there is some change?

Teacher: Yeah, there...I've seen... I've seen recently yeah and
and in that way it's going in the right way. But it's slow and it
gets slowed down... and it gets stopped by all the other
policies and all the other "red tape" that are there

ADEC's policies

Teacher agency

Interviewer: Thank you very much

Teacher: You're very welcome

Interviewer: That's the end of the interview