

**Learning and Teaching in English: A Case Study of Higher  
Education in Libya**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the learning and use of English as a tool of instruction inside Libyan universities. The study begins with an investigation of the challenges that students and lecturers face in the learning and teaching of the language of English in higher education. In-depth qualitative research was carried out at Sebha University in the South of Libya, including individual and group interviews with staff and students. The thesis, in this respect, makes a particular contribution as it sets out the multiple and contradictory challenges that all parties experience. It seeks not to lay blame but, rather, to understand how the parties concerned understand the issues from their unique point of view. This element of the thesis shows up the major challenges in the teaching and learning of English in higher education in Libya. The second element of empirical work concerns how English is then employed as the language of transmission in a professional field – medicine. This second ‘layer’ of work, then, illustrates what happens when a language which is not the language of either the lecturers or the students is used to try to communicate and develop complex information and understandings. This second element of the work shows then how the challenges evident in the teaching and learning of English are carried into a professional field. The concept of ‘deep rote’ learning is extrapolated from the data. The reliance on rote learning in the teaching of English ‘translates’ into a deeper level of rote in the teaching and learning of Medicine, as lecturers and students alike struggle both with the language and the content of the material they are working with. This ‘deep rote’ is consolidated through social and cultural issues and the challenges associated with funding, resourcing and training of staff in Libyan Higher Education. Connections are made between the area of study and the personal experience of the researcher carrying out the study with a methodological reflection on the challenges faced by a student of this same system. To this end, 45 semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and students from medicine and education departments at Sebha University, divided as follows: 21 semi-structured interviews with students and 24 semi-structured interviews with staff members. These interviews were followed by three focus groups with a particular focus on shedding light on the issues that the students raised in one-to-one interviews, including the main challenges they face when the lecturers use English as the medium of study instead of Arabic, their experiences of learning English, and the different methods that lecturers use in order to support students’ learning in different areas of study. Each group had five participants with two groups being made up entirely of young women. Grounded

Theory was used as the theoretical approach to investigate the collected data. The author tried to put to one side any a priori assumptions about what he would find and used a systematic process of organising the data under themes and categories which were then related to each other. The main motivation for the use of this theory was that the findings gained can be valid and reliable in respect of representing real-world settings. In addition, the stories that are told through this approach are context-specific, detailed, and robustly connected to the data.

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# **1 Chapter one: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis focuses on the learning and use of English as a tool of instruction inside Libyan universities. It first explores the main challenges that students and lecturers encounter in the learning and teaching of the language of English in higher education. English is currently taught at all levels in the Libyan education system, it being a lingua franca of the world. It goes on to explore what happens when English is used in the teaching of a specialisation in Libya, namely medicine. In Libya, Arabic is not used in several specializations at universities, where English is used instead. This use is forced because of the nature of these specializations, including medicine, where almost all available materials and sources are written in English. Additionally, English is also used in hospitals between doctors and other medical staff, hence requiring English use. This use of English engenders several difficulties and challenges that the students and the lecturers suffer from. It is the aim of the current thesis, then, to shed light on these challenges and investigate how they are addressed by both the students and the lecturers. The thesis also makes a particular contribution because it takes understandings from the first focus for study – the teaching of English in higher education in Libya – and then looks closely at how that teaching and learning impacts on the teaching and learning within a professional field. The research is qualitative in nature and focuses on a single university in order to generate depth rather than breadth, and detail rather than generalities.

According to a number of authors the use of English in a country where English is not the first language poses several challenges for lecturers to teach the relevant material (Abuklaish, 2014). As described above, this study focuses on one area, in depth, exploring the teaching methods followed by the lecturers in the Faculty of Medicine at Sebha University, Libya. The questions to be addressed include how lecturers teach medicine in English, and what techniques are employed to help the student encounter the difficulties of the use of English. It is clear that the lecturers themselves also encounter many problems teaching in higher education in Libya. It has been widely assumed in the related literature that Libyan higher education students' level of English is low and may be insufficient for the demands of higher education (see Sawani, 2009). This study sets out to take a broader perspective on the difficulties faced by all parties, and where those

difficulties originate, both in the teaching and learning of English and in the teaching of medicine *in* English.

In the following section, I provide a background on the use of English in Libya, which reveals the main rationale for the current work.

## 1.2 English in Libya: Background

English is taught in Libya as a second language and is frequently used as the language of teaching and a communication medium in several faculties within a university (see, Imssalem, 2002 and El-Hawat, 2006, among many others). For instance, medicine and engineering faculties make use only of books written in English and the instructors prefer to explain lessons using English rather than Arabic. The use of English in such faculties is now normal practice and the use of Arabic is the exception (Clark, 2004 and Sawani, 2009). English is a lingua franca of the world and ignorance of English limits students' experiences and their capabilities. However, many difficulties are experienced both in the learning of English and in the use of English in higher education. Several pertinent studies have strongly indicated that Libyan students suffer from low levels of English, something that makes them suffer when they upgrade to higher education (cf. Moghani and Mohamed, 2003, Azarnoosh, 2014, Hawedi, 2015, *inter alia*). The effects of such a low level of English are exacerbated when they are combined with the need of the students to focus on other demands which necessitate proficiency of English.

Reviewing the related literature on the use of English at the university level in Libya reveals that there seem to be no in-depth studies that investigate the use of English as the language of instruction and students' perspectives towards such use. Additionally, there are no studies that report the particular challenges all parties face. The main concern of the related literature centres on how English must be used in Libya and the possible pedagogical tools that generate the best outcomes, drawing on research on language teaching which is not carried out in Libya itself. Sawani (2009) investigated the factors that affect English teaching and materials' preparation in Libya. The author describes how new materials have recently been introduced into the Libyan system in order to prepare students to use English effectively. However, he warns that most teachers are still struggling to cope with these materials because they are accustomed to the old materials

and methodologies. In addition, they cannot communicate effectively in English due to the period of disuse which they experienced in the past. Elabbar (2011), Alfahadi (2012), Abuklaish (2014) and Khalifa and Shabdin (2016) have all published recent work which focuses on how English must be taught and how English teaching needs to be enhanced in Libya. Many of these studies focus on the need for a Communicative Approach to language teaching – the ‘accepted’ form for the teaching of a second language in Western industrialised nations, such as the UK.

Ultimately, my study grows out of the idea that the teaching of English to Libyan university students could and should be improved, and that teaching *in* English would subsequently be positively affected. In addition, the thesis reveals the many problems currently faced when English is used as the medium of instruction in a professional field.

In the following subsection, I shed light on the main theoretical approach, i.e. grounded theory, that I used to investigate the data.

### **1.3 The theoretical approach: Grounded theory**

Grounded theory is an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data. For Holloway (1997), grounded theory is not just about description but is also about generating and developing new theory, Hancock et al (1998) show that grounded theory goes beyond phenomenology because the explanations that are derived are new knowledge and are used to develop new theory about a particular phenomenon. Additionally, grounded theory is a systematic methodology in the social sciences that involves the construction of theory through the analysis of data (Strauss and Corbin 1994, Charmaz 2003, Glaser and Strauss 2009, and 2014). Grounded theory method does not attempt to seek for the "truth" but, rather, attempts to conceptualize the topic being investigated through utilizing empirical investigation (Glaser, 1978 and Heath and Cowley, 2004). The approach allows researchers to build new hypotheses in a retrospective way so as to fit data (cf. Birks and Mills, 2015); the approach does not, therefore, begin with a theory or theories that the researcher sets out to test or to prove.

Adopting grounded theory, the researcher pays attention to the data and attempts to investigate them with the focus on the phenomenon at issue, with no need to rely on the related literature to reach the findings. Here what matters is the context-specific data itself which leads the author to the expected findings. As such, grounded theory provides valid and reliable findings in respect of representing real-world settings, an important aspect for this research. Grounded theory is not tied to or limited by existing theory, but has the potential for innovative discoveries. Hussein et al. (2014) argue that the approach “unequivocally and overtly encouraged researchers to write the literature review after completing the analysis so as not to contaminate the research findings” (6). Glaser (1998), advised researchers to limit even their prior reading before the development of a grounded theory; literature is used, instead, in an inductive way to inform and inflect the findings that grow from the data. This explains why this thesis does not begin with a literature review. Literature, conversely, is brought into the discussion towards the end of the thesis.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The main contribution of the current thesis is that it explores the challenges that students and lecturers experience in the context of the use of English as the language of communication and instruction within an educational environment where English is not the native language. It brings insights on how the parties concerned understand the issues from their unique point of view, and as such provides pointers on how future developments might overcome the challenges of the use of English. Furthermore, the current thesis shows up the major challenges in the teaching and learning of English in higher education in Libya and the main educational methods used in this country. In doing so, it brings to the fore whether learning and teaching in Libya makes recourse to recent methods of learning and teaching and hence points to the weak and strong points. Additionally, the current thesis investigates the role of culture in teaching and learning practices within the Libyan community. Several works have mentioned that culture has an influential role in determining which methods and educational techniques lecturers must adopt. Such views remain speculations without any attestation by fieldwork, the gap the current thesis aims to unravel.

#### **1.5 Thesis organization**

The thesis is organized as follows. The current Chapter – Chapter one – sets the scene for the research. Chapter two presents a general picture of Libya’s location, population and history. It also offers a general picture of the teaching of the English language in the context of this study. It is made clear in this chapter that teaching English at schools in Libya has suffered several impacts resulting from the poor relationship between the authorities in Libya and the west. Chapter three introduces the methodology adopted in this thesis. It introduces design and methodology and compares the approaches to the differing paradigms that can be employed in the social sciences. It sketches out some significant ideas and notions of research philosophy, in general, and how data are analysed most notably in the positivist paradigm versus the social constructivism. Additionally, this chapter discusses the general theory of deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning and their bearing on quantitative research as compared to qualitative research. This chapter also includes information about data collection and the steps followed to analyse such data, using grounded theory. It also accounts for the use of semi-structured interviews as well as focus groups as tools to collect the data. Furthermore, this chapter includes my reflection on the data collection process and the most important points which are related to this reflection. I show herein how the process of data collection was difficult and the problems that I faced to encourage the students/staff to participate in the study.

Chapter four analyses the data from “Stage One” of the study: Exploring the teaching of English at Sebha University. The reporting is sub-divided into three sections: The awareness and need for using a Communicative Approach at Sebha University to teach English as a foreign language; Challenges in the implementation of a Communicative Approach to teaching English from the lecturers’ point of view; and Challenges in the implementation of a communicative approach to teaching English from the students’ point of view. It was clear that the lecturers understand the rationale for using a Communicative Approach as a means to teach English as a foreign language. However, they also indicate that they face multiple challenges in its implementation. It is difficult to get students to work in pairs or in groups as the students struggle with this in all sorts of ways. In addition to these problems facing the lecturers are the size of the group, size of the classrooms, using the first language when they work in groups, shyness, and lack of experience. This chapter includes a full analysis of their views towards a Communicative Approach.

Chapters five and six present and analyse “Stage Two” of the study data: Exploring the teaching of medicine in English at Sebha University. Chapter five highlights the main views of the lecturers. These include lecturers’ perspectives on issues of previous experiences of language learning and effects on entering higher education, and general difficulties once students have begun their studies (writing problems, speaking issues, and difficulties in understanding). This chapter sheds light on lecturers’ responses to the challenges that they face, including exam design, tolerating students’ mistakes, using Arabic and Code mixing, rote method learning and passive learning, opinions on English courses, and feedback. This chapter also provides a sketch of what the lecturers think of the infrastructure with respect to library services and other important complementary equipment, internet connection, scientific research, and university buildings. This chapter also features what the lecturers say about stability in education, teacher training, and political influences.

Chapter six explores the medical students’ responses to the use of English in their study of medicine. This chapter shows that the use of English causes them a wide array of problems, given their low level in the language. The students are frank that their level of English is very low because of the inadequate preparation they received at school. This preparation makes them struggle at the university. For them, what worsens the situation is the lack of attention paid to the students’ level of English from the university administration and the lecturers. There are no introductory courses to English, which would hopefully successfully develop students’ level of English. This chapter also includes students’ views about the lecturers. They reported that some lecturers’ level of English is not advanced, affecting their progress in English in a negative way. In a related vein, the students highlighted the issues related to the difficulty of their study and the way the modules are organised, in addition to the exam design. Furthermore, the students reported the problems related to the university infrastructure and library facilities, which do not allow the students to study appropriately.

Chapter seven explores the main reasons behind the use of rote learning at Sebha University despite many calls for modern learning and teaching techniques at Libyan Universities. There are multiple reasons for this reliance on rote learning. These issues inter-relate and reinforce one another. It is clear that it is insufficient merely to suggest/require teaching methods to change; they have not changed and attention is given



in this thesis to why that is the case. In addition to struggles that both lecturers and students have with their level of English, the tendency to rote learning is rooted in aspects of Libyan culture which prefer repetition and memorization. This is reflected in aspects of learning in the pedagogy of the Madrasah but is also embedded in cultural norms such as deference to authority; large class sizes, poor facilities and a lack of a professional development culture all exacerbate the problems. Rote learning is further 'embedded' when lecturers set out to teach a specialist field, like medicine, in English. This is a language many of the lecturers and many of the students struggle with. This leads to what is described as 'deep rote' learning in medicine.

## **2 Chapter two: Background**

### **2.1 Libyan educational context: a background**

In this chapter, I will introduce background information on the Libyan educational context. This background includes some information about Libya in general, in terms of location and population, as well as information about higher education in this country. Additionally, this background touches on education-related aspects including the division of education as well as the use of English in the system of higher education in Libya, which is the main concern of the current research. It will also include some brief literature about the use of English as a lingua Franca.

### **2.2 Geographical background**

Libya is located in the centre of North Africa. It is bordered by Egypt to the east, Sudan to the southeast, Republics of Niger and Chad to the south, Tunisia and Algeria to the west and Mediterranean Sea to the north with a coastline of close to 2000 kilometres. (CIA World Factbook, 2013). The country has an estimated area of about 1.8 million square Kilometers, with an average of 3.3 person per Km<sup>2</sup> (Ismae, *et al* 1991), According to Almansory (1995), it is the fourth largest among the countries of Africa and seventeenth among the countries of the world, and seven times the size of the United Kingdom (Ismae, *et al*, 1991 and Tamtam, *et al* 2011). The capital city of Libya is Tripoli, located in the northwestern part of the country with approximately 1.5 million residents. Libyan climate is described being dry and desert-like, especially in the southern regions. Consider Figure (1) for the map of Libya, which shows the prominent location-related properties of Libya.



**Figure 1:** The map of Libya with the prominent location-related properties of Libya<sup>1</sup>

As far as population is concerned, the population of Libya is approximately 6.4 million (The World Factbook, 2011). Most of the population live near the coast and in the northern part of the country, especially in the capital city of Tripoli and Benghazi. The largest cities of the country are Tripoli, Benghazi, Sebha, Musrata, Alzawia and Derna (WHO, 2011). It is worth saying that Arabic is the official language, spoken in almost all the parts of the country and its religion is Islam.

In the next section, I provide some historical background related to the political system in Libya.

### 2.3 Historical background

<sup>1</sup> The source is <http://africaanswer.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Libya-physical-map2.gif>. Retrieved on 12-11-2014

Historically, Libya experienced Turkish Muslim Rule from 1551 to 1912 and Italian colonization from 1912 to 1942. From 1942 to 1951 it was under temporary British military rule (Clark, 2004:1). Libya obtained its independence on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1951 and was named the United Kingdom of Libya, a constitutional monarchy under the first and only country's monarch named King Idris Senussi. King Senussi's reign lasted from 1951 to 1969 (18 years). While he was in Turkey for medical treatment, he was deposed in a 1969 military coup, led by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who ruled for 42 years and who was later expelled and killed during the uprising against him.<sup>2</sup> The current official name of the country after the incidents of the Arab Uprising is the State of Libya (see, Sami, 2013 for further information). Now let us shed light on the historical background of education in Libya.

#### 2.4 The historical background of Libya education

As for the historical background of education in Libya, according to Tamtam *et al* (2011), Libya was in the 1950s one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of income. There was just a small fraction of people who were literate. There were almost no schools. However, this backdrop changed once oil in 1963 had been discovered in Libya and worthy oil revenues have accordingly allowed the rapid growth of education in this country. It was the poverty, which prevented people from building and attending schools. When funds were available by oil revenues, which suddenly transformed the country from poor state into a wealthy country, the government at the time conducted several projects to enhance school education. By the end of 1969, school education was compulsory and, most importantly, free to all Libyans. These new laws and educational policies have led dramatically to an increase in the number of literate people (from 20% in 1951 to 82% (92% of males and 72% of females) in 2003. There are approximately 1.7 million school students in Libya (cf. Hamdy, 2007).

The general objectives of education in Libya can be summarized as follows (General Peoples' Committees of Education, 2008:4-5)

- Helping students to master the proper use of the Arabic language in all areas with interest in foreign language to communicate with the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was killed following the so-called Arab Spring Uprisings that overthrew the regimes of several Arab leaders, including Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (Anderson 2011).

- Develop the students' sense of national identity, and deepen their pride in the Arabic Nation and the Islamic world civilization.
- Provide educational opportunities for all and assist students to choose the specialization that is in conformity with their orientations and abilities, and meet the needs of the society to achieve sustainable human development.
- Enable students to acquire the skills of thinking and scientific analysis to keep pace with science and technical development in the contemporary world.
- Achieve a balance between theoretical information and its practical application and establish linkage and integration between different fields of knowledge, which help to employ them in their lives.

As for higher education, Libya has undergone several stages to develop the higher education system in Libya. The first stage was the establishment of the first university in the city of Benghazi in 1955, named as the Faculty of Art. Other colleges have been inaugurated through the period of 1962-1965. New departments, including faculties of economics and commerce, law, sciences, agriculture, engineering and education have been established in both major cities in the country, Tripoli and Benghazi (Ministry of Education, 1974). More universities were established in different parts of the country, so higher education has spread all over the country and does not only center on its two big cities. By the year of 1990 there were 14 universities around the country with a total of 91 faculties. In addition, more than 52 higher technical institutes had been established. Furthermore, in 2003/04 there was a change in the higher education level that included seven main universities, three universities of special nature and 15 departmental universities. They were distributed among the country's administrative regions. Followed by comprising 12 universities in the year of 2012, with a total of 160 faculties; in addition to 16 technical faculties and 81 higher technical and vocational centers (Report on Human Development in Libya, 1999).

As is the case in any other country, there are three types of higher education institutions in Libya. Such a type of education is called tertiary system, that is consisting of three stages. The universities offer three types of qualifications; namely Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees and PhDs. There are 12 general universities in Libya. These universities are distributed across the country. In addition, higher education in Libya is not all public;

there are five private universities, as well. Furthermore, there was, until recently, a focus on technical education. As a result, there are six technical faculties that offer a different degree in particular professional study areas. Additionally, there are 90 higher vocational institutions across the country. These institutions offer programs in several types of vocational specialties. The graduates from these institutions are awarded higher technical diplomas (National Foundation for Technical and Vocational Education, 1999). In the academic year of 2010/2011 there were more than 340,000 students officially enrolled at Libyan universities, both public and private. More than 90% of them were enrolled in a public university (El-Hawat, 2009). This is a remarkable and swift growth attributable to a willingness to make a serious investment in education.

The numbers of students that enrolled in the higher education institutions had increased at the beginning of 1980s and the size of the schools at that time were not large enough to fulfill these demands. Therefore, the ministry of higher education decided to send missions of undergraduate and graduate students in all fields to complete their studies overseas, especially in English and American universities. These scholarships were actually started in 1977. They were granted only to highly qualified students who had graduated with 90% or more. These scholarships helped to develop the level of higher education in Libya, in that well-educated students and scholars started taking up positions in the country's universities, which resulted in preparing highly-qualified undergraduate and graduate students.

What becomes relevant here is the use of English in higher education in Libya, the matter I take up in the next section.

## **2.5 English in the educational system in Libya**

Since 1954, English had been taught from primary school at age 10 until the completion of secondary school. In 1973, English language learning was pulled back to preparatory school (age 13). However, in 1985/86, there was an issue having a negative impact on the educational sector in Libya. Gaddafi made a decision to cancel English Language teaching across all sectors, even though English is the most important language of communication in the world. Gaddafi's decision was applied to all the country's schools and universities. This decision lasted for more than 10 years. The decision related to Gaddafi's political

arguments with the West and America (Black, 2012). The main reason behind this decision was Gaddafi's poor relationships with the West. Libya had direct responsibility in the bombing of Le Belle discotheque in West Berlin, West Germany in 1986. This led to the death of some people, including American soldiers. A few days after the attack, the American government retaliated by bombing Muammar Gaddafi's house in Libya (Alterman, 2006).

It has been widely proposed that the generation that studied during the 10-year ban of English teaching suffered a lot in terms of academic progress as well as compatibility with the latest scientific achievements. This ban created a huge educational gap between students and English as a second language. Some people described this issue as the most painful period in the history of the Libyan educational sector. I personally was affected by this ban during our studies. The bad effect of this ban is still obvious in several aspects of the educational system of Libya so far and it needs to be addressed very seriously (Joffe, 2001 and Simons, 2003).

However, according to Imssalem (2001), with the increase in the use of English as a second language and the improvement in Libya's relationship with the US and UK, the Libyan government began to recognize its importance by reintroducing the teaching of English into the school curriculum. Furthermore, due to developments in other sectors such as tourism, the demand for English language graduate speakers has increased. In response to this, the Libyan Committee for Higher education reviewed its policy regarding teaching English language and introduced a new curriculum for English language for basic and intermediate education. Presently, the educational system in Libya provides exposure to English by offering English language courses in schools from the third grade (primary school students age 9 years) up to university level. At present, all students who finish secondary school education will have had at least ten years of studying English as a school subject (Imssalem, 2001:9).

At the same time, the *quality* of the teaching of English has suffered from two main problems, as reported by the General Peoples' Committees of Education 2008. Firstly, the weakness of the education and teaching methods, due to the weakness of the teacher, and his educational qualifications. According to the report, this has resulted in over dependence on non-qualified teachers, and reliance on non-Libyan teachers coming

particularly from Arab countries in public education, and from some Asian countries. The second problem is connected to the first – developments in pedagogical techniques and methods of teaching and learning are continually being made, but the Libyan teacher has little access to such ideas. The teachers still rely on traditional methods, which rely on memorization and recitation, ‘learn by rote rather than by reasoning’ (Alhmali, 2007:77) and they receive absolutely no training in order to improve their teaching skills. Accordingly, students do not acquire the skills enabling them to pursue their studies, given there is a big gap between the school’s methods of teaching and the ambitions of the Libyan society. Where development programmes have been introduced these tend to take place without carrying out assessment field studies or using evaluation standards. The plans are applied without assessing their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the context in which they are employed.

The other pertinent issue worth mentioning in this respect is that the Ministry of Higher Education in Libya began to stop the scholarships program to the West. This move was strengthened in Libya at the time when a number of the students who came back from the scholarship programs joined the opposition movements against the working government at the time. Since that time, there has not been any significant number of scholarships been granted to the students. The termination of the scholarship programs made it difficult for the Libyan universities to develop. Even the available scholarships were granted to students whose parents or relatives were loyal to Gaddafi. With these steps and background, the standard of higher education in Libya was stalled or even diminished. This termination of the scholarships program ended in 2008 when the second son of the former president Gaddafi, “Saif Ala slam”, was educated at the London School of Economics and was then awarded a PhD in 2008. Saif Ala slam re-started the program; as a result, 4,800 Libyan students have been awarded a scholarship to study overseas at western universities. According to the Ministry of higher education, there were 12,000 Libyan students commencing their postgraduate studies at the western universities in 2010 (Ministry of higher education, 2010).

In the next section, I highlight the problems that Libyan universities face during the so-called Arab Spring uprisings.



## **2.6 The effects of Arab Spring on higher education in Libya**

Firstly, I will mention the main events in the Libyan Arab Spring; then I will shed some light on how this uprising affected negatively the higher education in Libya at the time, and subsequently.

The Libyan conflict began in Benghazi on 15th February 2011, as an aftermath of the Arab Spring, and it spread across all the country. At the beginning, the protests were peaceful and the people were calling for political reform. Unfortunately, the existing government at the time murdered unarmed civilian protesters. This triggered protests to grow into armed conflict with Gaddafi's government. After eight months of revolution, Gaddafi was killed in his stronghold of the city of Sirte on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Following these events, the National Transitional Council declared the liberation of Libya and officially ended the civil war on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2011 (Anderson, 2011). It is worth saying at this point that there was external military intervention in the Libyan revolution, as authorized by the United Nations Security Council Resolution of 1973, to protect civilians (Payandeh, 2012).

As a consequence of the Arab Libyan Spring, the scholarships programs was suspended. All 12,000 students studying abroad were badly affected by the war, due to the interruption of the fund. Additionally, all local universities were closed and some were changed to war related fields or even ammunition storages (Prashad, 2012). University students were obligated to join the conflict and thousands of them died. Nevertheless, after the end of the civil war, many of the universities and schools re-opened for the students. However, the infrastructure of the universities and the schools were affected and many buildings were damaged. Sebha University, which is in the south of Libya, was less affected by the turmoil than some of the other universities in the north of Libya.

## **2.7 English as a lingua franca**

It is obvious nowadays that English is not only the language of some countries including the UK, the USA, but it is also the first international language, which is repeatedly labelled

as the lingua franca of the recent centuries (see, Jenkins and Leung, 2013).<sup>3</sup> This unique status of English has mainly derived from several factors, including wide British colonization and the power of the USA and the UK in the international community. It is thus no surprise to find many countries all over the world have compulsory courses in English that students must pass to go through to the next stage of their academic life (Mauranen and Ranta, 2009). In fact, most of its modern use is by non-native speakers, and the number of people who speak English as a foreign or second language is surpassing the number of its native speakers; about 80% of speakers of English are estimated to be bilingual users (see Crystal, 1997). Libya is no exception in this respect, especially in that English is important for communication in the oil industry. As in many other international contexts, English in Libya has become an important subject matter in several areas of students' (and all people's) social as well as professional life. Several works that have documented the modern history of Libya have indicated that the social and political developments of the late 1990s have made English language learning more significant than ever to Libyan people (Asker, 2012). Consider the following quotation from Sawani (2009, p. 10) which describes the importance of English, and also some of the challenges associated with its reintroduction:

“After a while the Libyan educationalists realised the fault and determined to incorporate English in the curriculum again. They decided not only that English must be taught, but that other languages must also be learned even at the very early stages of the learning process. When English was welcomed back at school again teachers who were once teaching English became unable to teach it.”

Such changes led to greater access to the international community from within Libya. Additionally, the government's strenuous censorship on foreign channels as well as media was weakened (or loosened), and this was something that permitted locals to have access to foreign satellite TV channels and the Internet. Most of the channels and internet websites used English as the language of interaction and broadcasting. The government

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<sup>3</sup> Lingua franca means a vehicular language spoken by people who do not share a native language (Conrad and Mauranen 2003).

began investing in English learning and teaching across the country. Asker (2012) describes how Libyan students began to realize the actual value of learning English – much more so than the previous generation. Students are more convinced of the importance of English and as we will see later some students are sad because of their low level of English. For them, English is their window into the world.

In this regard, some researchers have studied the influence of the recent socio-political change in Libya on the students' learning of English. One pioneering study is by Turki (2004) who showed how secondary school students began to see English as a lingua franca and the value of this for them to travel abroad and have access to foreign media and technology. The students in Turki's study seem more motivated to learn English because of these purposes. In other words, students' endorsement of learning English is not because English is important for their academic achievements and a compulsory subject matter but because of its international scope and importance outside Libya. In a somewhat contrasting vein, Mahjobi (2007) argued that in spite of the observation that Libya has recently undergone an important socio-cultural and political change which resulted in bringing Libya closer to the world, Libyan learners of English do not appear to be particularly motivated by the cultural aspects (or artefacts) including music and movies. The author assumed that such lack of motivation is affected by of the students' low level of English. Students' low level of English is a barrier that prevents them interacting with the world and this means that they stay closer to their beliefs and customs. For Mahjobi (2007), English learning and teaching must, in future, be kept away from any governmental foreign policies.

Alhmali (2007) shows that Libyan students' interest in learning English language has been increasing. The author investigated the attitudes of 1939 Libyan mid and high school students towards four subjects of their curriculum, namely Arabic, English, Sciences, and Mathematics. The findings of this investigation indicated that these students were more interested in English than the other three subjects (Arabic, Sciences, and Mathematics). For the author, this inclination to learn English is caused by the status of this language as an international language. With a good knowledge of English, students have increased chances to have friendships from outside Libya and surf the internet, things that cannot be gained from the study of other subject matters.

This state of affairs, as previously mentioned, motivated the government to take several decisions to develop the quality of English language teaching and learning (Embark, 2011). One significant decision established an attempt at adoption of Communicative Language Teaching in the mid-1990s (see, Orafi and Borg, 2009: 244). This would encourage less didactic forms of teaching and it is clear in the data for this PhD that many lecturers have absorbed some rhetoric around the value of this approach. Another important decision was related to beginning teaching English in Libyan schools from grade five instead of grade seven. “The period from birth to 8 years old, which includes the majority of the primary education phase, is seminal to the achievement of universal literacy. This is a period of remarkable brain development, which not only sees the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills but also lays the foundation for all subsequent learning” (Brundrett, 2011 :453). Further decisions were related to providing schools with modern teaching and learning facilities. In this regard, the report of the GPCE (2008) pointed out that several secondary schools and universities had been provided with computers and language labs (GPCE, 2008). However, as also previously mentioned, some of these changes were not carried out with due regard to the context in which they were being employed, and it is questionable how much effect they have had.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a general picture of Libya’s location, population and history. The chapter then provided a general picture of the teaching of English language in the context of this study, the importance of English as a lingua franca, and the general enthusiasm of students for the subject. It ended with an acknowledgement of both the will to invest in English language learning and teaching and some caution about how much effect this has had.

### **3 Chapter three: Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I explain the methodology used in this study. I spell out the theoretical assumptions related to qualitative research which was adopted here to collect the data and describe the motivation behind why such an approach was selected as far as the objectives of the current work were concerned. Before that I touch on two key paradigms in research (positivism and social constructivism) and the main assumptions of those paradigms.

#### **3.2 Paradigms in research**

##### **3.2.1 Introduction**

Surveying the related literature, there have been several yet related definitions of the concept of ‘research paradigm’ and its relationship to the aims of a study (see, e.g. Shulman 1986, Gephart 1999, Embley *et al.* 2006, and Hall 2014, among others). But, basically, as Guba says, a paradigm is:

“a recognized approach that provides a sort of ‘model’ or parameters for a community of researchers to employ in their work”

And this ‘model’ helps us to develop responses to the following questions in relation to our research:

“what is to be observed, scrutinized, examined, ‘understood’?”

the kind of questions to be asked and probed for answers in relation to this subject

how these questions are to be structured

how the results of the investigations should be interpreted

how, then, is the work to be conducted? And who should conduct it?” (Guba, 1990: 17)

It should be noted here that responses to these questions are contingent upon people’s philosophies and views on the world as well as the area/issues in which the research is carried out. The relation between a research paradigm and people’s views towards knowledge prompts Remenyi *et al*’s (1998) observation of a paradigm that they suggest is like a ‘window’ on a particular subject. For Kowalczyk-Walędziak (2015), a paradigm provides a theoretical framework to inform both what the data of a study should be and

how the research is conducted. (Frankham, 2015 course notes) prompts consideration on some key questions and issues:

What guides our paradigmatic decisions when designing research studies?

The nature of the social world we endeavour to understand (ontology); what do we believe is ‘reality’?

The nature of the knowledge we can have about the world, including the relationship between the knower and the known (epistemology). What is knowable about this ‘reality’?

The purpose and role of social inquiry in society (politics).

Therefore, a research paradigm is significant in guiding the researcher to work within a framework which suits the questions to be used, the context of those questions, and provides insights on how data are going to be analysed. This gives rise to different methodologies that are used in research. In this regard, the division between positivism and social constructivism becomes relevant, because they represent different research paradigms, aimed at exploring different questions and reflected in research design, data collection and analysis (Shulman 1986, Guba and Lincoln 1994, and Kowalczyk-Walędziak, 2015).

In the next subsection, I will explore the differences between positivism and social constructivism as this will help to give context to the decisions I made about the methodology I employed.

### 3.2.2 **Positivism**

Of course, there are multiple definitions which have been provided for the positivist paradigm (see, e.g. Schrag, 1992, Guba and Lincoln 1994, Crotty, 1998, Krauss, 2005, Picciano, 2015). One common definition was furnished by Denscombe (2007) who defined the positivist paradigm as an approach attempting ‘to apply the natural science model of research for the investigation of the social world’ (Denscombe, 2007: 299). In view of this, it can be stated that the positivist paradigm is a bridge between social science and practice and the natural scientific model of investigation. This is also echoed by Crotty (1998) who sees positivism as an attempt to investigate social phenomena informed by ‘scientific’ principles. This being so, the positivist paradigm treats social phenomena

through the lens of their regularities – tending to focus on patterns – and large scale trends, as well as the effects and consequences of what is under investigation (Mugenda, 1999, Neuman, 2005, Taylor 2005, and Pickard, 2012).

Pertinently, the positivist paradigm makes available certain extremes of the social world in that its characteristics can be scaled and the differences can be numerically presented. This assumption gives rise to the major property of (the positivist paradigm, namely its claimed ‘objectivity’ Easterby-Smith and Lowe, 2002). Measurement lies at the centre of the paradigm – and the belief that most things are measurable. It is suggested that the methods of the natural sciences (e.g. hypothesis testing, causal explanations and modelling) are appropriate for the study of social phenomena because human behaviour is governed by law-like regularities.

On the other hand, the positivist paradigm has been questioned by several works which argue that this line of research pays insufficient attention to the differences between the natural and the social sciences (cf. Guba and Lincoln 1994, Coffey and Atkinson 1996, and Silverman 2013, among others). It has been advanced that objectivity is difficult to maintain in the social sciences, given the characteristics of the social world and the human ‘actors’ in that world (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Another key argument is that researchers working within the social sciences are influenced by their values, beliefs and experiences of the social phenomena at hand. This understanding has helped to inform social constructivism, and in the next subsection, I shed light on this approach, and the methods that are associated with it.

### **3.2.3 Social constructivism**

Constructivism is defined as a philosophical position whereby knowledge towards certain phenomena arise through the process of active construction (Mascolo and Fischer, 2005) and within this approach the emphasis is placed on the significance of cultural and social context. Social constructivism capitalizes on the significance of culture as well as context in exploring and understanding what happens in society in addition to constructing

knowledge through research, which is based on this exploring and understanding (see, Derry, 1999 and McMahon, 1997).<sup>4</sup>

Social constructivism – like positivism – depends on certain views about ‘reality’, knowledge, and learning. Firstly, as for ‘reality’, social constructivists think that reality is formed through human activity. In this sense, it is advanced that members of a society establish the properties of the world, they do not grasp ‘reality’ except through experience. Hence, as a researcher, it is impossible to ‘discover’ or uncover ‘reality’ independent of the people involved in that ‘reality’; it does not exist before its social invention (Kukla, 2000). As for knowledge, social constructivists believe that all knowledge is a human product which is socially and culturally constructed (Ernest, 1999). Crotty (1998) described it thus:

A “theoretical perspective that emerged in contradistinction to positivism in an attempt to understand and explain human social reality . . . The interpretive approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998: 66-67).

Here individuals establish meanings through their interactions with one another and with the context in which they live. As far as learning is concerned, social constructivists believe that learning is a social process that does not occur within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours which are shaped by external forces to the individual. Meaningful learning only happens as individuals take part in social activities (McMahon, 1997). Social constructivists thus ‘maintain that we invent the properties of the world rather than discover them’ (Kukla, 2000: 2). Following the reasoning of this research philosophy, methods to explore socially constructed realities began to develop – primarily the qualitative/interpretive act of interviewing that allows researchers to get access to individuals’ realities. In the next section I shed light on the most prominent aspects of qualitative research, which has been used to inform this thesis.

### 3.3 Qualitative inquiry

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the

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<sup>4</sup> Social constructivism is closely associated with many contemporary theories, including the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Schunk, 2000).



world visible. These practices ... turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 3).

Qualitative research explores people’s understandings of the world through data not arrived at by help of statistical procedures, but through applying observation and analysis of events, attitudes, photos, verbal and non-verbal communication (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Additionally, qualitative research is a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social worlds (Ritchie et al, 2013: 3), as evident in the data that is collected. As such, qualitative research differs from quantitative research, which depends on positivism, in that it does not aim to change or transform the data collected into numbers. Instead, language remains at the centre of the endeavour. Another significant property of qualitative research that distinguishes it from the quantitative mode of research is that the researcher is very important given he acts as an actor. The researcher’s perspective toward the social phenomena in question will inform all stages of the research, from inception to the final conclusions that are drawn.

Qualitative research is, consequently, also inductive in principle. It relies on people’s own words to explore events or actions and then takes those words as indicative of the meaning of those events/actions. Furthermore, in qualitative research, ideas are generated, and theories developed, as data collection, analysis and interpretation are performed (cf. Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As Stake (1995) summarises:

“The qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully – analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation” (Stake, 1995: 75).

Thus theory in qualitative inquiry is gradually expounded/developed, being sensitive to the data on which it draws. Centrally, in qualitative research, the subjective aspects of people’s thoughts and experiences are reflected through placing the focus on the meaning these things hold for people instead of any measurement of the social phenomena at hand (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Along these lines, it can be seen that the principal principles

of the qualitative research approach revolve around reality as it is seen through people's interactions, evident in the exchanges between the researcher and the respondents (Cresswell 1998, Crabtree, and Miller 1999, and Ritchie *et al*, 2013). Qualitative methods, then, are therefore seen as having key advantages:

“Qualitative methods are privileged within the naturalistic approach because they are thought to meet a number of reservations about the uncritical use of quantification in social science practice: in particular the problem of inappropriately fixing meanings where these are variable and renegotiable in relation to the context of use; the neglect of the uniqueness and particularity of human experience; and because of concern with the overwriting of internally structured subjectivities by externally imposed ‘objective’ systems of meaning” (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1993: 16).

Within this line of research, there are different ways of collecting data, most notably observations and interviews. The choice of which way depends primarily on the nature of the data to be collected and the objectives of the research.

### 3.4 Data collection

Conducting interviews has been widely adopted for the investigation of the attitudes of individuals towards certain phenomena (Kajornboon, 2005). The interview is recognised as one of the most powerful data collection methods in the qualitative research approach given that large amounts of data can be collected and analysed. Frey and Oishi (1995) define the interview as a purposeful conversation in which one person (the interviewer) asks questions and another answers them (respondent or the interviewee). Additionally, interviews can be structured in a face-to face fashion or over the telephone and they can be conducted with one individual or many simultaneously.

There are three broad types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Fontana and Frey, 2000). The major difference between these types lies in whether the questions are pre-determined or not and in how the questions are developed (beforehand or in context) (Arksey and Knight, 1999). In structured interviews, there is a list of predetermined questions which are asked to each respondent similarly, i.e. in the same manner. In semi-structured interviews, there are some questions prepared in advance but with an open fashion so the interviewer can ask other (new) questions, due to the

respondent's replies (ibid). The third type of interview is unstructured and this is described as being informal with open questions with no pre-determined list of topics for discussion (Fontana and Frey, 2000). The main purpose of all interviews within this paradigm is to begin to develop an understanding of respondents' worlds.

### **3.5 One-to-one Semi-structured interviewing**

Many researchers maintain that semi-structured interviewing is a very useful method when the qualitative mode of research is deployed (Sorrell and Redmond, 1995 and Melia, 2000). Whiting (2008) argued that semi-structured interviews furnish the researcher with the chance to collect additional information, that the researcher cannot know about in advance, which is important for the purposes of the research. This additional information is pursued as a consequence of the interviewee's replies. Hence, this mode of interviewing is both flexible and systematic, as information can be garnered from everyone in a unique way.

This 'handing over' of some control to the interviewee is important both in order to gain information that is relevant to the study but also because of the 'signals' that it sends to the interviewee. It signals that they enjoy the respect of the interviewer and that it is their opinions that really count – they are made to feel that they are significant to the study. It is hoped that this will also encourage them to contribute more to the study. Commenting on this point, Whiting (2008) stated that the interviewer usually maintains control over the interview (in a structured interview) through asking the questions, without any control handed to the interviewee. Hence, in the structured interview, it is not expected that the interviewee can produce some further information which might be significant for the purposes of the respective study. This means that interviewees may feel as though they are not important (cf. Miller and Crabtree, 1999 and Polit and Beck, 2006). The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, guarantees that some control is exercised by the interviewees, while they also enjoy respect and feel as though their opinions are central for the study at hand.

### **3.6 Sample of the study**

As far as the current study is concerned, 45 semi-structured interviews were carried out. The major objective of the interviews was to investigate the attitudes and experiences of both staff and under-graduate students at Sebha University - a public university in the city of Sebha, located in the south of Libya - towards the teaching and use of the English language in the Faculties of Education and Medicine. It is worth mentioning that the staff and students that I met in one-to-one interviews did not participate in the focus group interviews as I wanted new people to meet so I could gain more insights and information from the students. If the interviews were repeated with the same students, then there will not be any extra information we can utilize. Further, it should be mentioned that before I started the process of interviewing students and staff (in one-to-one interviews or in focus group), I gave the participants brief information about my study in order to inform them about the aims of the current work and to make clear my areas of interest. In addition, I repeated this process of introduction with every one of my participants. Such a process is vital as the participants need to understand the main objective of interviews before they provide information about their experiences to the researcher. Additionally, in order to establish a good relationship with interviewees (Greenfield, 1996), I exerted every effort to establish a good rapport with the interviewees; probes were used to encourage further exploration of issues and this included verbal and non-verbal gestures. For example, I might use a neutral question such as 'could you please tell me a bit more about... ' or ask for more clarification by asking 'what do you mean' or use nodding (to give someone a signal) like 'immm' 'huh' 'yes', 'yeas' (Dörnyei, 2007, Gillham 2000) to encourage them to continue talking. A prompt was also used to remind participants of issues that I felt they may have omitted to mention (Gillham, 2000). A few notes were taken during the interview process either in one to one or in the focus group as I was very busy in interaction with the participants and engaging with them by body language and eye contact. Further to establishing the relationship between me and the participants, I used a series of questions that were developed from the general questions like starting from their experience and how long they have been at the university to the specific questions which were most important. The reason of using these techniques were to breaking the ice between us and motivate the participants to say more (Marshall, 2015). Before the end of each interview, I asked the interviewees if they had any further questions. Moreover, I requested the participants if they would like to add any comments or any statements that should be relevant to the study that may not be mentioned during the interview (see appendices 3 and 4). Thus, I gave them a space to express anything that may contribute to

the study. Finally, at the end of each interview, I expressed my great appreciation and cooperation to the participants in my study (following Berg, 2009). The average time for each interview was about thirty to forty minutes and in some cases it lasted more than 90 minutes. The sample is represented in the following table:

Table 1: semi- structured interviews sample in PhD

Category		Semi-interviews
Staff	Medicine	15
	Education	9
Students	Medicine	11
	Education	10
Total		45

Students and staff were approached through a variety of means and invited to take part in interviews. I, firstly, gained official permission for my fieldwork from both the Faculty of Education at Liverpool John Moores University and also permission from my embassy here in the UK to go to Libya. Then, the first leg of my destination (for stage one of my study) was to the Faculty of Education with staff and students in the English language department at Sebha University. I approached them as I was a part-time lecturer for one year before I came here to the UK to do my PhD study. So it was easy for me to get access to the Faculty since I familiar with most of the staff there. Also one of my colleagues helped me a lot to recruit people and gain their consent orally instead of giving them a consent form to sign. There was a tendency among the participants to give me an oral permission. I understand that sometimes things do not work as we expect or exactly in the way the university imagines. For example, if I demanded that my participants sign a consent form then many of the participants will not participate in my study for fear of talking about something under their signature. There is a fear that I am going to pass their responses to the government or somewhere else. So, what I have done honestly, I obtained their consent orally. So in this case, their oral consent was enough for me. Before each interview I give all the participants a very clear picture with a short introduction about my study, and their contribution to research.

The second destination was the medical school at Sebha University. This is stage two of my study (main study) which was with staff and students in the Faculty of Medicine. I approached the staff with the help of the Dean of the faculty. I reached him in his office asking him to involve and recruit the staff to participate in my research. He agreed from the first meeting and warmly welcomed me as he had already been asked by one of his relatives beforehand. So as soon as I approached him, he directly started in recruiting the staff to participate in my study.

For the male medical students, I approached most of them at the students' accommodation during the evening time due to the time of data collection being very short and the situation of the country non-stable. This obliged me to collect my data whenever I got the opportunity to do so. I approached them in their rooms at evening time after they finished their study time at the Faculty which is separate from the female students' accommodation (I will explain more in the next paragraph). I came to their rooms with juice (in our culture when someone comes to a new place for the first time he or she has to bring something with them instead of coming with empty hands). With the help of my friend's son who lives in the same accommodation, I collected most of my data walking from one room to another until mid-night over many days.

However, this was not the case with the female students. The meeting with female students took place at the Faculty. It is not possible to get even one step inside their camps even if you have a daughter living in the students' accommodation (it is prohibited for males to enter such places). All people have to wait outside until a female student is called by the security office to come to see her visitor. As a stranger it would be impossible for me to approach the accommodation for research purposes. Thus, I approached female students via the help of my cousin's daughter who was a member of the target population. She asked them to participate in this research. Her presence helped me a lot given the sensitivity of interviewing female students in groups or individually. Ardener (1984) reported about his fieldwork difficulties in societies characterised by sex segregation and recommended depending on helpers from both genders (p: 125). Rees and Althakhri (2008) noted that Islam has a great influence on people's beliefs, behaviours and practices in Arab countries (p: 127). On one occasion, when I interviewed one female student and she was not comfortable with the voice recorder so at the end of the interview she asked

me to delete her voice and no longer participated. Accordingly, I fully respected her decision and was more than happy to adhere to her request and deleted it.

I chose this way of sampling in order to provide a purposive sample, which represents a 'cross section' of experience on part of the students and the staff (cf McMillan and Schumacher, 2014). Participation in an interview was on a voluntary basis (Opie, 2004). All interviews were recorded with permission of the interviewees and subsequently translated (when the interview was carried out in Arabic) and transcribed. All of the interviews with the non-Arabic speakers in the staff group were carried out in English. Further to that, all the interviews with students were carried out in Arabic.

All of the staff whose first language is Arabic, either Libyan or other Arabic nationalities (such as Sudanese, Egyptian and Iraqi) were interviewed in Arabic, upon their request. They preferred to do interviews in Arabic in order to express their insights freely and openly without any restriction of the language. This is a significant issue, given that I was interviewing staff who either taught English, or taught in English – they did not want to speak English to me. However, I tried to start the interviews with some of them in English but unfortunately, their responses were very short and it was mixed between Arabic and English. They struggled to express their ideas fluently or clearly in English. Therefore, according to their request, I carried out all the interviews with lecturers whom Arabic is their mother tongue in Arabic. I wanted to meet their request. If the participants are not greatly comfortable, then I would have risked losing what could be of value to my research problem (Gass and Mackey, 2007). Moreover, it provided interviewees with an opportunity to talk freely and to avoid any language barriers in order to provide more information. All interviews with the staff were carried out in their offices during the work hours at the university's campus. It is important to recognise that the language in which the interviews took place – and their subsequent translation – will certainly have affected what I was told and what I understood to be the meaning of what I was told. I believe that people spoke much more freely, and gave me much more detail, when they spoke in Arabic and their knowledge of local issues – the education system and its challenges – was easier for them to express in Arabic. It is inevitable that some of this detail was then subsequently lost or changed when the interviews were translated.

Accordingly, English was not used in the interviews as its use may affect the participants' ability to comment on the related questions. It is worth commenting here that even if the lecturers may use English in their classrooms, their knowledge of English is technical in the sense that they are familiar with the English words used in medicine and education, rather than in a general sense. This means their everyday English is limited and their abilities to speak about their attitudes would be limited and shallow if English is used, and their responses to the related questions would be negatively affected if a language other than their mother tongue was used.

During the first stage of the research, all interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. The main reason for this mode of interviewing is that it provides the interviewee more room and flexibility to express his/her attitudes towards the subject under discussion (Sorrell and Redmond, 1995 and Melia, 2000). In this regard, Ryan *et al* (2009) also argue that the individual or one to-one interview is regarded as a valuable method of gaining insight into interviewee's perceptions, understandings and experiences of a given phenomenon. As such, this mode of interviewing is important in contributing to in-depth data collection.

### **3.7 Focus group interviews**

Additionally, in order to further explore the findings from the semi-structured interviews with staff and students, as mentioned above, I asked to meet new students with whom I had not conducted one-to-one interviews. I invited them to take part in a focus group. In these groups I asked the students further questions about their perspectives towards the use of English in their departments as the language of books and communication. The use of focus groups set out to add further credence to the findings and to increase the reliability and validity of the generalisations as far as the objectives of the current work are concerned (cf. Frankland and Bloor 1999, Rabiee, 2004, and Gibbs, 2012).

Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging



anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view. The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way. Focus groups were originally used within communication studies to explore the effects of films and television programmes, and are a popular method for assessing health education messages and examining public understandings of illness and of health behaviours. They are widely used to examine people's experiences of disease and of health services and are an effective technique for exploring the attitudes and needs of staff (Kitzinger, 1995: p. 299).

Bradbury-Jones (2009) argued that individual's experiences can be reflected and expressed in a focus group setting. They assumed that a focus group allows the participants involved to pay attention to the ideas raised by other participants and at the same time express their own perspectives. In this way, it is hoped that focus groups provide rich data especially when the participants are allowed extended time to reflect on their own experiences while other participants are talking (Freeman and Mathison, 2009). According to Frankland and Bloor (1999), one of the main advantages of focus groups is that a rich complexity of responses is generated (Gibbs, 2012).

The idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview. Group discussion is particularly appropriate when the interviewer has a series of open ended questions and wishes to encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and pursuing their own priorities. When group dynamics work well the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions. (Kitzinger, 1995: p. 299)

As far as this work is concerned, I managed the group as follows: at the beginning, the questions that I used in the focus group were almost the same questions that I used in one to one interviews. We sat down altogether at one table with the voice recorder in middle of the table, bearing in mind there was enough space between me and the participants. Then, I asked them one question and gave them the opportunity to speak freely without any interruption. Group interviews are often conducted as a focus group. Individuals can share their experiences about a specific topic (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). I listened carefully and watched what happened with a full concentration, and with respect to what they said and asked (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Then they undertook some debate with each other and I gave them enough time to negotiate with each other. After that, each

one came up with his or her idea about the question that was asked. Then, we go together to the next question. My role was like leading the discussion, more importantly, as Denscombe said that “the researcher role during the interview was more like that of an active listener in a naturalistic setting rather than that of an interlocutor with a list of predetermined questions” (Denscombe, 1998, p: 114). For example, if someone keeps silent or declined to participate I tried to encourage him or her about their opinion instead of just keep watching what happened. For example, I ask him or her what do you think? What is your opinion? Is that right? So I can let them all interact in one way or another with each other. And also my role was to direct the group if one of them went outside the topic I tried to get him back to the main question. So this helped me a lot and gave me the freedom to direct the conversation to be focused on the topic under discussion. Because you can easily get someone in this kind of situation remaining silent. Perhaps, he or she has an idea and maybe this idea is better than the people who spoke a lot in the debate but unfortunately you found them shy or the individual did not get the opportunity to speak. So my role here is to encourage them to speak and interact with others rather than just keep silent. More importantly, my role in the focus group was a mediator and I took part in the discussion when I felt it was necessary by giving my own view in order to guide the discussion in the right path of the discussion. Sometimes I remained silent when the group was talking about medical related issues that they faced in their faculty and I decided not to interrupt them and prioritised naturally-occurring interaction as much as possible among them.

An important point here to capitalize on is that the interaction between the participants in the focus group helped them get more familiar with the situation of using English in higher education. Some of the participants started talking about their knowledge with the situation at other universities. Additionally, some students pointed to some solutions to the emerging problems, hence the students were getting more knowledge about the subject under discussion. The discussion reveals how interaction between students is important and how one gets familiar with issues he/she was not previously aware of. Furthermore, running the focus groups equipped me with the skill to conduct the conversations and ensure turn-taking. Such a skill is important for one’s interpersonal skills which are in turn key to any university lecturer, dealing directly with the students (See appendix 6).

On the other hand, it should be noted here the process of organising the focus group interview was not easy because of the Libyan culture as it prevents males to be directly in

contact with females. No direct connection with female students is allowed. Firstly, as I mentioned early, with the help of my cousin's daughter, in one-to-one interviews, I met female students in a large open room at the faculty where anyone can see and hear the conversation. This impinged on the study because of the frequent interruptions made by others and because girls when they are not with each other in their group are often shy and do not talk very much. Doing interviews in such places could easily affect the research study since their responses were not full, and in this case the interviewee could not express her ideas freely as she was surrounded by others. As a result of that, I had to deal with various inconveniences as a result of working in such rooms. So regarding these dilemmas, I preferred to interview female students as a group in a separate and quiet place to minimise any interruptions.

However, the positive thing in doing focus groups is that the female students are not only classmates (the same year of study) but also they are friends. They are having the interest and background which helped a lot the enrichment and smoothness of the group discussion and in gaining rich data. All the students were the same age with same culture and same social background. "Libya is more homogenous in terms of ethnicity, language and religion than other societies" (Dobbins and Wehrey, 2011). The students who participated in my study were all Libyan nationals. Given that Libya is a tribal society, I made sure that each group had no previous clash or problems outside the university since this would affect their responses and influence the interaction.

I divided them into three focus groups. Each group had five participants with two groups being made up entirely of young women. They asked not be involved in a group that included male students. The third group was mixed with male and female students. I noticed that when I interviewed only female students they talk much more than when they are mixed with male students, they gave more information and I have got rich data from their responses. This can be attributed to the conservative traditions and rituals of the Libyan community.

The initial questions I asked the participants in the focus group were the following:

1. What are the main challenges you face when the lecturers use English as the medium of study instead of Arabic?
2. What are your experiences of learning English?

3. What are the different methods that lecturers use in order to support students' learning in different areas of study?

In order to interpret and analyse the data I gained from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, I used grounded theory, which I explain in the next subsection.

### 3.8 Grounded theory

The grounded theorist initially approaches an inquiry with a fairly open mind as to the kind of general theoretical account likely to emerge from the particular investigation. Preconceptions cannot, of course, be wholly abandoned, and we do not suggest that they should be. We do, however, encourage the investigator to commence by concentrating on a detailed description of the features of the data collected before attempting to produce more general theoretical statements. Once an adequate stock of accurate descriptions of relevant social phenomena has been compiled, the researcher can begin to perceive or hypothesize about relationships among them, relationships that subsequently may be tested using other portions of the data. From the growing accumulation of data indicating such relationships the researcher develops or "discovers" the grounded theory (Martin and Turner, 1986: p. 142).

Grounded theory is a theory based on induction and methodological theory discovery which enables the researcher formulate a theoretical account about the general features of a topic, and at the same time grounding the account in empirical observations or data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the first to develop this theory in order to bring together theory and empirical research. They saw that there should be a shift from verifying theory to generating new theory. According to Cooney (2010), it was crucial for them to start generating new theory basing their argument on the fact that qualitative data is apposite to this aim. Holloway,(1997) saw grounded theory not only as a mere description tool but also as a means of generating and developing new theory. Hancock et al (1998) were of the same opinion and saw that the major objective of grounded theory is the generation of theory. In this way, as Hancock et al say, grounded theory goes beyond phenomenology because the explanations that are derived are new knowledge and these knowledge could be used to develop new theory about a particular phenomenon.

Grounded theory is a theory rooted in social sciences and based on a systematic methodology to construct theory through data analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1994,

Charmaz 2003, Glaser and Strauss 2009 and 2014). Accordingly, grounded theory is a research methodology which is different from the deductive process 'bottom up' in social science research and which investigate a question or questions along the way. Using the inductive process, the researcher reviews the data collected to unearth repeated concepts or ideas. These ideas are then tagged with codes extracted from the data (Bowen, 2006). The codes are grouped into concepts and then into categories which become the basis for new theory (Sillince, 2014). This shows that grounded theory is dissimilar to the traditional research model where the main aim of the researcher is to show how the theory does or does not apply to the phenomenon (Annells, 1996).

In view of this, it is clear that grounded theory method does not attempt to seek for the "truth" but, rather, attempts to conceptualize the topic being investigated through utilizing empirical investigation (Glaser, 1978 and Heath and Cowley, 2004). It has been claimed that grounded theory method is merely a justification for researchers to build new hypotheses in a retrospective way so as to fit data (cf. Birks and Mills, 2015). However, those who employ the method refute this criticism and underline the fact that scholars do not build or formulate his/her hypotheses in advance and that they grow as a result of close interaction with the data (Allan, 2003). Martin and Turner then lucidly describe the potential contribution of this approach:

An emerging grounded theory primarily justifies itself by providing a detailed and carefully crafted account of the area under investigation. This theoretical account not only aids the investigator's understanding, but provides a means of communicating findings to those in the area studied, either as a basis for discussion or as a vehicle for implementing change. This account also enables the researcher to ask questions about the similarities and differences between this theory and other more general theories in the field, especially with respect to goodness of fit and scope of coverage. Such an exercise generally provides not only a perception that some elements discernible in the locally based grounded theory may be relevant or applicable to a wider context, but also an enrichment of available general theories as they are evaluated in the light of questions drawn from a new, firmly based, and locally grounded theory (Martin and Turner, 1986: p. 142).

By the same token, grounded theory attends closely to the interpretation of meaning in the social interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and attends closely to interviewees' descriptions of their actions (Glaser, 1998). Following this, grounded theory was identified as a viable approach for investigating the perceptions of students and staff

towards the use of English in higher education in Libya. The grounded theorist's main aim is to get knowledge about the socially-shared meanings towards the matter at issue. Such meanings are reflected in the behaviours as well as the participants' realities (as expressed in interviews) being investigated (Clarke 2003 and LaRossa, 2005).

The significance of grounded theory lies thus in its aims and appropriateness for this research. In this regard, several works have highlighted benefits of this approach (Holloway, 1997). First and foremost, the findings gained can be valid and reliable in respect of representing real-world settings. In addition, the stories that are told through this approach are context-specific, detailed, and robustly connected to the data (Glaser, 1978 and Heath and Cowley, 2004). It is also the case that grounded theories, which are not tied to or limited by existing theory, have the potential for innovative discoveries. Another benefit of the researcher using grounded theory is that they can offer helpful thinking for future work, as the findings are rich in detail and try to take full account of context (Charmaz, 2003, Charmaz, 2011 and Glaser and Strauss, 2014).

The logic of grounded theory provides a major contribution to emergent methods because grounded theory involves creative problem solving and imaginative interpretation. Grounded theory strategies prompt the researcher to reach beyond pure induction. The method builds a series of checks and refinements into qualitative inquiry through an iterative process of successive analytic and data collection phases of research, each informed by the other and rendered more theoretical. In short, the grounded theory method emphasizes the process of analysis and the development of theoretical categories, rather than focusing solely on the results of inquiry (Charmaz, 2008: p. 156).

### **3.9 Coding the data**

Coding of the data was carried out following pre-defined and emergent themes. Afterwards, these pre-defined and emergent significant notions and themes were compared with each other, on the one hand, and with those notions and themes found in the related literature on the other hand. Such comparisons were designed to assist in the development of the conclusions and to establish theory.

Regarding the process of data coding, all data were manually managed and organized. After all the data had been translated into the English language, I ensured that all 45

transcripts had page numbers and then started coding the first transcript. I also gave each participant a unique reference code, for example, I labelled the first interview with a Lecturer as L1 instead of putting the name of the interviewee on it. Each one of the interview transcripts was written in a separate word document file.

The process of coding proceeded as follows: I read and reread the interviews several times until I became familiar with the data. I then started coding, first making notes on the transcripts and then using note paper to keep a record of possible codes. When I became confident that a code was useful and appropriate to the data I started using blank index cards, with each new code having a new index card. Quotes were copied verbatim onto the cards in order to avoid confusion, and each quote was connected to a transcript and to a page number of that transcript. I then used these codes to continue coding other transcripts, also building up new codes as I went. Each code was given an abbreviation to make this easier, e.g. the theme of spoon feeding became SF. An example of such a card appears in Appendix 8. In the original transcript I also underlined the relevant quotation then put the code next to it in the margin of the page, to aid both retrieval of that data and to allow me to see the context in which that quote was made. In this way I could go back to original data, I can always find which transcript, and which page in that transcript that data came from. I went systematically through all the transcripts doing this process, reviewing and refining my coding along the way. It is worth mentioning that all the emergent themes had been extracted from the interview transcript data. In total I was using approximately 235 cards by the end of this element of the process.

An attempt was then made to make sense of the data by clustering all the themes relating to each other and giving them further appropriate labels. All codes were grouped under different main themes and, sometimes, subthemes with the use of spray diagrams and charts. I checked this with my supervisor to ensure that each statement was relevant to the challenges in learning and teaching in English and had been given equal value (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Appendix 10 shows the practical steps of this part of the process.

Attempts were made throughout the process to be as neutral as possible to avoid bias when doing my coding. As the process continued, sometimes the codes/labels had to be adapted and changed as the meaning of the data became clearer. The cards also allowed me to play

with different groups of cards – so that I could see where ideas fitted together and to help me write summaries of the data/ideas (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

In the next subsection, I will shed light on the challenges that I faced when working in the qualitative/interpretive paradigm.

### **3.10 The challenges that I faced when working in the qualitative/interpretive paradigm**

I will first describe some of the practical problems that I faced, before going on to consider philosophical/methodological issues.

Following my selection of semi-structured interviews and focus groups as tools to collect data, it was difficult for me to carry out interviews at the point of the research because of the civil war at Libya. The situation in Libya was too dangerous at the time. A civil war between the governmental forces and opposition forces was underway. This war has been referred to as the Libyan Arab Spring. Students and staff were keen to remain at home and not to participate in any activity even if this activity is inside the university. Additionally, some logistical problems arose from the rural location of Sebha University as it is the only university in a very large open area. In addition, it is located far from the north of Libya where the main infrastructure for the country is in place (or used to be in place before the outbreak of the war). Therefore this created many practical problems, such as unreliable or no postal services, poor road conditions, and shortage of petrol, which obliged me to drive long distances between the faculties to gather the data from where I live.

I made many phone calls to both lecturers and students with the help of the administration encouraging the participants to agree to being interviewed. Despite every effort that I made to meet the participants at the agreed time, in many cases, I was not be able to find participants (especially lecturers). This may have been because of their busy schedule or for other reasons.

One of my invited interviewees refused to participate in this study only at the last minute when he discovered that another particular person was participating. I do not know why



this person withdrew but it suggests that there is some suspicion/hostility operating within the university.

The other thing that affected my study is the age of some participants (especially students) this also can be attributed to the Libyan beliefs and culture, which offer to older people a high rank of respect so they see me as older than them. On one occasion, in one to one interview with the female students, one student just keep nodding her head down while she was speaking. As a result of that it created some difficulties of having free discussions with participants. In such cases, I had to get out of the formal mode of the study and talking casually with them to create an atmosphere and bridge the gap of the age between us in order to let them speak openly. Additionally, some students are not used to listening to the opinions of other students and the idea of turn taking. For instance, one student kept talking about one topic, taking up most of the time. When I attempted to elicit responses from other students, she got angry and told me that she needed to complete her statement which lasted for another five minutes.

### **3.11 Reflection on research and data collection**

In this section, I shed light on the challenges that I encountered when I did the current research in general and when the required data were collected. It is important to be reflexive about my own conduct in this research for several reasons. As argued broadly in the related literature, nowadays, reflexivity is prevalent in qualitative research and qualitative researchers see its use a mandate to legitimise and validate representations as well as question research practices (Pillow, 2003). In this respect, the use of reflexivity brings to the fore the attention to the subjectivity of the researcher in the research process. This is clear from the researcher's focus on personal questions, such as who I have been, who I think I am and how I feel, all along that process. That is, an acceptance and acknowledgment that "how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to what the claims are" (Altheide and Johnson, 1998). "If the scientific observer has to be regarded as part of the experiment, then all the more complicit will be the observer bent on social inquiry, then there is the reflexivity which would seek to locate itself within a community of researchers, including scientists. In this account... Reflexivity is identified as the everyday resource of individuals in society". (Stronach, 2010: p142). In social research, as Finlay (2003a, p. 4) states 'myriad forms of reflexivities have been practised'

from introspection to critical realism through to deconstructionism. She points out though that a unifying theme is the ‘project of examining how the researcher and inter-subjective elements impact on and transform research’. Furthermore, Finlay (2003b) distinguishes reflection and reflexivity in the following way: “The concepts are perhaps best viewed on a continuum. Reflection can be understood as ‘thinking about’ something (an object). The process is a more distanced one and takes place after the event. Reflexivity, by contrast, involves a more immediate, continuing, dynamic and subjective self-awareness. (p. 108)”.

With this in mind, it becomes apparent that reflexivity in qualitative research is increasingly seen as a useful tool for understanding data that are embodied, unspoken or unavailable to consciousness (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009 and Henwood, 2008). One pertinent question of methodological writing has been the researchers ‘experience of the research encounter; how they feel and how they listen (Back, 2007; Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001; Hunt, 1989; Kleinman, 1991) – simply put, what they are able to hear and notice. The research encounter can be conceptualised as a co-created space such that the researcher and the research activity are seen as part of the production of knowledge (Frosh, 2010), with research subjects being ‘. . . reflexively constituted between the researcher and the researched’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p. 423).

As reflexivity is often (and sometimes exclusively) discussed with respect to a researcher’s own empirical research, I start with my personal educational background, followed by the problems related to data collection.

### **3.11.1 My personal educational background**

When comparing education in the UK and education in Libya, it is clear that there are several differences between them. These differences are really the main source of my reflection on the current research. First and foremost, the education system in Libya is very didactic, in the sense that a student is informed of the right answer to the problems he/she encounters. Put in a technical way, education in Libya depends on rote learning and this facet of the system is central both to this thesis and to my experience of studying to complete this thesis. The students just receive the information from the teacher and they are not encouraged or facilitated to participate in the class in an active way. This type of

education is completely different from what is adopted in the UK. When I came to the UK, I discovered that one is faced with several educational systems and approaches that he/she needs to decide which type of education/learning is suitable for his/her topic. Indeed, this decision was a big challenge facing me at the beginning, because of my lack of experience.

What is also known about the Libyan educational system is the crowdedness in the classrooms. There are about 40 students per single classroom. The teacher or the lecturer is not able to control the class and manage it, as he/she wants to (Alkhaldeh, 2010; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Yu, 2004). With the traditional rote learning, the teacher or the lecturer enters the classroom and tells the students what they should cover from the textbooks without having any mutual conversation with them. The teacher-student inter-communication is not present in Libyan schools or universities. This lack of any mutual communication makes it hard for the students to have communication with their lecturers when they come here in the UK for the first time. This is the reason why Libyan students are shy and a bit reclusive in their first days in the UK. They presuppose the same treatment. Anyway, they are supervised with the ease of communication between the teacher and the lecturers and are encouraged to participate actively in their learning. So they can fit in after some time.

Another problem I encountered when I started my postgraduate study, in Libya, is the lack of research background. As I made clear in the preceding paragraph, Libyan education depends on rote learning, hence the student does not undertake any real research (Hindi, 2012). The students are not given a chance to do any independent research. They are just given a book which they need to memorise for exams. There are no research assignments or tasks. These practices render the research experience for most Libyan students rather shallow at best. Given this, the Libyan students encounter several problems related to doing research when they come to the UK, struggling in terms of doing research. It is well-known that UK universities are research universities in the first place. So the demand to do research is an important condition for the student to get graduated. So it is not easy for Libyan students to accommodate to the research demands of UK universities.

Another problem relating to education in Libya is the interference of politics with education. What the students are required to learn must be in compliance with what

politicians consider fit. The education and the teaching topics covered circle around the achievements of the government whose deeds are included in almost every topic. Education is thus far from being independent and unbiased. Another problem is that students have no voice, as compared to lecturers. The lecturers are free to treat the students in any way they choose without paying attention to student needs and problems. On the other hand, the situation in the UK universities is quite different; the students can raise concerns with the officials at the universities who may take such concerns seriously. The Libyan students need time to adjust to the new environments they encounter.

Additionally, the problems that I face during conducting this research are not only related to the type of education in Libya but also extend to the data collection. When I asked the students and the lecturers to answer the questions I raised in the interviews, there was a kind of apprehension and fear (about saying the truth) that I will report what they say to the government. The relation between the people (including the students and lecturers of the universities) and the local government is often described as bad. Hence there was apprehension from the students and lecturers that I was appointed by the government to canvass their opinions. However, I hope that this apprehension disappeared when I insisted that all of their responses will be treated anonymously and will not be used for non-research purposes. In addition, they were willing to cooperate with me when I mentioned that their responses will have future impacts for them in terms of improving their education. I explained to them the importance of the current research in that it will discover some of the problems and benefits of the teaching and use of English in university departments. Their responses are important in determining to what extent the use of English is important in facilitating education or at the other extreme in complicating the task for the students and the lecturers. I repeated such goals and purposes with each interviewee and gave assurance that any information from him/her would be kept confidential and only made use of only for research purposes.

Another problem I faced during undertaking this research is that students and lecturers were frustrated with the civil war, which broke out two years before conducting this research. The students and lecturers were in bad spirits; so I was required to ease them and encourage them for a better look towards life. The effects of the civil war were observed, given that students and lecturers were somehow convinced that Libya will not be able to recover, and hence their future is not as bright as they had hoped. These

psychological problems weighed greatly on the students and lecturers. Anyway, with my continuous encouragement, they started answering my questions, and hoped Libya would improve as I insisted. The issue of commitment to this research project also relates to their own lack of understanding about the processes of research.

The last thing I shed light on here is that what I learned from qualitative research, which I used to answer the study questions. In qualitative research, one learns how multiple layers of data can be brought together to achieve one's goal. In the past, I never thought that students' and lecturers' replies from interviews could be so significant for research. In the qualitative research, one learns how to code the data according to the emerging topics and ground a theory based on these topics. There are many options to begin with and the initial picture might be messy, but by applying the main concepts and steps adopted in the qualitative research mode, the data can be analysed in a systematic fashion.

### 3.12 **Validity and trustworthiness**

Brown (1997) defines validity as “the degree to which the results can be accurately interpreted and effectively generalized”. For Cohen, et al. (2007:136), if the findings of the research explain the phenomena in precise terms, it is said that the research is valid. The state of affairs is commonly referred to as internal validity. Additionally, if they find that the findings of one research can be generalized to wider contexts, it is said that the research is valid. This type of validity is known as external validity. In a related vein, Wellington (2000: 30) states that ‘Validity refers to the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure’, whereas Gray (2004: 219) assumes that ‘Validity means that an instrument must measure what it was intended to measure’. As for trustworthiness, it reflects the honesty of the research process. According to the related literature, including Guba (1981), Shenton (2004), and Gray (2004), there are four criteria to address the trustworthiness of research which are credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. In order to make sure that the current work is valid and trustworthy, I used two tools to collect data, namely one-to-one semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as explained above. Additionally, I made use of the ground theory to analyse the data. As suggested by Bennett et al. (1994) grounded theory is based on an open and inductive approach to data analysis, which is particularly good for dealing with transcripts.

Additionally, I selected a large sample of students and staff who are significant representatives of the study community, which includes all students and staff at the Medical and Education departments at Sebha University. As referred to above, the length of interviews was sufficient to gain in-depth data and to make the interviewees feel free to deliver their opinions regarding the use of English at their department.

On the other hand, it should be stated that although the findings of the current work do not extend to all Libyan or Arabic universities, they may have significant implications for policy makers in higher education and for other researchers in the field. As is clear from the current thesis, the main target was the staff and students at Sebha University. The current research has not adopted a quantitative approach and does not represent data from all Libyan universities; hence, it does not extend to all other universities or higher education institutions. On the other hand, it must be stated that there will be inevitable and important resonances between the results represented here and the situation that obtains in other universities in Libya and more widely. Accordingly, this thesis is important for policy makers in Libya in particular and in the Arabic and other countries (with similar conditions) in general.

### **3.13 Ethical consideration**

According to Lindorff (2010), researchers undertaking enquiries in any research discipline and working within any paradigm should not put participants' lives in danger or be in any way disrespectful to them. This is true for all lecturers and students taking part as respondents in this study. In this study, all students and staff who participated in this study were volunteers. They were invited to take part and were asked for permission to tape record the interviews (Opie, 2004); this consent was taken verbally. They were also supplied with a participant information sheet, which included full details about the research project (See appendix 2). Moreover, they were told that they could withdraw from the interview at any point without giving a reason and without fearing the consequences of this.

At the beginning when I started coding the data, the anonymity and confidentiality of all lecturers was protected by labelling them, using L1 to L23 respectively and the same for

the students, using FO1 for the focus group and ST2 to ST20 for the one-to-one interviews to protect their identity. Then, we agreed (my supervisor and I) to put pseudonyms instead of numbers. The rationale behind this was that a name humanises the statements and facilitates the reader in following the threads of the stories from the participants. Anonymity was not compromised as I made sure I chose a name that did not match the participant's real name. All the interviews were carried out in Libya by direct personal contact between the researcher and the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher himself (see appendix 5)

Full ethical approval was obtained from Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), under the reference number of 14/EHC/022 prior to the beginning of the empirical element of the study (See appendix 1). All aspects of data gathering were subject to permission being gained from respondents and it was made clear from the outset that all respondents would be anonymized. In addition, a commitment was made that all data would be kept securely and only used for the purposes of the study. In addition, the interview recorder was stowed in a locked place. The data was encrypted and saved securely and was password protected, in order to prevent access without specific permission.

### 3.14 **Summary**

This chapter has explored the methodology adopted in this study and has emphasized the ways in which both methodology and methods were identified in order to address the focus of the study. It introduced, first, research design and methodology and compared approaches to the differing paradigms that can be employed in the social sciences. I described some significant ideas and notions of research philosophy in general and how data are analysed, most notably in the positivist paradigm versus social constructivism. Moreover, this chapter discussed the general theory of deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning and its bearing on quantitative research vs qualitative research. The chapter also shed light on how data were collected and by which ways they were analysed (grounded theory) alongside the ethical procedures, which were employed throughout the research study.

Furthermore, I reflected on the data collection process and showed how the process of data collection was difficult. I faced challenges in encouraging the students/staff to participate in the study. Fear from authorities and sex segregation and the related cultural rituals made my tasks to collect data difficult. In addition I faced personal challenges in respect of carrying out independent learning and thinking in respect of this research, subject as I am to the experience of rote learning that is so evident in the data I collected from staff and students in this study.

In the chapters that follow, I will analyse the data I collected and explore the issues that were raised in both the teaching of English and the teaching *in* English at Sebha University.



## **4 Chapter four: Stage one: Exploring the teaching of English -data presentation and analysis**

As outlined in Section Three, this section analyses the data from the first stage of the study. This reporting is sub-divided into three sections: The awareness and need for using a Communicative Approach at Sebha University to teach English as a foreign language; challenges in the implementation of a Communicative Approach to teaching English from the lecturers' point of view; challenges in the implementation of a Communicative Approach to teaching English from the students' point of view.

### **4.1 The awareness and need for using a Communicative Approach to teaching English at Sebha University**

Regardless of the lecturers' views towards the way they adopt their teaching of English language skills in general, all agree on the importance of the Communicative Approach to teach students language skills using this approach (and the data supports the claim that lecturers at Sebha University use this approach). This is probably reflective of their own training and what they have learned is the best way to achieve their objectives. Even though they do not necessarily use the same strategies; many of them do, by and large, voice the need for a Communicative Approach in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

When they were asked about their strategies in teaching English, they described the importance of using a Communicative Approach, and related some concrete examples and justification for its significance:

All the time I do not ask my students to work individually at, at all. I feel that if one needs help, they must help each other... Then, my time comes. They help each other there is a problem then I come to explore and see what is happening. Yah, but I usually leave them to help each other and I just supervise them, but if there is a problem that where my turn yah, comes...  
(L1 Omar)

The Communicative Approach is characterised by certain features, including concentration on the *use* of language and its appropriateness rather than simply on

language form. In addition, the tasks of the Communicative Approach are achieved *through* the language rather than simply exercises about the language. An emphasis is placed on student initiative and interaction, rather than simply on teacher-centred direction, and there is a sensitivity to learners' differences rather than a 'lockstep' approach (Savignon, 2008; Anderson, 1993; Maley, 1984). This is made clear in the following quote despite the fact that the lecturer does not use the term 'Communicative Approach':

As you may know language is living... living thing you have to practise every day if you want to enhance and improve your language. You must speak out every day; you need somebody to speak to... to improve your language. (L8 Adem).

As is apparent, this lecturer refers to the language as a living thing which needs practice every day and it is organic, therefore ever changing, and as a living thing, it is not confined to simple words in a textbook. This underlines the need for communication between people who are learning and growing and changing. It helps to explain why the lecturer subsequently takes advantage of what he calls 'student-centred direction' rather than 'teacher-centred direction', in order to encourage communication between students.

Another lecturer describes how he emphasises the interaction between students and teachers who are both involved in a discussion. Here, the lecturer encourages the students to work collectively, including through conversation and exchange of thoughts:

I follow a Communicative Approach mostly; you know, both students and teachers need to be indulged in a sort of discussion. So, both teachers and students will derive ... I indulge my students to have a conversation. (L2 Ameen)

We are using a Communicative Approach and somehow... in our aaaa cross the department here. (L3 Nizar)

Another lecturer says he adopts such a technique and he describes how he encourages more of the students to exchange ideas. This lecturer says he attempts to amplify the students' role and participation by minimising the teacher's role in guiding the classroom.

In addition, he assigns homework to the students in order to help them prepare for and participate actively in the classroom:

I am basically concerned with communication... so, I replace my way of teaching... in order to enable the students to be able to communicate either by writing or reading or speaking... activity so as to minimise a teacher's talking time and to maximise a student's talking time. (L4 Meftah)

As is evident, these lecturers describe how they concentrate on the *use* of language through verbal communication. Tasks are achieved through the actual use of language rather than simply exercises *on* the language. This real communication provides the students with the chance to develop their language skills, which helps to improve their confidence. Additionally, the cooperative method of teaching, which is also part of a Communicative Approach, is adopted by another lecturer who says that he uses different activities, such as working in pairs or groups. He maintains that students are more active and effective when working in groups, given that they can learn from one another. Learners are assigned randomly to the groups so that there are varied levels of competence in each group. This approach is intended to be an effective step in improving students' level and performance by learning from each other.

One lecturer described how he uses 'the traditional method of teaching' together with a Communicative Approach. He describes how the traditional method of teaching suits the conservative Libyan community in which the students find it difficult to work collectively or cooperatively because they are not accustomed to, for example, speaking in front of one another. In traditional methods therefore, most of the time the lecturer simply lectures the class, that is, informs the students of the gist of the lesson without any kind of cooperation between the students and the lecturers. So the communication between them is minimised, and there is no actual or real interaction among the students themselves. This lecturer hopes that traditional methods can help him to shift his students to a collaborative method of learning. He also describes how this helps him to focus on important topics for students including word relations, for example, synonyms and antonyms, so as to improve the students' vocabulary. In addition he uses skimming and scanning activities as a means to familiarise the students familiar with the ongoing task:

I am using a traditional method of teaching and at the same time I am using a collaborative method of teaching .... because here in Libya, because of... our tradition or Muslim culture, some of our students find it a bit difficult to collaborate in learning. They... feel shy and nervous to speak in the class. But since I came into this system .... I have my own methodology of teaching. First, to improve students' vocabularies... The more (words the students have in their vocabulary)... the more fluent the student will be... So, that is number one. And I... use scanning and skimming... in my teaching method. (L8 Adem)

As he makes clear, the lecturer uses these two approaches because some students feel shy and nervous and he tries to encourage them to collaborate in their learning. It is apparent that the lecturer is trying to be responsive to the students with whom he is working by fluctuating between the traditional and collaborative methods. He goes on to describe his use of cooperation alongside more traditional methods:

It is part of my strategies... to use what I call cooperative learning to work in pairs, to work in a group. So sometimes I use that if I have... some interesting topics to share with the students, I do use cooperative strategy; and I discovered that using this method... improves students' understanding, and they are much interested... than learning as individuals. (L8 Adem)

Generally speaking, this lecturer utilises various activities to deliver his lessons to the students. All in all, as is shown, a multitude of ways of teaching English skills to students has been adopted at Sebha University. These methods vary from one lecturer to another although, most say that they use the Communicative Approach, including focusing on the students and the use of language. The lecturers refer to some activities that come under the heading of Collaborative Learning. However, it seems that there are considerable challenges in fully implementing a Communicative Approach which became evident in their descriptions. Very often the lecturers found it difficult to describe in any detail what they actually did in the classroom, beyond putting people in groups and aspiring to get them to work cooperatively. This lecturer (below) was an exception, inasmuch as he described in some detail how he tried to adapt his approach to the specific needs of the students:

My approach is communicative. I contextualise the text and context... maybe later to society, culture or specific groups. So, when I take the specific groups, I encourage them with activities. For example, we have humanistic

approaches and I use some strategies... which is very much typical for them, local to them... and I prepare materials based on their professional level... not the commercial books or text books that are prescribed to them. The syllabus is there, but I contextualise according to their level or understanding of the proficiency. (L7 Ali)

In general, the lecturers make use of a Communicative Approach by attempting to get the students to work collectively with each other, or by dividing them into groups. There was also awareness among the lecturers that the methods employed were not always ideal.

The traditional system still exists. This traditional system should be turned off. And teachers should follow them (communicative approach) stage-by-stage development of the student. (L6 Wesam)

Many of the lecturers stated they wished to improve their methods—an ambition that is discouraged by various educational and administrative obstacles, as is shown in the next section.

#### **4.2 Challenges in the implementation of a Communicative Approach to teaching English from the lecturers' points of view**

In this section, almost all challenges hampering the lecturers from successful implementation of the Communicative Approach are discussed. According to their views these challenges are as follows: lack of motivation among the students and its pertinent reasons, students' shyness, meta-students challenges, including lack of necessary equipment, and the education system.

##### **4.2.1 Motivation**

According to the lecturers' views on the main challenges they encounter when trying to implement the Communicative Approach for teaching English as a foreign language at Sebha University, there is general consensus that the lack of motivation among the students has a substantial impact on rendering the teaching process more difficult. The lecturers understand clearly the importance of students' motivation to make the teaching process successful:

Oh well, all right, the activities that are needed urgently in classrooms first of all, are students' motivations. Students' motivations are very important to be known by the teacher and also aptitudes towards language... He has to be aware of all the motivations that are found inside students' you know, minds... After that, the teacher or the professor you know, will take... a sort of concept that will be compatible with their levels and with their aptitudes and motivations. (L2 Ameen)

The lecturers identified a series of issues, associated with motivation, according to three underlying aspects:

- Lack of intrinsic motivation among students themselves
- The effects of context (parents, relatives, situation, etc.) on motivation
- Lack of clear vision for (youth) motivation

#### **4.2.1.1 Lack of intrinsic motivation among students themselves**

Many of the lecturers believe that students do not have intrinsic motivation, that is, motivation to study hard and achieve a high average for its own sake. This is regarded as a general problem, right across the students' educational activity. Cooperation between lecturers and students, working collectively, is therefore a challenge to all parties. Lecturers noted that students want to be spoon-fed; the lack of enthusiasm among themselves is evident. For instance, consider the following responses from the lecturers on the lack of intrinsic motivation among the students:

So, that is one of the problems we face in this case you will end up in having students graduated without gaining the ability to improve themselves they cannot read... yah, so no way to improve themselves. They need all the time someone... to ask them to push them. (L1 Omar)

And this is a problem I mean... and good teachers are those teachers who prepare everything for them... put them in their mouths... maybe chew them before putting them in and then push them inside and then their stomach, like this hhh they want anyway ready, everything. (L1 Omar)

This lecturer is suggesting that not only do the students want the 'food' to be put into their mouths; they want someone else to chew it for them! Lecturers believe that this lack of intrinsic motivation means that students only like educational tasks which are easy to perform:

Yes, I mean this is... another problem that... when I was running the department here... I... raise this problem which is, students usually like something easy to do. (L1 Omar)

Students, according to the lecturers, do not regard the learning process and improvement of their level of language skills among their priorities. What is important for them is to simply pass the exam only without any serious preparation nor the ambition to excel:

What they would like to do is just to read for exams... most of them they think that studying and passing the exam is the most important thing while. (L3 Nizar)

#### **4.2.1.2 The effects of context (parents, relatives, situation, etc.) on motivation**

One of the lecturers called attention to an issue associated with the culture of Libya. He stressed the idea that the lack of motivation among students is worsened or hampered by the Libyan culture where reading in general is neither a leisure habit nor a voluntary habit welcomed by people. In my experience that it is often the case that people depend only on *listening*, for instance, to the news in order to gain knowledge. Reading is, by contrast, not a real habit in which Libyan students are involved unless they are compelled to do so. The contrast is obvious with Britain, where one regularly sees people reading on trains and buses and in 'idle moments'; this is not what can be seen in Libya. This, in turn, indicates that Libyan culture could be oral:

The students in Libya usually... are affected or influenced by the... real daily situation. We are not readers actually; we do not read at home we do not read in the bus situation we do not read in the airport, we do not read at home. We depend on listening. (L4 Meftah)

Most of the... Arab people, especially in Libya, are not good readers in general they spend most of the time without reading for maybe weeks and they do not read any story or article or magazines. (L4 Meftah)

In addition, the lecturers maintain that the students are also not motivated because they are pushed by their parents (or brothers and sisters) into studying they have not chosen to do it themselves. This may be aggravated by a lack of capacity of the parents to help them at home (possibly because they have so many other things to do). One lecturer mentioned

the fact that some young people have to work hard at home to help their parents, and certainly the current situation of civil war in Libya is not conducive to studying hard, as there is so much uncertainty in the country and stress from the war too:

Most of them are not interested to learn; maybe they were pushed by their parents, or by their brothers or by their sisters, so they are forced to learn the language... They do not have a personal interest in learning the language. (L8 Adem)

Their parents have a lot to do at home. They should encourage the student... to learn. They should maintain discipline at home towards learning. All these things have to change. So these are the challenges we are facing; but actually we are trying to overcome them. (L8 Adem)

#### **4.2.1.3 Lack of clear vision for (youth) motivation**

The lecturers also ascribe the lack of motivation among the students to the lack of real or clear vision towards their educational future. This, of course, may be connected to the political uncertainty in the country, as described above, although the lecturers tend to ascribe it to students' youth:

Students are not so much... motivated and that can be because of different factors... maybe they are not aware of... what exactly their aim is? What they want to do in future. (L5 Fathee)

In Libya I find students... have no motivation vision, nothing, there is no vision. (L6 Wesam)

This lecturer believes that the lack of clear vision results in a lack of discipline among the students who can defy the lecturers by not doing their assigned homework:

The top reason is as I said, they lack discipline. What I mean by discipline is... some students... do not attend their classes regularly. Some students they come late almost every time... they come late to the class... Some students when you give homework they do not do it. Some students, if you have a question to the class and you ask a particular student to answer, he or she will not answer... not because he doesn't understand... because of lack of motivation. (L8 Adem)



In varying ways, all the lecturers say that the students do not have a strong motivation to learn. There are a series of reasons why they believe this; among them that it could be due to their age, and that they do not care too much about their future. They may think now that studying is very hard and will not be useful for them, but will later realise the importance of the language and how important it is, either when between age 25 to 30, or after graduating from university.

However, the teachers can play a very important role in motivating their students. For example, teachers can help them to build an effective relationship among themselves. Thus the teachers should have a close relationship with the students as much as possible, as since the teacher is the head of the educational process in the classroom, he or she has the responsibility to strengthen the relationship among the students in order to motivate them.

#### 4.3 Shyness

The second obstacle facing lecturers from implementing the Communicative Approach is students' shyness. Almost all lecturers highlight shyness as an intrapersonal problem caused by certain factors, including hesitation and the confusion the students experience when starting to speak English. Students are not accustomed to speaking English, and thus are prone to hesitate in front of other students, a characteristic the students cannot easily tolerate.

There can be some obstacles yes... you know, students' hesitance, students being shy, student being shamed, students being, you know, feeling sometimes confused and puzzled... right, because it is not their... first language. (L2 Ameen)

These errors committed by students are varied. Specifically, lack of continuous practice renders students subject to many problems related to the actual pronunciation of the words they tackle. Thus, they prefer to stay silent and do not participate effectively in classes.

They feel shy because, aaaa they know that they have enormous problems of pronunciation in reading aloud and also that problem of understanding. (L7 Ali)

For example, if I have twenty students among the twenty students... I find some of them yet silent themselves. (L6 Wesam)

Shyness has been attributed to other factors, including Libyan tradition, where young people, in general, and students, in particular, are less open to group discussions which are usually the domain of older people. Islamic culture, which prevails in the communities where these students live is also counted as a reason for shyness.

Because of... our tradition or Muslim culture, some of our students find it a bit difficult to collaborate in learning. They feel shy and nervous to speak in the class... They are nervous to speak in the presence of our classmates so, all these are challenges. There should be another approach or attitude towards learning in Libya. (L8 Adem)

In addition, lecturers maintain that both shyness and related problems (such as making mistakes in front of fellow students) motivate the students to use their home language in classrooms, groups and pairs even though they are supposed to be conversing in English. This motivation among students to use Arabic is magnified by their weak ability to express their expressions, emotions, etc. in English. Students do not have a solid background of vocabulary with which they can tell their stories. Hence, this weak ability and lack of solid background are then, in turn, potential causes for shyness. Some lecturers try to ease this problem by allowing them to use Arabic:

Sometimes for many of the students... it is a little bit hard for them to think and write in English so they think in Arabic and... Write in English which... gets them into problematic situation. (L4 Meftah)

Sometimes we also use the first language... to look at how they would like to do something because... some of the students... have difficulties to express their... ideas of their deep ideas in English so, we try also to let them to using their first language. (L3 Nizar)

The lecturers also think students' weak ability to speak English is negatively affected by their environment as they are surrounded by people speaking Arabic and hear little English. Practising English-speaking is limited to the classroom, and this is an environment in which the students feel shy to communicate.

We have the problem of exposure... students do not get the required exposure they need in listening to English... all the time they just listen to Arabic so we need to give them maximum exposure of English... To listen English as well as to practice English also. (L5 Fathee)

Since they do not speak the language in their houses... they can only speak the language in the faculty. (L8 Adem)

All of these reasons together make the students hold back when attempting to practise English in the classroom in spite of the lecturers' continuous efforts to encourage the students to do so.

I do encourage them that... whenever you are free, you speak with your colleagues using English to express yourself and correct each other's mistakes, but they never do that; they only speak Arabic and they need to speak this language (if they are want) to improve themselves. (L8 Adem)

The lecturers use group work or pair work to (as previously described) to entice students to practice English and become more communicative. However, it seems that students most of the time use Arabic in order to communicate.

They will always be speaking Arabic even ... in some activity, or pair activity and a group activity, they sort that by using first language and aaaa that does not help them anymore. (L3 Nizar)

To try to cope with problems triggered by shyness, lecturers strive to make the students more confident and self-dependent. They indicate that confidence is an effective strategy to consolidate students' personal skills which are hampered by their shyness.

My goal in all my teaching is... to make my students able to depend on themselves. (L1 Omar)

I encourage everybody students alone and individually. So, that they will trust themselves in one way or another and will be ready for any type of question that will be directed to them. (L2 Ameen)

Lecturers indicate that there are real challenges facing them in the implementation of the Communicative Approach. They attribute such challenges in general to lack of proficiency among the students themselves.

Third one is their proficiency, when they are trying to communicate they face so many problems... practical problems come in these four major skills, when you ask them to speak... they find it quite difficult, when you ask them to read they find it quite difficult... sometimes they read, but they do not understand what they are reading. Third one... even when... you try to say something... they find it quite difficult to understand... and even trying to explain... also is a big problem. So, this is the problem with their proficiency. (L5 Fathee)

Lack of proficiency is, for some lecturers, caused by students starting their English lessons too late:

We have different levels of students... then the student does not do what we expected... and because that comes at the start of school because they start learning English quite late. (L5 Fathee)

For others, lack of proficiency is ascribed to the assumption that students are split from real English language settings, culture and people. This, in turn, makes it difficult for lecturers to contextualise certain events important for English-speaking people, including Christmas.

but I try to contextualise (events) in the ways of their level or understanding of the proficiency... who is very effective for example, if I ask them about Easter... or Christmas, they fail to describe (the event), but when I ask about a wedding ceremony in Libya, or Eid or... other kinds of cultural activities in your place, they are able to describe that and happy to describe how they are participating in those activities. (L7 Ali)

In short, shyness causes serious problems for the students who experience this for several reasons, such as their tendency to speak Arabic, local culture and traditions, a lack of solid background in English vocabulary, and a general lack of proficiency. All of these factors have a demoralising result and negative effect on their ability to learn English.

Students finish their studies without gaining any skill in reading. (L1 Omar)

Students finish... without knowing how to read... that's a problem yes and it is a big problem. (L1 Omar)

#### 4.4 **Meta obstacles**

In reality, lecturers all agree that not all obstacles to implementing the Communicative Approach can be attributed to the students. They stress that these obstacles are also triggered by other factors including a large number of students within a class, lack of necessary equipment, an inactive administrative system and the education system itself.

##### 4.4.1 **Large number of students within a class**

Lecturers are inundated with large numbers of students in class, which, in turn, renders the process of teaching and applying English language skills extremely difficult, given that time is limited and therefore inadequate for any extra activities the students may need.

But most of the time with the large classes because we have large classes here... it is very difficult to deal with large classes. (L3 Nizar)

We always... run out of time. Time is very limited as we have so many tasks... so the teacher does not have... room or enough time for... for example, to do additional activities or tasks. (L4 Meftah)

The class environment is not conducive to additional activities. (L2 Ameen)

##### 4.4.2 **Lack of necessary equipment**

Lecturers highlight how the absence of modern computers and educational tools damages the learning potential of the students. They justify that such absence prevents them from making use of modern educational strategies and methods. One lecturer comments:

You have a very small chance to work with computers just because there are very few devices and very few machines... and equipment... and learners are a little retarded in using these machines properly. (L2 Ameen)

In addition, the university lacks a well-equipped library. The existing library unfortunately has no recent references, journals, magazines or active network. A well-equipped

educational environment is of paramount importance in enhancing students' level of language skills:

We do not have a good library... even though there is a library there are no references, there are no updated references, there are no journals or magazines or network available for the students... so, and this is the most difficult. (L4 Meftah)

#### 4.4.3 **Inactive administrative system**

Another group of lecturers indicate that they are discouraged and hampered because of the existing administrative system at Sebha University. They claim that such a system does not provide them with the steps and flexibility which are necessary for better teaching:

Well, actually, the main problem is... mostly administrative problems. Those who are leading the university are not doing their job perfectly or actually properly, let say appropriately. (L4 Meftah)

Plus, we have so many other... problems because of... administrative things. For example, classrooms and teaching material that we have used. (L5 Fathee)

#### 4.4.4 **The education system**

Lack of well-developed organisational structures between the lecturers and little cooperation between them informally is another of the problems faced by lecturers. Most lecturers maintain that in order to develop the educational system, coordination between the various parties involved in the teaching process is essential. The distribution of teaching roles has to be carried out carefully, given that the same lecturer teaches all language skills, instead of real coordination among the lecturers where every lecturer should be responsible to teach a particular skill.

I recommend that the style of education should be seriously changed in Libya. (L6 Wesam)

The department should be well-coordinated regarding the need that should be need and necessary and the language activities should be well-coordinated...

for example, one teacher is teaching English listening and speaking, another teacher is teaching reading, another teacher is teaching writing and another is teaching grammar. They should coordinate... with each other to find out what exactly are the common problems... The department is not that coordinated... it is not well organised to diagnose... the problems. (L7 Ali)

#### **4.5 Challenges in the implementation of the Communicative Approach to teaching English from the students' point of view**

According to the participating students, the challenges which hamper the lecturers from implementing the Communicative Approach appropriately were attributed to certain reasons related to the students themselves and the lecturers. More precisely, the students emphasised their lack of language practice and necessary background, as well as the lecturers' behaviour and methods they adopted to teach language skills as obstacles against successful implementation of the Communicative Approach.

##### **4.5.1 Learning problems**

Many students agree that they encounter various learning problems when working both individually and collectively. Learning a new language, in whatever context, is very difficult. These problems are strongly tied in with pronunciation challenges that they experience, new vocabulary they must master, and writing skills. These problems make it difficult for them to work properly with each other, on the one hand, and with their tutor, on the other hand.

I found difficulties in terms of pronunciation, for example, how to pronounce each word correctly... Also writing was difficult, I found some problems I mean, how I can write a paragraph. (FO1 ST1)

I struggle with pronunciation. (FO1 ST2)

I have problems speaking and reading... regarding reading often stumbles me to pronounce new words. (FO1 ST4)

My low point is in reading .... For example, the length of the sentences makes me often not understand them. (ST3 Elhadi)

We always come across new vocabulary and terms, and this is quite challenging. (ST2 Yasein)

About my own weaknesses, they are mainly with grammar and vocabulary... Especially in the reading I am facing a problem where often I do not understand what I am reading. (ST4 Bader)

I feel my low point is in writing. (ST5 Jana)

For the students these obstacles are exacerbated by what they dub as ‘Lack of Practice English’ as they are using their native language, Arabic, much of the time. According to the students lack of practice in English occurs both inside and outside the classroom. Inside the class because there is no real motivation from some lecturers who speak in Arabic, and also because there is not enough time allocated by the lecturers to speak English:

In fact... I have to say that with my fellow students and ... some teachers, we do not speak English within the university environment. (ST2 Yasein)

In fact the tutors do not give enough time for students to speak English. (ST3 Elhadi)

Outside class (the students attributed this to the fact that Libya is an Arabic-speaking country where there are few chances to practice English):

I am limited in practicing English at home with my brothers and sister, but, we practice it from time to time, I mean not every day. (FO1 ST1)

Well... Being in an Arab country where there is little exposure to the English language is quite a challenge. (ST2 Yasein)

Most of my speaking outside the University is in Arabic... In fact, the community does not help... It tells you that, he learns a little bit of English and came to show us ... Speaking English in the street or in the public places is rarely used... This is one of the problems that confronts us. (ST7 Hussam)

Outside these days I do not speak English, only in the college. I speak a little bit with my family but not a lot. (ST9 Fatima)

#### 4.5.2 Shyness



Highlighted by the lecturers as an obstacle to implementing the Communicative Approach, shyness is also described as a problem by the students. Shyness affects how the students act within the class. It hampers the students from asking questions or participating actively in the class:

I mean, even when I come to speak with the professor in English, there is a possibility to be shy, or become modest, because of fear, that I says incorrect words, then I will blame myself of doing such mistakes. (FO1 ST1)

Maybe there are some students who do not agree with the idea because they are shy or become modest. (ST8 Hashem)

The students ascribe their shyness to several aspects, including the fear of committing mistakes in front of other students and lecturers. By and large, Libyan culture is not 'generous towards' or tolerant of mistakes:

People are afraid of making mistakes, especially when they are talking to each other... Others are afraid of speaking the language because they are too shy or anxious about making a mistake. (ST2 Yasein)

Additionally, the bad effects of shyness are quite evident when a male student attempts to speak with a female classmate:

Sometimes you will find someone feeling shy or modest to interact with female colleagues because he is not used to speak with them. (ST4 Bader)

At the beginning, I am ashamed of sitting next to a girl student and speak with her. (ST6 Fozi)

Consequently, working collectively with females appears difficult:

There were possible challenges... in terms of male and female students sat and speaking with each other. (FO1 ST1)

I think that the contact between male and female students will be a little bit harder comparable to male students only.... I think this is due to the culture of the community. (ST6 Fozi)

Shyness causes the students to work individually without a real motivation to work collectively in groups:

Maybe some students say I do not want to... work in groups. (ST9 Fatima)

#### 4.5.3 Lecturer-related problems

For the students, there are some obstacles triggered by the lecturers themselves in terms of their methods and behaviour.

##### 4.5.3.1 Teaching method

Students highlight the point that one lecturer uses only one teaching method all the time, which is in turn different from other lecturers' methods. It appears that the students experience problems related to this variance of non-unified methods among lecturers who do not vary their methods due to the lesson under question. The students think that the lecturer should use a variety of available methods which are suitable for the particular lesson being taught. In addition, all the lecturers should use the same method which fits the lesson irrespective of who the lecturer is, thus providing consistency for the students:

All my lecturers... take different methods every teacher takes different method to give us. (ST10 Aisha)

Teaching method itself is the same, but the topics vary... Even if the professor has changed material, but still on the same system. (FO1 ST2)

I have never seen any changes... The way that teacher teaches is the same, I mean the same way of instruction and the same question type. (FO1 ST1)

What I have noticed is that... the same methods are being used whether now or in the past. (ST2 Yasein)

I think they are... nearly the same method that the lecturers use. No different, they are nearly the same method.... not that big different. (ST9 Fatima)

There is no significant changing in the lecturers' approach... it is the same system... they teach the same way they taught from the first year to fourth year... there is no difference. (ST7 Hussam)

#### 4.5.3.2 Lecturers' behaviour

In addition to the sameness of methods used by one lecturer, the students criticise lecturers' behaviour towards different issues including exams and different levels of students. According to some of the students, exams do not always cover the actual materials explained before the exams. A teacher might bring questions on some topics of which the students are not aware:

The teachers focus on the mistakes of punctuation marks just in the exam, but they had not focused on these things during the lectures time. (FO1 ST1)

In addition, some of the students feel the lecturers are reluctant to hear from the students regarding their concerns about ongoing issues. As a result, poor communication between the lecturers and the students occurs:

Yes... even if you told him the idea he does not listen to you. (FO1 ST3)

Lecturers should treat the students as future teachers. Therefore, they should listen carefully to them and discuss with them the idea in a friendly manner. (FO1 ST1)

Teachers here do not accept novel ways of teaching like interchange ability in the classroom... In our country students could not guide their teachers with new ideas. (ST4 Bader)

It is also claimed by the students that the lecturers sometimes enter the classroom without real knowledge about the lesson to be taught. Thus, some of them prepare for the lesson during the class itself. This is hard evidence for some students that the lecturers are somehow not serious about explaining the lesson carefully, thus enhancing their skills.

The other teachers prepare their lectures during the lecture itself. So, there is so much time wasted. (ST2 Yasein)

Yes, sometimes we have some good ideas, but the teachers do not do. Yes, sometimes they do not allow us to share our idea to improve our skills. (ST9 Fatima)

Furthermore, the students think that the lecturers do not consider the differences between the students in terms of language skills levels. The students believe the lecturers should think of attractive methods to enhance students' level as much as possible and be more effective in doing so rather than just shouting at those students who have a low level of language skills.

In fact, I have a note to the teachers, they should observe the differences among students and they should think that each student has his own learning ability... Also, they should do more consideration on the students whom had a low level of English... instead of shouting at them. (ST5 Jana)

#### 4.5.4 School-related problems

The students appear unenthusiastic towards some of the topics chosen to teach them language skills. These topics are deemed as too general and irrelevant to the domain of teaching language skills:

I mean instead we should concentrate only in English subjects to increasing the depth of our specialty, we unfortunately, have other extra subjects excessive and waste a lot of our time and do not make us focus more on the specialised subjects. (FO1 ST4)

Even the specialised subjects some of them are unnecessary to study. (FO1 ST1)

In fact, the faculty increased the number of compulsory subjects (extra subjects)... and general subjects which put more pressure on students. (ST3 Elhadi)

The other thing is we are studying general subjects which are unrelated to the English language at all. I suggest that these subjects should be cancelled because they burden the student and increase his workload. (ST8 Hashem)

On the other hand, the students voice their criticism of the lack of necessary materials and equipment which often accompany the process of teaching language skills; including listening and speaking:

The faculty does not provide headphones, computers, networking, devices and the means of using modern technology is not provided here... Teachers are still using a blackboard and marker, that's it. (FO1 ST1)

The problem is that there are no adequate references in the library, most of them are outdated. (FO1 ST2)

Let me tell you about the resources of the university. In my point of view, they are very limited.... The most important resource is the availability of language labs... Lack of resources in the university is the most stressful problem in my opinion. (ST2 Yasein)

The shortage of English teachers is mentioned as a problem facing the students as well. Almost all of the students maintain that the number of English teachers is inadequate.

We have a serious shortage of English teachers. (FO1 ST3)

As a result, the same teacher has to explain more subjects (some of which are not within the expertise of the teacher). What exacerbates the problem is that these hard-pressed teachers are also given administrative positions, which takes their time away from students' needs and queries.

There are few teachers and a high number of subjects (school materials) during the four years which means the teacher teaches more than one subject. (ST4 Bader)

Furthermore, we are used to having only two teachers divided into seven subjects, which impacts the knowledge gained overall at this stage... The reason behind that is the people who are in the administrative office did not provide a sufficient number of teachers. (ST7 Hussam)

#### 4.6 **Conclusion:**

Deeply understanding the need for a Communicative Approach, the lecturers at Sebha University said that they use it as a means to teach English as a foreign language. This probably reflects their own training and what they have been told is a good way of doing things. However, they point out that they face multiple challenges in its implementation. It is difficult to get students to work in pairs or in groups as the students struggle with

method of learning this in many ways. In addition to the above, other problems facing the lecturers are the size of the group, size of the classrooms, using their first language when they work in groups, shyness, and lack of experience.

However, there are a series of contradictions in what they say. The lecturers' descriptions of what they actually do, when compared to what they say they do, do not actually fit with a Communicative Approach. Their way is quite didactic; they rely on textbooks and so on. It is also very interesting to note that when they describe the challenges they tend to focus on issues which are external to themselves; so it is foreigners, students, computers, and administration issues that prevent them from using the approach they say they want to use. Interestingly, they do not see themselves as part of the problem although the students have indicated that lecturers' behaviour is one of the problems which prevents them from working properly in the class. This suggests that there is considerable work to be undertaken by lecturers if a Communicative Approach to teaching English is to be developed in Sebha University.

Generally speaking, the main findings of this 'Stage One' study provided the researcher with a better appreciation and understanding of the whole subject. All the research tools involved, including interviews, will be refined and explained more concisely, and this should have a positive impact on clarifying the questions further at PhD level. Moreover, the findings corroborate the importance of determining the use of cooperative learning in motivating and enhancing the students' general level in language skills and practices.

## **5 Chapter five: Stage two: Exploring the teaching of medicine in English -data presentation and analysis part 1:**

### **5.1 The challenges medical students face when studying medicine in English (from lecturers' perspectives)**

As students move to higher education institutions, several problems facing them arise due to the challenges related to adapting to the environment of such institutions (cf. Brown *et al.*, 2013). The students, leaving high schools and enrolling at higher education institutions, enter a new experience, where they make new friendships, are faced with different methods of education they may not be accustomed to, and interact with people with high qualifications and expertise (Hara, 2000). These problems become more complex if the students are taught in a language different from their native language and in which they do not have a sufficient level of proficiency. It has been widely attested that barriers imposed by language difficulties are serious for students in higher education institutions (Seidlhofer, 2001; Jessner, 2006, and Braine, 2013, amongst others). Against this background, this stage two of the research aimed at determining the main language-related problems encountered by medical students at Sebha University.

It is clear that, despite the very difficult circumstances and the fact that the lecturers are working under a lot of pressure, they are still striving to do their best in delivering knowledge to their students. It is possible that for some of them there is an inability to do this satisfactorily; however, I do not feel that they ought to be blamed if any of them default in the performance of their work to the fullest, because they work in very hard conditions. In the light of these circumstances, a set of interviews was carried out with both the students and their lecturers, so as to reach a comprehensive understanding of such problems and how they could be effectively addressed. This chapter will first focus on the problems from the perspectives of the lecturers, before turning to address the problems which are encountered by the students. It should be emphasised that this structuring of the account is significant, given that the educational process is a mutual task whose main participants are the teachers (the university staff in our study) and the students themselves (Yalin Ucar, 2012 and Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Once the problems of both parties

have been identified, a discussion that makes interconnection between their responses is drawn.

## **5.2 Language-related problems students face from professors' perspectives**

Academics (professors or lecturers) highlighted several problems relating to what medical students encounter with regard to language skills. In general, all of the lecturers suggested a connection between such problems and the general situation of higher education in Libya and the problems students face when entering this system of education. In the following subsections, these general problems and those specifically associated with language are introduced. It should be made clear that all information included in the next subsections relies exclusively on the responses I elicited from the interviews.

### **5.2.1 Previous experience of language learning and effects on entering higher education:**

The most frequent problem voiced by the lecturers is that students' English language skills are so limited and not as developed as they should be, hence their preparation for the needs of higher education is weak. They believed that the students were not sufficiently qualified for university study. Many of the lecturers highlighted the fact that students face serious problems in their first years in adapting appropriately to the demands of the course, which requires them to have a good command of English. Some lecturers attributed the students' limited language skills to their inadequate preparation in the pre-university period (i.e., school). Consider the following replies:

Their English is not good, especially in the first years, since they were not prepared properly in the years prior to university, and they were not prepared well to join the university. This is one of the problems that we face. (L17 Ismail)

It is a fact that this is a hard choice for the students, because they are not prepared to receive all of the information in English, because their English level is not good, and the language they learnt in schools is not sufficient to enable them to study medicine fully in English. (L16 Ibrahim)



Similarly, other lecturers shed light on the issue that the school education system is not effective in respect to the development of English skills, because schools do not deliver English from a primary school stage.

The problem with learning English, and other languages, is that the process has to start at an early age because, as the Arabic proverb says: 'They took him to school after he became old'. English should be taught in primary, preparatory and secondary school, and the methods of doing it should be beautiful and efficient at the same time. And the teaching of English should also be monitored. (L19 Moktar)

I think that the change should happen from school level; that is, English should be included from their school education. So, when they enter the medical field they will be at least a bit comfortable to write a few sentences, understand at least one comprehensible line in English and so forth. (L12 Salem)

Other lecturers voiced their opinion that the students' limited language skills were ascribable to their weak preparation, which was not adequate for the task ahead of them. Put differently, these lecturers expressed that the students themselves, not the school education system, were responsible for their poor preparation:

They have not spent enough time learning and practising English to be able to understand well and satisfactorily the language, especially the English in medical sciences. Basically, their English is poor and their language competency is below basic. (L18 Hamed)

Alternatively, other lecturers think that the students' limited language skills are caused by factors separate from the school education system and the students themselves. This group of lecturers attributed students' bad language preparation to decisions taken by the state in the past. Such decisions played a role in preventing English from being taught in schools. Since schools did not deliver English and the students were therefore not exposed to it during their school life, their English level is, as a result, weak, and their English language skills limited and less-developed:

The students' English is poor due to the cancellation of English; political factors had a negative impact on English learning in Libya because the language was omitted from education for a long time, and the impact of that

action is still being felt. All the students and teachers were forbidden to use English; it was a disaster. (L19 Rajab)

The strength of this lecturer's feeling is clear in his use of the word "disaster"; this was not just an inconvenience but caused really significant problems.

As is clearly shown in the above response (Rajab), preventing the teaching of English in schools caused a disaster-like situation as far as students' language skills are concerned. On the basis of these replies, we can conclude that all of the lecturers agree that the students' level and language skills are weak. However, they do not agree on the actual reason for this weakness. Whereas some of them attribute the weakness to schools, others attribute it to the students themselves. A third party look at their weakness from a different angle; they argue that it has been caused by political interference in the educational system, where English was barred from being taught to the students. I will address this political issue in more depth later in this chapter.

### **5.2.2 General difficulties once students have begun their studies**

The lecturers stated that the weak level and performance of the students in different medicine modules can be attributed to their impoverished language skills. For them, English is extremely important for all students in general and for students with a medical specialization in particular. The extent to which they have a high level in English will dictate the extent to which they are able to grasp the lecturers' meaning quickly and easily. With a more advanced level, their understanding will be better and they will not have difficulties in receiving any knowledge transmitted to them. Without a satisfactory command of English, students face problems in understanding the topic at issue and encounter difficulties in interacting with the lecturers:

The student's level of English plays a big part in his or her understanding of the topic in question, because the better a student's language level is, the quicker and easier his understanding of the subjects is. (L14 Hassan)

Yes, there is a correlation between the student's level in English and his level in studying medicine; they must take the same direction. It can be seen that if a student's English is poor, he will struggle with studying medicine. (L23 Taher)

Other lecturers stated that English is critical for medical students because all of the exams are through the medium of English. Students must write their answers using English, and, as a result, students with poor English writing skills gain low grades and are not seen as promising. In addition, a student must know the meanings of the words he or she faces in order to understand the information properly:

English plays an important role . . . for the medical students they have to write out the names of medicines in English and know how to understand and how to express everything in English, so, English is important for the students.  
(L15 Naima)

On the other hand, some lecturers indicate that although the students face these problems, many students try their best to work hard and demonstrate their understanding regarding the subject matter. One of the lecturers stated that students without a great deal of past exposure to the language are sometimes better than those who had been exposed to the language. He indicated that the former students may show a higher understanding and performance in the exams than the latter. It is not necessarily those who are fluent in speaking English who are most suitable to study medicine. This lecturer underlined the idea that even though English may be a problem, the students can adapt to address this issue, and the real variation between students is not the language but students' preparations. In addition, the motivation to learn can be a very significant factor, so it might be that there is an Arabic student who has not had a great amount of practice in English, but is intensely motivated to learn medicine. Due to this motivation, he or she may even proceed better than students who have come from native English speaking countries.

I have seen some students for whom language is difficult, sentence formation is difficult, but they perform better than some students who have come with exposure to the UK, and both of their parents have studied there. The latter students do not give me the complete answer or a complete point under one heading topic; they will not give all of it. They will produce very good sentences, very good language, but they will not tell me every treatment, and so on. However, those people who are here who are from Arabic countries and are more comfortable speaking Arabic, they will tell you point by point, and they complete everything. They will complete what is necessary to be

done in the task, so that in some ways language skills do not have a positive effect. (L24 Shaban)

Those whose English poor, I advise them to join an English course to improve their language. The important thing is that I keep telling them to improve their language and make them aware that they cannot go far in studying medicine if their English is poor. (L23 Taher)

It was commonplace for lecturers to indicate that medical students' weak level and performance in English are tangible problems facing them in their university life. This weakness makes the subject less comprehensible for the students, who struggle to understand it appropriately. A further problem is related to exams, in that students' poor skills in English might have an impact upon their results. However, some lecturers indicate that the main problem facing the students is related to their personal preparation and readiness for the exams. It was clear that the students' difficulties led to a range of more specific problems, described below.

Lecturers stated that problems facing medicine students are related to each of the four main language skills (i.e., reading, speaking, listening, and writing) and the students generally need to use all of these skills to accomplish the tasks that are assigned to them. If the student has a problem with one skill, then the other skills in one way or another will be affected simultaneously, in addition to other specific problems. The following lecturers' comments demonstrate some specific language issues:

The language problem is a problem for the students who can spend too much time translating lectures. (L9 Rajab)

There are some language difficulties. For example, the student, when writing, makes some spelling mistakes and when speaking he has difficulty in pronouncing some words. (L10 Nasser)

Some lecturers complain about the language barrier, which constrains them to repeat parts of the lesson many times over. This will lead them to waste a lot of necessary time in completing just one lesson.

The language barrier is a little bit of a problem for understanding the subject; sometimes I must repeat the lesson many times to them. . . Maybe because

the students' level in English is low or the courses are written with difficult English, which such students have no previous experience of. (L11 Massoud)

Those (students) who have not studied English from a basic level, they have to put in effort in order to do well. (L11 Massoud)

In fact, there are some students whose English is very poor; I noticed that in simple situations. But sometimes I do not blame the student because English is not his mother tongue. (L13 Idrees)

However, one lecturer stated that the students' weak level in English is not an obstacle for them. For this lecturer, if students can convey what they want in English, and the lecturer can understand it, that is enough for the students:

Basically what I find is that there is no language problem for the students. Maybe they are slow in their standard of English language, but they understand it. They convey to us what is necessary; the idea is expressed. (L24 Shaban)

I can see that it is possible that what he is saying is again related to motivation. When students are keen and trying really hard, since their English is not good, the lecturers' English is not good, and medicine is really difficult, somehow they are able to convey what they want to; they succeed in communicating the main idea. They are ingenious, adaptable, trying hard to make things "work". It is showing that although there are problems, people can work hard to try to get round these problems. However, many lecturers expressed their sense of concern regarding students' weak level in English. Such weakness can affect students negatively. In what follows, lecturers' perspectives towards the problem facing the students in each skill, and in some related issues such as translation, are highlighted.

#### **5.2.2.1 Writing problems**

One of the major problems facing the students in the lecturers' perspective is writing. All lecturers agreed upon the issue that the students' level in writing is poor:

Normally when they have to prepare a report for the doctor for academic purposes they find it difficult, because their writing skills are inadequate. So, they cannot write a sufficient amount . . . because we have done a study here

among the students, about the level of English knowledge. So we asked them to write ten lines about themselves, and hardly any fourth year and fifth year were able to write five or six lines in good English, with good grammar. The study found that the students had difficulties even writing their names correctly in English. (L12 Salem)

Some lecturers state that the students themselves are aware of their weakness in writing. Students constantly ask lecturers to bring them types of questions, which do not depend on writing of length:

Yes, yes, students do not like to write essays. The students' English is very poor so they do not like to do essays. (L11 Massoud)

Writing problems result in it being difficult for students to express their ideas appropriately. They might depend on words, which are not sufficiently precise. Thus, the professors might not understand the students' idea and hence give them low marks:

The student writes words and sentences for which the lecturer does not understand the meaning, and he doesn't understand what the student wants to say. (L9 Rajab)

In a related vein, almost all of the lecturers surveyed for the purposes of the current study raised concerns regarding the mistakes in spelling made by the students:

Yes, you find some spelling mistakes in the answers of some students. (L10 Nasser)

Yes of course, there is some misspelling even when they write short essays. (L11 Massoud)

Yes, they have spelling mistakes, a lot of them, a lot of them. (L12 Salem)

Additionally, the lecturers highlighted the grammatical mistakes made by the students. Such mistakes are prevalent in their writing, obscuring students' answers. The students do not have the ability to build sentences and use the correct word order; as a result, when they try to write they have no clear structure. Furthermore, the lecturers were concerned that not only is it the students whose work suffers from grammatical errors, but such errors are also made by members of the staff:

Students not only make spelling mistakes when writing a case report or answering questions, which require long answers, but also make grammatical ones such as the lack of connectives and the word order. The teaching staff also make these grammatical mistakes. (L20 Moosa)

Such problems predominate in the writing of students in the first few years of their studies:

Regarding the students in the first few years, they have many grammatical mistakes in writing. (L22 Refat)

Therefore, writing is a serious problem facing the students, who cannot, because of this, express their ideas or answers appropriately. Students encounter problems in spelling and grammar. This results in the low marks the students get and might cause discouragement for them (an issue to be addressed later).

#### **5.2.2.2 Speaking issue**

Another problem raised by the lecturers is that students find it difficult to speak or practise English. On the basis of their replies and concerns, lecturers believe that speaking English appropriately is important for the students. This problem renders communication between the students and the lecturers difficult and even extremely hard upon occasion:

Of course, there are those who find it difficult to speak in English. This is one of the difficulties that we as lecturers come across, because sometimes they find it hard to hold a conversation in English. (L9 Rajab)

Many lecturers maintained that students cannot even have short conversations in English, reflecting how weak the students' level in English is. Speaking English is a 'struggle' for the students:

Also, you find that some students have difficulty in conversing in English. ...when they start talking about a specific subject, you find that they ... struggle with speaking more than others and the ones who are good at both writing and speaking are very few. (L10 Nasser)

The number of the students speaking English fluently is very limited. Almost all of the students run into trouble related to fluency and accuracy when holding a conversation in English:

In terms of fluency, say out of fifty, you will hardly find four or five who speak fluently. Then, another five or ten will speak in disjointed phrases, and another twenty percent find it very difficult to communicate. (L12 Salem)

In conclusion, the students face problems related to speaking. Many of them find it difficult to hold brief conversations in English. In addition, their performance in oral exams does not disguise the simple fact that the students' level in English in general, and speaking in particular, is limited and impoverished.

### **5.2.2.3 Difficulties in understanding (comprehension)**

These problems (writing and speaking) engender difficulties related to the students' ability to comprehend and take on knowledge related to the subject matter they are studying. Students struggle to understand the given lesson appropriately. This observation was made by several lecturers:

They have to write the answer in English not in Arabic, but they cannot understand English except one or two students. Therefore, it becomes necessary for us to teach simultaneously in Arabic and in English. Then only do they understand. It is very difficult. (L21 Sallah)

Other lecturers said that the students could not even understand the questions addressed to them, a state of affairs hindering their progress due to several difficulties caused:

Yes definitely, because even in the exam question, sometimes, they may not be able to understand the question itself ...we definitely have a lot of difficulties. (L22 Refat)

These problems are mainly derived from a lack of understanding of the main medical terminologies and grammar of English, which must be grasped appropriately in order for the students not to have any problems related to understanding:

Fifty percent understand; the other fifty percent have some difficulty in English and terminology; they do not understand and they cannot found the sentences, because you know they were never taught grammar, so they cannot found the sentences. (L11 Massoud)



I think that when he says “found” he means something like “form”. Thus, this lack of understanding regarding the main medical terminologies and issues related to medicine gives rise to another severe challenge for the students, in an area, which is necessary due to the demands of their medical study, i.e., translation.

#### **5.2.2.4 English translation**

The lecturers indicated that they believe students translate all lectures and topics they come across into Arabic in order to comprehend these lectures (helped by the Arabic speaking lecturers). This leads to some interesting negotiations between some lecturers and the students as some foreign lecturers are not able to understand or speak Arabic well. They may then be helped by some students who know English better than the others, in order to help them translate the lecture into Arabic. It is a good thing that they work together to make the lecture easy. With the right motivation they make it work; when they collaborate they make it work, using so-called “role reversal”:

Yes, yes definitely, what we do is we take help from, you know, students who speak a little bit of English and know both languages; we take help from them, and, you know, try to translate and make it easy. So, I take the help from . . . you know there is student who knows English and I translate the lecture. Yes, yes, now that is why I have picked up so much Arabic. (L11 Massoud)

As already suggested above, the lecturers maintained that they themselves help the students translate the lectures into Arabic:

We try to translate the lecture into Arabic as much as we can. (L17 Ismail)

Similarly, as the foreign lecturers receive help from students to translate the lectures; if a matter seems to them to be more complicated, they also directly and without any hesitation avail themselves of help from their colleagues to sort out such a matter of translating:

Yes, sometimes what happens is that we try to talk to the Libyan staff that work along with us. If the students are not able to understand us, definitely they try to help us to translate. (L22 Refat)

It is clear that the lecturers help the translation of the lectures into Arabic because they know that the students cannot understand the lecturers in English because of their weak level of English in the various skills.

#### **5.2.2.5 Conclusion**

Summing up, most of the lecturers indicated that the students' level of English skills is weak, and, as a result, the students do not always interact effectively with the lecturers. The problems are mainly related to students' poor writing skills, including mistakes in grammar and spelling. Additionally, students are weak in speaking, limiting the communication between the lecturers and students. As a result, students face problems in understanding their lessons and tasks. However, as one way of getting around these problems, the students translate their lectures into Arabic, their mother tongue, most of the time, so as to be able to comply with the demands of their study. At the same time, many of the students with the right motivation find ways to go around the problems. Foreign lecturers are assisted by their colleagues and students in order to translate and overcome the language problem. However, almost all of the lecturers reported the importance of English to medical students, who can fail to achieve their degree if they do not enhance their level. Several lecturers put forward their view that English is one of the main causes behind the students withdrawing from the faculty:

Yes, there is a large number of students who fail in medicine because of their poor level in English. Obviously, many students, after they find out that they need to work hard, they transfer to another course and do something else or leave the university. Yes, this does occur. (L9 Rajab)

Yes, so many students join the faculty in the first year but you would not find the same number in the final year. There is always failure in the first years; it is like in the saying: 'like a sieve whose holes are big'; it means so much comes out of it. For example, 150 students join the faculty in the first year; 60 of them fail, which is nearly half of them. They either change their course from medicine or leave the university altogether. Certainly, English is one of the causes for leaving the faculty. (L13 Idrees)

Yes, there is a ratio of failure (drop out) of about 30% or more, for many reasons, and the language is one of them. (L14 Hassan)

On the other hand, some lecturers show their understanding of the students' weak level in English, creating some methods to deal with this state of affairs. In the next section, we will focus on the strategies followed by the lecturers in dealing with such language-related problems facing their students, provided that they were aware of these problems.

### **5.3 Lecturers' responses to the challenges that they face:**

In order to figure out which ways (i.e., strategies) are followed by the lecturers to alleviate the negative effects of using English, all of the lecturers were asked to reveal such strategies. On the basis of their responses, it can be seen that different lecturers use a variety of methods in order to deal with these issues. In the following subsections, these strategies are highlighted.

#### **5.3.1 Exams design**

Exams are a very common measurement and assessment tool in the institutions of higher education and there are numerous types and methods of examination question. Regarding this area, lecturers indicated that they use some adapted methods in light of the students' weak level of English. These methods include designing the exams in a way which does not require the students to write essays. Exams are designed to be answered with short answers:

We ask them to give short answers in the exams because if we ask questions which require long answers there will be many students who cannot correctly answer them, so they will fail. (L9 Rajab)

In Sebha University, the answers consist of short notes, which do not require using linking words and sentences. The student does not write a long piece; all he does is write points, and this is the problem. If, in the exams, we focused on questions that necessitate long written answers, the lecturer, when assessing the student's work, would have a hard time trying to understand the meaning the student is trying to convey. (L19 Moktar)

Short questions can give the students a chance not to fall into the trap of writing-related mistakes, and at the same time the exams are much easier and the students' chance of getting high marks in the exams is magnified. In addition, it provides students with more

flexibility to explain their understanding and demonstrate creativity, as indicated by the lecturers in the above excerpt. Furthermore, exams also are designed which include questions with multiple-choice answers, which do not require writing or speaking skills:

What we do mostly is to give them question papers which are based on fill in the blanks or we do short essays; we do not give them long essays because that enables the avoidance of mistakes. (L16 Ibrahim)

Another method the exams are designed with reference to is the so-called MCQ (multiple-choice questions). This method does not require the students to be well-equipped in terms of writing skills in order to answer the questions:

Now, there is a new method of exam called MCQ. This method allows the student to use less writing in his answers and it is also an easier way of assessment than before. (L13 Idrees)

We decided to avoid questions requiring long answers to avoid these problems. We have adopted new ways of testing which require short answers like MCQ. (L20 Moosa)

It can be seen that the lecturers have attempted to adapt the exams to the students' weak level in English. The questions are designed not to depend much on the skills in which the students show weakness (such as writing). Although this does not give the lecturers sufficient opportunity to examine students in several aspects requiring essays and other questions with a high dependence on writing, this design of question makes it much easier for the students to get high grades and pursue their undergraduate study in medicine.

### **5.3.2 Tolerating students' mistakes**

Lecturers indicated that one way of getting around students' problems with English is simply to tolerate their mistakes. Lecturers understand that the students' poor level in English is not due to the students' own actions but a result of factors which were outside of their control. This understanding motivates the lecturers to overlook students' mistakes and bear with them:

What happens is that we know that is the average . . . we know what the average level of English is for the students. So, if they are trying to convey

the message, I give them the marks whether they make spelling mistakes and grammatical errors that they are not aware of or not, if they can convey the message, I give them the marks. (L12 Salem)

I turn a blind eye to the spelling mistakes to a certain extent. The main thing is that the student conveys the ideas in a way that shows you that he has understood the subject. Yes, we are lenient in that respect. (L20 Moosa)

Sometimes, like when we read the whole of a student's answer when we are trying to assess it; if they are able to convey the exact concept of what should be the answer or if they are very close to the correct answer, we can give the full marks, in spite of deficiencies in grammar. (L22 Refat)

However, this approach is not followed by all lecturers. There are some lecturers who do not make allowances for the students:

With major spelling mistakes the mark will be lost and there is no leniency, because adding or dropping a letter in an English word may change its meaning completely: for example, boy and by. In this case, I do not ignore these mistakes because a mistake is a mistake and a correct answer is a correct answer. (L9 Rajab)

Lecturers are extremely different in their stance towards tolerating students' mistakes. Unlike many of them, some lecturers do not make allowances for the students' English mistakes, failing them in the exams. For these lecturers, medical students must master the required skills of English in order to make sure that they understand what they read and answer properly in the exams.

### **5.3.3 Using Arabic and code mixing**

Many lecturers demonstrate different stances towards using Arabic in the classroom in order to explain the lesson. Some lecturers indicated that they use Arabic in the lectures in order to facilitate the students' understanding of the subject matter.

Even I, who am a Faculty Lecturer, sometimes find it difficult to convey the meaning in English, and it is easier for me to explain in the mother tongue. (L10 Nasser)

However, this point is not agreed upon by all the lecturers. Some of the lecturers only use English in the classroom:

Teaching medicine in English is important; there is no alternative, but always there is a requirement for it, all over world. They can understand only in English, if, the students need to go abroad, and also if they want to enrol on postgraduate courses. If they do not know English, there is a problem. It is good that classes should be in English. (L15 Naima)

I do not know what it would be like to teach medicine in Arabic; I do not have any idea about this subject. But I think it would be difficult because, for one thing, the references are in English, and secondly, in our subconscious the teaching of medicine is closely linked to English. I am not saying it is impossible but it would be difficult at the current time. (L20 Moosa)

Clearly, lecturers hold different views towards using Arabic in the classroom as a tool to facilitate the students' task in understanding the lesson. However, it appears that many lecturers use Arabic in the classroom. What lends support for this contention is observations from foreign speakers. Even foreign lecturers whose native language is not Arabic sometimes try to use Arabic in order to make the message of the lesson easier for the students:

Since I came here to Libya, I have learnt to read Arabic. So I try to convey my meaning in their local language so, even though my Arabic is not so fluent, I can convey the important message to them. (L12 Salem)

Yes, that is what we do; we even learn a little bit of Arabic. That is why we picked up Arabic and if they do not understand English words it is OK...yes, now that is why I have picked up so much Arabic. (L11 Massoud)

So for them . . . because I try to be always available for the students. So...with my broken Arabic, because since I have been here a long time I can speak a little bit of Arabic. Thus, I use it to explain to them. (L16 Ibrahim)

It seems, on some occasions, that instead of the students having to learn English and improve their language skills, the foreign lecturers learn Arabic to deal with the problems of language in the classroom. Additionally, the lecturers are lenient with the students in that they do not force them to speak English with them. If a student wants to speak with a

lecturer, the student is free to speak with him or her in Arabic, and the lecturer answers him or her in Arabic, as well:

Yes, most of the time students use Arabic in the classroom and we do not force them to speak English, because speaking English all the time might hinder their understanding of each other. (L14 Hassan)

When we explain the lecture we resort to Arabic a lot, and if a student asks me a question in Arabic or English, whichever he feels comfortable with, I gladly answer his question; there will not be any problem. (L10 Nasser)

Me personally, I do not think there is an obstacle between the student and myself. He can ask me a question in a passageway or clinic in any language; whether it be English or Arabic, I answer him. (L11 Massoud)

They communicate just in Arabic 99.9 percent; they speak in Arabic only; even though they know English, they speak in Arabic only. That we do not know maybe; they are trained talking in Arabic only. (L12 Salem)

Some lecturers related using Arabic and code switching to their assumptions that students might not understand everything said or explained in the lecture:

I mean, we need new ways to teach in English and to check whether the methods are working or not. The problem is that we teach the student, but we do not make sure whether he has received the information or not. (L19 Moktar)

We have a problem in delivering lectures because many students are not are not honest about whether they can understand the lecture or not. (L16 Ibrahim)

Furthermore, some lecturers mentioned that the students using Arabic might be motivated by their shyness regarding speaking English:

There are many I have noticed; many of them are shy, and I tell them, I call them, I make them sit separately, so they communicate in Arabic. (L12 Salem)

Additionally, some lecturers stated that Arabic might be a better choice of language to deliver lectures, given the fact that some of them have graduated from universities in non-English-speaking countries, such as Germany:

Some of the lecturers did their MScs and PhDs in non-English-speaking countries like France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, etc. So, sometimes there is a subconscious overlap between English and the other language. I know that because, when I started teaching here, I used to blurt out German terms instead of English ones, because, as you know, I did my MSc and PhD in Germany. (L20 Moosa)

Thus, the use of Arabic by the lecturer, from the perspective of the lecturers, is motivated by two different aspects: the probability that students do not understand the lecture (thus the students are given a chance to communicate with the professors in Arabic) and the idea that some lecturers have not graduated from English-speaking countries. Hence, their English is only fair and they would prefer Arabic instead of English to deliver what they intend for the students. In a related vein, even lecturers who insist on using English as a medium of communication in the classroom try to use a simple form of English. For these lecturers, it is important to use English as a tool for communication and explanation within the classroom, but due to the difficulties the students face when using English as a tool for communication, these lecturers try to make the situation easier for the students, using a simple form of English:

The challenges sometimes actually cause us considerable difficulty. We try to simplify as much as possible. We simplify the language to a basic level, so that we will be able to explain to them . . . we also refine our own English language when we are trying to teach them. Also, we have the help of a little of the Arabic language that we have gained. (L22 Refat)

On the other hand, some of the lecturers had some concerns about using English in the classroom. For them, using English encourages the students to memorise their lessons and the needed material without understanding it carefully. This point is explained in the next subsection.

#### **5.3.4 Rote method learning and passive learning**

Many of the lecturers indicated that with the use of English in the classroom and with the current teaching methodology followed in Libyan universities, students are obligated to memorise the material they need to understand. Consider the following responses, where



the lecturers link the difficulties facing the students with both using English and the rote learning techniques which are typically followed in Libyan universities:

So, many of the students memorise texts in English as they are in the book or on the sheet. One reason is that the student is not able to make correct sentences himself because of his language ability or the extent of his understanding of the subject. (L14 Hassan)

The system in universities around the world is based on research to develop and broaden the student's understanding of the subject, but here we still rely on the system of teaching, memorising and the classical and old ways of exams. (L13 Idrees)

A big percentage of students...memorise things. This is a habit that Libyan students have. They like to memorise things. This is their problem of learning by rote. (L23 Taher)

Understandably, due to the fact the students find it difficult to understand (completely or properly) the material because of it being written or delivered in English, students keep repeating the material in question until they memorise it, as a tool to pass the exams. Although this way might impinge on students' overall attainment in medicine, the lecturers do not force the students to change this method, as it is the only technique that they might be able to think of in order to cope with the difficulties of using English as a medium of communication and teaching.

Additionally, some lecturers noted that not only is the students' level of English low, but the communication between the students on one hand and the lecturers on the other is poor, because of the techniques lecturers follow when delivering the curriculum, (as was evident in the previous chapter). In these cases, it is possible that no two-way communication takes place, because the lecturers dominate the lectures and do not allow the students any chance to take part or even ask questions on the issues that they are less familiar with:

The problem here is not with students but with the teacher who dominates all the time and does not let the students participate in class. He or she just keeps talking without providing any opportunity for the students to take part. (L23 Taher).

In the lectures the lecturer speaks most of the time. (L18 Hamed)

Normally, lecturers speak most of the time and students do not talk that much, so the former cannot listen to their talks and discussions. (L14 Hassan)

Later on in this thesis, I will consider the students' views on this issue. What is important here to highlight is that students rarely participate in the classroom, making the whole classroom as a one-way communication. That, at least is what the lecturers' data indicate.

### 5.3.5 English courses

Additionally, the lecturers maintained that some courses aiming at raising students' level in English must be available for the students during their study at the university. They believe that such courses can have a positive effect on the students and address the problems, which arise for them due to the use of English as a medium of communication and teaching:

There are no courses for improving the students' English. There is a general English course in the premedical year, which is not enough to cover the five years a student spends in the faculty of medicine. (L20 Moosa)

No, no, here they do not offer any English courses; if the students are interested they will go to study what they are interested in themselves. (L21 Sallah)

### 5.3.6 Spoon-feeding

All of these issues render the students less able to deal with the course in a way which is appropriate and which might enable them to understand the lesson in depth. Students get the information from the lecturers in a way which suggests it is 'delivered' or 'handed down' in bite-sized chunks rather than in an independent way:

Here, we give the students 'sheets', or we tell them to go and read such and such a sheet or such and such a book. Sure, every doctor has their own method but we always try to give students practical important things. We give them this information on 'sheets'. (L10 Nasser)

The student is studying from the handouts and not from books. He is only using what the lecturer provides for him. He is not used to going to the library and borrowing books from there. (L13 Idrees)

We have to give them some standard books and sheets; it is told to them that they have to follow these books and sheets. (L16 Ibrahim)

This being so, this would suggest students may become even less active in communicating with the lecturers, who prefer one-way communication from them to the students. This technique of teaching causes the students to become even more dependent on the lecturers. Of course, this is also caused by the students' weak level in English, which it is probable renders the chances for the students to communicate very limited (as will be explained later). On the other hand, some lecturers argue that they maintain this situation and behaviour since no survey has been undertaken to assess to what extent the students are happy with them.

### **5.3.7 Feedback**

One lecturer here confirmed that there should be feedback given from students in order to assess their teachers' performance, and the subjects that they teach. They hold this view because they have a very strong belief that when students have a sense that they are a part of the education process, through such things as being supported by their lecturers by frequent and specific feedback and direction, then they will face fewer challenges in their learning process:

In order to know the quality of the course, we should distribute questionnaires to students so that they can evaluate us and the subject we have taught them. This way, we will know how much the student understood the subject and the problems he encountered in understanding the subject. Among the possible causes which could be mentioned in the questionnaire and which the student could choose from are: English language, the way the subject is taught, the length of the lecture and the way the lecture is delivered. (L19 Moktar)

### **5.3.8 Conclusion**

This section reported the lecturers' responses to the challenges encountering students due to the use of English as a medium of teaching and communication within the classroom.

Almost all of them maintained that they are aware of such difficulties, and, as a result, they design the exams in a simple way enabling the students to answer the questions without the need for a good background in English. In addition to tolerating students' mistakes and weak level of English, lecturers stated that they sometimes use Arabic so as to facilitate the process of explaining the required materials. In addition, due to the weak level of the students in English and the traditional teaching 'culture' of the university, the lecturers dominate the class without allocating enough chances to the students to take part. All of this makes the students over-dependent on the lecturers and encourages them to follow a rote method of learning.

Returning to the reasons for the weak English skills, the lecturers raised the point that the causes of the difficulties students face during their study of medicine are not only directly related to the students or their preparation, but also to some extra-educational aspects including their social situation and the infrastructure of the university.

#### **5.4 The wider context in which medical students are studying**

##### **5.4.1 Social situation**

###### **5.4.1.1 Student numbers**

Many of the lecturers indicated that the number of students in the classroom is very large, rendering the lecturers less able to communicate effectively with students. This high number of students is, from the perspective of the lecturers, caused by the 'respected' view of Libyan society towards doctors or students of medicine. All families wish their students to be doctors; it is a job which has a highly prestigious status in the community:

So, some students take a short cut to improving their standing in society and say: OK. I have now got the title of 'Doctor'. So their social status and financial situation become better and, in other respects, they think of other ways quickly to build a future for themselves. (L19 Moktar)

In addition, this high number of students is also caused by strong 'personal connections' which force officials to accept a higher number of students than is supposed to be allowed:

We have the staff for 70 students but we have 200 students each year. We accept this number because many factors such as social relationships and the surrounding environment impose such practices upon us. (L14 Hassan)

As referred to above, the size of the classes is extremely large, and the rooms where the lecturing takes place are not well equipped to deal with these large numbers:

As I said, only in one year, the number of students is more than 240 or 250; so then they had made two groups and we were teaching the same subjects. Now, normally there are around 100 students, so class-wise there is a problem and we have to speak loudly; even when I enter the classroom my voice becomes loud automatically. (L16 Ibrahim)

With such a large number of students, it becomes almost impossible to deliver interactive lessons, and it is not easy for the lecturers to engage with each student, since the facilities are not always adequate:

The number of students should be appropriate to the university's resources. Therefore, if the number of students outweighs the resources of the university, the learning will definitely suffer and this is the case in our faculty. (L18 Hamed)

#### **5.4.1.2 Students' behaviour**

Other lecturers raised the point that there are occasions when some students' behaviour is not favourable. These lecturers said that some students attempt to disrupt classes and do not interact in a positive manner with the lecturers or other students. In addition, they even cannot control the students and make them behave well:

You can say that sometimes it is difficult to control them because you do not find that all of them are well-behaved. There are some students who come and sit in class and only behave noisily. (L16 Ibrahim)

You talk to them in a respectful manner, which most of them reciprocate. But there are some who try to take advantage of your goodwill and become more daring when talking to you and ask for favours. (L20 Moosa)

This can give us as an indication that the lecturers have not been able to develop relationships as they should be with the students because there are too many of them in the class to make individual connections or offer individual support:

As I said, because of the number of students, I could not communicate with all of them. (L16 Ibrahim)

Some lecturers did not experience these problems, arguing that Sebha medical students are better than students at other universities as far as students' behaviour is concerned:

I am talking here about the students in the University of Sebha. In my opinion, they are more committed to learning than the students I come across in other universities, namely: the universities of Benghazi, Tripoli and Musrata. The most important thing is that they respect and appreciate you as a lecturer and do not trespass their boundaries, which is the opposite of what we have heard about other universities. (L23 Taher)

Thus, lecturers have different perspectives towards the students' behaviour inside the classroom. However, the idea highlighted in this subsection is that the very high number of students in the classroom presents a number of challenges. These including adding to the language problem other problems with controlling the class when some students behave disruptively, this further hindering the communication between the lecturers and students.

#### **5.4.1.3 Gender differences**

Another point raised by many lecturers is the idea that there is a difference in performance and achievement between male and female students. Many lecturers maintained that female students do better than their male peers:

Honestly, female students are better at studying than male ones because there is nothing to distract them. They spend most of the time at home after university classes, hence they have more time to revise than the males. (L20 Moosa)

Some lecturers raised their view that female students are different from male students in that the former might stay at home when graduating from the university, typically when

they get married. Sometimes a female graduate will work and sometimes she will not, because this depends on her husband, while male students continue by working at hospitals in Libya and specialising, and sometimes, if they get the opportunity, they go abroad for their postgraduate studies:

As far as the girls are concerned, because of our social situation, when they get married they stay at home. But males, I do not think a single one of them has graduated from the Faculty and stayed at home, rather than going to work. This happens to girls only. (L10 Nasser)

As regards studying abroad, one lecturer said that many of the male students, when they get the opportunity to study abroad for postgraduate studies, would not want to return. This in turn has led to a shortage of teaching staff at the university, which is an issue which will be addressed further in this chapter, in the university administration section:

Another problem we face in Libya today is that many students who go abroad to study stay abroad after they finish their studies; it is a problem that needs a solution. Now in Sebha we have many graduates who went abroad to study, have acquired a master's degree or a PhD in medicine and have stayed in the countries where they did their postgraduate studies. (L9 Moktar)

#### **5.4.1.4 Environment and practising English**

Some lecturers maintained that the students' level in English is affected by the type of the environment the student is immersed in, among many other factors. For instance, the lecturers said that students whose environment requires them to practise English have an elevated level of English. In contrast, the student whose environment does not help him or her in speaking English has a poor level in English.

The lecturers were aware that there were not very many chances for students to practise English. There is hardly any appropriate environment outside the classroom to practise in such a way in Libya. For example, there are no English language newspapers or people who can speak the language at native speaker level to communicate with. The lecturers were sceptical about what the benefit is of students listening to the lecturers in English for a few hours and then going back home where they do not practise the language. It is clearly a problem when learning a language if you do not practice it. The faculty should put the

students in a position where they would not get through without speaking English, they cannot understand without English. Then they will gain many opportunities to improve their language. In fact, in a society like Libya, it is still a challenge for people to gain exposure to the English language:

The problem with the English language stems from practising the language; the practice depends on the person and his environment. If he comes from an environment where there are opportunities to practise the language, he will have no problems. (L14 Hassan)

Indeed, this takes us to a more social-related issue, which is whether parents encourage their daughters or sons (who are medical students) to interact with other students and speak English with them or not, a point discussed in the following subsection.

#### **5.4.1.5 Group work**

As indicated above, one issue affecting students' interaction with other students, and thus the possibility to communicate in English, is the attitudes of parents towards whether their sons and daughters are allowed to interact with other students or not. The role of parents is very significant, as far as the Libyan community is concerned:

Obviously, the family has a say in whether the student takes part in group work or not. So you have some families (parents) who tell their son not to mix with anyone in the faculty for fear that he might fall out with someone in the study group he is part of because of the tribal problems in the country. So the student tries to minimise his involvement with any group because his parents are wary of too much mixing with other students. (L22 Refat)

Honestly, I noticed that there is no student group work here, maybe due to social factors. I came from a different background (Sudan), where students mingle with each other and work together in the university. Here, there could be some tribal and social traditions which make the student reserved and, as a lecturer, I can do nothing to resolve this problem. These problems can be resolved in due course. (L23 Taher)

According to the lecturers, interaction between students is affected by some extra-educational factors such as cultural factors, which prohibit male students from interacting with female students and vice versa. And other thing is that tribal problems which exist



already in the city because students connect more with each other might lead to other problems because the situation is already sensitive outside the university.

#### **5.4.1.6 Students' motivation**

All of these factors render some students less motivated to study or improve their English, from the perspectives of the lecturers. However, almost all of the lecturers voiced their opinion that studying with motivation or not depends on the students themselves in the first place:

It depends on the student. I mean there are students who have enrolled on a medical course to please and impress the people in their immediate environment; these people want so-and-so to be a doctor. This category faces big problems. In fact, not all the students have the desire or inclination to study medicine. This affects the other students in the classroom in terms of performance and discipline. (L13 Idrees)

There are some students who have a negligible motivation to study medicine. They try to for a year and then change to another subject because they know that they are going to lose nothing as the studies and lodgings are free. (L14 Hassan)

Other lecturers claim that some students just study for the sake of their parents, i.e., they are not self-motivated. They just study to be doctors and their families get proud of them before the community:

You can say that they come due to the ambition of their parents; they themselves are not much interested...yes, they are not motivated. (L16 Ibrahim)

There are students whom you feel have been pushed by their parents to study medicine. They have no motivation and are not bothered if there is no doctor to cover the subject [they are meant to study]. On the contrary, as some of their classmates say, they are even happy that no doctor is available to do that. (L19 Moktar)

However, another lecturer says something different about students' motivation, which is in contrast to the other lecturers. He presents quite a positive image of student motivation

and interest in learning medicine in English. He attributes this intrinsic motivation to their aim to be a doctor, which greatly supports them to be more motivated than others:

Many students have a desire to study. I mean the student's ambition to become a doctor works as a motivating tool. (L9 Rajab)

#### **5.4.1.7 Conclusion**

This section addressed the other factors, which are not related to students' self-preparation. It highlighted the issue related to the extremely high number of students, which means that lecturers become less able to deal with the classroom situation appropriately; some students' negative behaviour; gender differences; the tribe and family role in making the students less or more interactive with other students, and some issues about the low motivation of the students.

On the other hand, some lecturers expressed their view that the students' low level in English and medicine is influenced by the poor infrastructure at Sebha University, the topic of the next section.

### **5.5 Infrastructure**

#### **5.5.1 Library service and other important complementary equipment**

Many lecturers expressed the opinion that everyone in the medicine department suffered because of a lack of the required equipment and laboratories. Given the nature of medicine, this necessitates special equipment and laboratories:

Regarding the other problems, they consist of the lack of equipment, laboratories and chemical substances. There is a continuous shortage of these things all the time.... every year we ask the university to procure these things but they do not respond. (L9 Rajab)

We need laboratories and dentists' chairs and the equipment that goes with them. Moreover, all this equipment requires regular maintenance. (L10 Nasser)

Lecturers maintained that other basic resources are not obtainable. Photocopiers are non-existent. This raises another problem regarding the security of the examination system (see below). A shortage of essential resources affects the lecturers' ability to carry out their work in professional way.

Not all facilities are provided; I mean the university does not have even basic amenities such as printers or photocopiers. We, as members of the teaching staff, if we need to print or photocopy some teaching material, we have to do it at our personal expense to give to the students. And the private places where we print and photocopy the material are not trustworthy, especially when we print or photocopy exam questions; they might be leaked in one way or another. (L18 Hamed)

The laboratories are in a very bad condition, which affects the students and obliges us, the teaching staff, to focus on the theoretical side of the subject at the expense of the practical side. This is not enough; the laboratories should be well equipped in order to help the student understand things better and in an easy way. (L23 Taher)

The lack of such facilities leads to a negative experience for the students, and causes them to struggle in attempting to understand the most important parts of their study.

Additionally, almost all of the lecturers highlighted that students lack the required books and the library is not helpful regarding this issue. Many of the books the students need are lacking. What is there is just a set of old books and references, which must be modernised and computerised:

There are some updated references in the library but, generally, it is not sufficient, because the library is so small and does not contain many books. (L10 Nasser)

There is a small library, and there are no up-to-date references, and the books are scarce. (L18 Hamed)

The modern way of learning does not depend solely on the traditional physical library. There should be an electronic library, where references are available. Making available a soft copy of a book is easier than having it in a hard copy because the student uses the soft copy more. (L19 Moktar)

Similarly, the lecturers state that there is no electronic library helping the students and the lecturers alike to work efficiently:

They need to add an electronic library with computers as quickly as possible.  
(L23 Refat)

### 5.5.2 **Internet connection**

In a similar vein, the lecturers raised the issue that there is no internet; this essential source for successful teaching is not provided for any lecturers. If the access to computers and the internet were available it would greatly help the lecturers and their students, especially when material resources are not available, since the internet now has a profound influence on young people across the world:

We do not have any internet services; this is another disadvantage for us. (L21 Sallah)

The internet has not been provided for everybody in the faculty. (L22 Refat)

Now the internet connection, everyone has his or her own, both staff and students; we do not rely on the university's line. In addition, there are not enough computers for the students, and there is no email provision for the students and lecturers in the university. (L16 Ibrahim)

Some lecturers link this with the inability of the students to become acquainted with the needed sources for their study and success in medicine:

If the university acquired more computers and made the internet faster, it would be easier to access reference books because everything is on line nowadays. However, that would have a drawback; that is that the student would ignore 'real' books. Students use the internet all the time because it provides instantaneous information without any effort. (L20 Moosa)

### 5.5.3 **Scientific research**

All of these factors (including lacking the required laboratories, a fully-fledged library, online sources, and so forth) render the staff less helpful in orientating the students with the needed research papers and research databases:

You know, our problem is that we do not have scientific research. We cannot tell the student to go and read about the latest research in scientific journals. We lack these things. ...there is no basis for doing scientific research. (L10 Nasser)

In addition, this affects lecturers' research ability, as well:

I would like the faculty to devise a strategy for scientific research because it is non-existent here. ...our faculty produces nothing except some reports for the treatment of some cases in the hospital, which they consider as case studies, and which do not amount to much and are not published in any magazine. (L14 Hassan)

Here basic research cannot be found. We do not do any basic research; special labs and animal facilities do some for other purposes; I cannot do anything here. (L21 Sallah)

#### 5.5.4 **University building**

What adds to their grievances, is that the university in general and medical school in particular, are in unsuitable building:

There are difficulties. These are fundamentally due to the establishment of faculties in the University of Sebha on non-scientific bases. Therefore, most of the faculties have been built on the remains of primary and secondary schools. So they were not initially designed for higher education. This is a continuous problem; you are talking about infrastructure which was not developed or changed to suit the purpose, so the building itself constitutes a problem. The design of the building is a problem because it was designed to be a school and not a university. This means that you are restrained by the nature of the building. (L14 Hassan)

Now only some staff have offices, before that they did not have any separate offices in the departments; they only sat in the lab. (L21 Sallah)

This unfavourable situation regarding the university buildings affects the students as well:

The number of students should be appropriate to the university's resources. Therefore, if the number of students outweighs the resources of the university, the learning will definitely suffer, and this is the case in our faculty. (L18 Hamed)

Other aspects related to the inadequate infrastructure of the university building include poor ventilation and air conditioners, no projectors, and unreliable electricity. There are even some classrooms without air conditioning, which is especially problematic as Sebha university is located in the south of the country, where the temperature most of the year is very high:

Concerning classrooms, we have a serious shortage of rooms; they are without air conditioners and furniture. (L9 Rajab)

The classrooms are not properly equipped; there are no air conditioners and the lighting is not sufficient, especially when there is a power cut. (L22 Refat)

As we know, electricity is a crucial energy commodity and its interruption or availability in weak supply damages electrical and electronic equipment, such as fridges, computers, air conditioning and medical equipment laboratories, etc. And this is exactly what happens here at the university. We suffer a lot because of these interruptions. (L19 Moktar)

Because the power is unstable and is cut off for hours and hours. All activities come to a standstill and even laboratories are closed down because of the recurrent power cuts. (L22 Refat)

### **5.5.5 Conclusion**

This section highlighted some problems related to the infrastructure of the university and medical school. These impinge on students and lecturers alike, making them less effective. They include such issues as poor equipment, library, laboratories, lack of online resources, and electricity outages.

## **5.6 University administration**

### **5.6.1 Financial support**

Other problems raised by the lecturers relate to the way the university is run. The lecturers believe that the current system renders the educational process difficult and less fruitful. Some of these problems are related to a lack of money:

The person who is responsible for the university declined the budgets allocated by the government to this institution, arguing that they needed more money. (L9 Rajab)

Nothing you need is ready, and when you ask for it, it takes a long time to supply it because there is no budget for it and even after it is supplied, it is below the normal standards. This problem is amongst a list of unaccountable issues. (L14 Hassan)

There is a difficult circumstance which the government and universities find themselves in: budget deficit and inability to provide students with what they need. (L10 Nasser)

Sometimes we ask for some substances or materials which are not costly, and we are told that the university cannot afford them while they build a garage for cars in the university. When you question these things, they tell you that the budget is earmarked for other things and not for scientific research. This shows that the university's priorities are not based on logic. (L9 Rajab)

#### **5.6.2 Shortage of staff**

Lecturers indicated that the medical school suffers from a lack of staff, which places pressure on the current staff and does not allow them to work efficiently. When all the foreign lecturers left the country during or after the revolution, they left a considerable gap in the staff of university departments, and many departments struggled to find competent lecturers:

Before, I heard that there were around ten Indian dentists working in the same faculty here, but now we only have three who are here. So there are a few departments where there is no experienced staff. There are some local staff there, but experienced staff are not there in many departments. (L12 Salem)

The other factor, which intensifies the gap in staffing in the universities is that more students have been taking up university places, and there is not a sufficient supply of lecturers to fulfil the demand. This creates an extremely unbalanced scale between the number of students and teaching staff:

In addition to the premises, which are not suitable for the increasing number of students, there is a shortage in the teaching staff. There is a huge

discrepancy between the number of students and the number of teaching staff.  
(L14 Hassan)

Lecturers argued that this problem must be solved in order to increase students' performance and efficiency:

But we are having difficulties because we do not have enough staff... it is not easy to get more staff. If this problem could be solved, the students who are diligent will manage their study well. They can come and ask questions, and learn successfully. (L16 Ibrahim)

Another problem related to the shortage of staff is that doctors and those who hold high degrees travel abroad for work:

Nowadays, doctors go abroad for work, because of the low wages a doctor receives in Libya compared to the wages of a doctor in Europe or America.  
(L9 Rajab)

This leads the university to bring in some staff from other countries where wages are less advantageous:

Another reason for staying here is the salary. For Egyptian people, the salary here is better than in Egypt, so for this reason we were patient and stayed here.  
(L17 Ismail)

However, some lecturers stated that they cannot work abroad because of their commitment to their homes:

If we all go abroad for work, who will stay in Libya? I like my country and have never thought about going abroad for work. In fact, I have had many opportunities to work abroad, but I refused to leave my country. (L13 Idrees)

Honestly, I have never thought of working abroad. The idea of working abroad did not occur to me even when the country was stable. If I leave now while the country is unstable, I believe it will be a selfish act. I mean, if everybody thinks about leaving, it will mean that we will have to close our educational and health institutions. Furthermore, our domain is medicine, so from a humanitarian perspective, our task is to help people with their health problems. (L20 Moosa)



The other factor regarding this issue of teaching staff is that there is a high number of teachers from Sebha University who have taken up the opportunity to study abroad for postgraduate studies, but, unfortunately, many of them have stayed in the country where they studied. This has created gaps and shortages in teaching staff:

Another problem we face in Libya today is that many students who go abroad to study stay abroad after they finish their studies; it is a problem that needs a solution. Now in Sebha we have many graduates who went abroad to study, have acquired a master's degree or a PhD in medicine and have stayed in the countries where they did their postgraduate studies. (L9 Moktar)

### 5.6.3 Salary inequities

A further problem raised by lecturers is that the university does not pay them well:

The second problem is the disparity in wages between the Libyan lecturers and foreign lecturers. For instance, I, as participant professor, should earn as much as or more than a foreign lecturer, but it is not the case; he or she earns 8000 Libyan dinars while I earn less than 2000 dinars. I mean the difference in wages is huge, and this is a problem Libyan universities face. Up to now I cannot understand why this disparity exists. (L9 Rajab)

The university administration should give the faculty lecturers equal pay. I cannot say that Libyan lecturers are right to have less motivation and desire to teach, but at the same time, I cannot blame them for that attitude because they are paid less than their foreign counterparts. Libyan lecturers get much less money than foreign ones, which makes them have less desire to perform well and make an effort. Truly, I do not know who came up with such regulations. (L10 Nasser)

### 5.6.4 Stability in education

Despite all of these obstacles facing the lecturers, one of them described a significant further problem related to the lack of stability in education among Libyan universities:<sup>5</sup>

The other big thing is the continuous opening and closing of the universities; there is no stability in education either. This means that if there is continuity in education, there is no benefit from it.... There is also disruption regarding

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<sup>5</sup> Although the lack of stability might not be related to the university administration, I classify it under administration because decisions to disrupt education are ultimately made by the university administration.

the times of exams and [regarding] those [students] who could not take the course in one go. All of this negatively affects the student's knowledge acquisition and the lecturer's delivery because he cannot finish the teaching programme, as he has to keep starting and stopping again and again. (L18 Hamed)

Another issue the lecturers think that the university administration must take action to crack down on is students' absenteeism:

The issue of absenteeism has been irking me to the extent I have insistently asked the university to devise a marking system for presence and absence. Yes, there should be marks for students' presence and absence. For instance, a student who comes to the university at 8.00am and another who sleeps till 12.00pm and sits the exam and gets the same marks as the former and sometimes better marks than him; honestly, this is not fair. (L9 Rajab)

Yes, sometimes they do not attend the class . . . I will see them only at the time of exam. It is OK for me; I do not care about it, but it feels like it is not good . . . here they do not have any attendance regulations. In India, like other countries, they must make 85 percent of classes annually per academic year; if they fail they possibly will not be allowed to attend the exams. Here it is not like that. . . All the students should come; this is not school. You come, and regarding this college, those students, as medicine students, they must come. (L21 Sallah).

#### **5.6.5 Assessment centre and teachers' training**

Lecturers voiced their opinion that there should be training and assessment for themselves in order to make them aware of problems they may encounter in the future and help to enable them to avoid these problems. Some of them conveyed their opinion that the challenge concerning the lack of special training for the lecturers was one of the most serious problems facing them. They feel that more training is needed regarding raising the awareness of the faculty members, aiming to enhance their recognition and consideration of the importance of teaching methods, and implementing them:

Usually, there is an 'assessment centre', which assesses the lecturers and their development. The problem is that this centre in Sebha, up to now, has not started. If it did, it would help the lecturers do their job properly and would highlight to them the mistakes they make while carrying out their responsibilities, so that they could avoid them. (L19 Moktar)

There should be a survey or evaluation method whereby both teacher and student are assessed in the university. (L18 Hamed)

Because the English language is not the mother tongue, there should be a centre at the university for studying English and monitoring the teaching of it. (L19 Moktar)

Additionally, they believe that there should be a centre training them from time to time, since the university does not offer any opportunity for training courses for lecturers in how to use the resources. Thus, they are not using any resources to their full potential. From time to time, the university should grant the lecturers these training sessions to keep them up to date with their specialisms and to improve their teaching methods, as Western universities do with so-called Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This is development activities, which the university has an obligation to provide for lecturers. For example, in the United Kingdom it has been noted that newly graduated teachers with a few years of experience are more likely to participate in such developmental activities, since their aim behind this is to learn more about pedagogy (House of Commons, 2011: 281):

There are not any training sessions here for doctors. There should be, so that the doctor can develop and grow and become more productive. (L19 Moktar)

It is very important, and all lecturers should study educational psychology to help them deal with the students, because they have their ways of thinking so you should know how to accommodate those ways. (L23 Taher)

As indicated above, the lecturers classified the lack of teacher training to be one of many challenges, which face them. They stressed that training continued to be highlighted as an issue, and they expressed their view that teachers need proper training, especially in new methodology.

## **5.7 Lecturers' responsibility**

### **5.7.1 Lecturers' accent and speed of delivery**

The lecturers voiced their concerns about each other's accents. Some lecturers mentioned that the Indian lecturers employed in the department have a different English accent and pronunciation, which makes it very difficult to follow them. Even the lecturers themselves cannot sometimes understand their Indian fellow colleagues:

Students have always pointed out to me that they have problems with the Indian lecturers because they use mainly English in their explanations and because their accent is not clear and is incomprehensible. Honestly, most of the time we lecturers cannot understand our Indian colleagues because of their accent, so how can the students? This obviously leads to some misunderstanding between the student and the lecturer, particularly if the latter does not speak Arabic. (L13 Idrees)

This concern is also extended to other professors who do not speak English with a clear accent:

There are problems with accent, which are as follows: first, because English is not the mother tongue of the Libyan teachers, so they sometimes pronounce the words in a confusing way, which is not clear to the students. Second, the foreign teaching staff come from different backgrounds where English is not the mother tongue. For instance, we have Egyptians, Sudanese and Indians whose accents differ from one another. Even the Libyan lecturers do not have the same accent. Therefore, the accent can be an obstacle for both the student and the lecturers, and the exposure of the former to the different accents constitutes a problem for him. (L14 Hassan)

In addition, it is not a matter of accent, but also speed. Lecturers said that students sometimes ask them to slow down their speech so as to be able to understand them:

The problem we have, when we teach, is regarding the speed of our speech. So that usually students ask and we always try to slow down our speech to a very slow speed. (L22 Refat)

### **5.7.2 Lecturer efficiency**

Similarly, one lecturer highlighted that some lecturers do not speak English well. They have not properly mastered English skills:

My English is not as fluent as it should be. These are personal things I am talking to you about. I am not linguistically equipped to give an entire lecture in English. (L13 Idrees)

This lack of mastery of English skills causes them not to communicate well with the students when using English and hence there is a lack of proper transfer of the information.

The lecturer should master his subject; otherwise what is the benefit from having a good relationship with the students if he is not competent in his subject? ... He could be a professor in his field but he cannot transmit the ideas properly, so the most important thing is that he should be able to convey scientific facts. (L23 Taher)

### 5.7.3 Lecturer behaviour

Some other lecturers mentioned that some behaviour on the part of the lecturers themselves has a role in the students not performing well and does not encourage them to study. Some of the lecturers are so flexible and lenient:

The first lecture, when I start, I introduce myself, telling them that... if there is any sound from you, I will send you out and sometimes I do that also... I leave the door open so they can go any time, they can come any time. (L16 Ibrahim)

Some of them do manage their lecture properly; they make their lectures interesting and engaging for the students:

I believe that the lecturer should be an actor. I mean that he should be moving round in the classroom and capture the students' attention while explaining things, rather than sitting on the chair all the time, because I noticed that the student does not like lecturers who sit all the time. He should use different props to capture the students' attention. (L23 Taher)

On a very different note, some other lecturers ascribed some of the problems they face while teaching medicine in English to political reasons, discussed in the following section.

## 5.8 Political influences

### 5.8.1 English cancellation

Due to Libyan foreign policy, some decisions relating to English were made. English courses were cancelled:

The students' English is poor due to the cancellation of English; political factors had a negative impact on English learning in Libya because the language was omitted from education for a long time, and the impact of that action is still being felt. All the students and teachers were forbidden to use English; it was a disaster. (L9 Rajab)

These decisions were termed as historical events having a negative impact on the students' level of English skills:

Regarding challenges that we face when we teach medicine in English, to be clear and honest with you (we are scientists and not politicians), and to tell you the naked truth, I have noticed that the Libyan student's English is poor due to historical events. For example, in the past, English was not taught in schools for well-known political reasons. (L23 Taher)

### 5.8.2 Engagement with political situations

Another different but related problem is that lecturers are engaged with political situations and security, a situation, which does not give them time to sit down and discuss how English courses should be activated and taken:

Due to the security situation and other circumstances we cannot find an opportune moment for people to sit and discuss the topic or organise workshops, conferences and meetings, because the security situation is worrying. (L23 Taher)

The lecturers stated that they are forced to be totally preoccupied with the issue of general security at the university, which is poor:

Now what happen is, after the revaluation, the percentage of students passing actually increases . . . the percentage failing is lower . . . . So there is something that I do not know, there is unknown pressure from outside. Maybe the parents

may come; they may threaten lecturers. So lecturers, just to avoid controversy, they just pass the students. (Salem L12)

Honestly, there was security until the last six months, especially here in Sebha, and then the situation worsened and there is more theft and snatching. I have been robbed before; they took some money and they let me go. (L17 Ismail)

Now the situation is not good; it is not safe; many of our colleagues and other staff working in other faculties and other departments have suffered from kidnaps and robberies. We have faced several problems, and here local transport is very difficult. Before we could go normally, we could go in any taxis, but now we cannot go in an unknown taxi; we take a known taxi. If we went with an unknown taxi, maybe an incident would happen to many people, especially foreigners, so this situation very difficult. (L21 Sallah)

### **5.8.3 Foreign staff drain**

A further problem caused by the concerning security situation is that foreigners like Indians have become discouraged and wish to leave the country:

Now, yes, I am thinking [about it], but before it was not like that. Before I very much liked working here, but now, due to the conditions, I am thinking security is a problem. Tomorrow I will go to India; if the conditions are good I will come back to Libya ... now I feel very bad and [there is] pain in my heart... So, due to the conditions I now have to think about my life and my family. (L15 Naima)

Initially when we came, there were no problems... now again, the problems are there and we are planning to go back now because of the situation with the security issue. So once the security situation improves I will not mind coming back here. (L11 Massoud)

### **5.8.4 Lack of cooperation**

Another group of lecturers maintained that the lack of cooperation between university faculties and schools made it difficult for them to be exposed to other faculties' experiences. No cooperation is available for the staff:

I wish that there were a system of cooperation between faculties, which would facilitate the contact with others in the same field, the exchange of teaching staff, students, experiences, equipment and research papers. (L14 Hassan)

The students will improve more if there is some sort of cooperation and link with other foreign universities; this would mean their staff could come as external examiners, could give lectures or organise conferences in different subjects. There are also video conferences that can be organised with universities in other countries. Really, there are many things that the university can do, but of course the country's actual situation is the problem. (L23 Taher)

In addition, many lecturers stated that these political situations and problems facing Libya had a negative impact on the general ability of the university to buy new tools and maintain its laboratories:

We still have problems like maintenance and the development of laboratories. These problems are caused by the security situation in the country, which makes impossible for us to hire a maintenance company or import the spare parts to repair broken equipment. This leads to the students missing the opportunity of receiving good teaching and acquiring good expertise. (L20 Moosa)

## **5.9 Other problems**

### **5.9.1 Students' lack of awareness**

One lecturer indicated that although there is some equipment available, such equipment can be broken because of students' lack of awareness. This lack of awareness complicates matters for the lecturers:

Here in Libya, university is free, so the student is not aware of the cost of the equipment. Hence, he does not take any precautions to protect the equipment or look after it; that is why we have a lot of broken apparatus. We have this problem; students use the equipment in a careless way because they do not know that it is very expensive. (L20 Moosa)

### **5.9.2 Financial difficulties**



Other lecturers stated that the students' level in medicine is affected by the lack of ability to buy the necessary books on the part of the students. Not all students are wealthy, which means that some students are not well equipped with the needed materials:

The student faces new problems, such as looking for his own place and financial difficulties because there are those who come from faraway places and do not have enough funds to finance their studies' daily life. (L14 Hassan)

Normally all the students buy their own books and always they have their own books, and medical books are very expensive for them. (L16 Ibrahim)

### 5.9.3 The adopted criteria followed in selecting medicine students

Many lecturers stated that some students ought not to study medicine because they are not qualified enough. However, these students were elected because of the university system adhered to right now:

There are those who do not have a choice because the educational system in the past was limiting people's choice regarding medicine. I mean that once a student in secondary school chose to join the medical secondary school, he had inevitably to enrol in medicine at the university. (L14 Hassan)

Concerning Medicine they should make the grades higher for entrance (acceptance in) to the faculty of medicine. Because the faculty accepts many students whose grades are below the grades required for medicine. The study of medicine requires a certain level of education and effort. (L18 Hamed)

### 5.10 Conclusion

Although using English might lead to some problems for the students regarding performing well, all lecturers articulated that using English is very important for the students in order to succeed in their subsequent life in medicine:

Because medicine all over the world uses English and the Libyan medical system is based on English; therefore, medical studies are part of the health system as a whole. In other words, the medical terms used in hospitals are in English, the prescriptions and reports and all other things are written in English. So those who established this system a long time ago were English,

or the Libyans were assisted by the English (English school) in the beginning of the establishment of this system. Therefore, it has lasted because there is no one who dared to substitute it with Arabic, who has written medical books in Arabic, supplied medical reference books in Arabic, or changed the health system into Arabic. All of these things depend on each other. (L14 Hassan)

When we try to talk to our colleagues, we try to put across the importance of the language, especially when it is English. If they are only in this country – yes! Students can manage, but if they want to go abroad, it is not the same thing. ... So, English is very important for them. (L22 Refat)

I believe that this point is important. The students should be taught English not only in the first year but also in all of the years, and the person who teaches it should be specialised in scientific English and not in general English. He should have at least a master's degree in scientific English and a few years' teaching experience, which will help a lot in this domain. (L23 Taher)

## **6 Chapter six: Stage two: Exploring the teaching of medicine in English – data presentation and analysis part 2:**

### **6.1 The challenges medical students face when studying medicine in English (from the students' perspective)**

Having explored the challenges the medical students encounter when studying medicine in English from the viewpoint of the lecturers, let us now explore such challenges from the students' perspective. This exploration is of paramount importance for the purposes of the current research. That is because it unfolds the nature of the problems and challenges facing the students and how they tackle them. If using English as a teaching medium in Libya is a problem, we need to understand it from the perspectives of all parties involved, including the lecturers and the students themselves. Additionally, the students' views provide us with a unique insight in respect of whether using English is the primary problem or whether the methods adopted by the faculty staff are the primary problem, or a mixture of both. As shown in the previous chapter, the lecturers indicated that the weak academic level of some students is not only ascribed to their weakness in English but also to some meta-language issues, including the lack of the necessary labs and so on. In this section, I will shed light on the students' perceptions of using English as a language for modules, instructions and communication.

After interviewing the students and analysing their replies, it is clear that the challenges they encounter due to the use of English in their study fall into several subcategories, including their level of English, the staff, and the school facilities. In what follows, I explain each problem supported by the relevant students' replies. All of these interviews were carried out in Arabic and then translated into English.

### **6.2 School-related problems**

Many students indicated that one of the problems they face in relation to the use of the English language during their study of medicine at the university is their poor standard of English. They said that they lack many language fundamentals that are important for their

progress on the programme. The students ascribe their weakness in English to a constellation of factors, which I explain below.

### **6.2.1 Learning English at a later stage of their education**

The students made it clear that their weakness in English can basically be attributed to the fact that lessons begin quite late in their school career. English is a required course that all students must take and successfully pass in year seven (when students are approximately 13 years of age), meaning that the students miss the chance to learn/acquire the language at an earlier age. This concern is voiced by several students:

The teaching of English starts at year seven. This is a mistake because it is supposed to start in the first year in primary school or in the nursery. At this stage, the pupil at least will be acquainted with the letters and the names of animals and fruit. I mean, things like these will motivate and make him/her love the learning of the language. They will prepare him for its study, unlike us who did not learn English properly in the first years of our schooling. So, we had a kind of frustration when we encountered the academic language in the university and we were shocked. (FOC2 ST5)

Other students state that this situation was made worse by the fact that their English teachers were only interested in the students with high academic performance without paying attention to the students with low performance or achievement. For example, some students tried to pass even though the teacher was not interested in them, Consider the following reply:

I started learning English in year seven and I had the same teacher for the following three years. He was only interested in the clever students. I mean that the other students made great efforts to pass. (FOC2 ST1)

### **6.2.2 Experience in learning English**

In addition to the fact, the English is only taught in schools during the later years, other students indicated that the English they received at school was too simple, and therefore not adequate for them when studying in their higher education. Consider the following replies:

I have studied general English in the primary and secondary schools. However, this English was too simplified, thus I do not have any benefit from it. (ST21 Manal)

This was a problem because my English before I studied medicine was not adequate; I studied English to a rudimentary level in primary and secondary schools, which did not qualify a student to pursue his university studies with English as a medium of teaching. The teachers taught us how to pass the exam and not how to learn English. (ST13 Tofuk)

The English courses in primary and secondary schools were delivered as a normal course without care or emphasis. I mean there is no any sort of consideration on English language. (ST18 Faisal)

When comparing school English with university English, it becomes clear that the former is not a bridge to the latter but rather a simplified form of skills and vocabularies, which are not enough for the students to comply with the needs of their university requirements.

A related point is that the students claimed that English teachers and the school administration did not pay much attention to English, displaying a lack of motivation and commitment. This resulted in the students finding it difficult to benefit from the courses that were available at their primary school.

We used to study English as we would any other subject. The school administration and the teachers were not really interested in it and you did not find anybody who could make you love the subject. So, teaching was traditional and without any noticeable benefits. (ST16 Najeeb)

The first time when we started learning English in primary schools, we memorised what the teachers gave us without having the possibility of adding any material to it. Most of the time they did not give us the opportunity to talk in English and if a student tried to say something in English, they told him/her to be quiet. I mean, we only listened – we could not participate. (ST17 Basher)

Some other students stated that their schools did not even deliver English courses, as I discuss below.

### 6.2.3 Lack of English courses

Other students described that they had no preparation in English whatsoever. They did not receive any English courses at school, the pre-university stage. Consider the following replies:

I mean, it was really bad because we did not take any courses in English before we joined the faculty. (FOC 2 ST1)

They do not teach us English in the university. I had not had any courses in English before I joined the university. (FOC2 ST3)

These two replies might at face value run contrary to the above replies which stated that there are some English courses in schools. However, it must be emphasised that some schools in Libya do not deliver any English courses, violating the national strategy that English should be taught, and hence resulting in the possibility that some students enter the university without any English preparation.

#### **6.2.4 English teachers at primary and secondary schools**

Other students indicated that the core problem behind their weakness in English was caused by the poor quality of teaching at school. The students emphasised that some teachers were not competent to teach the students the basic English skills. Consider the following replies:

In secondary school, my understanding was not like it is now, because back then there were no competent English teachers who could teach you the kind of English that will benefit you at university. The teaching we received was very simple and there was no emphasis on important things. (ST20 Anwar)

The problem is that the teachers who taught us English in preparatory and secondary schools were not competent. I have suffered a lot because of this. The teacher would have the paper in her hand and would spell the words and hardly be able to pronounce them. It was difficult to learn English properly from such a teacher. (FOC 3 ST3)

On the basis on these replies, it is clear that some teachers' level of English skills is very poor, impinging upon the students' level of attainment in the language.

In a related vein, some students indicate that there are not enough English teachers, and some schools do not have any English teachers, so English is not taught at all. Consider the following replies:

In secondary school, we did not study English until the third year because there were no teachers. The main cause was the school administration and the person responsible for education in the region. And even if they provided us with a teacher, he was without competence. So, the shortage of English teachers in our region was acute and this caused us difficulties. (ST17 Basher)

#### 6.2.5 No private English courses before university

The students also indicated that there were no private English centres available for them to take English courses privately. This results in the fact that the students have to rely on themselves to enhance their English skills. Additionally, it was difficult for the students to travel abroad to have private courses.

I did not take any course to strengthen my English before I entered the university. (ST18 Faisal)

I could not join a course in English in order to improve my language skills and be able to pursue my studies in the university. I joined the university directly after my A levels. Therefore, as I told you, I had to face many difficulties. (ST13 Tofuk)

I have never taken a course in order to improve my English. I have relied on myself from the start. In truth, I had the desire to take an English course but here in Sebha, there are not any and I cannot afford to go abroad at my own expense. (FOC3 ST2)

In view of this, the students admit that their English skills are very weak, although they can hardly be blamed for this, under the circumstances. The school system plays a major role in this situation. As a result, it is not surprising that they had problems at the university pertaining to their language skill level.

In the next section, I explore the problems the students face when entering the university.

### 6.3 Learning support

The students raised a set of problems pertaining to the university itself. In this section, I shed light on these problems, highlighting what the students described.

### 6.3.1 Perceptions on arrival at the university

First of all, it must be clearly stated that the students were convinced that using English is crucial for their study, experience, and future career:

Learning of English will help us in our work in hospitals, dealing easily with foreign patients, attending scientific conferences, and acquainting ourselves with the latest medical lectures and conferences on the internet. (ST17 Basher)

The students believe it is essential that they learn English. Having only a low level of English threatens their future careers, and they describe their concerns about the difficulties they may face in the future.

To tell you the truth, we still want big support and urgent solutions in order for the level of students' English to improve. English is very important in the life of a medical student in particular, more so than for students from other faculties. This is because the student will need it and will use it when practising medicine, more than his mother tongue. (FOC3 ST4)

To develop my language, I have to do a course in English. Maybe now English is not very important. But its importance will be clear in the future or after graduating because the student whose English is not good won't be able to practise Medicine in the future and will also face this problem when he wants to do his or her postgraduate studies abroad. (ST17 Basher)

The students also emphasised the fact that they did not receive enough preparation from the university to make them ready to deal with medical requirements in the English language. The extent of the challenges they faced is evident in their accounts:

When I first commenced my study in medicine, I found out that all materials are taught in English. For this reason, I experienced many problems in my premedical year at the university, when I used to spend six to seven hours to read just one sheet because of translation. (ST19 Hatem)



The first time I entered university, I found great difficulty. I mean, the first time I saw the sheets and they were all in English, I thought to myself that was it and that I would never progress from here. I mean, there is real difficulty. When I saw the introduction in the sheet, and it was written in simple English, I did not understand it and I translated it. I mean, the difficulty was so great that I cannot describe it to you. (ST17 Basher)

English is used in everything the medical students meet in their university life. As indicated above, the students' level of English is very weak, given that they did not receive adequate English preparation at school, making them vulnerable to problems related to the use of English at the university. Many of them expressed dismay when they recognised the extent of the challenges they faced when beginning to study medicine in English.

### 6.3.2 English courses offered by the university

In this regard, the students hoped and anticipated that the university would be the source of better preparation in English skills, which was contrary to the reality they witnessed and lived at the university. The university gave them no help in this regard, rendering them desperate and not able to comply with the requirement to use English in their courses.

The university has not given us any kind of help with our English. We have asked them many times but in vain. We need these kinds of courses to help us understand the lectures. (ST20 Anwar)

The university did not deliver any extra English courses for students. Indeed, it would be very good if the university delivers such courses bearing in mind that my English is totally restricted to the medical terms. (ST21 Manal)

There should be a regulation requiring us to only speak English from the premedical year and asking the professors to speak with us only in English. As a result, we will be used to speaking English. We are accustomed to speaking Arabic because they themselves speak with us in Arabic. I believe that this problem will be serious for me after graduation, especially if I met a foreign professor who does not speak Arabic. In general, I will face several problems in the future if I do not continue to improve my English. (ST18 Faisal)

As is clearly indicated in the above two replies, the students expected the university to provide them with the opportunity to learn/acquire English, given that the university adopts English in their studies. However, the students were surprised that no English courses are delivered, making them face the situation on their own and, as a result, imposing great pressure on them. Consider the following reply, whereby the student accepts the idea that he is exclusively responsible for teaching himself English.

Language learning depends largely on the student's personal efforts, so we cannot only blame the teachers. In order to learn the language properly, we need to have conversations in English in the class and the teacher should not speak Arabic. (FOC2 ST4)

We rely more on ourselves in revising than on the lectures and we listen to the audio-recordings made by the students from the University of Tripoli and Egyptian universities; I mean, the students do not depend only on the university. (FOC2 ST2)

I deal with these difficulties in increasing the number of study hours, as I do not understand quickly. It takes always much effort and time when revising lessons in English. For instance, if I need one hour to work out some lessons in Arabic, it takes me two hours or even more to do the same job in English because I need to focus more to understand. (ST18 Faisal)

With a low level of English, the students become convinced that using Arabic is essential to their growing understanding of medicine. This is because they can understand the subject matter more clearly, without striving too much to determine the gist of the topic under discussion. Consider the following replies:

Studying and talking in Arabic definitely has an impact on the student, especially if he wanted to do his postgraduate studies, then he will have problems with English. The problem is not only during the studying period but also when you deal with a foreign lecturer. I mean, it is harder to make your point clear to a foreign lecturer than to a Libyan one. (FOC2 ST1)

Speaking in Arabic affects our studies and this effect becomes clear when the lecturer uses the English language only. This forces us to learn more and makes us say all the words in English. But, when the doctor uses Arabic, the student does not think – I mean, when he asks a question, you understand him straightaway and do not have to concentrate on the English language when it

comes to questions. So, when Arabic becomes part of English lessons the student will not get any benefit from it. (ST17 Basher)

Understandably, the students' desire to use Arabic is related to their weakness in English. The students are plagued with their weak level of English, expressing their wish for their professors to use Arabic in lieu of English, with which they are struggling. In the next section, I will capitalise on the students' replies regarding which aspects of English they acknowledge they are struggling with.

#### **6.4 English language and its difficulties**

The students spoke at length and in some detail about the aspects of English they are weak at. Generally speaking, the students mentioned that they are weak in all English skills. Generally, they do not believe that their performance is very good or even at the minimum level required.

When I first joined the university, I found that the study was in English. My English was so poor that I had a problem with the language; many times, I thought of leaving the course because of the language difficulty. I mean, my English was not good enough to cope with the English used in teaching medicine. Therefore, I thought of leaving the course and wondered why someone would put himself in an invidious situation. (ST12 Jalal)

The problems they describe relate to all aspects of English, including reading and grammar:

The staff sometimes ask us to read big references published by Oxford University. The language in such books is very difficult because people who author such books have high experience of using a sophisticated language with a high academic register. Thus, I face serious problems when reading such books because I do not have a strong command of English, given that I was not well in my high school. Our English in high schools was not advanced enough to study medicine. (ST18 Faisal)

Up to now, my English is not perfect. I learn the rules of the language to a certain extent but I find it more difficult to speak in English. (FOC3 ST5)

In what follows, I raise more specific problems that the students encounter. I begin with speaking-related problems.

#### 6.4.1 **Speaking-related problems**

Almost all of the students indicated that they face big problems in speaking English, articulating what they know or would like to know in respect of medicine. This reduces and impinges on the extent of communication between them and their professors.

The difficulty in speaking English fluently affects me badly because I am in my last years in medicine and my English is not up to the level it should be. (ST12 Jalal)

I am not satisfied with my level because I do not speak English fluently although it is supposed that I speak English fluently and properly, given that English is nowadays the lingua franca and I wish to speak English fluently. In addition, this makes me feel frustrated because I am a medicine student spending many years in studying English up until now but I still do not speak fluently. Another problem I am frustrated with is that I cannot comply with the requirements of speaking English fluently once I graduate and want to round off my post-graduate study abroad. (ST18 Faisal)

Their problems in speaking English fluently result in the students becoming frustrated and embarrassed by their level of English. The students studying medicine believe that their level should be many times better. These medical students believe that their level of English should be many times better than it is, to help them with their studies and future careers.

#### 6.4.2 **Spelling mistakes**

The second problem the students raised pertaining to the problems they face while learning English is spelling. They highlighted that they have considerable problems when trying to write English words correctly. Some words for them are similar in terms of pronunciation but their spelling is different:

I make spelling mistakes when I write in English because English terminology is intricate and the words are very similar and a bit difficult. There is also, of course, the difficulty of coming across new words. (ST20 Anwar)

I make some spelling mistakes. For example, if you tell me to write about something specific, definitely I will make spelling mistakes.... Imagine if you write a report or a prescription and you make spelling mistakes. These mistakes affect the report and the prescription you have written. Hence, it is necessary to write correctly and without mistakes. (ST16 Najeeb)

Yes, I make some spelling mistakes while writing but not that many. (ST11 Ayman)

As indicated in the previous section, the lecturers struggle greatly with spelling mistakes made by the students. As implied by Najeeb above, a spelling mistake on a prescription could constitute a dangerous error, not simply a mistake. Of course, many medical terms are complex, long, and easily confused one with another. This makes learning to spell correctly a major challenge. Consider the following reply:

We make mistakes in writing because of our broken English. Most of the spelling mistakes were made when writing medical terms because they need memorising and continuous revision. (ST14 Samee)

Lecturers respond to spelling mistakes in a variety of ways, as described below:

Some doctors pay close attention to spelling mistakes and in this case it affects the grades that we get in the exam. For example, sometimes the student's answer in the exam is correct but, because there are some spelling mistakes, the doctor counts the answer as wrong. (FOC3 ST2)

The doctor is sometimes lenient and does not mark you down, but not all the time. I say if doctors marked us down for every spelling mistake we made, few students would pass the exam because most students suffer from this problem. (FOC3 ST1)

Evidently, the fact that students make spelling mistakes in their work and the fact that lecturers notice these and mark down the work accordingly, can play a significant role in reducing a student's marks and thus affect their progress'.

### 6.4.3 Pronunciation problems

The students also described what they call ‘pronunciation problems’. The students recognise that they do not always pronounce words correctly. They find it an arduous task to articulate the English words, given their weak level of English and lack of appropriate practice. Some students have never been exposed to the language in real situations, making learning it and its pronunciation a challenging task. In addition, some lecturers do not pronounce all the terms correctly. Consider the following reply:

The student cannot read properly or misheard the words. He does not know how to pronounce the words correctly because he failed to hear them correctly and he cannot put a sentence together. If the lecturer pronounces the words correctly, the students would not need to look for them in a dictionary or the textbook. He will write them spontaneously in the lectures and, when he goes home, he will only learn them. But to work that way is not feasible because the lecturer’s pronunciation is something and the word is something else. (ST14 Samee)

### 6.4.4 Problems in listening and understanding

Another problem raised by the students was their inability to understand the lecturers appropriately. Much of what the lecturers say is missed by the students whose listening skills are insufficient to capture everything that is said.

The difficulties we face are mainly related to understanding and the manner of understanding lessons, because there are some lecturers whose English is poor and this makes it hard for them to communicate ideas in the right way and has a negative impact on us as students. We face these difficulties from local and foreign lecturers. But this problem is prevalent with Indian lecturers because we cannot understand their accent and it intensifies when the whole lecture is given in English. (ST11 Ayman)

Most of the time, I blame myself for not understanding a sentence or something. I say to myself that my level should be better than it is. (FOC3 ST2)

Clearly, the inability of the students to fully understand their lecturers impinges on their progress and, once again, the following student mentions the crucial role Arabic plays in his understanding:

I cannot understand the whole lecture in English. I mean, I can understand some of it, but most of the words in general and the important ones in particular are difficult for me to understand. I sometimes understand the first part of the lecture but, if the lecture continues in English, I cannot grasp the whole lecture. For example, if the lecturer is an Indian professor without command of Arabic, I struggle to understand his/her lecture. (ST18 Faisal)

Listening is a very important skill for the students to develop in order to capture the main gist of the lecture, otherwise they cannot be expected to perform well.

#### **6.4.5 Translation problems and using a dictionary**

Another problem highlighted by the students is translation. Given that English is not their first language and the course is delivered in English, they are obliged to translate the required materials so they can understand the main details of the lectures. This translation task is laborious and demands huge efforts from the students. To translate medical terms and the new words that they encounter, the students turn to the dictionary, which takes a considerable amount of time and is also regarded as a boring task – as described below:

It took me three weeks to finish a chapter which is supposed to take only one week, because I needed to translate the terms. It takes a student a long time to get used to these terms, so I translated the most basic ones. (FOC2 ST5)

One of the difficulties is translation because the programme is loaded with English terms and many things need translating, especially medical terminology. It takes a long time to do. (FOC3 ST2)

When I first used the dictionary for translation, I was shocked by the plethora of words I found when I was looking for one word. That is what made me like the syllabus. (FOC2 ST2)

#### **6.4.6 Language as a barrier to progress**

Given what they described, it is not surprising that some students questioned the use of English as the language dedicated to learning medicine. In order to cope with the requirements of medical training and at the same time struggling with English, the students need to expend a great deal of time, effort and toil in order to succeed in their studies. Some described struggling with the demands and bearing a huge burden in relation to studying medicine in English.

The use of English as teaching medium is an obstacle for me. Why? Because, as you see, our English here is poor, so, obviously, it is going to be an obstacle. I mean, it will hinder the student's progress in his studies because instead of spending time on his studies he wastes it struggling with language. I am telling you, my problem up to now is with the English language. I am in the fourth year and I am still struggling with language. (ST12 Jalal)

Studying medicine in English represents a big obstacle that students face. Students who can afford to take English courses before starting medical studies do so. Medicine in itself is a difficult field and it is even more so when studied in another language. (ST17 Basher)

On the other hand, some students think that using English is not only essential but provides another motivation to do well:

On the contrary, if the student has the desire to learn English, this will be an added incentive, given that studies are in English. And also it will provide an opportunity for him to learn more. (FOC3 ST3)

#### **6.4.7 Using Arabic**

It is not surprising, in the context, that many students indicated that Arabic is essential to their studies, given the problems they face with the use of English. Consider the following reply:

Let us be realist, teaching medicine in English is more difficult than in Arabic and the proof is that lecturers give lectures in a mixture of English and Arabic. If it was easier in Arabic, then why do we talk to the lecturers in Arabic and when they explain things to us completely in English we do not understand everything? This shows that English is an obstacle for the students. (FOC2 ST2)



Additionally, the students describe how they use Arabic because they do not receive sufficient support from the lecturers to use English, many of whom also struggle with elements of the English language, or communicating with each other in the English language, because of students' difficulties.

We speak Arabic in the class and all the time and lecturers do not tell us to speak English in the university. (ST11 Ayman)

We speak Arabic at all times inside classrooms. I mean, even when we read something – for example, one sheet – in English we use Arabic in explaining this sheet. (ST21 Manal)

When the lecturer used English the whole lesson, there were things that we did not understand but when there is a mixture of English and Arabic, I feel that I learn something and understand most of the lecture. I really understand that much more, but when the lecture is given purely in English I miss many things. Frankly, we prefer the explanations in Arabic. (ST13 Tofuk)

Explaining is often done in Arabic and English at the same time, which makes the lecture easier to understand. (FOC3 ST2)

At the same time, other students described how they attempt to practise English and use it in their studies as much as possible, irrespective of whether they are encouraged by their lecturers or not:

In my opinion, the study of medicine in English is good because it could be beneficial to the student in the future if they want to pursue their studies abroad. Therefore, I ask this university and all the faculties of medicine in Libya to provide English courses for the students in order to improve their English language. (ST13 Tofuk)

This being the case, one might wonder whether other students practise English, the matter I highlight in the following subsection:

#### **6.4.8 Using English in daily life**

Generally then, the students stated that the university does not provide them with any suitable environment where they can practise English. As previously mentioned, they rely

on themselves to enhance their English. They also described how infrequent the opportunities were for talking or using English outside the university:

I rely mostly on myself when it comes to revising because, when I tried group revision, I noticed that the different student levels affected me. I mean, when the level of the students is a lot lower than yours, even in language, revising in a group becomes difficult. I found myself sometimes explaining to the group and benefiting them, without receiving anything in exchange. (FOC3 ST3)

We do not use English outside university at all. We do not even speak English at university, let alone outside it. (FOC3 ST4)

The same notion is emphasised by other students: that it is impossible to practise English outside the university campus.

Society and the environment we live in is another reason why students do not have the desire to learn English. For example, when people hear somebody speak in English, they are surprised as if he was a strange personality. They mock you, do not take you seriously and say that you are 'philosophising'. This makes you have less desire to develop your English. (FOC3 ST2)

The problem is that people in the social circle do not excuse you for making unintentional mistakes or having a slip of the tongue. I mean, if you say a word in English they instantly change and their faces tell you that, 'You intended to say those words while you know that we do not know their meanings'. (FOC2 ST4)

You feel like a stranger in this society when you speak English outside the university. (FOC2 ST4)

Yes, people actually make you feel as if you are presumptuous or arrogant when you speak to them in the medical jargon. (FOC2 ST4)

Other students do not practise English or attempt to do so because they do not have enough words to enter into any activity aiming to enhance students' skills:

I do not have enough vocabulary to be able to talk about every topic. And also, as I have told you, we practise English neither at university nor on the street. And, if the situation remains as it is, the student's level in English will fall to its lowest and even the level of the student whose English is good will

be lower than that of the 'normal student' because of a lack of daily practice.  
(ST20 Anwar)

Pertinently, other students indicated that they do not practise English because there are no real opportunities to speak English, either inside or outside the university:

I have never had any opportunities to talk in English, either inside or outside the university. I only listen to English in the lectures, and after that I go home and do not practise it. (ST12 Jalal)

All of these factors are involved in discouraging the students from practising English in real-life situations:

#### 6.4.9 Impact of poor English

As a result, the students are discouraged because of their poor English skills. This low level of English impinged on them to a great degree. Some impact is psychological in that the students are less confident in themselves. Consider the following replies:

Yes, there is a psychological impact, which is apparent in the student's pronouncement that he does not know how to transmit certain information in English. Therefore, he says he does not want to speak in English. This shows that he is in a bad psychological state. (ST15 Maher)

Yes, sometimes I feel very frustrated due to my inability to speak English fluently and get the information across in the right way. (FOC3 ST5)

English is envisioned as an obstacle forcing the students to develop themselves:

There is an impact at the moment you could not express yourself or convey your ideas due to your poor English, although you know a lot about the topic. This is the impact and the obstacle is the language. (FOC2 ST2)

The students, for revision, rely on sheets that are given to them by the doctors and do not rely on references a lot. The student says to himself that he does not want to bother looking for books because it takes a long time and his English is too weak to understand these books because they are written in a high-level English. (ST17 Basher)

Elements of the stress that students experience are evident when they talk about a sense of losing motivation and confidence. These things then have unfortunate ‘knock-on’ effects.

The difficulty to speak in English fluently has a big effect on my personal motivation. And, as a result of that, I have started to think about taking an English course to develop my language. (ST17 Basher)

The difficulty to speak English fluently negatively affects my personal motivation.... And also this affects the student's studies because it creates in him an inferiority complex because he has not got the ability to convey the information to the doctor appropriately. So, the student becomes hesitant about asking the doctor questions, which makes his understanding of the subject decrease. (ST20 Anwar)

This frustration is most acute amongst students who are about to finish their studies. They are discouraged that they cannot speak English properly, and this makes them think that both their skills and their capabilities as professional doctors are lacking:

The problem for me now – and I am on the verge of graduating – is that I cannot speak English fluently. This has an effect even on my personal motivation towards learning. Sometimes, I would like to say some specific things but I could not find the proper words to express them. (ST13 Tofuk)

In conclusion, the students are discouraged and frustrated about their low skills in English, which they think is important for both their current study and their future career. Their low level is ascribable to the insufficient preparation they received at school and their lack of practice inside the university. Furthermore, the students are not encouraged by their lecturers, so that their level of English turns out to be low and weak, compared to the required level. This weak level of English means that some students decide not to attend lectures and instead they try to study everything they need from home:

Because three quarters of the students do not attend the lectures due to the weakness of their English, they are obliged to study and revise on their own for long hours at home or in the students’ accommodation they live in. It is because the student considers attending just a waste of time if he does not benefit from it. So, he tells himself that revising at home is better than going to university because all the lectures are available on sheets. (ST16 Najeeb)

The students do not oftentimes attend the lectures; they prefer studying at home, memorising the sheets. It sometimes happens that students who do not attend the lectures regularly get better grades in the written examinations than those who are committed to attending all classes. (ST18 Faisal)

In the next section, I will focus on the university's responsibility to enhance the students' English level as far as the students perceive it.

### **6.5 The university's responsibility**

According to the students, it is clear that they feel that the university is letting them down in various ways. Consider the following response:

The university has become worse than before. The university is more interested in getting rid of the students rather than their success or learning. For the university, they just want to get the student in and [they think,] 'after a while he will get fed up and leave of his own accord, rather than troubling us'. (ST14 Samee)

In what follows, I shed light on the problems the students face because of the university system and the way it deals with them.

#### **6.5.1 Administration problem**

The first problem raised by the students concerning the role of the university is related to their assumption that the university administration is not responsive to their needs in making available the required number of lecturers.

The administration is nil; we do not have a serious administration that we can complain to. It does not hold doctors to account and does not put pressure on them to do their job properly. It has become normal for us to go to university in the morning and not be able to have the lecture. Like today, we had a lecture scheduled for 8am; we did not have it until after 9.30am. Sometimes, we spend the whole day waiting for the doctor to come and give us a lecture. (ST17 Basher)

Additionally, the students indicated that, when the university recruits a lecturer, it does not care whether this lecturer's command of English is good or not. The students indicated

some lecturers' level of English is very bad, which also affects the students' command of English:

The problem is the university does not help you or recruit a lecturer whose English is good and [who] understands the student well. The university makes the problem worse by employing lecturers whose English is poor and those are the majority. (ST14 Samee)

### 6.5.2 Organisation problem

In a related vein, the students indicated that they suffer from mis-organisation, which negatively affects their preparation and performance. Consider the following responses:

We are suffering a lot because there is no organisation, as we mentioned before. They come up with different yearly timetables in one day. And also, the examination timetable changes, and sometimes you revise and go for the exam and find that it's been cancelled. (FOC3 ST2)

As far as organisation is concerned, honestly, there is not any at this faculty. Yes, organisation here is haphazard. Yes, even the academic timetable and the lectures are not in harmony with each other. A doctor may come to give us a lecture who is different from the one who was scheduled to give it, without prior notice to us being informed about that. So, we are not prepared for the lecture. (FOC3 ST3)

That is right, we are not prepared, and sometimes the student does not come because no lectures are scheduled for that day. But you come the next day and you are shocked to learn that there was a lecture the previous day. Yes, we are still suffering from the organisation problem. It is a very big problem and it has caused us to waste a few years in our medical studies. (FOC3 ST5)

Clearly, the students feel extremely dissatisfied by the university and with the way that it addresses their needs:

### 6.5.3 Students' complaints

One major problem the students reported is that the university is not responsive to their complaints and requests. Although the students voice their concerns about what is going

on, the university administration does not respond to such concerns or does not feel able to respond to them. Consider the following situation reported by the students:

Regarding the challenges of the lecturers who do not explain things in a proper way, we first complained to the dean. He told us that he could not do anything about the situation because that is all they could get. In the university, they recruit the lecturers through the internet after they have had a look at their profile. In this way, they know nothing about them until they come to the university. One of the many examples is that once they recruited a Ukrainian lecturer who was not at all adequate to be a lecturer in the university. We complained about him every day until the end of the year, and then they got rid of him. We had a similar situation with an Indian lecturer in the second year but they did not end his contract. He kept teaching and when he left he was not replaced. I mean, the university says they do not have a solution to the problem; they cannot bring in any lecturers. (FOC3 ST2)

It is clear from this example that, occasionally, the university does listen to the students and act in relation to their complaints. However, this seems to be the case only when the issue is very acute. At the same time, some students indicated that they understand that the dean of the faculty has limited opportunities for change given his/her limited resources and authority. However, what makes the situation more dispiriting for the students is the way the officials deal with them. Students reported that staff tell them that they are not welcome if they keep complaining:

If a student goes to the dean and complains to him about these things, the latter's answer is, 'If you do not like our system or cannot cope with the studies, you can drop out and leave the place'. Here in the faculty, they prefer you dropping out and leaving the faculty altogether because their resources are limited and they want only a small number of students, so they do not value the students. (FOC2 ST2)

#### **6.5.4 Examination procedures**

The university regulations make huge demands on the students and there are no mechanisms to amend them to satisfy the students' needs. Consider the following reply indicating how difficult it is for the students to deal with the demands of the university in some exams, and how one exam is administered:

In the physics module, the professor gives us some sheets before the examinations without giving the students enough time to revise or think of such sheets. In the first paper sheet there are 40 papers, while 20 papers in the second. Therefore, because of the time limit, it is difficult to answer his questions. As a result, I failed the exam. (ST19 Hatem)

The student is surprised in the exam because the questions are written in a different diction than the one the lecturer used in the lessons. So, the students say, 'We did not see this; it is different to the way we learnt it'. The lecturer flips the pages of the sheets and said, 'Learn this', and then he changes the question configuration; so the student gets confused. (ST114 Samee)

These challenges combined with the university system, which seems largely impervious to the students' needs, means that some students fail their studies and drop out of their courses:

Yes, there is a ratio of failure, mainly in the premedical and first years; half the students fail and they drop out. Most if not all the problems are caused by the English language: the student joins the university from the secondary school without having even a rudimentary knowledge of English and he is expected to study medicine in English. (ST11 Ayman)

#### **6.5.5 University's resourcing and administration**

A series of other issues in relation to the university resources and administration impacted on the students' capacity to learn. For example, the university fails to make available the references that the students need:

The university must work hard so as to provide us with the necessary references with sufficient quantity for all students. Besides, it should expand the library and increase the work hours. (ST21 Manal)

Additionally, the university has insufficient space to accommodate the number of students, which is increasing year on year:

You saw how small the faculty building is and the large numbers of students. Every year the university accepts large numbers of students without providing suitable educational climate for the students. (ST12 Jalal)



Besides, the university needs to update its education system, so it would become modernised, meeting the students' needs and being on a par with other systems at other universities:

There is another thing: we in the University of Sebha are different from other universities in Libya. In this university, they do not apply the education rules and laws. (FOC2 ST2)

Yes, they do not follow the education regulations. They apply the rules only during the correction of the exam papers. (FOC2 ST1)

The general environment of the university is also very poor. The existing services are not adequate and suffer from wear and tear:

The university capabilities are not great; they are not adequate enough to produce a successful doctor to rely on in the future. Honestly, after the revolution the university income has decreased to the extent that very few dentist chairs in the dentistry department are working and the others are out of order and they have not been repaired. (ST12 Tofuk)

Every year the university accepts large numbers of students without providing a suitable educational climate for the students. This creates some confusion in the teaching process and negatively affects the students' learning. (ST12 Jalal)

#### **6.5.6 University support**

It has already been mentioned above that the students observed that it is the responsibility of the university to make available enough well-qualified lecturers. Such lecturers must have a good command of English so that the students can benefit from them in terms of skills and practice:

The faculty administration should give more attention to the medicine students in terms of both the moral and academic support by providing specific courses to tackle students' weakness in the English language and by providing medical laboratories to help students pass their university studies. (ST18 Faisal)

It is in the university's interest that the language becomes a barrier for the student of medicine, so they can take the smallest number of students. (FOC2 ST2)

The notion that there is a shortage of staff is reiterated by almost all students:

There are not enough teaching staff, especially lately. I am a student in the fourth year and there are some subjects I have not studied yet, which I was supposed to study in the previous years. There is a shortage of teaching staff: some departments do not have heads and some subjects do not have proper lecturers and rely on visiting lecturers. (ST13 Tofuk)

There is a significant shortage of lecturers, especially during the country's situation lately. Every year their number dwindles. (ST11 Ayman)

Such staffing difficulties, of course, have knock-on effects on the students and on how they progress:

The many cancellations and the cancellation of the exams affect the students' academic year, too. I, for example, am supposed to be close to finishing my third-year studies. But, due to cancellation of lectures and exams, I have just finished second-year exams and I am waiting for the results before it is too late to go on to the third year. The reason behind this is the current situation of the country and the crisis it is going through in general. (FOC3 ST4)

Yes, there is another problem. At this university, medical studies are not continuous. There are always many cancellations due to shortage in doctors and sometimes due to the security situation. So, when the studies are not continuous, the student becomes less motivated. For example, due to cancellations, the gap between one exam and another one is nearly a month. The student wastes time without making any progress. (FOC3 ST1)

In summary, most of the students regarded their experience at university as disappointing. They reported that the university does not appear to exert any effort to develop their readiness to learn by providing the necessary services to upgrade their level of English. They also report that the shortage of staff has negative effects on them, given that some lecturers might teach courses without any experience in them.

In the next subsection, I will shed light on the students' perspectives towards individual lecturers, who no doubt are also experiencing difficulties because of the way the

university is run. However, they are also seen by the students as contributing to the problems they experience.

## **6.6 Lecturers' job and their ability to perform their role**

### **6.6.1 Lecturers' accent**

One main theme raised by the students is related to some lecturers' accents. The students mentioned that some lecturers have a difficult accent to follow given that they are not native English speakers:

There is a problem that we always face and it's Indian doctors. Their English is not clear and they speak it with an Indian accent. It is good if we understand the beginning and the end of the sentence. This is why most of the time I do not understand anything they say. But those who have here for a long time, we can learn a bit from them by using Arabic. (ST16 Najeeb)

The problems are caused by the accents. For instance, the Egyptian lecturer has a somewhat strange accent, so does the Indian. I mean, the accents confuse the student and also the Indians use a boring accent, which is not understood. So, they have a strange accent which leads to the loss of the meaning. So, when you think the spelling will be like this, it will actually be something else. (ST14 Samee)

### **6.6.2 Speaking speed**

In addition, the students voiced their concerns about some lecturers who speak English very fast, resulting in the students missing much of what has been said:

Amongst the great challenges and problems are the Indian lecturers. I mean, their accent is not good and they speak fast. I mean, I do not understand quite a lot of what they say and I miss many words. I need to concentrate a lot to understand something. Therefore, after the first half hour of concentration, I find myself exhausted and I cannot concentrate any more. Most of the time, I waste the second half of the lecture. (ST15 Maher)

There is a problem that we always face and it is Indian doctors. Their English is not clear because they speak fast and the accent is not clear. So, I am obliged

either not to be prepared for the lecture or to study and revise on my own. And most of the time, I study revise on my own. (ST16 Najeeb)

The students would like the lecturers to speak much more slowly so they can easily follow and understand them, considering the students' own level of English.

### 6.6.3 Lecturers' relationship with students and their support

The students mentioned in a related aspect that the relationship between them and some lecturers is not good, affecting the communication between them. The students indicated that the lecturers are not keen to have good relations with the students and treat them badly:

Half of the lecturers have a shaky relationship with the student; the relationship is always bad and he derides the students and is not bothered whether the student understands or not. He does not think of the student's interest at all. (ST14 Samee)

The relationship between the lecturer and the student depends on the lecturer. There are those whose dealings with the students are limited; they give lectures and leave the class without asking whether any student needs any clarification or help. There are others who deal with the students in a friendly way and always say after the lecture that, if any students need any clarification or help, they can see them in their office for that purpose. (ST11 Ayman)

This unhealthy relation between the students and some of the lecturers means there is little focused help available. Indeed, in some respects, lecturers seem to almost make the problems worse:

Sometimes, when a lecturer finds out that a student knows something about the subject, instead of encouraging him, he starts asking him difficult questions to discourage him. This means, you, student, stop talking to me and if you have an idea keep it to yourself. (FOC2 ST4)

There are some lecturers who leave the room as soon as the lecture finishes and say they are busy and have no time; we got to a point where we do not ask them anymore because we already know the answer. (ST13 Tofuk)

Some doctors do not give you the chance to interact with them. Sometimes, the student would like the doctor to explain or clarify an important point but he has not given the opportunity even to ask a question. The student then feels some kind of frustration and has less desire to interact with the doctor during the lecture. And the number of students attending such lectures decreases. (FOC3 ST1)

Additionally, the students mentioned that communication between them and their lecturers is passive; some of this poor communication stems from the students' low level of English and their lack of confidence:

When I want to ask the doctor something in English, even if it is simple, I cannot string a full sentence together and I cannot talk to the doctor in order to get the information from him. So, I really had difficulty conversing with the doctor. (ST16 Najeeb)

We at least want to acquire some fluency in conversation. For example, when we go to the hospital with Indian doctors and we want to ask them a question, we find it difficult to formulate it fluently because we lack practice in English. (ST16 Najeeb)

Clearly, this does not apply to all lecturers and there were examples where staff were obviously keen to try to address students' needs:

There was a lecturer, who joined the faculty last year, who wrote his phone number on the board and said that, 'Anyone who needs help with the syllabus can get in touch with at any time and I will help him'. (FOC2 ST5)

#### **6.6.4 The lecturers' behaviour**

Other students described the way the lecturers manage the classroom and deliver information. Some lecturers are moody, making it difficult for the students to follow them and even deal with them. Additionally, other students described how the lecturers encourage the students to memorise the material instead of encouraging them to try to understand it:

In addition, some professors are moody. It might be the case that one professor comes to the lecture while angry about something outside the university. In such cases, he delivers the lecture in a very bad manner and

without motivation. It should be stated that we are here to receive information from professors who are motivated, not moody and who are responsive to the students' needs. (ST21 Manal)

It is clear that some lecturers' accents are hard to follow and their English is 'broken', as the students put it. Additionally, the students indicated that some lecturers are not dedicated in their teaching in that they pay attention only to some aspects, rather than to the material that needs to be delivered and the students' needs. The following responses suggest a series of unhelpful practices by some lecturers inside the classroom, as reported by the students:

One lecturer is not dedicated to teaching the students; he gives the lecture and his eyes are on the phone and [he uses] it all the time to arrange appointments for his private surgeries from the moment he sets foot in the classroom. (FOC2 ST3)

We have some lecturers who keep looking at their watch during the lecture as if they want the time to run out quickly. In addition, their phones do not stop ringing, so that half of the lecture's time is wasted on answering calls regarding the arrangements of appointments in his private surgery. (FOC2 ST2)

Yes, it is normal that the lecturer leaves the class in the middle of the lecture and tells us that he has to go because he was told that he has an urgent case in his surgery. It is normal even during clinical practical. (FOC2 ST4)

These practices provide empirical evidence for the lack of adequate attention (preparation) on the part of some lecturers towards the educational process in general and the students' needs and concerns in particular. It is apparent that the students have become demotivated and frustrated by some lecturers' acts, which have negative impacts on the students and their progress on the programme. Consider the following response:

There are some professors who do not pay us any attention. They do not care whether we understand the lesson or not; once the lecture is over, they get out of it directly without giving the students any time to ask questions. These professors do not consider the individual differences between the students either, in terms of their understanding and their comprehension. (ST18 Faisal)

There are some professors who are helpful and try to provide anything the students need. On the contrary, there are unfortunately other professors who even do not like students to speak with them. For instance, such professors ask us in the exams some questions that they have never told us about during the lectures. (ST21 Manal)

#### **6.6.5 Lecturers' reaction when students use Arabic in the classroom**

As for the attitude of the lecturers towards the use of Arabic inside the classroom, the students explained that the lecturers differ in this respect: some tolerate the idea despite the fact that the class is taught in English, while others do not accept the idea that Arabic should be spoken inside the classroom. Consider the following response:

There are some professors rejecting the notion that we speak with them in Arabic during the lecture. They say, 'You should speak in English'. However, other professors do not ask us to speak English. They do not care about the language that you use with them. (ST21 Manal)

This reply indicates that there is no clear-cut strategy or consistency in practice in the department towards motivating students to speak English inside the classroom; it depends in the first place upon the lecturers themselves and their perspectives towards the point in question.

In the following section, I shed more light on students' perspectives towards the lecturers' pedagogical approach in delivering the material in the classroom.

### **6.7 Pedagogy (approach to teaching)**

The students indicated that the lecturers do not follow a unified way of teaching, but rather each one of them has his/her own method of teaching. However, the vast majority of them use PowerPoint (a software program that can help a presenter give a good presentation on a PC or an overhead projector without using a white board) to explain the lectures. The students had many concerns about these devices, regarding the use of this modern technology as another part of the problem when it comes to facilitating learning. Consider the following responses:

Every doctor has their own way but most of them use Data Show to explain things. But most of the students prefer things to be explained using the board. Yes, I am surprised that most doctors that are teaching us now use Data Show because, when they do so, students' capacity to understand is very low. This is because the doctor reads the first line, the middle and the last one, then quickly goes to the next page without asking us whether we have understood or not. Therefore, students' understanding is very limited. (ST20 Anwar)

In fact, many of the lecturers have bad teaching methods, which are difficult to pursue. Additionally, we suffer from frequent power outages. Given the fact that most of the professors rely on PowerPoint presentations, as soon as the power fails he or she stops delivering his lecture. (ST21 Manal)

Other students described how some professors follow a very traditional way of teaching, largely highly didactic 'chalk and talk', making it very boring for the students to follow them. Even if some lecturers use slides in presenting the material, their use of modern techniques in delivering the information is basic and has caused many problems:

The methodologies are a problem because they are sterile; even with the development of the teaching tools, they are still using the same methods. I mean, the performance is not developed; the idea is developed but not the performance. In the past, the explanations were done on the board. I mean, the lecturer explained things using the board and things were running smoothly. Now we have moved to the data show. What does the lecturer do in this stage? He puts the USB in the computer, reads from the computer and changes the slides and that is all. I mean, there are no elaborate explanations and the lecturer does not make any effort. The lecturer is the only one who benefited from these tools. Instead of standing by the board and explaining, he found himself relaxed and changing the slides. This in fact has led to the students abstaining from attending lectures. (ST15 Maher)

The lecturers thus just stick to the traditional way of teaching or use the modern methods in a basic form without attempting to enhance their abilities in presenting the material in a more appropriate way.

### 6.7.1 Method of assessment

Some other students mentioned that the lecturers deal with the students' answers to the exams in a crude way, in that the student must write the answer as it is in the textbook.



Any deviation means – in the lecturers’ eyes – that the student has got the material wrong even if the answer is right:

There is another problem in the exam: that is, you could have written in good English and answered well but the person who corrects your paper knows only the prototypical answer. So, if your answer is not the same as the prototypical answer he will readily dismiss your answer. (ST14 Samee)

The correction in the exams is bad because sometimes the university brings in people who do not know English well and asks them to correct our exam papers, and this is disastrous and harms the student. (ST14 Samee)

It is clear that most lecturers encourage and expect the students to engage in rote learning. It seems that many of the lecturers learn by rote themselves, so they do not let the students try to write in their own words:

There are correctors whose English is so poor that if you substitute a word for another they deduct marks. The answer should be a photocopy of what he said; they do not consider any other way of answering. So, if you are one of those who memorise things and reproduce them the way they are, you are going to succeed, but if you are one of those who like to understand and use your own style, you fail. If you do not answer exactly the way they want, your answer is wrong. (ST14 Samee)

I am required to memorise everything as it is, and write it in the exam verbatim since I am not good at English and do not understand everything on the sheets. (ST18 Faisal)

Moreover, the students are not required to conduct their own research. They must just memorise the material for the exams:

No, doctors do not ask us to do research papers. No, it has never happened. I remember once in the third year, we were asked to do it for one of the subjects. After that, we did not do anything like that in our medical studies. (ST16 Najeeb)

Additionally, the questions in the exam are mostly multiple-choice questions (MCQs) because, as the students assume, they are easier for the lecturers to mark and handle than essay-like questions.

The lecturers are trying to avoid long answers by using MCQs in the exams because they find them easier to mark than the other questions, which require long answers. These questions are usually short and use multiple-choice answers. (FOC2 ST1)

Even if there is any writing in the exam, it will be short because the lecturers are aware of the spelling mistakes made by the students. Thus, they ask questions that require short answers, like 'give the reasons for this or that'. (FOC2 ST5)

### 6.7.2 Students' feedback

In addition, the students said that there is no opportunity for them to provide any feedback or evaluation of the courses provided:

The other problem is that lecturers do not ask us for feedback and this feature is not present in the university at all. There should be an assessment model, which can be used by students to assess their teachers' performance and how to make teaching methods easier. (ST20 Anwar)

In a reply to my question whether the students are able to explain these concerns to the lecturers, they indicated that they cannot because they are shy and not confident to raise these aspects to the lecturers:

The student does not always stop the lecturer while s/he is explaining because there is a kind of shyness as the class is mixed between male and female; I mean, he feels shy. Sometimes the shyness is not related to asking the lecturer but he feels shy to tell the lecturer that he does not know this word in case his classmates know it and they may laugh at him. This is something we grew up with. Therefore, not asking might result in the student giving up the lecture due to some trivial thing, because sometimes the main point of the lecture is expressed in its first words or first sentence. The students are not used to stopping the lecturers while they are explaining; you can say that a large number of students have this problem. We got to the point where you can say that it is rare that a student can stop a lecturer. (ST15 Maher)

There are some students who seem to be OK in the lecture, but when they go out they ask other students if they could tell them the meaning of this or that word. We can deduce from this that the student was too shy to ask the lecturer

during the lecture. This means that bashfulness plays a major role in the students' problems. (ST14 Samee)

In conclusion, rote learning permeates the pedagogy and assessment expectations in the course. The students must consequently adapt to this method of education, with little or no opportunity to provide feedback on the problems this raises.

## **6.8 Students' concerns**

In this section, I consider the students' descriptions of the specific challenges of studying medicine and how this study is made even more difficult given their low level of English.

### **6.8.1 Challenges of studying medicine and its effects**

Almost all of the students indicated that studying medicine is extremely difficult and requires them to allocate all of their time/life to it:

Studying this difficult subject mainly affects the social life; there is no contact with relatives and friends, unlike before. Since we started the studies in the university the social contacts have ceased, but these are minor effects. In addition to the social effects, there are financial ones because the study of medicine requires extra financial means to buy books and other expensive things. (ST13 Tofuk)

Medical studies are hard and it takes me a lot of time to revise. I have had to cut down on my social visits and everything, especially during the exam period. I do not go out at all. (FOC3 ST2)

Some other students highlighted that studying medicine has led to feelings of loneliness and isolation in that the students feel cut off from the people around them.

Certainly, the study of medicine has an impact; it took over my life. There were no more visits of the relatives and friends, and I did not go out of the house to the extent that they started feeling that you were a stranger and I reciprocated that feeling. (FOC2 ST4)

In addition to feelings of isolation, trainee doctors indicated that, despite the fact the medicine is hard to tackle, they received little appreciation or respect from the local people:

The other social situation is that the doctor now has lost his standing in our society; no one respects him anymore. The more you progress in your studies and get nearer to graduation the more frustrated you become. I always wonder is it rational that the student studies for seven years in the faculty of medicine, works very hard during these years, and in the end a worthless person comes and puts a gun into his head in the hospital and tells him to treat him. Things like these do not encourage you to work in these circumstances. (ST14 Samee)

### 6.8.2 Not enough family support

Other students mentioned that they must work hard and depend exclusively on themselves so they can proceed on the programme. However, they must help their families when they return home from the university:

Studying medicine has direct impacts on my social life and family. In addition, I am the eldest member in my family, so my mother, father, sisters, etc., always ask me to buy some items from local supermarkets. Thus, sometimes I could not even get enough time to revise my homework. (ST19 Hatem)

There are some families that do not help their daughter as a student of medicine. I mean that, once she is back from the university, she must carry out household chores. (FOC2 ST5)

Because of the family, I revise only during the exam days. I, therefore, cannot cover the entire syllabus, so I get only the average mark to pass. I do not do the necessary things. (ST11 Ayman)

Moreover, the student learns English by himself and there is nobody to help him; even his parents cannot because they did not even learn Arabic and his siblings struggle with English themselves. These are the reasons for the students' difficulty with English. (FOC2 ST1)

### 6.8.3 Impact of the society on female students

In this regard, many female students mentioned that customs and local community rituals make it particularly difficult for them to cope with this area of study while they are students or proceed to their postgraduate studies when they graduate:

Female doctors move from working in the hospitals to private clinics or local surgeries. The reason behind that is to abnegate their responsibilities and to evade night-time shifts because, as you know a female cannot spend the night outside her home in normal circumstances, let alone at a time of war. (FOC2 ST4)

Some female students, after they graduate, get the opportunity to do their postgraduate studies abroad but they cannot, because they do not have an accompanying male. So, they stay at home and waste the opportunity and lose the scholarship. (FOC2 ST5)

The parents of female students can play a role in their daughter's resumption of her studies or getting a job after graduation. But the society we live in curtails that role. In other words, even if the parents allow their daughter to travel abroad to do postgraduate studies, the latter won't be safe from the society's disapproval and people's talk. (FOC2 ST3)

#### **6.8.4 Group work and helping each other**

The students indicated that some of them do engage in group work, but it seems to be restricted to the women students. Consider the following replies:

The female students cooperate more with each other than with the male students. Female students exchange everything but the males withhold certain things. (FOC2 ST3)

There are some students helping each other. As for the notion that there is no mutual cooperation between boys and girls, as you know, our social rituals and conditions preclude them doing so. (ST18 Faisal)

Girls help each other very much. You can notice them doing so in the library and the faculty. All the time they ask themselves several important questions related to the lecture. Boys do not have such relations. (ST18 Faisal)

Other students described how they feel there is very little cooperation between the students in general. Each student seems to want to work individually:

There is a sense of negativity among the students. Everyone cares about himself or herself; they would rather work at home by themselves than work in a group and have discussions with their mates. I mean, students have very passive thinking about learning together. (ST15 Maher)

It seems clear, however, that students' group work is neither systematic nor supported by the university.

In the next section, I will raise some issues related to the situation in the university and how it negatively affects the students.

## **6.9 The wider political and social context at Sebha University**

### **6.9.1 Security problem**

Almost all of the students raised the notion that there is no security at the university, which forces them to leave the university when they have finished their classes. It is important to highlight this problem, given that students practise English inside the university and not outside, as indicated above. Consider the following responses:

As far as the faculty is concerned, the security situation in the country, even here, when the student takes a taxi and wants to return to his student accommodation, sometimes he gets robbed. Yes, sometimes the way from student accommodation to university is not safe and there is a lot of harassment, especially towards students who live in student accommodation. They are always the subject of robberies, maybe because people know that they come from far-away places and are not from Sebha. For this reason, they also harass and rob them. They rob their telephones and, if they have any, money. We informed the faculty administration of this harassment and they told us that even they encounter the same harassment, it's not only us. (ST20 Anwar)

The security situation nowadays is not conducive to doing any work. It preoccupies a student's mind and prevents him from concentrating. No lecturer can come from outside the city. Some visiting lecturers who used to come from Tripoli cannot come anymore because of the problems in Sebha, although these problems are happening all over Libya, but I think that their refusal to come is partly due to the administration. (ST15 Maher)

I have previously described how students' studies are frequently disrupted. It is clear from the following student's comment that this is partly because of the political upheaval that is currently taking place:

Yes, there is another problem. At this university, medical studies are not continuous. There are always many cancellations due to shortage in doctors and sometimes due to the security situation. So, when the studies are not continuous, the student becomes less motivated. For example, due to cancellations, the gap between one exam and another one is nearly a month. The student wastes time without making any progress. (FOC3 ST1)

Another reported problem is related to the lack of availability of a fixed timetable for the students. Such a lack makes the students less motivated:

There is nothing to help you in your studies. You start having problems from the beginning – I mean, from the enrolment. For example, the dates for the exams are deferred and confused and there are no fixed time tables. It is supposed that once the student starts the year they the administration should give him all the dates for mid-term and final exams; it would be one timetable, which would not get changed. But here, the timetable changes every time and they set the dates for the mid-term exams and always postpone them for another two months. (ST14 Samee)

A further problem pertains to the library. Almost all of the students indicated that the university library is short of books and the required references:

The library's problems are the following: the shortage of books, the lack of up-to-date references and the absence of a library culture on the part of the student. This last point is the main reason why those responsible for the library do not bother to buy recent reference books or provide enough books, because not many students use the library. It should be open 24 hours, but it is small and opens and closes for certain times; it closes even before the official working hours, about 1pm. The library is only like an annex to the university. (ST15 Maher)

As regards references in the library, I do not use them at all since all of them are old and not updated. I often rely on the sheets delivered by the professor or buy the books I need from outside the university. The professor delivers the lecture to us, and afterwards I buy the related books from outside the university. (ST21 Manal)

An additional point is that there is no care taken with the books, which are left dusty and uncared for:

Sometimes you look at the books in the library and they are covered with dust because they have not been lent or used for a long time. When a student wants to borrow them, they tell him that these cannot be taken out of the library. (FOC2 ST2)

Relevant here is the point raised by almost all of the students regarding the appropriate behaviour of the Libyan staff. The students reported that the staff in the library sometimes do not follow the university regulations regarding borrowing the books; instead, they give the books to their relatives, allowing them to keep the books as long as they want.

One time I wanted to borrow a book. It was the weekend and just before closing time, which means nobody would borrow it, yet the library employee gave me a hard time, as if I was asking for alms. I regretted asking to borrow that book. Since then, I did not set foot in the library again because of the treatment I had. I will never forget that situation. (FOC2 ST1)

What hurts is that the treatment of students differs from one to the other. I mean that the rule of lending books is applied to certain students and not others. The library employees lend books to their relatives, who do not return them until the end of the year. (FOC2 ST3)

### **6.9.2 Libyan economy's effects on resources**

Other students indicated that they cannot use the internet inside the university because sometimes there is no internet connection and, when it is available, the internet connection is poor:

As far as the internet at the university is concerned, it is bad because it is very slow to the point that it nearly stops. We cannot use it to search for references because it is weak, and the whole country suffers from this problem, not just the university. We are at the 21st century where the internet should be very fast everywhere around the globe, but unfortunately in my country there is no such service. So, using it is really a waste of time. (ST17 Basher)



### 6.9.3 Classroom facilities

Other students mentioned that classrooms are not outfitted with suitable equipment; they are small; and there are too many students:

Classrooms are small and not equipped for studying, and the number of students is large compared to the room sizes and there is no air-conditioning. (ST11 Ayman)

There are no classrooms ready for studying. We used to study in the Nursing section; the ceiling leaked water, and the classrooms were full of dust and not ready for studying. Also, there was not enough lighting to use the projector. So, most of the time we use the meeting room, which is used by the hospital administration. Therefore, as soon as they need it for a meeting, we have to leave and sometimes, because the meeting is long, we do not study that day. (ST17 Basher)

Classrooms have been refurbished, but there is an echo in them. Sometimes, you cannot hear the doctor because the classrooms are not furnished. I mean when the classroom is large and not furnished, then the students cannot hear what the doctor say because of the echo. (FOC3 ST1)

It is clear that the infrastructure of the university is not suitable for the students and does not meet their expectations.

### 6.9.4 Lecturers' strikes

An additional point raised by the students is that there are interruptions in their studies because of the continual strikes undertaken by the staff because of their low wages and other frustrations. Many of the issues raised by the students also negatively affect staff. Consider the following responses:

There were problems between the lecturers and the administration. The former went on strike until their problems were solved. Then they had financial problems, so they went on strike again, insisting that they would not go back to work till they received their salaries. As a result of this conflict between the administration of the university and the teaching staff, our studies were suspended for four to five months. Indeed, the lecturers were able to suspend the studies until they received their dues in full and then they went

back to work. These problems between the lecturers and the administration of the university have a negative impact on the students, who do not have the power to solve these problems. (ST15 Maher)

We did not study for a long time, for more than seven months, due to administrative problems and financial problems between faculty lecturers and the faculty administration. We should have finished the programme by now and we should be ready for the exams. But all we have done right now is a fourth of that because of these circumstances. Despite the availability of doctors, they do not want to teach us because of the problems they have with the university administration. We, the students, were obliged to approach the administration and we talked to the dean of the university about this problem. (ST16 Najeeb)

### **6.10 Conclusion**

It is quite clear from the medical students' responses that the use of English in their studies causes them a wide array of problems, given their low levels of skill in the language. The students are frank that their level of English is very low because of the inadequate preparation they received at school. This preparation results in them struggling at the university. What worsens the situation is the lack of attention paid to the students' level of English by the university administration and the lecturers. There are no introductory courses in English, which would successfully develop the students' level of English. Moreover, the students' reported that some lecturers' level of English is not advanced, which also negatively affects the students' English progress. In a related vein, the students highlighted issues related to the difficulty of their study and the way the modules are administrated, in addition to the exam design. Furthermore, the students reported problems related to the university infrastructure and library facilities, which do not allow the students to study appropriately.

## **7 Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I will bring together understandings from across the study, engage in further discussion about the issues raised and draw the thesis to a conclusion.

The chapter begins with a description of the main methods of teaching English used at Sebha University. It will be clear that rote learning is the main method used, due to several factors. I go on to provide some background on the issue of rote learning. I then recap on students' and lecturers' experiences and views of this mode of learning. I go on to discuss what I have called 'deep rote' and to what extent it affects students' learning, before exploring cultural issues in respect of education in Libya. I conclude the chapter with a series of remarks aimed at underlining the main points of the study and how some future developments might be taken forward.

Additionally, it is worth spelling out here that despite the circumstances in which students and lecturers are currently working, the participants revealed themselves to be highly intelligent and articulate individuals who were constrained from revealing this criticality and creativity by the system of learning and teaching operant in the university. This intelligence, criticality and understanding is revealed in the interviews that took place; when given the opportunity to talk freely, the participants had plenty to say and gave me many important insights. This is an important finding, in itself, as it suggests that there is plenty of potential for change and development in this system, drawing on the insight and intelligence of the participants in this system.

### **7.1 Methods of Teaching English at Sebha University**

By looking at the students' and lecturers' views on teaching English at Sebha University, we can determine which methods are followed in teaching English at this educational institution. It is clear that English is primarily taught using rote learning and passive education. Below I summarise some literature about rote learning before going on to investigate this mode of learning and its implications as viewed by students and lecturers at Sebha University.

## 7.2 Rote learning: definition and views

According to Smith (1998), rote learning is a mode of learning that depends on memorisation (see, also Cohen and Feigenbaum, 1982). Moore (2000: 1), in his turn, defines rote learning as a method of learning in "a mechanical way without thought of meaning". Gairns and Redman (1986: 93) and pointed out that rote learning is a memorisation method that:

Involves repetition of target language items either silently or aloud and may involve writing down the items (more than once). These items commonly appear in list form; typical examples being items and their translation equivalent, items and their definitions (e.g. nap=short sleep), paired items (e.g. hot-cold, tall-short), and irregular verbs. A common practice is for the learner to use one side of the list as prompts and cover the other side in order to test himself.

According to Li (2004), it is obvious that researchers working on rote learning define rote learning as a strategy that is involved in the storage as well as retrieval of new knowledge, the two main functions of memory strategies (Oxford, 1990:58). As such, rote learning is a strategy that hinges on repetition, practice and memorisation. This discussion gives rise to the question as to what is the learning strategy that is qualified as repetition, practice or memorisation. In other words, what repetition, practice and memorisation stand for. The answer to this question is important as it provides us with more solid ground on the nature of rote learning. In this regard, Oxford (1990: 45), among others, defined repetition as saying or doing the same task over and over or listening to a particular task several times. Oxford indicates that repetition also includes rehearsing and imitating a native speaker. In a related vein, Wenden (1991) argues that repetition as an activity that involves imitation of a language model, including, but not limited to, overt practice as well as silent rehearsal.

Additionally, as for practice, Li (2004) indicates that practice refers to the strategies which contribute to the storage and retrieval of language with emphasis on the accuracy of usage. Such strategies include repetition, experimentation, rehearsal, imitation, application of rules, and attention to detail. As for memorisation, Wenden and Rubin (1987) indicate that it refers to the strategies which focus on the storage and retrieval of language. The main strategies used in this activity include drill and repetition. It should be noted that the main difference between practice and memorization is that in the latter attention is oriented

towards storage and retrieval processes and organisation rather than imitation and application of rules, as is the case with the former.

What is relevant here is that several works have shown that rote learning is heavily used in language learning. For instance, Rubin (1987) and Marchman and Knudsen (2014) argue that in the language learning strategies literature, rote learning and memorisation have significant roles in contributing to the storage as well as the retrieval of language and its related activities and skills. For these authors and others rote learning can be used in language learning as it is efficient in vocabulary and grammar learning. Additionally, listening and speaking can be learned and even improved through rote learning. Following theories on languages acquisition especially the notion that language is acquired because of repetition and imitation or emulation (cf. Whitehurst and Vasta, 1975, Ochs and Schieffelin, 2001, and Morgan et al 2015), the role and implications of rote learning on language learning has received much attention. This emphasizes certain techniques to learning a foreign language using the main tenets of rote learning. A case in point here is the study by Gairns and Redman (1986: 93) who set several features which are used in language learning through the implementation of rote learning. These features are summarised in Table 2. Below (cited in Li, 2004: 14).

Table 2: Features of RL strategies involving repetition

Rote learning strategies	
1.	To read silently or aloud
2.	To write down the items (more than once)
3.	To learn in list forms or cards (can be taken anywhere and studied at any free moment)
4.	To use typical examples
5.	To find translation equivalents
6.	To find definitions
7.	To group paired items

8.	To memorise irregular verbs
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Source: Adapted from Gairns & Redman's (1986:93) statements

Another example of the use of rote learning can be adduced from Richards and Renandya's (2002) study on the so-called Grammar Translation Method.<sup>6</sup> The authors argue that learners using this learning method are required to learn the grammar rules as well as the vocabulary of the target language using rote learning techniques. According to the authors, learners are provided with the grammar rules along with concrete examples; then they are told to memorise these rules and are asked to apply them to other examples (p.176). Additionally, Felder and Henriques (1995) argued that many EFL settings teach and learn English through inductive reasoning which specifies a reasoning progression proceeding from observations, data, or measurements to rules, laws, or theories. Within this way of learning, English vocabulary is provided in long word lists that are required to be memorised by rote learning. Along these lines, it is clear that rote learning has been used as a tool to learn language, because it makes available a range of options and strategies which, among many others, enhance students' competence and performance of language learning (see, Fareh, 2010 and Melton, 2014), at least in terms of taking on vocabulary and grammar constructions.

### 7.3 Students' and lecturers' perspectives on rote learning

In a related vein, some literature has thrown light on students' perspectives towards this type of learning. Students' views on the implementation of rote learning and the ways they think are important in enhancing such implementation. A series of works has considered students' views on rote learning and whether this should be adapted as a mode of learning; these works do not converge on specific findings or recommendations (Tinkham 1989, Scovel, 1994, Oxford, 1996, and Rashidi and Omid, 2011). An example of this focus is Li's (2004) study which explored Chinese EFL learners' attitudes, views

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<sup>6</sup> Brown (2000) summarised the major characteristics of the Grammar Translation Method as follows: (1) "Classes are taught in the mother tongue with little active use of the target language" (2) "Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words" (3) "Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given" (4) "Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words" (5) "Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early" (6) "Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis" (7) "Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue" (8) "Little or no attention is given to pronunciation" (pp. 15-17).

and beliefs about the role of rote learning in vocabulary learning strategies. The main aims of Li's research were first to help a solid understanding of rote learning as a concept in the literature and also to explore Chinese EFL learners' culturally-based opinions and views on their preference for rote learning methods and techniques. Furthermore, Li's research offered a challenge to widely-held beliefs that Confucian culture is considered as a negative impact on learning. Thus, in order to investigate this, Li collected data through three instruments, i.e. questionnaires, interviews and an English vocabulary test. The subjects were around a hundred Chinese learners in the English Language Department at a very big University in the Northeast area of China. The result of Li's study was Chinese EFL learners have positive beliefs about rote learning in EFL vocabulary learning. The study found out that Chinese EFL learners believe the integration of repetition, memorisation, and practice is consistent with traditional Chinese values. Li states (2004: 236):

Chinese EFL learners believe that rote learning strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. The characteristics of Chinese EFL learners in terms of the combination of memorisation and understanding indicated consistency with previous studies

Likewise, other works have shown that teachers hold positive views on rote learning as it offers proficiency of vocabulary and prefabricated phrase learning, considering it a central part of effective classroom practice (cf. Mitchell and Martin, 1997). On the other hand, several works have shown that teachers as well as students hold negative views on rote learning in general and memorization in particular. Ellis and Beaton (1993a; 1993b) argue that rote learning and repetition is, generally, out of fashion in language learning.

Within my own study, and according to students' and lecturers' views, it is apparent they both groups like rote learning, in some respects, while simultaneously holding some negative perspectives towards it. The lecturers had absorbed the rhetoric of using other approaches and understood the value of a Communicative Approach, in theory. At the same time, they had received little or no preparation or guidance in using alternative approaches, and rote learning requires less effort on their part and it is in compliance with the Libyan culture which they are happy with (see appendix 9). The same thing for the students who wish to have different techniques for learning but they are happy with the

rote learning because of being accustomed to it and they recognise that it is, currently, their best chance of doing well in exams. Support for this argument comes from the fact that it is researchers predominantly, who criticise rote learning – not the teachers and the students, as will be shown below.

In this context, Nakamura (2000: 43) argues that repetition and memorization (one form of rote learning) has been regarded inferior to more effective ways of second language learning. Biggs (1998: 726) argues that rote learning is a mere exercise of memory, without proper understanding, that has negative impacts on students who heavily depend on it; it does not he says really enhance students' linguistic skills. Several other works have argued that rote learning is regarded as an ineffective strategy in the education area. In these studies, it is reported that few learners make use of the rote learning activities, including memorization to help them read and write, reviewing often, using the dictionary, and dealing with irregular verbs. The tasks are somewhat laborious and take great commitment. Furthermore, some researchers have shown that most of the learners who use rote learning follow the activity of repeating aloud without much understanding (Schmitt, 2000 and Lucas, 2000, and Nee, 2001). In this regard, Sinhaneti and Kyaw (2012) argued for the negative impacts of using rote learning on Burmese Students' language learning. The authors show that there are several factors that would advocate against the use of rote learning, although this type of learning is, nevertheless, much followed by the students, much as is the case in my study. They indicate that rote learning strategies are adopted across the country by Burmese learners because of some reasons according to their content analysis. These factors include Burmese cultural/educational background, EFL environment, cultural tradition, national situation/examination requirements and demands, as well as failure to use "the best" ways. Sinhaneti and Kyaw (2012) imply that the use of rote learning is tied to several factors which are extra-educational including culture and tradition, hence the desire to use this type of learning is not purely educational.

It is clear that there are many reasons why rote learning is not ideal, and it leads to many unfortunate consequences. These unfortunate consequences are particularly obvious when it comes to moving the discussion from the rote learning of English to the rote learning of Medicine, *in English*. I will move now to draw elements of my study together and to elucidate interconnections between the two 'case study' fields.



#### 7.4 Studying English and studying *In English*

As has already been described, students' experiences of learning and proficiency in English have profound effects when beginning to study in the professional field of medicine. This is partly a consequence of the reliance on rote and passive learning in the teaching of English in Libyan higher education and because of other issues which I will discuss below.

In the study of medicine, the language of instruction and books is different from the native language of the students (and most of the lecturers), as is the case at Sebha University. Surveying the lecturers' views towards the use of English in the study of medicine, it became clear that the lecturers see many disadvantages to students depending on rote learning in their study. The study of medicine, although it relies on a great deal of memorisation and understanding of facts, also looks for an ability to reason, to be analytical, to consider alternative approaches and interpretations. The effects of a reliance on rote learning (and the associated issues of having a low level of English) leads to several negative impacts on the students' attainment in medicine. Consider the following views of the lecturers:

So, many of the students memorise texts in English as they are in the book or on the sheet. One reason is that the student is not able to make correct sentences himself because of his language ability or the extent of his understanding of the subject. (L14 Hassan)

The system in universities around the world is based on research to develop and broaden the student's understanding of the subject, but here we still rely on the system of teaching, memorising and the classical and old ways of exams. (L13 Idrees)

A big percentage of students...memorise things. This is a habit that Libyan students have. They like to memorise things. This is their problem of learning by rote. (L23 Taher)

The lecturers are clear that rote learning is still the typical form of learning in Libya. Although most of the countries in the world have been using other learning modes, students in Libya are still using traditional rote learning. For the lecturers, this commitment to this conventional mode of learning follows partly from the students' inability to form sentences themselves. Students' proficiency in English is low, as is clear from the section

of this thesis describing EFL teaching, and this results in severe difficulties facing the students when studying medicine in the English language.

It is clear that the use of rote learning follows the typical mode of learning and that the students are not able, exposed, trained with other types of learning and this has strong (negative) impacts on the students' creativity and their progress. The lecturers should be aware of the new methods of learning and encourage the students to adopt such methods so the students' level is improved. It bears mentioning here that to be a doctor is a dream of almost all students. Firstly, this job provides the students' and his/her family with a high social position. Doctors are considered very important people for their efforts in saving people's lives. Secondly, it is a rewarding job.

However, I have already described how some students enrol on medical degrees because their parents wish them to study medicine, or because medicine is a high status occupation. This may account, in part, for their lack of motivation when studying medicine:

It depends on the student. I mean there are students who have enrolled on a medical course to please and impress the people in their immediate environment; these people want so-and-so to be a doctor. This category faces big problems. In fact, not all the students have the desire or inclination to study medicine. This affects the other students in the classroom in terms of performance and discipline. (L13 Idrees)

There are some students who have a negligible motivation to study medicine. They try to for a year and then change to another subject because they know that they are going to lose nothing as the studies and lodgings are free. (L14 Hassan)

It may also be the case, however, that the struggles that they encounter when *trying* to study medicine, and the emphasis on rote learning, exacerbate the situation and diminish their motivation even further. Students being unable to understand their studies, given their low level of English, use only rote learning to be able to bear the responsibilities of studying medicine. This practice, though, negatively affects the students' progress and accommodation with the demands of their study, something that leads them at the end to lose even more motivation. The lack of motivation may especially build up in cases where the main motivation of the students to study medicine is not intrinsically motivated but pushed by their parents.

You can say that they come due to the ambition of their parents; they themselves are not much interested...yes, they are not motivated. (L16 Ibrahim)

There are students whom you feel have been pushed by their parents to study medicine. They have no motivation and are not bothered if there is no doctor to cover the subject they are meant to study. On the contrary, as some of their classmates say, they are even happy that no doctor is available to do that. (L19 Moktar)

Accordingly, it can be suggested that a confluence of factors, including students' low level of English, the use of rote learning, and lack of motivation all conspire against students' good performance during the study of medicine. In this regard, several works indicated that using rote learning in the study of English leads to negative views towards *using* English in other fields; this is what I found during my study. For instance, Turki (2004) discovered that secondary school students hold negative views and have low levels of enthusiasm and motivation to invest their effort in learning English. Likewise, Abuklaish (2004) observed that university science students hold little interest in ESP classes. That author argues that this lack of interest is tied to the use of traditional teaching methods such as rote learning, "lecturer-centred" teaching and being "spoon-fed", the typical mode of teaching and learning in the Arab world (see, Orafi and Borg, 2009).

Accordingly, it can be indicated that the use of English in the study of medicine at Sebha University has indirect negative impacts on the students' progress and performance. Such negative impacts can be accounted for assuming that due to the students' low level of English, they use passive rote learning in memorizing the material required from them. They do not understand much of this material, a problem that leads ultimately to poor performance on the part of the students and hence their frustration and lack of motivation.

### **7.5 Assessment pressures and demands**

At this point it is important to acknowledge the pressure that exists in favour of rote learning because of exam demands. Forms of summative assessment such as exams, whatever the context, typically require students to engage in 'cramming' or rote learning, in order that they can respond to exam questions, under pressure. In a context such as

Libya these tendencies are exacerbated by a number of factors. One of these will be students' own confidence with the material – if students lack confidence in their own abilities they will typically try to rote learn the material.

In the context of Libya, where the teachers *also* lack confidence in the material (in many cases), there are a number of other factors involved. Drawing on the students' views about the exams and the methods they follow to get high grades (see the previous chapter), it was clear that students prefer memorizing the material as it is, because if they try to rephrase the answer in their own words, they will be punished by the lecturers by giving them low marks. According to the students, many of the lecturers learn by rote themselves so they do not let the students try to write in their own words, or are simply unable to understand what students are saying if they try to do so. This leads to the fact that most lecturers actively encourage and expect the students to engage in rote learning:

There are correctors whose English is so poor that if you substitute a word for another they deduct marks. The answer should be a photocopy of what he said; they do not consider any other way of answering. So, if you are one of those who memorise things and reproduce them the way they are, you are going to succeed, but if you are one of those who like to understand and use you own style, you fail. If you do not answer exactly the way they want, your answer is wrong. (ST14 Samee)

I am required to memorize everything as it is, and write it in the exam verbatim since I am not good at English and do not understand everything in the sheets. (ST18 Faisal)

The students then follow rote learning, forced by the teaching style and examination marking by their lecturers. A similar view was reiterated by other students:

There is another problem in the exam; that is you could have written in good English and answered well but the person who corrects your paper knows only the prototypical answer. So if your answer is not the same as the prototypical answer he will readily dismiss your answer. (ST14 Samee)

The correction in the exams is bad because sometimes the university brings people who do not know English well and ask them to correct our exam papers and this is disastrous and harms the student. (ST14 Samee)

## 7.6 The phenomenon of 'deep rote'

These views reveal an important characteristic of the teaching method by the lecturers, which is that lecturers are involved in one manifestation of rote learning as well. Let's call this manifestation 'deep rote' where the repetition and memorization lurk deep in the teaching method of the lecturers. The same material, techniques, and way of marking the exams are the main common properties of teaching methods by the lecturers. This reiteration of the same methods force a form of rote teaching which is the mirror of rote learning by the students. As such, it can be suggested that students' adoption of rote learning is epiphenomenal of rote teaching and pedagogy practiced by their lecturers. This path of analysis suggests that the lecturers with deep rote teaching methods are less than ideally qualified, and their presence affects the students negatively. This assumption has been widely advanced in the related literature. In this respect, Alhamali (2007:78) argued that the educational programmes in Libya suffer from limited curricula, a lack of qualified teachers and university lecturers, and a robust trend to learn by rote instead of reasoning, which is sometimes characteristic of Arab education in general (Rajab, 2013). 'Deep rote' learning is thus produced by experiences which *reinforce* lecturers and students deficiencies. It is caused by historical, cultural, educational and pedagogical factors likewise, according to Abuklaish (2012: 11) "The overall picture is a system in which the quality of teaching and training provided for teachers at institutions is of a low standard and does not meet the teaching demands of the current curriculum at middle and high schools".

As I have already described, rote learning permeates the whole of the Libyan educational system, and poor English teaching predominates from the primary level. This is partly as a consequence of the fact that English teaching was banned altogether from 1986 to 1997. In many ways, teachers and students will continue to struggle in relation to this gap, and in relation to the effects of this gap.

It is clear that the so-called 'deep rote' has effects on the general interaction between the students and the lecturers and permeates not just teaching methods but forms of assessment. Unfortunately, it also leads to impoverished forms of assessment such as multiple choice questions. This means that some students are never required to try to draw ideas together and make arguments in relation to their knowledge and understanding. In a worse case scenario, students may even be able to pass such exams employing guesswork. Of course, such forms of assessment are also the quickest and easiest to mark and grade.

‘Deep rote’ as I have already indicated is self-reinforcing. If teaching methods and assessment practices rely and reward rote learning, then rote learning will continue (to an extent) to be preferred by the students as well as the lecturers; they want to succeed in their studies. Given the many challenges associated with *changing* teaching and learning practices, it is a lot to expect lecturers or students to want to engage wholeheartedly with alternative practices – in the short to medium term, they would not only face practical challenges and resistance but would also, probably, see less success in exams.

### 7.7 The challenges of effecting change in this system

Several research papers have shed light on the phenomenon of school students’ low level of English in Libya. Shihiba (2011) addressed this issue, arguing that although new English textbooks include different communication activities and learning tasks (designed to facilitate pair and group work, role-play, problem-solving and language games) yet students’ oral skills are still very bad. The author argues that a suitable implementation of these activities includes the students’ actual engagement as well as active participation and teachers’ adoption of the role of facilitator (see, e.g. Phillips et al, 2008). Having said that, after several years of introducing this curriculum, local research on the outcomes of Libyan students in connection to their English level and proficiency have shown that the instructional approaches of most Libyan EFL teachers in secondary schools are still teacher-centred. The author argues that this aspect is responsible for the phenomenon of Libyan students who finish their secondary education with undeveloped speaking and listening skills which affect their English education at university, a state of affairs that is attested by both the students and the lecturers interviewed in the current study.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, the General Peoples’ Committee of Education (GPCE) (2008) stated that school education has negative impacts on the students in that it makes them depend on memorization and repetition when they pursue further studies. The GPCE states that the traditional methods of teaching, which depend on memorisation and recitation, are still

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<sup>7</sup>See, also Saleh, 2002; Ahmad, 2004; Dalala, 2006; Alhmali, 2007; Ali, 2008; and Orafi & Borg, 2009 for further discussion that education in Libya is teacher-centred. All of these studies converge on the assumption that students’ level and progress in English and in all other subject matters would be higher if the shift to student-centred education is made.

widely used in Libya and the educational system still encounters the following challenges (2008: 24-43):

1. The weakness of the education and teaching methods, due to the weakness of the teacher, and his educational qualifications. This has led to depend on non-qualified teachers, and rely on non-Libyan teachers coming particularly from Arab countries in public education, and from some Asian countries in the university level.
2. The educational and pedagogical techniques and methods of teaching and learning have improved, but the Libyan teacher is still lagged behind. The teacher is still using traditional methods which depend on memorization and recitation. As a consequence, students do not acquire the skills that would enable them to continue their studies because there is a large gap between the school's methods of teaching which prepare them only for exams and the reality and the ambitions of the Libyan society.
3. The development programmes are introduced without conducting assessment field studies or using evaluation standard. In other words, the plans are applying without assessing their strengths and weaknesses to be taken into consideration in organizing other educational programmes.

In a related vein, other studies have indicated that school students have a low level of English progress and performance because English curricula are not implemented effectively. In this regard, Orafi (2009) argues that the English curriculum for students in its new version is consisting of many course books called *English for Libya*. These course books are designed in a same way and instruction but in a different levels and specialisations. In each unit of these books has some sections which are devoted to reading, words, grammar, and functional use of language, speaking, writing and listening. Hence, this curriculum is different from its predecessor, where functional language use, listening and speaking were not of interest. At the same time, Orafi (2009) argues that the new activities are ignored by many teachers, something that might leads to tragic consequences for the students' level of English. Orafi (2009) shows the reason behind this ignorance which is the poor of facilities within schools and also not enough preparation for teachers to teach listening and speaking. Additionally, the author shows that this ignorance is also caused because many teachers believe that speaking and listening will be achieved spontaneously (see, Elabbar, 2011). These same teachers, of course, are also unlikely to have experienced these collaborative, discursive methods themselves as learners, further reinforcing the problems associated with changing their practice.

What is insufficiently acknowledged in the body of work quoted above is that it is extremely challenging to bring about change in such a system. The factors involved are interconnected, and exacerbate one another. It is also the case as Al-Badree (2007) has described that change itself is hard to achieve, without a deep understanding of the issues at stake and without a great deal of time and commitment being expended by all those involved. In this respect, Tamtam et al (2011) argue that the higher education in Libya needs to go forward in applying the recent methods of learning and teaching, so as the Libyan students are not left lagged behind. Said this, the researchers argue that this move would be difficult, given the Libyan context and the strong effect of culture on the tendencies of the students and the lecturers alike. In other words, although the researcher advocates a (radical) change in the system of higher education in Libya, they submit that this change would be hampered by several factors that lie outside the domain of education. See Abosnan (2016) for similar assumptions that there should be a change in the way the students (and lecturers) learn English skills and other subject matter; though he argues that this change must be implemented in a series of steps that square with the trends inside Libyan community.

This whole situation is mirrored in the study of Alrbie (2015) who argued that indoctrination (didactic learning) and memorising have played an essential role in the building of Libyan Curricula since the founding of the modern school which was historically based on a teaching-led curriculum which the student must learn, leading to the focus on the quantity of information contained in the book without taking into consideration the objectives and outcomes of that learning process. The result is clear: not taking into account the age of the student, and given that the teacher is the corner stone of pupil learning (in the school), and the student (in the university) is the recipient (passive) of the negative impact on the educational process.

Information transmission has been the predominant mode of learning in the school or university and exam design focussed on the recall of information. This neglected many essential tasks in the educational process, such as critical thinking, reasoning, creativity and analysis. It is also a system which does not draw on or encourage the benefits of group work or discussion (an issue discussed at greater length, below). This is also true of Madrasa pedagogy. Madrasah is the Islamic school where students learn the holy Quran through a memorisation method. People of all ages can attend Madrasa and they



have to repeat after their teacher, a 'sheikh', the verses of the holy Quran many times until they fully memorise these verses fluently, as it is not permitted to change any one letter or pronunciation to the person who teaches it. It must be memorised as it is (Moosa, 2015). Such conservatism may have been positive in the past, but it seems may have contributed to people seeing rote learning as being both normal and expected. It may also have contributed to people being more willing to accept political repression and tyranny, although the 'Arab Spring' would perhaps suggest that this level of obedience cannot be taken for granted indefinitely. An authoritarian education does not, very easily, provoke critical citizens. In the Libyan context it was clearly the case that the Gaddafi regime was itself highly authoritarian as Matar (2016) describes:

“Like the rest of my cousins, Marwan had endured the restrictions and interferences of Qaddafi’s Libya. He had witnessed the militarization of schools, where, as a young boy, he had to turn up in military uniform and crawl on the ground with a rifle before morning class. He had seen the banning of books, music and films, the closure of theatres and cinemas, the outlawing of football, and all the other countless ways in which the Libyan dictatorship, like a crazed jealous lover, infiltrated every aspect of public and private life” (p.109).

Such indoctrination and memorising constitutes psychological pressure on students' lives and their relations, especially on those who did not have a strong memory, leading to boredom and loss of pleasure in thinking, depriving them of the pleasure of searching and discovering the information needed, and involving interaction with teachers. It is an unsuccessful way in teaching that suppresses critical thinking, and focuses on quantity and not on quality. The scourge of indoctrination pervaded the teaching curricula, leaving the teacher with no role except the automated transport of information or writing on the blackboard. Thus the student is trapped, on the one hand having a negative experience during the lesson, which repeated information provided in the textbook, and on the other hand needing this method for the purpose of obtaining the highest ranks in examinations. The 'deep rote' system is, one has to conclude, is highly passive and demotivating.

In the next section, I will shed light on the impacts of culture on the students' level of English.

## **7.8 Impacts of culture in the students' level of English**

One of the recurring issues from the students and the lecturers alike is the impact of Libyan culture on the students' level of English, on how they learn (in general) and how the wider context influences everyone in this situation. In this context, I am using the term 'culture' to denote "the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time" (Cambridge Dictionary). Inevitably, the interaction between students, and between staff and students, is to a large extent affected by cultural views and trends that are prevalent in Libyan society. The effect of culture on students' educational progress has been reported in other Arabic countries. For instance, Alqahtani (2011) shows the strong effect of culture on language learning in the Saudi context. The main results show students' language ability and different assessment types are affected by culture something that affect students' achievements, negatively.

### **7.8.1 Challenges of group work and interaction**

#### **7.8.1.1 Peer learning: importance**

It is widely known that one of the main methods to elevate students' level and motivation is to make them learn from each other (i.e. peer learning) and the lecturer becomes a demonstrator who supervises the students' interaction and turn taking. According to Topping (2005), peer learning is defined as 'the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions' (p. 631). This type of learning may involve people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers who assist each other to learn and learn themselves through doing this.

According to Boud et al (1999: 416), peer learning is significant in scaffolding students' skills and knowledge. For these authors, this type of learning necessarily involves students who work with each other as well as enhance their skills of collaboration. This method of cooperation provides them with the needed practice which is important in planning and teamwork and involves them as indispensable part of the learning community where they have a stake. Additionally, within peer learning, there are increased possibilities for students to engage in reflection and exploration of the themes and the ideas in the contexts

where the authority of the teacher is not present or available. Furthermore, using peer learning, students get more practice in communicating in the topic they are engaged in than is typically gained in the contexts in learning activities when teachers are dominant. Students would be more able to indicate and consolidate their understanding towards the subject matter. The students can also be critiqued by their peers as well as learn from adopting a reciprocal role. An additional benefit of peer learning is, as Boud et al (1999: 416) see it, that peer learning involves a group of students taking collective responsibility for identifying their own learning needs as well as planning how such needs might be addressed. As such, peer learning comes out as an important factor in developing the students' skills and mutual collaboration. For Boud et al (1999: 416), 'peer learning is a vital learning-how-to-learn skill as well as providing practice for the kinds of interaction needed in employment. Learning to cooperate with others to reach mutual goals seems a necessary prerequisite for operating in a complex society.'

In the following subsections, I will highlight the main problems relating to the application of peer learning in Libya

#### **7.8.1.2 Gender-related problems**

Several works have argued that peer learning must be free in the sense that there are no constraints that might delimit the interaction and collaboration between the students themselves. The lack of constraints on peer learning makes it a viable tool that has several positive impacts on the students (see, e.g. Swan et al 2006, Goldsmith 2006, Papinczak, 2007, Gaunt and Westerlund, 2016). What this implies is that peer learning in Libya does not yield the desired results as there are, among many others, gender-related constraints placed on any interaction between male and female students. In view of this, we can now account for why the lecturers assume that group/peer learning might be inappropriate for the Libyan context. Consider the following replies by some lecturers.

Obviously, the family has a say in whether the student takes part in group work or not. So you have some families (parents) who tell their son not to mix with anyone in the faculty for fear that he might fall out with someone in the study group he is part of because of the tribal problems in the country. So the student tries to minimise his involvement with any group because his parents are wary of too much mixing with other students. (L22 Refat)

Actually, I noticed that there is no student group work here, maybe due to social factors. I came from a different background (Sudan), where students mingle with each other and work together in the university. Here, there could be some tribal and social traditions which make the student reserved and, as a lecturer, I can do nothing to resolve this problem. These problems can be resolved in due course. (L23TaHer)

Orafi (2009) assumes that within the Libyan culture, there is often separation between males and females. For him, the reason for this separation is because males and females are not brought up together, there is always separation even within the families. Consequently, females and males grow up without close relationships. This separation is mirrored also in classrooms where it might be seen as a violation of the sociocultural norms to work in groups containing the opposite sex. Even in mixed schools of males and females, any interactions within the classroom oftentimes happen among groups of the same sex, i.e. males tend to speak with each other, while females also prefer to keep to themselves. Following these lines, we can account for why the lecturers conclude that peer learning is not appropriate. Gender-based constraints placed on this type of learning force the lecturers to have recourse to more traditional (conventional) ways of learning among students. As such, learning is typically treated as an individual endeavour rather than a collective and dynamic process (Orafi, 2009). This is confirmed by the Ministry of Education in Libya which states in a recent report:

Education in Libya has a traditional character in methods and schemes. It is interested to supply students with information, but it does not care much for scientific thinking methods. Undoubtedly, the assurance on information learning by heart, for which the learner is awarded with high grades, is one of the obstacles of innovative thinking, and preparing students to knowledge production (The Libyan National Commission for Education, 2004: 65).

Elabbar (2011) argues that teaching in Libya is influenced by Libyan culture and beliefs about teaching. Libyan teachers (at the university and the school levels) find it difficult to utilize activities involving group or pair activity with their students. Elabbar (2011) assumes that this follows from cultural barriers between male and female students and even teachers. He adds that the teachers themselves are affected by the culture of teaching, such as the prevailing belief that university teachers are professional enough to teach and do not need any further pedagogical knowledge.

Furthermore, Libyan culture has further effects on the way the students deal with one another and any communication between the students and their lecturers. In this respect, Orafi (2009) argues that the Libyan culture emphasizes the value of saving face over maintaining conversation. What this implies is that even though, for instance, a student has a different (diverging) view from another student's point of view, it is considered as highly impolite in Libyan culture to explicitly express this disagreement. The student with a different view must say it in a way that implies his/her respect for the other student or lecturer and vice versa.

These cultural traits encourage the conventional ways of teaching and learning that involve lecturing, where there is no direct contact between the students themselves or between the lecturer and the students. Reasoning along these lines, it can be assumed that the use of the direct method of teaching, i.e. lecturing without any appeal to other interpersonal methods is one consequence of Libyan culture. This assumption might account for the prevalence of this method among lecturers as it is compatible with the rituals the students and even the Libyan lecturers grow up with. Consider the following replies:

The teaching method is a traditional one. I mean, either I prepare lectures from old material I had as student or from old syllabuses; I edit and update them. I also use some medical cases I come across in the faculty as topics of my lectures. (L20 Moosa)

The methodologies are a problem because they are sterile even with the development of the teaching tools; they are still using the same methods. I mean the performance is not developed; the idea is developed but not the performance. In the past, the explanations were done on the board. I mean the lecturer explained things using the board and things were running smoothly. Now we moved to the data show. What does the lecturer do in this stage? He puts the USB in the computer, reads from the computer and changes the slides and that is all. I mean there are no elaborate explanations and the lecturer does not make any effort. The lecturer is the only one who benefited from these tools. Instead of standing by the board and explains, he found himself relaxed and changing the slides. This in fact has led to the students abstaining for attending lectures. (ST15 Maher)

## **7.9 Parental influence and control**

A further manifestation of the cultural impact on the students is parents' interference in the students' university life and the topics that they study. The students are completely

guided by their parents who even communicate with the lecturers to encourage them to pay attention to their sons and daughters. What this means is that students are not allowed to do anything themselves or think of their future career which is determined by their parents, as communicated through lecturers. As another example, when students enter the university they do not choose which subject or faculty to study in - they just follow what their parents have already decided for them. This enforced passivity on the part of students is then reinforced through lecturers assuming passive learning subjects. It is assumed that parents and lecturers will interact with one another determining the best options for the students. This 'close connection' between lecturers and parents is evident in one example I will give. For instance, one student mentioned that his father always asks his lecturers to keep an eye on him and to follow his assignments and progress, which his father should be updated with on a regular basis. In this regard, several researchers argue that the interference of parents in students' university life makes the latter less motivated to achieve their aims in completing university (Moghani and Mohamed, 2003 and Abushafa, 2014). This observation lines up with Dornyei's (2009) assumption that motivation is one of the most important concepts in psychology and language education, which is commonly used to explain learners' success and failure in learning (p. 55, cited in Elabbar, 2011: 160). It also appears that parental scrutiny and pressure is applied to the lecturers, such that practices within the university are impacted:

Now what happen is, after the revaluation, the percentage of students passing actually increases . . . the percentage failing is lower .... So there is something that I do not know, there is unknown pressure from outside. Maybe the parents may come; they may threaten lecturers. So lecturers, just to avoid controversy, they just pass the students. (L12 Salem)

As previously mentioned, in a number of places in this thesis, there are particular issues that relate to the training and education of young women, in regard to parental influence and concern.

The parents of female students can play a role in their daughter's resumption of their studies or getting a job after graduation. But the society we live in curtails that role. In other words, even if the parents allow their daughter to travel abroad to do postgraduate studies, the latter won't be safe from the society's disapproval and people's talk. (FOC2 ST3)

This context is likely to present the young women concerned with an additional challenge inasmuch as they are likely to have to negotiate multiple conflicting desires and expectations.

There are also more general issues associated with lecturers' reliance on transmission models of learning which I describe below:

#### **7.10 Further factors in using traditional methods of teaching**

Surveying the related literature, a number of researchers argue that Libyan lecturers use traditional methods of teaching because they think such methods are useful and the students get great benefit from them (Aldradi, 2015; Orafi and Borg, 2009<sup>8</sup>). And in a context where there are many constraints on using other methods, this is almost certainly the case. According to Fareh (2010), using traditional methods of teaching is also influenced by teachers' own experience as students as they have the tendency to repeat their previous teachers' traditional roles and techniques. Farah assumes that this kind of teaching practice is a characteristic property of teaching in most of the Arabic countries (p. 3602).

Other researchers argue that the lecturers use the direct method of teaching because they find this method easy and it does not demand much effort from them. For instance, William and Burden (2005: 10-11) argue that the audio-lingual approach (a practice of the direct method of teaching) is still widely used in several educational contexts in the developing world because of the following reasons. First, in many of these countries teachers or university lecturers are not provided with professional training, hence they rely on their previously accumulated experience as students and teach with methods in a fashion similar to those with which they have been taught. Secondly, lecturers and teachers stick to the methods which are typically recommended in their course books, without any kind of personal input. This tends to lead to an approach which also does not take account of individual student differences. Thirdly, lecturers and teachers with low confidence have a tendency to be more motivated to use the audio lingual procedures

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<sup>8</sup> Also see Hayes (2009) for similar assumptions made for Thai context where the 'inherited traditions' of teaching are still widely used because they are regarded as useful for improving students' level of English and their achievements in exams.

which rely on repetition and drills, or a 'transmission model'. This is true of most teachers, probably, whatever the context (Stenhouse, 1975).

It needs to be repeated here, that there is a 'double layer' of challenge evident in what I have found. The teachers who are teaching medicine are not only faced with the challenges I have described in relation to culture, experience, and so on, but they are also themselves struggling with the *language of instruction*. For William and Burden (2005), the implementation of interpersonal, collective interactive activities including group work and peer teaching is regarded as too challenging for such teachers with low levels of linguistic ability and poor knowledge of the subject matter. For these teachers, it is easier to implement the direct way of teaching (i.e. presentation, practice, repetition and drills) rather than new methods of teaching which might put the teachers and the lecturers in awkward situations with the students. In this connection, Latiwish (2003) described how important it is for teachers to have direct control over students' interactions with each other as well as their contributions in the classroom in order to maintain authority in the classroom. In such a context it is not surprising that lecturers restrict themselves to conventional teaching methods and do not take into consideration new approaches which are more often regarded as process oriented (Orafi and Borg 2009 and Lagga et al 2004).

The trend to use traditional methods in teaching has been raised and discussed in other educational contexts in different countries. For instance, Schulz (2001) argues, in his study exploring Colombian teachers' and students' perceptions in connection to the role of grammar and error correction, that Colombian teachers are more inclined towards the use of the conventional language teaching. Schulz (2001) shows that Colombian teachers had strong commitments concerning the effectiveness of the traditional methods of teaching grammar teaching as well as error correction. Along similar lines, Schulz argued that the teachers' background as learners is considered a significant factor in shaping the teachers' perceptions and beliefs.

As is typical at University level, lecturers have significant autonomy and are free to use whatever methods they prefer inside the classroom. There is little or no guidance as far as pedagogy is concerned and there are no commitments to continuing professional development inside higher education in Libya. Indeed, it could be suggested that there is little in the way of teacher professional development in Libya.



Naeem (2007) argues that the curricula in the Arab world generally seem to encourage submission and compliance instead of cultivating free critical thinking. Embark (2011) argues that it is the insufficient *training* for teachers that is the main problem facing education at Libya schools and universities. The researcher calls for a rigorous training for all teachers as they would be more compatible with the modern needs of Libyan education.

### 7.11 Teachers' lack of experience and learning

Such views and trends prohibit male-female interaction or communication, so male students are disallowed to interact with female students and vice versa. This lack of communication leads to weaker roles of the groups and limits the chances the lecturers have to increase interaction and communication between the students themselves. This contrasts with Western cultures where interaction between students is less constrained by gender-related considerations (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).<sup>9</sup> When the lecturer asks the students to work in pairs or groups, students select their counterparts in the group from the same sex. So, groups either consist of male students or female students. This is imposed by their tribal associations and beliefs on placing strict segregation between the two sexes. This division of labour has negative impact on the students themselves because of the fact that not all students are accessible to each other, and hence weakening the possibility of the students benefiting from each other.

Additionally, the use of traditional methods also extends to forms of assessment. Several researchers argue that assessment at Libyan universities is very traditional and lacks any innovation. The lecturers appeal to conventional ways of assessment, mostly in written form and with little emphasis on oral/practical skills (see, among others, Clark, 2004). In a related vein, it is also the case that the students themselves become familiar with the methods that are needed for them to pass the exams and therefore come to rely on, and feel comfortable with, these methods (see, Orafi, 2008). The use of traditional exams and

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<sup>9</sup> Markus & Kitayama (1991) argues that in many non-Western cultures, there is much greater emphasis placed on the interconnectedness of selves with other selves, involving the maintenance of good relationships, fulfilment of roles, and accounting for the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours of other people, something that make these cultures conservative.

assessment was certainly supported by both lecturers and students in my study. As is clear, below, the lecturers feel they are supporting the students by their use of multiple-choice questions (MCQ) and the use of short answers to cope with the students' low level of English. This is used as a justification for these approaches rather than acknowledging that traditional ways of assessment prevalent in the country are taken for granted as the best way of doing things. Consider the following replies:

Now, there is a new method of exam called MCQ. This method allows the student to use less writing in his answers and it is also an easier way of assessment than before. (L13 Idrees)

We decided to avoid questions requiring long answers to avoid these problems. We have adopted new ways of testing which require short answers like MCQ. (L20 Moosa)

The lecturers are trying to avoid long answers by using MCQ in the exams because they find them easier to mark than the other questions, which require long answers. These questions are usually short and use multiple-choice answers. (FOC2 ST1)

Even if there is any writing in the exam, it will be short because the lecturers are aware of the spelling mistakes made by the students. Thus, they ask questions, which require short answers like give the reasons for this or that. (FOC2 ST5)

The students, as outlined previously, also describe other challenges that the lecturers face:

There is another problem in the exam; that is you could have written in good English and answered well but the person who corrects your paper knows only the prototypical answer. So if your answer is not the same as the prototypical answer he will readily dismiss your answer. (ST14 Samee)

The correction in the exams is bad because sometimes the university brings people who do not know English well and ask them to correct our exam papers and this is disastrous and harms the student. (ST14 Samee)

The negative effects of the use of traditional methods of teaching and assessment in higher education have also been emphasized by Tamtam *et al* (2011) who argue that “problems observed in the same area include lack of well-developed learning strategies and modern employment in teaching, and the omission of the use of self-learning skills such as: analytical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, and research skills” (p. 749).

Overall, this discussion concludes that students' tendency to not use English effectively in their study of medicine is caused, among many others, by factors that are not related to the students themselves. Given that the students' level in English is low and the language used in medicine is English, teachers must follow developed methods of teaching in order to facilitate the educational process of the students. According to the response of the students and the lecturers, students do not benefit much from their pre-university education in connection with English skills, hence the need to take this weakness into account when teaching students in English. As it is clear teachers stick to old methods of teachings which are teacher-centered, something that complicates life for the students. I conclude that it is the use of the traditional methods that is behind the negative perspectives of the students towards the use of English, as the same students believe that English is the right choice for their medical studies, and many are highly motivated to learn and improve their English. They may struggle with English but this is not the same thing as not wanting to improve the standard of their English. Consider the following replies:

To tell you the truth, we still want big support and urgent solutions in order for the level of students' English to improve. English is very important in the life of a medical student in particular, more so than for students from other faculties. This is because the student will need it and will use it when practising medicine, more than his mother tongue. (FOC3 ST4)

To develop my English language, I have to do a course in English. Maybe, now English is not very important. But its importance will be clear in the future or after graduating because the student whose English is not good won't be able to practice Medicine in the future and will also face this problem when he wants to do his or her postgraduate studies abroad. (ST17 Basher)

The above discussion also reveals the negative impacts of Libyan culture on the students' progress in medicine. As is clear from the responses, some students are forced to study medicine by their parents, and are not internally motivated to study this subject. This may exacerbate any difficulty they encounter in their study of medicine. The natural question to ask here is why the students cannot resist their parents' choices if they do not like them. As we saw, the answer to this question lies in the role of the culture in shaping the social relations between the members of the same community and even between the members of the same family.

In this chapter, I have explored the main reasons behind the use of the rote learning at Sebha University despite a number of calls for modern learning and teaching techniques

at Libyan Universities. According to the students' and the lecturers' replies, it is clear that both parties are – in many ways – happy pursuing this type of learning. I have argued that this tendency is rooted in aspects of Libyan culture which prefer repetition and memorization, as reflected in aspects of learning in the pedagogy of the Madrasah. It comes as no surprise that the whole educational system in this country is based on the (deep rote) learning which is manifested through the practices of the students and the types of exams prepared by the lecturers. In view of this, it is not true that the reason behind rote learning is the low (i.e. poor) level of the students, which in turn can be one reflection of how education in this country is shaped. Lecturers are also responsible of using this type of learning as many of them are unable to implement modern educational techniques inside the classroom. One might wonder why such lecturers are not fired from the job, and the answer of this question lies also in the culture prevalent in this country. It is considered a wrong (or even bad) practice to expel somebody from his/her work within Libyan culture. Additionally, I have shown how cultural and traditional trends of Libya force the lecturer to adopt a teaching/learning mode whereby separation between male students and females students is highly respected and perceived. Furthermore, many students are not encouraged to take part in educational activities such as participation in group work as they may commit some mistakes of which the students become shamed. Within Libyan culture, one must save his/her face value in front of others.

### **7.12 Concluding Remarks**

The thesis focuses on the learning and use of English as a tool of instruction inside Libyan universities. It started with an investigation of the challenges that students and lecturers face in the learning and teaching of the language of English in higher education. It then investigated how the use of English in a professional field – medicine – impacted on both lecturers and students. In-depth qualitative research was carried out at Sebha University in the South of Libya, including individual and group interviews with staff and students.

One of the main conclusions of the current thesis was that the use of English in the study of medicine at Sebha University has indirect negative impacts on the students' progress and performance. Such negative impacts are due to the students' low level of English and they use passive rote learning in memorizing the material required from them; this is constantly reinforced by the lecturers in terms of teaching methods and expectations (see

below). Students consequently do not understand much of this material, a problem that leads ultimately to poor performance on the part of the students and, in turn, to frustration and lack of motivation. In turn, it is important to ask what sort of ‘professional’ these medical students may become. Professionalism, generally, is associated with both subject knowledge and the capacity to make context-specific, independent judgements, in respect of the field of practice. There is little to suggest that the medical lecturers I interviewed were engaged in encouraging this sort of attitude or expertise, or that the medical students I interviewed understood or were capable of acting in this way. Having said that, it is also the case that a significant proportion of the students I interviewed have a desire to continue to study medicine – but abroad – and with this an acknowledgement that they both wanted and needed further training and development. Many students also lamented the fact that they could not speak English very well and wanted to improve their language skills. This desire is something that should be capitalised upon in future developments.

The students’ tendency to not use English effectively in their study of medicine is caused, among many others, by factors that are not related to the students themselves. Given that the students’ level in English is low and the language used in medicine is English, teachers must follow developed methods of teaching in order to facilitate the educational ‘success’ of the students, in terms of gaining qualifications. According to the response of the students and the lecturers, students do not benefit much from their pre-university education in connection with English skills, hence the need to take this weakness into account when teaching students in English. As is clear teachers stick to old methods of teaching which are teacher-centered, something that complicates life for the students. In addition, many lecturers themselves struggle with the English language.

Additionally, it was concluded that rote learning is considered the main learning method used at Sebha university. The thesis describes the main reasons behind the use of rote learning at Sebha University, despite a number of calls and acknowledgement among the lecturers for modern learning and teaching techniques at Libyan Universities. According to the students’ and the lecturers’ replies, it is clear that both parties are actually happy pursuing rote learning, in many ways. It has been argued that this tendency is rooted in aspects of Libyan culture which prefer repetition and memorization as reflected in aspects of learning in the pedagogy of the Madrasah. It comes as no surprise that the whole educational system in this country is based on the (deep rote) learning which is manifested

through the practices of the students and the types of the exams prepared by the lecturers themselves.

Besides, the thesis also illustrates how the so-called 'deep rote' has effects on the general interaction between the students and the lecturers. According to the elicited views from students and lecturers it was clear that the latter follows the same path of assessment and teaching method which forces the students to deal with the medicine courses in specific methods. For instance, multiple choice questions are the preferable way of assessment by the lecturers as it needs less effort from them. This preference forces the students to deal with their courses in a way that fits this method. Even if the questions are different, but the method is the same, which create a mode of deep rote. The lecturers must be aware of this setback of using deep rote and attempts to vary their methods of assessment and the ways they teach the students.

One look at the whole thesis reveals the necessity of the use of new and different methods of teaching in the context of English as a foreign language. The lecturers ideally should follow the teaching methods that stimulate the students to search for new information, not force them to memorize the material in the books. According to the students, they currently feel they have to memorize the books so they can pass the exams. The lecturers ask for the information and do not inquire whether the students understand it or not. This thesis certainly reinforces other work that calls for a complete shift to the new methods of teachings, which aims at rendering the students competent in their subjects.

These problems used to affect me when I was a student at university in Libya, a part-time teacher in Libya, and have followed me to the UK when I became a Master's and then a PhD student. As I described at the end of the methodology chapter, I have faced many challenges myself in 'breaking out' of the accepted ways of teaching and learning in Libya and taking on a more independent role. Changing the teaching/learning relationship is a profoundly difficult thing to achieve, without considerable time, the commitment of all parties, and a willingness to allow students and lecturers to make mistakes along the way. The system of 'deep rote' is likely to continue until there are sufficient resources and commitment to engage in a radical investment in Education. Gaddafi expended considerable resources on establishing basic, and higher, education for the population of Libya. Unfortunately, given the current political situation in Libya, it is difficult to

imagine when an equivalent investment might be made in teacher education, teacher development and investment in the infrastructure of education. In the meantime, lecturers still consider the students the problem, and students have a tendency to blame the lecturers. I think this is another of the main barriers against development of Libyan higher education and I hope that this thesis may be used to help all sides understand *one another* better.

Furthermore, there should be understanding among the students, lecturers, parents, and the community that the effects of culture should be examined, considered, and where possible put to one side so that this does not affect the students' learning. One of the main conclusions of the current thesis is to highlight how cultural trends and customs within one community can determine the teaching styles and techniques in that community. As we have shown, the Communicative Approach is sometimes blocked because of cultural beliefs which delimit the use of other methods. Attention needs to be paid to how elements of a Communicative Approach could currently be incorporated into Libyan higher education, taking account of culture, rather than ignoring it, or pretending it does not exist. Once again, if lecturers and students could communicate about such issues, share concerns, and discuss the challenges together, a more mutually beneficial system may begin to develop.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Ethical Approval

**From:** Williams, Mandy  
**Sent:** 10 March 2014 15:11  
**To:** Khalid, Khalid  
**Cc:** Frankham, Jo  
**Subject:** Ethical Approval

**Categories:** Red Category

Dear Khalid

With reference to your application for Ethical approval by proportionate review.

#### **14/EHC/022 - Enhancing EFL students' reading skills in Higher Education in Libya: A newspaper based intervention**

Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed the above application and I am pleased to inform you that ethical approval has been granted and the study can now commence.

Approval is given on the understanding that:

- any adverse reactions/events which take place during the course of the project are reported to the Committee immediately;
- any unforeseen ethical issues arising during the course of the project will be reported to the Committee immediately;
- the LJMU logo is used for all documentation relating to participant recruitment and participation eg poster, information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires. The LJMU logo can be accessed at <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/corporatecommunications/60486.htm>

Where any substantive amendments are proposed to the protocol or study procedures further ethical approval must be sought.

Applicants should note that where relevant appropriate gatekeeper / management permission must be obtained prior to the study commencing at the study site concerned.

For details on how to report adverse events or request ethical approval of major amendments please refer to the information provided at <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/RGSO/93205.htm>

Please note that ethical approval is given for a period of five years from the date granted and therefore the expiry date for this project will be March 2019. An application for extension of approval must be submitted if the project continues after this date.



Mandy Williams, Research Support Officer  
Graduate School, Research and Innovation Services  
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## Appendix 2 Participants information sheet



# LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

## PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

### **Title of the project**

Enhancing EFL students' reading skills in Higher Education in Libya: A newspaper based intervention

### **Name of Researcher and School/Faculty**

Khalid A Khalid, Faculty of Education, Health and Community

### **Invitation**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you make your decision, it is important that you know what the research will involve and why it is being done. Please read all the information below and feel free to ask me if you need more information.

### **1. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to explore and analyse the potential of newspaper-based learning activities as a resource for improving the reading skills of EFL undergraduate students in Libya. The work is divided into two phases. In the first phase I will employ interviews to gather data with students and staff at a higher education institution in Libya. These interviews will assist me in gaining an overview of the current situation and help to inform the second phase of my study. It is phase one of the study that I am hoping you will participate in. The interviews will provide me with in-depth information about methods currently in use in English language classrooms and challenges I will face in implementing new pedagogies and new content to the classroom. I will use the insights gained to help inform the design of Phase 2 of my work.

I will then design a course for teaching English which draws on the use of newspapers as 'authentic' materials. A series of co-operative activities will be designed for use in an undergraduate classroom. I will then return to Libya to implement and evaluate these teaching materials over a period of three months. I will test the students' reading levels at the beginning and the end of the course in order to judge the impact the course has had on their reading levels. I will also distribute a questionnaire and carry out further one-to-one interviews with the students to gain in-depth understandings about their experiences of the course.

### **2. Do I have to take part?**

It is completely up to you to decide whether you want to participate in this study or not. However, if you want to go ahead and take part, this information sheet will be given to you to retain and you will be requested to sign a consent form. If you decide to participate, you still have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process whether this is before or during the interview. You do not need to provide a reason for doing so.

### **3. What will happen if I take part?**

If you agree to participate I will carry out a face-to-face interview and, with your permission, audio record this interview. The interview should last between 45 to 60

minutes. The questions will revolve around your experience of teaching English to Libyan undergraduate students, and your experiences (if any) and feelings about the use of newspapers in a classroom environment. A discussion of the time and date of the interview, which will take place at the department where you are currently working, will be arranged at your convenience.

**4. Are there any risks / benefits involved?**

There are no risks arising from your participation in this study. Although you will not directly benefit from taking part in the research, the information gathered will improve the researcher's knowledge about suitable curriculum materials and approaches leading to longer term improvements in university practices.

**5. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information will be kept confidential to me and my supervisor. Pseudonyms will be applied to the transcripts. Once the study is finished, recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. During or after the research, your identity will not be disclosed in any reports.

**Further Information**

Should you require any additional information regarding the study, please feel free to contact the researcher or my Academic Supervisor by using the contact details given below.

Khalid A Khalid (Researcher)  
Faculty of Education, Health and Community  
Liverpool John Moores University,  
Room H203 Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh campus  
Barkhill Road  
L17 6BD  
Email: [K.A.khalid@2013.ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:K.A.khalid@2013.ljmu.ac.uk)  
[almabrokk@yahoo.com](mailto:almabrokk@yahoo.com)

Dr, Jo Frankham (Academic Supervisor)  
Faculty of Education, Health and Community Liverpool John Moores University  
Email: [j.frankham@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:j.frankham@ljmu.ac.uk)

### Appendix 3 Lecturers' interview questions



Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. The aim of this interview is to find out the difficulties faced by the students studying medicine in English in the university. Everything you say in this interview will be confidential and nobody will know about it except my supervisor and me. Your contribution is crucial for the advancement of research and the overcoming of the problems faced by students of medicine in particular and the learners of English in general. The main questions will be:

1. Could you tell me a bit about your history in medicine – where did you study medicine? Did you study in English or in another language? If not their first language – did you face any difficulties because you were not studying in your native/first language? Did you work in Libya as a doctor before training other doctors?
2. Could you tell me a bit about your history as a teacher of medicine? How long have you worked at Sebha University . . . etc. Have you taught medicine in other places?
3. What do you teach? What different elements of the programmes are you responsible for? What methods do you use for different elements of the courses? Do you do all your teaching in English? Why? Why not?
4. Do the students do ‘practical’ work with real patients while they are training? If yes: At this point, I assume they are talking to patients in Arabic? Does that cause any problems for the trainees or for you as a teacher – they learn in English but then they have to practice medicine in Arabic?
5. What do you feel are the main challenges you face in teaching medicine in English at Sebha University?
6. Does the assessment of students take place in English? Do some students struggle more with writing than with speaking or the other way round?

7. How do you try to overcome the challenges that you face when teaching the students in their second language?
8. To what extent does the students' level in English play a role in their performance and understanding of the material that you are explaining to them?
9. Is there any correlation between students' level at English and their performance in medicine/dentistry?
10. Have you had assistance of any kind to help you think about the best way of teaching medicine in the students' second language? (E.g. courses) Do you talk to your colleagues about the difficulties you face?
11. Do you think it is the right thing to do, to teach medicine in English, or do you think it would be better to teach medicine in Arabic? Why?
12. Do you notice any differences between the young women and the young men who study medicine in terms of their language abilities? In relation to anything else?
13. Do students ever fail their medical degree because they struggle with the language?
14. Where do most students go on to work as doctors after they have qualified?
15. If mostly abroad: What do you think of this? Do you talk to your students about issues like where they might go to work after qualifying?
16. If you do not mind me asking – why do you stay in Libya working here – do you think about going to work abroad?
17. Would you like to talk about other aspects related to studying medicine in English that we had not discussed in this interview or to add anything?

Thank you for your participation.



## Appendix 4 Students' interviews questions



Interview questions with students phase two (which will represent the PhD part of my study). The interviews will be carried out in Arabic.

Interviews with students are mainly meant to gain in-depth understandings about their experiences of the course and their opinion of the current teaching method and the challenges they face because of using English as a language of materials, instruction, and communication instead of Arabic. The main questions will be:

- 1- Why did you decide to study Medicine/dentistry at University?
- 2- Take me back to the beginning of your course here at the university. What happened when you first arrived? What were your first experiences of studying medicine in English language? Is all the material taught in English?
- 3- Tell me a bit about how the programme is organised over the five years here.
- 4- Tell me about the different methods that lecturers use in order to support your learning in different areas of study. Do you struggle more with some approaches than with others?
- 5- What are your experiences of learning in English? (Prompts to take the student back to when they first started learning English and what experiences they have had since.)
- 6- What are the main challenges you face when the lecturers use English instead of Arabic?
- 7- How do you cope with these challenges? Do you ask for extra help? (If yes – from who? are they helpful?) Do the students try to help each other? EXPAND ANY ANSWERS.

- 8- Did you take any language courses before you started your medical degree? Are you taking any language courses now? Does the university help you directly with improving your language skills?
- 9- How often do you use English outside your courses?
- 10- Do you think that using English is a barrier facing the students? For you? For others? Why? /Why not?
- 11- Do you have problems in spelling? If yes, to what extent does this problem affect in your performance in exams? Do the lecturers tolerate such mistakes?
- 12- Do you ever speak in Arabic inside the classrooms? When? Do the lecturers want you to speak in English at all times? (If yes – how do they react if they discover you are speaking Arabic?) What difference does it make to your learning when speaking or reading in Arabic?
- 13- When you struggle to speak English (if you do) do you find this has an effect on your motivation? Does it affect other things?
- 14- How do you cope with the struggles of learning medicine and studying in English?
- 15- What effects does studying such a challenging subject have on the rest of your life? (e.g. your family, other things?)
- 16- What do you want to do when you qualify as a doctor? Do you know where you would like to work? EXPAND ANSWERS – why – how will you try to achieve your aims, etc?
- 17- Are there any social circumstances that restrict your engagement in learning medicine in English? (Emotional, physical, personal, family, etc)
- 18- Would you like to talk about other aspects related to studying medicine in English that we had not discussed in this interview or to add anything?

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix 5 Students Arabic interview

### اسئلة المقابلة الشخصية مع طلاب كلية الطب البشري/طب الاسنان

السلام عليكم

نشكرك جزيل الشكر على موافقتك لأجراء هذه المقابلة. الغاية والغرض من هذه المقابلة هو التعرف على الصعوبات التي تواجه طلبة العلوم الطبية بالجامعة عند دراسة الطب باللغة الانجليزية. دعني اوضح لك ان جميع ما تقوله في هذا السياق سيكون في غاية السرية. لا يطلع عليه الا انا او المشرف الخاص بي في الجامعة. مشاركتك معنا مهمة لتعزيز البحث ولإيجاد حلول لتفادي مشاكل اللغة الانجليزية بصفة عامة.

- 1 لماذا قررتم دراسة الطب/طب الاسنان في الجامعة؟
- 2-أعدني إلى بداية دورتك هنا في الجامعة. ما حدث عندما وصلت لأول مرة؟ ما هي تجاربك الأولى من دراسة الطب في اللغة الإنجليزية؟ هي جميع المواد التي تدرس باللغة الإنجليزية؟
- 3-قل لي قليلا عن كيفية تنظيم البرنامج على مدى السنوات الخمس هنا.
- 4-أخبرني عن الطرق المختلفة التي تستخدم المحاضرين من أجل دعم التعلم في مناطق مختلفة من الدراسة. هل النضال أكثر مع بعض النهج من مع الآخرين؟
- 5-ما هي خبراتكم التعلم في اللغة الإنجليزية؟ (مطالبات باتخاذ الطالب إلى عندما بدأت لأول مرة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وما التجارب التي كانت لديهم منذ ذلك الحين.)
- 6-ما هي التحديات الرئيسية التي تواجهها عند استخدام المحاضرين الإنجليزية بدلا من اللغة العربية؟
- 7-كيف تعامل مع هذه التحديات؟ لا تسأل عن مساعدة إضافية؟ (إذا كان الجواب نعم؟ - من الذين هم مفيدة؟) هل الطلاب يحاولون مساعدة بعضهم البعض؟ توسيع أي أجوبة.
- 8-هل كنت تأخذ أي دورات اللغة قبل أن تبدأ درجة الطبية الخاصة بك؟ هل أنت مع أي دورات اللغة الآن؟ هل الجامعة تساعدك مباشرة مع تحسين مهاراتك اللغوية؟
- 9-كيف وغالبا ما كنت تستخدم اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الدورات الخاصة بك؟
- 10-هل تعتقد أن استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية هي حاجز التي تواجه الطلاب؟ لك؟ بالنسبة للآخرين؟ لماذا؟ / لماذا لا؟
- 11-هل لديك مشاكل في الإملاء؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، إلى أي مدى تؤثر هذه المشكلة في أداؤك في الامتحانات؟ لا المحاضرين يتسامح مع مثل هذه الأخطاء؟
- 12-هل تتكلم من أي وقت مضى في العربية داخل الفصول الدراسية؟ متى؟ لا المحاضرين يريد منك أن تتحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في جميع الأوقات؟ (إذا كان الجواب نعم -كيف يكون رد فعلهم إذا يكتشفون كنت تتحدث اللغة العربية؟) ما الفرق أنها لا تجعل من التعلم الخاص بك عند الحديث أو القراءة في اللغة العربية؟
- 13-عندما كنت الكفاح من أجل التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية (إذا كنت تفعل) لا تجد هذا له تأثير على الدافع الخاص بك؟ أنها لا تؤثر على أمور أخرى؟
- 14-كيف يمكنك التعامل مع نضالات تعلم الطب والدراسة في اللغة الإنجليزية؟
- 15-ما هي الآثار لا دراسة مثل هذا الموضوع تحديا لها على بقية حياتك؟ (مثل عائلتك، وأشياء أخرى؟)

16-ماذا تريد أن تفعل عند التأهل كطبيب؟ هل تعرف أين كنت ترغب في العمل؟ توسعات أجوبة -لماذا -كيف لك محاولة لتحقيق أهدافك، الخ

17-هل هناك أي ظرف من الظروف الاجتماعية التي تحد من الخطوبة في تعلم الطب في اللغة الإنجليزية؟ (العاطفية والمادية والشخصية، والأسرة، الخ)

18-هل ترغب في الحديث عن الجوانب الأخرى المتصلة دراسة الطب باللغة الإنجليزية أننا لم يناقش في هذه المقابلة أو إضافة أي شيء؟

الباحث/ خالد المبروك خالد

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## Appendix 6 Focus group interview



**Researcher:** First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to do this interview. Let me introduce myself to you; my name is Khalid A Khalid a PhD student at Liverpool John Morse University, UK. The aim of this interview is to find out the difficulties faced by the students studying medicine in English in the university. Everything you say in this interview will be confidential and nobody will know about it except my supervisor and me. Your contribution is crucial for the advancement of research and the overcoming of the problems faced by students of medicine in particular and the learners of English in general. So, let us start with the first question: Why did you decide to study Medicine at University?

**Student 1:** For me, it was my own desire to study medicine; from the beginning, I did not think of doing anything else. After I spent three years in the secondary school, I joined the medical high school in order to join the faculty of medicine. So, after the medical high school I joined the faculty of medicine.

**Student 2:** I am the same, it was my desire to study medicine even before I reached puberty, and I used to say I am a doctor. One day I travelled to Sert to visit some relatives and I met my cousin. She said to me ‘are you still thinking of becoming a doctor?’ It was the first time I met her and I could not remember that I had met her before. I told her ‘how do you know that I wanted to be doctor?’ she replied ‘long time ago when you were too young you used to say that when I grow up I want to be a doctor.’ so ‘ I did not think of anything else. Straightaway, after the medical high school I joined the faculty of medicine here in the university.

**Student 3:** For me it was my own desire to study medicine since I was in primary school. I mean, When I held something between my hands I started to dissect it, even the animals and the insects were not safe from me .I was not afraid of any animal or insect, so anything I caught with my hands should cut open. Even my mother used to tell me to leave the insects alone but I was insistent to cut open this insect in front of her. So, nobody told me to join the faculty of medicine; it was my own choice.

**Student 4:** It was my own desire to study medicine because I like helping people and medicine is based on helping others get better. It could also open doors for me to participate in International organisations. I mean I would not remain in one place. My objective is to help people.

**Student 5:** It was my parents' desire more than mine was. My father was the one who chose medicine for me, I agreed with him and did not say no. when I joined the faculty of medicine, I felt at ease with it because it is a humane field and it enables you to help people and make a small contribution to the society we live in. I was young and did not understand well but he started this process for me and told me to study here. It was him who enrolled me the faculty of medicine and I am in the last year now praise to Allah.

**Researcher:** Take me back to the beginning of your course here at the university. What happened when you first arrived? What were your first experiences of studying medicine in English language?

**Student 3:** When I first started the studies, I was enthusiastic about it. The group I was in, was selected according to the marks they get in their A levels. I mean that those who get high marks in the A levels they join the university straightaway and those who do not reach certain mark they need to sit an entry exam. I was aware of this fact, so I worked hard and got high marks in my A levels and joined the university without sitting the entry exam. I was determined that I will get in without the entry exam. I achieved that because I had big ideas, was driven and resolute to realise my dreams, which were beyond reality. I mean, I had some relatives who had studied medicine in the years before I started the medical studies, who advise me not to study medicine because medicine is hard and there are many obstacles in the faculty. But I had my own design; that is I will join the faculty of medicine and succeed. When I started, the obstacles were not restricted to English alone but I also had problems with the medical terms. For example, it took me three weeks to finish a chapter, which is supposed to take only one week because I needed to translate the terms. It takes a student a long time to get used to these terms, so I translated the most basic ones. I, therefore, had to live with my Grandmother because my aunts were doctors, so they could help me with my revision; I used to ask them about every word because it was easier and less time consuming than translation. There were so many doctors in my family.

**Student 3:** I had been translating for the entire first year in order to understand the syllabus.

**Student 1:** Those of us who studied in the medical high school and joined the faculty of medicine straightaway and did not do the premedical year, we understood the basics like chemistry and biology in Arabic. So, translation was the *bête noire* because in the beginning we translated everything. I mean it was really bad because we did not take any courses in English before we joined the faculty. Then, we get used to the language and translated only the strange words.

**Student 2:** When I first joined the faculty, I was like the old saying "a deaf person in weddings". I was lost, not because of the syllabus or English because my English was good. But my problem was the university and its system; I did not know what subjects we were going to study because I was the first in my family to go to the university, where the kiosks were, where the books were sold or anything. I had a problem with the university's amenities.

**Student 4:** It is a problem not to have somebody to guide and direct you. To discover something by yourself is different from somebody who has someone to guide and direct him towards the right direction.

**Student 2:** I mean this is something that encourages you. You are a person who wants to find his way by himself and there is not only anyone to help you but your English is not good enough to make things easier for you. Sometimes, there is some discouragement from the family; I mean they tell you this course is not for you and you cannot go far. For example, I was telling my sister, on the day of the results, about the difficulty of the subjects we studied and the lecturers were using the minus three marking system (one wrong answer equals 3 correct ones) which makes the risk great. For instance, in the chemistry exam there were 12 questions and for one wrong answer they mark down three answers and I remembered that I was sure of eight correct answers. So, I was telling my sister that I did not answer the chemistry questions well. She was an employee in the faculty and was there when they gave out the results. We were 500 students in the first year and only 50 passed in the first session. So when they put the lists up my sister was looking for my name in the list of those who have failed just because I told her about the difficulty of the exam and the minus marking system she presumed that I was going to fail. Fortunately, I was among the 50 who had passed.

**Researcher:** If she started with the list of those who passed, it would have been easier for her!

**Student2.** She did not expect that I was going to pass because I told her about the difficulty of the situation due to the three minus marking system particularly in chemistry. This shows that when a person is determined to succeed he will; nobody in my family studied medicine and my English was not good yet my determination to succeed was stronger than all the shortcomings.

**Student 5:** my first day in the university was an indescribable shock for me.

**Student 4:** My first day in the university was full of enthusiasm because I felt that I had started to realise my ambitions. Yes, my brother was in the faculty of medicine before me but my friend helped me more than him. She drew the plan for me, which I followed from the premedical year up to now. I had no problem with English because I had lived in Canada and my mother had an MA in English.

**Researcher:** are all the subjects taught in English?

**Student 3:** All the subjects were taught in English except a cultural one, which was taught in Arabic.

**Researcher:** Tell me a bit about how the programme is organised over the five years here?

**Student 3:** Our system is based on a full year study and not on semesters. Each year we studied two subjects, which had many subparts.

**Student 2:** In the new system, they have divided the subjects into four subjects in the first and second years. Now, they teach them half the syllabus in the first year and the other half in the following year. If the student fails any subject, he can carry them over to the next year.

**Researcher:** how many subjects can a student carry over to the next year?

**Student5.** Our year system does not allow you to carry over any subject to the next year, but the new students can carry over two subjects. For example, the University of Tripoli and other universities did not change their system.

**Student 2:** There is another thing; we, in the University of Sebha, are different from other universities in Libya. In this university, they do not apply the education rules and laws.



**Researcher:** In the university, do not they follow the education laws?

**Student 1:** They do not follow the education regulations. If you ask them to show you the education laws, definitely, they tell you they do not have them.

**Student 4:** They apply the rules only during the correction of the exam papers.

**Researcher:** is the edict of the minus marking part of the regulations?

**Student 1:** In the first and second years, it was not, but this system exists in the fifth year.

**Student 5:** In the first years, there is no minus marking system. It exists in the fourth and fifth years; it is an international rule and all the universities all over the world use it. There was a group after us where they did not use the minus system; it was up to the lecturer to use the marking system he wants.

**Student 2:** You feel that the minus system depends on the number of the students. For example, if the students' number is small, they do not apply the system but if it is large, they use it to restrict the number.

**Student 1:** Some lecturers destroy the moral of the students by telling them all the time you will not pass. For example, we were once in the amphitheatre in the beginning of the year and this lecturer came and told us you will not succeed we want only 50 students. At that time, the amphitheatre was completely full, so some students cancelled their registrations and left the faculty even though they were good at the secondary school and their English was not bad. They left the course because of the lecturer's threatening talks.

**Student 4:** The officials in the university plan that only 50 students reach the fifth year regardless of the number of the students who joined the faculty in the premedical year. It is a well devised plan to have the number of graduates they wanted and no more, so they decrease the number each year till they get to the number of students they want in the final year.

**Student 2:** Yes, there were some students with us in the premedical year, who dropped out before the end of the year and joined other faculties.

**Student 3:** There were, some students with us, who passed in the premedical year and started the studies in the first year, but they dropped out before the end of the year exams because of the pressure exerted on the students.

**Researcher:** I think that the premedical year is the most difficult year.

**Student 4:** No, on the contrary, the last two years (four and five) are more difficult than the preceding years because the clinical part of the course is introduced in those two years.

**Student 2:** In the premedical year, it is supposed that there should be more focus on and attention paid to the student because it is the year, which prepares him for the study of medicine. But here they do not pay any attention to or focus on the student's English; they only focus on the syllabus.

**Researcher:** Tell me about the different methods that lecturers use in order to support your learning in different areas of study.

**Student 1:** Regarding the teaching methods, each lecturer has his own method. There are those who explain things on the board because they do not like using the data show, and those are usually better in imparting ideas than those who use the data show because they know what to say in the lecture and how to say it. But those who use the data show, once there is a power cut they start stammering and say we will finish the lesson in the next lecture. And there are lecturers, I mean, who are so reliant on the slides that they do not have any eye contact with the students. They only want to finish the lecture and look at the slides as if it is an online lecture. We still have this problem! It is hard. In the past, the lecturer who had a board and a pen use to draw and explain better than the present situation.

**Student 4:** The faculty has no specific standards or programmes to be followed.

**Student 3:** The lecturer is not dedicated to teaching the students; he gives the lecture and his eyes are on the phone. The lecturers do not update their knowledge. I mean that the students' knowledge is better than theirs because they do not keep to date with the developments in the field. I mean that once they graduated and got the job, their main concern becomes their families and do not bother about the students' education. They stop learning about new developments, which could not only be beneficial to the student but also benefit society as a whole. They forget that today's students will be their colleagues in the future. The other thing is that lecturers frustrate the students. I mean you feel as if you are in the Open University; if you want something you should research it yourself and when you ask for their help they do not provide it.

**Student 2:** After all this, the student is required to attend. I mean, if he does not attend he will have problems on the day of the exam. We rely more on ourselves in revising than on the lectures and we listen to the audio- recordings made by the students from the university of Tripoli and Egyptian universities; I mean the students do not depend only on the university. There are some lecturers who bring an X-Ray image, and present it to the students who are present in the lecture and they say that the aim behind it is to know the students who were present and those who were absent. I mean, they do not explain these things (X-ray Picture), they just waste two hours of our time that is all.

**Researcher:** if the process consists only of slides, you could photocopy them from your friends who were present.

**Student 2:** Initially, they do not give us the slides to photocopy.

**Student 5:** There is no specific or fix syllabus; for example, this is first year syllabus and this is second year syllabus. I mean things become haphazard; sometimes they refer you to a postgraduate textbook and ask you to revise and read from it and this is obviously impossible.

**Student 4:** I know that the lecturers do not play a big part; still I encourage the student to attend because he/she could benefit from his attendance even at the rate of 1%. At least he/she would know the title of the lesson, the lecturer, what the focus was on and what does the lecturer like or does not Even if the latter did not explain anything, it is the absence of the student, which is the problem.

**Student 3:** We cannot describe all the lecturers that way. I mean there are useless ones; they use their mobile all the time to arrange appointments for their private surgeries from the moment they set foot in the classroom.

**Student 1:** I mean that he is agreeable up to the point where we take items from him and the input of the lectures. But in the exam he ignores what he delivered in the lectures and uses tricks with the students.

**Student 2:** I had a situation similar to this. In the past, Dr Ahmed one of the lecturers , used to teach us dissection .all along the year he urged us to concentrate on certain things and told us they will be in the exam. I believed him and leant those things by rote. But at the day of the exam the questions were totally different from the parts he urged us to

concentrate on. Like the saying goes, "the words that he was saying were in one valley and the exam was in another valley"

**Student 4:** the lecturers test us as if we are professionals. For example, in the clinical they ask you hard questions and tell you that you had learnt these things a long time ago, and you should know them because you will soon be a doctor, so you should have answers for everything. I mean the level of delivery is not related to the exam.

**Student 2:** The lecturer initially does not ask the student if he understands or not. He does not make him feel that his main concern is to teach him something.

**Student 1:** You feel that the lecturer only delivers while being disassociated from the process.

**Student 4:** I mean to the extent that we so much rely on the audio recordings from other universities like the University of Tripoli and the University of Benghazi. And the material of these recordings is not by lecturers in the university but it is provided by doctors who have recently graduated. They provide courses in the curriculum and are better than those who have MScs and PhDs.

**Researcher:** how do you communicate with them?

**Student 1:** We communicate with them through Face book. I mean we have a group on face book and we keep in touch with each other. They always upload updated sheets.

**Researcher:** are these recently graduated doctors help you?

**Student 1:** Yes, they do.

**Student 2:** They help because they are not affiliated to the university.

**Researcher:** Do you struggle more with some approaches than with others?

**Student 2:** Regarding the difficulty of the subjects; there are difficult ones and less difficult ones, which need revising. I mean all the subjects need revising.

**Student 5:** There are subjects, which need only to be understood and there are others which need to be memorised.

**Student 3:** The most difficult part of the course is the clinical one because you need to relate the theoretical side to the practical one. It is as if you connect all the subjects to each

other and to the way you deal with the patient. I mean, it is not like the first three years where you memorise things to answer the questions in the exam. But in the clinical stage you do not need that, you have to memorise, organise and link ideas to many other things.

**Student 5:** In the clinical, the lecturer asked me how many systems are there in the body linked to each other. But there is no theoretical notion which links them.

**Student 3:** The problem is that we move from paediatrics to surgery and to internal organs. This is difficult because how could we match the symptoms with each other, with the medicine dosage and how to administer these medicines.

**Student 1:** Also the difficulty lies in the fact that the subject matter is not stable that a student can study and practise on every patient. I mean each case (patient) has a specific diagnosis.

**Student 2:** Yes, no real life case will be classical as the ones you studied. I mean the symptoms are dissimilar from one case to the other.

**Researcher:** What are your experiences of learning in English?

**Student 4:** Yes, I had learnt English because my mother is specialised in this field. I speak English with my mother and siblings at home. We also listen to English songs, read English stories and surf the internet. I mean, I use many sources to improve my English, rather than rely on the university in that respect.

**Researcher:** good, these are all experiences, which help the student to learn English rather than rely on one specific source.

**Student 4:** Yes, it is a personal effort. I mean I started learning English when I was in the fifth year in primary school. Since then I have been having an English course every year.

**Student 5:** Our English is not the university's concern. They only teach us medical vocabulary. If your English is poor, it is your problem because the university has no input whatsoever in improving our English.

**Student 3:** No, they do not teach us English in the university. I had not had any courses in English before I joined the university. My English level is normal in the medical studies. I am managing; I have some problems with the medical and cannot hold a conversation in English. Whenever I tried to join an English course, the circumstances militate against

that. I mean the situation in the country does not allow me to have courses. Adding to that the place where I can have them, and the teacher. In fact, I have never had any opportunity to take an English course. If you ask questions about the medical field, I can answer but outside it, I cannot.

**Student 2:** I started learning English in year seven and I liked to learn a new language. I also had energy and wanted to use it in mastering this language but the teacher shocked me because not only her English was poor but also she made mistakes in the lessons and she could not deliver the ideas. I was frustrated regarding English learning. In the following year, we had a teacher who only spoke in English, told us to memorise things and rely on ourselves. I liked her method because I was obliged to revise on my own and learn by myself. When I went home, I memorised the vocabulary, so that she listened to us the following day and gave us symbolic prizes in order to encourage us to learn. I found in her the person who cares about the student. Since then my interest in the language grew until I reached secondary school.

**Researcher:** do you mean it was all personal efforts?

**Student 1:** Yes, personal efforts but the teacher also plays an important role in this operation. For example, I started learning English in year seven and I had the same teacher for the following three years. He was only interested in the clever students. I mean that the other students made great efforts to pass, but they did not although they were good in the other subjects. English always detracted from their achievements. They got good marks in the other subjects and less than average marks in English. But when we joined the secondary school, the teacher was excellent. He was interested in all the students all the time: during language exercises, discussions etc... He also taught us how to look for words in a dictionary. He always talked to us in English and urged us to use the new words we learnt, so that we won't forget them.

**Student 5:** I took a course with an Egyptian teacher. He taught me how to read because I knew nothing of English. When I joined the university, I found that the medical terms were difficult. That course was the first step for me in learning English.

**Student 2:** The teacher, who taught us English in the secondary school, always told us to listen to the language even if we do not understand in order to accustom our ear to it. So,

I started listening to the news or tapes in English. In addition, I started reading anything written in English in the kitchen and then compare the English version to the Arabic one.

**Student 1:** Yes, you are right. The adage that the child from birth listens and understands how people talk first, and then he starts speaking, convinced me that listening is the most influential aspect in learning a language. It is a correct rule.

**Student 2:** In the secondary school curriculum, the teachers must have had listening tapes, which accompany the textbook because there were pictures of a tape by certain exercises. We were supposed to listen to the tapes and answer the questions in the book but the teachers never used the tapes or taught us the listening skill. It was a double blow regarding pronunciation: we did not listen to the tapes, which were made by native speakers and our teachers' pronunciation was bad. So, how could we learn that way!

**Student 4:** In my opinion language, learning depends largely on the student's personal efforts, so we cannot only blame the teachers. In order to learn the language properly, we need to have conversations in English in the class and the teacher should not speak Arabic. Unfortunately, the teacher who uses the proper methods in teaching the language faces opposition from the students because instead of listening and understanding, they want him to translate everything and ask for ideas in a hurry. This way the lesson is carried out in Arabic and the student does not understand anything in English. When Arabic becomes part of English lessons the student will not benefit anything from it.

**Student 1:** The language is constrained by the curriculum. I mean the teacher has to finish the programme during the academic year according to a plan devised by the ministry of education. So, he starts teaching the curriculum in a hurry in order to finish it before the end of the academic year. This is a problem for the teachers.

**Student 5:** Yes, you see them trying to finish the curriculum as much as they can and quickly.

**Student 1:** Initially, it is a demand from the school's administration and ministry of education that the teacher should finish the curriculum before the end of the academic year, whether the students understand or not. So, he has to go through the lessons as quickly as possible without bothering about the students' learning.

**Student 4:** According to what the teachers in the secondary school told us; the curriculum was too hard for the students' understanding and the time frame for the lessons was too tight. All of this affects the language acquisition of the students.

**Student 3:** Something is lacking in the teaching of English. Moreover, the students' Basic English was very limited.

**Female student 1:** Moreover, the student learns English by himself and there is nobody to help him; even his parents cannot because they did not even learn Arabic and his siblings struggled with English themselves. These are the reasons for the students' difficulty with English. If it were another subject like Arabic or Islamic Education, they would find somebody to help them. But English, they have to rely on themselves and no one else.

**Student 2:** Learning English is an accumulative experience. It does not depend on one year; it compasses all the years preceding the university to form the foundation. Every year, it improves a little bit. If the foundation is not good, obviously the student will have problems in the university.

**Student 5:** The teaching of English starts at year seven. This is a mistake because it is supposed to start in the first year in Primary school or in the nursery. At this stage, the pupil at least will be acquainted with the letters and the names of animals and fruit. I mean things like these will motivate and make him/her love the learning of the language. They will prepare him for its study, unlike us who did not learn English properly in the first years of our schooling. So, we have a kind of frustration when we encountered the academic language in the university and we were shocked.

**Student 3:** yes, the most important thing is that the student should be ready to learn the language. I mean it needs personal preparation to learn. The teacher's role is to help the student but the latter has to make some efforts.

**Researcher:** What are the main challenges you face when the lecturers use English instead of Arabic?

**Student 2:** There are some Indian lecturers who only speak English in the lectures and their accent is difficult not only for me to understand but for most of the students.



**Student 3:** Yes, sometimes I know the words but cannot make them out because of the lecturer's strange accent. Sometimes the letter W is pronounced like V and vice-versa. Most of the time I cannot make the words out until they write them on the board, then I realise that I know them. If they do not write them on the board, I will be confused all along the lecture.

**Student 4:** it takes a long time to get used to the Indian accent and understand what they say. The problem is that they teach us in the first years.

**Student 5:** the Indian doctors speak so fast that we ask them to slow down, so we can understand them. We face two problems: the Indian accent and the fast pace in their speech.

**Student 2:** Also, Arab lecturers' pronunciation is a problem for us. Some Arab lecturers explain things in the data show in English and do not use Arabic in their explanations because with the data show they read more than they explain. On the other hand, some Indian lecturers sometimes explain things on the board and we understand the entire lecture. Although sometimes they introduce new terms the student comes out of the lecture understanding more of its content than what he understands in the lectures where the data show was used and all in English.

**Student 5:** This depends on the objective of the lecturer. For example, there are some who want the student to understand and if he does not, they will repeat again, and again in easier way till he/she does. And there are those who just deliver lectures one way or another without bothering whether the student understands or not.

**Researcher:** do you have other problems?

**Student 4:** The other problem is the expanse of the syllabus compared to the academic year. I mean, you feel as if it is a burden heavier than the student can bear to the extent that he needs to deal with each subject using a specific skill. Because he/she sometimes comes across certain things, we did not study and yet the lecturers say we want you to become doctors without providing the necessary support and encouragement. So, the student works hard and the lecturer mock him either by ignoring him or telling in a derisory way: you want to graduate as a doctor, where would you go.

**Student 3:** True, even if the student has a better idea than the lecturer, the latter belittles him and do not ask him where he got that idea from.

**Student 4:** Sometimes, when a lecturer finds out that, a student knows something about the subject; instead of encouraging him, he started asking him difficult questions to discourage him. This means, you student stop talking to me and if you have an idea keep it to yourself.

**Student 1:** Even the faculty did nothing to help us in improving our English. They always say that they barely could afford the lecturers to teach you the medical syllabus and if there are any students who want to take English courses to improve their language, they can do so at their own expenses.

**Student 4:** If a student goes to the dean and complains to him about these things, the latter's answer is: if you do not like our system or cannot cope with the studies you can drop out and leave the place. Here in the faculty they prefer you dropping out and leave the faculty altogether because their resources are limited and they want only a small number of students, so they do not value the students.

**Student 2:** True, it is a psychological war waged by the university's administration, the syllabus and the lecturers.

**Student 4:** In the first years, in addition to hard work and big efforts, the student needs to phlegmatic in order to be able to bear the sufferings.

**Female student 5:** The syllabus is expansive and time consuming, so we cannot take English courses besides it. It is hard enough to keep up with our studies.

**Student 3:** The syllabus is so broad that even if there is a lecturer who explains things in an excellent way he cannot cover it all. So, what if the explanation are done in a hurry.

**Researcher:** How do you cope with these challenges?

**Student 2:** regarding the challenges of Indians and the lecturers who do not explain things in a proper way, we first complained to the dean. He told us that he could not do anything about the situation because that is what they could get. In the university, they recruit the lecturers through the internet after they had a look at their profile. In this way, they know nothing about them until they come to the university. One of the many examples is that once they recruited a Ukrainian lecturer who was not at all adequate to be a lecturer in the

university. We complained about him every day until the end of the year, and then they got rid of him. We had a similar situation with an Indian lecturer in the second year but they did not end his contract. He kept teaching and was not replaced. I mean the university says they do not have a solution to the problem; they cannot bring any lecturers.

**Researcher:** Sometimes the university gives contracts to lecturer for a certain period of time, so they cannot do anything till the contract expires!

**Student 2:** As the recruitment of the lecturers is only done online, there is nobody who can assess their ability before they join the university. All the university does is to have a look at their C.Vs. Then they offer them the contract without assessing their competence.

**Student 4:** Sometimes you feel as if the least competent people, who could not find a job anywhere in the world, are recruited by the university. It is better for the university to recruit such people because they do not want to recruit lecturers from America or Britain in order not to pay more. Here in the University of Sebha we have the worst lecturers compared to other universities in Libya.

**Student 1:** we got to the stage where we complain to nobody. We rely on ourselves; there is no other solution. We attend lectures, which are related to the exams and rely completely on ourselves.

**Student 5:** In the oral exams, the Indian lecturers ask us questions, which we do not understand because as I told you their accent is hard to understand. So, sometimes we ask them to write the questions down to enable us to understand.

**Student 4:** In the written exams, the Indian lecturers ask questions related to the things we covered in their lessons. They never asked us about things that they did not teach. Moreover, in the oral exams they put the questions in a simplified and easy to understand language. For example, lately an Indian lecturer taught us forensic medicine in a proper way. You can sense his self-confidence and his willingness to satisfy the student's curiosity. I mean they have a kindled conscience.

**Student 2:** True, you cannot understand to the extent that you wonder whether the man has really got a conscience or somebody is observing him. I mean, when he wants to transmit a new idea he uses different things i.e. writing, drawing etc. to make the student understand.

**Researcher:** what about the internet, the library, reference books and research papers?

**Student 3:** The internet is in the houses; there is no internet in the university. Regarding books, there are some in the library but you cannot lend them for more than three or four days and you cannot borrow them more than once and there are books that you cannot borrow; you have to use them in the library. Even if the student wants to study in the library, he could not because it is not equipped for that purpose and it is noisy. So, the student does not feel that there is a conducive atmosphere to working in there. Thus, he works at home.

**Researcher:** are the references in the library up-to-date?

**Student 1:** One time in the second year, they did something good; that is, they lent us books for the whole year. But one time I wanted to borrow a book. It was the weekend and just before closing time, which means nobody would borrow it, yet the library employee gave me a hard time as if I was asking for alms. I regretted asking to lend that book. Since then, I did not set foot in the library again because of the treatment I had. I will never forget that situation.

**Student 3:** What hurts is that the treatment of students differs from one to the other. I mean that the rule of lending books is applied to certain students and not others. The library employees lend books to their relatives, who do not return them until the end of the year.

**Student 2:** Sometimes you look at the books in the library; they are covered with dust because they have not been lent or used for a long time. When a student wants to borrow them, they tell him that these cannot be lent out of the library.

**Student 4:** If a student needed a book for a long period, he would have to ask a student in the fifth year to borrow in his name because, they are allowed to borrow books for long periods unlike students in the first years who are not.

**Student 5:** Yes, there is favouritism in lending books to students. For example, last year I came to the library to borrow a book the employee told me that I could not borrow it. A few seconds later, another student came in the fifth year, while I was still standing there, and asked to borrow the same book and the employee lent it to him there and then I could

not say anything, except that I gave her a funny look she knew what I mean by this and left the library.

**Researcher:** Do you ask for extra help? (If yes – from who? are they helpful?) Do the students try to help each other?

**Student 2:** Extra help! As I told you about the Indian lecturers' accent; I mean, sometimes we complain to the dean and he gives farfetched excuses until we got to the point where we do not complain at all.

**Student 5:** Regarding the English language, I sometimes ask my friends who are in the last years to help me and they do that willingly.

**Researcher:** is there an entre-aid between the students?

**Student 1:** Yes, the students help each other. There is cooperation in this respect.

**Student 4:** For me, I relied on my relatives who studied medicine before me. I have many who are doctors and medical students. At the time, we studied there were no English courses for the medicine syllabus but now there are private courses.

**Student 3:** It is supposed that the university should treat the student in the premedical period as a student who does not know English. So, they should concentrate on English and offer intensive English courses rather than concentrating on the syllabus. This way the student will overcome all the obstacles posed by the language and his English will be good in the first year. But it is in the university's interest that the language becomes a barrier for the student of medicine, so they can take the smallest number of students.

**Student 2:** a translator called Al- Mawrid helped me in translation. it was huge and covered all the terms. I benefited from it a lot. For example, when I look for a word, I memorise others, which precede it.

**Student 1:** I am like that. When I first used the dictionary for translation, I was fascinated by the plethora of words I find when I am looking for one word. That is what made me like the syllabus.

**Researcher:** do you benefit more from an ordinary dictionary than an electronic one?

**Student 3:** There is another way of dealing with the language problems that we face. For example, we sometimes write the translation over the translated word; a friend of mine stopped doing that and told me to have a brainstorm to remember the words. This is one of the learning strategies that student uses to improve his/her language. I mean, the student translates the new word but does not write over or under the translated word so, he tries to remember it without writing down the translation.

**Student 2:** Yes, we had a teacher in the secondary school who prevented us from writing the translation in Arabic over the English word and he used to check our books, and if he found the translation over the word, he crossed them and said that you should rely on your memory for the new words.

**Researcher:** because writing the translation over the English word, leads to the student to forgetting the word quickly. As soon as he turns the page over, he forgets what he has translated.

**Student 1:** The other thing is that we (students) in the university help each other. I mean, when we revise together we understand things quickly.

**Researcher:** do you mean that the students support each other more than the lecturers do?

**Student 3:** Yes, as I told you: the lecturer's concern is the syllabus and not the language. He does not even deliver the syllabus in the right way; they are always in a hurry.

**Student 5:** Sometimes I do not understand a word in the lecture, which spoils it for me. If I ask about it, they ignore me and do not answer.

**Researcher:** Did you take any language courses before you started your medical degree? Are you taking any language courses now? Does the university help you directly with improving your language skills?

**Student 4:** I started taking English courses during the summer holidays when I was in year five in primary school .what helps me a lot is the fact that my mother is a teacher of English. She helps me with my revision and I also listen to English at home because my mother and my siblings sometimes speak English; I listen to them and learn.

**Student 2:** There are students who had private English courses when they joined the premedical year. I used to watch cartoons in English, which improved my listening skills.

**Student 1:** My real contact with English came when I joined the premedical year in the medicine faculty. Before that, I studied English in the secondary school but I considered it as a normal subject not worthy of any concentration or hard work. But when I entered the premedical year my first challenge was English.

**Student 4:** Sometimes in the oral exams in the first years, I answered questions in Arabic when I could not answer them in English. The lecturers did not object to that; all they wanted is that you convey correctly the ideas. But in written exams the answers should only be in English.

**Student 1:** In the written exams the students do not rely on the understanding of the subject, they rely on memorisation of terms and facts. So, we only acquire medical terms from learning by rote.

**Researcher:** How often do you use English outside your courses?

**Student 2:** We do not use English outside the classroom instead; we use Arabic most of the time.

**Student 1:** I sometimes use English when I am with a student of medicine or a lecture. But this rarely happens.

**Student 3:** I do not use English outside the university because there no one to use it with. But as students of medicine we should do anything to improve our English. I mean we should speak English in our discussions. This will ameliorate our language, unfortunately, students do not do that because, may be, we do not have enough time for such activities.

**Student 5:** We females do not have the opportunities to speak English outside the university as the male students do because of the social background.

**Student 1:** As I told you, the social circumstances are one of the obstacles, which prevented me from having English courses i.e. the place where I can have the courses, the time and the country's security situation. All of these things are obstacles, I wonder why I would ask my father or my brother to take me to the course and put their life in danger.

**Student 4:** You feel like a stranger in this society when you speak English outside the university.

**Researcher:** Do you think that using English is a barrier facing the students? For you and for others? Why? /Why not?

**Student 3:** I do not think that teaching medicine in English could be a big obstacle for the student because he/she can easily overcome it with the desire and determination to learn.

**Student 1:** You feel as if it is a matter of habit. I mean you become accustomed to something.

**Student 5:** For me, studying medicine in Arabic would be better than in English.

**Student 4:** I feel that studying medicine in English is not an obstacle because there are some medical terms, which are more difficult in Arabic than in English.

**Student 2:** Let us be realist, teaching medicine in English is more difficult than in Arabic and the proof is that lecturers give lectures in mixture of English and Arabic. If it was easier in Arabic, then why do we talk to the lecturers in Arabic and when they explain things to us completely in English we do not understand everything. This shows that English is an obstacle for the students.

**Researcher:** Do you have problems in spelling? If yes, to what extent does this problem affect in your performance in exams?

**Student 5:** Yes, I have problems with the spelling. I mean I make spelling mistakes when I write long paragraphs.

**Student 1:** Yes, I make spelling mistakes in long medical terms, especially the new ones.

**Student 2:** I, Sometimes, make spelling mistakes in Latin nouns because not only is their writing difficult but also their pronunciation. In addition, the strange diseases have strange names; up to now, I am still trying to pronounce them correctly.

**Researcher:** Do the lecturers tolerate such mistakes?

**Student 4:** The tolerance of spelling mistakes depends on the lecturer because in one of the exams, the lecturer did not correct a whole question because he could not understand my handwriting, so he did not understand my answer. When I asked him about it, he said he could not do anything about it then. I mean I lost ten marks on that question.



**Student 2:** I do not think that the lecturers penalise us for spelling mistakes. I think that they focus more on the content than on spelling mistakes, except when the mistakes are really bad.

**Student 1:** The lecturers are trying to avoid long answers by using MSQ in the exams because they find them easier to mark than the other questions, which require long answers. These questions are usually short and use multiple-choice answers.

**Student 5:** Even if there is any writing in the exam, it will be short because the lecturers are aware of the spelling mistakes made by the students. Thus, they ask questions, which require short answers like give the reasons for this or that.

**Student 4:** We look at the patients' records in the hospital and the written reports, which were written by the doctors, we find spelling mistakes because they were written in a hurry. But the main thing is that one can understand them.

**Researcher:** Do you ever speak in Arabic inside the classrooms? When?

**Student 2:** Yes, we speak Arabic in the classrooms and even the lecturers talk to us in Arabic.

**Student 5:** We speak Arabic only if the lecturer does not know Arabic then we speak to him in English.

**Researcher:** Do the lecturers want you to speak in English at all times?

**Student 2:** The lecturers do not ask us to speak English. They talk to us in any language we talk to them.

**Student 1:** Not all the lecturers ask us to speak English. For example, one among five asks to speak English because he says that in the exam we might have an external examiner who will assess our performance, so it is better if we speak English. The others answer you in the language you talk to them.

**Researcher:** how do they react if they discover you are speaking Arabic?

**Student 2:** When we talk to them in Arabic, they do not have any reaction.

**Student 3:** The lecturers do not encourage us to speak in English; they treat us this way.

**Researcher:** What difference does it make to your learning when speaking or reading in Arabic?

**Student 5:** Yes, studying and talking in Arabic has definitely an impact on the student, especially, if he wanted to do his postgraduate studies, then he will have problems with English.

**Student 1:** The problem is not only during the studying period but during also when you deal with a foreign lecturer. I mean, it is harder to make your point clear to a foreign lecturer than to a Libyan one. The latter gets your point quicker than the former because he understands your native language.

**Student 4:** In order to put their ideas across in a proper way, the lecturers sometimes need to use Arabic. They teach some types of diseases and minute things in English, but if they feel that we have not understood they use Arabic to make the points clearer. The problem occurs only when you are dealing with the people who do not speak Arabic.

**Researcher:** When you struggle to speak English, do you find this has an effect on your motivation?

**Student 4:** Yes, struggling to speak English has an impact on my motivation because we are medicine students and our English should be better than what it is.

**Student 3:** I know some female students who dropped out of the course in the first two months and joined other faculties due to the English language. And there are those who do not even try to stay that long and left the faculty for another one straightaway.

**Researcher:** does it affect other things?

**Student 3:** Nothing affects me. The main thing is that the person should be self-confident and not coy to other people's reaction if they tell him that he pronounce the words incorrectly, because he is in the learning stage and every day he learns something new.

**Student 2:** There is an impact at the moment you could not express yourself or convey your ideas due to your poor English, although you know a lot about the topic. This is the impact and the obstacle is the language.

**Student 4:** It has a big impact, especially in oral exams where the examiner does not speak Arabic. The effect here is huge on the student because he is constrained by the time and his inability to convey his ideas to the examiner although he knows the correct answer.

**Researcher:** How do you cope with the struggles of learning medicine and studying in English?

**Student 1:** One way of dealing with the language problem in the oral exam is through drawings. I mean I know some female students who took some paper and a pencil to the exam and when they could not convey their ideas verbally because of the language, they drew them.

**Student 5:** If I do not understand the question, I ask the lecturer to write it down. Most of the Indian lecturers have no problem with that. For example, once a lecturer asked me a question four times and I still did not understand it because of the language problem. So, I asked him to write it down, and when he did I easily answered it.

**Researcher:** What effects does studying such a challenging subject have on the rest of your life? (e.g. your family, other things?)

**Student 4:** Certainly, study of medicine has an impact; it took over my life. There were no more visits of the relatives and friends, and I did not go out of the house to the extent that they started feeling that you was a stranger and I reciprocated that feeling. There is cohesion between the female students in the faculty to the extent that we sit with each other's in the social occasions.

**Student 1:** I mean, sometimes an English word comes out of my mouth when I am talking to a patient because it is the word I have been used to during my studies in the university. The patient looks at me and asks me what I have said. Then I remember that I used a medical term he is not familiar with.

**Student 4:** The problem is that people in the social circle do not excuse you for making unintentional mistakes or having a slip of the tongue. I mean if you say a word in English they instantly change and their faces tell you that you intended to say those words while you know that we do not know their meanings.

**Student 2:** Yes, people actually make you feel as if you are presumptuous or arrogant when you speak to them in the medical jargon.

**Student 5:** The lay people have the idea that the moment you make a mistake and say a medical word in English they spontaneously say oh!...because he is a doctor!

**Student 3:** There are many members in the family and I need to help my father in his work, so I do not have enough time for revision.

**Student 2:** Even with the family at home, I find myself isolated. Sometimes, I have more dealings with the students because I am with them all the time. When I am with my family, I am only with body because my mind is busy thinking about my studies.

**Student 4:** I am so enveloped in my studies that even when I visit one of my relatives I feel that I am extracted from my studies and all that they say in the conversation is only noises.

**Researcher:** What do you want to do when you qualify as a doctor? Do you know where you would like to work? How will you try to achieve your aims?

**Student 2:** If my family wants to destroy me, is to tell me to stay at home after my graduation and do not work because I am a girl. It will be a disaster for me if they say so.

**Student 4:** It will be the worst nightmare in my life if my family told me not to work after my graduation. I mean after all of this hardship and the time I spent studying they tell me not work.

**Researcher:** are there cases like this?

**Student 4:** Yes, there are cases like this because female doctors move from working in the hospitals to private clinics or local surgeries. The reason behind that is to abnegate their responsibilities and to evade night time shifts because, as you know a female cannot spend the night outside her home in normal circumstances let alone at the time of war.

**Student 2:** Yes, regarding the females the influence of their surroundings and society are far greater than their personal choice or desire.

**Student 5:** Some female students, after they graduate, get the opportunity to do their postgraduate studies abroad but they could not because they do not have an accompanying male. So, they stay at home and waste the opportunity and lose the scholarship.

**Student 3:** The parents of female students can play a role in their daughter's resumption of their studies or getting a job after graduation. But the society we live in curtails that role. In other words, even if the parents allow their daughter to travel abroad to do

postgraduate studies, the latter won't be safe from the society's disapproval and people's talk.

**Student 2:** The country's actual situation has a huge impact on employment and studies.

**Researcher:** if there is an unexpected incident in Sebha, do doctors in the hospitals go about their work in a normal way; because if there are casualties during the skirmishes they will be brought to the hospital for treatment?

**Student 4:** if there is an unexpected incident, there will be no female doctors in the hospital, and there will be a few male doctors.

**Student 1:** We cannot stay in the hospital during the problems because if there were an incident in the city and the casualty is brought to the hospital, his enemies will follow him up there and retaliate. Many times the retaliations took place here in the hospital while the casualty got here after the dispute. They retaliate while he is still bleeding.

**Student 5:** It is not the female doctor's choice not to come to work in situations like these; it is the family, which prevents her from doing so. They come to her in the hospital and take her home to protect her from any harm.

**Researcher:** Are there any social circumstances that restrict your engagement in learning medicine in English? (Emotional, physical, personal, family, etc).

**Student 2:** The problem is not the number of years. It is, as I told you, in the country's chaotic situation. So, the student does not know when the academic year will start or when it will end. It is this uncertainty, which is out of the student's control that affects more than anything else.

**Student 1:** The circumstances differ from one student to the other. There are students who can afford to buy the books, which are not available in the university's library and those who cannot because they are very expensive.

**Student 5:** There are some families, which do not help their daughter as a student of medicine. I mean that once she is back from the university, she must carry out household chores.

**Student 1:** Combining study and work is no longer limited to male students; even females started working in pharmacies to cover the expenses required by the studies and to lighten the financial burden of their families.

**Researcher:** what about the internet?

**Student 1:** The internet connection is very weak in the university.

**Student 4:** You cannot rely on the internet connection in the university for your studies.

**Student 2:** Honestly, I do not like to rely on the internet; I prefer to hold a book in my hands, learn from it and flick through its pages.

**Student 5:** Even the library employees do not have any expertise in this domain. It is supposed that they should know what sort of books and references they need and their knowledge should be extensive in this respect. However, the university's administration does not put the right person in the right place.

**Student 3:** Yes, the library should be spacious, but we have a small library and cannot accommodate a big number of students.

**Student 2:** The library is not equipped for doing academic work nor is it big enough for the number of the students. In addition, the conduct of the employees there towards the students is bad; they make you feel as if you are asking for a favour or asking for alms. And the problem, as I told you, is that there are some books gathering dust because they have not been used or lent to the students.

**Researcher:** Do female and male students do the same group work spirit or is there an obstacle?

**Student 4:** This depends on the student and her/her intentions. If you come to the group with the sole intention of making friends, doing the work and no other motives, and do not bother about what other people say because you know how our society sees things, then you are fine. But if you have different intentions, then it is a different matter. But if you impose your ethics on the others, they will value and respect you. But, sometimes, our work dictates that we mix with the male students. For example, sometimes a male patient tells you I do not want you to examine me on your own, so you are forced to involve a male student one way or another.

**Student 3:** In the first years, the female student does not have to work with male ones or even with the females work with one another. I mean that it is not obligatory to have groups; be them male, female or mixed. But in the clinical phase you are forced to have the cooperation between the sexes. For example, in the women's wards a male student is not allowed to go there by himself and talk about the medical history of a woman on his own; there should be one or more of his female classmates with him. So, the cooperation is superficial and we are not obliged to hang around together all the time. It is only, when we have a situation as above that we work together and then we go our separate ways.

**Student 3:** I feel that the female students cooperate more with each other than with the male students. Female students exchange everything but the males withhold certain things.

**Student 4:** Sometimes, there is a male student who works in a group of female students because he knows that the latter work harder and research things more thoroughly than the male students do. So, he joins the group to learn more and to have discussions regardless of the gender of the participants.

**Researcher:** is it possible that male students study less at home than the female ones!

**Student 2:** On the contrary, we females have a bigger responsibility at home than the males because we help our mothers in household chores but the males do nothing; everything is prepared for them. Not every family take into consideration the efforts needed by their daughter to succeed in the faculty of medicine, to allow her to focus only on her studies. So, they tell her that she should help her mother in the running of the house.

**Student 5:** the success of female students is the result of hard work and determination rather than intelligence. But you might feel that male students are cleverer than the females but do not work as hard as them. Although they study hard, only during the Exams' period, male students 'memorisation rate is higher than that of the females.

**Student 4:** we females worry the things we revised and the things we did not but the males take things at ease. For example, in the practical work, we move the patient slowly for fear of hurting him but the males move the patient with confidence as if they have been doing that for years. This is the difference between them and us.

**Researcher:** Are female students cleverer than the males?

**Student 3:** In the faculty of medicine, male students are cleverer because they study hard only the exams' period and still they pass straightaway but we females we study hard all year round and we could not finish the syllabus and have some problems.

**Researcher:** what is the relationship between the lecturer and the student?

**Student 1:** The relationship depends on the lecturer. For example, there are lecturers who do not want to know you once the lecture finishes and there are others who are sociable and have normal relationships with the students.

**Student 5:** There was a lecturer, who joined the faculty last year, wrote his phone number on the board and said that anyone who needs help with the syllabus can get in touch with at any time and I will help him. I mean this depends on the lecturer's willingness.

**Student 2:** Yes, this depends on the lecturer's disposition but the student prefers that the lecturer will be helpful, which is not always the case. I feel more at ease in the lessons where the lecturers are friendly and approachable because there are some lecturers who are so arrogant and presumptuous.

**Student 3:** We have some lecturers who keep looking at their watch during the lecture as if they want the time to run out quickly. In addition, their phones do not stop ringing, so that half of the lecture's time is wasted on answering the calls regarding the arrangements of the appointments in his private surgery.

**Student 4:** Yes, it is normal that the lecturer leaves the class in the middle of the lecture, and tells us that he has to go because he was told that he has an urgent case in his surgery. it is normal even during clinical practical.

**Researcher:** Would you like to talk about other aspects related to studying medicine in English that we had not discussed in this interview or to add anything?

**Student 2:** I wish that the faculty prepares the student for studying medicine once he joins it through giving him intensive courses in English, so he becomes ready for learning medicine and receiving medical content in English.

**Student 1:** When we did, the premedical year there was an English course which should have been given the same value as the other medical subjects. In reality , they consider the English course as a cultural one and not as a core subject ,which not only make them



teach us only the basics but also make us ignore it. So, there no opportunities provide for the practise of the language such as, discussions, reading, writing and listening; all these skills are not taught here. We hope that the faculty sees English as a main subject and gives more importance in order to help the remaining students in improving their language.

**Student 5:** Yes, they should teach English during the five years in the faculty and treat it as a core subject like the others and not as a secondary or cultural one, which taught only in the premedical year without having any value. It is the main subject and not the others.

**Student 3:** Yes, there should be more focus on the English language than what it is now and it should be taught all along the five years and not only in the premedical year.

**Student 4:** I think that the language learning should be based on a good foundation. I mean form the beginning students should be taught the correct pronunciation because I know some people who went abroad to have intensive English courses for a year and when they came back, they pronounce certain things incorrectly. So, the student's learning in the beginning constitutes the foundation on which to build up. So, if there is a problem in the foundation, it will continue forever; even if the student could speak English because the problem is not whether you could read or write, it is whether your pronunciation is correct or not.

**Student 2:** Yes basically, speaking is more important than writing.

**Student 4:** But the pronunciation should be correct and not that you talk regardless because sometimes the interlocutor can understand you but when you make bad mistakes in pronunciation, he would wonder why do you talk like that.

**Researcher:** thank you very much for your cooperation.

**Student 4:** You are welcome.

## **Appendix 7 Lecturer's interview**

### **L 14**

**Researcher:** First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to do this interview. Let me introduce myself to you; my name is Khalid A Khalid a PhD student at Liverpool John Morse University, UK. The aim of this interview is to find out the difficulties faced by the students studying medicine in English in the university. Everything you say in this interview will be confidential and nobody will know about it except my supervisor and me. Your contribution is crucial for the advancement of research and the overcoming of the problems faced by students of medicine in particular and the learners of English in general. So, let us start with the first question. Could you tell me a bit about your history in medicine – where did you study medicine?

**Lecturer:** I studied in the High Institute of technology in the city of Barak long time ago. I spent three years studying in Malta, from 76 to 79, and graduated from the department of medical laboratories. I studied in English because most of the lecturers were English and Americans and only a few Arabs. Then, I had summer training in Ireland for three years. I then graduated and became a lecturer assistant for two years. In 1982, I went to Britain to do my master degree and PhD in biochemistry; I did my master degree in the University of Sussex and my PhD in the University of Surrey in the south of London. In 1990, I got a position in the High Institute of Technology; exactly in 1/3, I became a member of the teaching staff in the Institute in the department of the medical laboratories; at that time, teaching was in Arabic. After that, I moved to the faculty of medicine in 1997. I was a co-operant in the faculty of dentistry from 1992 where I was a member and responsible of the administrative committee up to 1998. Then I became the dean of the faculty of dentistry until 2012.

**Researcher:** Did you study in English or in another language?

**Lecturer:** Yes, all my studies were in English including my undergraduate study.

**Researcher:** did you face any difficulties because you were not studying in your native language?

**Lecturer:** Yes, there was some difficulty but not significant because in secondary school I studied English and attained an advanced level. Therefore, when I went to the university

I did not have a problem. I also had no problem with English when I did the master degree and the PhD because it was a resumption of learning English after rupture of a few years. The problem with the English language stems from practising the language; the practise depends on the person and his environment. If he comes from an environment where there are opportunities of practising the language, he will have no problems.

**Researcher:** Have you taught medicine in other places?

**Lecturer:** I work most of time in the University of Sebha but sometimes, I work as an external examiner in Tripoli, Benghazi and Zawiya. I also worked as a co -operant in the faculty of pharmacology in Tripoli for short periods.

**Researcher:** I have some questions, which are a bit different from those for the teaching staff because of your position as the dean of the faculty.

**Lecturer:** Yes, go on, you can ask any questions.

**Researcher:** do you know anything about the beginning of teaching medicine in Libya? Was done in Arabic or in English?

**Lecturer:** Regarding other faculties of medicine in Libya, like the faculty of Tripoli and the faculty of Benghazi, medicine was taught in English at first. The teaching staff and founders of these faculties were foreigners, especially the faculty of Benghazi where the system depended on foreigners and Egyptians whose system used English. The English and the Egyptian systems were a bit similar; afterwards, the latter was developed a little more. But In the faculty of Sebha, the teaching of medicine started in Arabic.

**Researcher:** I did not know that in the beginning medicine was taught in Arabic in the faculty of Sebha, I did not know that fact!

**Lecturer:** Yes, the teaching started in Arabic and it was called the High School of Medicine. Syrians played a part in this process because the university recruited some of the teaching staff and reference books from Syria.

**Researcher:** did that system last for long?

**Lecturer:** No, the teaching system in Arabic did not last for long; I mean in 1991 English became the medium of Teaching. The Arabic system lasted only three years.

**Researcher:** why the English language is so important? And why medicine is taught in English?

**Lecturer:** Because medicine all over the world uses English and the Libyan medical system is based on English, therefore, medicine studies are part of the health system as a whole. In other words, the medical terms used in hospitals are in English, the prescriptions and reports and all other things are written in English. So those who established this system long time ago were English or the Libyans were assisted by the English (English school) in the beginning of the establishment of this system. Therefore, it lasted because there is no one who dared to substitute it with Arabic wrote medical books in Arabic or supplied medical reference books in Arabic or change the health system into Arabic. Everything depends on each other.

**Researcher:** Can the university take the decision of changing the language without having recourse to the ministry of higher education?

**Lecturer:** it is hard for a small faculty like ours to take such decisions like changing the language of teaching; it is up to big universities and faculties, which possess the means and the power to take decisions.

**Researcher:** It is not easy to say we want to change the language of teaching overnight.

**Lecturer:** of course, because even the countries we cooperate with speak English and use English in their educational system. For instance, Egypt, Pakistan and India use English and some of our teaching staff are from those countries. Therefore, our system is built that way. There are also some Sudanese in the teaching staff and their system is in English. This means that the system is based on English and not Arabic.

**Researcher:** did you take part in the Arabic experience? Was it successful or not?

**Lecturer:** I took part in it for a short period when I joined the university in 1990; at that time, the teaching was in Arabic. We started dentistry in English in 1992 while in the medicine faculty, they were arguing about English and Arabic up to the time when they got rid of the Syrian teaching staff and replaced them with lecturers from other countries like Egypt, Sudan and other nationalities. Then, the teaching started in English.

**Researcher:** What do you teach? What different elements of the programmes are you responsible for?

**Lecturer:** My position now is the dean of the faculty of medicine and the head of the biochemistry in the faculty.

**Researcher:** What methods do you use for different elements of the courses?

**Lecturer:** We use the projector the most. In the past, we used the overhead projector and then things developed to the use of Power point and projector slides. These things facilitate and help in the teaching process.

**Researcher:** Do you do all your teaching in English?

**Lecturer:** Yes, all the subjects are taught in English, except clinical psychology, which is taught in Arabic.

**Researcher:** Do the students do practical work with real patients while they are training?

**Lecturer:** yes, they do

**Researcher:** At this point, I assume they are talking to patients in Arabic. Does that cause any problems for the trainees or for you as a teacher – they learn in English but then they have to practice medicine in Arabic?

**Lecturer:** I do not think that the use of Arabic during training creates any problem for the student because they are Arabs and Arabic is the basis, so it creates no problem for them. Regarding the use of medical terms, the student knows them and he would say them to the patient in English because sometimes there are no equivalent terms in Arabic. But in most cases there are no problems because the student or the doctor tells the patient exactly what his illness is using everyday language rather than medical jargon.

**Researcher:** What do you feel are the main challenges you face in teaching medicine in English at Sebha University?

**Lecturer:** Sometimes there are problems with accent, which are as follows: first, because English is not the mother tongue of the Libyan teachers, so they sometimes pronounce the words in a confusing way, which is not clear to the students. Second, the other thing which is related to the previous point is that the foreign teaching staff come from different backgrounds where English is not the mother tongue. For instance, we have Egyptians, Sudanese and Indians whose accents differ from one another. Even the Libyan lecturers do not have the same accent because, their accent is influenced by the country where they

pursue their studies. For instance, those who studied in England have an English accent and those who studied in India have an Indian accent etc... Therefore, the accent can be an obstacle for both, the student and the lecturers and the exposure of the former to the different accent constitutes a problem for him.

**Researcher:** Even the students complain about the Indian accent and say it is difficult especially the new ones who do not speak Arabic. What is your opinion regarding this matter?

**Lecturer:** in fact, we cannot blame one group without blaming the other for the difference in the accent or the difficulty of the Indian accent because even Arab lecturers can be blamed in this respect because where they should say some words in English (and the students continually hear it in English), they say them in Arabic. This mixing of English and Arabic, while it makes easy for the student to understand, it affects his ability to improve his English because there is not one complete sentence in English.

**Researcher:** but medical or drug terms are in English?

**Lecturer:** the student learns these terms in English because the slides, power point, reference, and recommended texts are in English. So he is compelled to learn them in English and his effort is reinforced especially by somebody who does not speak Arabic like the Indian lecturers. So, in this situation he is closer to English than Arabic which in turn improves his English. But Arab lecturers have a clearer accent and they speak a little louder than the others.

**Researcher:** What is the university doing concerning these difficulties? What has it provided in terms of books, internet, and moral and material support for the students and the teaching staff?

**Lecturer:** There are difficulties. These are fundamentally due to the establishment of faculties in the University of Sebha on non-scientific bases. Therefore, most of the faculties are built on the remains of primary and secondary schools. I mean many of the faculties in Sebha whether in the city of Sebha or outside they were schools like this building; it was an unfinished and forsaken building. The university finished its building and used it; this is the same situation for the faculties of dentistry, agriculture, science and others. Most faculties were not initially designed for higher education; they are buildings taken from other governmental sections.

**Researcher:** do you mean that once they acquire a building they turn into a faculty whether it is suitable for that purpose or not?

**Lecturer:** Yes, that is why you find that most of the buildings belonging to the University of Sebha are built on the remains of schools, which belong to the education department and this one of the problems. This is a continuous problem; you are talking about infrastructure which was not developed or changed to suit the purpose, so the building itself constitute a problem. The design of the building is a problem because it was designed to be a school and not a university; this causes a lack of facilities like laboratories. This means that you are restrained by the nature of the building. So, there is penury in laboratories, a deficiency in the design a lack of recreational space for the students and the lack of offices, library computer room, etc. In short, the building does not satisfy the requirements of a university building. The other problem is the shortage or lack of all the necessary equipment and their procurement needs insistence and repeated demands. Not anything you need is ready and when you ask for it, it takes a long time to supply it because there is no money float and even after it is supplied; it would be below the normal standards. This problem is amongst a list of unaccountable issues.

**Researcher:** all of these things affect negatively the ability of the student and the educational process in general because they complement each other.

**Lecturer:** yes, all this shortages affect negatively the quality of the educational operation. The educational operation should have a foundation and any shortage or imbalance in the provision of necessary things will affect it. In addition to the premises, which are not suitable for the increasing number of students, there is a shortage in the teaching staff. There is a huge discrepancy between the number of students and the number of teaching staff. For instance, we have the staff for 70 students but we have 200 students. We accept this number because many factors such as, social relationship and the surrounding environment impose upon us such behaviour. Moreover, the faculty of medicine is not independent of the hospital and a great part of medicine studies is linked to the hospital and its resources. In other words, many of the teaching staff who teaches at the level of the clinical stage live and work in the hospital or are heads of departments and treat patients. So when the student reaches the level of the clinical stage he needs a placement in the hospital where he can be trained by having a direct contact with the patients and acquires some medical experience through learning in the hospital and dealing with the

patients. Therefore, all these things increase the pressure regarding the shortage of the teaching staff, specialists and the inadequacy of the place and the increasing number of students.

**Researcher:** Does the assessment of students take place in English?

**Lecturer:** The assessment of students is done in English only.

**Researcher:** Do some students struggle more with writing than with speaking or the other way round?

**Lecturer:** Yes, there is a problem with writing and speaking. The problem of writing does not interfere in the dealings between people but pronunciation creates a problem considering that English is not the mother tongue of the student, but they are compelled to speak Arabic, although they write and study in English, because speaking differs from writing. In writing, we do not dwell too much on the mistakes if they are simple and understandable. The main thing is the student's ability to put across an idea even if the writing is not a 100% academic. If we penalise the student for major and minor mistakes, there will be a problem. So we are forced to ignore the minor mistakes and explain them in order to give the student a chance to improve his language level in general.

**Researcher:** is it because the students are shy in the classroom that you allow them to speak in Arabic and English? But if you tell them this group do this and this group do that; do they use only Arabic or not?

**Lecturer:** yes, most of the time students use Arabic in the classroom and we do not force them to speak English because speaking English all the time might hinder their understanding of each other. We, therefore, do not have discussions due to the lack of time and resources and the huge number of students. We cannot have small group discussions because of the large number of students and the small number of classrooms. Normally, lecturers speak most of the time and students do not talk that much, so the former cannot listen to their talks and discussions except when they practice in the lab.

**Researcher:** What about the library here?

**Lecturer:** As I told you, there are some books in the library and there is a shortage of books in some specialities. The most lacking thing is in the number of books and not in fields covered. I mean there are some books in the library but the number of students is large and the number of books is small. Sometimes they are not sufficient for all the



students, so the borrowing system is limited: there are books a student can borrow for 24 hours, those that he can borrow for 3 days and those he can only use in the library.

**Researcher:** How do you try to overcome the challenges that you face when teaching the students in their second language?

**Lecturer:** We overcome the difficulties by using power point and sheets; we provide the latter for the student, which is summaries of the main books and at the same time, we urge them to read the books. But most of the time the lecturer limit himself to the sheets in questions and exams.

**Researcher:** To what extent does the students' level in English play a role in their performance and understanding of the material that you are explaining to them?

**Lecturer:** Yes, the student's level of English plays a big part in his understanding of the programme because the better a student's language level is, the quicker and easier his understanding of the subjects is. Here in the faculty the higher a student is in his studies, his language ability improves. So, the difficulties regarding his use and understanding of the language gradually decrease because the reference books we prescribe for the students are all in English and the student is forced to deal with them in his revision. We also advise the students to revise at least 2 hours a day for each lecture. He will do his revision from books or references in English, so many of the students memorise texts in English as they are in the book or in the sheet. One reason is that the student is not able to make correct sentences because of his language ability or the extent of his understanding of the subject. Another reason is that there are parts of the subjects, which should be memorised, and the student is not allowed to change anything for fear of distorting the meaning, so he memorises the scientific terms for this subject. At the same time, there are subjects, which require memorisation as well as understanding. I mean, they need a high degree of memorisation and understanding and this depends on the language because all the questions are in English and the assessment process is also in English. The student, therefore, is obliged to be able to understand, read and write English correctly but the utterance of the words could be personal to him.

**Researcher:** Have you had assistance of any kind to help you think about the best way of teaching medicine in the students' second language? (e.g. courses) Do you talk to your colleagues about the difficulties you face?

**Lecturer:** Yes, we had discussions many times but we do not have a plan or a method; we do not have a specific method. We acquire some expertise and experience from those

who practised teaching before us. I mean, we took part in so many work- shops but a great deal of experience comes from practise and directly from the others in the field.

**Researcher:** Do you think it is the right thing to do, to teach medicine in English, or do you think it would be better to teach medicine in Arabic? Why?

**Lecturer:** teaching medicine in the same way as in the eighties won't work but if the methods are improved we may support that provide that the change will be gradual and better than the way it is practised in Syria and Iraq. This means that the terms should be in English or in simple Arabic, which can be used by the people; we are not accustomed to or have these terms. Therefore, even if the teaching becomes in Arabic the terms should be in English, because I noticed that the Arabic terms used in Syria and Iraq are not adequate for the Expected Arabisation.

**Researcher:** if the teaching of medicine remains in English only, the student would not be a 100% able to understand the syllabus. To prove my point is that when the student goes abroad to do his postgraduate studies he has to spend a year or more learning English, although he has studied medicine in English?

**Lecturer:** When the student goes abroad to study, he needs the everyday language to communicate with the people, which he did not acquire here because he dealt with language he found in his environment. So when he goes abroad he had to learn the everyday language. We have graduates in medicine who must learn the language in order to deal with the patients they are going to meet in the country they go to. For example, if they go to Britain, the dealing will be in English and if they go to Germany, their dealing will be in German etc. This means that they should learn the language, which enables him to deal with the patients.

**Researcher:** Do you notice any differences between the young women and the young men who study medicine in terms of their language abilities? In relation to anything else?

**Lecturer:** Regarding the performance, female students are a bit better. I see many facets to this issue; amongst these: first, females have a better educational level when they leave secondary school. Second, the preoccupations of the male student are more than the female's. Third, the number of females is greater than the number of males, which creates some kind of psychological pressure on the latter.

**Researcher:** do female students have more a competitive streak than males?

**Lecturer:** For example, female students come to the classroom early and occupy the front seats. When there are 150 students and the females occupy the front seats, male students will inevitably sit in the back. Their number is small and they sit in the back means that they will have some difficulty in listening, following the lecturer, communicating and even maintaining discipline. For when they sit in the back there will be a possibility of talking to or disturbing each other. In addition, when the females are in the front and the males are in the back the physiological factor will play a part, so you find some male students absent-minded and wandering. All these factors have an impact on the male students but all the students have moral courage in their comparable level. I mean even the male students have moral courage; they speak and ask questions but regarding language use the females are a bit better.

**Researcher:** Do students ever fail their medical degree because they struggle with the language?

**Lecturer:** Yes, there is a ratio of failure (drop out) about 30% or more. This ratio is not only due to the language, but also to other factors. For example, the syllabus is too broad, the teaching system and the change of environment; I mean moving from secondary school where the student is passive in his learning to the university where the system is open and he needs to be more involved in the learning process. There is also the change of dynamics in the classroom; in the university, there are 150 students or more while in secondary school the student was used to 30 or less. Moreover, the student faces new problems such as looking for his own place and financial difficulties because there are those who come from faraway places and do not enough funds to finance their studies.

**Researcher:** Where do most students go on to work as doctors after they have qualified?

**Lecturer:** A good part of them tries to resume their studies and finish their formation because it leads to specialism.

**Researcher:** What do you think of this?

**Lecturer:** It is a good idea because the country needs a large number of medicine graduates (doctors). Here in Sebha and the south regions there is a shortage of specialists and general practitioners and we need some of the graduates to become specialists and others to practise general medicine in order to remedy the situation at the national and regional level.

**Researcher:** Do you talk to your students about issues like where they might go to work after qualifying?

**Lecturer:** normally, most of them say that they want to finish their degree and do a speciality.

**Researcher:** If you do not mind me asking – why do you stay in Libya working here – do you think about going to work abroad?

**Lecturer:** I have stayed in Libya because of my convictions and circumstances. I mean that the environment I come to is good and stable, and I have faced no hardship or anything that made me think of leaving.

**Researcher:** Would you like to talk about other aspects related to studying medicine in English that we had not discussed in this interview or to add anything?

**Lecturer:** in general, the study of medicine and specialities should be planned because it costs the country a lot of money, and it needs to be developed in stages. In other countries, they have long term plans for medical students; from the time they join the university up to their graduation. There are limited places in the faculties of medicine because governments do not want to have a surplus of doctors because their formation is costly, so they match the number of students to their needs. There should be the same system in Libya and here in Sebha. I wish that some medical facilities would be under the control of the faculty of medicine like a university hospital where students can train and the teaching staff can work while they are affiliated to the faculty. Moreover, I wish that there were a system of cooperation between faculties, which facilitates the contact with the others in the same field, the exchange of teaching staff, students, experiences, equipments and research papers. I also would like the faculty to devise a strategy for scientific research because it is none existent here. If we compare the faculty of science or the faculty of engineering to ours, they produce some research papers, which are published in scientific magazines. However, our faculty produces nothing except some reports for the treatment of some cases in the hospital, which they consider as case studies, which do not amount to much and are not published in any magazine. The final point is linked to the situation in our country and its impact on individuals and the faculty as a unit. For example, we have some foreign staff who works in the university; they are more sensitive to the social unrest surrounding the faculty and their families back home are worried about them. This has a negative impact on everyone in the faculty and their morale.

**Researcher:** What about the students' motivation to study; do they have the desire?

**Lecturer:** most of the students have personal motives to study and some of them are pushed by their families. The latter group's performance suffers because they are not as keen as the former group to do well. In other words, they try to satisfy the desire of their parents who pressurised them to do medicine. So, some of them do not attend lectures or do their homework because they cannot be bothered as it was not them who chose to study medicine. There are also those who had a slight motive to study medicine. They try to for a year and then change to another subject because they know that they are going to lose nothing as the studies and lodgings are free. Finally, there are those who have strong motive; they are studious in their studies and overcome any problems.

**Researcher:** is it because of this that there are many students in the premedical and first years?

**Lecturer:** there are those who do not have a choice because the educational system in the past was limiting people's choice regarding medicine. I mean that once a student in the secondary school chooses to join the medical secondary school, he had inevitably to enrol in medicine in the university. At that early age most of the time it is the parents who made the choice for their children and decide for them.

**Researcher:** Thank you so much for your contribution.

**Lecturer:** God bless you.

## Appendix 8 Coding sample

'QUALITY' OF THE COURSE?

8A Rote Learning (RL)

L9 "some students do not attend even a single lecture and then they take a sheet from their classmates, sit the exams and get good marks. (P6)

L13: "the system in the universities of the world is based on research to develop and broaden the student's understanding of the subject but here we still rely on the system of teaching, memorising and classical and old way of exams." (P5)

L14: "so many of the students memorise texts in English as they are in the book or in the sheet ----- because of his language ability -----" (P8).

L20: "He started with scientific English with more emphasis on the medical terms. These he learns through repetition so he does not make mistakes in them." (P7).

L23: "a big percentage of students make mistakes in writing. This is because they memorise things. This is a habit that Libyan students have. This is their problem with learning with rote. Therefore, the assessment here is difficult." (P4).

## Spoon feeding (SPF)

- L13: "the student is used to studying from the handouts and not from books. He is only used what lecturer provides for him. He is not used to going to the library ..." (P4)
- L14: "we using power point and sheets, we provide the latter for the students which is summaries of the main book ... but most of the time the lecturer limit himself to the sheets in questions and exams." (P8).
- L16: "we have to give them some standard books and sheets that is discribed to them that they have to follow these books and sheets." (P9).
- 10 " (P.3)

## Spoon feeding (SPF)

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- L14: "We using power point and sheets, we provide the latter for the students which is summaries of the main book... but most of the time the lecturer limit himself to the sheets in questions and exams" (p. 8).
- L16: "We have to give them some standard books and sheets that is discribed to them that they have to follow these books and sheets." (p. 9).
- L10: "
- (p. 3)

## passive Learning (PL)

- L18: "In the lectures the lecturer speaks most of the time" (p. 6).
- L19: "Normally, lecturers speak most of the time and students do not talk that much" (p. 7).

## FC

### Students' feedback (SFED)

- L19: "Along time ago we were asked to distribute questionnair to students so that they can evaluate us and subjects we taught..." (p. 5).
- L19: "There should be a survey or evaluation method whereby both teacher and students are assessed in the university-run Center." (p. 8).

## Appendix 9 Sample of rote learning

### Acquired Toxoplasmosis.

1. Acquired infections of T. gondii are common (about one-third world population may be infected).
2. Acquired infections are mostly benign or asymptomatic.
3. In acquired toxoplasmosis patients are mostly asymptomatic because the growth of parasite is checked by the development of acquired or active immunity and death parasite (bradyzoites) cause inflammatory reactions in chronic stage of acquired toxoplasmosis.
4. In acquired toxoplasmosis mostly eye and lymphnodes are involved. In eyes parasite cause - retinochoroiditis  
- maybe unilateral blindness.  
In lymphnodes cause - lymphadenopathy with or without fever.  
In acquired Toxoplasmosis rarely patients may show myocarditis and encephalitis.
5. Acquired toxoplasmosis is not fatal.

### Congenital Toxoplasmosis.

1. Congenital infections of T. gondii are not very common (1 to 5% of 1000 pregnancies).
2. Congenital infections are mostly severe and symptomatic.
3. In Congenital toxoplasmosis patients are mostly symptomatic because during pregnancy there is immunosuppression and the growth of parasite is not checked and parasite (T. gondii) reached to placenta and cause necrosis of placenta tissues due to multiplication of tachyzoites.
4. In Congenital toxoplasmosis parasite can cause - abortion due to necrosis of placenta  
- death of foetus (due to fatal cerebral damage).  
- Still birth with congenital abnormalities  
- Congenital abnormalities may develop after 2-3 months in eyes and CNS.  
In congenital toxoplasmosis mostly vital organs of foetus (Eyes and CNS) are involved. usually  
In eyes parasite cause - retinochoroiditis (bilateral)  
- usually bilateral blindness  
In CNS parasite cause - hydrocephalus  
- microcephaly  
- mental retardation, convulsions  
- encephalitis, intracerebral calcifications  
- multiple foetal.
5. Congenital toxoplasmosis may be fatal.



## Toxoplasma gondii

(1)

T. gondii is an obligatory intracellular coccidian parasite (both sexual and asexual cycles are in the gut epithelium of cat). It is a common parasite of man and animals.

Disease: - Toxoplasmosis (zoonotic disease).

Distribution: - It is widely distributed and about one-third world's population is infected with T. gondii. Infections are mostly asymptomatic or benign in nature.

T. gondii infections are common in Libya as cats are plenty, which are source of human infection.

Habitat: -

T. gondii is a intracellular parasite. Development or multiplication takes place in the gut epithelium of cat and in the macrophages and other tissues of man.

Morphology: - There are three stages

1. Oocyst: - Oval shaped, 9-11  $\mu\text{m}$  in length, containing two sporocyst and each sporocyst has four sporozoites.

Oocysts develop in the gut epithelium of cat and are passed out in feces. Oocysts are resistant to acids or alkali and are killed by exposure to 55°C temperature for 30 min. and can survive in the soil for a year in the moist soil.

Oocysts are infective stage to man and various domestic animals (sheep, goat, cattle, pigs and rats).



Sporocyst containing four sporozoites

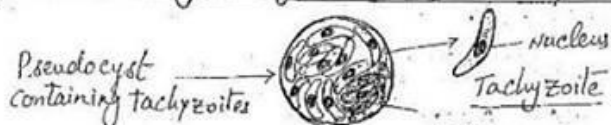
Oocyst

2. Pseudocyst: - Rounded shaped, has definite membrane. It contains crescent shaped (4-6  $\mu\text{m}$  in length) tachyzoites

which have central nucleus. Tachyzoites are fast multiplying stage of parasite and are responsible for tissue destruction and initial spread of infection. (2)

Tachyzoites multiply in reticuloendothelial cells (macrophages) of lymph nodes, heart, <sup>muscles</sup> lungs and CNS of man and domestic animals (sheep, goat, cattle and pigs) and form cyst called pseudocyst.

A cyst-containing tachyzoites is called pseudocyst.

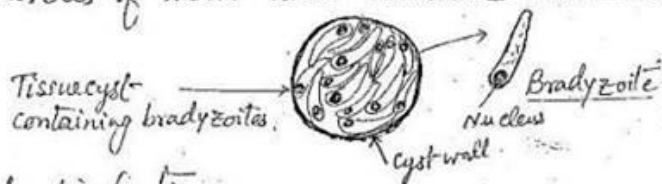


3. Tissuecyst: - A cyst-containing bradyzoites is called tissue cyst.

Tissuecyst contains elongated crescent-shaped bradyzoites, which have nucleus at rounded end.

Bradyzoites are slow developing stage of parasite and do not cause inflammatory reactions if the cyst is intact.

Bradyzoites mostly develop in CNS, heart, and other skeletal muscles of man and domestic animals.



Mode of infection:-

Cats become infected by eating infected meat (containing pseudocysts or tissuecysts or both) of intermediate hosts (sheep, goat, cattle, pigs, birds and rats or mice)

Acquired infections in human:-

1. Ingestion of oocysts with food or handling of infected cats (due to hand-mouth contact)
2. Eating of undercooked infected meat (containing pseudocysts or tissuecysts or both) of sheep, goat, cattle and pigs and chicken

3. Blood transfusion:- Tachyzoites present in blood, are transmitted by blood transfusion.

4. Handling of infected meat by abraded hands (rubbing).

Congenital infections in human:-

Human to human transmission (from mother to fetus) occurs through placenta and giving rise to congenital toxoplasmosis.

Tachyzoites, easily across the placenta.

Life cycle:-

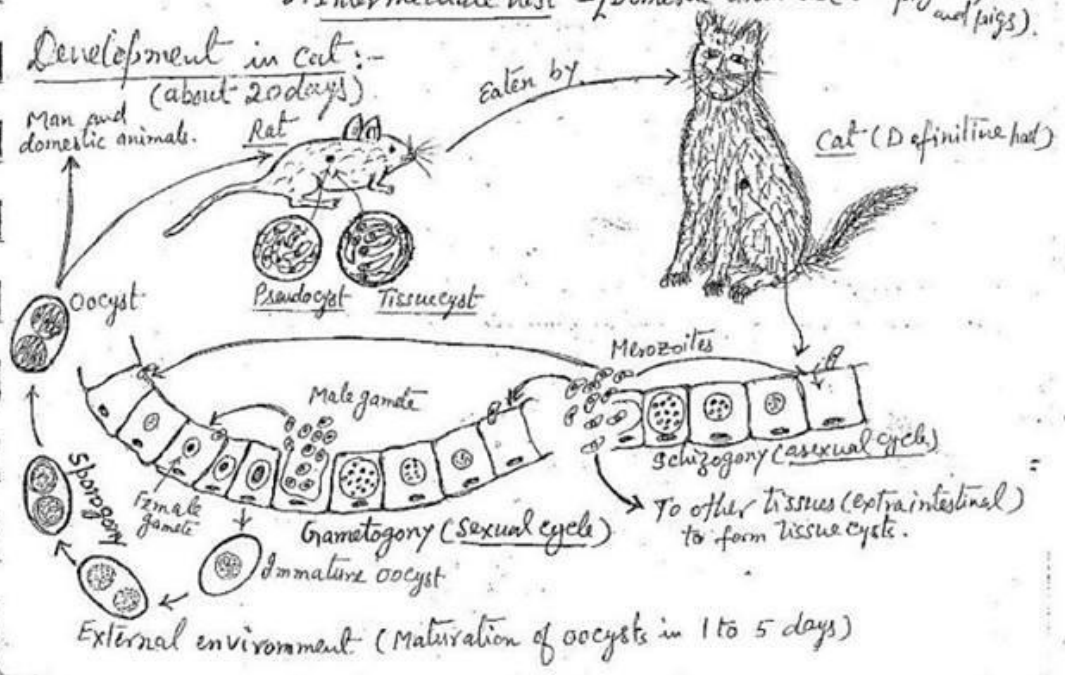
In cats both asexual and sexual cycles are completed in the gut epithelium and act as both intermediate and definitive host. Asexual development also takes place in the extra-intestinal tissues of cat.

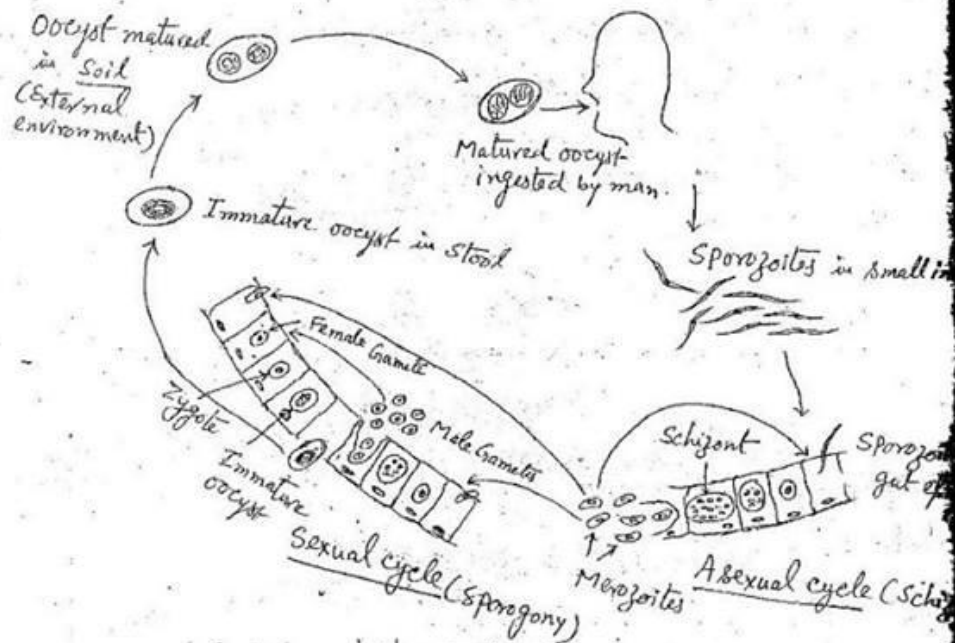
Cats are considered as definitive host of T. gondii as asexual cycle of parasite commonly occurs in various domestic animals (sheep, goat, cattle and pigs) and which are source of infection to cats.

Life cycle completed in two hosts.

1. Definitive host - Cat <sup>Humans and</sup>
2. Intermediate host - Domestic animals (sheep, goat, cattle and pigs).

Development in cat:- (about 20 days)





### Life cycle of *Isospora belli*

#### Pathogenicity and clinical symptoms:-

- Mostly infections are asymptomatic. *I. belli* damages gut epithelium and clinical symptoms are:-
- self limiting diarrhea (resolves slowly in few days)
  - Abdominal pain
  - Malabsorption, weight loss and anorexia.

*I. belli* is an opportunistic parasite, therefore in HIV/AIDS patients it causes

- Profuse (severe) diarrhea or life threatening diarrhea.
- severe dehydration which may be fatal.

In *I. belli* relapse are common (reoccurrence of disease) as parasites remain resting (dormant) in the gut epithelium.

Diagnosis:- Stool examination for oocysts using acid-fast stain.

Treatment:- Drugs like combination of Trimethoprim and Sulfamethoxazole and Pyrimethamine with sulfadiazine.

- Prevention and Control:-
1. Treatment of Patients.
  2. Proper disposal of human faeces.

### Pathogenicity and clinical symptoms:-

(5)

Main pathology or pathological changes in Toxoplasmosis are due to rapid multiplication of tachyzoites which results destruction of infected cells and necrosis of tissues.

### Acquired Toxoplasmosis:-

Acquired infections are common but disease is less (mostly asymptomatic or benign in nature). In acquired toxoplasmosis eye or lymph nodes are generally involved. Eye lesions may be - uveitis<sup>and</sup> retinochoroiditis (Chorioretinitis). Rarely retinochoroiditis progress leads to blindness (mostly unilateral).

In lymphatic system may produce lymphadenopathy (lymphadenitis) with fever or without fever. Rarely myocarditis, encephalitis and hepatitis<sup>??</sup> may occur.

### Congenital Toxoplasmosis:-

Toxoplasmosis is more severe in its congenital form. Majority of infections are symptomatic and quite severe and only small percentage, they recover from disease.

Congenital toxoplasmosis occurs 1 to 5% in 1000 pregnancies. Severity of disease range from severely damaged infant or death of fetus or abortion.

Tachyzoites cross the placenta and are disseminated in the various organs of fetus (especially CNS and eyes).

Risk of fetal infection is 25% in first and second trimester

and 65% in third trimester.

(6)

If the fetus becomes infected during first trimester, there may be abortion or death of fetus or still birth with congenital abnormalities in eyes and CNS.  
If the fetus becomes infected in second and last trimester, fetus may be normal at birth but will develop congenital abnormalities after some times (2 to 3 months) or may be die.

In congenital toxoplasmosis mostly CNS and eyes (both, usually) are involved.

In CNS, congenital abnormalities (common sequelae) are -

- hydrocephalus
- microcephaly
- mental retardation
- encephalitis
- intra cerebral calcification
- and convulsions (are common).

In eyes, congenital abnormalities are - Chorioretinitis or retino-Choroiditis which results in impairment of vision and blindness (mostly bilateral)

(Pigmented ringed-scar near macula)

Necrotizing retinitis appear as yellow-white "cotton-wool" in the fundus region.

New borns may show symptoms like fever, pneumonitis and hepatosplenomegaly.

Toxoplasmosis in an immunodeficient host (Disseminated Toxoplasmosis):- <sup>(7)</sup>

Toxoplasmosis in immunodeficient or AIDS patients is life threatening, severe, fatal and acute fulminating as *T. gondii* is opportunistic parasite.

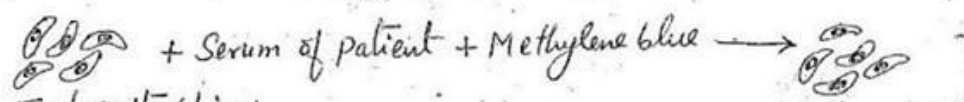
There is reactivation of latent toxoplasmosis in immunodeficient patients and *T. gondii* is disseminated in various organs of body through circulation. Majority of cases show pathological changes in CNS, like necrotising encephalitis or cerebral mass lesions.

Clinical features may include headache, myocarditis, pneumonitis, retinochoroiditis and confusion. Tachyzoites in CSF are diagnostic.

Diagnosis:-

1. Serology:-

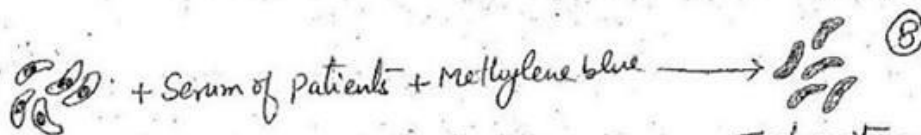

(a). Sabin-Feldman dye test:- Dye test is demonstrable within first two weeks of the infection. This test is formed by using live *Toxoplasma gondii*, obtained from peritoneal fluid of infected mice and methylene blue dye.

(i)   
Tachyzoite (Live) → Tachyzoites do not get stained (Positive)

Note:-

If parasites (tachyzoites) do not take stain of methylene blue, means surface of parasite is covered by *Toxoplasma* antibodies, which are present in serum of patient. (It means patient is infected with *T. gondii*)

7

(ii)  + Serum of patients + Methylene blue  $\longrightarrow$   (B)  
Tachyzoites (Live) Tachyzoites get stained (Negative)

Note :-  
If parasites (tachyzoites) taking stain of methylene blue, means surface of parasite is not covered by antibodies of Toxoplasma. (It means patient has no infection of T. gondii).

### (b). Serological tests :-

(1). Immunofluorescence antibody (IFA) test :- This test is useful for the diagnosis of acute toxoplasmosis and test becomes positive within two weeks of infection.  
High titre of <sup>specific</sup> IgM antibodies in the serum of patient and infants is suggestive of acute toxoplasmosis.

(2). Enzyme linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) :-  
ELISA also detects specific antibodies (IgM and IgG) in the serum of patients.

(3). CSF examination :- Aspiration of CSF by lumbar puncture also shows tachyzoites, specially in AIDS patients.

### Treatment :-

Combination of drugs like ① Pyrimethamine + sulphadiazine  
② Spiramycin + Sulphadiazine  
and ③ Spiramycin.

### Prevention and control :-

1. Proper cooking of meat
2. Avoid contact with cats
3. Pregnant women, should avoid contact with cats and don't eat undercooked meat.
4. Wearing gloves when cleaning cat's litter pans.



## Intestinal Sporozoa or Coccidian Parasites.

(1)

Coccidian parasites have both asexual (shizogony) and sexual (sporogony) cycles in the same host (same host act as both definitive and intermediate host). Infection is acquired by ingestion of oocysts with food.

Examples: Isospora belli  
Cryptosporidium sp.  
Toxoplasma gondii } Present in Libya  
and  
They are opportunistic Parasites.

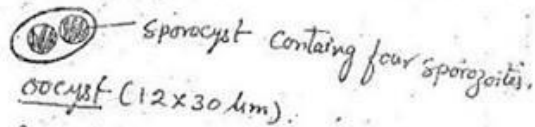
Isospora belli

Disease:- Isosporiasis

Distribution:- It has world wide distribution. Infections are present in Libya.

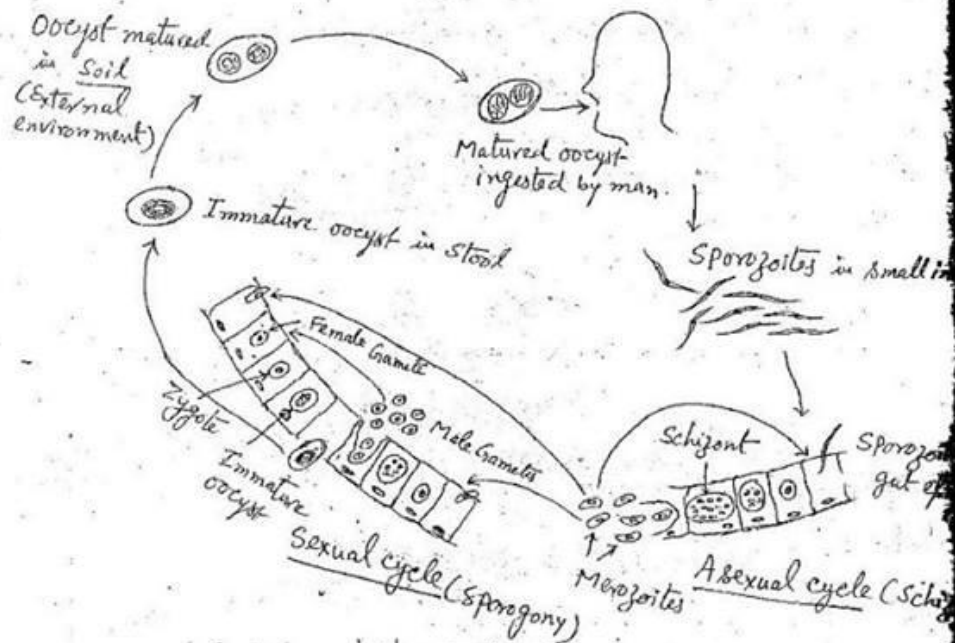
Habitat:- Gut epithelium of small intestine of man.

Morphology:- I. belli is a intracellular parasite. Oocysts are elongated and oval shaped. Each oocyst contains two sporocysts and each sporocyst contains four sporozoites.



Mode of infection:- Faecal-oral route. Man gets infection by the ingestion of oocysts with food, water and green vegetables.

Life cycle:- Excystation of oocysts occurs in the upper part of small intestine and sporozoites are released, which enter the gut epithelium of small intestine. First asexual cycle (shizogony) occurs in the gut epithelial cells. Some merozoites develops to gametes in the other part of small intestine and finally immature oocysts are formed which passed out in faeces and get matured in external environment (soil).



### Life cycle of *Isospora belli*

#### Pathogenicity and clinical symptoms:-

- Mostly infections are asymptomatic. *I. belli* damages gut epithelium and clinical symptoms are:-
- self limiting diarrhea (resolves slowly in few days)
  - Abdominal pain
  - Malabsorption, weight loss and anorexia.

*I. belli* is an opportunistic parasite, therefore in HIV/AIDS patients it causes

- Profuse (severe) diarrhea or life threatening diarrhea.
- severe dehydration which may be fatal.

In *I. belli* relapse are common (reoccurrence of disease) as parasites remain resting (dormant) in the gut epithelium.

Diagnosis:- Stool examination for oocysts using acid-fast stain.

Treatment:- Drugs like combination of Trimethoprim and Sulfamethoxazole and Pyrimethamine with sulfadiazine.

- Prevention and Control:-
1. Treatment of Patients.
  2. Proper disposal of human faeces.

## Cryptosporidium parvum

Disease:- Cryptosporidiosis. Zoonotic disease (domestic animals are reservoir hosts)

Distribution:- It has world wide distribution. Infections are present in Libya (6-13%, specially in children).

Habitat:- Brush borders or microvilli of epithelial cells of small intestine.

Morphology:- Oocysts are small and oval shaped and contain four sporozoites



sporozoites (4).

Mode of infection:- Oocyst (5-6  $\mu$ m). Faecal-oral route. Man gets infection by the ingestion of oocysts with food, water and green vegetables.

Life cycle:- Both asexual and sexual cycles occur in the brush borders or microvilli of gut epithelium of small intestine. Oocysts get shed in the lumen of intestine. Sometimes, oocysts may reach to upper part of small intestine and released their sporozoites resulting to infection, which results hyperinfection of this parasite and disease may be severe.

Oocysts immediately passed out in faeces are infective to man.

Pathogenicity and Clinical Symptoms:- Light infections are asymptomatic.

Cryptosporidium sp. causes - self limiting gastroenteritis or diarrhea.

It is a opportunistic parasite, therefore in HIV/AIDS patient

Cryptosporidium causes - Profuse (severe) life threatening diarrhea.

- Severe dehydration (may be fatal)

- abdominal pain

- malabsorption, fever and weight loss.

Diagnosis:- Stool examination for oocysts using acid-fast stain.

Treatment:- Drug like Spiramycin. oral rehydration for electrolyte depletion.

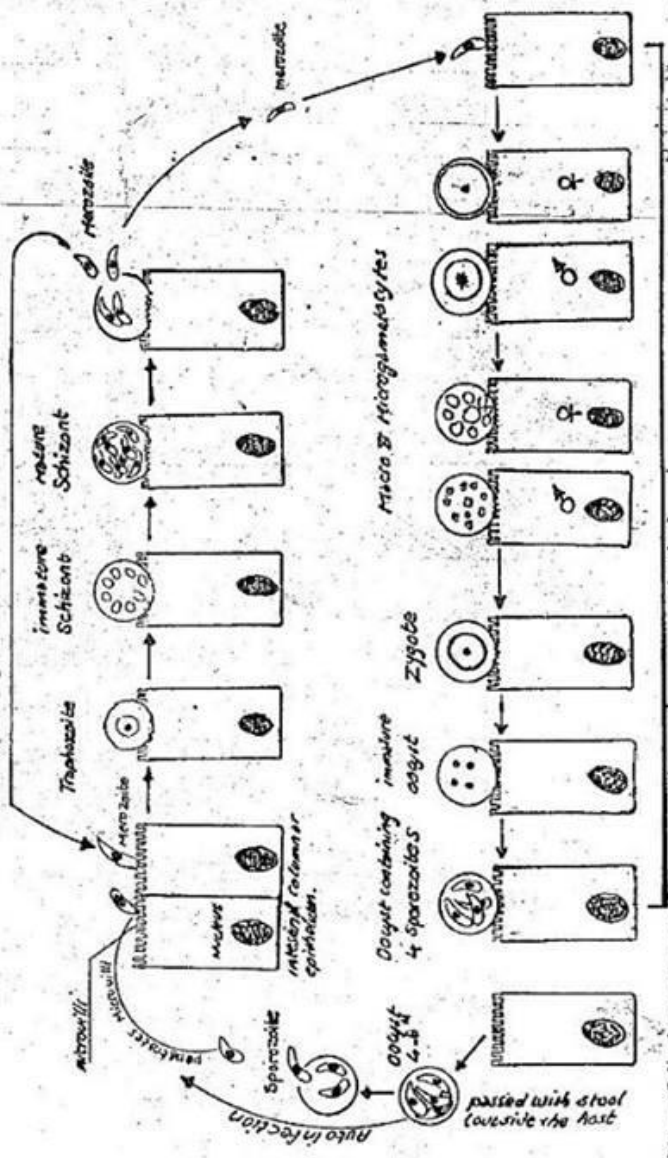
Prevention and Control:-

1. Treatment of patients
2. Proper disposal of human faeces
3. Avoid contact with domestic animals.

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### Life cycle of *Cryptosporidium parvum*

Asexual cycle (reproduction)



### Sarcocystis spp.

(4)

Disease: Sarcocystosis and it is two types.

Muscle sarcocystosis: - It is caused S. lindemanni. Man gets infection by ingestion of oocyst - coming from animals. Man act as accidental intermediate host. Final host is not known.

In man parasite occurs as elongated cylindrical bodies in the skeletal muscle or cardiac muscles <sup>called Miescher's tubes</sup> or occasionally produces pain and swelling of muscles (myotitis).



Intestinal Sarcocystosis: - There are two species.

(i) Sarcocystis suis hominis (from pigs)

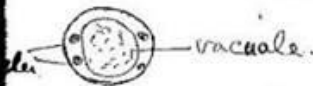
(ii) Sarcocystis bovis hominis (from cattle).

These two species develop in the intestine of man and produce oocysts. Man gets infection by ingestion of meat of pig or cattle containing cysts and cause - abdominal pain, fever, diarrhoea and tachycardia.

### Blastocystis hominis.

It has world wide distribution. It is spherical in shape (5-30  $\mu$ m), ring like peripheral cytoplasm with nuclei and has large central vacuole.

There is controversy about its pathogenicity. Usually it is non-pathogenic but have been reported that it can cause self-limiting diarrhoea. It is diagnose by direct smear of stool and by culture in the medium.



B. hominis (vacuolar form)

# Appendix 10 Themes categorisation

