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**‘I don’t learn at school, so I take tuition’**  
**An ethnographic study of classroom practices and**  
**private tuition settings in the Maldives**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Second Language Teaching



At Massey University, Palmerston North,

New Zealand.

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2012



# Abstract

This study explores the classroom practices of both secondary classrooms and private tuition settings in the Maldives. By adopting ethnographic methods of data collection informed by an interview as social practice approach, the study aimed to further understanding of these practices in urban and rural classrooms and in private tuition settings in the context of the Maldives.

Qualitative data was collected through observation, interview and document analysis over the course of nine months. Detailed observations of the learning sites and interview as social practice were applied when conducting interviews with teachers, students and parent in the three various settings. Participants of this study included six teachers from the two secondary schools; students and parents from both schools; six private tuition teachers; and four students and parents from private tuition settings. Rich contextual data was obtained relating to classroom practices, and private tuition settings and their interrelationship in the Maldives.

The analysis of the data was on-going throughout the observations. Thematic analysis was adopted within an interview as social practice approach, by examining the ‘hows’ as well as the ‘whats’ of the interviews. The detailed ethnographic ‘thick descriptions’ were analysed, including in-depth reflection on the interviews and how they were used as communication tools in social situations.

The findings of the study revealed that the practices of teachers and students in the classrooms were shaped by: the sustained mini exam sessions of teaching and learning, the absence of teachers’ voices in decision-making; teacher-centred approaches; passive learning; the physical conditions of the classrooms; and ever-present concerns about noise and managing time in the classroom. The analysis was extended to uncover the complex reasons that led students and their parents to opt for private tuition, and how these reasons were interrelated with classroom practices. In addition, it was found that teachers preferred to give private tuition not only for financial reasons, but also to counterbalance some of the pressures they experienced in classroom settings.

The study revealed the value of the interview as social practice approach within an ethnographic study as well as the need for sustained enquiry within and across both classroom and private tuition settings so as to reveal the meaning and significance of the practices that form learning contexts in both public and private contexts in the Maldives.

# Dedication

*In memory of my dear late grandmother, Maama;*

*My pillar of strength*

*Katha, for your inspiration*

*Mamma and Bappa for your unconditional love*

*My loving daughter Aisha, for all the joy you bring me.*

# Acknowledgements

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful

Alhamdulillah, all praises to Allah for the strength and His blessings in completing this thesis. It is amazing to sit and think how many people over the past four and a half years, have contributed to, or supported my own motivation to complete this piece of work and it's even more difficult to attempt to acknowledge all those who have contributed to this process in other ways over that time, or even before it started. However, I would like to begin by extending my appreciation especially to my supervisors. Indeed, without their guidance, I would not be able to put the topic together.

Professor Cynthia White, for making this research possible: her support, guidance, and advice throughout the research project, as well as her painstaking effort in proof reading the drafts, are greatly appreciated. I am grateful for the advice and expertise which she has given me throughout these years, for her generosity, her quick and insightful feedback, and for her continuous patience, encouragement and support at so many different levels.

To Dr Martin Paviour-Smith, for his on-going assistance, his precious suggestions, confidence in my approach to the materials and his invaluable comments and recommendations for my drafts.

To Dr Gillian Skyrme for her interest and encouragement and for the guidance she gives me and for keeping her doors open for me at all times.

This study is a reflection of my intellectual journey as a student, teacher and educator. I acknowledge and honour my teachers in the Maldives and the Principals and colleagues of Aminiya School. I am indebted to you.

To the two schools and the teachers, students and parents who willingly participated in this study and gave me their time, patience and enthusiasm to share their classrooms. To the teachers, parents and students: for inviting me to walk into their home and watch the private tuition lessons.

To my friends in Palmerston North, who have become my extended family, who have supported me at all times. Thank you Arifa, Shujau, Mazu, Rifu and Masko, for being there for me when my life has its ups and downs. Ayya and Shazla, for taking care of my daughter and listening to my dilemmas. Sheryn and Rahman for being so kind and supportive. Eman, for the good times. To Shihan and Nai for being just a phone call away and ready to support. Faya, Ampu and Nafiu, thank you for the great Maldivian desserts.

I owe a special thanks to my parents for their unconditional support, both financially and emotionally throughout my degree. For them who educated me as a person and a scholar since childhood, there is no such word of thankfulness I could say that I feel is fit for them. To my brothers and sisters – many thanks for the spiritual support. A special thanks to Lu, my sister in law, for taking the time to read my work. I love you all very much.

Lastly, special thanks to my own family for being so dear to me, for always being there for me, and for all the joy that you give me. Aisha, seeing your sweet smile each day has given me the energy to finally finish this study. And Midhu, you have given me more dedication and support than I could ever have dreamed of. Thank you.



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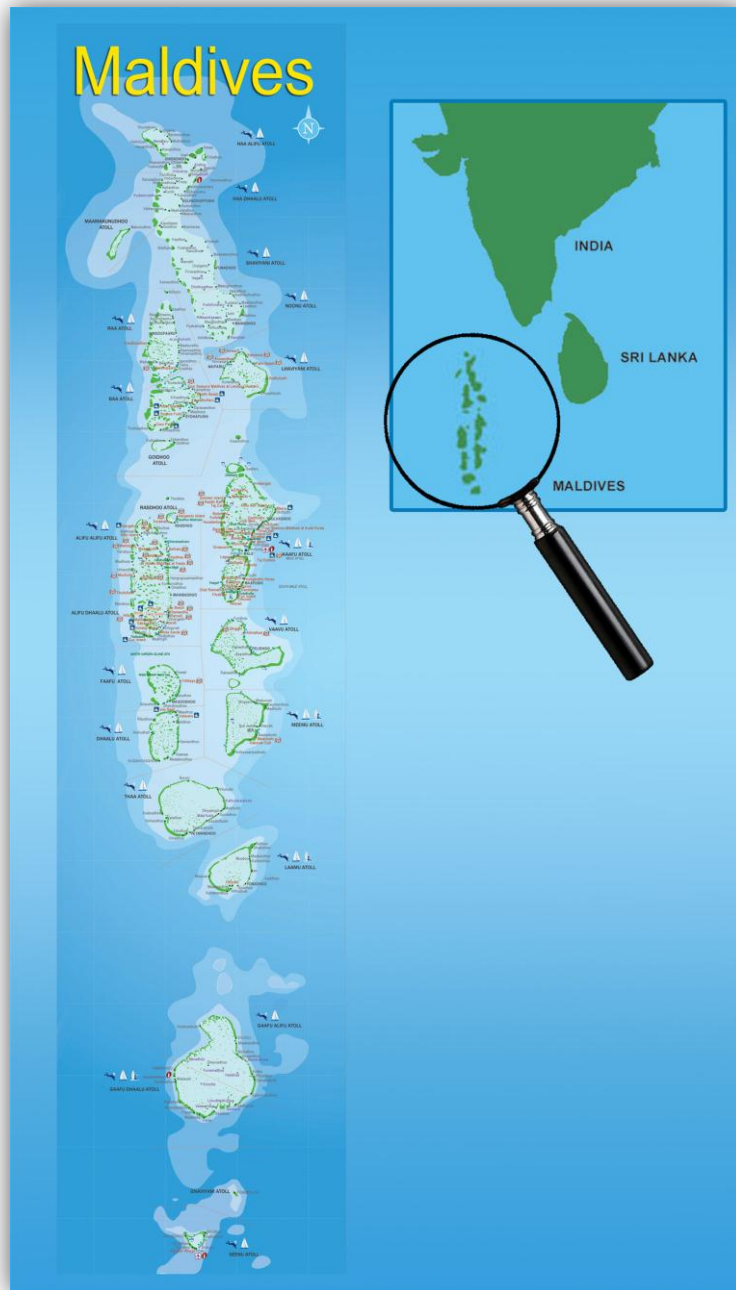
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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction



Source: <http://ibalmaldives.com/>

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

---

*“I don’t learn much in school, so I take tuition”*. This expression comes from Maya<sup>1</sup>, a secondary school student in the Maldives. Like Maya, most students in the Maldivian schools consider private tutoring or private tuition after school hours for many reasons including: not understanding the lessons taught in the classroom; not getting individual attention; the classroom environment not being conducive to learning; and, most importantly, to prepare for the examinations. A typical day for Maya would start with rising at 5.30 a.m, attending to prayers before going onto do some school work and some homework and leaving for school at around 6.30 a.m. After school at 1.00 p.m., Maya goes home, has lunch and after a shower and a little rest, she is ready to begin her tuition classes. Maya takes English and Physics lessons at her own home with two of her friends joining her three days a week from 3.00 p.m. until 6.00 p.m. She attends a friend’s house two days a week, to get private tuition on two other subjects and returns home at 9.00 p.m. Maya goes to bed after dinner at about 11.00 p.m. after doing some additional work, if there is any. Students like Maya do not engage in extra activities: “I do not attend sports or other activities after school, as I have to go for tuition. If I don’t go for tuition, I find the lessons very difficult. I take tuition because I am not good in the subjects. I need to take English tuition too because all the subjects are taught in English and sometimes it is hard to answer the questions because I don’t know what they say. I cannot understand what the teacher explains in the classroom. I cannot concentrate there.”

The reasons why Maya takes private tuition could be due to the problems of classroom practice in Maldivian secondary classrooms. As Maya mentioned, all the curriculum subjects, except Dhivehi and Islam, are taught in the medium of English in Maldivian classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> All the proper names in this study are pseudonyms.

I have been fascinated by learning foreign languages since my childhood and have been involved in English language teaching for the better part of my adult life. In recent years, my focus has been mainly on English language teaching/learning, particularly teaching English in secondary classrooms in the Maldives. When I reflect back to the time I started teaching:

It was with much enthusiasm that I started as an assistant teacher. My students loved me. Soon, though, I had to leave for studies to get trained as a teacher. I then came back again and joined the school community with much confidence. From then on, I started teaching the lower secondary grades. Here, I tried to do various kinds of activities with the students. I got them in groups, pairs, took them outside and talked about the trees and the sites we saw in the school and later discussed those in class and even made them write about the things that they saw. I also brought them in after school and watched movies like ‘The Sound of Music’ which the children loved and discussed for weeks. We also did drama and acted out different plays and even dressed up as characters out of books. The children even loved it when we listened to the song ‘Hero’ by Mariah Carey and we discussed the important heroes in history and present. I was very satisfied by everything. The children’s progress in writing and speaking was very visible.

However, things did not turn out quite like this forever. Soon, the head of department thought that we teachers need to focus very much on the requirements of the syllabus and the curriculum. We were asked to rigidly follow the daily lessons and were asked to complete them on time. Teachers were given uniform worksheets to be given to students. We had to follow the text book. I was even told to ‘stop bringing students in after school as it would be unfair for other students, as other teachers cannot come to school and do the same with their students.’

So things changed. The teaching was more examination-oriented. The University of London O’ level examination, which the students in Maldives do at the end of their lower secondary grades, was quite difficult for students. The comprehension passages were very hard to understand. Most of the time, the children practised ‘fill in the blanks with the correct tense of the verb in

brackets or choose the best word from the list' type of grammar exercises which did not help them when they had to write a paragraph or an essay.

Most of the times the youngsters claimed they loved the English lessons and worked very enthusiastically in the classrooms. Nevertheless, when it was time to test their knowledge, they failed the exams. It saddened me while marking the term papers to see they did not gain good marks in the reading comprehension section as they seemed unable to comprehend the question. All the teachers helped the students by bringing them in after school and giving them extra help to make them improve. All the same, most of them ended up failing in English in the London Ordinary level as well. This was the state of the whole nation as the country's English Language pass percentage in the London exam was below 28%. (Journal Entry, January 25, 2008)

Of course, the above notions inspired me to undertake my study and weave my way back into the past and the present and investigate the classroom practices in the Maldives. On top of this, many students in the Maldives take tuition to try and improve their examination grades and this is very common practice for English; therefore, I wanted to see the private tuition practices in the Maldives. Just as I have described the classroom teaching and learning experiences, I would like to share my private tuition experiences both as a student and a provider of tuition.

## **A long time ago in a tuition class**

When I was at school, I was not good at mathematics so I took private tuition for which I had to pay Maldivian Rufiyaa 500.00 (NZ\$40.00) per month as I was in a group class. If I was to take individual tuition, I would have had to pay Rufiyaa 1000.00 (NZ\$81.00) per month. I was in grade ten and it was the most important year as at the end of it, I would be sitting the London Ordinary Level examinations. It was very important that I took tuition that year. Most of my friends went for tuition in maths and I got to know a very good teacher through them. They all went for group tuition to Ms Sam's home. So, they talked to Ms Sam and I was included in their group. We had to attend tuition three times a week. She lived very far from my home, so my brother gave me a ride on his motorbike on tuition days. We went there in the evening between 4.00 and 5.00pm and the next two days from 5.00 to 6.00pm. We got there about 5 to ten minutes before it

started and waited outside the door. She lived right opposite the boys' school and we had to wait, standing near the door, until the group who were already taking tuition came out, putting up with rain, shine, boys bullying and passers-bys' comments.

As soon as the students who were in Ms Sam's earlier class came out, we headed in. Ms. Sam lived by herself in a small rental house. There were two rooms there. One was her bedroom and we studied in the next room, her kitchen/dining/living room. The room was very small and a large table and eight chairs took all of its space. A small stove and utensils were neatly kept in the far left corner. Ms Sam would sit at the far end of the table while we sat around it. A blackboard was fixed on the wall behind her where she wrote explanations. Most of the time, Ms Sam would be sitting down. She rarely wrote on the board. Most days when we went in, Ms Sam would be eating a biscuit and drinking tea. As soon as we entered, she would give us some small pieces of paper with a maths problem on them and would ask us to work it out. After we worked it out by ourselves, we passed our notes to her and she would correct them and discuss each with us line by line. She explained very well and sometimes, if she found that one of us was finding it hard, she would ask us to go and sit near her and would give us more help. Her explanations were very clear and we were able to grasp the way of doing it with her help. She made us practise similar sums from past papers for the whole one hour. At the end of the day, solving such sums would be a piece of cake for us. We enjoyed and benefitted from Ms Sam's lessons.

## **Taking my turn as a provider of tuition**

From the time I was an assistant teacher, I gave tuition in English for students sitting the London Ordinary Level examination. I worked at a tuition centre after school hours. Since I was working in the school in the mornings, I took tuition classes in the afternoons and some days in the evenings. The tuition centre was located a bit far from home. If I had to walk there, it took me about 20 minutes. So, most of the time, I either used my push bike or got a lift from my brother on his motorbike.

The tuition centre was a small two-storied place with only one classroom (Figure 1). The ground floor was the main office, where a secretary managed the centre. The office had a desk and a chair for the secretary, another desk for the manager, a photocopier, shelves with books, and other stationery. As soon as we arrived, we needed to sign in.

After signing in, we collected any worksheets that had been made ready for the day. Then, we collected the class record book and the register and climbed up a narrow winding staircase to the tuition classroom.

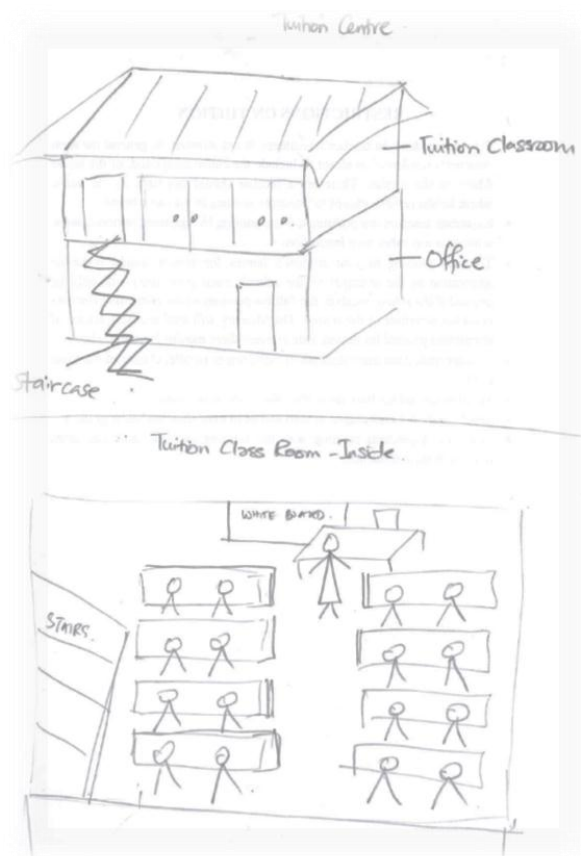
The classroom was the same size as the office, with a white board on the wall and two, two by four rows of chairs. The walls were painted white and looked very neat. The floor also had white tiles and looked very clean and shiny all the time. A maximum number of sixteen students attended at one time. There was a very narrow aisle in the middle so that teachers could walk and monitor the students' work. It also had four windows at the back of the classroom, for ventilation, as well as two ceiling fans which helped to keep the classroom cool in the scorching heat of the afternoon sun. Day or night, the climate of the island is normally very warm, therefore fans and air conditioning are fixed in almost every home and building. The only other thing that was in the room was a bin which was placed at the back of the class.

Before the lesson began, students waited outside the tuition centre, near the door or just opposite the centre or even in the narrow lane opposite. Sometimes parents waited with the students until they went up to the classroom. When the previous class was over, the students came out and the students waiting would go up. I followed them and waited for everyone to settle down. Then, I greeted the students and they greeted me back and I marked the attendance roll. Having done that, I began the day's lesson. The lessons were mainly based on practice for the examination and lasted an hour. Sometimes, students were made to do pair work or put in groups. There were occasions where I needed to help individual students as well. At the end of the class, I collected the students' work, marked them at home and returned them with comments. I also discussed various mistakes students made and explained to them how to improve in those areas. The students were not afraid to ask questions in the classroom and were very helpful to each other. They came from various schools in the capital with most students coming from government schools. During the sessions, there might be occasional screams of people passing by on the roads and the loud noises of car horns and motor bikes. However, these did not stir the classroom much.

From the feedback the management and the students gave me, I gathered that the lessons were enjoyed and valued by them. At the end of the year, after the exams, the students themselves were very pleased with the grades they got and even called to

inform me of their achievement. In addition, the management of the tuition centre made it a point to get the students' parents to inform the centre of their grades so that the centre could monitor progress.

The manager of the centre was a very dedicated person, who kept records of the students' achievements both at school and in the tuition centre. If the students were absent, the secretary made sure to call the students' homes and find out the reason for their absence. When the examination approached, the manager would meet the parents and students and discuss the importance of attendance. The tuition centre and its management were commended by the parents and students in the capital and it was very popular with classes always full and more students on the waiting list. Because of this popularity, the manager of the tuition centre sought a bigger place and more dedicated teachers to run the centre so that more students could benefit from its services.



**Figure 1:** Sketch of the private tuition centre

Having shared my experiences of the classroom practice and private tuition settings in the Maldives, I aim to provide contextual background information about my home, the Maldives.

## The context of the study

### *The Maldives*

The Republic of the Maldives, *Dhivehi Raajje*, as we call it, comprises a 500-mile north–south archipelago of 1,200 low lying islands and islets which form part of a series of nineteen coral atolls lying to the west, below the southern tip of India. Approximately 200 of these islands are inhabited. Male’, the capital, with an area of about 2 sq. km. accommodates 35% of the country’s population of around 394,999 (Maldives Demographics Profile, 2012). Different from any other island in the country, Male’ is a city of high-rise buildings and paved roads. It is the centre of the government and almost all business activities.

### *History and Education*

The Maldives remained an independent nation throughout its own history except for a brief period of 15 years in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and when it was occupied by the Portuguese in 1887. In that year, Maldives became a British protectorate and remained thus until its independence on 26 July, 1965 (Ministry of Education, 2008).

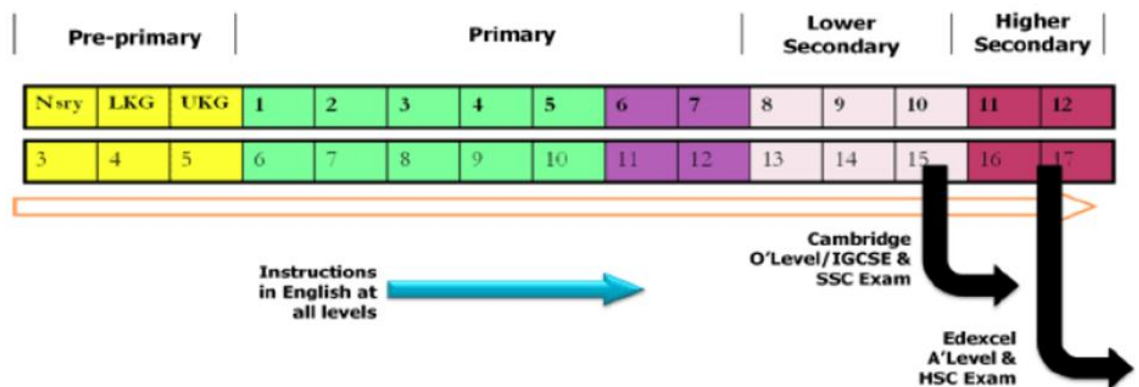
The Maldives has had a long history of semi-formal religious-based education. The traditional system consisted of children gathering in homes called *edhuruge* to learn the Arabic script, and to learn to recite the Holy Quran and to read and write the local language, Dhivehi (Mohamed & Ahmed, 2004). The primary challenge to this traditional system occurred under the British in 1927 with the formation of the first government school in Male’. At first, this school was limited to the education of boys, but later, in 1944, a section was opened for girls and young women. Instruction in this school covered the Dhivehi language, Islam, Arabic and Arithmetic. By 1945, each inhabited island had a traditional school, *maktab*, providing instruction at the lower primary level (Ministry of Education, 2008). In 1960, a dramatic change in the education system occurred; as part of a conscious effort to prepare its citizens to meet the increasing development needs of the nation, two English medium schools were opened in Male’ (Mohamed & Ahmed, 2004).

The most recent historic development in education in the Maldives occurred in 1978, with the decision to move to a unified national system of education and to promote a



more equitable distribution of facilities and resources (Mohamed & Ahmed, 2004). Since then, school enrolment has grown rapidly (from 15,000 in 1978 to 102,073 in 2005), admission to primary education (grades 1–7) has been universalised, secondary education is being extended at a very fast rate, entree to tertiary education has been provided, and numerous schemes have been started that support students to move on to tertiary education both locally and overseas (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Currently, government schools offer classes from grades one to 10 and some up to grade 12. At the end of schooling, students sit the International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE) and the Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-Level) as well as the Secondary School Certificate (similar standard, local examination). At the end of higher secondary schooling, the students take the Advanced Level (London Edexcel) examinations and the Higher Secondary Certificate (local examination) (World Data on Education, 2010/2011). The structure of the school system (Ministry of Education, 2010) is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Structure of the school system. (Source: Ministry of Education, Maldives 2010)

## ***Language and Writing***

Dhivehi is the language of the Maldives. It belongs to the subgroup of the Indo-European language family. The written script called ‘Thaana’ and, in its present form, was introduced in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and is written from right to left. It is very clear that there are three languages used in the islands which align with education in different

ways. In fact, Dhivehi, Arabic and English each occupy different niches in the linguistic landscape of the islands. The language also shows a strong Arabic influence (Maumoon, 2002). However, the use of Arabic in the Maldives is largely limited to reciting the Quran, at present. Only those students who attend the Arabic Schools, *Madhurasathul Arabiyya* and *Mauhadhathul Dhiraasaathul Islaamiyya* know how to speak and understand the Arabic language.

Despite the richness and vibrancy of the Dhivehi language, since the introduction of English as a medium of education in the early 1960s, this newcomer has become an influential factor on daily spoken Dhivehi.

At present, the Maldivian speakers use Dhivehi and English in the speech and other forms of communication, such as emailing, sending text messages and on face book. Both of these languages have become a part and parcel of the small community.

Moving on to normal conversations, today, young people use English very frequently, as the means of communication. They tend to use a mix of English and Dhivehi and has become a way of greeting each other and it has become the source of text messaging too. However, at home, with family and close relatives and friends, Dhivehi is still the normal code of communication. At school, in the formal settings, the children are advised to use English with the teachers and they are also encouraged to use it to communicate with themselves.

English is also used in various forms in public places. The use of written language in public places in Maldives reflects the diversity in languages and scripts in the country. Compared to rural settings, the major urban centres show a better public print atmosphere with street signs, names of businesses and public offices written in two languages (English and Dhivehi) and three scripts (Latin and Dhivehi). A similar mix of languages and scripts is usually applied to produce handwritten signs, announcements and graffiti on notice boards and walls. For example, the ubiquitous ‘smoking is not allowed’ sign commonly appears in the two languages (Dhivehi and English) and two scripts (Dhivehi and Latin). English is also used in newspapers, magazines and television and radio.

Therefore, if we are to predict the future of the Dhivehi language we can say that there is a chance that it could exist in a state of strong bilingualism with English but this

depends on the approach of Dhivehi speakers to their language, whether they take pride in their language, whether they enjoy listening to others using the language and use it themselves whenever they can and as productively as they can.

### ***The emergence of English as a dominant language***

The uniqueness of the national language means that Maldivians also need to learn foreign languages to: communicate with the outside world; obtain higher education; and to support the tourism industry. The most useful language for this purpose is the English language (A. Mohamed & Ahmed, 2004). In the 1960s, the introduction of the two English medium schools by the government had the effect of relegating traditional education to second-class status and around the 1970s and 1980s, the English knowledge of Maldivians increased. Educational opportunities arose and Maldivians started going abroad to study in Western countries. With the dawn of tourism, the Maldives opened more and more to the outsideworld and the need for the English language increased.

### ***Teaching of Dhivehi and English***

There are some important points to be made about the role of English in education and in the public sphere, regarding the current state of the national language. The prominent role given to the English language in the country's education policy is reflected in equally prominent visibility of English in the streets of Male'. The global language of English has crept into every major domain of the day-to-day life of at least the urban citizens. Although the country does not recognise English as an official language, the use of English in formal (e.g. education, ministries, etc.) and informal settings (e.g. street signs) attests to its wide role and influence in the country, making it, in reality, a defacto national language alongside Dhivehi.

Moreover, Dhivehi, being a small language, spoken by 394,999 people (Maldives Demographics Profile, 2012), has faced many threats to its existence. The spread of English, as the instructional medium in the education system has fuelled the declining use of Dhivehi. While the curriculum consists mainly of subjects taught in English, a few classes are allocated for teaching Dhivehi (Education Development Centre, 2000) and the related subjects (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Maldives, Lower secondary education, weekly time table around the year 2000. (Source: Educational Development Centre website, retrieved April 2012. Each period lasts 35 minutes)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade		
	8	9	10
<i>Core Subjects</i>			
Islam	3	3	3
Dhivehi Language	4	4	4
English Language	7	7	7
Mathematics	6	6	6
<i>Stream Subjects</i>			
Two subjects (5 weekly periods each) from any one stream	10	10	10
<i>Elective Subjects</i>			
Two subjects (5 weekly periods each)	10	10	10
<b>Total weekly periods</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

Though a great amount of student time is spent on learning English, as seen in Table 1 above, students graduate from schools without much knowledge of and practical skill in the English language. Furthermore, with English as the medium of instruction in the schools, the Dhivehi language is important as a means of: expressing the community's identity; preserving historical links; communication within the family context; maintaining social relationships; and for communication in most formal situations. On the other hand, English is important: as a means of communication with the outside world; for tourism; for access to higher education, as a medium of education; as well as being seen as essential for the development or progress of the community.

## The purpose of this study

Although English is both the medium of instruction and a taught subject in the schools, there are issues of low rates of achievement in the subject at the end of lower secondary level examinations (EFA Mid-Decade Assessment, 2007). English competence has been tested at all levels and there are many factors contributing to the low levels of English

proficiency. This is partly attributed to the learning materials, teaching style, rote learning techniques, teacher-centred learning and the examination syllabus (Cook, 2004b). According to Nazeer (2006), the fact that the curriculum and lessons delivered to the students not being student friendly are additional issues for the decline of the pass percentage. It is due to these reasons that parents send students for tuition.

Years have gone by since I have been teaching in secondary classrooms in the Maldives and many years have passed, since I observed the teachers teaching in those classrooms. However, nothing has changed since then. The students learn in the same way and the teachers teach no differently. The students still keep on getting private tuition. Today, as I sit here, I note that my personal and professional experiences as an English language teacher in the secondary classrooms in the Maldives and my job as a leading teacher, guiding teachers in various stages of the classroom teaching and learning, motivated me to embark on this ethnographic journey in capturing the answer to the big question: *What are the classroom practices in the secondary classrooms and the private tuition settings in the Maldives?*

Therefore, I have chosen the present research project firstly, to find out about the classroom practices in the secondary classrooms in the Maldives, particularly focusing on the English language teaching and learning classrooms; because of the low achievement in the English language examinations. Secondly, to explore the private tuition settings of the Maldives; why the students opt for private tuition although they receive instruction in the mainstream classrooms and what the children find in private tuition settings that they do not find in the classrooms. Thirdly, through the findings and the explorations, to create the opportunity for my colleagues and myself to improve our classroom practices.

While the findings of this study may not be directly relevant to other teaching situations, it is hoped that they may contribute in some small way to the pool of knowledge that informs the classroom practices of teaching and learning in secondary classrooms in the Maldives and other similar South Asian classroom contexts. In addition, a deeper insight into classroom practices and the private tuition settings in the Maldives could be a contribution to the fields of teaching and learning English. Given the widespread demand for English language learning, the findings of this research may be of benefit to other English language teachers and learners.

In light of these objectives and goals, the following research questions formed the initial impetus for this study:

## The research questions

1. What is the nature of classroom and private tuition practices?
2. What are the factors that shape classroom and private tuition practices?
3. How do participants entwine their beliefs and practices in classroom and private tuition settings?
4. How do participants perceive and interpret their actions in relation to classroom and private tuition practices across a variety of settings?

In order to capture the answers to these questions, I employed an ethnographic approach that reflects and helps illuminate the everyday activities by using different techniques (Hammersley, 1997) such as observations, field notes, journal entries, document analysis and photographs. In addition, I applied interview as social practice to find out in more detail the participants' *hows* and *whys* of doing things in socially complex contexts (Talmy, 2010), namely the classroom practices in the three classroom streams; the city school, the island school and private teaching settings in the Maldives. Data from all sources were sorted and analysed by using excel sheets and by looking at frequently occurring patterns which showed some common themes. These emergent themes helped in providing satisfactory answers to the above questions.

## Thesis overview

The thesis is structured into seven chapters. The first chapter has served as the introduction to the study and has included my experience as both a teacher and a student who took a part in private tuition. The introduction also gives an overview of the context of the study – the Maldives as well as drawing on the questions driving the investigation and offering a brief mention of the research methodologies. Chapter Two reviews the literature relating to the research study, focusing mainly on the South Asian region and studies carried out by Maldivians. It deals with the literature in the fields of classroom practice and private tuition settings. In the methodology section, chapter three, I describe the ethnographic approach and interview as social practice and discuss how I analysed my data, and reflect upon issues and insights I experienced as a

researcher using these two methods. Following this, I present my research findings in three separate chapters (four, five and six). Chapter four presents the findings in relation to the classroom practice of the city school, chapter five, the classroom practices in the Atoll school and chapter six, the results of the investigation of private tuition settings in the Maldives. Chapter seven is dedicated to bringing together the results from the previous three chapters and discussing them in terms of the literature reviewed in chapter two. This last chapter also aims to draw together the conclusions from the study as a whole and possibilities for future research.





# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **Literature Review**

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

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*This review begins with an overview of critical perceptions of teaching and learning English in the Asian region, including the Maldives. Moving from specific views of classroom practices, I then focus on more global interpretations of language classroom practices made by two key researchers in the field from this region, Canagarajah and Kumaravadivelu. Afterwards, I attempt to explore the background to private tuition which has become a prominent out-of-class learning practice in South Asia, as well as the Maldives.*

### South Asian English classrooms

Looking at English, we can say that, in one way or another, it has indeed a presence in the most vital aspects of Asian lives, cultures, languages, interactional patterns, discourse, economies and, indeed, politics. Kachru (1997), for instance, describes the increase in the use of English in Asia as “overwhelming” (p. 68). Further, English in South Asia has developed to a more distinctive level than in other countries where English is used as a second language (Crystal, 1988). Above all, English contributes to transforming identities, not only of individuals and societies, but also of languages of the region.

Looking at studies conducted in the region, relatively few have looked at South Asian classroom-based studies. Nunan (1992) defines classroom-based research as research carried out in “genuine” classrooms [...] which were specifically constituted for the purposes of teaching and learning, not to provide a venue for research (p. 102). The dearth of classroom-based research in South Asia could be because of unanticipated difficulties in qualitative methodological procedures, such as classroom observations and interviews (Baker & Lee, 2011). Baker and Lee also added that the researchers may experience persistent efforts by the teachers who will or will not participate in the research. Therefore, the inevitable and unexpected challenges that would face the

researcher could be the reasons why classroom based research studies have been avoided.

With respect to the literature on South Asia, Gupta's (2007) edited collection, *Going to School in South Asia*, provides a rich and contemporary study of educational culture in the region. Gupta takes in the span of South Asia including India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The various authors discuss the educational challenges that each South Asian country mentioned above is facing today. The most outstanding reflection is the challenge that each of the traditional societies is facing in the maintenance of their culture and tradition, given the influence of Western media and commerce on their children and youth. In addition, Gupta notes that the language of the English-speaking nations is becoming *the* (italicised in the original) language of power, and with globalisation materialises the importance of being fluent. Other challenges include resources, leadership and community participation.

Colcough (2005) has written one of the reports focused on classroom-based studies that identify elements important for the learning environment in general. According to this report, resources are significant for education quality, saying

allowing school-level governance is very important for the structure and management of the schools. Examples of possibly essential factors having an indirect impact on teaching and learning are strong leadership, a safe and welcoming school environment, good community involvement and incentives for achieving good results (p.37).

According to Shamim (1996), large classes are the reality in developing countries such as Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. Shamim conducted interviews and class observations in Pakistan investigating the influence of seating arrangements in large classrooms on student learning. The findings showed that students sitting in the "front zone" performed better than those sitting in the "back zones"; the former were considered to be industrious and hardworking, whereas the latter were considered as "dull" or "bad" students. Further, Shamim described the classroom structure of a typical classroom: "teachers conduct their lessons from the center of the front of the classroom where they have easy access to the blackboard. The classrooms are arranged in four rows of five or six desks. There are pathways between the first and second rows and between the third and fourth rows" (p.145). Moreover, Shamim highlighted the fact that when teaching in

large classes, monitoring is difficult because of the inadequate space for the teacher to walk around and, in addition, she observed that it would be taxing for the teacher who teaches about three to four large classes a day. Organisations, such as UNESCO, also recognise the problem with large class sizes in Asian classrooms and according to the report, being taught in a smaller group is “an advantage” (Colcough, 2005, p.50).

Similarly, according to Govinda and Biswal (2006)

more than half of the countries in South and West Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh India and Pakistan) have overcrowded classrooms in primary schools, i.e. the teacher-pupil ratio is 1:40. In the region, teacher-pupil ratios range from 1:20 in the Maldives to 1:61 in Afghanistan. Between 1999-2000 and 2002-2003, teacher-pupil ratios in primary education have marginally improved in all countries in the region except Afghanistan, India and Sri Lanka. Such high teacher-pupil ratios make it difficult to provide quality primary education (p. 16).

The review of literature so far has highlighted the problems of large classes, physical conditions and quality of teaching in the South Asian region. The next section explores further a number of themes that have emerged from classroom-based studies in South Asia.

### ***Theme 1: Enquiry into teachers and teaching***

In South Asia, according to Govinda and Biswal (2006), even when the required level of qualifications is low, many teachers do not reach the national requirements to teach. While data on teachers’ qualifications is limited, on the basis of available data for 1995, it was found that more than one fourth of the teachers in Nepal did not have a teacher certificate. In the Maldives, 30% of the teachers lacked a certificate and another 22% did not have any other nationally identified qualifications to teach. A shortage of qualified teachers in Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, and in remote areas of India and Pakistan was also noted.

In terms of the quality of teaching, Weber and Bali (2010) provide the results of a 2 ½-month pilot study of Project Listen’s PC-based Reading Tutor programme for enhancing English education in India. Through the use of interviews and surveys, they found that a lack of trained teachers, especially for low-resource schools catering to the lower socio-economic strata of the society, makes it difficult to provide consistent

quality of English teaching in India. Large class sizes and a focus on completing the prescribed syllabus mean that individual attention and practice in English classes are minimal in most schools. An additional factor is the strong emphasis on the end of the year examinations which leads instructors to target written skills at the cost of comprehension and spoken skills. Aslam (2003) also uncovered the above problems in a study of English teaching in India and, in addition, identified out-dated methods of teaching (traditional teaching, teaching to examinations) and unsuitable textbooks as the main problems for ineffective teaching.

Another classroom-based study looked at causes of students' low achievement in the subject of English at secondary level. Head teachers and 208 English teachers in 52 government schools in Pakistan were selected as the sample of the study. Shahzad et al. (2011) carried out the a questionnaire study and validated it through pilot testing by visiting all the institutions and respondents. In this study, they found that a tradition-oriented curriculum, incompetent English language teachers and harsh classroom environment were the causes of the students' low achievement. According to (Shahzad, et al., 2011) "a large number of student fail in English, because of lack of language learning environment, outdated curriculum, rigid teaching methods and incompetent English language teachers in the academic and professional areas" (p. 162). As part of the implications of their study, Shahzad et al. suggested that a market-oriented curriculum, competent English language teachers as well as conducive classroom environments would improve the achievement level of the students in the subject of English.

Further, in their study of the policy-practice nexus in English classrooms in different settings, Bhattacharya et al. (2007) found that, in Delhi classrooms, they witnessed only one instance of peer interaction, where the teacher instructed the students to discuss and write their answers 'without making too much noise'. On another occasion, the teacher made the students read the text aloud, one paragraph at a time and tested their comprehension ability by asking them questions. Some questions were written on the board. The teacher made sure the students understood the answers to the questions by "rehearsing answers: paraphrasing the paragraph that had just been read through a series of pointed questions which demanded specific, short answer" (p. 472). According to Bhattacharya, this practice would mean getting the students ready for their tests. In this teaching setting, textbooks were the key to teaching and learning.

Also, in a classroom-based study focused on girls' schools, done by UNICEF, it was observed that all countries in the region continue to encourage memorization of lessons and the school curriculum needs 'practical exploration' (Huxley, 2008, p. 2). Moreover, Tarvin and Faraj's (1990) study on teaching in developing South and Southeast Asian countries found that social factors (like low enrolment, parental indifference, unequal educational opportunity, high absenteeism and dropout rates), physical factors, (such as insufficient schools, inadequate classroom and laboratory facilities, irrelevant curriculum, outmoded and inappropriate instructional materials) and also poor teaching have been accountable for a country's incapability to attain its goals in education.

It is clear from the above review of the research that most Asian classrooms do not have enough trained teachers or a relevant curriculum and that teaching is still based on traditional methods. It is also important to note that the teaching and learning is based on examination-oriented goals. Examination-focused teaching is another strand which runs in the background of the current study.

## ***Theme 2: The issues of examination-oriented teaching in the South Asian Region***

Teaching for examinations is consistently revealed as a main goal in most of the Asian classroom-based research. According to recent research, Huxley (2008), for example, argues that all countries in the region still rely on traditional teacher-centred classrooms, where teachers drill learners to memorise facts, simply to pass examinations. According to Gupta (2007), India's educational system is driven by a strong focus on the assessment of students through a rigid examination system, with English taught as the official language and the language of business.

Bhattacharya et al. (2007) carried out a case study with Delhi students, observing that the students were taught using an examination-oriented method. They concluded that these pedagogic practices result from a long tradition of textbooks supporting the examination system. "During colonialisation, the bequest of an older master-disciple (guru-shishya) relationship was changed into a mass process. Hence, an overdependence on textbooks and examinations has been developed, with little or no freedom for classroom transactions" (p. 482).

In the field of second or foreign language learning, Canagarajah (1993) found that Sri Lankan Tamil students' examination-oriented motivation, and their alternative desire for grammar-based, product-oriented learning constituted one way for them to reconcile a conflict between, on the one hand, the threats of cultural alienation resulting from speaking the foreign (English) language and using foreign textbooks, and on the other hand, the pressure from the educational system to display proficiency in English (to pass the English course) and the promises of English as a socio-economic necessity. In the same study, Canagarajah elaborates on the students' preference for learning in an examination-oriented method saying some students preferred certain sections of English lessons as they were useful for the examination. They also saw little meaning in the English course because of the fact that their main objective was to pass the examination to fulfil the English requirements of the university. In addition, when the students were asked to give a recommendation for a more effective ESOL course, they confirmed a "product-oriented, examination-based" motivation (p. 603).

In his analysis of testing in India, Ramanathan (2008) indicates that examinations are a major part of the school culture and teachers teach to the test in Indian schools. This examination-oriented approach defines the curriculum and classroom activities. Since the focus of teaching is completely test-related and examination-centered, students are taught in the class with reference to the examination and given practical hints all the time for it while the related syllabus is taught. Subsequently, Shahzad et al. (2011) confirm this teaching style in India in their study of 52 schools; they found language learning is still largely examination-driven and text-oriented with the examination testing mainly bite-sized answers, rehearsed in classroom transactions.

More detail is given by Weber and Bali (2010) in their study of government schools in India. They found that while the teachers are well qualified, they are not able to teach English effectively because their background learning has been in their first language. This leads to classes where students are tested on their skills to produce standard answers to predefined questions, with no real focus on comprehension and pronunciation.

Shermila (1999), in her study in Chennai on the reading comprehension skills of students, adds the comment that, in truth, neither the student nor the teacher is anxious to learn or to teach English. So, the student is only nervous about his success in the

examination and the teacher's only problem is to see that the pass percentage does not go down. "An average teacher tends to teach nothing more than what the examiner is likely to require" (Shermila, 1999, p. 20).

In an ethnographic study carried out in an Indian Gujarati class by Ramanathan (1999), the overt method of examination-based teaching was noted. Instructors of the college began the first day by putting up the university examination format on the board. Every new topic in the class was delivered with the examination as the focus. According to Ramanathan, such stress on the examination at a very important stage of the teaching and learning process partly accounts for students choosing to do extensive memorisation of lessons that they do not fully understand. He claims that they would do that only for the sake of passing examinations.

Further south, in Kerala schools in India, Nayar's (2008) study of the English-teaching situation there also revealed similar issues. He found that English teaching is:

far from ideal, and is a saga of crowded and ill-equipped classrooms, stretched, stressed, and unmotivated teachers, confused but examination-driven students, unsympathetic bureaucratic rigidity, inflexible curriculum material based on tradition rather than practicality, and an evaluation system that tests rote memory of text material rather than actual language ability (p. 6).

Further, Karunaratne (2003) conducted semi structured interviews amongst the principal and teachers of two schools and did participant observation of teachers and students and he emphasises that the primary goal of all language classes in Sri Lanka is the preparation of students for the London Ordinary Level Examination. Examination preparation is achieved through concentrating on reading and writing practice and the text book. Teachers have to teach the textbook in order to prepare students for this examination. Karunaratne also observed that the students in Sri Lanka expect teachers to give work based on the examination which would help them better prepare for it.

Teaching for the examination has emerged as a very important objective for the countries referred to in the studies above as students want to pass the examinations in order to get accepted to colleges or universities, apply for scholarships abroad or to get employment. Examination-based teaching and learning have emerged as key themes in



the literature on English in South Asia. Now, it is also pertinent to examine the time spent in teaching and learning in the classrooms of the region.

### ***Theme 3: Classroom instructional time***

Little information is available for most countries regarding the proportion of the intended instructional time that is actually used to engage students in learning and its relationship to student performance. Little systematic information also exists regarding the amount of time schools actually spend presenting new material and progressing with the specified curriculum (Abadzi, 2009).

One reason for loss of instructional time could be teachers avoiding teaching. For example, the PROBE study in India found that in only 53% of the schools visited by the research staff, were all teachers actually teaching in their classrooms; in 21% of the surveyed schools, teachers were mainly minding the class. In the remaining 26%, they were talking with other teachers, sitting/standing outside the room, were in the head teacher's room, or were observed in other non-teaching activities (De & Dreze, 1999).

The amount of instructional time students encounter is determined by the length of the school day, scheduling of the school year, teacher attendance, and student attendance (Bray, 2009, p. 51). This crucial time is lost, minute by minute, when teachers fail to start work promptly in class, distribute textbooks, leave the room to chat with others, or leave early (Abadzi, 2007). Precious class time may be spent in handing out textbooks, doing small chores, or getting the students to copy from the blackboard. Teachers may also interact only with the few students who perform and neglect the rest (Abadzi, 2009). In an additional review of the education research literature in developing countries, Fuller (1987) identified 14 studies covering the role of teaching time, 12 of which showed a positive effect on achievement. The processes of time included length of the school day, hours of school offered per year, number of class periods in academic courses and number of hours of teaching per subject per year.

According to Benavot and Grad (2004), teachers play an especially essential role in defining the quantity and quality of instructional time in classrooms. Recent studies (PROBE, 1999; EARC, 2003, cited in Benavot and Grad, 2004 ) highlight the following teacher-related reasons for the decline of classroom instructional time:

Expectations that teachers will perform, in addition to their teaching roles, non-teaching functions and activities – for example, census taking, rehearsing and participation in sporting events and cultural festivals; poor teacher training, especially in relation to the effective management of instructional time; high levels of teacher attrition; the predominance of formalistic syllabi and overloaded curricula; and the schoolteacher's low position in highly bureaucratic educational administrations (also related to the inadequate support of, and low respect towards, teachers (p. 296).

Further, Abadzi (2009) argues that to make up for instructional time lost to strikes, absenteeism, and lack of feedback, parents have resorted to private tutoring. This is a major phenomenon worldwide that has grown dramatically in recent times and has affected the priorities of those who tutor. Families with the necessary resources are able to secure not only greater quantities but also better quality of private tutoring.

The review has provided some insights about perceptions of instructional time loss in some South Asian countries. Hereafter, I review studies based on the physical conditions of the South Asian classroom also providing significant background to the current study.

#### ***Theme 4: Focus on structural concerns of South Asian classrooms***

Good school infrastructure is an important contribution to effective teaching and learning, as a recent World Bank evaluation indicates (Operations Evaluation Department, 2004). However, a recent working paper by Nilsson (2003) reveals school resources are a significant problem in the South Asian classrooms. She claims that the resources are extremely limited and lack of facilities, such as toilets and water supplies, play a major role in the school environment. Findings from a survey done in 1995 showed different learning conditions for some of the countries in the region, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Lack of educational resources in some South Asian countries. (Source: Schleicher, Andreas & Siniscalco, Maria Teresa & Postlethwaite, Nevill, 1995)

Country	Average class size (grade 1)	% of classrooms with no usable chalkboard	% of pupils with few or no books at home	% of pupils using different language in school and home	% of pupils in school without water	% of school toilets not usable
Bangladesh	57	47	1	0	23	48
The Maldives	25	51	..	..	10	48
Nepal	40	..	93	34	28	54

It is clear that while the lack of adequate facilities have been identified as a huge concern for such organisations as UNESCO and UNICEF, teachers also find teaching in these classrooms a difficulty with an increasing number of students occupying each classroom.

Having touched upon the issues in South Asian classrooms in the above sections, it is important to look in more detail into the classroom practices in the Maldives. Therefore, in the next section, I review research carried out in Maldivian classrooms.

## Schooling in the Maldives

As with other countries in the region, the system of education in the Maldives has its origins in the traditional system of schooling that has been there for hundreds of years (Mohamed & Ahmed, 2004). Current secondary school curriculum content is designed around the Ordinary level offered by the Cambridge Examinations and the local curricula for Dhivehi and Islam. A significant number of teachers teaching in the schools are expatriate teachers who come from India and Sri Lanka. According to the Education Statistics for 2003, 64% of teachers who teach in the Maldives are local and 36% are expatriate (Ministry of Education, 2003).

In the edited book by Gupta (2007), *Going to School in South Asia*, Latheef and Gupta (2007) reflect on schools in the Maldives. They state that the new global ‘information age’ highlights the growing role of the media as an agent of socialisation among the Maldivian youth (pp.113-114). A lot of these children are getting extra knowledge, attitudes and values from new media such as television, the Internet, and other forms of mass media in addition to their knowledge at school. “Current challenges facing

education in the Maldives are seen as innumerable” (p.121). Among them is the increasing need to reduce the number of dropouts, failures, and repeaters in order to maximise the current funds available for education. Latheef and Gupta (2007) concede that properly trained and motivated teachers, effective management and supervision, appropriate facilities in addition to learning materials are very important. Also, a curriculum with increased relevance to the individual and national development needs, suitable subject distribution and content are basic requirements for acceptable educational quality. Besides, “the expansion of the secondary education sector is severely impeded due to not only the lack of adequately trained personnel at the basic education level, but also a lack of teachers and the fact that majority of secondary school teachers are still expatriates” (p.117) causing the subsequent dominance of expatriate staff.

Also, findings show that schooling in the Maldives is examination-oriented similar to other South Asian countries. In his PhD thesis on *Teaching Economics at Secondary School Level in the Maldives*, Nazeer (2006) confirms that teaching and learning in the Maldives is very much based on rote memorisation for school examinations which, in turn, means the students are not able to retain longer term information gained in the classroom beyond the examination performance. Nazeer made another observation that the teachers were prejudiced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) or the school administration to concentrate on the examination to get better results in the main examinations. In addition, he reflected that such influence on teachers could foster harmful competition within the school, amongst teachers and students. According to Nazeer, one of the teachers he had talked to commented that the MOE or the departments viewed good teaching as good results in the examinations and any teacher who helped produce good results in the examinations became “the school hero” (p. 192).

Some comments made by the teachers in his thesis reveal the nature of their examination-oriented teaching and how they were pressured to produce good results: “Here we use examination-oriented teaching ... This method is very effective because students don’t make noises during the explanation’ (p. 103).

Noise was also an area of concern when teaching in the classrooms. According to Nazeer (2006), many Maldivian classrooms are generally too small and compact to

arrange face-to-face interactions accordingly. In addition, the level of noise associated with small group discussions is often louder than that of traditionally controlled classrooms.

He also observed that preparing group work was a big problem for the teachers as they complained about the shortage of time to get work prepared. One of the teachers he had interviewed commented about the rigid time in a school day:

Time limitation is another factor. Most of the time we teach, then they expect us to involve in the extra curricula activities, so we don't get much time to prepare activities for group work. So we prefer the traditional teaching because it is easy (p. 141).

Nazeer states that for many teachers, the lack of time is linked to the fact that they also do tuition after work hours.

Likewise, in her study on teaching English grammar in two secondary schools in the Maldives, Mohamed (2006) talks about the problems facing the teaching and learning in the Maldives today. She posits that many

Maldivian secondary school teachers may not have received any training; their lack of expertise is further hampered by the inadequate professional development activities. Second, teaching is entirely based on the examination. Third, compared with the amount of time dedicated to teaching English in schools, students attain unsatisfactory results in the examination (p. 14).

Like Nazeer (2006), Mohamed (2006) also found that noise and discipline were major issues in schools of the capital, Male', and she was surprised by the passivity and quietness of the students in the rural school. Further, she stated that when supervisors or principals talked about teachers, they seemed to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness based on their ability to maintain discipline among the students. In the Urban School (her pseudonyms), for example, "Komal was seen as a good teacher because she could keep the students quiet; Idris was viewed as less effective simply because there was usually a lot of noise from students in his classes" (p. 230).

According to Mohamed (2006), teaching at the Urban School was very teacher-centered, with a remarkably high amount of teacher talking time. In many classes, all

that was required of the students was to sit passively and listen to the teacher, copying down whatever was written on the blackboard. Very few teachers attempted to involve the students in the lesson, and make them active learners and users of the language.

Mohamed (2006) also stated that although prescribed textbooks and examination syllabuses had mostly changed, the methods of teaching and the classroom dynamics had not: “the classrooms’ focus was still on the teacher; the content was dominated by matters related to grammar and the model of instruction was clearly one of transmission” (p. 2). Mohamed felt that nothing had changed from the time she was a student. She had witnessed the same lesson she had experienced when she was at school, happening exactly the same way, from the same text book by the same teacher:

Discussing the lesson afterwards with the teacher, he told me how, through using the same lessons repeatedly, teaching had become almost automated for him; how he did not believe in applying ‘Western’ ideas about education into his teaching because he felt that they would be unworkable in his classroom (p. 3).

Similarly, in his case study of environmental education in the primary schools in the Maldives, Shareef (2010) carried out a case study adopting semi-structured interviews and observations. He discovered that “a lot of pressure is imposed on the schools to prepare students for the external examination they sit at the end of the secondary schooling” (p. 24). In addition, his findings also revealed that teaching was mainly ‘teacher centred’ (p. 28).

Furthermore, Cook (2004a), a consultant at the Ministry of Education, Maldives, who carried out a study on educational quality, did an analysis of the international examination sat by secondary students in the Maldives. He observed from his initial glance at the syllabus document for the Cambridge O Level English indicated that it is an ‘examination syllabus’ providing little or no curriculum information that assists teachers to teach the course. Explicit statements of expected student outcomes for the course are also not present. In addition, the required standards of performance are not clearly stated and there are no student work samples to clarify the various levels of standard. He argued that the O Level syllabus needs to be checked for relevance to the Maldivian students and the Maldivian context in general.

Gall (2009) reported on a recent visit to the Maldives and noticed that many teachers, especially in the outlying islands, are untrained. He speculated that a lot of teachers who teach English are themselves English second language learners coming mainly from India and the teaching “pedagogy is mainly didactic and transmissional – chalk and talk and memorisation” (Gall, 2009, p. 17). The vast majority of teachers working in the island schools cited workload as a demotivating factor. They had to teach between 25 and 40 periods per week. According to Wheatcroft’s report, the increased workload is due to a number of factors, “including lack of teachers, too many extracurricular activities, teaching methodology, and lack of participation in decision-making” (Wheatcroft, 2005, p.25).

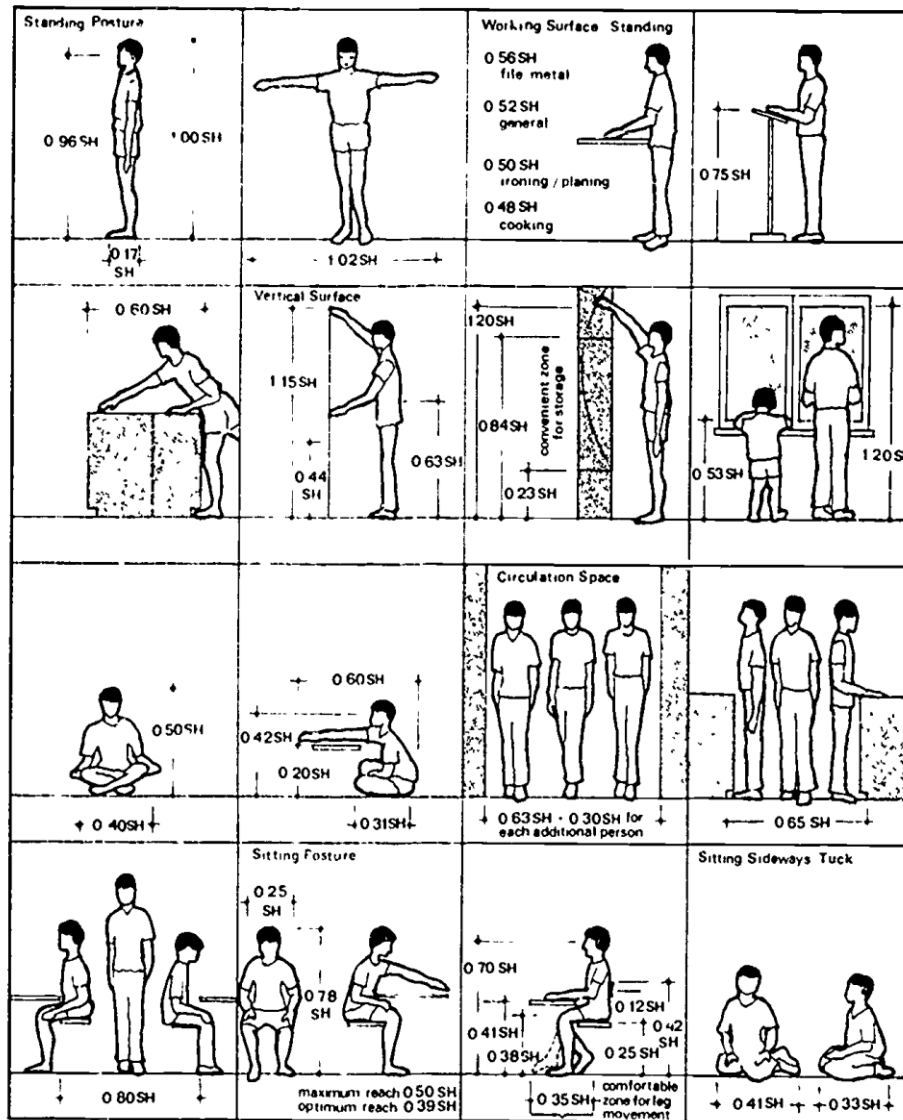
In a curriculum reform of the social studies syllabuses and textbooks in the Maldives, the Ministry of Education aimed to make subjects more interesting and relevant and designed a curriculum to encourage teachers to change their style of teaching by encouraging them to: use different teaching skills by being problem solvers; use authentic everyday contexts; involve the society in the learning; use group work and encourage process-oriented teaching (Mohamed & Ahmed, 2004) According to Mohamed and Ahmed, textbooks and practice books were pre-tested with the help of practising teachers and published after trials. The new syllabuses received positive feedback from schools. The students and teachers had increased motivation in the subject after the new curriculum reform. However, some schools noticed the English language level of the textbooks were higher than other subjects, which created some problems.

The physical environment also appears to play a major role in the teaching and learning situations in the Maldivian classrooms. In a study done by Ali (2006) on the cluster schools policy in the Maldives, she highlighted the community schools’ physical facilities as being “multipurpose open plan, with a small hall and space for three classrooms divided by makeshift boards: these rooms cannot be closed or locked” (p. 26). Similarly, in her study of Maldivian secondary classrooms, Zahira (2005) found that this physical set-up had a detrimental effect on teaching: “The classroom environments were not altogether conducive to learning. The walls were bare...seating arrangement was the traditional row of desks and seats” (p. 70). Zahira employed a triangulation mixed method approach using observations and open ended questions. Her findings revealed that grades eight and nine had behaviour difficulties such as being

noisy and rude and some expatriate teachers experienced difficulties related to contextual factors. According to Zahira, the open structures of the classrooms contributed to the noise level and behaviour of the students in the classroom. It also affected the neighbouring classes and the noise from adjacent classrooms remained an issue. Zahira had “informal conversation with teachers, who shared the issue of the classroom structure” (pp. 70-71). In addition, Zahira noted the teachers’ consciousness of the limited time available for the completion of assigned tasks and the fact that the secondary curriculum was motivated by grounding students for final examinations.

Reflecting on classroom structure, it is also crucial to see the meticulous care taken in measurements of the school furniture of the Maldivian classrooms. This derives from the perceived importance of good infrastructure in classroom teaching and learning (Operation Evaluation Department, 2004). For example, in the Maldives, ‘in the olden days’, schools were built of lime and coral, with thatched roofs and most schools were tiny with one small room (p. 20). Later, in the 1940s, a more uniform structure was developed which consisted of one main hall with many pillars. Elongated desks and benches were used as furniture and the school operated in shifts. With the change of government in 1978, education facilities were expanded. UNICEF, UNDP and UNESCO offered help. Therefore, a UNESCO aid granted to the Maldives for building community schools was carefully thought out based on traditional types of spaces and on the use of indigenous building materials. The layout is done with utmost care and according to “proportioned internal spaces” to upgrade schools (Luthfi & Zubair, 1986, p. 13). In order to design furniture for the schools, measurements of the standing heights of both boys and girls from atolls and the capital Male’ were taken. With the help of the data, suitable dimensions for the furniture were derived by using the ratios given by UNESCO as given in Figure 3.





Source: Lutfi and Zubair, 1986

Figure 3: The critical dimensions and their ratios of the standing heights

This section has focused on the research into South Asian classrooms, and specifically into Maldivian schools. It is important to highlight that Maldivian secondary classrooms face similar problems to those of other countries in the South Asian region. The issues include: examination-oriented teaching; teacher-centred teaching; physical and contextual factors that lead to noise and discipline problems; limitations of time in delivering lessons; passive learning; and unsatisfactory results in examinations. Having covered these, I intend to bring in another layer, taking the examination to a deeper level, by looking into critical analyses of classroom pedagogies from two key authors in the region, namely Canagarajah and Kumaravadivelu.

## Canagarajah

*Suresh Canagarajah, William J. is one of the leading scholars exploring the global use of English. Originally from Sri Lanka, Professor Canagarajah researches English in a variety of contexts throughout the world and has done work in areas as wide-ranging as bilingualism, discourse analysis, academic writing, critical pedagogy, and postcolonial theory. He is the author of several books, including *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Language Teaching*, which examines English teaching in postcolonial settings.*

Canagarajah's (1993) study of 22 tertiary level Sri Lankan Tamil students in one English classroom describes the interaction of the students over one academic year using the course book – *American Kernel Lessons (AKL): Intermediate* (O'Neill, Kingbury, Yeadon & Cornelius, 1978). Canagarajah initiated this study using various ethnographic research techniques that involved: observations; field notes; analysis of glosses and drawings made by students on the texts; a pre-course questionnaire; and one-to-one interviews with students. In his study, Canagarajah shows a mismatch between the mainstream methodology in the course book and the attitudes and expectations of the group of students in the study.

In the initial period of the course, Canagarajah observed students' weakening interest in the study of the course book which initiated his investigation into the reasons for their discontent. Canagarajah found student resistance to the cultural content of the course book, from the comments and drawings in their course books, which Canagarajah sees as "discourses which mediate for the students the situations, grammar, and language taught by the textbook and in another sense, these are students' counter discourses that challenge the textual language, values and ideologies:" (p. 613). In addition, Canagarajah observed that some pressures in the course were because of the styles of learning desired by the students; the students were reluctant to engage in collaborative learning activities and so they were resistant to the pair work suggested in the course book. The students preferred a teacher-centred format: "before each class, the students rearranged the desks into a traditional lecture-room format, with the teacher's desk in front of the room and their own in horizontal rows" (p. 615). Hence, Canagarajah concludes from these students' behaviours and judging from their conversations in

class, they follow the features of traditional teacher-centred classroom discourse. Moreover, Canagarajah observed that in pair activities the students “uttered their parts in a flat reading intonation when they were asked to dramatise the dialogue in front of the class” and they thought it was “funny” or “unbecoming of themselves to speak in such manner”(p. 617). Canagarajah interpreted these observations as meaning the discourse represented in the exercise dialogues was so “alien” (p. 617) that the students could not relate to the roles. Indeed, many of the learning activities found in *AKL* required students to step into a set of social values and aspirations which were alien to them and with which they neither could nor wished to identify. Furthermore, this reluctance related not only to the target language culture as such, but also to the social associations of the target culture within their own culture. Additionally, Canagarajah discovered that the students sought explicit grammatical instruction where they could memorise the rules as products or content. The students demanded notes and written work which they could retain for studies and tests. Likewise, students missed the activity-based classes, but attended classes that delivered more of the grammar sections of the course book.

Canagarajah noted that the lived culture of the students suggests a twofold “oppositional trend” and “on the one hand, they oppose the alien discourse behind the language and text book and on the other hand, they oppose a process oriented pedagogy and desire a product oriented one,” (p. 617) which is considered “pedagogically dysfunctional” as it is more teacher-centred and “passive” (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 215). Canagarajah (1993) concluded that both trends could be connected as the students found the course irrelevant and they did it only for the sake of the examination and to satisfy the English requirement of the university.

The post-course interviews conducted by Canagarajah with the students support this conclusion. They revealed that they were reasonably happy with the more explicitly grammatical parts of *AKL*, although most felt that *AKL* should be replaced by a more grammar-based course book and that grammar should be given primacy in the course, with grammar being taught first without wasting time on skills and activities. These student reactions reveal a perspective on language as code and content, as opposed to language skill and a means of communication; one student, “Jeyanthi, said that she enjoyed the grammar lesson ‘because it is useful for the test’” (p. 618). Such statements

as those highlight the students' desire to learn the rules of grammar based on an examination-oriented motivation.

In addition, Canagarajah found that the students sought private tuition from private tutors (who used Sri Lankan or Indian textbooks). This was revealed in the post-course interviews carried out with the students. They had been following extra classes from private tutors outside university for which they had to pay. Canagarajah found the texts used by the tutors were overtly grammar-oriented and were rarely contextualised and so matched the students' preferences. This was reinforced by other questions where the students confirmed they sought extra grammar instruction and found it useful.

Canagarajah's (1993) case study suggested that the students' resistance to the text book and its activities were not related only to the foreign target language culture but also had links with aspects of the Sri Lankan society. "It conveyed the pressure from the educational system to display proficiency in English, the promise of social advancement English holds and the uses of English as buffer against Sinhala nationalism and passport for exodus as political or economic refugees abroad" (p. 622).

In another ethnographic treatise on the Sri Lankan Tamil community, Canagarajah (1999) explores these issues in greater depth. In this exposition, Canagarajah illustrated some of the challenges facing post-colonial communities today. He has written extensively on the notion of linguistic imperialism and its relation to English language teaching, particularly in his 1999 book *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*. In this book, Canagarajah described how teachers and students in war-torn Sri Lanka culturally and linguistically resist the colonial nature of English as it is presented in their classroom (and textbooks), while appropriating it for their own subversive communication purposes. The expression *linguistic imperialism* is now almost a domestic word among teachers and applied linguists. Taking up the theme of linguistic imperialism, and drawing on his ethnographic research, Canagarajah demonstrated from an insider perspective, how linguistic imperialism can be challenged and resisted in practice and the language appropriated for local use. Canagarajah, carried out his research in the "outer circle" context (Kachru, 1986) of the Sri Lankan Tamil community, but as he points out, it is also relevant to a number of "expanding circle countries" (p. 4), such as South Korea and Vietnam, who have "come under the neo-imperialist thrusts of English-speaking center communities" (p. 4). Indeed, as the use of English continues to

expand globally, and its influence on non–mother tongue communities of either circle grows, Canagarajah’s example of practical ways of appropriating English during the learning and teaching process could become increasingly relevant to the lives of English users of either circle.

Meanwhile, Canagarajah (1999) used this context to contest the overarching theory of linguistic imperialism, preferring to focus on the “micro social level of everyday life” (p. 6) as opposed to a macroscopic theoretical perspective. The methodology applied argues that a methodological approach suitable for this purpose is afforded by ethnography, which attempts to understand values and assumptions that motivate the behaviour of people in their everyday contexts, provides a useful challenge in theories and pedagogies that are produced from the ivory towers of academia. The ethnographic perspective to understand the attitudes of teachers and students in the periphery helped Canagarajah to develop constructs that better reflect the challenges faced in English language teaching.

Canagarajah observed that ESL teachers had the notion that borrowing from recent Western pedagogical developments suggests a belief that cognitive strategies are universal and that learning styles, found to be effective for students in one community, may be assumed to be equally effective for students from other backgrounds. He went on to mention that if the teachers were to be asked for a definition of ELT, they would probably describe it as an essentially innocent pragmatic activity of facilitating the transmission of linguistic rules and communicative skills, accompanied by the beneficial side effects of ennobling the mind and enabling social mobility. According to Canagarajah (2000), this could be said to make good pedagogical sense, however, it is important to consider the students’ response to the classroom experience.

The local power structure of language learning contexts can legitimise certain identities while devaluing others. Writing about the role of power in shaping identities, Canagarajah (2002a) continues that in a society, certain values, norms, practices, and codes are higher than others so that learners who do not share the mainstream norms, values, or codes may feel that they are at a disadvantage. He opposes that overlooking these structural inequalities or power dynamics can cause learners to develop a negative identity. In addition, Canagarajah rejected any view of the existence of a one-size-fits-all best methodology and urges a non-globalised solution: “How does classroom

practice proceed in a context where there are no formalised, formulaic methods to deal with? This is perhaps the right moment to empower the local knowledge of teachers, deriving from their years of accumulated experience, wisdom, and intuitions about what works best for their students” (p. 140). Perhaps, this insight also has equal application in the area of inclusion/selection of cultural content.

Indeed, Canagarajah claimed that “in the remote corners of the world in small village classrooms . . . away from the eyes of the professional pundits of the centre”, the best teachers have always striven to impart to their pupils a range of language-learning strategies which promote autonomous learning from an early stage (p. 140). At present, though ELT is a worldwide profession, the flow of ideas regarding English language teaching and learning mainly spring from the core English-speaking countries (Canagarajah, 1999; 2002a). This situation has locked the West, including the core English speaking countries, and developing countries into an unequal power relationship. Taking a critical stance, Canagarajah (2002a) argues that the West holds a monopoly over the developing countries since the latter rely heavily on Western-generated products. This uni-directional exchange, he notes, has led many educators in the developing communities to accept core-produced methods, materials, training programs, research journals, among other things, as “the most effective, efficient, and authoritative for their purposes” (p. 135). With each new teaching product, he argues that a necessity is created, and this is followed by a demand in the developing countries, which use their limited resources to purchase these products. In this manner, the vicious cycle of dependency is maintained.

Canagarajah (2002a) also argues the concerns of English imperialism from the anti-imperialism point of view, pointing out that users/learners use English in their own way and for their own purposes. In other words, just because English is hailed as a global language, that does not mean that ELT is value-free and context-independent or that the opportunities which English promises are distributed equally among learners. Making a similar assertion, Canagarajah objects that the world of English has been stratified by an unequal distribution of power and material resources. As Canagarajah (1999) explains “Just as the personal background of the learner influences how something is learned, what is learned shapes the person: our consciousness, identity, and relationships are implicated in the educational experience” (p. 15). Simply put, the languages we learn shape our identities. This, in turn, can contribute to unsuccessful teaching and learning

of English. Using critical theory as a framework, it is possible to explore and critique inequitable educational practices resulting from an unequal distribution of power within a classroom which mirrors the uneven power structure of the society in which it is embedded. It is argued that an understanding of the relationship between power, language, and learners' identities is crucial if we are to envision changes leading to more equitable educational practices..

In terms of English language teaching, the notion of the native speaker as a model has lost much of its credibility, and as Canagarajah (2006) articulates: “the centrality of inner circle communities to the life of English is increasingly being questioned” (p. 23). Canagarajah also asks: what does it mean to be competent in the English language? What do we mean by correctness? He advocates teaching students to “shuttle between communities” rather than simply join a speech community (p. 26), arguing that to be really proficient, one should be multidialectal.

Canagarajah (1999; 2006) has worked extensively on local agency of English language learners (ELLs). His basic argument is that instead of blindly accepting whatever English instructors teach them, ELLs are their own agents who bring their native cultures and languages into language classrooms and negotiate with the dominant (competing) discourses. Similarly, Canagarajah (2002b) has taken a clear position against Western language teaching methods, considering that classroom realities rarely match any distinguishable method. Analysing the Communicative Language Teaching approach, he suggests the immense complexity of the social, cultural, and historical contexts that can mediate the use of the method in classrooms and advocates for pedagogy of post methodism where language acquisition does not get abridged to any particular method.

Likewise, students who are clear about and aware of their motivations and purposes, according to Canagarajah, are critical learners of English who use their own ways to liberate themselves from the hegemony of English or English imperialism. In all, as Canagarajah (2006) points out, the English language, for those who use English for purely instrumental reasons, is very likely to be detached from the norms; accordingly, learners with instrumental motivation are more likely to be detached from English linguistic imperialism. Here, Canagarajah seems to highlight that students favoured a teacher-centred method and were resistant to do pair or group work; essentially, they

wanted to be passive learners and they learned only with an examination-oriented motivation.

## Kumaravadivelu

*“When the colonial masters are forced to leave the occupied land, their tongue lingers on,” and “English is used to further the interests of the ‘Empire’ through “scholastic, linguistic, cultural” means which “are linked to a vitally important economic dimension that adds jobs and wealth to the economy of English-speaking countries through a worldwide ELT industry.” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p.12).*

*Kumaravadivelu, Professor, educated at the Universities of Madras in India, Lancaster in England and Michigan in the USA, has specialised in language teaching methods, post method pedagogy, critical classroom discourse analysis, and teaching culture. He has been very supportive of educational techniques which may not be strictly theoretical but are illustrative and self-explanatory. In this section, I will primarily look at the general teaching methodologies and challenges, which he has identified as common in South Asia.*

In order to understand the perspectives that create a concern in the South Asian education system, it is important to look into the basic issues that have been identified as hampering the learning cycle. The first and the most basic expectation is the provision of amenities and strategies, which are required in order to handle the challenges of a communicative classroom. In his study on ‘Critical language pedagogy: A post method perspective on English language’, (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b) claims that “adequate attention has not been given to a pedagogic area that matters most: classroom methodology” and he called for a “systematic attempt to explore possible methodological means to decolonise English language teaching” (p. 540). Particularly, in English language education, Kumaravadivelu claims that “British colonialism used its colonial territories, especially India, to devise appropriate teaching methods, testing techniques, and literary canons all with the view to serving its colonial agenda” (p. 540). The strength of such statements suggests that the concept of colonialism is still very much in the minds of some scholars as they review language policies and practices. Most literature on this topic so far has been based in the former colonised territories such as India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong among others.



Further, when local knowledge, language, and literature are marginalised and devalued, the next logical step is to make such local heritages irrelevant for teaching and learning English. Influenced by Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism* in 1992, Kumaravadivelu (2003b) employs his term "monolingual tenets" (p. 542) to refer to this phenomenon. The monolingual tenet "holds that the teaching of English as a foreign or second language should be entirely through the medium of English" (p. 542), which means that ideally rather than trying to reach the language in a way where it is forced, it should be taught like a child learns the language when he does not know how to speak, all he does is listen to the language that he should learn and the process of learning becomes somewhat automated.

There is another important aspect of education that needs to be considered in regards to South Asian education strategies, namely, the autonomy of teachers with respect to teaching methods. Education in this geographic area primarily involves traditional methods, which are based on theories laid down by applied linguistics, psychologists, and writers. Many different problems arise from the above-mentioned strategy including examination-oriented teaching, lack of teamwork, passiveness in students, cultural issues and teaching to tests (Prabhu, 1987). To explain further, the ideology around English encourages language teaching in such a manner that it is either grammar translation or audio lingual methods; however, due to this, the focus shifts towards the language system rather than the actual learning of the language. This kind of teaching method is rigid and restricts complete learning; ultimately, the students end up studying the language for a long period of time without achieving the desired level of proficiency (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

Kumaravadivelu (2006b) has effectively exposed myths which are commonly present in the field of second language acquisition. These myths embrace the above-mentioned conventions that there are such things as: a "best" method (p. 163); methods can be an "organising principle for language learning and teaching" (p. 164); methods transcend time and place; methods are produced by theorists and implemented by teachers; or that methods are "neutral" in a socio-political, socio-cultural, or economic sense (p. 167). Post-method pedagogy brings into question the very concept of method by debunking several myths about its legitimacy and usefulness. One major flaw of the methods paradigm is the assumption that the various language teaching methods thus far proposed are fundamentally different from one another. Now, that we have looked into

the features seen as negatively impacting aspects of learning process, it is important to also examine the suggestions made by Kumaravadivelu, regarding the creation of more appropriate learning environments.

Kumaravadivelu writes about the strategy of language teaching, where he has provided some very interesting guidelines in order to enhance the quality and the effectiveness of teaching a language. He argues that a language cannot be taught; however, conditions can be created in order to learn a language, which basically means that a language cannot be forced on someone, but by creating the right environment and inquisitiveness, the learning process can be developed. Therefore, it is clear that it is more important to initiate opportunities where the students can learn rather than simply forcing the learning objectives upon them. Information acceptance has a lot to do with psychology and not much with education; hence, Kumaravadivelu explains that, in order to create a learning opportunity in developing countries where the initial or basic knowledge is minimal, it is first important to initiate keenness for the information or the learning to be provided (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

Kumaravadivelu has provided a solution to the above problem in his book *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching* (2003a). The macrostrategic framework he proposes as the best application in the above scenario is in the interest of both the teacher and the students. The macrostrategic application in teaching requires the use of techniques which are empirical, theoretical and experimental that empower the learning procedure with accuracy and efficiency, thus enhancing the quality of learning and decreasing the time taken to learn. He highlights in this book that a simple translation or dictation will not be sufficient to make the students learn the language accurately; there needs to be a joint effort among sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, second language acquisition and structural pedagogy.

In another article, Kumaravadivelu (1999) proposes a framework for conducting what he terms *critical classroom discourse analysis* (CCDA). He begins by reviewing two approaches commonly used to analyse classroom interaction in L2 classrooms, the interaction approach and the discourse approach. Although both approaches have delivered valuable insights into classroom learning, the author argues their limited focus has produced “only a fragmented picture of classroom reality” (p. 456). Kumaravadivelu, for one, argues that classroom discourse analysis is limited because it

neglects to examine how the larger social and political framework influences what is said in the classroom. In order to overcome this shortcoming, he advocates a critical approach to classroom discourse analysis.

Kumaravadivelu's (1999) study is significant to this research project. He mentions that a classroom is almost like a small society which can be called as a 'learning community', and it has its own specific rules and regulations, and that this helps in developing people. It is all about meaningful communication which can make the students understand well but requires an analysis of the basic perceptions of the students according to which, the learning can be planned and executed. Kumaravadivelu theorised that the CCDA is a framework that helps us understand what actually transpires in the classroom that reflects the socio-linguistics, socio-cultural and socio-political dimensions of classroom discourse. Under CCDA, understanding the interaction of the second language classroom requires an awareness of discourse participants' complex and competing expectations and beliefs, identities and voices, and fears and anxieties. In its transformative function, the researcher advocates a reflexive role for CCDA in which teachers learn to understand their classroom environment by equipping themselves with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct CCDA for themselves.

The advantage of using discourse analysis to investigate classroom interaction is that it allows researchers to gain insight into what is being accomplished in a particular classroom interaction that takes place in a specific social context. As Kumaravadivelu (1999) notes, by emphasising the social context of language use, classroom discourse analysts can "look at the classroom event as a social event and the classroom as a mini-society with its own rules and regulations, routines and rituals. Their focus is the experience of teachers and learners within this mini-society" (p. 458).

Kumaravadivelu, as a director of a teaching programme, conducted a study on CCDA with the help of his staff teacher 'Debbie', where he observed a few students from Southeast Asia. The results revealed that they had not read the text which was prescribed, and despite being proficient in English, they did not take an active part in the discussion; lastly, it was a teacher-fronted class. Kumaravadivelu draws upon poststructuralist and post colonialist conceptualisations of discourse in order to look at teaching practices in the L2 classroom and hence bring to the fore how "classroom

discourse, like all other discourses, is socially constructed, politically motivated, and historically determined; that is, social, political, and historical conditions develop and distribute the cultural capital that shapes and reshapes the lives of teachers and learners” (p. 472). Kumaravadivelu’s emphasis on conceptualising critical classroom discourse analysis, draws attention to the analysis of multiple perspectives based on the premise that “language teachers can ill afford to ignore the social-cultural reality that influences identity formation in and outside the classroom, nor can they afford to separate learners’ linguistic needs and wants from their social needs and wants” (p. 472).

Kumaravadivelu (1999) suggests that it is not the type of texts employed in a reading lesson that is critical for engagement, and neither is it necessarily the specific teaching methodology. He describes a reading class he observed in which a North American teacher employed a traditional teacher-centred teaching style, and one of a selection of readings under the theme of “American Heroes” to a class of educated foreign learners (p. 21). The learners presented as being stubbornly resistant and uncooperative, and afterwards complained to Kumaravadivelu that the teacher was not helping them with their English and talked about nothing else but American culture and American heroes. Kumaravadivelu’s evaluation of the problem here did not concern the choice of text, but that the teacher apparently ignored or was unaware of the cultural relativity and political implications of her materials and her own perspectives. He felt that the students did not engage, because they felt that “their identities were not being recognised and that their voices were not being respected” (p. 454); what the lesson fatally lacked was the inclusion in its context of the students’ knowledge, experience, reasoning and inevitably different perspectives on the topic.

As discussed in a previous section, there is a characteristic lack of group work in the South Asian teaching system and this is due to the fact that the theoretical and the traditional methods do not promote the facilitation of discussions between the participants in a class. Kumaravadivelu suggests that in order to ensure that each participant plays an active role in the learning activity which is taking place, it is important the teacher actively introduces questions, confirmations, reactions, clarifications and repairs. Kumaravadivelu goes on to argue that this will ensure that the students learn as a group and will be able to show better understanding of the subject that is taught.

Kumaravadivelu (2003c) provided another view by saying that teachers may be stereotyping the learners because it aids to “reduce an unmanageable reality to a manageable” brand (p.716) and, therefore, teachers explain the students’ behavior in terms of culture and cultural stereotypes. He also prompts another factor to be measured as the pedagogic conceptualisation in TESOL is very accustomed and forced by the dualistic categories of native and non-native speakers as well as by the prevalence of Western perspectives to the teaching of culture (Kumaravadivelu, 2002, as cited in 2003c).

Kumaravadivelu (2006a) points out that the TESOL enterprise has been transitioning from a state of awareness to a state of awakening. He concludes that we are approaching a state of attainment of learning and teaching English. In order to cope with changing tracks and to challenge trends as Kumaravadivelu describes, TESOL professionals thus should realise that the mainstream one-size-fits-all approach is irrelevant.

In another effort, Kumaravadivelu (2003c) critically examines the persistence of cultural stereotypes around Asian students in the TESOL profession. He argues that Asian students are constantly described as “obedient to authority, lack critical thinking skills and who do not participate in classroom interaction” (p. 710). He interprets this as a result of colonisation. However, he dismisses the behaviour of the students by adding that it happens only in Western academia rather than in the real classrooms of Asian cultures. Kumaravadivelu shares his experience of teaching of almost ten years in India and mentions the fact that, while he was there as a teacher, he realised the “perennial discipline problem”, meaning the problem of discipline and mass rebellion, was present (p. 710). He agrees with the views on this issue that most of the time in these countries, the teachers are all concerned about the discipline among the children rather than the actual teaching methodologies.

Kumaravadivelu (2003c) then moved on to point out the Asian students’ inhibition to take part in class discussions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Sato, 1981, cited in Kumaravadivelu 2003c)) are because of their cultural outlooks. However, he reflected on several experimental studies that had reservations about this notion. One of the studies cited by Kumaravadivelu is Pierson (1996) who argues,

that these characteristics are mainly the product of ‘the present colonial education system with its excessive workloads, centralised curricula, didactic and

expository teaching styles, concentration on knowledge acquisition, examinations emphasising reproductive knowledge over genuine thinking, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequately trained teachers (p. 55).

Reflecting critically on English education, Kumaravadivelu highlights that learning the English language in Asia is automated; the concept of colonialism is still present in the teaching methodologies; and Asian students are described as passive students who are very obedient. Importantly, the education channels need to concentrate on the learning rather than other basic features like awareness, discipline and availability of resources. Private tuition, however, does not feature prominently in discussions of the issues of South Asian classroom practices, or in key theorists' and researchers' work from the region. It is to this topic that I now turn.

## Private tuition

The research available on private supplementary tuition internationally is not extensive. Tutoring has become widely known in the literature as shadow education (see eg., Bray 1999, Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Shadow education has been visible for some time now, especially in Japan and other parts of Asia and South Asia, for instance, Sri Lanka (De Silva, 1994; Wijetunga, 1994). Bray defines the shadow education system as “mechanisms through which pupils extend their learning and gain additional human capital, which benefits not only themselves but also the wider societies of which they are part” (Bray, 1999, p. 18). In a subsequent report, Bray (2003) argues that the nature of education systems is also an important influence on private tuition: “private tuition is more prevalent in systems in which success in examinations can be gained by receiving private tuition, and private tuition is a necessity in systems that are more teacher-centred” (p.26). Also, “tutoring has been delivered in systems rather than as a separate informal activity, by establishing companies or franchising systems for tutoring” (Bray, 2009, pp. 28-29).

There are different ways of addressing private supplementary tutoring across the globe. In some English-speaking societies, people refer to private tutoring as private tuition (Bray, 2003, p. 20) as for example, in Sri Lanka (De Silva, 1994) and the Maldives. Formal establishments for tutoring are called centres, academies, institutes or coaching centres. In Japan, tutoring centres are called *juku* (Bray, 2003, p. 20), and in Hong

Kong, they are referred to as cram schools (Kwok, 2004). The most comprehensive accounts of the phenomenon of private tutoring worldwide are drawn up by Bray (1999; 2003) and published by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). Bray has undertaken numerous consultancies in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and the South Pacific for such organisations as the Aga Khan Foundation, the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. In his analyses, aimed mainly at educational planners and policy-makers, Bray gives an overview of the scope and forms of tutoring all over the world and contrasts positive and negative implications of the practice. He states that “the development of private tuition has to be interpreted within an overall trend, that of a gradual privatisation and marketisation of education” (Bray, 1999, p.10).

Dierkes and Bray (2011) discuss the phenomenon of private tuition in Asia in the newsletter published by International Institute for Asian Studies stating that it “deserves more attention, in Asia as much as in the rest of the world, especially since some of the most securely institutionalised systems of supplementary education can be found in Asia” (p. 13). This has become an enormous initiative that takes a lot of the students’ and families’ time. In addition, it also offers large employment opportunities that generate large sums of money for individuals and organisations.

According to Bray, the metaphor of the shadow is appropriate in many ways: the private supplementary tutoring prevails because of mainstream education; secondly, as the size and shape of the mainstream system change, so do the size and shape of supplementary tutoring; third, in almost all societies, a lot of attention is focused on the mainstream rather than on its shadow; and finally, the features of the shadow system are much less distinct than those of the mainstream systems. In general, supplementary private tutoring is defined as fee-based outside school lessons that provide supplementary instruction to students in academic subjects they have studied or will study in school and aim to help prepare them for the high-stakes exams administered in the public education system (D. P. Baker, Akiba, Gerald, & Wiseman, 2001; Bray, 1999, 2003, 2011; Dawson, 2011; Silova & Bray, 2006). The nature of these examinations is related to the nature of the curricula which are overloaded (Bray 2011, p. 36).

It may not be easy to measure tutoring as it commonly varies in forms, duration and intensity across different terms. Most tutoring is obtained face-to-face and it may range

from individual attention to large classes. In addition, some students may receive tutoring in many subjects regularly over extended periods while others obtain it only in a few subjects and in a discontinuous fashion (Bray, 2009, p. 17; 2011, p. 28). One-to-one tutoring is generally more costly than having tutoring in groups, which, in turn, is more costly than having tutoring in large classes (Bray, 2011).

In a recent article, Heyneman (2011) both advocates for and warns against private tutoring, which he describes as “a worldwide dilemma”, and provides recommendations to better administer the system of shadow education (p. 183). According to Heyneman, private tutoring can comprise three purposes: enrichment; remediation; and preparation for examination. He also adds that it is the normal tendency of every parent to maintain the education of his or her children. On the other hand, private tutoring is an endorsement to purchase grades, which is “a sign of educational corruption” (p. 184).

Bray’s book-length treatment of the topic, *Confronting the shadow education system* (2009), argues from a broad perspective and not in relation to any particular context that the problems of private tutoring need to be challenged. He argues that all aspects of private tutoring are not negative; it helps students to learn and encompasses their human capital which, in turn, contributes to economic development. Bray also adds that it could have valuable social functions, offering positive opportunities for children and youth to interact with peers and others. In addition, private tutoring creates additional income for tutors while also assisting mainstream teachers to help students to comprehend lessons which have not been understood in the classroom. However, Bray claims that it may rule students’ lives and confine their leisure times in ways that are psychologically and educationally adverse.

Likewise, in Sri Lanka, where the education system is similar to that of the Maldives, some educationalists, including university professors, the director of education, psychiatrists, commissioner of examinations and principals have expressed their negative perception of the private tuition system in the *Economic Review*, 1994. Their viewpoints on private tuition are as follows:

Tuition classes are not suited to help the free education scheme. Students lose their respect for their teachers. Professor K. Dharmasena, University of Kelanya



The fierce competitiveness of the present examination system has forced parents to send their children for tuition classes. It is timely to evolve a system of examinations designed to improve the intellectual pursuits through the use of reference books. This scheme of tuition classes does not fulfil the aspirations of a National education. Professor G.L. Peiris

Various students have suffered from mental problems due to parents making so many demands regarding better results at examinations. More students with this problem come for treatment during the period when OL and AL examinations are held. Dr. Gamini Prematilake, Psychiatrist, Sahanaya Institution. (p. 2)

Wijetunga (1994) argues that private tutoring is part of an all pervading systemic malaise. He continues that extra-school instruction or private tutoring has become an inescapable part of childhood in Sri Lanka “like moth to flame, the weak, the mediocre and the bright, the willing and unwilling, all get compulsory schooling in this second system. Till late evening you see children moving to and fro, armed with their books and writing equipment in the suburb or the backwoods of rural Sri Lanka” (p. 15-17).

Wickramasinghe (1994) conducted a case study assessing the stress factors of children brought into clinics in Sri Lanka. He interviewed and questioned them for three months and found out that the children were stressed due to examinations. His findings indicated that the private tutoring industry was flourishing to such an extent that it had become a shadow of the regular school system. The majority of students perceived extra-school tutoring as a crucial determinant of academic success. They were strongly convinced that private tutoring can give the competitive edge to emerge as “winners” in a system of education which places a high premium on good grades (p. 23).

On the other hand, Welivita (1994) endorses the prevalence of private tuition in Sri Lanka, “in Sri Lanka the organised form of tuition classes and ‘tutories’ has become a very common feature in all parts of the country today” (p. 27). According to Welivita, private tuition is seen as a place which helps, “like a boat or a ferry which helps to cross a river which is otherwise impossible to cross” (p. 27).

In spite of its prevalence in the area, and whether it is seen as good or bad, supplementary education is not widely seen as a form of education by itself though many Asian societies prize good education and put a great effort for success by

“teaching to-the-test” (Dierkes & Bray, 2011, p. 14). De Silva (1994) also indicates that the current status of private tutoring in Sri Lanka is a reflection of the close connection between examination results on the one hand, and both educational and occupational destination on the other.

*As private tuition has a vital function within this study, it is crucial to explore the factors that lead to it. Therefore, in the following section, I move on to discuss the causes and implications of private tuition as identified in the research literature.*

### ***What are the causes and implications of private tuition?***

Research has identified multiple individual, educational, and institutional factors that lead students and parents to seek shadow education (D. Baker & LeTendre, 2005; D. P. Baker, et al., 2001; Bray, 1999, 2003). Factors Bray covers include the scale of tutoring (growth), its forms (whether individual tutoring, in groups etc.) and its causes (cultural, educational and social factors). Bray mentions that tutoring is more prevalent in cities than in rural areas, because the people in the cities have higher incomes enabling them to afford tuition; cities are more competitive environments and the population density in cities invites a sufficient market to encourage tutors to provide the service (Bray, 2009, p. 36).

In terms of this study based on Maldivian classrooms, it is necessary to explore more explicitly the state of private tutoring in neighbouring countries, like Sri Lanka, because teaching and learning are very similar to that of the Maldives. According to Arunatilake (2006), many children pay and attend tuition classes that cover the school curriculum, which are run by school teachers, after school hours. In his qualitative research paper, Gamage (2006) did personal observations and got feedback from teachers and students during his visits to his village in Sri Lanka. He looked into “the learning processes by the youth within the formal public education system in Sri Lanka” (p. 8) and he pointed out one of the factors that contribute to better learning by the youth to be the existence of private tuition outside school. Gamage adds that these tuition classes report the flaws in the school education system and “claim to perform the job better, i.e. preparing school children for Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations conducted by the government” (p. 12). He added that the villagers see that their “children are always either in school or in the tuition class outside it” (p. 12).

Parents' discontent regarding the school teachers are also factors that lead to private tuition. In a recent article in the newsletter published by the IIAS, Lee (2011) notes that dependence on markets for supplementary education is growing, as parents become increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated with schools. Parents want their children to get higher scores than others to enter a well-known university and to get a job with high earnings. Students want to be taught differently according to their interests and abilities. Referring to Korea, Lee adds that it does not have a flexible school system and varied options for success, so every student's future depends on the results of competitive college entrance exams. In this context, a 'better' education implies attending cram schools for entrance exams. Since students and parents cannot choose which school the student will attend, the best option for them is supplementary education (p. 17). Lee also adds that another motivation for parents seeking tuition for the child is the fact that when they realise one parent sends their children for tuition, their own child has to be sent for tuition as well.

This issue has also caught public attention and is the subject of discussion and reportage in the newspapers of Sri Lanka. According to Nimal Premaratna of Avissawella (Ananda, 2007) some academically qualified people are not good teachers: "They lack teaching ability and that's why I send my two children to private tuition classes" (p. 1). Also, a principal of a school in the Sabaragamuwa Province, Sirisumana Kotalawala, asked teachers not to blame students for attending private tuition classes: "As most schools are not giving them a better education like in private schools, let them obtain their education in private classes" (p. 1).

There are also parents who send their children for extra lessons to make work easier for them. There is evidence, according to Bray (2011), that the reasons for shadow education may not always be so aspirational. He highlights that it is a mode of removing tension from the home and it is much better if someone else attends to their children's homework.

As well as the causes, Bray (2009) has investigated the implications of private tuition focusing on the economic, social and educational implications of the practice. Firstly, looking at the economic aspect, Bray highlights that private tuition consumes a large percentage of household expenditure. Secondly, Bray points to the social implications by adding that market-driven tutoring maintains or worsens social inequalities since

high-income households can purchase more and better private tutoring than low-income households. In addition, private tuition increases social pressure on families. Although Bray focuses on private tuition's domination of students' lives and restriction of their leisure, he concedes that students may find the private lessons a welcome opportunity to meet friends.

According to Bray (2007), three areas call for attention in understanding the social implication of private tuition. They are “the consequences of pressure on students, the impact of social relationships and the implications for social inequalities” (p. 57). Bray stresses those children who attend both mainstream and private tuition classes are under a lot of pressure. Wijetunga (1994) points out that in Sri Lanka the children are rushed to tuition classes immediately after school, after a quick snack. There is a lot of competition which neglects the students' age-appropriate development phases such as building attitudes towards oneself, learning to get along with peers to name a few. Wijetunge adds that learning and examination scores are often gained by skipping sporting and leisure activities which are important for growing children. In addition, looking at social relationships, De Silva (1994) said that when children are away from home most of their time, family bonds deteriorate.

Thirdly, Bray (2009) addresses the educational implications of private tuition by stating that, theoretically, tutoring supports mainstream education by providing supplementary avenues to strengthen the class work done in school. However, he adds that in some settings, tutoring undermines school work. For example, the pedagogical approaches of mainstream education and private tutoring may differ. The mainstream teacher of mathematics may concentrate on students' comprehension of concepts and principles, while private tutors may solve problems mathematically. In addition, another educational factor, according to Bray, is when examinations are close, private tuition may become not a supplement but a substitute to mainstream education. The relationship between tutoring and education systems where examinations are vital for education and career admission has been noted by several researchers with reference to many countries, for example in Japan by Stevenson and Baker (1992), in Sri Lanka by De Silva (1994) and in Mauritius by Foondun (2002). As a result, students in many countries place more faith in the coaching of private tutors than in the mainstream school teachers to get good results in examinations.

Tutoring may be supply-related. In developing countries where school teachers receive low salaries, tutoring can be the result of teachers' direct or indirect attempts to secure additional income (Bray, 1999, 2006; Foondun, 2002; Gunawardena, 1994; Silova, 2010). Relatively poor school quality is another supply factor that has led to the rise of tutoring (Foondun, 2002); Foondun gives examples of countries such as South Korea, China, Mauritius and Thailand, where a perception that teaching at school is insufficient, therefore creating a need for tutoring. He also points out that large classes and a lack of individual attention contribute to the need for tutoring. He adds that students, in some settings, find themselves under considerable pressure to invest in tutoring as their peers all seem to be receiving tutoring; their mainstream teachers emphasise the desirability of tutoring; or their families perceive tutoring to be a major avenue for educational and thus economic advancement. From a broader perspective, it may depend on the culture of the societies (Bray, 2003, 2010). For example, supplementary education is particularly likely in cultures that stress effort. Amid the cultural factors, according to Bray (2003), is the apparent role of educational success.

The nature of tutoring is changing over time. As societies become more competitive, in part because of the forces of globalisation, school systems also become more competitive which, in turn, expands the demand for tutoring. Since the turn of the century, the scale and nature of tutoring have intensified in most regions of the world (Bray, 2003; 2009).

### ***Who provides private tuition and how?***

For more than a decade, Bray has enquired into the identity of private tutors. In his study from a global perspective of private tutoring, Bray distinguishes between a number of different types of private tuition providers; there are tutors who also teach in the mainstream system and receive additional payment for tutoring pupils who are already in the public schools (Bray, 1999, 2011).

An article in the IIAS, 'the newsletter', Dawson (2011) highlights that supplementary education in Cambodia involves state teachers conducting private tutoring for their own students, involving "politics and economics of corruption," (p. 18). Similarly, in an email interview to Subod Varma of *Times India*, Mark Bray makes the point that, in South Asia, tutoring has become an established part of daily life, especially in urban areas. "Private tutoring can corrupt public education systems", especially when teachers

neglect the school curriculum and focus more on the tutoring (p. 1). Bray stresses that the initial thing to do would be to recognise the existence and potential dangers of private tuition. Teachers also should be prohibited from teaching the students they teach in the mainstream schools (Bray, 2010 as cited in Varma, 2010). In Sri Lanka, De Silva (1994) adds that there are also teachers who neglect their regular classroom teaching and “openly suggest” to their pupils and parents to attend their private lessons (p. 5).

Bray (2006) echoes the same situation where mainstream teachers themselves provide supplementary private tutoring. Regulations to this effect are in place in some countries, such as Australia, France and Singapore, where teachers are forbidden from providing such paid tutoring to the children for whom they already have responsibility in the mainstream. Nevertheless, in such countries as India, Lebanon and Nigeria, it is acceptable for mainstream teachers to provide paid supplementary tutoring for their own mainstream pupils. “In some settings this creates a problematic form of blackmail, in which teachers cover only part of the curriculum during school hours and then require pupils to come to the private classes for the remainder of the curriculum” (Bray 2011, p. 40). The practice of class teachers providing extra lessons for their existing students can be problematic. Most obviously, it risks the inducement for teachers to reduce the effort they put into their normal duties in order to increase demand for their services outside school hours.

Key to private tuition is the tutors themselves and, research indicates, they vary widely compared to the teachers in the mainstream system. Tutors may have a range of educational and training backgrounds or no training at all (Bray 1999, p. 39). University students commonly gain additional income by providing tutoring for secondary and possibly primary school children and also, in some societies, secondary school students provide private tuition to primary students to earn money (p. 39).

In order to find tuition teachers, some centres offer prizes for academic success and expand their market by advertising through leaflets, posters, newspapers, magazines, cinemas and television while, in most settings, recommendations operate more effectively than formal advertising. In Malaysia, Chew and Leong (1995, p. 54) indicates that 71% of respondents found their tutors through friends, 14% through selected tutors in response to advertisements and 12% followed the advice of their mainstream teachers. Only 7% showed that the tutors approached them first. Even in Sri

Lanka, tutors advertised their extra lessons through the above-mentioned methods (De Silva, 1994, p. 6).

Finally, according to Bray, some tutors and institutions are more popular than others. There are some teachers who need to look for students while the reputable teachers keep students on their waiting lists (Bray, 2009, p. 41).

### ***Who obtains private tuition and why?***

Looking at the receivers of tuition, the students, some people speculate that the dominant group of students who opt for private tuition are those who are weak in their academic subjects. Hong Kong students' main reason for taking private tuition was because their academic performance was not very good (Tseng, 1998) The Sri Lankan study by Gunawardena (1994) also showed similar reasons. Nevertheless, Bray sees it is as the opposite; the students who are excelling and who want to uphold their performance are the ones who seek private tuition (Bray, 2007, 2011). Besides, students may have academic and non-academic reasons for seeking tutoring. For example, to make friends or to be a part of a peer group (Bray, 2011).

Bray posits that students are more likely to demand private tuition at secondary rather than at primary level as parents of primary students may be confident in helping with children's homework. At the secondary level, where the secondary examinations form a divide between who can continue in school and who cannot, private tuition could be more in demand. Bray also adds that peer pressure among parents can be another factor (pp. 44 - 45). Also, according to Bray, in some cultures, a certain prestige can be derived from sending their children to particular high-cost tuition teachers (p. 45). Moreover, according to Kwo and Bray (2011, p. 20), it is important to note that the students can have a choice over who becomes their tutor while they have no choice over who becomes their teacher.

### ***The effect of private tuition on academic achievement***

In spite of the demand of parents and students for tuition, it is hard to answer if tutoring works (Bray 2011, p. 47). In each setting, it will be influenced by "the previous histories of the students, their attitudes and motivations, the skills of the tutors, and the suitability with the pedagogical approaches of their mainstream teachers" (p. 51).

According to Bray (2007), this is one area that is in dire need of further research as it has many factors involved. However, from a research perspective, students who do and do not receive tuition cannot be compared as they are seldom comparable in other characteristics. Further studies need to be done for urban/rural and socio-economic differences and they should also allow for the fact that in most cases the largest group of students who take private tuition are those who are good at their studies (p. 46).

In the *Sunday Observer of Sri Lanka*, Sunday, April 8, 2007, Ananda, writing of a highly successful secondary student, wrote “Takshila Rajapaksha, a student of St. Paul's Girls School, Milagiriya confessed that during her time, she did attend tuition classes for Mathematics, Science, Commerce and English which helped her to obtain nine ‘A’ passes at the last GCE (O/L) examination,” (p. 1) which shows her perception that private tuition brings a positive effect on academic achievement.

### ***The effect of private tuition on mainstream schooling***

Private tuition is beneficial when it aids the students to attain knowledge and improve in subjects learnt in mainstream schools. However, it can also create a negative influence in learning at schools.

Kwok's (2004) field studies in five East Asian societies, based on a qualitative research approach, concludes that “the existence of mass tutorial schools is a risk to the daytime educational systems as it can change the students' attitudes towards mainstream schooling and may alter teaching and learning in East Asia” (p. 72). In addition, Bray's (2007) speculation based on evidence from various contexts also shows that tutoring may affect teaching and learning in mainstream schools. Bray adds that when all students receive private tuition, mainstream teachers may not be required to work as hard. In addition, mainstream teachers may be challenged with differences between the students who receive and those who do not receive private tuition. This, in turn, would lead the teacher to help the less able students; however, other teachers may attend to students who take tuition as a norm and allow gaps between students to grow. “This is one situation where parents come under pressure to opt for private tuition for their children” (Bray, 2007, p. 51).

A questionnaire survey, carried out by Hussein (1987), with 934 Kuwaiti students who were being tutored found that the students have the notion that they do not need to



attend school classes as long as they can pay someone to show them how to pass the examinations. Hussein also links this belief about examination success to the rise of absenteeism in some schools, especially two months before the school year ends. The students stay at home in the morning and attend private tuition sessions in the afternoons.

In Sri Lanka, Nanayakkara and Ranweera (1994) identified a similar cause in their questionnaire-based study. They revealed that some students do not pay enough attention to the classroom lesson in school because they have already covered the lesson in the tuition class or they expect the tutor to teach the same material more efficiently.

Other research done in Sri Lankan schools by De Silva (1994) points out the exhaustion of both teachers and students in mainstream schools. She stresses the fact that “teachers and students lack enough rest and leisure due to continuous teaching-learning process that continues from morning till evening during week days and week-ends and school holidays” (p. 5). She also adds that this fact leads to the students and teachers being lazy and less productive during school hours.

On the other hand, there may be benefits of private tuition on mainstream learning according to De Silva (1994). She observes that tuition can help remedial teaching be accepted according to individual student’s needs:

Sometimes, large gaps in students' learning are created due to a number of factors such as student and teacher absence, frequent closure of school, ineffective teaching and negligence on the part of the teacher. It is not every school that can boast a full complement of specialist teachers in crucial areas like Mathematics, Science and English. Immature, inexperienced or unqualified teachers handling these subjects may not be able to lead the students to a proper understanding of the sections taught. Effective private tuition may help overcome these gaps or deficiencies in students' learning and build their confidence enabling them to compete with others and experience a happy and pleasant life. (p. 5)

Also, private tuition may help better students to gain more from mainstream classes. In his study of upper secondary classes, Yiu (1996) argues that Hong Kong teachers complemented private tuition. The teachers found that the students gained from getting

the content which was taught in English in the mainstream classroom in their mother tongue in tuition. Also, the teachers could complete the main material in school while the tuition teachers could cover the additional lessons. Finally, they found that tutors extended students with extra questions which cannot be done in the mainstream classrooms.

### ***Private tuition in the Maldives***

In this section, the focus will be primarily on the work of Nazeer and Mohamed, who have both made reference to private tuition in the Maldives in their studies.

“The dependency on private tuition has a long history in the Maldives,” (Nazeer, 2006, p. 203). In his study, Nazeer explored a cooperative learning approach to teaching and learning economics in secondary schools and investigates teachers’ and students’ perceptions of cooperative learning. He applied some elements of ethnographic and grounded theory in Maldivian classrooms with nine teachers and 232 students. During his study, Nazeer discovered that a lot of parents in the Maldives depended a lot on tuition and this could be that “they themselves might have undergone tuition themselves and experienced its fruitfulness” (p. 203). Further, he added that private tuition may be preferred for reasons such as lack of confidence the parents place in the public schools or the belief of the society that students could improve only by getting tuition. It was impossible for him to conduct workshops on week nights for teachers in the schools where he did his study in the capital Male’, as “many of the teachers had private tuition at week nights and weekends” (p. 119).

Nazeer also found that private tuition was very common in the Maldives, and parents send their children to private tuition as soon as their children begin formal schooling. They do it to get good results in school. Nazeer highlights that these children who depend on school education and private tuition have “different methods of learning” (p. 159). At school, teachers use direct explanation to teach concepts while in tuition sessions, students discuss these concepts more openly. He observed that all nine students he interviewed attended tuition to get help with their learning to clarify the knowledge they did not comprehend at school (p. 203). This implies active engagement in the tuition session and passive reception in school.

In another study by Mohamed (2006), carried out in two schools in the Maldives, she discovered that almost all students attended private “tuition classes” or had a “tuition teacher” (p. 72). The purpose of this additional tutoring was to help students cope with schoolwork, and prepare them for the examinations. What frequently happened was that the tuition teacher did all the homework for the student and discussed the answers to exercises to be done in class in the future. As a result, the students became entirely dependent on the tuition teacher and were unable to do any work on their own. According to Mohamed, although the school management discouraged teachers from giving tuition, all teachers she studied were employed part time at other schools in Malé, and all of them provided private tuition during their free time.

In the research reviewed above, private tutoring or tuition is seen as classes that take place outside school, in addition to formal schooling, after school hours. Tuition is provided for a fee, oriented towards the school syllabus with the goal of improving the students’ performance at school, especially in examinations. Teachers with varied educational backgrounds provide private tuition. The benefits of private tuition are many: it helps the students to enhance their school performance and to improve in the examinations. On the other hand, it has a negative effect on mainstream schooling; students do not give much importance to school lessons, do not pay attention to school lessons and may become less productive in school.

It is evident from the studies that private tuition, in parallel with the education system, has become an integral part of the Maldivian education scene today. Parents and students of all levels are under pressure to opt for tuition in order to excel in examinations. In addition, reasons for private tuition in the Maldives are the same as those found for other countries by Bray (2003; 2007; 2009), DeSilva (1994) and Wijetunga (1994), to name a few. All the research findings examining the phenomenon of private tuition bring an understanding for the current study in which private tuition has also emerged as a theme.

*The review of literature reveals that classroom practices in the South Asian region are teacher-centred, examination-oriented, and have physical and structural issues of the classroom whilst classroom instructional time is a problematic issue. Also, it has highlighted the importance of private tuition for the teachers, students and parents. The intention of this study is to research the significance of classroom practices and private*

*tuition in the Maldives; therefore, similar to Canagarajah's ethnographic methodology, I attempt to explore these settings in the Maldives, using an ethnographic approach alongside interviews as social practice. The details of how these are carried out are highlighted in the next chapter.*

# CHAPTER THREE

## Methodology



# CHAPTER THREE

## Methodology

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*A journey of a thousand miles, begin with a single step - Confucius*

The research on which this thesis is based involved an ethnographic study- from January, 2009 to September, 2009 - of two grade eight classrooms, two grade 10 classrooms and four teachers teaching in a secondary school in the City School as well as two grade ten classrooms and one grade eight classroom and two teachers of the Atoll School. I watched these classrooms over the nine month period for about three to four hours each week. I observed for 35 minutes each session, and observations and field notes were taken for each lesson. In addition, I met with the Principals of both the schools, heads of departments, supervisors, and teachers working within the English department, other teachers I met occasionally in the staff room, a number of students and some parents.

Apart from these two school sites, I also explored the private tuition setting. It was difficult to gain access to private tuition sessions as most teachers were not willing to let me come and watch them tutor. Only one teacher, Naomi, from the City School agreed and expressed her strong willingness to let me watch her private tuition classes, as captured in *Chapter Six*. I note in my personal journal:

The teachers were maybe not eager to let me visit the students' homes or the tuition centres where they were undertaking private tuition. A woman working in the office shared with me that a teacher I had spoken to in the office told her this:

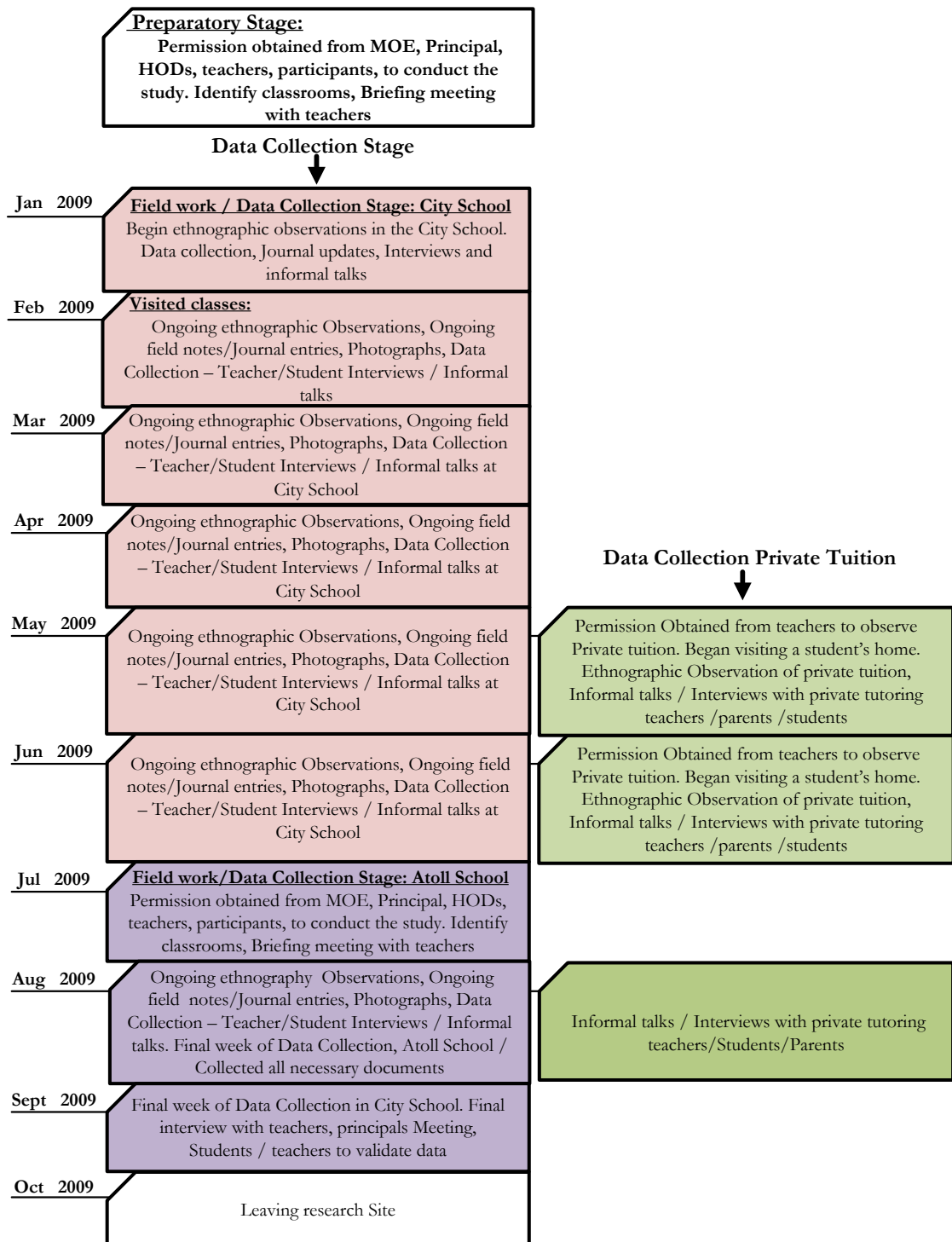
*Miss asked me if she can see me teach a student at tuition. I don't think I should. I am not comfortable.*

I think the teacher was a bit worried that I might share such information with others in the school, the MOE or something like that. (Journal Entry, May 2009)

As mentioned in the extract, the teachers saw me as a figure of authority, as I was their supervisor before and that along with the fact that I was also a local made them possibly think that I could impart the knowledge to higher sources, like the Ministry of Education.

I visited a student's home from July to August 2009 three times a week. Although most of the other teachers were reluctant to let me watch them teach in their private tuition settings, I was able to have informal talks and interviews about their tutoring in this context. In addition to observing and interviewing teachers, I interviewed four parents and many students who took private tuition as detailed in *Chapter Six*.

Several random interview sessions were conducted with each interview participant from both the schools and private tuition settings with each of these sessions lasting between five and seven minutes. However, in-depth informal meetings lasted more than 15 minutes. The interviews with principals and other senior staff were held in their respective offices. Within both schools, the interviews with students and teachers were held before and after school in different locations. The interviews with parents were held before and after school in the office space that was allocated to me by the school as well as in their own homes. Figure 4 presents a summary time line of the data collection.



**Figure 4:** A summary time line of the data collection

In this study, ethnographic methodology was combined with interview as social practice to gain an in-depth understanding of both the classroom streams of the City School and the Atoll School as well as private tuition settings. Apart from observations and using interview as social practice to collect the data, I also gathered data in the form of field



notes, researcher journal, audio taped lessons, and collection of artefacts, photographs and documents.

I collected and analysed the data by daily analysis: fleshing out, reading, re-reading field notes and journal entries; listening to and transcribing audio tapes; looking for patterns of actions/meanings in the data; and reflecting on the data through using excel sheet recordings. By colour coding the words, I was able to find emerging patterns. When the patterns emerged, I obtained feedback from the informants about them. This was done by asking the informants to give their opinions about the transcribed conversations. Having done so, I came up with themes by reading the notes again and again. Once the themes were collected and the notes had been studied, I was ready to formulate theme statements to develop a story line. Figure 5 is an excel worksheet I used in the attempt to identify the themes.

B1	Observations/Field notes	Notes	Notes 2	Core Categories	Themes
10S16 Mark	Teacher enters the classroom, greet the students and recapitulates the previous days lesson.	Greeting	Greeting	Greeting	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Teacher: "You should be ready for the writing exam..."	Exam oriented	Teaching for exams	Teaching Method	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	It seems that there is going to be a writing exam soon, a class test.	Reminding about the exam	Teaching for exams	Teaching Method	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Teacher: "How many of you like reading as a hobby?"	Discussions	Inquiry	Teaching Techniques	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Student A: " I hate reading" (makes a face)	Discussions	Inquiry	Teaching Techniques	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Teacher: " There is a saying that 'Reading makes a full man', did you hear it?"	Explanations	Teacher centred	Teaching Method	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	There are 29 students in the classroom, listening passively to the teacher. They did not respond to this.	Passive listeners, bored	Passive learners	Passive Learners	Learning Style
10S16 Mark	Then the teacher writes on the board, "Review"	Use of blackboard	Blackboard	Teaching Resources	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Teacher: "What's the meaning of review?"	Discussions	Inquiry	Teaching Techniques	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Students talk to themselves and give answers. Teacher gives examples of reviews, book reviews, movie	Discussions	Inquiry	Teaching Techniques	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Teacher: " By watching a movie you do also have to do lots of things, you need to just sit and watch, but reading a passage takes a long time. When watching the movie you think about the characters, abilities of the director, cinematography, end etc."	Teacher centred, explanations, classroom controlled, passive learners	Teacher centred	Teaching Method	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	Then the teacher explains about writing a review: "Start a review with a question, remember you are writing for a reader."	Teacher centred, explanations, classroom controlled, passive learners	Teacher centred Passive learners	Teaching Method Passive Learners	Teaching Style Learning Style
10S16 Mark	Then he writes on the board:	Use of blackboard	Blackboard	Teaching Resources	Teaching Style
10S16 Mark	"Involve the reader in the writing"	Teacher centred, active participation in classroom	Teacher centred	Teaching Method	Teaching Style

Figure 5: Analysis of data

In sum, the analysis enabled me to generate a description of the classroom practices of both classroom streams of the City School and Atoll School and the private tuition settings I observed.

## Ethical considerations

The Massey University Ethics Committee approved the research methodology. Later, permission was sought from the Ministry of Education, Maldives and, consequently, from the school principals, teachers, parents and students. In conducting this study, I

had the advantage of being an experienced teacher who was familiar with the school setting and the people. So, therefore, it was easy to approach the informants and negotiate a project timeframe. Gaining access to the schools was very easy to me as I was very familiar with the way the institutions worked. I had all the necessary contacts and knew the procedures I had to go through to both get the necessary permission and to gain access to the various study data.

In the City School, once I had had the preliminary meeting with the principal, I met some school supervisors and they enlightened me about various events happening at the school. One of the assistant principals showed me some places that I could work during morning and afternoon sessions. I also got to share some of the supervisors' shelves and computers during the two sessions. I was very pleased with the arrangements.

Later, I met with the Head of Department (HOD<sup>2</sup>) and shared and exchanged ideas about the research project. Then, she nominated the teachers I would be observing at random and introduced me to them. The teachers were very friendly and each one of them gave me a copy of their timetables. I informed them that I would like to see every lesson of the week and they were satisfied with the procedure. Therefore, initially I observed almost all the lessons. The prior relationship I had with most of the City School teachers helped in the data collection; I had been working alongside them at some stage as a teacher and later as a supervisor.

Permission to study the Atoll School was gained by ringing a friend from the school and later calling the principal and the assistant principal to fix a date. I flew to the Atoll School and was welcomed by the assistant principal and the supervisors. I met them briefly and exchanged and shared information about my project with them. Having done so, they introduced me with the HOD of English who had already made plans with the teachers that I would be meeting and observing. The participant teachers in both schools were nominated by the respective HODs and were randomly chosen from a pool who were willing to participate in the research.

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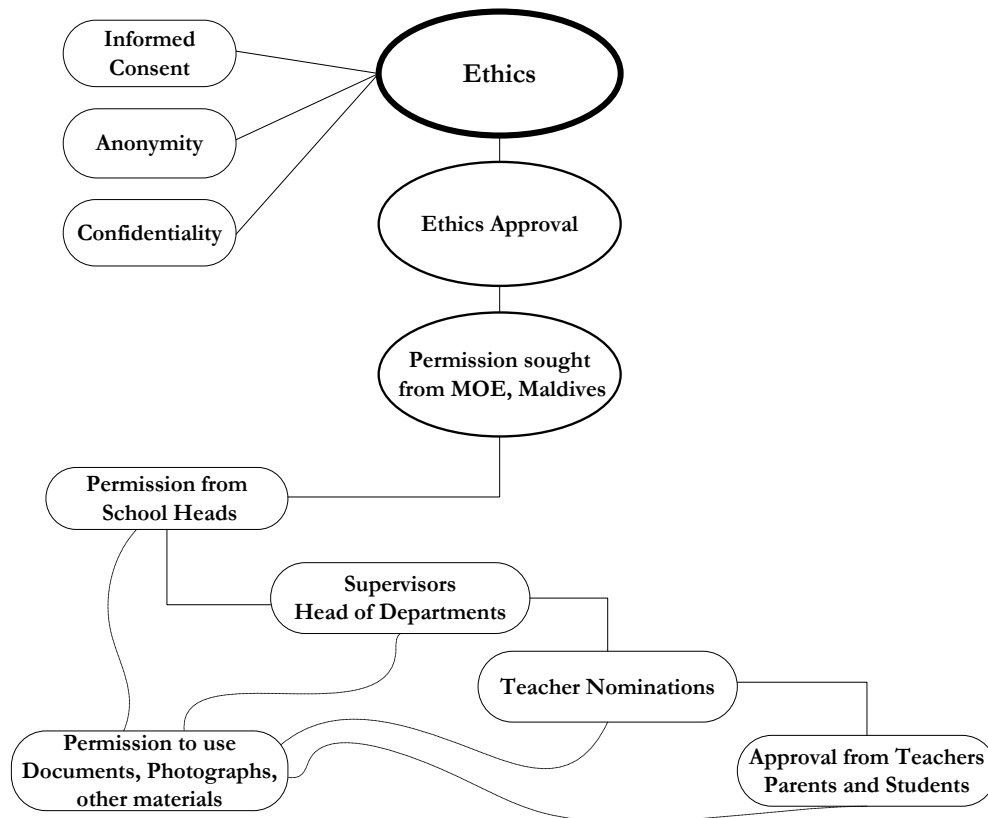
<sup>2</sup> Heads of Department are those teachers who are in charge of a subject. They coordinate with teachers and are answerable to Principal for not only the effective operation and development of their department, but also for the management of staff and resources as well as for the provision of high quality services to students.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, gaining admission to the private tuition settings was not easy. Therefore, I only visited one home where private tuition was carried out and, other than that, had informal talks and interviews with the other teachers. The teacher who volunteered to let me observe her private tuition sessions was a former colleague who later was part of my supervision team; this relationship was one reason she let me come and watch her. The teacher was kind enough to seek permission from the parents and the students and on the first day, I briefed the parents and students about the research project and they informed me that they were very happy to help me.

During the data collection process, all the participants of the City School, Atoll School and the private tuition settings were made aware of the type of information I wanted from them, why the information was sought, what purposes it would be put to, how they were expected to participate in the study and how it would directly and indirectly affect them. I also explained the nature, contents of the study and the anticipated benefits to the Maldives and to the participants, all of whom responded positively and gave their full support. As a trusted colleague, the participants appeared to come forward with the information they confided to me. They were willing to talk to me because they perceived me to understand their school situation and, further, did not hesitate to give information as they knew what I was going to do with the data gathered. They also appeared to trust me and considered themselves as part of the research project. It is important to note that they were in no way compelled to give any depth of information. However, considering the capacity and my role as a researcher as an insider (in the City School) all necessary measures were taken to ensure that the standard ethical principles were followed. This entailed, for example, the decision to use different data than that that appeared in the form of data collection through the interviews as social practice, documentary analysis and photographs.

In addition to addressing the above challenges, I took special measures to address other anticipated ethical issues, particularly those related to informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). According to Hamersley and Atkinson (1995, 2007), two of the most well-known authors of ethnography, research ethics consist of five main areas: ensuring informed consent is obtained; ensuring privacy is protected; protecting participants from harm and exploitation; as well as considering consequences for future research. With respect to these issues, I used face-to-face meetings to ensure that participants of all three settings had clear and accurate

information about all aspects of the study and to assure them of anonymity. In this way, the participants were repeatedly reassured that the information would be treated confidentially and no person would be identified in the research report. Photographs of the two schools, the teachers, the students and the private tuition settings have been used with permission. All the documents, including interview transcripts, field notes and journal notes are kept in a safe place and will be destroyed later. The routes I took in getting the ethics approval is defined in the diagram below (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** The routes of ethics approval

## Ethnography

Observing the fisherman coming to shore and cleaning their fish. Joining the women of the island community in the early morning and sweeping the different corners of the island. Riding the ferry to and fro from the main island to other nearby islands whilst watching people get on and off. These different activities share a common theme. They show examples of ethnography. What is ethnography?

Ethnography has its roots in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Gobo, 2011). However, in a more conventional view ethnography is an approach to research that encompasses involvement within, and study of, a culture or social world. Broadly speaking, researchers enter a given culture and draw upon a variety of methods in order to make sense of public and private, obvious and abstract cultural meanings. Hence, ethnography can be perceived as a methodological persuasion: a guiding approach to research, in which the researcher attends to the rich generation of meanings by groups of performers, as a consequence of various structures and decisions made by individuals.

“Ethnography generates new theories or builds on existing theories of culture” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 8) and this is accomplished by studying how people behave, think, or, most relevant to this study, how they learn, all of which is ‘situated’ in the time and place of a community.

According to the dictionary of anthropology (Barfield & Barfield, 1997), ethnography is the systematic description of the single contemporary culture often through fieldwork. In basic terms, ethnography is the practice of anthropological research based on direct observation of and reporting on a people's way of life. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) describe it as a universal strategy of qualitative research through which “the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, in fact collecting whatever data available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned” (p. 2).

Watson-Gegeo (1988) defines ethnography as, “the study of people’s behaviour in naturally occurring on going settings with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behaviour” (Watson-Gegeo 1988, p. 576). According to Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 16), ethnography within education is defined as:

An approach to social research based on the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location (p. 16).

In alignment with the above description, the research design for this study involved investigating the classroom practices and private tuition settings while relying on observations of the settings and participants while they experience their daily activities. In this sense, the research intention was ethnographic in nature. As Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) highlight in relation to the teacher ethnographer, ,

Look, listen, ask questions, take part, learn the language, learn and record any specialised kind of language or argot, make inferences from what people say, locate informants, develop relationships, become friends, and experience different ways of life (p. 120).

*Having defined ethnography, I now turn to present the significance of ethnography in an educational study such as mine.*

### ***Why ethnography in this study?***

An ethnographic approach was chosen for this study because of its flexibility and range. In choosing ethnography, data collection included all kinds of experiences in different places and different instances in the City School, the Atoll School and private tuition settings. I found data everywhere, including personal experiences, observations, and conversations that are part of everyday life. Data collection occurred in everyday discussions in the supervisor's room, the classroom, the staff room, the canteen, the school compound, the school office, the corridors, the printing room, the school hall - wherever possible.

I continually asked all the participants questions relating to what they were learning to realise what they were experiencing, how they interpreted their experiences, and how they themselves structured the classroom practices and private tuition settings. I wanted to be in their shoes and seek their understanding of that world. I tried to make sure that I captured the instances accurately.

I tried to get thick description i.e.; a lot of details. When culture is examined from the ethnographic perspective, researchers are faced with a series of interpretations of life, of common sense understandings that is complex and difficult to separate from each other. As a key instrument in the study, I, as an ethnographer, had to equip myself with an insider's view, with extensive communication with the observed, and with continuous

discourses with others and myself. In other words, I needed to engage in dynamic participation and self-examination.

Ethnography has a focus on natural, ordinary events in natural settings, helping me better understand the underlying, hidden or non-obvious aspects of the behaviours, attitudes and feelings. As ethnography uses multiple data collection methods focusing on the cultural aspects of the participants, it helped in revealing the complexity of how and why things happen in both classroom and private tuition settings. Additionally, “qualitative data with the emphasis on people’s lived experiences is well suited for locating the meanings people place on events, processes, and patterns of their lives” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This study is an ethnographic study where I, as the researcher, spent some considerable amount of time in the field gathering data about real people in order to understand and explain the social processes in the school as they relate to the phenomenon under study (Wolcott, 1999).

As my study continued to progress, I considered ethnography to be one of the most effective approaches used within social research at the present time (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). I realised that ethnography is important in the research of secondary classrooms as I began to discover that there is a missing link between the innermost mechanisms of the classroom and how these factors can create an impact on learning. As an ethnographer, I envisioned that our students would have a clear grasp of the meaning of unified routines of action, common values and beliefs, and the roles of the various classroom stakeholders so as to more effectively foster student learning. In my own study, the classroom setting is the mirror that reflects the culture and social background of the students and defines how they will be able to achieve better learning. As Hammersley (1990) pointed out, culture is a central element of all that a teacher works hard to establish. This was echoed by Wolcott (1999) when he stated that ethnography is a highly personal endeavor because it is during this time inside the classroom that the teacher and the subjects let their guard down and become as natural as they can be. Reflecting this, I witnessed all the students’ and teachers’ behaviors and how they reacted in different situations.

I realised the importance of ethnology because it helped me assess the effectiveness of the materials I collected, the teaching methods and approaches used and how the teachers built a connection with the students (Fasse & Kolodner, 2000). The

ethnographic approach that I chose allowed me to familiarise myself with the culture of each student and how he or she interacted and responded with other members of the group. The use of classroom observations, observation instruments and documentation strengthened the social interactions within the environment. I followed the concept of Suresh Canagarajah (1993), who made use of critical ethnography as a means to assess his English classroom. He made use of the extreme circumstances in his classroom by focusing on the language of learning. At the same time, he highlighted the perception of the relative autonomy of the classrooms by suggesting that they are social and cultural domains that have a strong connection to the outside world (Pennycook, 2001).

In this particular research study of classroom and private tuition practices in the Maldives, I viewed ethnography as the glue that bonded students from all walks of life. It strengthened the ideology that the classroom can be viewed as a “microcosm of social order” that is reflective of a broader concept of a social world (Pennycook, 2001, p. 103). Basing my statement on the view of Wolcott (1999), I fully agree that ethnology is suited for studying small-scale and isolated tribal cultures. By looking at these scales and dimensions, the teaching styles, textbook, language and cultural background became the determinative factor for making the curriculum effective for the students who are learning both in the classroom and private tuition settings. As the ethnographer, I made use of all the data that I collected, analysing carefully before deriving conclusions. My unending efforts to blend in with the Maldivian culture served as a significant instrument to enable me to embrace diversity in social science and apply it in the classroom and private tuition atmospheres.

I used an ethnographic approach as it enabled me to listen to the stories of the teacher, student and parent understandings in order to achieve a fuller more contextualised understanding of the practices in the three settings. Therefore, as I continued to explore the context as an ethnographer, I got to know the classroom practices in the two classroom settings and the private tuition one in the Maldives. The constant study and observation of the Maldivian education setting helped me progress and find more effective data which illuminated my field of enquiry. Thus, by discovering these I understood why the teachers did the things they did and, as an ethnographer, I opened my mind to understand the classroom practices and private tuition settings in the Maldives



*Having discussed the advantages of applying the ethnographic method as well as outlining what I studied using the method and the process followed, I now turn to present interview as social practice, which complements my research quite well, working alongside ethnography and fitting perfectly in a qualitative applied linguistics study such as mine.*

## The interview as social practice

Qualitative research has used interviews to “generate insights into matters as varied as cognitive processes in language learning...motivation...language proficiency and learner autonomy” (Talmy & Richards, 2011, p. 1). However, interview theory is not studied as readily or as thoroughly as it should be, and much less so as a social practice.

The interview as a construct is an immensely useful way of gathering data in applied linguistics. However, there are two vastly different ways to approach study of an interview: the interview as research instrument or the interview as social practice (Talmy, 2010). Interview as social practice or active interviews treat interviews not as sites for the excavation of information held by respondents, but as participation in social practices while interview as a research instrument takes the perspective on the interview as a neutral technology or research instrument (Talmy, 2010). Gubrium and Holstein (2003) differentiate between these two types of interviews. They compare what they call the active interview with conventional approaches by arguing that the latter privilege the *whats* of the interview, that is, the interview content, whereas active interviews are interested in both the *whats* and *hows*, that is, the content and the “interactional, narrative procedures of knowledge production” (p. 68).

Gubrium and Holstein (2003) have claimed that conceiving of the interview as a fundamentally social encounter rather than a conduit for accessing information means that the interview becomes “a site of, and occasion for, producing reportable knowledge”, (p. 68) that we need to be more aware that the nature of the social encounter in itself affects the knowledge that is produced in that co-constructed account. However, as a research instrument, interviews are seen as a resource for collecting or eliciting information: “you ask, they answer, and then you know”, (Hollway, 2005, p. 312). The data are reports of truths, facts and attitudes and beliefs of self-disclosing respondents.

These different perspectives are often confused in social sciences research, and, as such, can yield vastly different results than are intended or should be expected in certain studies. The interview is a collaborative achievement between two or more parties, performing identity and co-constructing themes of social categories. The viewing of an interview as a social practice helps to classify these speech events in more accurate ways (Talmy, 2011). Active interviews are a method of interview in which the interviewee is also asking questions and participating in equal measure with the interviewer. This is considered the ideal manner for an interview to be conducted in social practice settings, as this involves a much less informational and more casual manner of communication (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011).

Interviews are often dependent upon prior relationships in order to gather more or less information; people are more likely to confide in colleagues and friends than complete strangers. Interviews are a place where what is said is inextricably tied to where it is said, how it is said, and, importantly, to whom it is said (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). Closer confidantes can generate more data from interviews than strangers in a social practice setting. Prior relationships can help in developing rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Garton & Copland, 2010); this was evident from the interviews I conducted with Naomi, as seen in *Chapters Four* and *Six*.

Moreover, Pavlenko (2007) discusses the notion of an autobiographic narrative as data in applied linguistics; personal narratives are often the subject of interviews, and are the main way in which individuals share information about themselves with another which is a part of interview as social practice. In my experience in the field, I was able to gather such narratives from the participants within the three settings, as we became more acquainted. According to Pavlenko, this is a way participants open themselves up as friendly and sociable beings to others, and these narratives are often exchanged in order to gather information about the other. However, most of the time, the researcher's narratives never make it into the final research write up. Nevertheless, I used these narratives as there are important details to be included in the research within them, making the writing richer and the context more meaningful. In addition, applied linguistics benefits greatly from the "collection, analysis and representation of qualitative interviews" (Mann, 2011, p. 6). I also reminded myself to exercise certain parameters of sensitivity when reporting these interviews in a more reflective way.

In addition, I also became aware that interviews carry a great deal of significance within the canon of applied linguistics learning methods; interviews are an advantageous way to perform field research and define the range of different roles applied linguists can take on in their professional lives, “contextualizing their intellectual practices into a useful, everyday application” (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003, p. 27). The qualitative interview can link content with context when used as a social practice, revealing not only information about the interviewee, but the interviewer and their relationship with the other party also. Contextual issues become part of the conversation when used in an interview format (Clarke & Robertson, 2001). Examples of such issues are the place where the interview is held (the school hall, the private tuition home or the school compound), the time, the sound conditions or whether there are other people present during the interview.

### ***The place of interview within the study***

In choosing to use interviews in this study, I maintained awareness of their function as social practice to find out about the classroom practices and private tuition settings in the Maldives, I interviewed a range of participants: staff, teachers, students and parents. Four teachers were selected from the City School, and two from the Atoll School. As mentioned in the previous section, these teachers were selected by the school administrator or the HOD. One of these teachers volunteered to let me collect data from their tuition setting. The relatively small number of teachers interviewed was intentional as it allowed the researcher to gather relatively rich data and perform more sensitive analyses on the existing interviews than would be possible in studies that have greater numbers of informants.

In addition, I interviewed and had informal talks with students during school time, when they had a library period, when they were free or during the break. Sometimes students themselves came and sat near me and started conversations, while at other times, I got students to volunteer to come and talk with me in a more formal interview setting. In addition, I met three students at home in a private tuition setting, weekly over one and half months for approximately an hour each time. Connected with this, I interviewed the parents (to find out details of the child's life inside and outside of school and to see parents' interpretations of their child's learning at school and within the private tuition setting). Interviews were also conducted with some academics and the school

administrators; these interactions were generally a pleasant and meaningful experience. The students were a little more difficult, despite my attempts at explaining my purpose (I am doing a research study on the classroom practices, trying to understand how teachers teach, students learn etc.),. They probably put me in a role as an outsider, asking interesting questions that did not concern them or perhaps they just wanted to think about me in a different way. However, with time they accepted me in their circle of life and began to see me as someone they were familiar with and became more open with me in sharing their thoughts and feelings and we formed good relationships (Garton & Copland, 2010).

## **Data collection**

As stated earlier, I employed ethnographic methods to observe practices of the participants. Throughout the progression of this research, I had to deal with a range of data collection methods appropriate to contexts, settings, participants and tasks. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe this practice in their statement saying “ethnographers use many kinds of data collection techniques, so that data collected in one way can be used to cross-check the accuracy of data gathered in another way” (p. 48). This has been my aim; I have tried to build what Geertz (1973) refers to as a ‘thick description’ of the culture I have worked within, constructing a multi-layered account which reflects the experiences and understandings of both teachers and students as well as others who are salient to the study. Delamont (1992) also speaks of the importance of examining multiple perspectives, stating that, “observation alone is rarely desirable, and most studies benefit from multiple data collection strategies” (p. 6). In accordance with these commendations, the data collection techniques I exploited included observations, interviews, informal conversations, field notes (Sanjek, 1990), journal entries, documents, a blog and the Internet, as well as a collection of artefacts and photographs.

### ***Observations***

I considered this process to be my opportunity to both observe and experience the ‘culture’ developing amongst the teachers and their students. Geertz (1973) describes culture as a shared “imaginative universe within which members’ acts are signs” (p. 13). Van Maanen (2011) adds that the trick of ethnography is to sufficiently present the culture in an expressive way. Considering both of these ideas of culture, my goal as an

observer within the classrooms was to examine the acts of the teachers and students and to become aware of the actions and reactions within the setting. When researchers become part of the cultures that they describe, then the researcher and the participants interact together to produce the data (Charmaz, 1995). In convention with a statement made by LeCompte and Preissle (1993), I determined that “ethnographers must work in settings where behaviour occurs naturally; they must go to their participants” (p. 95). The settings of my observations were the classrooms of both schools and the private tuition session in the student’s home. Literature concerning the role of the ethnographic researcher says that several positions within the conception of observer can be taken. In one study, researchers took the role of an absorbed observer or ‘fly on the wall’ interacting relatively little with those observed (Thorne, 1993). In other studies, researchers have been described as those that “involve the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting” (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p. 40). According to Burns (2000), the purpose of observation is to create a dynamic picture to explain patterns, review complex and subtle interactions and seek relations. Like Thorne’s observer, I preferred to sit back in a detached position and observe what was happening, so that I did not intrude or take over.

It is also important to mention that there were many occasions when students and teachers and even office staff commented about my constant note-taking and asked me questions regarding that. Once a student came up to me and asked what I was writing and I told them I was noting down what was happening in the classroom. Then, they would try to sneak a look at my note book which I slowly closed, to which they would give a smile and walk away. Thrice, I was asked about my note-making by the teachers I observed and I explained to them that it was important that I did so. They remarked that “you write so fast without looking, Miss” (Some teachers at City School, June 2009).

## ***Interviews***

As mentioned earlier, studies that regard research interview as social practice treat the interview data as “conceptualized accounts of phenomena jointly produced by interviewer and interviewee” (Talmy, 2010, pp.139 -140). There were no prior questions written to touch upon in the interviews; although all of the comments were spontaneously generated over the course of the interview, they were based on the

research questions. The interviews were conducted in an informal manner in various places around the school, including the school staff room, the classroom or in school halls with the teachers. These informal interviews were recorded and notes were taken. Interviews were also conducted with the students using the same informal methods and they occurred in classrooms, school halls or in the compound. Once more, questions were created during the interview spontaneously while talking, or as a comment about an observation.

In addition to unplanned speaking, I arranged time for specific interviews with selected teachers by talking to the teacher and checking when they had free time - this was often during a free period, or sometimes in the minutes directly after the class. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the teachers. I also recorded the interviews of students and teachers in the private tuition setting and wrote down the details in case the recorder should fail. For each interview, I ended up with both a written and audio recording of the entire conversation, allowing for maximum absorption of the information exchanged in these conversations. Almost all the interviews were done in English, though there were times, the students felt comfortable to use Dhivehi terms in their conversations. For instance, when once they were asked about the lessons in the classroom, one student said: “*Noon Miss, abadhu abadhu exams ah practice!*” [No, Miss, we need to always practise for the exam].

Difficulties inherent to the practice of collecting data through interviews involved issues such as identifying a proper research site to interview (for example, outside the school hall, when no one was around, in an empty classroom or the supervisors’ room), being sensitive to the anxieties of the participants and being as flexible as possible to accommodate their concerns (Hobbs & Kubanyiova, 2008). I attempted to accomplish this through lowering the level of time commitment and pressure placed on the participants; keeping the interviews as informal and social as possible; as well as to be happy around people and in their everyday lives. Finally, by ‘activating’ the subject ‘behind’ the respondent, I was able to transform the interviewees from a ‘passive vessel of answers’ to someone who “not only holds facts and details of experience, but in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms the facts and details” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 70). For instance, Kumar and Mr Lin shared with me, as indicated in *Chapter Six*, their private tuition experiences by displaying an acute appreciation that they were negotiating some

delicate topic with me, and also showed me that they were not doing so with just anyone;

*I am ready to share this only because it is you Miss. Ask away. (Kumar)*

*Of course, since it's you, I can tell you. Feel free to ask anything. (Mr. Lin)*

### ***Field notes and journal entries***

My field notes included notes from teacher observations, subject committee meetings, staff meetings, informal meetings in the staff room, and descriptions of other information or experiences that seemed potentially relevant to my research. I also kept a researcher journal where I jotted down things that came up. I recorded the notes in a notebook. These notes were later expanded in password-protected computer files without specific identifying information. Everyone has their own way of writing field notes (Sanjek, 1990). I wrote mine as a chat, as though I was telling someone about a meeting or observation. I was particularly concerned with expanding and writing the notes more fully “while the memory is still fresh enough” (Delamont, 1992, p. 54). Ultimately, my field notes served as records of my perceptions of what took place at a given time, in a given situation. Geertz (1973) describes field notes as ‘inscriptions’ of social life and discourse, explaining that “the ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse, he writes it down. In doing so, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account which exists in its inscription and can be re-consulted” (p. 19). The field notes which I constructed, particularly as I gained experience and moved toward the end of my study were specifically written with this purpose.

### ***Document analysis***

In addition to the above mentioned techniques, I also made use of various documents in answering the guiding questions. Merriam (1998) defines documents as any form of data not gathered through interviews or observations. These documents added additional insight or information to my study. In his typical study of a school principal, Wolcott (1978) examined the contents of the *Teacher's Handbook*, documented the type and frequency of materials distributed by the school's office staff, perused the school's bulletin boards, and reviewed letters and memos written by the principal. Similar to

Wolcott, I used work descriptions, annual reports, memos, school records, correspondence, informational brochures, teaching materials, newsletters, student note books, examination papers, lesson plans, worksheets and many other kinds of written documents. These documents provided background information to the practice sites, additional context for the social settings and became potentially good sources of rich data. Along with observation and interviewing, document analysis helped verify the data provided by the participants. This redundancy helped to “triangulate” the data, which is a method of ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of the data.

### ***Internet and blog***

Using email, websites, blogging, and Facebook, I was able to make use of this range of electronic tools to collect information. Blogging and the other social media tools provided me with the opportunity to participate and engage with people. By engaging with this range of media, I was able to create publicly accessible texts. I was also able to keep a record of the every day events in the field by updating the blog. My supervisors read and commented on the blog and gave me direction on what should be done further with regard to my research.

In addition, I was able to find information about private tuition in the Maldives through online news sites in the Maldives: the ‘Haveeru online’ and ‘Haama Daily’, to name a few. In addition, through frequent chats with my colleagues and students on Facebook, I was able to talk to them about private tuition practices and get their invaluable insights.

### ***Photographs***

I decided on ethnographic photography as factual evidence as it not only provided proof of having been there but also assisted in the recall of what it actually looked like. By intermixing text and photographs, I was able to reflect Malinowski’s famous observation, how “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (Malinowski, 1922, as cited in Gobo, 2011, p.18). According to Silverman (2011), photographs are generally meant to play a secondary role, supporting sources of information in ethnographic texts. Nugent (2007) makes an interesting observation about how anthropological photography “‘carries others’ histories with it’” (Nugent, 2007, p. 61). Therefore, the use of photographs from the City School, Atoll



School and the private tuition settings, enabled me to capture the world inhabited by the participants and helped me to seek to reflect the worlds they lived in.

## Selecting the sites

As is apparent, this study was motivated by my educational background, work experience and research interest. The access to research sites was a very important practical matter in conducting this ethnographic study. Two schools were chosen as sites of secondary English classrooms: one school was situated on the capital island (City School) and one on a rural island (Atoll School). Both were doing well in the end of year secondary examinations and, hence, were providing quality education. However, the island school was performing much better than the one in the capital, so I felt that important lessons could be learnt from them both.

The City School was a very convenient choice for me and I readily gained admittance to the settings there, making relatively positive relationships between the research site and myself as a researcher. This I saw as promoting the smooth conduct of research. In addition, the selection of my research sites came after a careful thinking process. For example, I had good rapport and had established wonderful relationships with many other secondary schools in the capital and the atolls too and, before I embarked on my studies, I had been communicating with them about how I wanted to come and see how things are done at their schools. However, considering the financial implications of going to the atolls and the fact that the City School is in my home town, I chose the school in the city. Still, things did not go entirely accordingly to plan. As I prepared for my data collection while in New Zealand, my family moved to Sri Lanka, leaving me worried about where I could go and live when I went to the Maldives for my data collection. I had to communicate with family and friends in the Maldives to find a place for rent in Male', which was not an easy task. Soon, to my relief, my brother arranged for me to stay at my sister-in law's place.

Just before I left New Zealand for my data collection, I wrote to the principal of the City School and also spoke with her over the phone about my reasons for selecting the City School for my data collection. She was very willing and enthusiastic and was ready to welcome me with open arms. I also communicated with some supervisors and teachers

at the City School who were keen to be of help when I arrived. Finally, I arrived at the City School and was given a warm welcome.

While I was doing observations in the City School, I was approached by a former colleague and a friend, requesting me to go to some atoll schools to help them by doing some observations. It would be a five-day trip and all the expenses were to be covered by the party. So, I thought it would be a good break for me and, in addition, it would also be a good opportunity for me to see schools on another atoll. On top of all, it was going to be my first time on that particular Atoll so it seemed to be an exciting adventure for me. So, I tagged along with them. It was a very good experience for me and the islands themselves were amazing. I was in awe of the beauty of the natural environment, the friendliness of the people, the wonderful island culture; I was completely mesmerised. The secondary schools that I observed in these islands were very different to the one I was studying in the capital; the management, the heads, the teachers, the parents and the students too. Generally, schools in the islands have lesser resources than schools in the capital and so I was surprised at how well most of these schools were doing and what they were achieving educationally. It left me wondering why I had never thought of stopping over in this part of the archipelago. Anyway, I ended up blogging about my splendid journey on my research blog and this caught the attention of my supervisors who thought I should get back to one of the island schools and conduct observations and discussions, reflecting my work in the City School. Therefore, I contacted my friends in the Atoll School and got informed consent and was ready to embark on that part of my journey as described in *Chapter Five*.

## **My role as a researcher**

At the beginning of the research, I strongly identified as a teacher. I had ten years of English language teaching experience mostly in secondary schools. I, thus, identified essentially, as mentioned in *Chapter One*, as a teacher. In addition, the teachers I interviewed and observed were effectively, from my point of view, colleagues in the sense that they were teaching the same subject and students of the same age group, very similar to lessons and students I had taught in the past. In this sense, I saw myself as an *insider*, able to immediately take an emic perspective with the teachers in the school.

Before the data-gathering stage began, I was initially concerned that my insider status with the teachers may prevent me from analytically looking at the site and its context, all of which were very familiar to me. My increasing investment in the student and teacher comments and my identification with the teachers' daily routines provided the analysis presented in the thesis.

By situating myself physically in the classroom at a student's desk at the back of the rooms, I was, in some sense, aligned with the students, almost becoming a participant myself, and thus had an insider status. Students included me in their class, as my presence had become an ordinary fixture. For instance, if the teacher handed out papers the students would pass me a copy.

My supervisors advised me to keep observing looking for unfamiliarity. I was so familiar with these classrooms that sometimes I may have failed to see things that I should notice. Normally, as a teacher, I had been accustomed to standing at the front and talking about something while the students sat back and listened to me. Here, I was looking at the students from behind and watching the teacher act out the play. It was quite interesting to notice things that I would not have thought of noticing and pondering on while I was teaching:

The bored student passing notes to the neighbour. The neighbour replying back. Scribbling on a piece of paper without giving any interest to the teacher. The constant doodling on the notebooks they keep to draw, sketch and scribble. The light tapping of the pencils on the desks. (Journal entry, April, 2009)

### ***My role as a researcher in interview as social practice***

In my role as a researcher in this study, I was conscious of the need to remain reliable and ethical throughout. In this type of interview as social practice, I treated the interviews as "a site for investigation itself" (Talmy, 2010, p. 139). I saw that the interview data was jointly produced by myself and the interviewees and was mindful of the reflexive recognition that data are produced jointly (Talmy, 2010).

While I inhabited the role of the researcher for the duration of my field work, I, on occasion, simultaneously inhabited other roles due to the familiarity with the settings and the participants. In the context of interviewing at the City School in which I had worked preceding my research, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee

was perpetually very familiar. The prior relationships that I had with some teachers and administrators contributed a lot in developing rapport for the interviews which led me to generate data easily (Garton & Copland, 2010; Rapley, 2004; Roulston, Baker, & Liljestrom, 2001) because it drew on the role of co-worker or colleague like, for example, the relationship I have with the principal and the teachers of the City School. In addition, because of my “knowledge and understanding regarding the topic of inquiry”, I was able to lead the teachers to produce certain types of talk which were useful for my study (Roulston et al., 2001, p. 748).

As indicated earlier, in terms of relationships, I knew some teachers like Naomi and Mr. Lin who I interviewed in classroom settings and private tuition settings as a friend and a colleague and, in the past, I had also worked as their supervisor. In other words, I had a range of relationships with the interviewees and was not meeting most of them for the first time in the research interview settings. These prior relationships are also called “acquaintance interviews” (Garton & Copland, 2010, p. 535), and allowed me to access resources that may not have been possible in more traditional interviews (Garton & Copland, 2010). For instance, Naomi shared with me her daily lesson plan books and notes she made and also the note book she carried for tuition and discussed what and how she planned to teach in the tuition settings on a particular day very freely.

Further, as mentioned earlier, with my research being an ethnographic study, I immersed myself in the culture of the school in which I was interviewing, and so my presence as an insider made interviewing very simple to accomplish. However, in some instances, since I had been the supervisor of the teacher I interviewed, this made it more complex as sometimes this role could have a negative effect. For example, if the teachers perceived me in this role, they might feel inhibited to share some views with me as supervisors are part of the senior management team within the school. In the Atoll School, I was not a complete stranger as I knew the heads of the school. However, in complete contrast, in some cases, I took up the role of stranger. This was particularly the case when observing private tuition settings. I visited a student’s home, a place where I had never been before, and I also spoke with the parents who were complete strangers to me at first. However, I built good relationships with teachers, students and parents within all the settings as a result of the frequent visits I made there throughout the research process (Garton & Copland, 2010). For example, initially during the first visits to the private tuition settings, the students’ home, both the parents and the

students were shy and said only a few words. However, as my visits became regular, the students began to share their daily school issues with me and talked to me openly about various things.

A significant advantage to my study is “starting out with a normal role within the environment in which [I] work” (Holliday, 2007, p. 24) and using the interview as social practice alongside ethnography enabled me to produce rich data. As I had already worked at the City School, the pre-existing social routine and reality in which I operated permitted wider movement within the environment, as well as being able to behave in a manner characteristic of me personally even within my role as a researcher. However, I tried to distance myself from thinking like a teacher or supervisor and I constantly reminded myself that I was a researcher looking at the teacher or pupil culture or subcultures, school ethos, teaching methods and teacher-pupil relations. Also, I was inside the classrooms, sitting at the back and taking down notes constantly as seen in *Chapters Four and Five*. On the other hand, the only difference that I experienced in the Atoll School was that I had not worked there before and the administration and teachers were not closely known; however, the research went quite similarly as it did in the City School.

## **Data analysis**

Analysis was on-going throughout the observation sessions. Data was reviewed both in terms of the most common emerging themes, and those themes that were more narrowly represented. Manual coding of the expanded notes was done, including the emergent themes and categories. The aim of the analysis was to gain deeper understanding (Miles & Huberman, 1984) of the situations under observation and to provide reasonable explanation.

A number of factors were involved in analysing the interview data, determining the nature of the interview as social practice. By using interview as social practice as the foundation, attention was paid to both the practical *hows* and the substantive *whats* of interviewing in reporting the results for the co-construction of the meaning which has significant implication for data analysis (Talmy, 2010). In this respect, Holstein and Gubrium’s (2003) active interviews align with interview as social practice where

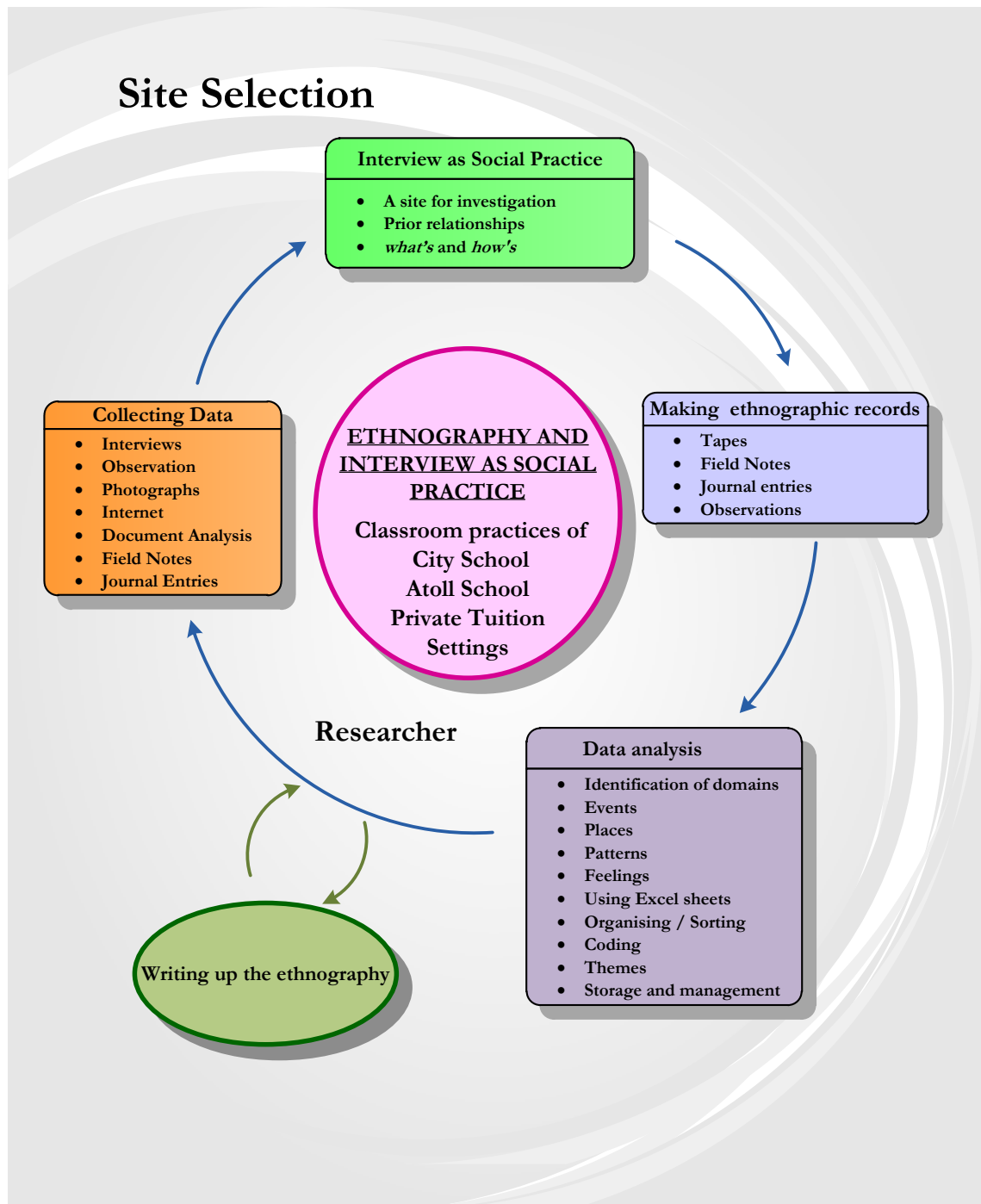
interviewers are interested in the content as well as the “interactional [and] narrative procedures of knowledge production” (p.68).

Also, the voices and opinions of the interviewees were considered as social action, the manner in which the interviewee spoke, their mood, and gesture and other actions. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee was also studied and used as context for examination of the aforementioned attributes. These factors were written out qualitatively, identifying extracts that were significant in some way (Borg, 2001). I recorded instances, for example, when I learned something new about the interviewee, where plans were made for future interviews/social situations, and when events that occurred in the interviewee's presence were discussed.

Many analytical approaches can be adopted for the analysis of research interviews. However, depending on the design of an ethnographic study and its scope, its research questions and theoretical framework, the analysis of interviews as social practice implicated some form of ‘micro-analysis’ (Talmy, 2010, p.140). Detailed ethnographic “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) were analysed, focusing on reflection of the interviews and how they were used as communication tools in social situations. As Talmy (2011) argued, the analysis of interviews as social practice “entails an ontological and epistemological shift” (p.140) away from enquiries into “what interviewees ‘really’ think, feel, or believe” (p.4).

## **Writing the ethnography**

Finally, writing up the ethnographic account, on the basis of the field notes, journal entries observation notes and interview details made earlier was the next step in the process. I evaluated everything, including interpretations of the observations and interviews conducted as well as the documents sighted, avoiding judgement. The aim was to figure out how all the different perspectives within Maldivian educational settings make sense when engaged together. The whole methodological process that I applied is summarised in the diagram below (Figure 7).



**Figure 7:** Methodological processes

## **Transcription**

I transcribed all the audio-recorded interviews using the following conventions.

.,? Conventions of punctuation have been used to make the transcription readable.

- (...) Indicates a gap in the data (e.g. pauses)
- (N.I.3) N indicates initial of the name of speaker, I indicates it is an interview and the number indicates the number of the interview
- (N.O.4) O indicates observation
- (R. FBD) R stands for the initial of the name of person. FBD, for Facebook Discussion
- [standing] Indicates researcher's comments relating to gestures, gazes, posture of the interviewees

*Aadhey* (come) Italics indicate words in another language other than Dhivehi. The word in the brackets is the translation.

Transcription of interviews was relatively easy as there were only two people speaking (the interviewer and the research participant) and a word-for-word transcription was made where possible. I also noted down other things like gestures, gazes, posture, actions and activities of the interviewees.

## ***Pseudonyms***

Pseudonyms are important for permanent protection of participants' identities. Delamont (2002) provides a wide-ranging argument about the choice of pseudonyms and identifies that permitting people to choose their own may not always be appropriate. Therefore, I chose the pseudonyms myself including the names Maya, Naomi, Gopal, Mr Lin, Shauna, Azza among others.

*These characters will be introduced in the next three chapters, as this thesis moves from the methodology to findings. The three chosen settings, namely- the City School, the Atoll School and the private tuition settings are examined separately in the following three chapters, drawing on the data gathered through ethnographic methods and interview as social practice illustrated in this chapter.*



# CHAPTER FOUR

## Back to School in the Capital City



Source: Haval, 2011 <http://www.worldofstock.com/stock-photos/TAN1254.php>

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Back to School in the Capital City

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### Journal Entry, January 16, 2009

Walking through the gates of the school, I feel *nostalgic*. The familiarity welcomes me back. I studied there myself for ten years and worked there all my life until I left for further study. It is the place where I spent most of my childhood and adulthood. I feel the sense of belonging. Almost nothing has changed; the darkish green and white painted walls look fresh, newly painted I suppose. Climbing the few steps and standing in the lobby for a few minutes reminded me so much of my past; as a student, when we could only see a glimpse of the lobby during rainy days as these were the only times we were allowed to pass through that way and then as a teacher, when we used to stop and sign the register. Instead of the arm chairs that were there before, there are some sofas and new single chairs with a coffee table in front of them. The lobby looks more presentable and friendly now.

I walk forward to the right side and am greeted with the beaming smiles of my colleagues. I am happy to see them and they me. They are filled with remarks and questions; you look so thin! (This is the way most of us are greeted in this part of the world). Am I back for good? Are my studies over? When did you come? And ... etc etc. I spend a few minutes there and walk towards the supervisors' room. On my way, I observe that the school canteen has been extended and there is a variety of food available. I remind myself that I am going to have a taste of Maldivian short eats (snacks) later today. From the school canteen!!! I am already starving, craving them....after a long time!!!

I enter the supervisors' room and everyone is happy to see me. We exchange greetings. They are busy as it is the start of the day. We all go outside to the compound. I see the vision of the school for the year 2000 boldly written on the wall in dark green: EXCELLENCE! Next to it stands the flag of the school waving proudly in green and white along with the Maldivian flag. The

supervisors, smart and colourfully dressed, scatter themselves and walk in different directions towards their specified classrooms to see if the teachers are in class on time at the start of the day. The teachers, too donned in their best attire, march hurriedly into their respective classes, some carrying heavy loads of books.

## **The City School**

The City School is the oldest girls' secondary school in the Maldives that provides the Ordinary Level curriculum. At the end of three years of learning, the students sit the Cambridge Ordinary Level Examinations, the UK IGCSE Examinations and the Maldivian Senior Secondary Examinations. It is an English medium school that teaches three streams: Arts, Science and Business. Apart from these subjects, Dhivehi and Islam are also taught. The school population is made up of approximately 1500 students of average age between 13 to 16 years and 137 teachers, both foreign and local. The average class size is 30 students. The school has real potential and it has made massive strides in its quest to be a leading school in Maldives. This can be seen by the number of students who have achieved success in the final school examinations.

A number of extracurricular activities are offered by the school and are conducted through different clubs, such as the Environment Club, the Maths Club, the English Association, and the Dhivehi Association to name a few. Students, along with the help from the teachers, organise and run the club activities. Apart from these activities, students also participate in the Cadet Corps, the School Brass Band and the Girl Guides.

The physical environment of the school is superb with well-appointed classrooms. It has laboratories for the sciences, an art room, audio-visual room and a library. The school library has books of various genres, videos as well as cd roms.

Within each classroom, the blackboard remains a key tool for teaching; the students each have a desk and a chair and the classroom walls look white and bare,. Two ceiling fans in each move the air.

The management team consists of the head, and three skilled deputy principals along with a number of leading teachers. The head is an exceptionally experienced educator. The school management team is very enthusiastic and meticulous and meets with the

heads of departments at least once a month to ensure the smooth running of the department.

Other aspects of the system also contribute to a strong code of conformity within the student body. All the students are required to wear white uniforms with green ties. Girls with long hair have to wear it neatly braided. No make-up, personal jewellery or ornaments are allowed.

6.50 a.m. Oh, the glorious bell.

Most students do not arrive until about 7.00 a.m. They come to school alone or on foot or with their parents by car or taxi. On arrival in the classroom, the students make their way to their desk. If their classroom teacher is there, then they pay respect to them first through a greeting. If their teacher is not so strict, then they will probably chat with their friends or read a book. However, if the students are more diligent, then they might read a school book or revise for an examination. The school bell rings at 7.00 a.m. which means students should all go and line up outside the classroom to listen to the Quran recitation before the start of the day, followed by the school song.



**Figure 8** Students and teachers stand outside the classrooms for morning assembly

Before the first lesson starts, the students will have reading time with their classroom teachers. The teacher might also give them a talk on ethics may prepare them for an examination by getting them all to read aloud from their school book. Just before this,

the teacher will check the class attendance. After 7.25a.m., the lessons run according to the timetable.

The school employs local and expatriate teachers from countries like India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The teachers are all university trained and professional. I observed that there are more local teachers at present, than before. Local staff are all friendly and, at least in senior positions, have English language skills. Out of the teachers for my research, I focused only on English language teachers. English language teachers at the school have a teaching load of three classes, conducting six 35 minute English lessons per week per class. Among the teachers that I was able to talk with and observe, there were two expatriates and two local teachers.

### ***The teachers***

Naomi, an expatriate teacher from a neighbouring country was a short, pleasant lady. She always wore a welcoming smile on her face. She was mostly formally dressed when she attended school. Naomi thought of coming to teach in the Maldives because of the high salary offered to expatriate teachers compared to what they earned at home. Naomi felt that the main objective of the school was to facilitate students to pass the Cambridge GCE Ordinary Level examination. However, personally she felt that it was not only passing the exam that is most important but “mastering the skills of the language, learning to attempt comprehension questions, to read and understand, to learn to speak in the language fluently and to know how to write essays creatively” (N.I.3).

Gopal was a 48-year-old tall, smart man, born and raised in India. Gopal received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and joined a school in India in 1983 as a secondary teacher. After teaching in three secondary schools, Gopal obtained a Master’s degree in English. After that, he continued his teaching at the secondary school until he came to the Maldives and joined the City School in 2006 as an English language teacher. Gopal explained he believes that learning cannot occur successfully without students feeling good about themselves and about their ability to learn. This, he believes, requires teacher-student relationship building: “teacher needs to talk to students, make time to listen when students come with problems, and encourage students who don’t believe that they can achieve in life, so I spend a few minutes of my time to talk to them” (G.I.1).

Salma is a local graduate who has been teaching for almost three years. She did her BA in teaching in the Faculty of Education, Maldives. She is a very quiet, helpful person who is nice to her students and fellow staff. Salma chose to become a teacher because, “I feel that being a teacher is good, we can share knowledge, be with children and it is fun. Also, we get a reasonable salary and holidays” (S.I.1).

Referring to teaching in the City School, Salma said, “I like teaching in this school. I am getting my first experience as a teacher here, the senior teachers are very helpful and supportive and I have learnt a lot here: (S.I.1).

Similar to Salma, Maha is also a graduate from the Faculty of Education, Maldives. She had been teaching at the school for three years. Maha also took up teaching as she feels it is a good job for a woman, with a good salary and generous annual leave.

Maha informed me she was happy working in the school and helped with other activities as well. She enjoyed teaching though she sometimes got frustrated when she did not have enough time to do creative work with students as she used to do when she did her training:

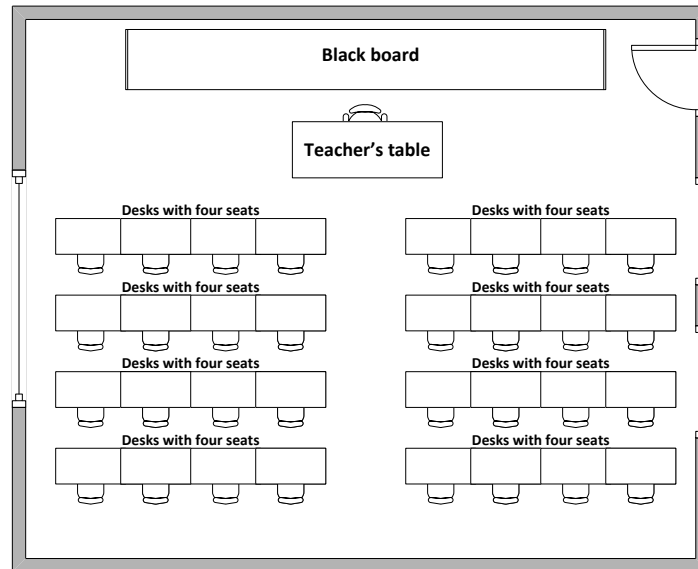
When we did our practicum, we made a lot of teaching aids. But now, we hardly have time to do anything as such. With lots of books to mark, extra activities to attend to and holding extra classes, there is no time. We need to follow the curriculum strictly and try to complete the tasks on time. Anyway, that is ok. But sometimes we do interesting lessons as I am teaching the grade eights, we do fun stuff. (M.I.1)

## **School structure and resources**

### ***The classroom, where the learning takes place***

When entering the classroom and even from outside, one can see the entire room clearly. The classrooms are well-kept and clean most days. The walls are bare except for a cleaning chart and the class timetable stuck near the black board suggests order, conformity as well as a lack of privacy. Charts and posters are not placed on the walls and even if there are, they are only temporary as they need to be removed when the students do examinations and unit tests.

The students' desks are arranged in four rows on either side, with an aisle in the middle separating the rows. The desks provide quite a bit of room. The students can keep their books inside their desks. All students keep their bags on their chair when seated.



**Figure 9:** The floor plan of the classroom

In front of the students' desks is the teacher's table and chair and behind it on the wall is the blackboard. The classrooms have windows for air and light to come in. Most old classrooms have half open walls near the entrance, and people who walk that way can see what is happening in the class.





**Figure 10:** Classrooms with half open walls.

However, in the more recently constructed buildings, the rooms have doors which can be kept closed. The classrooms have four walls, though usually during teaching hours the rooms are always kept open.



**Figure 11:** A recently constructed classroom.



Sometimes, when students walk near other classrooms on their way to toilet or elsewhere, they stop and say hello or pass a note to their friends. As the entrances are open, the noises from the classrooms are heard in the neighbouring classes.

### ***Audio-visual aids***

In terms of resources, the school has equipment such as televisions which are used more frequently now than in the past. Students get opportunities to watch movies appropriate to their lessons and do activities while-watching. Students look forward to these types of tasks and contribute very well to these lessons.

As the students need to practise listening comprehension, they are taken to the audio visual room or sometimes a tape recorder is brought to the classroom to develop those skills. However, it is the voice of the teacher that students listen to most of the time.

### ***'We never really use the text book'***

Text books are prescribed by Cambridge International and the schools include them in the book lists every year for each grade. Students have to buy them before the school begins. However, the text books are hardly used. "We never really use the text book." (N.I.2). According to the students and parents, text books are either at home collecting dust or inside a cupboard at the school and rarely opened. The students use the resources located by the school instead.

### ***Activities and worksheets used in the classroom***

The head of the department prepares work sheets and sometimes gets the help of the teachers. Worksheets are either downloaded from the Internet (sometimes adapted) and photocopied for all students or sometimes photocopied from a book or magazine and adapted. Worksheets come in different forms. Grammar worksheets sometimes consist of notes followed by some gap filling or individual blank-filling sentences. Comprehension worksheets have a passage and variety of questions following. Sometimes, the lesson for the whole week is based on a theme. For example, the theme 'Heroes' was focused on for a whole week and the students did grammar, comprehension and vocabulary based on that. It is important to point out that, most of the time; the students enjoy these lessons based on themes. The teachers also like the idea of following thematic activities.

During co-ordination meetings, the method of delivery (whether it be in pairs, groups, pre-reading tasks, while-reading tasks etc) is not discussed greatly, therefore, most teachers do not spend time in class to make these lessons enjoyable for the students. Worksheets are printed on the school printer and the teachers collect them. All papers for the week are stapled and ready. Most of the time, the comprehension exercises, grammar, writing and vocabulary are prepared and attached together. In the first lesson of the week, teachers distribute the packs to the students who keep using them throughout the week.

The teachers do not get students to do brainstorming activities or pre-reading or while-reading activities. Their main concern is to see the students complete the tasks on time, as finishing the work on time is seen as helping prepare students for examination conditions. Nevertheless, there are some teachers who make an effort to make such lessons interesting, especially the young local teachers who teach the lower grades. The teachers have the answer key to the worksheets and so once the students complete the comprehension by writing the answers on their note books, teachers either go through the answers in the class or collect the books for marking.

## **What the teachers do**

### ***Teachers are responsible for...***

Teachers are seen as someone who provided knowledge to the students as well as people who show values and guide the children to live a proper life in society. The students see the teachers as people who educate them and as good role models:

I expect the teacher to know everything.

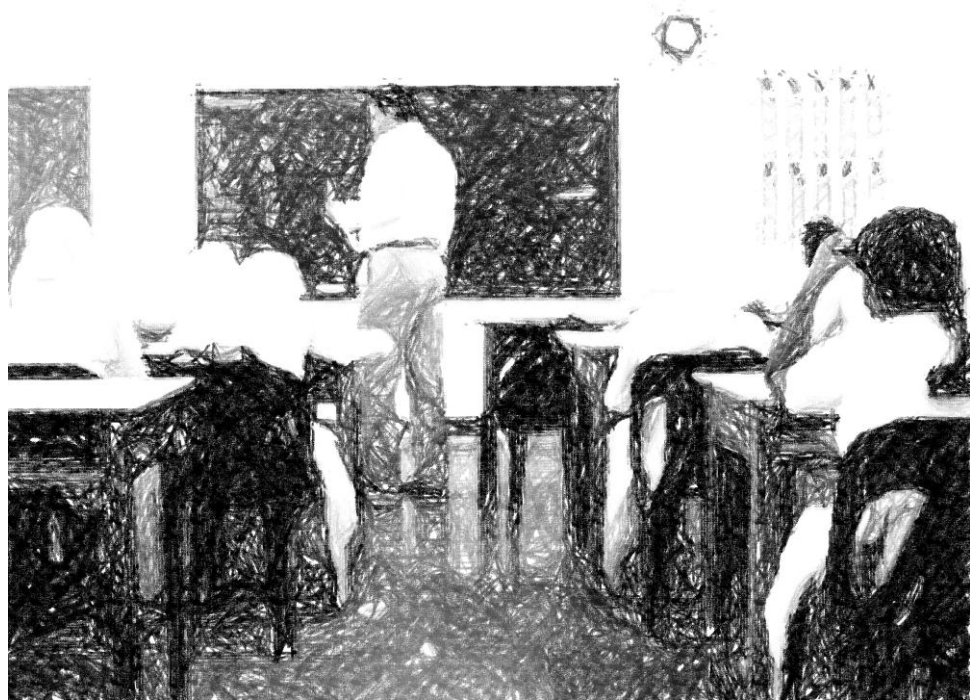
Miss should know the subject very well. I want to learn everything I can from Miss. I see her as a good person. My parents tell me that we need to obey the teachers and listen to them and learn from them.

The role of the teachers in the school depends on the roles set by the management of the school. The school principal has given the HOD the autonomy to make all the decisions on how English is taught at the school. Nevertheless, the principal meets with the HOD occasionally and gets updates on the progress of the department and also makes sure to give her input too. The HOD is free to do what she considers best. Concerning the role

of teachers and students in the classroom, I observed that the teacher was mainly the model, class organiser and class controller. Children were usually repeating individually or chorally after the teacher, answering the teachers' questions or responding to the instructions s/he gave. Individual work in their notebooks or worksheets was a general pattern. As there were many students in the classes, the most common interaction patterns were whole-group and individual work, with little pair or group work.

### ***'Now students, less noise, more work!'***

In the classrooms that I observed, *most* of the lessons were teacher-centred or traditional; the teacher controlled all the tasks: discussions, lectures, thinking, asking, and deciding among many others. The power and the responsibility all lay on the shoulders of the teachers themselves. In a typical classroom, while the students sat in rows with an aisle in the centre and the teacher stood in front of the class facing the students, the teacher went on with his or her explanation of the lesson.



**Figure 12:** Teacher in front of the students

Sometimes, the teacher would write on the board while explaining or at other times would instruct the students to look at the worksheets or notes in front of them. So basically, the teacher talked and the students listened. The students sat very quietly without making much noise. On occasion, students would raise their hands to ask

questions or sometimes they spoke together and there would be a lot of noise and the teacher would quickly advise them to be quiet:

*“Now students, less noise and more work.” (G.O.2)*

Classroom noise was not encouraged, as this would show the teacher’s inability to control the class. The students were expected to sit, listen to the teacher and do their work very quietly. The students were probably bored or even frustrated by the English teacher droning on about the ‘rules’ of English and all the exceptions to those rules.

However, there were rare occasions where teachers sat students in groups and made them do group work. As each lesson was thirty five minutes long, it was not plausible for teachers to get students to do a lot of group work as can be seen from this account of an interview with Gopal:

As usual, I joined Gopal in the staff room. There were not many teachers in the room. At the table Gopal was sitting, he was by himself with a tower of books in front of him. He was marking books. While doing so, he would talk to me informally. However, he would not start a conversation unless I did so. That day, I asked him about why they did not give group work. He thought for a little while, looking away from the book, and said:

*The students are regularly sitting in rows and when they are asked to sit in groups they tend to make a big noise...dragging of chairs. Moving places...Talking at the same time and a lot of time is wasted.*

Can’t you make them do it silently? I asked him

Gopal [smiling] replied, again looking away from the books he was marking;

*I don’t think it is a good idea Miss, I think it is best to keep them seated the way they are...[laughs a little] and also the other classes will get disturbed too and the girls, you know them Miss...*

Gopal returned to marking his books and there was complete silence for a while. He closed the book and I kept writing in my journal. Gopal stood up with the stack of books and turned around and left them on the shelf behind him and

returned back to his seat next to me. Then, he took a deep breath and sat straight on his chair and told me:

*Ab! Excuse me miss, the timetable has a slight change. Can I have your copy please, I will do the corrections.*

I flipped the pages of my journal and went to the last page of my book and slipped out the timetable from it and handed it over to Gopal who he made the changes with his pencil. I thanked him and wanted to continue the talk.

*So Sir, (I called him Sir, as he called me Miss) that means [continuing our talk on group work]*

*Does that mean, that you cannot ever do work with the children in groups?*

*Well, it is safer not to and we have lots of work to complete before the week ends..*

We continued talking for a few more minutes and since it was time for the bell, I thanked Gopal for his time and stood up. Gopal also stood up and smiled and we left the staff room in opposite directions. (G.I.3)

Like Gopal, during the period of observation, the teachers had to complete the work set for that week before the end of the week, therefore, they made a point not to waste any time doing extra things like grouping and pairing. Teachers' preferred students to do individual work in a manner they saw as effective, which meant completing the set tasks.

The teachers also felt that students did not do well individually when they were put into groups and it was good in terms of classroom management:

'Why don't you give group or pair work?' I asked at one instance. The teachers struggled and said

The students who always do good work individually do it well even in the groups. The others just sit and disturb their friends, chat or disrupt the class. So, I feel it is best to get students to do individual work most of the time. At least they will learn something. (S.I.1)

I don't encourage group work. They take advantage of it and play around. Disturb, shout and do not concentrate on the work and waste their time talking till the bell rings. (M.I.1)

### ***Sitting silently, listening to the teacher***

While the students listen, the teacher sometimes writes on the board while giving explanations. It is the norm in the Maldivian classrooms; students sit silently and listen to the teacher without making a noise. Therefore, most of these lessons are teacher-centred rather than learner-centred and the teacher expects the students to listen to them very attentively, in silence. It is the custom in the Maldivian context for teachers to have a very formal relationship with students; therefore, teachers are very strict when dealing with day-to-day tasks in the classroom.

One typical day, I was speaking to the students during the interval. Some students from the class I was observing saw me standing near the school hall and came running to me. They were excited to see me. They were giggling and commenting on my hair while drinking juice from bottles. I saw a couple of chairs nearby and we sat on them. They kept asking me when I would leave, how long I would be there and so on. One of the students began to share what she feels about the teacher and this opened doors for others to be more open. They looked to both sides and got a bit closer to me and kept whispering:

*“Some of us feel very left out and unwilling to learn from Miss. Miss is very angry.*

*She doesn't even smile.” (S.I.2)*

*Then they looked at each other and some of them put a finger on their lips and said to bush and told me ‘Miss nubunaathi’ [don't tell miss].*

Chalk and talk methods have always been adopted in the classrooms which are both boring and hinder children's interaction as one student confided,

“We always had to sit and look at the board and was told not to talk. It was so boring. Same thing every day.”(S.I.2).



**Figure 13:** Chalk and talk method of teaching.

I also observed extensive teacher talk, repetition, lecturing, note-taking, writing and few interactive activities and a lack of individual attention were common strategies used in the classrooms.

According to most of the teachers, group work and pair work were not very much encouraged as the teachers did not want the class to be noisy and disruptive which would show their lack of class control. They also expressed concerns about the noise disturbing other classes because of the classroom structure.

Another reason many teachers gave for favouring a teacher-fronted style was the structural factors of the classroom. The traditional arrangement of desks and chairs played a major role in the teachers' choices of approach in the classroom: the furniture being arranged in a formal setting welcomes a more traditional form of teaching with the teacher standing in front of the students sitting in rows. Another factor seemed to be time. As each lesson is 35 minutes, it was very important for the teacher to complete the set task within the time frame. So, instead of getting the students to interact, it was seen as the best thing for the teacher to manage the classroom efficiently and effectively, staying in control of the focus of student work.

## ***Not enough teaching time***

English lessons are divided into seven periods a week. There are 4 single period lessons of 35 minutes each, one double period of 70 minutes and one period was allocated for library.

Each lesson I observed was 35 minutes long and teachers were expected to do a grammar lesson, comprehension passage, essay writing or worksheets within this time frame. Usually, the first few minutes of the lesson were taken to greet and get students settled. The teachers would then instruct the students to get their note books out and if it was a grammar lesson, they would write the heading on the board and give an explanation of the topic followed by notes and practice exercises. If the work was not completed during that period, the teacher would sometimes get the students to complete the task at home. If not, the students would be told that the lesson would be continued the next day.

Teachers felt the need to complete the tasks on time otherwise they would need to drag the lesson into the following week. According to some teachers, the teaching time was not enough for them to complete the weekly lessons:

“We did not have time to discuss the lesson properly sometimes, as the time is not enough.” (S.I.2)

“I do not have time to explain the lesson so I ask the students to read by themselves quickly and do the work or else the work is not completed that week.” (G.I.3)

The short period of time allowed for lessons was also a deterrent for the teachers to get students learning in groups and pairs, as they saw it was taking a lot of time settling students which would again waste a lot of teaching time.

## ***Classroom management***

Classroom management was not much of a problem for teachers. The way the students were seated did not require much further supervision. The fact that the students sat in rows made it easier for teachers to see from afar whether the students were paying attention or not. As mentioned before, students were quiet most of the time and sat patiently while the teacher was standing in front of the class talking.





*Figure 14:* Students sitting quietly, passively

### ***Curriculum, syllabus and learning materials***

The syllabus was put together along with a scheme of work after carefully going through the objectives and aims of the curriculum. From my own informal discussions with the HOD and the supervisors, I gathered that the syllabus was organised as a three year programme where the work was distributed over the period to cover the whole syllabus whilst preparing the students for the examination at the end of the third year. However, I observed and learnt from the teachers that almost everything was covered in the first two years of study and the final year was spent on revision and exam practice.

The current curriculum is very flexible and relevant to the students. The students found it quite easy and the school that I observed had an increase in the number of students who passed in English. However, the Ministry of Education still does not see it that way when the whole nation is considered:

English language results at the end of school examinations (CIE IGCSE) are very poor nationwide.

There is a concern that students are unable to fully understand classroom instruction due to English language difficulties.

Education is aimed at teaching subject content; with little assistance from subject teachers to help students understand the language associated with the content. (National Curriculum Reform, Symposium, September 2009)

According to the teachers, lesson planning and the work set for students were consistent throughout the levels. They felt that having uniformity in teaching resources gives an assurance to the department that all students learn the same thing. There is an element of safety to this approach as it means none of the students missed anything that needed to be learnt. One teacher also mentioned that:

Common worksheets are good in the sense that it would mean that all students are catered for and we know that everyone got the same thing, [He started smiling]. And when we give a unit test all teachers would have covered that topic in the same way leaving no room for complain from the students. (N.I.3)

In addition, teachers felt that printed worksheets saved a lot of time and since each student had their own work sheet, it was easy for them to do it individually. In addition, it was a comfort for teachers to know that they had done what needed to be done.

### ***Teachers meet in a circle***

Teachers meet in coordination meetings and spend a few minutes discussing what they have done the previous week and the HOD briefs them on what they will do the next week. Each teacher gets copies of the worksheets that they will be setting the next week so that they can get familiar with the content and also have time to write lesson plans ready for the following week.



**Figure 15:** Coordination Meeting

***Field Notes, Saturday, February 14, 2009 Grade 8 Teachers' Coordination Meeting at 12.50 pm***

Grade 8's English weekly coordination meeting was held in the school hall. There were many other subject meetings held in the same place at the same time. This meeting was held from 12.30 to 1.00 pm. The place was quite noisy. It was held at the time when school's first session was over. Students and teachers were rushing out and the next session's students were coming in. There was chaos. Teachers came into the hall and sat in front of the HOD. We sat in the circle chairs that were already placed here and there. So, each teacher took a chair and placed it in the circle. They were looking at their watches occasionally and talking at the same time. Then, the HOD instructed the afternoon session teachers to go to class as soon as the meeting finished. Teachers from both sessions were present at this meeting. As the HOD continued to speak, she asked the teachers if there was any work left over from this week for the following week. Teachers nodded and confirmed that there was incomplete work. Since there was incomplete work, she allocated 2 teaching periods for work not completed.

*Then she moved on to talk about note taking, which I assumed they were going to teach the following week. The HOD mentioned avoiding giving vague instructions to students when teaching note taking and summary writing. Then she distributed the hand-outs for the*

teachers, which contained the work that would be done the following week. The theme was sports. There was not much discussion on the worksheets. Next, the HOD allocated the time for different teaching sessions for the following week as such:

*2 periods work carried over*

*1 period - Library*

*1 period - listening page 48*

*1 period - introduction, page 44*

*2 periods leaflet making*

After the periods for lessons were allocated, teachers were in a hurry to get up and leave.

Since the afternoon session teachers were getting late for class, the meeting was over at one pm. Teachers rushed out of the hall, some towards the staff room and others towards the gate, to go home.

Grade 10 coordination meeting at 1.00 pm

Things happened in an almost similar format to the grade eight meeting-  
Periods were allocated as follows:

*2 periods - Book Review*

*2 periods - Note Making, page 52 -60*

*2 periods - Summary writing, Introduction*

*1 period - Library*

The meeting ended at 1.15pm

## ***Scheme of work***

The scheme of work comprised the weekly lessons planned under the headings; teaching weeks, the topic of the lesson, number of periods allocated for the topic and resources. At the beginning of the year, there was no scheme of work and it was the

duty of the HOD to assign weekly lessons. Therefore, she had to come up with teaching materials and meet the teachers on a weekly basis, informing them about what they would be teaching the following week, for all three grades. Sometimes, she would get teachers to find worksheets for the weeks that followed. This was confirmed by Naomi as can be derived from this account when she came to talk to me at the office:

Another day, I was sitting in the supervisor's room. No one was there. Naomi, also an English teacher, came and sat in front of me. With Naomi being a former colleague, she often came to talk with me. She said she had something to tell me. She shares things with me as she feels I can help solve the problem (This perception existed as I had previously worked within the school management as a supervisor and teachers still felt that I have a role to play, though I have no say in any matters at the school at the time of research). She whispered very softly to me, 'There is still no scheme of work, madam. We do what she asks us to do. This is between you and me, madam.' I tell her to stop calling me madam and then she goes on, 'Okay miss, you see, we have to think of some lessons and meet during weekend with her and come up with lessons for the following week...' And she goes on.

Naomi then asked me if I was coming that night to observe the private tuition session and I said that I would. I then asked her more about the scheme of work and she said that they always decide on learning materials during free periods or weekends.

After that, I asked her "How do you know which lesson should come next?"

Oh! The HOD knows, she will decide. As it was almost time for her to go to another class, she stood up. I thanked her and she smiled and left saying 'See you tonight, madam!'

Towards the middle of the year, during the second term, the HOD resigned and a supervisor was put in charge of the department and noticed the absence of a scheme of work. It was after this that she brought all teachers together one weekend and got them started on a scheme of work for the rest of the year. After that, the teachers met with the said supervisor and worked under her instructions and followed the scheme of work.

### ***Writing lesson plans***

Lesson plans were written and left on the HOD's desk every Thursday before the following week. When the teachers met for the weekly meeting on Wednesday, the following week's work was decided; the teachers would write the lesson plan after that and submit it on Thursday or during the weekend. The HOD would then check the lesson plans and initial them. The teachers would collect their lesson plan books at the beginning of the new week. There was a separate book provided by the school to record the lesson plan.

A lesson plan consisted of the grade, topic, week and the date at the top. Then, the duration was noted, followed by the objectives, teaching procedures, student participation and evaluation. At the very bottom was a place for the HOD's initials or signature and the date. Some teachers wrote lesson plans in detail while others wrote them only in brief.

### ***Marking students' work***

“Correcting written work is enormously time consuming, and is only worth doing if the students do corrections and benefit from it, however we got to do it.” (N.I.4)

Grammar lessons, essays, comprehension lessons, and other lessons that were completed in class were collected and taken to the staff room to be marked by the teachers. Exercises which had a definite right answer were marked in class, either by the student herself or by peer marking.

The teachers marked the students' work either during their free periods or after school hours or during the weekends. The books were marked using a red pen. The teachers would go through the work and tick the work that did not need any correction or any comment. Sometimes, the spelling mistakes were either circled or underlined and if the teachers noticed that work was not completed, they would leave a comment such as ‘incomplete work’. When essays were marked, grammar mistakes and other errors were highlighted on the essays. However, the students did not like teachers to write unpleasant comments even if they had not done their work. One student pointed out:

*I do not like and want teachers to write 'incomplete work', 'do corrections' and 'write neatly' with their red pens. Sometimes my friends tear the pages with such comments from teachers. (Student 3.I.4)*

This remark came from a student who was brought into the office for not doing homework. Once when a student from the class I observed was brought to the office for not doing homework, I was there and spoke to her. Students liked to share things with me since they thought I was from ministry or I was someone who could help resolve their problems. That particular day, the student started talking openly to me about her homework and the teacher.

Another day, I was in the staff room with a teacher. She was marking books while talking with me. She showed me how she marked.

This teacher took meticulous care in checking books and leaving comments:

*I make a comment on how each individual student is doing in order to inform the student on work that's missing from their book; I leave a note inside their books. I also have a separate book where I keep the students' records and I tell them that I note everything they have completed and missed. It takes a lot of time though. (M.I.3)*

After having corrected the work, the teacher would initial at the end of the page or at the margin, followed by the date. Not all teachers were devout about the marking. Some teachers just ticked and underlined and would just write their initials and return the books. Teachers also left positive comments on students books too, like 'good', 'neat work' and smiley faces.

It was the duty of the HOD to check if the teachers were correcting students' books, so teachers would make sure that almost all of the students work was initialled, so that the HOD would know that it was attended to.

### ***Attending extra and remedial classes***

Students were asked to attend extra classes and remedial classes after the first term examination or sometimes even before it. These classes were held for those students who were weak in the subject or sometimes for all students who were interested in getting some extra help. According to the teachers, these classes did not work very well as students had to come after school. Sometimes, the students stayed after school for an

hour or less for these classes. During these extra classes, students were given extra help in areas of need. Sometimes, grammar and essay writing or comprehension would be practised. There was nothing markedly different from the daily routine classroom lessons. The only difference would be that the students and the teachers would be more relaxed while at task and they would be sitting in a different classroom at a different time, either in the afternoons or in the evenings. There was very poor attendance as after school hours were the times when students went from one tuition class to another. Thus, they valued the tuition classes more than the extra classes organised by the school.

As the exams drew nearer (whether it is the school term exams or the final international exam), students were taken after school for extra lessons. These lessons were focused on getting the students to practise for the exam. Grade ten students, who were the final year students, were given a lot of enrichment classes after school and they were monitored very well by the teachers and the supervisors as they would be sitting their final examination that year. The attendance, therefore, was mostly high. The students would practise past examination papers or did work on areas they needed to concentrate on more. Even then, there were occasions where there were few in attendance.

Most parents did not like to send students after school either. They thought that it was not safe to send them in the evenings especially because “they might get into trouble, meet boys; there is so much of violence and drugs out there and they might not even go to school. I cannot take them to school that time as I have to be with my other children at home as there is no one else and I have lots of work at home too.” (Parent 3.I.1)

At times, teachers seemed very frustrated over these extra and remedial classes as they did not get many students and they thought it was a waste of their own time, as well. In addition, it was the time that most teachers provide tuition.

### ***‘All we did was examination oriented studies throughout our school life’***

To teach to the examination is the culture of the whole education system of the Maldives. Every school in the nation still revolves around assessment as fundamental to the approach to teaching and learning. The City School, like all other schools, teaches for the examination. The teachers took this action, not due to lack of enthusiasm, eagerness or innovativeness in their tasks, but as defined by the expectations of the



traditional examination-oriented focus of the whole society - the school and the wider community. Most schools rely on their students' performances to portray the academic image of the school. Therefore, it is very important to train the students to pass the examinations well. During informal talks, teachers expressed that they felt that it was their duty to prepare the students for the examination in the best way they could. Some believed that there were students who just worked to get a mere pass in all the subjects while the others strived hard at school and at extra tuition sessions from morning until night to get a place on the national or international top ten list.

The materials used in the classroom were evidence of preparing for the examination. Most grade nine and ten class work was designed for examination practice. For instance, the grade ten students practised questions from previous examination papers (during their English lessons) that would help them for the exam.

I was standing in front of the supervisor's room and one of the students I meet occasionally for chit chats about examinations passed that way with her friends and stopped and asked me if Miss X, an English teacher, was there? I told her that I had not seen her. Then, she said she wanted to call home to ask someone to pick her up. I showed her the phone and waited until she had finished the call. Then, she came out and said it would take a few minutes for someone to come and get her. I asked her if she had time to talk and she said okay. I asked her about teachers and teaching and she and her friends made the following comment:

*All we did was exam oriented studies throughout our school life. So, we didn't even gain any much of knowledge even on most subjects. In English, we practised all the time, reading comprehension, summary writing, essay writing [one of them was very excited and kept counting from her fingers while she said these]... and most importantly to time ourselves so we complete all the tasks on time. Even other subjects, we were totally exam oriented [giggles] and the papers are also more theory oriented; what we did is just memorise the theories, and just did the exam and forgot it. Eyee! Varah foobi Miss, sometimes! [That's it! It is very boring] (Some grade ten students, 2009)*

Then they asked me

*Miss, for how long are you going to be here. Miss, adhives varah ginadhuvahu ulbeynantha?*  
*[Are you going to be here for long]. We were all sitting near the chairs outside the supervisors' room.*

*Well, yes I will be here for some time, I replied.*

*Miss, why don't you teach us English? Please miss, added one of them*

*Eyee thedheh! [That's true!] Miss, please, why don't you?*

*I replied [smiling], I am here to do some studies so I cannot teach.*

*Alhey [Oh, in disappointment] [all show a disappointed face]*

*Then, they looked at their watches and told me that they had to go and said that they would see me the next day!*

*So, when they had left, I went inside the room.*

The teachers tried very hard to help the students as the pass and fail rates of the students and getting good grades were perceived to reveal the abilities of the teachers. If results were good, these teachers would be recognised and applauded by the HOD and the school administration. Further, helping the grade ten students to get good scores in the examinations, helps to make the school image shine and, additionally,, assist the school in reaching the top ranking in the MOE best school list.

Teachers displayed different attitudes to this way of teaching. For example, one teacher felt that teachers had to stick to the strict rules and regulations of examinations and he also mentioned that:

I am in favour of it because it can very well assess and motivate students. (G.I.2)

From her interaction with students, Naomi, however, knew that school lessons were sometimes boring and examination oriented. She felt that the role of a teacher was to make lessons fun and interesting. “We need to get students actively involved in the learning process,” she said, also adding that teaching methods should be more student-centred.

## **Unit tests**

Unit tests are conducted after completing a certain unit and make up a part of the students' term tests. About 20% of marks are based on unit tests while the other 80% are taken from the final term test given, at the end of each term. Unit tests come in the form of answering a reading comprehension passage, completing grammar exercises, or producing an essay or some sort of writing. The tests are conducted in the classroom during one class period. These tests are prepared by a teacher assigned by the HOD. These unit tests are identical for all the students of the same grade.



**Figure 16:** Students doing a unit test

## **A reading comprehension lesson**

“Now, take out your books. First read the passage carefully, try to understand what it says and then attempt the questions” (N.O.5).

These are everyday instructions in language classes. If I look at the activities in terms of language skills and sub-skills, I see that classes are focused mainly on vocabulary and grammar. Reading and writing are seen as a process of reading passages by themselves, jotting down answers and essays as something to be written in the classroom after a few

minutes of discussion on a topic which is written on the blackboard. Sometimes, the teacher spends a few minutes discussing the main idea of the passage briefly.

The students are given a handout of the reading passage and the questions. Sometimes, the questions are written on the blackboard. Each student has their own copy. A typical reading comprehension lesson in a pattern followed by almost all the teachers was observed as:

**Field Notes, February 15, 2009**

The teacher enters the classroom and greets the students. The students had already been given the reading materials in a previous lesson. The teacher instructs the students to read the dialogue 'Break Time', in pairs. The comprehension questions are written on the board. While the teacher writes the questions on the board, the students open their notebooks and starts copying. Others read the dialogue or talk to their neighbour. When the teacher finishes writing, she walks around the classroom, checking what the students are doing. The students have discussions with their partners while doing the work. They speak in Dhivehi. The teacher reminds the students to read and answer the questions carefully. A student calls the teacher to help her find an answer. The teacher goes to the student and helps her. Others still keep reading and writing. A student finishes the work and calls the teacher. The teacher goes and checks her work. I look at the students' work. The reading was about bullying. The bell rings now. The students become noisy. The papers are collected by the teacher and the teacher instructs the students to hand in the books for checking. She gets a student to collect the books. Only two students finish the work. The teacher tells the students that they must finish the work for the next day. Then, she takes the two books, farewells the students and leaves the class.

In most of the reading lessons observed, not much time was spent on discussing vocabulary or doing pre-reading questions, while-reading or post-reading questions. Vocabulary was often dealt with if there were new words. The new words were written on the board and meanings were given by the teacher. Sometimes the teacher would ask if any students knew any of the words and tried to get the meanings from them. However, the reading lessons were mostly a matter of distributing the passages and instructing the students to answer the questions.

## What students do

### ***‘We always sit in rows and look at the teacher talking...’***

Students are given the role of passive learners. It is evident from my observations that they mostly preferred listening to the teacher, taking down notes or having printed notes. According to the teachers, students learn much better with this type of learning:

Students need more explanation from teachers. They do not learn much from the discussions or taking their own notes while the teacher explained. These students are not much exposed to holding discussions in the classroom and note taking. Students expect to be spoon fed. They learn better when there is visible notes on their books. (N.I.3)

However, students were not entirely compliant with teachers’ wishes and they also engaged in transgressive behaviour:

We always have to sit in rows and look at the teacher talk. It was the teacher talking most of the time. And when they finish, we need to take our books and get on with some writing, grammar or an essay or some notes. It is boring sometimes. You know miss, we enjoy working together, sitting in groups [smiling!]. We learn while we talk with each other. (S.I.1)

Miss, I don’t want to do this. You always give us this kind of work. I don’t like. Hoon varah foohi mi teacheru! (this teacher is too boring!). [The student stands up and walk around the class though the teacher tells her to be seated. She giggles and mocks the teacher and sits] (S.O.6)

Some students do not give respect to teachers, especially expatriate teachers. Sometimes, they are very rude to the teachers, talking back and not letting the teachers continue the day’s work.

On the other hand, it is normal practice in the Maldivian classroom to sit and listen to the teacher silently and do the work assigned. Students do not interact with each other very often, though, sometimes, some under-the-radar discussion takes place. It is daily routine for the students to obediently listen, watch, and then follow the instructions of the teacher. The teacher plays a dictating role in most of the lessons in the classrooms.

## ***Yawning, sighing, boring!***

Students' lack of motivation in the English lessons was noted many times during the classroom observations. The students were left bored and agitated and it was visible on their faces during most of the lessons observed.

### **Field Notes, March 12, 2009**

Students sat quietly while the teacher explained about note taking and note making. The teacher was writing down the notes on the black board and filling in the two columns on the board about note taking and note making. It was not clear whether the students were listening to the teacher or whether they were bored. Some students were looking blank, while some students were scribbling on a note book and some were in their own world. This was an everyday event in the classrooms; the students would sit silently without a word and watch as the teacher talked and wrote on the board. The boredom on the students face was observed as well as their occasional sighs and yawns.

However, the teachers did not agree with this interpretation. The teachers believed that it was how they learnt and they were simply listening to the explanation. The teachers were not happy with the observation implying that the students were not interested. They explained that the time factor and the need to complete the work on time would be the reasons why they could not get the students to be involved in the majority of the lessons. Teachers were very clear about their dislike for giving group work as discussed above.

Students' lack of motivation could be due to the factors such as the traditional teaching methods and the monotony of the daily lessons. It was quite boring for students of that age to sit and listen to the teacher all the time, from morning till afternoon, every single day, throughout the whole year.

## **Commentary**

The school has achieved a lot of success compared to previous years. The management structure is more organised and the teachers seem very committed regardless of their frustrations. Teachers felt that they needed to have more freedom in applying their own methods of teaching but they still did not want to see that as something negative. They

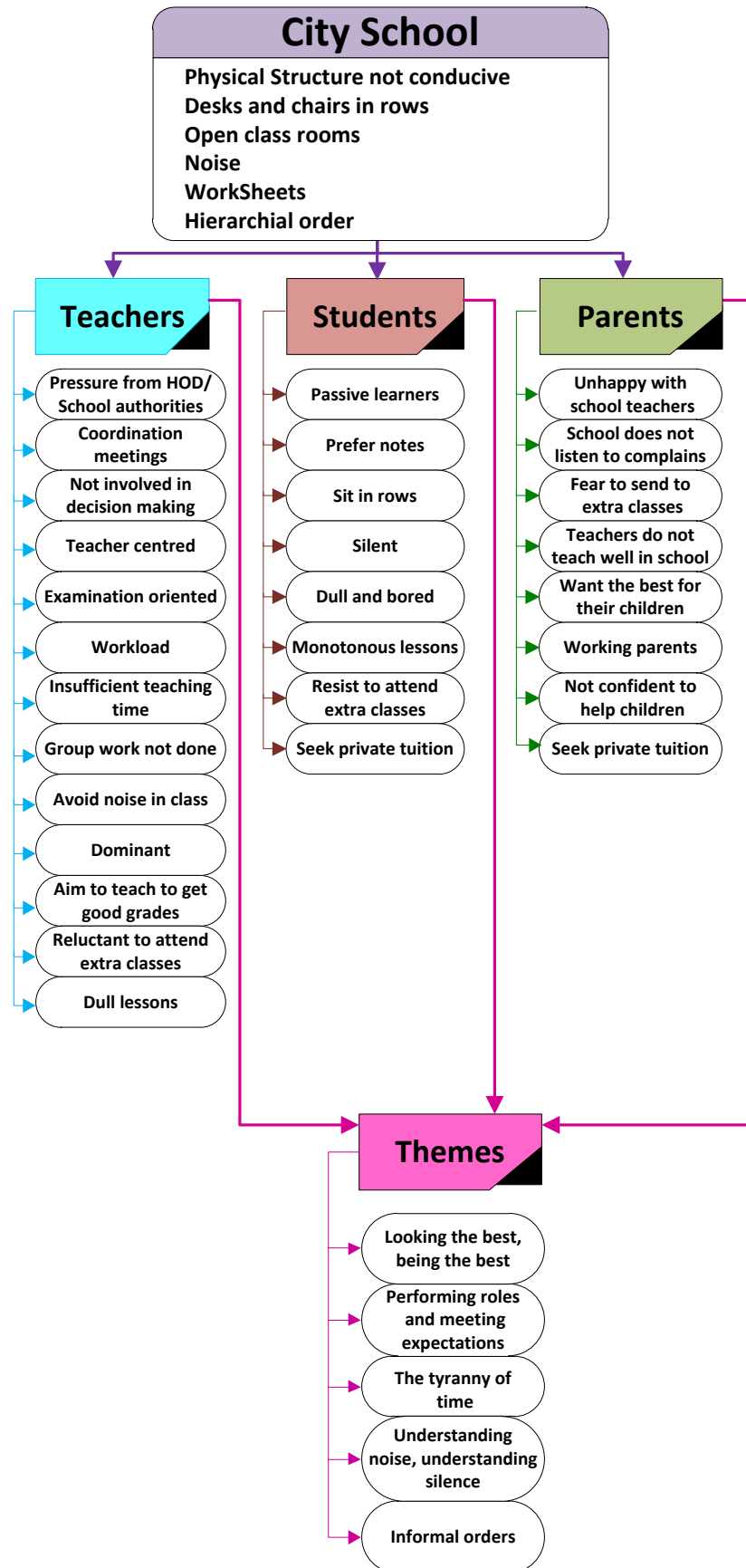
felt safer to conform with the current approach. They were also constantly anxious about the fact that they had to teach to the examinations, which they found dull and boring as well. However, the teachers constantly reminded themselves that that was what the school expected of them, to produce good results in the examinations.

According to the parents, there is good communication between the parents and the school through annual parent teacher meetings and meetings at the end of school terms. The parents are also represented on the school board. However, some parents I met were disappointed by the school and felt the school's discipline had deteriorated and the education is not satisfactory. One parent said,

I send my child there because I do not have a choice. I cannot afford to send them abroad. I don't want them to go to a co-ed school. When my daughter joined here, her discipline was good. She has been a good child when she was in the primary school. I never had to go to meet the supervisor or the principal because of any problem she caused. But now, I have to come daily. She has made some bad friends here and is not studying either. The teachers cannot even control students. I complained. But nothing is done. They do not come here to learn. They turn out as disobedient.

Even in my visits there, I noticed the students' behaviour towards teachers, especially foreign teachers. There were some students who did not respect the teachers and always talked back at them. One teacher very sadly said, "Miss, what can I do, this is the situation every day. I need to spend most of the time controlling the class, than teaching" (N.I.1). On the other hand, there were students who caused no trouble in the class and behaved quite well too.

With ethnography as my foundation, I interviewed, observed and several distinct themes emerged ( Figure 17) from the data and I move onto presenting them in the following section.



**Figure 17:** Summary of the findings from the City School



## Themes: City school

### *Looking the best, being the best*

In the Maldives, there are evident beliefs that teachers are placed in schools to impart knowledge to students. More importantly, they serve as moral embodiments for students to follow; they are entrusted to provide a strong foundation for learning and to ensure students make progress. It is reinforced by parental expectations of not merely ensuring that the learners acquire literacy but more crucially, parents are concerned with providing their child with the moral ways to develop as a person in the society. This is part of the traditional respect for the teacher, as a valued elder transmitting knowledge and wisdom to a subordinate junior. While this is the ideological, idealised position, in the pressure of the weekly work load it is often lost sight of.

In the Maldivian classrooms, the students expect their teacher to have deep knowledge, to be able to answer questions, as well as be good moral role models. In return, students show their respect to the teacher by their quietness and obedience in class:

#### **Field Notes, March 14, 2008**

Throughout the lesson, the students sit back and listen while the teacher talks and writes on the board. The students do not say a word.

The relationship between teacher and student is highly authoritarian in character. The teacher imparts knowledge and wisdom to students by personal example. The students accept what their teacher has imparted without questioning. This, however, was not always the case for expatriate teachers.

Teachers are overseen by the HOD, checking if the day's work is done promptly. Therefore, the teachers do their best to complete the day-to-day tasks on time. If the work is not completed by the teachers, it is seen as a failure on the part of the teacher. Teachers are very concerned with looking good in the eyes of the HOD, so the pressure is on the students to perform not for their own learning but also so that the teachers look good.

It is the duty of the HOD to see that the teachers finish the work so that they know that the curriculum for that term is being covered, as detailed in the field notes relating to the

coordination meetings. Not much discussion was had on the worksheets, as the HOD expected the teachers to know what follows and teachers know what needs to be done. This reveals the hierarchical power relations at work in the school.

It is evident that the superiors of the school are interested in obtaining a good school ranking; therefore, the HODs are pressured by the school heads to do their work as efficiently as possible. The HODs push the teachers to perform at their best, and the teachers, in turn, push the students. Therefore, the whole school tries to do things as best as they can, to look good.

### ***Performing roles and meeting expectations***

“The education system in the Maldives is so examination oriented that it has forced many students into rote learning and memorising just to get better results in the exams,” exclaimed Naomi.

Teachers at the school see themselves as operating under constraints which remove their freedom to make decisions on pedagogical learner-centred grounds; they have to follow the school’s policy in doing things. Also, the school expects the teachers to help students to produce extremely high grades. Therefore, the teachers teach in a teacher-centred method in the classroom as they see it as more “secure and able to control” (N.I.3). As a result, teachers do not use group work and prefer to teach to the whole class and get the students to do their work individually which mimics the examination routines and settings.

The school administrators, who are most interested in seeing that many students achieve ‘A’s in the GCSE Examination, instructed these teachers to concentrate on training their students to do well in the examination. So, the teachers focus their teaching on training their students to achieve well in the international examination. The expectations of the school hierarchy evidently shape the way the teachers perform their roles.

Furthermore, teachers meet and discuss with the HODs every week and follow their instructions to the letter. In particular, they meet with the HODs who convey the materials to be taught with the clear expectations that all the classes need to be taught exactly the same thing. Some teachers are frustrated by this, though some teachers, mostly the expatriates, feel that the uniform worksheets are a safe harbour:

Common worksheets are good. We can be assured that all students have done the same thing.

In spite of such comments, and an apparent widespread acceptance of the way things being how they had to be, each of the teachers interviewed indicated that what they appreciated ran directly against what they were required to do to prepare students for the Cambridge Examinations:

Gopal: We need to spoon feed them and it is not the way it should be.

Naomi: It is like we need to cover the whole syllabus; we need to run very fast sometimes, without even checking if they know what they really need to learn.

Salma: We can do lots of activities with students of grade eight but still, we are constantly faced by the examination practice. Practise, practise all the time, most of the time.

On the other hand, the limitations are not seen as completely negative because the end goal is to excel in the examination. Students are more focused in their studies and teacher-dominant lessons make teaching easier for the teachers; there is an absence of uncertainty as there is the security of all classes working in unison. Besides, the time in class is fully utilised for learning purposes, not giving any room for improper behaviour.

However, a drawback of traditional teaching is that it inherently places the most value on standards, curriculums and passing tests as opposed to student-focused learning. Attention to individual learning processes is, thus, neglected, and students are not encouraged to understand the methods, techniques and skills required to find answers. The students also may miss the joy of learning.

In short, it is clear in the City School that teachers need to keep up with the school's expectations as well as having an underlying belief that individually controlled work leads to better learning.

### ***The tyranny of time***

School time is set aside as the primary stepping stone to time management. The spread of activities throughout the day are given their time slots and pre-set goals are expected to be accomplished within those time frames. Students are also expected to acquire the

skills to comprehend and accelerate the pace of learning in the pre-determined time slots. Getting the activities done in the lesson mirrors getting their work done in the all important exam.

In the typical secondary school, students have different teachers for each subject, and the class period lasts about 35 minutes. Many teachers and administrators in the schools believe 35 minute class periods are too short to cover the required material, answer all student questions, and ensure that students fully grasp the concepts presented. Therefore, the teachers do not get students to do brainstorming activities or interesting activities as the teachers feel it would waste time that could be used on getting the set tasks completed for that week. Their main concern is to see the students complete the tasks on time, as finishing the work on time helps prepare the students for examinations:

In English, we practised all the time, reading comprehension, summary writing, essay writing and most importantly to **time** ourselves so we complete all the tasks **on time**. Even other subjects, we were totally exam-oriented and the papers are also more theory-oriented what we did is just memorise the theories, and just did the exam and forgot it. (A group of grade ten students, 2009)

Most importantly, teachers felt that the need to complete the tasks on time was very important or else they would need to drag the lesson into the following week. If it drags on to the next week, then the teachers need to bring the students in after school to complete the task or give it as a homework as it would disrupt the lessons arranged for following week.

I don't encourage group work. They take advantage of it and play around. Disturb, shout and do not concentrate on the work and waste their time talking til the bell rings. (M.I.1)

There are also teachers who do not use interesting teaching aids because they if they used them in class, it would again use a lot of teaching time. For example, Maha is happy working in the school and helps in other activities in the school as well. She enjoys teaching though she sometimes get frustrated when she does not have enough time to do creative work with students as she used to do when she did her training:

When we did our practicum, we made a lot of teaching aids. But now, we hardly have time to do anything as such (looking frustrated). With lots of books to

mark, extra activities to attend to and holding extra classes, there is no time. We need to follow the curriculum strictly and try to complete the tasks on time. Anyway, that is ok. But sometimes we do interesting lessons as I am teaching the grade eights, we do fun stuff. (M.I.1)

However, there are times when teachers cannot complete the work assigned for the day as students come late or the worksheets are too time consuming.

They come late from the labs or some students take the opportunity to go to drink water, meet friends or they prefer to come late. So by the time we start the lesson it would be late and so we cannot complete it that day. (N.I.1)

One of the teachers said this as a complaint, in a tone that showed that it needed attention.

In view of the above, time is a significant pressure for the teachers in Maldivian classrooms determining what they do, what can be achieved, and how lessons proceed.

### ***Understanding noise, understanding silence***

#### ***A typical example of everyday noise:***

Someone singing at a distance. A girl. Laughter. Flipping of pages. Sharp pens on paper. Writing on the blackboard. Scribbling. Hitting on the wall? Silence for a minute. A pencil drops. The roaring sound of a machine. Endlessly. A teacher with a high pitch, trying to unsuccessfully compete with the background orchestra. Tearing of pages. Fiddling with pencil cases. Coughs. Sneezes. Murmurs. Yawns! Rubbing of shoes. Pens down on the desk. Car horns. Movement of the plastic chairs. Tapping on desk. Giggles. Passing of notes. Ringing of the bell. Children standing dragging desks and chairs. Teacher greeting. Students' return greeting. More dragging of furniture. More noise from the whole school. Break time!

In almost every class at the beginning of the day, the students are in the class before the teacher comes in. The bags are kept on chairs and some students remove their books from their bags and keep them inside their desks. After dropping off their books, some of them go outside to meet their friends and socialise while others remain in the

classroom and talk. As the bell rings, the teacher comes into the classroom and students stand up dragging their chairs, fairly noisily and greet the teacher in unison.

The classroom structure, in fact, discourages teachers and students from making noises associated with educational activities. The classrooms have windows for air and light to come in. Most old classrooms have no walls near the entrance; they are open and people who walk past can see what is happening in the classroom. These classes also do not have doors; the entrances are open. The noise from these classrooms is, therefore, heard in the neighbouring classes, as they are not closed either.

Noise is a fact of educational life though most noises in the Maldivian classrooms are interpreted as disruptive. In the Maldives, classroom noise is seen as something symbolically negative; it is seen as teachers' lack of class control, students' poor discipline and a non-teacher and non-learning focus. Therefore, teachers are very careful not to do group or pair work because they think students would make a lot of noise and, in order to keep them disciplined, they would rather conduct teacher-centred style lessons. Teacher-centred learning keeps students silent. Teachers prefer to keep students silent because they make a lot of noise if they are left in groups or pairs:

They make a lot of noise, chatting, pulling desks and chairs and time is wasted.  
And they become unruly and are not disciplined.(G.I.3)

In contrast to the reason for maintaining a silent classroom atmosphere, being silent in the classroom does not mean that students are attentive or learning but on the contrary could mean the lessons are boring, dull and monotonous as recorded during the following observation:

**Field Notes, March 17, 2009**

The teacher stood in front of the class explaining the passive voice. While he did so, he wrote some sentences on the blackboard. The students sat silently, some listening to the teachers, some yawning, some scribbling on their note books and some day dreaming.

As evident from the previous discussion, it is day to day practice in the Maldivian classroom for the teacher to talk and the students to stay on their seats in complete silence and listen to the teacher. The teachers were more comfortable standing at the

front of the classroom and watching the thirty or more students look back at them, listening to their explanations. Though the teachers saw this as best practice, the students' distress can be palpable in their voices:

Every day, it is the same. We have to do same kind of work. Sit here, listen to Sir, writing, reading and it is so boring. (S.I.1)

### ***Informal orders***

Within the current school system, administrators and teachers perform their specialised tasks on their own, without collaborating with one another, ensuring that the school system works as a whole. Based upon the system of control and hierarchy, each of them is expected to conform to the expectations of those above them. Within the classroom system, students are expected to adhere to the rules and norms of their teachers without question. Teachers are expected to conduct their lessons exactly as told by the HODs. HODs are expected to follow the instructions of principals. At the next level, all teachers are also required to conform to the expectations of the school principals who are, in turn, controlled by their school superintendents.

From the observations and the interviews with teachers, it could be seen that the school does not have effective communication channels between teachers and HODs or the school administration. The absence of facilities like the intranet is an additional factor in the lack of communication. As a result, they do not share information with one another regularly, which could be helpful in enabling one another to perform their tasks more effectively. For example, the teachers are met briefly at coordination meetings held by the HOD and were updated about the teaching schedule for the week:

The HOD asked the teachers if there was any incomplete work from the previous week. And since some teachers noted there was some work, the HOD allocated one period for its completion. Then, she read out the lesson plan for the week. One period for grammar, three periods for comprehension and summary writing, one for library, two for essay writing and one for incompleting work. Then, she gave the teachers copies of the handouts for the next week. And since there were no questions, the teachers' meeting was over.

By working on their own, the individual teachers and school administrators are focusing solely on the objectives and goals within their own immediate spheres. They do not

discuss the handouts, nor do they talk about how the lessons are to be conducted. The overall school objectives of helping students to learn can, thus, be forgotten or lost.

The right way in doing things is predetermined, prior to any meeting, workshop, or in-service education programme. The details have been worked out ahead of time by the school supervisor, principal or the HOD. These are to be communicated as absolutes to others and so there is little or no room for discussion of ideas. The ideal for the hierarchical leader is to have teachers accept his/her commentary as factual content, as seen from the field notes above. This rules out debate, elaboration, or the extension of presented ideas. Thus, critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving, are not emphasised in the curriculum.

*Although the City School has seen lots of successes throughout the years, the teachers and students are under a lot of pressure. The teachers need to work to the expectations of their heads and they refrain from doing group work as they are concerned about losing teaching time as well as worried that students will make noise and be disruptive. So, therefore, the students learn passively, in an examination oriented, teacher fronted method. Having painted a picture of the classroom practices in the City School in this chapter, I move on to find out how these practices are carried out in the Atoll School, in a more rural setting, in the chapter that follows.*



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Twice Upon a Time in the Atoll School



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Twice Upon a Time in the Atoll School

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**Journal entry: May, 2009**

I embarked on the flight and the joyful flight attendant confirmed my arrival as soon as she cheerfully announced, “Ladies and gentleman, now we are crossing equator. Welcome to the southern hemisphere!” The hearty welcome that met my arrival was warm and pleasant.

Stepping ashore here brings delight to me and my new-found friends. Friends from the school staff mostly, and the students. I am once again finally back on the island, back at the school. Back looking at the beautiful trees, the *reethi gas* (beautiful tree) and the curious students with huge grins, wondering why I was back there again?

Before I embarked on this journey, I had contacted a friend in the island who was the head of all schools in that atoll region. She had given me the green light and had made contact with the school heads. She even went out of her way to arrange me accommodation for the time I would spend there. It was all ‘on the house’. The family I was staying with was very kind and hospitable. I left my luggage and soon went to the school. I met the supervisor and the HOD and was given the timetables. I had already met the teachers on a previous trip and we exchanged words for some time as they were all free at the time I arrived. I started my observations straight away. I had also observed a number of classes on my previous trip so, this time, I was more focussed on the areas important to my study. I arranged times to meet with some students too. So in the Atoll School, I observed a number of teachers and met with a group of students and some parents. The principal was away that day, so I met with the assistant principal who briefed me on how things took place at the school.

I was up early in the morning every day and the young woman at the house I was staying in prepared breakfast for me every morning, in spite of me telling her that I could take care of myself. She had the table ready with *roti* and curry or *mashuni* (a mix

of fish and scraped coconut with chilli and lime) and tea. The house was very close to the school, so I took a lovely walk and sometimes met students who shared a lot of things with me that I needed to know about their life at home and at school. I also told them why I was there. As it was a double session school, I stayed in school the whole day until it was over in the evenings. I sometimes took a taxi back home if it was getting dark. Later in the evenings, I would be called for dinner by Haseena, the young woman of the house, and after dinner, we sat outside on the *joali fathi* (seats with rope net on a wooden frame) and talked about different things like different types of food (that were only special to this atoll) that are sold in the shops and how she spent her time at home and about many other things.

Also, during lunch times every day and sometimes in the evenings after dinner, I was invited by my new-found friends for either lunch or a late night tea. During these times, I met school teachers, parents and school heads and I learnt a lot about private tuition on the Atoll as well.

## The atoll school

The Atoll School represents a milestone in the history of the development of secondary education in the Maldives as it is the first fully fledged secondary school in the atolls that teaches both the Ordinary level (O level) and Advanced level (A level). The school caters to two levels of curriculum and offers co-education. The lower secondary curriculum prepares students for the UK Cambridge GCE O level and IGCSE examinations and the Maldivian SSC examinations. All the subjects are taught in the medium of English, except Islam and Dhivehi. Students are streamed into three subject combinations; arts, science and business. The higher secondary curriculum consists of three core courses, Dhivehi, English and Islam, and seven elective courses. Teaching at higher secondary level is geared towards preparing students for the following examinations. The higher secondary curriculum prepares students for the UK CAE and Edexcel Advanced level exams and the Maldivian HSC exams. At the higher level too, all subjects are taught in the medium of English, except Islam and Dhivehi. The curriculum is streamed into two different subject combinations, science and business studies, and there are three core subjects compulsory for all students.

The school buildings look very neat and tidy and look recently renovated. The whitewashed walls and the beautiful trees make the school a very welcoming place. The school population consists of girls and boys of between 14 to 18 years old. These students are divided into three streams. The school has 780 students and 105 teachers. The average class size is 27 students.



**Figure 18:** Atoll School classrooms and compound

A variety of extra-curricular activities are conducted in the Atoll School, like the environment club, the science club, the arts and culture club, the maths club and the English club to name a few. The English Literary Association (ELA) and the Dhivehi club are the two literary associations in the school. These associations organise a range of literary activities to promote both the English and Dhivehi languages. The students take the initiative in organising the meetings and conducting various activities. The teachers simply guide and monitor them. The other three important bodies are the school Cadet Corps, the Brass Band and the Girl Guides. The activities MS Cadet Corps take part in are parades on the streets of Hithadhoo and other neighbouring islands in the celebration of important dates and functions. These groups are important as they link the school to the community.



**Figure 19:** Students, during the break

The school has accomplished a lot in the past few years. Since the beginning, the school has produced excellent results in the academic field and most of the past students hold responsible jobs in various sectors throughout the country and have even managed to reach key positions in society. Graduates of the school are recognised doctors, politicians and a principal as well. One of the secrets of the success of the school is how the school selects the students. Students from all Atoll zone schools, which has a population of 30,000 people, sit an examination which they need to score at least 40 marks out of 100 in five subjects in order to get entrance to the school. Therefore, only the cream of the Atoll zone schools are able to gain a place at the school. The school, as a whole, is focused on maintaining consistency and standards which they see as underpinning their success. The school administration and teaching staff are very dedicated and classrooms are constantly monitored by the grade supervisors and HODs. The teachers are very well prepared and coordination meetings are held weekly in order to prepare for the following week. The head of faculty and head of department confer before meeting the teachers and discuss the themes that need to be taught the next week. The HOD meets the teachers every Wednesday after school and provides a briefing on the lessons. After that, the teachers write very structured lesson plans which are

submitted to the HOD the next day. The faculty head and the head of department do regular observations of the teachers as well.

The management and staff are very hardworking and anxious to produce good results. Each year's academic performance is analysed and staff reflect on the past year's achievement to make progress in the next year. They make a joint effort to create a better programme for the students to enrich their learning, and priority is given to providing the best education for the students. In order to do this, the HODs and teachers meet and prepare worksheets and past papers to practise with the students. The teachers find the students' weaknesses and help them improve. They try to practise for the exam by constantly reminding the students that they need to learn to finish tasks on time. This is one reality of how the school produces students that are within the best at a national level in the Cambridge O level examination.

I was impressed with the number of records the administration keeps of the students and staff and how careful and meticulous they are in maintaining the academic standards of the school. Students' progress records are very well maintained by the teachers and management, teachers and the faculty head keep a close eye on individual students who need extra attention. Every little thing is recorded and all data are stored on a computer. All teachers and students are given a computer user name and a password and the school has an intranet system too. Most notices are passed on using the intranet, which does not happen in schools in the capital. This brings a sense of belonging within the school community.





**Figure 20:** Students using the school resources in the library

According to the teachers, they are very happy with what the school has to offer. They are quite pleased with the resources of the school. Most English language teachers are expatriates from India and Sri Lanka with a number of local teachers as well. The faculty head is a local graduate. Almost all teachers are graduates.

Khadee is a local graduate and is the head of the faculty of English. She has been teaching English for five years. She is from the island itself and “is very happy to be serving the school”. She is a very confident person and deals professionally with her colleagues. Khadee organises meetings with the English department every two weeks and also meets with the department head to discuss the weekly work. Khadee had some good things to say about the teachers in her department:

Khadee invited me to her office so that we could meet and discuss the things I wanted to know from her about the school. Her office was a huge room which occupied only the school management staff. There were several desks in the room, with a computer on each. There was another person in the office at that time whom I recognised as a very old friend of mine. We shook hands and greeted each other with a smile and were very happy to see each other after fifteen years. She left the room, leaving Khadee and me to carry on with our discussion. Khadee showed me the chair opposite her desk and I sat down.

I asked her about the English department: ‘What do you have to say about the English department?’

‘I feel the English department is a tightly knit family. The teachers are very friendly with each other and take advice and criticism very well. They are willing to help the school and students at all times. All teachers know the students very well [smiling]... they are hardworking and enthusiastic and it is with their help that we go on to bring good results.’ (K.I.2)

Zainab is a young local graduate, who has been teaching for only a year. She has completed her Bachelor’s Degree in teaching at the Faculty of Education in the Maldives. She has chosen to be a teacher as “it is a good job with a good salary and we get lots of holidays”. Zainab is a native from the island itself and she is happy to be teaching in her community.

Zainab has gained a lot of knowledge from her colleagues and she thinks that the English department at the school has been very helpful and welcoming from the beginning of her career. Zainab finds the school management and her department head and teachers also very helpful. She finds teaching at the school very satisfactory:

I met Zainab after observing her lesson. She was free after the lesson and we decided to meet in the staffroom. There was only one teacher there then and he was busy writing something. Zainab invited me to sit in the far corner of the room. She asked me many questions, about where I did my studies, if doing a PhD was hard and if I was going to return home after my studies. Then, after talking about personal things and developing a rapport, we focused on the teaching and learning in the school.

“I like teaching here. I joined this school as soon as I completed my training um I was scared at first [giggling], the boys were a bit naughty sometimes, but after a few weeks, they were very good and polite [smiling]. The other teachers are very helpful too. If I am confused about any teaching item I ask them ... um, I have learnt so much from them you know.”

I kept listening and noting down her words as well as recording what she was saying. Sometimes, I nodded and let her talk.



“The school’s management is very enthusiastic and motivated to grow support and to become the best supported school in this atoll.” (Z.I.1)

Maan is an expatriate graduate from India, who is tall and pleasant. He always dresses very neatly and formally; a long sleeved shirt tucked into his carefully pressed trousers. Maan has been a teacher for four years. Like the other teachers who chose to teach in the Maldives, Maan decided to come because it offered an attractive salary, compared to what he earned at home. He joined the school, with little experience, just after his studies. He had been teaching his mother tongue and just a few classes of English before he joined the school in the Maldives. According to Maan, he is a good learner and has been learning from his colleagues in the school:

I have got a lot of help from my fellow teachers here. I have learnt a lot within the past six months. Producing materials, different ways of dealing with students and teaching them. I feel very confident now. (M.I.1)

Ruth has been teaching for 14 years and she joined the school five years ago. Before that, she had been teaching in her own country. Ruth is an amusing person and has a smile on her face most of the time. She loves teaching and is a favourite amongst the students because of her loving personality. Ruth chose to teach in the Maldives because her sister had been teaching there for more than 10 years and it was after her recommendation that she opted to come here. Ruth likes the management at the school and the students:

I love teaching here. The management is very good; it is like a family here. Everyone is taken care of. The principal and the other management staff are very closely knit and we can always approach them for anything, anytime. The students are well behaved and loving children. They are very fond of learning and participate very well in class activities.

I met a group of students during their break time outside the classroom. They had just finished their lunch and had finished praying. I asked them how they feel about the school, they said:

“I am very happy to be here and very lucky to be here. The teachers are very good.”

“School is where I can be myself with my friends. I can share with them. I love all my teachers. They are very helpful and understanding.”

Some students said this about the teachers:

“Our English teacher is excellent. She makes learning fun. She is like a friend. We can talk anything with her. She does different types of activities with us.”

“I am proud to be here.”

At the time I was there, the grade 10 students were anxiously getting their last minute tips for the exam. All grade 10 teachers and students were engaged in extra classes. According to a parent, almost all students were taking tuition in as many subjects as they could these days. “They are all aiming for good results and are busy going from one tuition to the other,” mentioned one parent. “My salary is exhausted. All that I earn is spent on my daughter’s tuition. It is not that she is weak in subjects; it is because her friends take tuition, so she wants to take too.”

The parents’ dedication and commitment to the school and education is very much in evidence. Even in the year 2009, some students from the school were among the IGCSE world top 10, and the national top 10, which is an enormous achievement for the community.

## **School structure and resources**

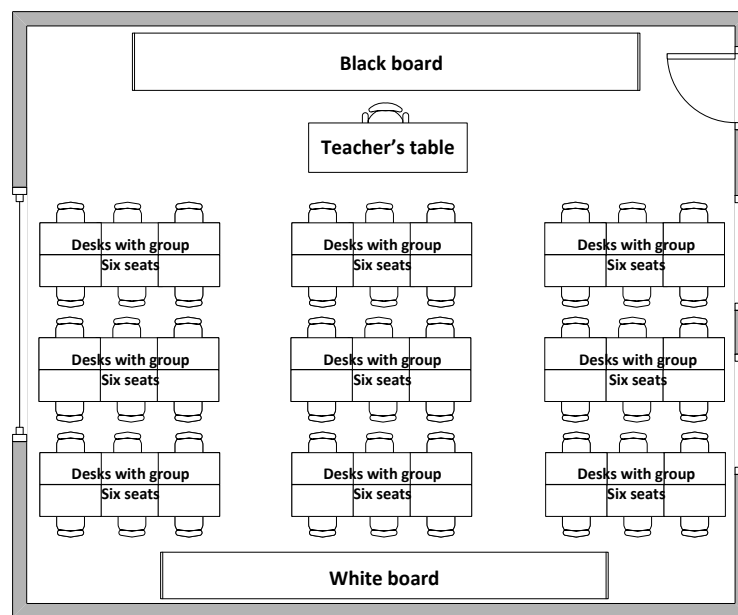
### ***Where the learning takes place***

I observed that the classrooms in the Atoll School had full walls and were well maintained and the chairs and desks were arranged so that students could sit together in groups most of the time. The teacher’s desk and chair stood at the front of the class. Each classroom had a door and was well ventilated, with windows on either side. Some classes had whiteboards while other classes had blackboards. The noise from the other classes was not very evident in the classrooms as the rooms had proper walls.



**Figure 21:** Classrooms with full walls

Not much of the students' work is displayed on classroom walls as it is the place where constant unit tests are conducted and it is not an easy task to remove and replace the charts again and again. Although there were some wall charts and other art on the walls, they were only temporary.



**Figure 22:** A floor plan of the classroom

## **Audio-visual aids**

The Atoll School has many resource rooms too. Its multipurpose room has all the necessary equipment for the use of audio-visual aids. There is a colour television, slide projectors, overhead projectors (OHPs) and multimedia facilities available in the room. Teachers can borrow video tapes, audio tapes or CDs from the library and conduct lessons in the multipurpose Room. Moreover, the school library has a good collection of video and audio tapes in its multimedia section. The library is organised by the library staff and a library committee, which is selected from among the teachers. The librarians also look after the stock of books, audio and video cassettes as well as the CD ROMs.

## **What the teachers do...**

In the classes I observed, the teachers had a very friendly relationship with the students, and felt relaxed with them. I saw that the teachers made sure that the students enjoyed the lessons, yet there was always the issue of not completing tasks on time. Student-teacher interaction as well as pair and group work were frequently observed:

### **Field Notes: August, 2009**

Maan enters the class and the students stand up to greet him. He counts the number of students and asks them to sit down. Next, he writes the number of students present in the class on the board; 26/27 goes in the right hand, top corner.

Then, Maan asks the students to take out the worksheets that were given to them before. Students look for the worksheet, while chatting softly with each other.

*M: Okay, now you must be ready for the lesson.*

It was a lesson on vocabulary. The worksheet was a cloze passage on eating in restaurants.

*M: How many of you go out to eat food? Do you like to eat at home or try food from restaurants?*

Some students raise their hands.

M: *Simla, tell me about your experience.*

S: *I like going to restaurants, I like Nasi Goreng. I saw you at the Morning Café Sir. You like food there?*

M: *(Smiling) Yes. So you enjoy food there then. Ibrahim, what type of food do you like?*

S: *I like spaghetti. But I sometimes like going to the restaurant.*

M: *How many of you like to cook?*

Students speak together.

S: *Sir, my mum cooks nice food. I like fish.*

M: *Ok, so some of you like to eat at home and from outside, don't you? Now, let's look at the worksheet.*

The teacher reads out the cloze passage to the students and reads some words, chef, restaurant, waiter, menu etc. Then, he asks the students to read it again and to fill in the blanks. Students get to work, individually. The teacher moves around the classroom checking out on students and helping them. Students work very silently. They work on it for about twelve minutes. Then, the teacher asks the students to exchange the worksheets with their partner and instructs them to correct them when he reads out the answers. After this has been done, the students get their own sheets back. Then, the teacher asks the students to turn over to the next handout. This time the work was a comprehension exercise. The teacher asks the students to read the passage and underline any new words they come across. Students get to task. The students spend their time reading the passage until the bell rings. (C.O.August 2009)

### ***'Can you tell us what you think please?'***

The teachers seemed well prepared for the lessons. They introduced the lessons by brainstorming or asking questions from the students:

Teacher writes on the board 'Heroes' and ask the students what they think of the word. The students raise their hands.

*T: Yes, Hisham?*

*S: Sir, Shah Rukh Khan! (A famous Indian Actor)*

*T: Okay another student, Eman, can you tell us what you think please?*

*S: Someone who has done something great. Michael Jackson.*

And this goes on for a few minutes.

The teacher also uses photos of some heroes, like Mahathma Gandhi, Michael Jackson, Amin Didi, and shows it to the class. Like this teacher, most of the teachers did pair or group work with the students and involved all the students in the lesson by asking them questions and getting them to read out their work. The teachers also managed the time and lessons very effectively by occasionally looking at the lesson plan and making sure that it was followed. However, while the students were given time to talk (sometimes student-student), the teachers controlled the lesson and made sure that the tasks were completed for that week on time.

### ***Moving around the classroom***

The teachers moved around the classroom frequently, checking the students' work. Sometimes, they would stop and help the students if it was necessary or exchange a few words. When the students were on task, there was little conversation. The teacher was the manager of the class and, most of the time, stood in front of the class observing what the students were doing.

### ***Curriculum, syllabus and scheme of work***

As mentioned previously, the school focuses on two levels of curriculum. The lower secondary curriculum prepares students for the Cambridge GCE- O level and IGCSE and the Secondary School examinations. At the beginning of each year, the teachers meet and decide on the scheme of work for the whole year or half of the year and later meet in the middle of the year to complete the scheme. The worksheets are prepared by the teachers after deciding on themes. Almost all the worksheets are based on weekly themes. Worksheets are produced by the HOD and the teachers. They get them from text books, adapt passages from magazines and collect materials from the Internet.

Worksheets and teaching materials are also prepared by all teachers and discussed in the meetings. The teachers indicated that they enjoyed the responsibility of having to produce worksheets. Nevertheless, they reported a tendency to include too many activities. Sometimes, the teachers are not able to complete the tasks and need to drag the lessons into the next week. This leaves the student bored as the same theme is focused on for a long time. For example, a lesson on ‘Planets’ can drag on for two weeks, where the students read and answer comprehension on it, write essays, do grammar and even summarising.

Sometimes, the HOD holds peer teaching sessions to refresh the teachers on how to go about doing particular lessons. Teachers are quite friendly and very willing to accept feedback and criticism. They work very well as a team.

### ***Coordination meetings***

Teachers meet once every week with the HOD and discuss the lessons for the following week. The minutes of the meetings are recorded by the HOD and filed after every meeting. The HOD distributes the handouts to the teachers and explains, very briefly, how to go about the lessons. The teachers and the head spend a good deal of time talking about the lessons.

I met the teachers before the coordination meeting began. They had arranged it during school time when all teachers were free. The teachers were quite at ease with me and were chatting away about different things. The meeting was held in the staffroom. Desks in the staffroom were placed together and teachers sat around them.

### ***Lesson plans***

Lesson plans are written weekly and checked by the HOD. All the lesson plans are word processed by the teachers and are very detailed.

Once when I was sitting at the desk allocated to me, Ruth came by and showed me some of the teachers’ lesson plans. She showed me that the teachers had word processed them on the computer.

“All teachers will word process these and send it to me through the intranet, then I do a print out and check the plans and sign it. um and leave it on my

desk...the teachers will collect them before they start the day. They keep these lesson plans in a file. I think it is better to do it this way then writing on a book...Don't you think so?"

I gave a smile and a nod and Ruth went towards her desk and sat down.

I could see that Ruth was very proud of her department and the teachers' work.

### ***After school, marking books!***

Marking students' work was one of the most important and time consuming tasks for the teachers. Teachers stay after school and mark the books. The teachers go through the students' work in their books and use ticks and crosses with red pens and provide feedback through writing some notes in the margin or at the bottom of the page. The students are very happy with the teachers' feedback as it helps them to identify the areas they need to improve, as a few students mentioned at one meeting in a classroom during their short break time. They were eager to meet me and share things with me. So, I asked them a few questions and they mentioned the following before they rushed back to class:

The teacher leaves comments like, use another word, wrong use of the word and give examples. It helps me understand. (S.I.3)

She corrects my spellings and sometimes makes me write them three to four times. I also like the way she explains to me how to write correct sentences. (S.I.3)

I try to do work correctly or miss will put a wrong. I don't like wrongs on my books [smiling]. (S.I.3)





*Figure 23:* Teacher, marking books.

### ***Extra and remedial class***

Extra and remedial classes are held for weak students. Students and teachers come after school for this. Teachers prepare additional tasks for students and most of the time explain grammar rules and essay writing styles. Teachers identify weak students and, in addition, those students who would like to attend are encouraged to come as well. A lot of extra classes are held for the final year students to give them enrichment lessons as the examinations draw near.



*Figure 24:* Students in an extra class

### ***We prepare students for the examinations***

As in a typical classroom in the Maldives, the main focus of teaching is for examinations, even in the Atoll School. With students handpicked from the schools of the Atoll, the school strives to get excellent results in the international and national examinations. Therefore, to achieve this, teachers remind the students constantly about examinations and try to follow suit in practising for them:

We need to do a lot of practice with writing. The students need to know to write a good essay in order to get good grades. So, we train them to write an organised essay within the timeframe. Just like what they have to do in the examination. (Z.I.1)

The school management expects us to help our students achieve very good results. It is the priority of the school to produce students who can be amongst the top 10 in the final exams. So, we are trying very hard to do our best here.

The students and parents are very competitive too, you know. (R.1.2)

Teaching and learning in grades eight and nine are quite different to what happens with grade 10. In the grade eight and nine classes, teachers teach in a more enjoyable and

relaxed atmosphere, if only occasionally. The lessons are fun and mostly based on themes; the fact that they do role plays and other student-centred activities in pairs and groups makes learning exciting for the students. In grade 10 classes, teachers are very examination-oriented and lessons are more teacher-centred. They prepare the students for the examination by getting students to spend most of the time working on doing past exam papers. However, even in the lower grades, teacher-centredness and examination-oriented methods are very obvious too.



**Figure 25:** A teacher-centred lesson

**Field Notes: August, 2009**

Khadee enters the classroom and greets the students. Then, she checks the attendance and writes the roll number on the blackboard. Next, she asks the students to take out the handouts on sports.

*T: How many of you enjoy sports?*

Most of the students raise their hands.

*T: What are the different sports?*

Students discuss some of them, cricket, football, netball, volleyball etc

Khadee then discusses some equipment used for different sports. After this, she asks the students to read the passage on sports and find the meanings of the underlined words by guessing the meaning from the context.

Students read the passage and attempt the work. While they do this, the teacher walks around the classroom. Students do the work silently. After 10 minutes the teacher announces:

*T: Okay, those of you who have finished now read the questions and try to write answers.*

*S: On the paper, miss?*

*T: No, write it on your books. Now, hurry up. You should learn to be quick. In the examination, you don't get time to dream you know. Learn to use the time.*

Students keep reading the passage and answering the questions.

The bell rings to end the lesson.

The teacher emphasises the need to be quick here in terms of time. As the students get 90 minutes to answer questions to three or four comprehension passages and to write a summary in the public exam, teachers constantly remind them of the time, but they hardly explain to them how to use the time.

## ***Reading comprehension lesson***

**Field Notes: August, 2009**

*T: Good morning, children.*

*S: Good morning, Miss.*

*T: So, how are you today? Everyone fine? Now, today we are going to do some reading. Take out your worksheet on heroes*

Students ruffle through their bags and take some time to dig out the worksheets.

*T: Now, go to the comprehension passage on heroes. Read silently. Areef, have you found your worksheet? No?*

Areef nods his head to a 'No' and looks at the teacher with concern.

*T: Shibam, share your sheet with Areef, now start reading everyone.*

Students read silently.

*T: Underline any word that you do not understand. Spend about ten minutes reading ok.*

While the students read, teacher checks the number on roll and writes 26/27 in the corner of the blackboard. Then, she walks around the class a little and gets back to her desk and looks at her lesson plan. After ten minutes, she tells the students that the time was up and to read the questions. Most students are still reading. Then, the teacher asks the students to take out their writing books and start answering the questions. The students take out their books and hurry. They draw margins, write dates and begin their work. The teacher moves around checking what the students are doing and warns Areef:

*Next time, do not forget to bring your worksheets Areef!*

The student nods with a smile.

The students keep on working silently till the bell rings and the teacher informs the students to complete the work as homework. The students stand and farewell the teacher and the teacher leaves the classroom.

This is a typical comprehension lesson. The teachers feel that it was a waste of time going over reading passages with students: “but we do it on occasions, if we think the passage is a bit difficult we read it with the students,” mentioned one teacher. Otherwise, the teachers merely get the students to read and answer by themselves and the answers are discussed in the class most of the times while the students mark their own work. Sometimes, peer marking is also done in the classroom.

### ***Finishing the work on time, we must!***

Time was a setback in the Atoll School, as well. Though each period of instruction was 40 minutes long in the school, teachers rushed the students to complete the tasks on time. When I was meeting the teachers to discuss various things they did at school, the teachers mentioned why they had to hurry with the lessons: “We need to finish the work

on time, so we cannot do the brainstorming sessions or pre-reading discussion with students. Sometimes, we need to spend time getting the students to answer the questions before the bell rings for the end of the session” (Group of English teachers, Atoll School).

### ***Private tuition***

Almost all the students in the Atoll School also desired to have extra tuition. Tuition sessions were at their homes, their friend’s home or at the teacher’s home. Parents are very keen on providing tuition for students and some parents find teachers for their students because other parents do so. Just like the teachers in the capital, the teachers in the island school also opt for tuition in order to gain extra money to survive. Teachers at the Atoll School were reluctant to let me watch a tuition session but they shared their experiences with me.

I go to give tuition after school to the student’s home. Parents ask if I can take tuition for them. So, if I have a free slot, I say ‘yes’, otherwise I recommend another teacher. The teaching takes place in the living area or kitchen in some houses. I decide on what to teach after talking to the students and going through their work. Then, I explain to them. If they are weak in paragraph writing, I do a lot of practice with them. Students are very willing to learn and ask a lot of questions. (M.I.1)

I give tuition to about 5 students in a group and I go to about 6 homes. The parents are worried that their children might not get good grades so they always tell me to help them get in the top 10 in the O level exams. I try to do as much as possible with them. The students tell me what they want to learn sometimes, so I find lessons for them and make them practise. Especially, they need to learn to finish the writing paper on time. We do a lot of practice. (R.I.1)

## **How do students learn?**

In spite of the more interactive processes that teachers at this school used, the students were not always willing to participate in discussions. The students in the Atoll School also chose to learn passively unless encouraged by the teacher.





**Figure 26:** Students listening to the teacher

In my observations, they would silently listen to the teachers most of the time, while the teacher explained, and then they completed their tasks later. However, they were more confident in asking the teacher if they had any doubts than the students in the City School. It was very encouraging to see that all students used English throughout the lessons. Some students even helped negotiate meaning in Dhivehi for those who did not know certain things. The teachers did not mind this. In one instance,

*T: The school building will be demolished soon.*

*S: Demolished?*

Teacher writes the word, demolished on the board.

Students read it aloud.

One student tries to explain the meaning in Dhivehi: demolished means 'halaaku kohlung' to break.

Students are very comfortable in the class and seem to enjoy the class and also had a good rapport with the teachers. (C.O.3)

## Commentary

**Journal entry: May, 2009**

Being on this island induces strong emotions and extreme reactions. Something big, yet subtle has its energy surrounding the island. With its smooth and easy rhythm, the slow ticking days of your feet in the sand, images of the little ‘*undboalithab*’ (swings), shade giving palm trees, the bright orange sunrise and sunset. Amazing.

For me, life on an island has not been anything close to seclusion. The challenge in some perfect paradises could be such, definitely. But this island, which would be home for me for a couple of days, with a deep history of the land and many stories of escapades... has grown into a delightful community; one that, after immersing myself in, I have found a group of friends more quickly than ever imagined.

Here, the teachers and I have become good friends instantly. The school environment is so amiable and different from what I have seen in the school in the capital. It may be because it is a small community and the people know each other very well. They even knew the students by name. I was touched by the caring and sharing.

The principal of the school, a native himself, pilots the school with enthusiasm. Openness and commitment to team work are features of the working atmosphere he promotes, and there is close collaboration between the principal and colleagues alike. Discussion about in-school management activities mostly takes place during informal meetings. The principal and other heads meet and talk in the corridors and resolve issues there, as well. Teachers’ duties are clearly outlined and many relate to the organisation and administration of the school, extra classes and co-curricular activities.

I admired the good rapport, commitment and hardworking staff that strived towards one goal and thought that these are the factors that contribute fruitfully to the success of the school. Also, I viewed that there is a positive and mutually respectful relationship between the parents and the school. Parents are very supportive of the school and this strengthens the bond between the school and the wider community. I met with some parents who stated that they are satisfied with the school. According to them,



communication between school and home is maintained through the open-door policy in the school. Channels of communication that support the link between school and home include letters from school to home, annual parent-teacher meetings, participation by parent representatives on the board of management and dialogue between the parents' association and the principal. According to the parents, they provide practical support to the school in a range of ways. They were affirming of the management of the school and of the teachers' commitment to their children's education. Another reason for the close tie with the school community, I sensed, was the language. The natives of most islands are very proud of their dialects and give it a lot of importance. When the students, teachers and staff had their breaks, they talked in their own dialects and it was good to see them talk to each other with enthusiasm and care.



**Figure 27:** Break time.

In my visits there, I have been struck by the forward-looking attitude of the teachers and students I have encountered and have been impressed with their abiding optimism about the school's success in the examinations.

The distinctive themes that arose from the data (**Figure 28**) will be discussed in the following section.

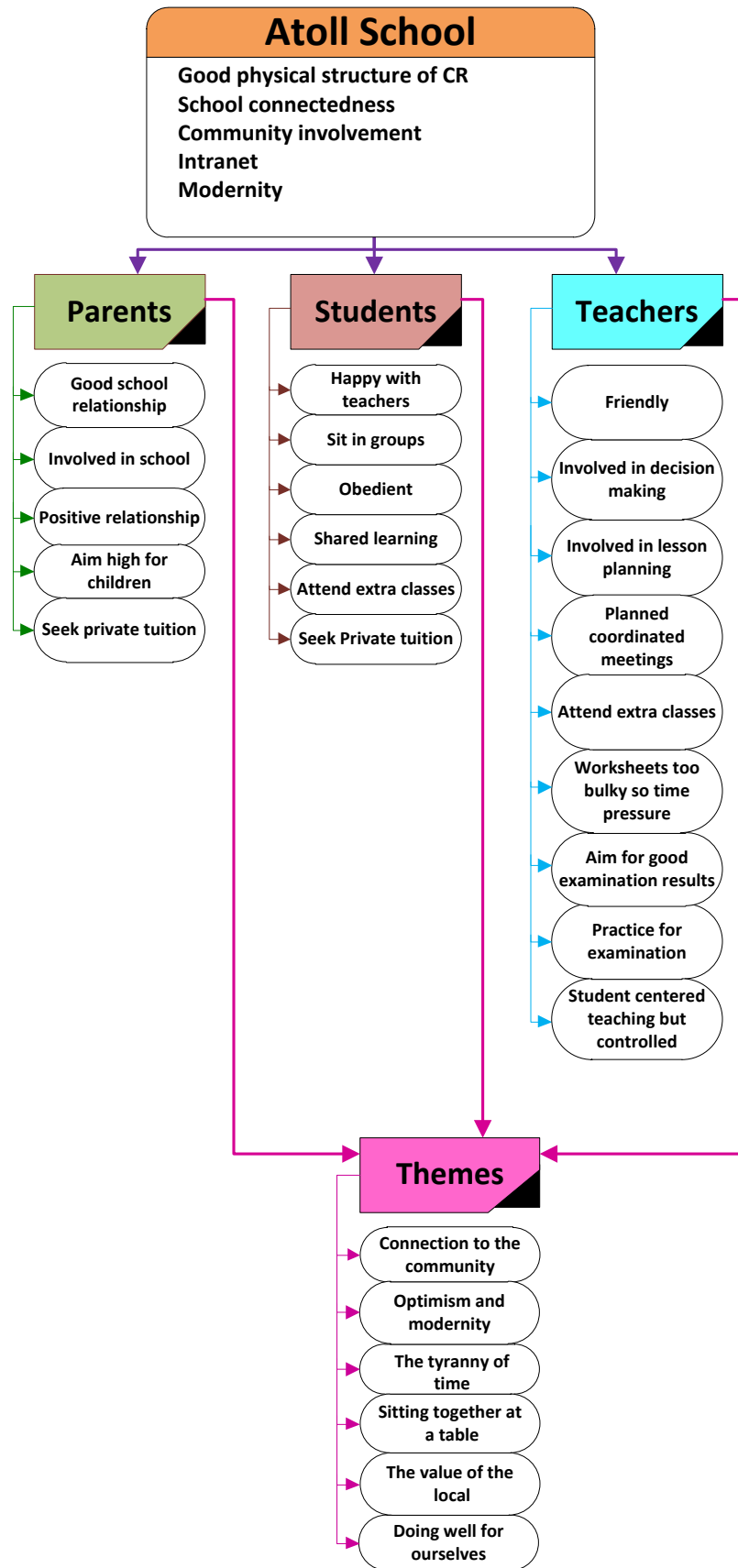


Figure 28: Summary of the findings from the Atoll School

## **Themes: Atoll school**

### ***Connection to the community***

School connection and community are very good in this institution. There is teacher respect, student-to-student positive regard, teachers valuing students' opinions and input, as well as a sense of pride and trust in the entire school community

In addition, the school has a well organised instructional program with committed teachers and high standards and expectations for students. The students are generally motivated and engaged in learning both in school and in community settings, during and after school. There is also evident mutual respect and effective collaboration amongst parents, families and school staff. Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school atmosphere that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.

There are also several other factors that bring a sense of connection to oneself, one's community or one's friend and it is clear that school connectedness makes a difference in the lives of the students of the school. The students seem to like the school, find the teachers and staff supportive and caring, engage in their own academic progress, believe that there is good discipline and participate well in extra and co-curricular activities. Above all, the school's intranet keeps the true meaning of connectedness between students and teachers and the students know what's happening in different sections of the school daily. The relationships formed between students and school staff members are at the heart of school connectedness.

Indeed, teacher support is essential in guiding students toward positive, productive behaviours. This relationship allows students to develop a stake in their own achievement. Likewise, parents and community members contribute to the success of the school. They serve as mentors, participate and provide opportunities for community service take advantage of parent training opportunities and develop on-going relationships with the school.

The school administration has created an orderly school environment. They involve students in maintaining the physical environment and in all-school projects like clean up, repair and planting. Above all, there is a sense of belonging within both the school

community and the outside community which is why there is an air of optimism around the school environment. I was struck by the sense of optimism that parents held for their children's futures. They talked again and again about the "opportunities" that their children had in contrast with their own experiences.

### ***Optimism and modernity***

A dynamic school can be described as one in which the institutional, administrative, and teacher levels are in coordination; and the school meets functional needs as it successfully copes with disruptive external forces and directs its vitality towards its mission. The Atoll School is one such school and this is due to a number of factors.

Firstly, the school sets high standards for performance and the students in the school can achieve the goals that have been set for them for the term ahead. Secondly, the teachers in the school believe that their students have the ability to achieve academically by praising them, motivating them and giving extra help by conducting classes after hours. Thirdly, academic achievement is recognised and acknowledged by the school and the learning environment is orderly. Also, the students respect others who get good grades and try hard to improve on their previous work. For instance, students shared with me that they "learn from each other, from students who gain high marks" (S.I.2). As a result of this, students from the school achieve recognition internationally and locally in the IGCSE examinations every year.

In addition, the management of the school, the school academic staff, the office staff, parents and students are very close knit, and there is a lot of harmony between these bodies. Teachers work collaboratively to raise student engagement and achievement. As one student mentioned:

... now a lot of maldivian teachers hav traind n come back t work in the school so it's made a huge change too i did my o levels there n i preferd the school environment and everything there. small amount of students also meant the teachers were available at all times to help out . so if v needed extra help you can always go in the other session n ask ur teachers for extra time. (Muna, facebook chat, August 2009)

Similarly, the principal and teachers promote and value positive relationships. On most days, the principal will come in and wander around informally, chatting with individual students about them, their families or what they are actually doing.

The educational environment at the Atoll School is conducive to the discovery of knowledge and developing a real sense of achievement for all. The school has achieved a great deal in such a short time, however, as a school community, the school administration “look to the future with great optimism and excitement” (Assistant Principal, 2009). Most of its alumni range from medical doctors, professors, principals and many more professions besides. One of the past students from the school had this to say:

the short period of time i spent in the school was fun.. we had loads of activities and most of the days was around in school till late.

i did my ols in the city school .. spend 5 yrs ... had a lot of activities but i will say the Atoll School gav the students more power to chose , do what they want ... rather than spoon feedin everythn .. organising english day and dhivehi day was on our hands.. we do what we want . we had to b creative and plan everythn and go for the aproval of the heads rather than they all planning everythn n informin us this and that wil happen .. we had our say in the school.. this is quite important in a school life as it teaches u to learn to make decisions .. to chose. and most importantly compromise and work as a team ,..

however there are times in the Atoll School when we students do al the work n the heads of school change everything without even informing us.. like what happend in the prize day.. true these times it is really demotivating but looking at the bright side that gets us ready to face the world.

with all this i wont call the Atoll School an exam/academic machine... il say with all its flows its a pretty cool school.(Muna, Facebook chat, August 2009)

In particular, although the school is considered rural, being on a faraway island, it is, in many ways, very modern. The school community is not conservative but forward thinking. The school environment is very friendly to the eyes, whitewashed walls, clean and very welcoming. The classrooms are large and well ventilated. The modern facilities represent an exciting opportunity for students and parents and establish the

school's culture, values and future direction. The school is up-to-date, preparing students for a modern world; for example, it is rich in information and communication technology with the flexibility to allow access to IT and communications equipment in the computer laboratory. The school has also introduced intranet where teachers and students are each given a username and password. This facility helps in passing notes, messages and other information between school administration, teachers and students.

Moreover, the school also has its school board which provides good support to the school. The school board is involved in organising various programmes for the school. For example, the school board initiates professional development programmes for the teachers and constantly invites guest speakers and academics for extra classes. In addition, the school board is also involved in helping the school in conducting extra classes when the examinations come near by being present at the school in the late evenings to help monitor the students.

The school staff has a lot of faith and trust in the parents. The parents are reliable in their commitments and teachers can count upon parental support.

### ***The tyranny of time***

Perhaps, the most essential and limited resource schools have is time.

The existing school timetable requires that teachers spend the vast majority of their time in classroom instruction. Most teachers have little non-instructional time during the school day, and in that time, they must prepare instructional materials, assess students, and communicate with parents. Additionally, teachers must often serve on school committees, staff various extra-curricular activities or cover interval duty. Such schedules do not allow adequate time for the continuous professional learning that is necessary for quality teaching.

In the school, class time is further reduced or interrupted by intercom announcements, group trips to the restroom, taking attendance, fundraisers, early dismissals for athlete and prefect meetings, allowing students to pack up before the school bell rings, lessons that do not engage students, or students who arrive late, leave early or disrupt class.

**Field Notes: August, 2008**

The teacher goes into the classroom. The classroom is empty. The fans are off. There is complete silence. The teacher leaves her books on the table and I grab a chair and keep it at the back of the class. “They (students) must be in the lab now. Usually, the last period is their lab time. So they take some time to come back to class,” the teacher informs me. We wait. Before long, we hear dragging of feet and a bit louder conversation. Students keep coming into the classroom, after saying lots of ‘Excuse me, please.’ Not all students come together. Some came a bit late. They have gone to the toilet or to get a drink of water. It took about 11 minutes for the students to settle down and start the day’s lesson. The lesson was a comprehension lesson. The teacher read the passage to the students while explaining some words and also got a couple of students to read some paragraphs. There were about 10 questions to answer along with a summary question. The students were able to answer only a couple of questions before the bell rang and the teacher informed them that she would continue the lesson the next day.

As most lessons are teacher-centred, students often get relatively little time to do the task. This means sometimes that the work is not completed on time and, therefore, needs to be done the next day. Also, according to the teachers, the prescribed lessons for the week are too bulky to complete and sometimes a comprehension exercise may drag on for days due to the length of the passage and its level of difficulty.

In addition, the utilisation of time in the school does not readily accommodate the uniqueness of individual learners. In fact, most student frustration is based on the fact that individuals are not treated as individuals during classroom learning time. Teachers and students are short of time in schools because teachers need to finish the curriculum within a specified period and students are trained to complete tasks within the given time as practice for the examinations. The time allocated for each subject is always short for the teachers and students, adding a lot of pressure on their day to day learning. Taking these factors into account, parents opt for private tuition for their children in order to help them learn more in a more individualised, less pressured environment.

### ***Sitting together at a table***

Although the teachers feel pressed for time in the classroom, overall, the teachers are very happy with other commitments in the school:

We feel very relaxed here, the HOD is very helpful and we can approach them any time. Even the supervisors and the heads of the school are very friendly and very committed and we feel at ease with them, no. yes, it's very good. (K.I.2)

In the case of the Atoll School, everyone is approachable; there is an absence of hierarchy as evident from the teacher's quote above. Further, the principal and the rest of the senior staff speak to the teachers in an informal manner during the school hours and keep them at ease.

For instance, the English coordination meetings are held every Thursday and the atmosphere is very informal and friendly between the teachers and the HOD:

### **Coordination Meeting: August, 2009 - Staff Room**

Teachers sit around a few desks in a circle. The HOD sits with them. The meeting begins during school hours, as all teachers are free every Thursday at that time. The HOD greets everyone and asks how the week was going so far and each teacher gives their feedback, one by one. Then, they talk about a few problems they had with regard to certain weak students and then decisions to bring them after school are discussed. Next, the HOD highlights what they should be doing the following week by looking at the scheme of work. Some teachers have the scheme of work with them. Then, the HOD asks if they had any work prepared to show everyone. Two teachers come up with worksheets and pass a copy to each teacher. Then, they discuss one of those and chat about what they would include for the next week. One teacher discusses how the lesson could be organised:

*T1: We could brainstorm about heroes, write on the board 'heroes'. Then students can come up with some. It would be good if we can get some photos of heroes, if possible. Or some books from library? Internet? We can print some out.*

*T2: That's a good idea. We can also talk about Maldivian heroes? The Dhivehi book would have some too. Children will know a lot to talk about them.*

*HOD: Yes, we can do that!*

And the discussion went on for a few minutes. The meeting lasted about 40 minutes.



Within this space, staff and HOD evidently work together. Throughout the meeting, the teachers have the feeling of comfort, without the formalities of the school, making it a place where the teachers can voice their opinions very freely.

One can also say that everyone feels comfortable and there is no obvious sign that any particular individual is in control. Also, the atmosphere of the meeting is inclusive and informal. There is an informality that breaks down enduring barriers. In these meetings that I observed, teachers were understood and accepted and listened to by the HOD.

These meetings are held once a week. One important feature of the meeting is the use of tables around which groups sit for discussion. The length of the meeting is determined in advance. It rarely lasts more than one hour, and the meeting is so planned that it is completed in that time. Teachers have other opportunities during the week to meet in smaller groups, either working in committees on special problems or discussing methods that apply to particular situations. Two or three minutes are devoted to general announcements that are of importance to the whole group.

### ***The value of the local***

The Atoll School heads and teachers are mostly graduates from the school itself. They belong to the community themselves. Therefore, the school administration staff holds a very close connection to the school. They see it as their home away from home.

One supervisor explained some reasons why the everyday activities of the school run so smoothly:

The principal of the school was also instrumental in gathering a very good management team for the school. The school principal, vice-principals, the school secretary (are all locals), HODs and the school counsellor (another local) worked together with him and the school superintendent in the planning and running of the school. The principal acted as mentor to all of them. He instilled a management philosophy that is concerned with excellence and yet is very caring and people-oriented, consistent with the values that is adopted by the school. He has given the staff of the school much autonomy in the decision-making process. This autonomy has allowed for the staff to gain confidence in their ability and develop themselves professionally.

As the heads and some teachers are local, they have a sense of belonging to the school community and understand and value the students' expectations and feelings. The Atoll itself is renowned for being very close knit and dedicated. In addition, they are very protective of their people; having a similar dialect, particular to the group, makes the community more tied together, with everyone looking out for each other. In addition, they know the community better, its people, attitudes and their behaviour. Hence, the students would be more respectful towards the local people as they know that their parents and the school community are very close. In addition, as the community is a very small place, all families know each other in the atolls, where they come from, what they do and how the society perceives the family.

Likewise, the communication medium between the teachers and parents is better, keeping the parents updated on the children who need more attention in various ways. Further, the local teachers' input in pushing the students to achieve is more as they want to help them prosper to bring a good name to their community. Indeed, the teachers believe teaching the students was not just a job but something that they are doing to express the value of and add value to their island.

Moreover, having locals in the school community leaves the students and teachers well bonded, engaging in good relationships, as well as local teachers knowing the students they teach almost on a personal level, so the study and teaching environment is good for both the teachers and students. Most importantly, a certain level of trust is built as local teachers are more aware of students' social background and behaviours.

Further, the parents are partners in the process of imparting value-based education to the children. "All our efforts would not have been so rewarding and encouraging if it were not for the unflinching support given to us by our parents over the years" (Principal, Atoll School, August, 2009). "There is new vigour and enthusiasm in our school and a trust in one another that the shared vision is the single most important road that we walk together" (Assistant Principal, Atoll School, August, 2009).

### ***Doing well for ourselves***

Since the school opened, it has experienced significant gains in the percentage of students achieving good results in international examinations.

“Students enjoy learning here,” said Salva, the head of year 10. “It builds their confidence and makes them feel like they’re in control of their performance in school and on the state tests.”

According to Salva, student progress monitoring is critical to the school’s improved performance. “We run a spreadsheet for every grade level that shows each standard and the percentage of children achieving mastery in all the subjects. Teachers review the spreadsheets in their team meetings, so they can identify areas of need.”

At the Atoll School, it is all about balance: ensuring that lessons are interesting in the class; emphasising the importance of both academic achievement and extra activities; and providing individualised help along with whole-group instruction. The school offers an after school program until 7.00 p.m. for students who need additional help in their academic courses. Other enrichment activities are occasionally offered during this time as well.

Similarly, collaboration is also important, and teachers work in teams. Also, more than 60 percent of teachers at the school hold at least a bachelor’s degree. Salva has taught at the school for 10 years. “We’re a very experienced staff,” she says. “Teachers are here for their entire careers.” Salva says that teachers and administrators have collaborated on a number of programmes, including extra classes for weak students. For instance, the school has implemented ‘after classes’ in which students who do not hand in assignments are assigned to a half-hour homework lunch, where they finish incomplete work. If they are still having trouble handing in assignments or understanding academic material, students are then assigned a mentor.

The management and the staff are very hardworking and anxious to produce good results. Each year’s academic performance is analysed and they reflect on the past year’s achievement to make progress the following year. They make a joint effort to create a better programme for the students to enrich their learning and priority is given to providing the best education for the students. In order to do this, the HODs and teachers meet and prepare worksheets and past papers to practise with the students. The teachers find the students’ weaknesses and help them improve. They try to do practice for examinations by constantly reminding the students that they need to learn to finish tasks on time. This is one reality of how the school brings students on that are among the best students at a national level in the Cambridge O level examination.

Balanced against teaching, the teachers in the school were not limited to work in the classroom; rather, their work went beyond the classrooms and corridors (e.g. workshops conducted in the school, subject coordinators meeting, planning meetings) to the community (e.g. teacher development workshops outside the school, in-service programmes).

*The Atoll School has moved forward by being collaborative and involved in students learning and achievement. The teachers and students teach and learn in a friendlier environment with less pressure from the stake holders. After being in the peacefulness of the island school, I then turn to discuss in the next chapter, the place where out of school learning takes place, namely, the private tuition settings in the Maldives.*

## CHAPTER SIX

### A view into Private Tuition in the Maldives



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### A View into Private Tuition in the Maldives

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*I don't learn at school, so I take tuition'*

#### Private tuition in the Maldives

While parents seem satisfied by teachers and teaching in the Atoll School, that is not the case at other schools. For instance, according to parents from the City School, private tuition is the place where students do the real learning. The teachers visit the students' home and teach them individually or in groups, or else students go to private tuition centres. It was hard for me to convince teachers to discuss the private tuition classes they conducted. Most of the teachers were reluctant to share information about their classes because aspects of their activities might be revealed. The reason could be because of the restrictions on private tuition underlined by the Ministry of Education, Maldives:

Teachers are prohibited from providing tuition in the 'teacher's residence'; expatriate teachers are restricted to tutor in registered tuition classes or any other form of institution; teachers need to get permission from the school prior to visiting students' homes for tuition and teachers are prohibited to teach students in their own grade or parallel class of the same grade. Also, teachers are not allowed to teach more than 5 students at a home (Ministry of Education, 2002, pp. 17-18).

Although these rules are there, the government, the schools and the teachers do not give them much importance. Some schools give out a small booklet 'Guidelines for teachers' on the first day of their work but do not monitor the points mentioned in the guide; therefore, teachers openly seek all kinds of private tuition.

While almost all teachers were hesitant to share their private tutoring life with me, luckily one teacher was willing to let me observe a few of her tuition lessons and two other teachers let me ask a few questions.

**Journal Entry: June, 2009**

*The walk to a tuition class*

I rang up Naomi and she wanted me to meet her near the new service provider shop on the main road. It was around 7.40 pm and there were not many people on the streets. I headed towards the main road to meet Naomi.

I was going to meet one of my research participants, for my first private tuition observation. I was excited to meet her and go see her giving tuition. I got myself ready with my notebook, camera and the voice recorder and I adjusted the bag on my shoulder. It kept falling down and I kept pulling it up. My attention was focused on my preparation for the meeting with Naomi.

*Let's see, I brought the recorder with me? I tested it just yesterday. So, I know it does a great job recording. But, sometimes it fails to work. I hope it works this time.*

*I hope the batteries work...*

*Where did I put those batteries?*

*I snaked my right hand into the opening of the red handbag and rummaged around, until I feel the hard roundness of the AAA batteries. I put my hand in and inserted the battery into the very lean recorder and popped it back into my bag.*

*I sigh. I wondered what the parents would be like? Why had they agreed to allow me to come into their home?*

*I think Naomi must have told them that I was a supervisor at the school.*

*I don't want to appear rude or awkward.*

*Well, I'll just have to wing it and hope things work out.*

*Stop worrying!*

*You are an excellent person with strangers...*

*You have met parents thousand times before, so just try to relax and be yourself. Yes, I affirm, as a way to soothe myself.*

*You will be alright.*

*And people feel comfortable around you.*

*Yep, I should be okay, I conclude.*

*And Naomi had appeared to be very verbal, open, and friendly when we talked over the telephone last week, about the parents and me visiting the home, I reason. I should be okay.*

*Well, I hope both she feels comfortable with me observing the lesson and the parents having a stranger watching their children learn at home.*

I focused back on the road. The streets that I was walking were not very familiar to me and I was kind of a bit scared as it was only recently that a friend had been robbed of her handbag during daylight on one of those streets. I clung onto my bag hard and kept walking while I was greeted by a crowd of young boys who were playing dart on the road:

Aadhey Kulhelan! (Come play!)

My heart was beating a bit faster than usual but I kept on walking quickly and did not give them another glance. Soon, I turned into another lane and strode as fast as I could and reached the main road. Sigh! Naomi wanted me to stay near the corner shop that was painted red, until she came. So, I stood there. Usually, that part of the city would be very noisy, but since it was the prayer time, the shops were closed and there were only a few people on the road. I didn't want to wait there standing so I thought I would do some window shopping until Naomi came. I looked around the shops nearby.

Soon, I saw Naomi walking towards me. She seemed a completely different person to the one I saw at school. At school, she wore a sari. She looked more relaxed in a skirt and a shirt and seemed fresher. She started smiling when she saw me.

'We should take this road,' she pointed to the opposite direction and we walked towards it. 'I got two students today. I have spoken with the parents about you



Ma'am and they are very nice. They don't mind you visiting the place,' she confirmed. The name of the house is *M. Windy-ge*<sup>3</sup>.

I thanked her for that and reminded Naomi that I did not like to be 'madamed'. I do not remember the number of times I had told her not to address me that way but I still had not been able to stop her from doing that.

While we moved to the destination, which was only a few minutes away, Naomi told me about the lesson she would be doing that day. I told her that I would be taking a few pictures and recording the lesson and also that I would like to talk with the parents and the girls as well. She was very helpful and told me that it would be no problem. Naomi mentioned that the parents were very cooperative and friendly too. Finally, we reached the house.

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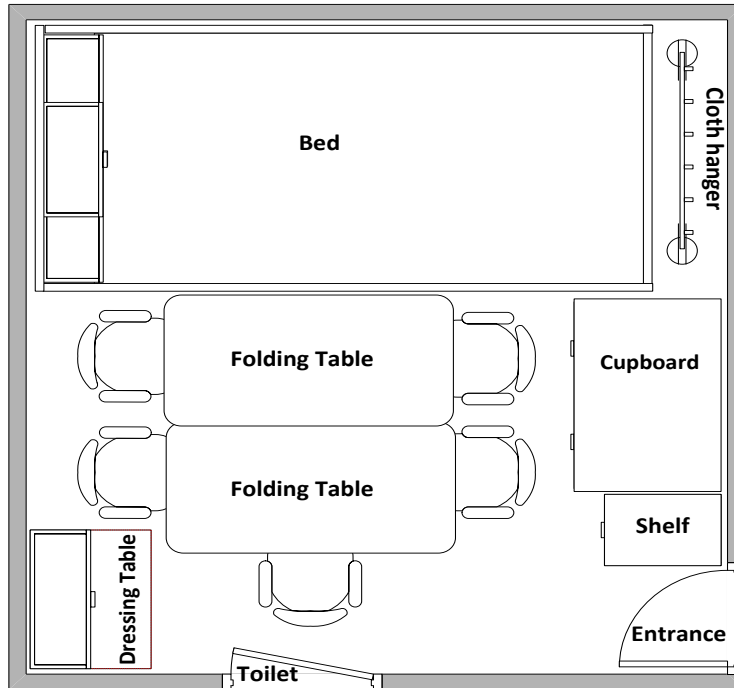
<sup>3</sup> Maldivian homes are given unique names. M. here explains the name of the district *Maafannu* and Windy is chosen as the name of the house while *ge* means house in Dhivehi. There are a number of types of names. Some examples are H. Morning Villa, Ma. Surprise *Vaadhee* (river), G. Apple.

## ***Windy- ge: The home, the room.***

**Journal Entry: June, 2009**

We had to climb up a narrow bit of winding stairs to an upstairs house. It was a very small place. We left our shoes at the bottom of the stairs and Naomi gestured with her hands to come up. She led me up the stairs. As soon as we climbed up, we entered a tiny sitting area, which contained a three-seater sofa. It was a very narrow room. A minute kitchen stood right next to the sofa area. The television set was switched on and the evening news was showing. There was a woman and a man sitting when we reached the top and when they saw us, they quickly got up from the seat, said hello and showed us to our seat. I gave them a smile and introduced myself and thanked them for the opportunity. I told them my name but they did not introduce themselves but rather gave me a smile and left, going towards the tiny kitchen. Naomi asked me to sit. We sat down. She told me there was another tuition session going on in the room opposite and we were to wait until they came out. So, we waited.

Before long the door of the room opened and the teacher came out, along with the students. A girl rushed out and sat and started eating a burger. The tuition was held in the student's bedroom. Naomi showed me in and pulled out a chair near the table for me to sit down. Naomi sat on the right. I pulled out my notebook and a pen and my recorder and the camera. The room was very small (see Figure 29).



**Figure 29:** A floor plan of the room where private tuition was held

Two folding tables were unfolded and chairs were kept around it. The child's single bed stood behind the desks. On the wall of the room, there were some notes on chemistry formulas and physics, on sheets of paper. The girl also had her multi-coloured varieties of necklaces hanging on hooks on the wall. Right opposite, stood a wardrobe and on top of it were bags of different textures, makes and sizes. Nice choice, I thought. A small dressing table and small cupboards also occupied the corner of the room. An air conditioner cooled the room. The wall also boasted some glow-in-the-dark stickers around a clock. Soon, the girls hurried into the room. We did introductions. The two girls were Shauna and Azza. Shauna was from Windy-ge and Azza was her friend, who had come there to take tuition with her. They were very excited and had a million questions for me. I told them what I was doing there and why I was there. They seemed quite friendly. The door closed and the lesson began at 08.07 pm.

Naomi had a small notebook which she opened and then she started talking.

**Field Notes: June, 2009**

08.07 pm

T: *So how was school?*

S1/S2: *Good*

T: *That's good! [smiling]*

The teacher takes out her notebook from her bag and opens it. Then she says

T: *Today, we will practise passive voice, okay!*

Then the teacher talks about writing for newspapers.

T: *If we are writing for a newspaper, we will be using a formal language.*

*And one way the writing can be made formal is by using the passive voice.*

*Let us go through the previous day's notes.*

08.15 pm They go through the notes and teacher explains more.

Next, the teacher focuses on what the students have been learning at school that day. Teacher asks about work done at school.

S: *We are discussing about disasters in school now. We watched movies too. It was awesome. We are going to watch 'Titanic' this week.*

The girls are thrilled and talk about Titanic [giggling]

S2: *I love the movie, I have watched it before... it is going to be fun, dho*

*(isn't it?) Miss!*

T: *[laughs]... yes, I am sure you will like to watch it again.*

08.20 pm The door to the room opens and the mother brings us two cups of coffee. I thank them. I was not expecting it though. Naomi sees my surprised look and tells me that it is routine. While we have the coffee, they (the girls) also talk about the absence of a girl at school and things that they did at school that

day. Then, the teacher talks with the girls about one of their friend's boyfriend and why the parents did not allow her to attend tuition.

Then, the teacher brings the students back into the lesson. She starts talking about the simple past tense in the passive voice.

Students say that they use 'was' and 'were'.

Students give examples: She was washing her clothes

The teacher says it is not correct

*S2: She washed her clothes.*



**Figure 30:** Students taking private tuition

08:25 pm Then the teacher gives examples.

*T: The clothes were washed by her. That is the correct one. Now girls...mechanically copying is not good. You need to understand how it is formed... the structure of the sentence.*

She gives more examples: They painted the home. The home was painted by them. Did they paint the home? Was the home painted by them?

The students copy the examples into their notebooks, while the teacher reads out the examples.

08.30 pm The teacher explains the past continuous using passive and gives examples.

She was washing the curtains

The curtains were being washed by her.

Was she preparing the meals?

The meals were being prepared by her.

Then the teacher moves onto the past perfect tense

08.40 pm The teacher explains the past perfect tense

She gives the rule and when and where it is used.

Had she washed the car?

Had the car been washed?

Then the teacher gets the students to write their own sentences. Shauna and Azza start writing sentences. When they finish their work, the teacher goes through some of the sentences they have written and commends their work:

*'Good work, girls!'*

Then she looks at her watch and says:

*Alright girls, revise the work, okay! It's time to go*

Looks at her watch again.

The teacher sips her cup of coffee, gives me a smile and stands up and I do the same.

Class ends at 8.55pm

The lesson was conducted over an hour. The whole time, Naomi sits at the table and reads from her notes and explains to the students and the students listen to the teacher, ask questions and do their work. Naomi gives the students some homework. I ask the students:

*Are you confident with passive voice now?*

*Students: Yes [giggling]*

*That's good, I tell them and add that I will see them again soon.*

*Students: Yes, Miss...see you!*

We say goodbyes and leave. I walk with Naomi, this time I thought I would walk with her towards her home. I had a friend, whose boutique was near Naomi's home, where I planned to visit that night. We continue our talk about the girls and how they took interest in lessons etc. She tells me that the girls had improved a lot after she started tuition with them. She was very happy with her work with them and found a lot of satisfaction.

Soon, we reach Naomi's home and I bid good night to her telling her that I would be meeting her at school the next day.

Private tutoring is defined here as extra, fee-paying academic teaching or drilling for full-time students studying in regular school instruction programmes or syllabuses at primary (Grades 1 to 7) and secondary and upper secondary (Grades 8-12) school levels. It is academically-oriented, with monetary transfer occurring from parents to tutors, tax free. The tutoring content and assistance with mastery of cognitive or technical skills are related to the students' daytime schooling.


Tuition is usually held in the student's home, either one-on-one or in small groups of three or four students formed by the students and parents. The most ideal setting for tuition is the student's home. Most homes in the Maldives are very congested and small, therefore sometimes tuition is conducted in the kitchen (dining room). Or as we just saw, in one of the bedrooms converted into a study, just for the times of the tuition.

Most Maldivian schools teach double sessions due to lack of space in the schools, so there are some children attending school in the morning and some in the afternoon. The tuition is provided outside school hours, in the mornings for students going to school in the afternoon and in the evening for students going to school in the mornings and afternoons. For a student who goes to the school in the morning, the tuition would begin, “as soon as I go home I have my lunch and the tuition begins. It goes on from two until six or sometimes until eight” (S.I.1). Teachers spend one hour on each subject. Students spend a lot of time of the day for tuition, depending on the number of subjects for which they take tuition.

Most children spend their whole childhood studying; they do not have time for themselves, even during the weekends. As one student interviewed, Shauna, reports, “I get up in the morning at 5.30am and get ready for school and attend school around 6.45am. I am in school till 1.00pm. I have to rush home soon, take a shower, have lunch and then wait for my tuition teachers to come from 2.00pm till 9.00pm in the night. After the teacher leaves at nine, I do my homework. If not, I am so tired so I sleep. Even on weekends I have tuition. I do not have time to visit my relatives or do any extracurricular activities” (S3.I.1). There are also private tuition centres where they provide tuition for larger groups of students and in more formal classroom settings just like in schools. In such tuition classes, there would be a maximum of about 20 students per class. Desks are arranged in rows and students get to sit just like in the normal public classrooms. Those parents who cannot afford one-on-one tuition send their children to these tuition centres as these centres offer tuition for more than one subject at a lower fee. Teachers for these tuition centres are sought through advertising (Figure 31) or by contacting people at the schools or through friends. The Classic Tuition Centre is a tuition centre that provides tuition for GCE O Level subjects. Here, the centre is advertising jobs for English and Mathematic teachers.



Classic Tuition Centre  
Lonuziyaraiy Magu, , Maldives, Tel: (960) 0, Fax: (960) 0



macromedia FLASHPAPER

**JOB VACANCY**

**Post: Tutor (English for Grade 8 & 9)**  
**Working Hours :** Between 7:10 am - 8:45 am

**Post: Tutor (Maths for Grade 8 & 9)**  
**Working Hours :** Between 9:00 am -10:30 am

**Post: Tutor (Maths& English for Grade 9 & 10)**  
**Working Hours :** Between 8:25 pm -10:00 pm

**Qualification:**

- ☞ GCE "O" level standard
- ☞ Should posses pleasant personality
- ☞ Experience in teaching is an added advantage

For more information please contact: 777 5504  
**CLASSIC TUITION CENTRE**  
Lonuziyaraiy Magu, Male  
Tel:3317216

**Figure 31:** An advertisement for a tutor. Adapted from ‘iulaan.mv’ (2012) – a leading website in the Maldives for jobs, careers and announcements.

Private tuition has been a significant feature of the Maldivian society for a long time. Private tuition is a tradition and a culture in the Maldives and is practised on a large scale. The practice of tuition may have started in the Maldives because of the late development of universal education, which happened only in the past 20 to 30 years, accompanied by a rapid rise in the importance given to education, which resulted in earlier generations of parents not being educated enough to help their children with homework and test preparation, particularly for higher grades. It is a widely held belief in Maldivian society that the students must be provided with tuition in order to get good results in the unit tests and examinations.

Private tuition teachers are chiefly teachers who teach in the same school or in other schools. Private tuition is provided by almost all teachers in the school while most students in school also seek tuition in nearly all the subjects. Teachers who work in the morning sessions give tuition in the afternoons and evenings, while the afternoon session teachers give tuition in the mornings and evenings. Teachers find students for private tuition by word of mouth, by advertisements in newspapers (Figure 32) or through friends.

Here, the advertiser requires an English Teacher for a grade 6 Student. The Phone number is provided so that teachers can contact them.

We Provide tuition for Grades 5 to 10.

We teach reading, writing and speaking in English to those above all ages above 4. For more information call.

TUITION (the category)

We provide home tuition.

Tuition for other subjects like Maths, Dhivehi, Science and Business stream are also

**Figure 32:** The Classified section (2011) of the Maldivian newspaper, Adapted from ‘Haveeru Daily’, showing individual advertisements for private tuition.

This is from the classifieds section of the Haveeru Daily newspaper in the Maldives. Job advertisements, catering and other miscellaneous things are advertised here. People who require and provide tuition advertise on this page as well.

The tuition fees of these tutors vary from teacher to teacher and differ for the primary grades and secondary grades. Teachers who provide tuition can earn a lot of money and can become quite well-off. Most teachers give tuition in order to earn more money. The salary set for the teachers by the government takes into account the fact that most teachers will make tax free money from tuition. According to the teachers, the accommodation and food expenses are very high in the Maldives and, therefore, their

salary is not sufficient for them to cover all expenditure. Therefore, what they receive from tuition is very helpful for them. They feel that the salary they get is not sufficient for their needs, especially when supporting a family:

**Journal Entry: June, 2009**

I met a few teachers in the school office, during their free time, and after some chit chat, I asked them if we could talk about private tuition. Some of them agreed, saying that as long as I do not disclose their names or mention them to the Ministry of Education, they were willing to talk about it (They do not want to be known to be providing tuition as there are rules and regulations for giving tuition and they may or may not be following it.). I assured them that I wouldn't. There was only one other staff member who worked in the office in the room and we quietly went to the back of the room and found some chairs and sat near a desk. After some chit chat, I went straight to my question:

*Why do you give tuition?*

*I have my family here with me now and it is hard to get by with only the salary, so tuition is a good way of earning an additional income to meet the basic needs, rent, food, clothing and medical (M.I.2).*

*I give tuition for survival. I cannot endure with the salary that I earn. Accommodation is very high here. One room is Rf5000 (US\$389.10) per month. We need to buy the furniture and so on. Food is expensive too. Our salary is Rf12,800 per month (US\$996.10) (K.I.1).*

I also asked them how much they charge for tuition. Some teachers did not want to disclose it. They just gestured with their hands to leave that question off but one teacher shared the amount with me. In general, some teachers charge: “for one student, individual tuition, the normal rate, is Rf1000 (US\$77.82) per month. If it is a group, we charge Rf400 (US\$31.12) per student per month” (K.I.1). Students, whose parents can afford to spend the required money on tuition, take coaching for almost all the subjects they learn at school.

In the Maldivian classrooms, there are about 30 students in each class and the teaching and learning time for each lesson is 35 minutes. Within this time, the teachers are expected to give explanations on a certain topic and get students to practise the topic:

*We have to cover the work allocated for the period within 35 minutes and so we sometimes do not do much practice. So, for these reasons and more, many students go for tuition (N.I.3).*

According to school administrators and parents, teachers who are not very keen to teach during the school hours are often seen to be active in the tuition classes (that lasts one hour per subject) and show much enthusiasm. There are teachers who do not seem interested and lack individuality in the classroom possibly because they need to teach prescribed work. The interest they show in the tuition class may be due to factors like a change of environment, fewer students, and lack of pressure on the teachers to stick to time and syllabuses, unlike at the school.

There are some teachers who also claimed that they did not offer tuition to gain money but as a service to the students and to impart their knowledge. In addition, there are also teachers who carry out tuition because of parents' requests.

*I have never initiated. Requests keep coming. I don't always have time and my charges are very high too. And then again, it has never been me soliciting tuition (Z.I.1).*

*I provide tuition because it is a way of not wasting myself. I feel that I am doing something valuable to these children (N.I.3).*

According to the teachers, many students are very disruptive in class and they even say that they would only ever learn the lesson content from the tuition teacher not in the classroom situation:

*Well...classroom atmosphere is not good. Students are restless. Over-crowded. Children are not attentive. Students have too many social problems which they bring to school. And there will be announcements from the PA system which lead to disruptive students (K.I.1).*

Teachers also feel that tuition does foster a lot of improvement in students as:

*They are free to ask anything. No inhibitions. Some students are shy in class to ask the teacher anything even when they don't know. During tuition sessions, students feel very at ease and they tend to ask anything and everything. They take tuition classes very seriously. They trust us very much. And when they improve in unit tests and class tests, they seem to work harder with us (K.I.1).*

*Students who got Ds and Cs strive very hard and try to get the best out of us (N.I.1).*

While some tuition conditions are favourable, there are also other pressures on teachers too. Some teachers feel stressed about tuition as parents have so much confidence in them when it comes to the success of their children:

*It is like we are responsible for the success and failure of our students. Parents have a very high expectation from us. They think that we have to make them pass and get good results (A.I.1).*

The teachers I met in the school office thought that I may share their private tuition stories with the school heads or the Ministry of Education, so one of them was sure to stress to me, ‘Madam, please do not talk about this with anyone else. Not even with the ministry. You will not tell the ministry, will you?’

And another colleague added that, ‘Miss now come on, we trust you, that is why we told you...’ And also in the end, they invited me to go to the school canteen for a cup of tea. However, since I was tired and was ready to leave school for that day, I thanked them and promised them I would not tell anyone about their private tuition stories. They also thanked me and walked out. (Journal Entry, June, 2009)

Teachers also gave tuition because of peer pressure. According to some teachers, they provided tuition since their colleagues worked in private tuition and if they did not, people would see them differently:

*We also need to give tuition as everyone else is giving. It would show that we are not up to the mark. As if, we are not capable. We need to upkeep our status.’ (A group of teachers, City School)*

Also, some teachers observed there are also parents who find tuition teachers for their children because they are not happy with the grades that their children get at school and find the teaching at school is not good.

Having discussed some teachers' views on private tuition; I now turn to present a teacher who is very popular amongst the parents and students, who they believe is one of the best teachers of English to seek tuition from.

### ***A vignette of one teacher's view on tuition: Mr Lin***

#### **'Sheep without the shepherd'**

Mr. Lin is one of the teachers in high demand when it comes to tuition. He is always fully booked. He is reserved by parents and students, even for the next two years. Mr. Lin has been teaching for over ten years and he has also been giving tuition for that period. He is very much liked by students and parents as he is caring and very patient and an excellent teacher. As a colleague, he is very helpful and has always been a source of advice and support to the English department.

The parents seek the best teacher and the best teacher is judged by the number of pupils who get the best results in the exam after getting coached by the teacher. The best students are announced over the media and are published in the newspapers. In addition, parents and students find out the best teacher by word of mouth.

*"Mr. Lin is a very good teacher. He has produced very good results with all the students he has coached. The girls who learnt from him even reached the top ten. I bring him to teach my daughter." (R.I.1)*

According to many students and parents, Mr. Lin has provided tuition and helped them achieve many A's and passes in the final examinations. This convinced me to ask him a few questions. I had met him a few times before, informally, and he agreed to make some time to meet me. However, he had asked me to remind him.

Mr. Lin is a very busy person. He is rarely seen at his desk. So, I decided to check his teaching schedule and find out when he would be free. I got the

information from the supervisor and found out that he was free that day during the third period.

When it was time, I went to him. He was busy rummaging through his drawers. I greeted him and he greeted me back and said;

*You found me at the right time. I was going to see if you were around today... [smiling]. I am free now, are you? We can talk today... Please sit.*

I sat across from him.

I sat down at the table, and, after arranging a spiral notebook and two pens in front of me, I decided to check my tape recorder to ensure that our voices were loud enough to be recorded.

*Thank you, Sir, for seeing me today, I began.*

And he replied:

*Let me first find something. I have left my notebook somewhere and don't seem to find it. Aha! Here it is, okay. Tell me. So how are you? How are the observations?*

And he kept asking me some questions about my research.

*Now I have asked you too many questions. I should give you a turn. [smiling]. We laughed.*

*Can I record the interview?*

*I'd rather you not do it please... let's be more relaxed.*

Mr Lin was not happy about recording the talk so I was ready to write down notes and so I kept making notes on my note book. I asked him:

*Why do you think students take tuition?*

Mr Lin gave various reasons why he thinks children opt for tuition:

*The reason why students take tuition, I personally feel, is because they do not get enough in class. They are either confused or have doubts. Another group wants to be on the top... I have both groups. Some wants to just pass the exams, the others are aiming high. Certain*

*parents depend on the tuition. Tuition is for those who accept... to get an additional edge. Tuition is not necessarily negative. So many parents are not competent so they get teachers. Many parents are educated too but they need someone else to help. In some cases, tuition is the only place they learn. There are all types of situations. It is for them, it is like the sheep without the shepherd...*

*What time do you give tuition? [His shoulders slump a little and he settles into his chair]*

*After I go from school in the afternoon, I have lunch and sleep till 3.30pm. I start at 4pm and end at 6 and take a small break and then go on from 6.30 to 8.00pm*

Mr. Lin preferred to give short and direct answers. He was a very serious and authoritative type of person. So he was gesturing with his hand for me to keep continuing the questions one by one... So I kept asking one after the other, while noting down whatever he said.

*How much do you charge per student?*

[says a bit softly, leans forwards towards me]

*I can make an extra salary, RF10,000 per month*

*How many students are you attending to now? [keeps fiddling with his pen] 15 to 16 students*

*Do you think students are more attentive during the tuition sessions? [continues fiddling with his pen and leans back on the chair]*

*Very attentive, personal type of attention. Their parents monitor.*

*Monitor? You mean walk around? Ask you?*

*Yes, they are around, looking from a distance, and sometimes ask me how their children are doing and even look at their work done with me.*

*Do you repeat your normal class lessons in tuition classes?*

*[smiling] I don't give tuition to my own students. I ask them to come with their exercise books and I look at them. I supplement and fill in the gaps. I have my own curriculum.*



*Set lessons. My own passages. I have my own file. It may have nothing to do with what I have in school. Lessons to learn newly.*

Mr. Lin felt that students who take private tuition achieve better academic results due to ‘exposure to the content more often. Intensive learning and more time spent in learning and students are more serious. Most children value money. Students want to get the money’s worth.’ He also added that it could also depend a lot on the student’s attitude and belief towards learning:

*I believe that achieving students would achieve and students with determination and thoughts for knowledge would achieve. Zara (a former student), was school captain last year; she didn’t take tuition but she got eight distinctions. She was the best all-rounder and got World Brilliance Award in Cambridge. If you have the drive, you can! (L.I.1)*

Mr. Lin concluded that many students go for tuition because it ‘*is a remedial measure and it is like going to the doctor*’.

As soon as I finished asking questions, Mr. Lin said that he had to meet another teacher. The teacher was already standing outside the door, waiting for him.

*‘I am glad to help you,’* he told me and asked me to mail him if I had further questions. I hope I have provided enough to make it worthwhile for you to in your project. Mr Lin shot a furtive glance my way before turning his gaze to the teacher who was waiting for him.

I thanked him and left the room.

### ***If the neighbour’s child takes tuition, my child should too***

Most parents, who can afford it, make sure that their children are given private tuition either on a one-on-one basis, in groups or in a tuition class.

Some parents feel that the teachers are not doing their jobs well at school and they are not dedicated enough. There are many other reasons why parents take their children to private tuition. As mentioned earlier, a further reason could be the fact that the parents themselves are not proficient enough to help their children. Sometimes, both parents are working parents and, therefore, do not have the time to help their children. In other cases in the school, the competitive nature between the students, the parents and the

society at large, forces the parents to give their children opportunity for the best tuition possible as they feel that tuition will help their children to excel and achieve the best result possible in the examinations:

Tuition teachers can give individual attention. They help in weak areas. They explain very well, until the student understands the topic. They also use the text books prescribed by the ministry. The school hardly uses them. The tuition also helps my child to improve in the subject. Last year, my daughter got a B in English in the final term and this year, with tuition, she has improved and gained an A (P1.I.1- Atoll School).

I guess we wouldn't need tuition for our kids if the schools provided a better education. And, we also would be able to save the tuition money to invest on other things. I feel that it is not the school that is accountable for the success of most of the students. It is the parents who spend their time and money to find good teachers to give our kids the best (P2.I.1- City School).

Some parents who earn an average income also exhaust most of their salary on the child's tuition:

I have to spend RF2100 per month on tuition from my salary of RF5000 (P1.I.1- City School).

My daughter takes tuition in physics, chemistry, maths, biology and English. I am almost drained. I hate it. To earn that much money, I have to work like a bull (P4.1.1- Atoll School).

In addition, with the limited opportunities available in the form of scholarships, funding, and local opportunities for further education in the Maldives, higher qualifications are needed to ensure good options to continue further education. Therefore, children and their parents demand private tuition to excel in the examinations to get a high rank in the school and also to attempt to be included in the national top ten; this sort of recognition assist them to reach their future goals.

Moreover, there are also some parents who get tuition teachers for their children because they think it is fashionable.

Private tuition is an embedded culture in the Maldives, and so if the neighbour's child takes tuition, I should too. It is something fashionable (P3.I.1- Atoll School).

This suggests a bandwagon effect where more and more parents seek tuition for their children, due to the parents sensing that, when others parents provide tuition and they do not, their children might suffer.

## Why do students take tuition?

Shauna studies in the grade 9 science stream. She feels that her English writing is very weak and “private tuition helped me change my D to a C” and so, from then on until now, Shauna has been taking tuition. Shauna told me more about herself. She is the girl from M.Windy ge, and on one of the days after her tuition, we had time to talk. We sat in her room around the same table after Naomi left. I had been visiting their home for two weeks by then so Shauna was very comfortable with me and we turned out to be good friends. The frequent visits had helped us build a good relationship. What Shauna shared with me, I present below.

### *A vignette on Shauna and tuition*

Shauna has four members in her family. Her mother, father and sister. Her sister is eleven years old and goes to school but she doesn't take tuition. Shauna gets tuition in all seven subjects. Her father works at a service provider and her mother is a teacher. Her mother works at an island school so she lives on that island. However, she visits them during weekends. Shauna lives in Male' with her father and her mother's best friend.

Shauna studies in the grade 9 science stream and she feels that her English writing is very weak. She got a D in the first term in English so she started to take tuition in English. She also takes tuition for other school subjects as well.

Shauna does not read stories much nor use the Internet often. She rarely reads a book. *I borrow books from library but I just keep it at home and return it.*

And she went on to say more:

*Members in my family read newspapers but not books*

*It is sometimes hard to understand explanations given by teachers of other subjects and I also do not understand the questions of examination papers because the English is hard.*

*I am not very happy with the teachers' feedback. They just put a tick or a cross and that's it. No explanation about what I did wrong. So I don't know where and how to improve.*

*Last year, in the final term I got 43 in English and this year, with the tuition, I feel I am doing much better.*

At the end of the second term, Shauna got 63 in English, which is a grade C. She is very happy with her achievement and hopes 'to work for a B or an A next term,' she said with enthusiasm. She adds: *Naomi Miss is a very good teacher. Me and Azza like her a lot. She listens to us and helps us improve our comprehension and writing. She corrects our essays and tells us how to use new vocabulary in our essays.*

Shauna and her friends do not speak in English in the class, at the tuition sessions or at home. She enjoys English lessons at school but 'we don't get much speaking practice.'

Students feel that they do not get as much as they want from their teachers because of their anxiety not to appear stupid:

*Our teacher tries to explain but sometimes we cannot concentrate in the class. And even when I don't know something I am too shy to ask the teacher. My friends would think I am dumb (S1.I.1).*

Also, there are others who want to excel in the subject: "I want to get an A in English. I enjoy learning English at school, but I am very weak in writing essays and that section of the paper. So, my English tuition Miss is very helpful and I think I am learning to write better now" (S2.I.1). There are also students who cannot comprehend the lessons in class:

*Everyone speaks together sometimes. Sir goes on explaining. It is difficult for me to understand sometimes (S1.I.1).*

Azza also takes tuition to improve in her weak areas:

### **Field Notes: June, 2009**

Azza studies in a secondary school and learns in the science stream. She achieved 76, a grade A, in English in the final term in the previous year. She aims to achieve better, so she opted to take tuition in English and all other subjects that she studies. She feels that she is very weak in summary writing.

Azza comes from a family of herself, her father, mother, brother and sister. Her siblings are married and settled down. Her father works in a company and mother stays at home. Azza reads books and magazines when she gets time. She also uses the Internet sometimes. Azza feels that the library does not have interesting books. Azza is very happy with her tuition teachers and wishes to stick to them until she finishes her studies. Azza goes to M. Windy-ge, to take tuition, with Shauna.

Students like Azza and Shauna also believe that at tuition they can be more relaxed and ask anything they want:

I can ask anything I want; I am shy at school to ask questions. I cannot take my hands up. But at tuition, we can talk and ask everything we don't know (S4.I.1).

Finally, even the best students go for tuition because they want to be recognised and make their parents proud:

I want to get all A's, so I get as much help from my tuition teacher. My parents want me to be on the national top ten. (S3.I.1)

### **The views of the stakeholders**

Turning now to the stakeholders that govern education, the school administrators, they are sometimes disturbed by the teachers' lack of devotion given to their work at school:

Teachers are also not very committed. Teachers provide private tuition. Text books are not used and the lessons are dull and boring. Teachers do not have enthusiasm. They have a lazy work culture (AD.I.1).

According to one of the school administrators, one reason for students and teachers to neglect extra-curricular activities is also because of tuition:

Clubs activities are held in the evenings. Kids go for tuition in the evenings so we do not get many devotees. Even the teachers go for tuition during this time so the turnout is very low and again neither commitment nor drive. Everything needs to happen in the evenings because of space and time. (H.I.2)

The administrator of the City School also added that, “Parents give tuition to students not because of teachers’ ability or time but because they want their kids to achieve more. All parents with above average kids, target the Cambridge Brilliance Awards. Parents do not have confidence in the school because of the negative comments of the media.” I questioned a few academics and school heads, who I met on facebook, and they discussed their views about tuition with me.

One reason for tuition according to one of them is because of high-spirited parents:

I think the competitive nature of parents is one reason for asking kids to take tuition. We want our children to reach the goals we did not and, hence, the pressure on the child in all forms and tuition being one of them. Also, it is one way of parents thinking they are doing the job of a parent! (L. FBD).

Another sees it differently; something which assists in finding new ways of learning lessons or prestige in society:

There are many reasons for having a child tutored. Some people learn in a different way than the techniques used in schools. Tutors can find out what that special way of learning is and use it to reinforce the lessons in school. Some students just have a learning disability in specific subjects and need extra help. There are many parents who, to achieve social status, must have their child enter a prestigious college or university. This is often more for the parents than for the kids. So they spend lots of money on tutors to get their average student into a great school. (M. FBD)

There is also the view that schools teach children only to take the test and to get a good name for the school and gain income for the teachers:

I believe public schools are failing the society by teaching to the TEST. High test scores mean all sorts of good things happen for the school and teachers all important dollars. That doesn't automatically make them good standardised test takers. They are learning to take a test. (R. FBD)

One very interesting comment is made by an experienced teacher and former principal of a school. He blames the parents for overlooking their children's education, schools for not doing remedial work and perceives tuition as unwanted:

As an individual who's been giving tuition from age 15, I feel tuition is NOT required if the schools and teachers do their job PROPERLY. I blame "educated" parents who are too "busy" to clarify/help in clearing up doubts children have. Schools should have subject clinics where remedial/extra work ought to be done. We did this in our school. As a person who has run 'O' level night classes and as head of a tuition centre, I say tuition - in the form that it is given in Maldives - is a total waste of time and money!! (K. FBD)

There are many reasons why private tuition is becoming even more popular. However, perhaps the most common are both the learning environment that many schools now provide and traditional teaching methods. Class sizes are often still too large for effective teaching across the entire ability range, the structure of the open classrooms and low standards of discipline and behaviour frequently affect lesson delivery. The effect of this type of environment can be particularly disadvantageous for children at the extreme ends of the ability spectrum, resulting in the gifted child losing motivation, and the less able falling further and further behind. Also, the pressure of time in both the City School and the Atoll School and the pace of the teachers' lessons leave the students with lot of pressure as well. In addition, teaching to examinations, rushing to complete the syllabus and rote learning do not help to retain knowledge.

The public discourses on tuition are widely spread and strongly held as mentioned above. Newspapers talk often about the students' achievement and criticise the school's inability to produce high achieving students. The media praises the parents for their hard work to get their children private tuition in order to get better grades in their examinations. The media has a lot to say about private tuition:

A single day doesn't go by without a ruckus about the education system, occasionally in the media but more often than most by some disgruntled parent. School administrators complain of overcrowding and lack of resources; teachers complain of lack of interest among students and administrators; and students complain of low quality teachers. Parents complain about every single aspect of their children's education. The discontent for the teaching in schools being one of the main reason that parents seek out teachers for private tuition at exorbitant prices. (Shareef, 2006 - The Evening Weekly, June 27)

Expatriate teachers are giving tuition for students at rather high rates. Parents complain of this as they cannot afford it, and neither can they afford their children missing out on tuitions from qualified teachers. (Munaz, 2006 - Haveeru Daily, February 6)

Now some of the more educated among us believes that the current method of teaching in schools has resulted in the stunting of personal growth of the students. According to an official in the education field, the high level of competition among students and parents to achieve the best in exams has resulted in paying less attention to the development of the child's personality and social interaction. (Shareef, 2006 - The Evening Weekly, June 27)

Even if the students have textbooks, we need to explain its context. Parents cannot give tuition to their children. Most parents are not educated. Also, children prefer to take tuition from a tuition teacher than from their parent. Without tuition, the youngsters cannot learn their school lessons...If the kids do not get a good tuition teacher, they fail. Therefore, in order to provide a good education for children, they need to be sent to an effective tuition class or teacher. (Naseer, 2011 - Haama Daily, January 12)



The scenarios above are typical private tuition stories from the Maldives. Private tuition undoubtedly holds a very demanding status in the educational development of the children in the Maldives.

Finally, tuition helps the teachers to earn a better salary to supplement the low salary that they get from the school. When they help produce excellent students, it also heightens their status within the school and the society. Furthermore, parents are adamant to provide tuition for their children to help them excel in examinations. It helps low achieving students to enhance their work in the subjects that they need more attention in, while developing the student's self-esteem. In addition, it helps children to achieve well in school and international examinations as well as to find a place in a higher secondary school or recognition for scholarships abroad.

## Commentary

On reflection, one of the most striking things about private tuition was the emotional setting; the atmosphere in the tuition classes or homes was very relaxing and friendly. The students could openly discuss their doubts with the teachers without feeling any inhibition or fear. The teachers were open to talk about what the students wanted. They were not afraid to stray from the lesson. I was amazed to see how open the teachers were to questions and suggestions. The classes were relaxed and interesting and the teachers could easily explain things the students had trouble with. The teachers did everything to make the students feel comfortable and made sure that the students learnt at their own pace. Plus, the classes were small and, although the price was high, the students enjoyed the private classes. In every instance, tutors were able to teach to extremely high standards whilst simultaneously making them interesting, student centred and relaxing. At the private tuition classes, the students seemed to benefit from the teachers.

The rooms where they had the classes were the kitchen, the bedroom or a living room. During the time of tuition, the rooms were transformed into a tuition space and there was silence, unlike in the normal classrooms at school where there is a lot of noise. The students were able to concentrate more and focus greatly on the subject.

Not only students but teachers also gained a lot from private tutorials. In a country like the Maldives, where secondary school teachers do not earn a good salary, private tuition provided them a good option to supplement their earnings. It helped in retaining quality teaching staff, as the money they earn from private tutorials sometimes went as high as \$500- \$1000 per month.

Although it is heavy on the pockets of parents, private tuition reaped rewards at the end of the day. The parents of both the schools were very happy relying on the teachers for their children's grades. Although the Atoll School parents were satisfied by the teachers teaching in the school, the parents wanted to supplement their children's learning by providing them with private tutors. The parents of both schools worked hard and made sure that their children were not deprived of tuition. They felt that if their child took tuition, they do not need to worry about their student's learning as they have a lot of trust in the teachers.

What I observed in these private tuition settings was amazing. The teachers' enthusiasm to teach and relatively relaxed attitude left me wondering. They were the master of themselves. There was no one to dictate to them and so they were free to use whatever material suited them. They dealt with the students with much ease; they were very friendly and laughed and enjoyed the time with the students. They did not have to look at their watches constantly neither did they have to time the students' work progress again and again.

Having gone through the domain of private tuition, it can be gathered that students found tuition a place where they could learn things that they did not learn at school in a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere. In my study of the private tuition domain, two themes materialised, (Figure 33) which I discuss in brief, in the next section.

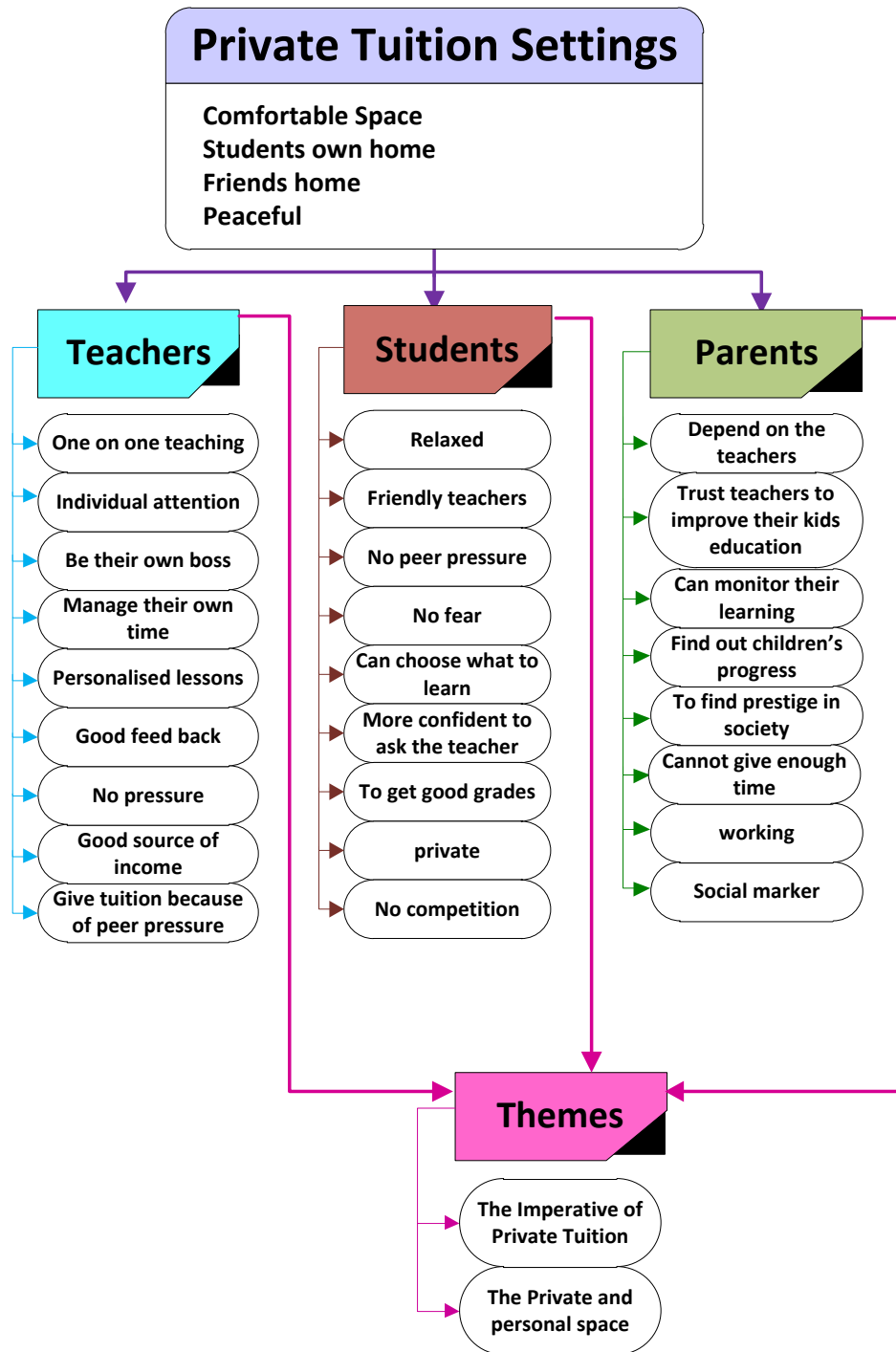


Figure 33: Summary of the findings from the private tuition settings.

## Themes: Private tuition

### *The Imperative of private tuition*

As can be perceived from the private tuition scenarios in the Maldives, almost all teachers do some form of private tuition. Teachers spend most of their free time going from house to house earning good money which helps them pay their bills and tend to their own family's needs. According to the teachers, without the extra money, it would be hard to live on the salaries that they get from the government. Further, the teachers enjoy the tuition and they are pleased with what they do to boost the students' performances while they get to be their own boss. The teachers also have the right and freedom to choose the learning task and spend as much time as they like on the task. In addition, providing tuition is also an affirmation of the teacher's status. In contrast, there are also some teachers who give tuition because of peer pressure.

The parents' motivation in seeking tuition for their children is diverse. There is a fear among parents that if they do not provide their children with tuition, their children are going to be failures. Moreover, they are unsettled by a lack of confidence in local schools, dropping standards, traditional teaching methods, large classes and under-qualified teachers. In addition, parents who do not feel confident enough or are not sufficiently educated to help their children with their school work are more than happy to get extra help from a tuition teacher. As can be ascertained from the analysis above, parents of various financial means make sacrifices to pay for a tutor. Peer pressure also plays a part; demand for tuition in some circumstances is also driven by children themselves who are influenced by their classmates into wanting tutors. There is more competitiveness and pressure for tuition than ever before; when more children are getting top grades at GCSE and A level, parents naturally want to do the best for their child. Especially just before the examinations begins, children who are about to sit their GCSEs are more likely than any others to have extra tutoring after school.

Tuition provides several benefits to the parents. Those parents who cannot give enough time to their children or are not able to help their children in their studies because of their full time or part time jobs appoint private teachers for their child. Parents can also keep an eye on their child's progress as they can freely discuss a number of things about their child with the tutor. Like the coffee cup incident in the private tuition setting

above, the serving of the drink during the tuition could be the parent's way of checking the status of teaching and learning in the room. Besides, tuition is a social marker for doing the right thing and not providing tuition for their children would seem an anomaly, suggesting: the parents are not concerned; they cannot afford tuition; the school is sufficient; or, possibly, that they have a less long term investment in education.

Lastly, the number of children who have tuition has risen. The children seek help from tuition teachers because, for some, the curriculum is too difficult; the teachers are not so effective; they are perhaps not confident; or feel inhibited to ask questions in the class.

Above all, there are negative aspects of this trend as well. Firstly, students pay less attention in class as they can catch up in tuition. Secondly, parents feel that teachers find it a source of income so they teach less in class and more in tuition making tuition compulsory for students.

### ***The private and personal space***

In a classroom, children are bound by the level and attitude of the people that surround them. Private tuition is personalised to the level of the student. This benefits all levels of aptitude and knowledge, whether it is found in a classroom to be paced too quickly or too slowly, in a private tuition scenario the pace is set by the student and the teacher. Naomi shared how she does this:

I try to cater to the skills of the students. If it is a very weak student, I try to give work that is not very challenging. I give simple exercises, like fill in the blanks, comprehension and vocabulary that is one or two levels below their standard. I get them to write simple paragraphs and explain how to write simple sentences first and then make them write complex ones. For a good student, I make them do challenging ones. If it is a grade eight student, I try to find practice exercises a bit higher than their level. For example, I make them do grade ten type of comprehension and also do interesting vocabulary exercises of a higher level. I also use the Singapore text books which has work for different levels.

On the other hand, I found that the atmosphere in the tuition classes to be very creative and very private. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. In private tuition, there are only a few students and the tutor for that particular time, and so, the tutor will be able to concentrate on the set of students at all times, for an hour or an hour and a half. The children sit around the table with the teacher and learn with ease, giggling, enjoying and gaining the maximum from the lesson:

*S: Miss, can you tell me another word for hurt?*

*A: pain? Harm? I wrote pain..*

The students were writing an essay on a disaster

*Teacher: Remember, the brain storming strategy I told you? Write sentence with hurt and think of other words that mean the same that would fit the sentence. Look at your thesaurus if you are stuck..[takes out the thesaurus and flips through the pages]*

*S: Yes Miss, yes, let's do that! [thrilled]*

*A: Oh yes! [smiling] I found one already, here [pointing at her thesaurus]I got hurt. I got injured. Wounded? Miss, ok tha?*

While the students enjoy their lesson, there is no noise from outside, like at school and the children can concentrate peacefully. In this setting at M. Windy-ge, unlike in a classroom, a student may pause, ask questions or take a break as frequently and as lengthily as they deem appropriate. The student is able to learn at their own pace and ask questions in-depth, processes which rapidly improve the understanding and application of the subject matter. There is no negative peer pressure and the teacher identifies the learning problems and swiftly deals with them having tasks geared exactly to the student's ability and experience. Due to the one-on-one nature of private tuition, embarrassment and humiliation are generally neutralised and give students greater freedom to ask questions naturally without competition. The informal atmosphere allows the mind to focus on work at hand without being distracted. It also provides opportunities for personalised feedback.

As the students are learning in their own homes or their friend's home, they feel a sense of comfort there. They sit in easy chairs with the air conditioning on and learn

contentedly. Also, they seem more relaxed in their casual clothes than the uniforms. What struck me most was the coziness of the room.

*The private tuition settings have been perceived as a place where students enjoy learning. The teachers and students teach and learn in a cosier environment compared to that of the City School and the Atoll School. Having discussed the findings of my study in these chapters, I now turn to answer my research questions by bringing together the findings backed with relevant literature, in the next chapter.*

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Discussion and Conclusions





# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Discussion and Conclusions

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### Introduction

In this ethnographic study, using interview as social practice, I have provided insights into the nature of practices in the classroom and private tuition settings. The analyses offered in *Chapters Four, Five and Six* (Figure 34) reveal a number of factors that enhance and inhibit teaching and learning in the classroom and the reasons for students, teachers and parents are opting for private tuition. It is reasonable to argue that English language teachers in the South Asian classrooms face a range of difficulties and challenges in their classroom practices: examination based teaching and learning; overcrowded classes; passive students; physical conditions of the classroom; noise; and the concerns about time allocated per lesson were all identified in this study. As reported by the teachers, students and other stakeholders of the City School and Atoll School in the present study, these reasons and others have led them to choose private tuition as something of a saviour.

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the collected data of the two schools and the private tuition settings and to discuss the meanings of the findings. Through the use of ethnographic observation, interview as social practice, excerpts from field notes, vignettes, various documents, photographs and a research journal, I sought to answer the four research questions that have shaped this study:

1. What is the nature of classroom and private tuition practices?
2. What are the forces that shape classroom and private tuition practices?
3. How do participants entwine their beliefs and practices in classroom settings and private tuition?
4. How do participants perceive and interpret their actions in relation to classroom and private tuition practices across a variety of settings?

In the section that follows, I will address each of these questions in turn.

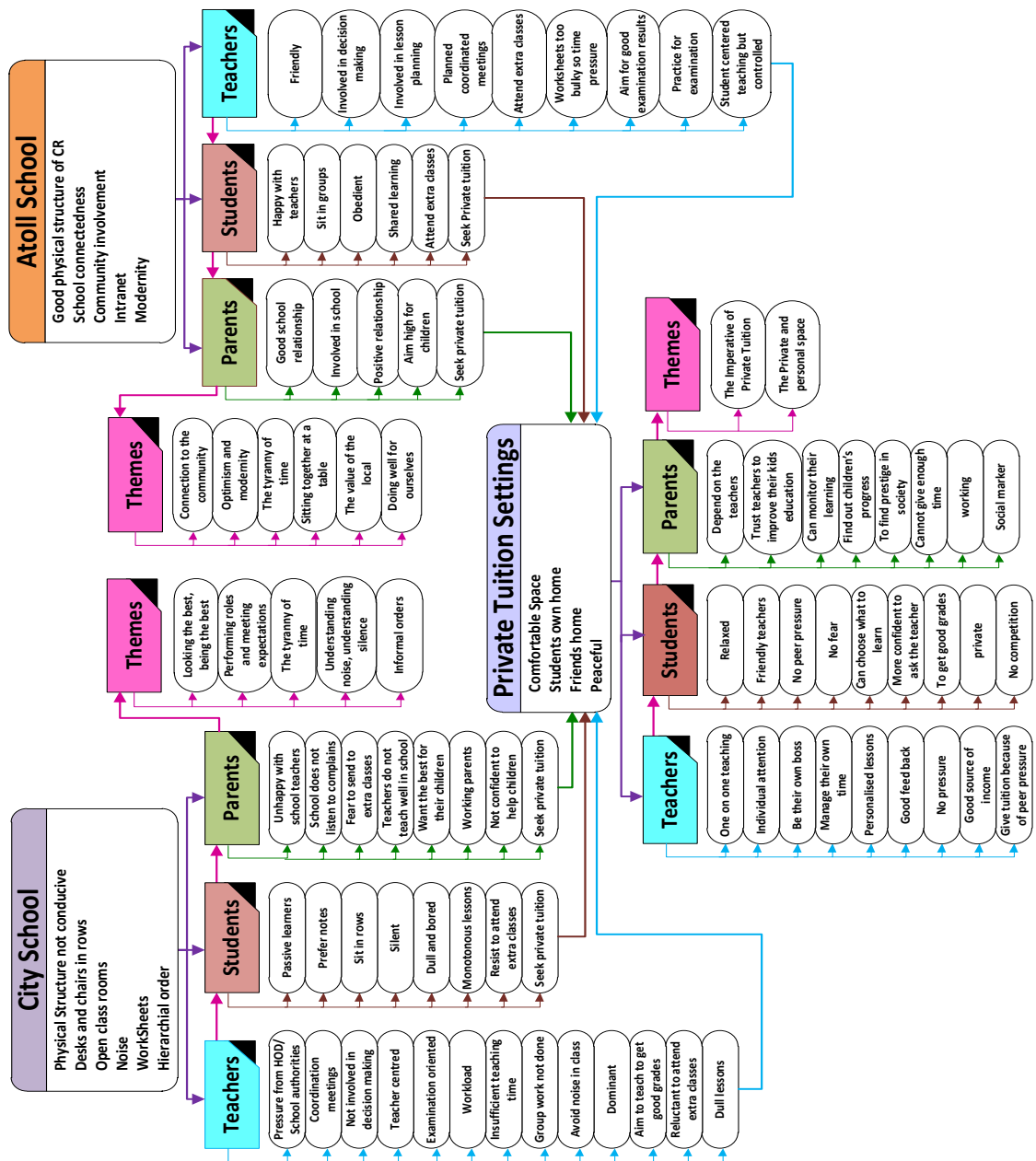


Figure 34: Summary of the findings from the City School, Atoll School and Private Tuition settings

## Research question one:

### ***What is the nature of classroom and private tuition practices in the Maldives?***

A preliminary answer to this question comes from the physical nature of the classrooms since the physical structure is closely related to what takes place in the classroom. In the Maldivian classrooms I observed in the City School, the rooms were open plan, with desks and chairs placed in rows, as seen in Chapter Four, where noise from other classes could hinder teaching and learning. The teaching in the classroom was limited to the chalk and talk method, as teachers are cautious about doing group or pair work which could make the classroom noisier. In addition, because of the short open walls of the classrooms, the teachers and students are distracted not only by the noise from the neighbouring classrooms but also by students and others who pass by the corridors at different times.

The impact of these kinds of physical conditions of the classroom have been identified as one of the main causes of ineffective teaching, as illustrated by a number of research studies reviewed in Chapter Two (for example; Govinda & Biswal, 2006; Shahzad, Ali, Hukamdad, Qadeer, & Ullah, 2011; Shamim, 1996).

As the findings from Chapters Four and Five suggest, the classrooms are often hot, crowded and overflowing with thirty or more students in each class. The school environment is such that classrooms are overcrowded both in the City School and the Atoll School:

The classrooms in the City School had short open walls with desks and chairs arranged in twos on the right and left with a narrow passage between the rows. One big blackboard covered the front wall of the classroom with the teacher's desk and chair in front. A quick look at the classroom arrangement made one wonder why the desks and chairs were lined up in rows. The teachers had specific reasons for this arrangement:

*It is safe to keep students sitting in rows. If we keep them in groups they will make a big noise which will disrupt the neighbouring classes. (N.I.3)*

The classroom set up made it difficult for teachers to do group work though the international literature suggests that group work is very beneficial to learning in the classroom. Also, the teachers of both classroom streams in the City and Atoll Schools confessed that the classroom's physical nature made it hard for them to make use of group work and that moving the desks and chairs around would make it even noisier.

However, a more critical perspective adopted in the study revealed more complex attitudes to noise. Noise was identified as a concern for both the schools and teachers saw group and pair work as meaning uncontrollable noise, distracting both teachers and students and other classes. Everyday noise in the classroom was also interpreted as lack of control and lack of class management. The noise gradually became worse as the school approached its last few periods of teaching during the day. Similar findings have been reported in studies from the Maldives by Nazeer (2006) and Mohamed (2006) as well as by Bhattacharya et al. (2007) in his study of a Delhi classroom. Further, Kumaravadivelu (2003c) shared his experience of teaching in India for almost ten years and he recognised the “perennial discipline problem” present in the classroom and agrees to the fact that most of the time, the teachers in Asian countries are concerned about the discipline of children more than the actual teaching (p. 170).

The teachers expressed that it was almost impossible to give individualised attention to each learner, due to the over-crowded classes. This finding is consistent with Weber and Bali's (2010) report that “large class sizes and individual attention are minimal in most schools” (p. 1). Moreover, disciplinary issues, such as those found in some classrooms in the City School, dominate large classes. This provides evidence in support of Shamim's (1996) conclusion that large classes are a ‘hard reality’ (p. 132) in developing countries like Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka and he added that it would be difficult to monitor students by standing in front of the classroom. Also, a UNESCO report by Colcough (2005) echoed the difficulties concerning large classrooms in Asia and, in contrast, pointed out the advantage of being taught in smaller groups, though my participants have not mentioned this.

Because of the problems, the teachers complained a good deal about the classroom management complications that resulted from these conditions. Since the classrooms are organised in this way, if they do group work, classroom management becomes a very

serious challenge for the teacher (Nazeer, 2006). There is fear of chaos due to the interpretation of noise.

When I try to use group work in my class, students become too active and really hard to control. Also, if there is a big noise in the classroom, the supervisors will feel that I cannot control the class. (N.I.2)

Due to the reasons stated above, the teachers' beliefs about teaching become normalised, persuasive and strongly held. From the data gathered in the interviews as social practice, observations and field notes, it was evident that the classroom teaching and learning were very much teacher-centred, examination oriented and dominated by 'expatriate teachers'. The teachers' comments revealed that the teaching was teacher focused; the teachers dominated the classrooms. All teachers in this study from both the City School and the Atoll School were 'traditional teachers', as I observed:

Teaching was done mainly from the front of the class. In every classroom, the teacher did most of the talking. Student obedience in all classrooms meant complying with the teacher's expectations. Most of the time, teachers discussed the worksheets and expected students to participate according to his/her expectations. According to the teachers, when teachers were not strict, most students drifted away from the lesson without engaging in any activities. Therefore, teacher-dominance and strictness were necessary. (Journal Entry, April, 2009)

This finding resonates with Mohamed's (2006) study where she found that teaching at the urban school was teacher-centred with a remarkably high amount of teacher talk. In the classes she observed, she saw that the students sat passively and listened to the teacher.

Another important revelation from the study, aligning the Maldives with what is known about South Asian education, was the importance of external examinations in the teaching and learning in the classroom. The findings from Chapter Four and Five exposed that the teachers felt obliged to teach to the examination to help increase their students' test scores. They disclosed that in their teaching, they focused on improving the students' skills in order to prepare them for the examinations rather than teaching the language skills as such. This, in turn, means that they teach what is tested in the

Cambridge Ordinary Level exams rather than teaching what exactly is necessary to improve their students' overall English proficiency. That is why the most common activities in English classes, as reported by my interviewees, were reading and answering comprehension questions quickly in order to learn to finish on time as well as learning to complete different writing tasks on time.

Since education is solely examination-oriented in the Maldives, students are always in competition with each other in the endless number of tests exposed to their repetitive nature of this continuous practice. Students were evidently left bored and less motivated to learn in the classroom. The learning culture was found to be 'dull' and 'boring' by most of the students interviewed. The students also felt inhibited to ask questions and were afraid to make mistakes in front of their classmates so they preferred to remain silent in the classroom and in the examination-oriented atmosphere. This finding, therefore, supports claims made by studies in the South Asian region reviewed in Chapter Two (Bhattacharya et al., 2007; Canagarajah, 1993; Gupta, 2007; Huxley, 2008;) regarding the strong emphasis on examination based teaching and learning.

As Prabhu (1987) has argued, examination-oriented teaching and teaching to tests are both problems that need to be considered in regard to South Asian education strategies. Further, Pierson (1996, cited in Kumaravadivelu 2003c) listed similar characteristics that were evident in the context of the City School including extreme workloads, teaching to a specific curriculum, examination-oriented teaching and classroom structural issues, particularly overcrowding.

Furthermore, classroom observations also confirmed the teachers' use of uniform worksheets that are generally selected from different textbooks and text extracts adapted from appropriate books and magazines and compiled and used by all the students in that grade. This, according to the teachers, ensured that all classes were taught the same thing which left no room for complaint from the students and the parents that the syllabus was not covered by everyone. This study challenges Canagarajah's (1993) study of how teachers and students in war-torn Sri Lanka culturally and linguistically resist the colonial nature of English as it is presented in their classroom and textbooks while appropriating it for their own subversive communication purposes. Canagarajah powerfully elicits images of teacher and student resistance to the curriculum and points to the importance of recognising the different 'cultures' students bring with them to the

classroom and “the ways in which these mediate the lesson” (p. 98). Hence, he also highlights teacher resistance to and appropriation of the dominant curriculum, where teacher methods are affected by their levels of “suspicion, opposition, and disinterest” (p. 121) and where curriculum is appropriated “to different degrees in terms of the needs and values of the local communities” (p. 122). Unlike the teachers and students described by Canagarajah, the teachers and students in my study were satisfied with the worksheets even though there was a prescribed text which was absent in the classrooms, as teachers and students did not use it often. These textbooks were not used because the HOD used her own material chosen from different other sources such as magazines, other relevant textbooks and appropriate resources from the Internet. The HOD felt that by creating worksheets would mean that they would be able to produce materials to different relevant themes, which would make it more interesting. By doing it this way, the teachers could develop worksheets on current issues of the world. Also, the HOD believed that sometimes the topics in the textbooks may have been already covered by students in tuition classes or at home as the text book was not much used in the schools and also for the reasons that it had the elements of the examination objectives covered.

The two schools that I observed differed in a number of ways; the nature of the classrooms being one, as can be seen on Chapters Four and Five. Therefore, it is important to discuss the differences between the two:

### ***The City School***

As evidenced in the observations and interviews, many of the key problems in education located in the schools are due to governance and the management of the school. In the City School, the physical nature of classrooms, the plethora of examination and the curriculum requirements, the 35 minute lessons, complex schedules, departmental meetings and authoritarian leaders are all problematic because these structures make it difficult, if not impossible, for those closest to students to make decisions and design learning experiences that will enable students to learn in a student-friendly environment. In South Asia, an enormous number of students fail to attain good grades in English in government schools with a similar culture, such as Pakistan, because of factors such as outdated curriculums; rigid teaching methods; and a harsh learning environment (Shahzad et al., 2011).

Rather than a problem of the connection between school and community, these conditions were viewed as a consequence of the massive bureaucracy that has evolved to control and regulate schooling (Nayar, 2008). Teachers just do their jobs because they are employed to do so. Evident from the observations at the City School, the teachers performed their duties with more rigidity and haste while not having a very close connection with the school community. For instance, the teachers did not stop and talk with students very often and nor did they have a close relationship with the students.

In addition, the parents' role in the school was neither evident nor significant. The community did not appear to play a big role in the City School. The school administration's main goal was to form a good image of the school on a national level by working to establish themselves in first place in the international and national examinations in order to earn a high status in society and to remain as a recognised school in the nation.

### ***The Atoll School***

The Atoll School, on the other hand, had similarities and differences to the City School. It is evident from the observations and interviews with the teachers that the lessons were examination-oriented. The students also preferred to learn in a teacher-dominant method as they preferred to remain 'passive' and listen to the teacher (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 215). This is also confirmed by Mohamed (2006) who observed the passiveness and quietness of the students in a rural school in the Maldives.

In addition, while the teachers in the Atoll School tried to use a learner-centred approach at the beginning of a lesson, most of the lesson was controlled by the teacher. They do this because of the time factor and the need to complete the daily tasks within a specific time. Even in the Atoll School where there were normal classrooms with four walls and doors, the teachers kept the doors open and they were very conscious of the noise and having control of the students. This view is supported by the findings of Nazeer (2006) who observed in an economics class that teacher expected the students to remain obedient without making any noise.

As indicated in Chapter Five, the students and teachers in the Atoll School also had difficulties completing tasks on time because of the bulky worksheets for each week,



although the instructional time in the school was 40 minutes per lesson. This also supports Shareef's (2010) finding on the problems of teaching time in the Maldivian school he studied. The teachers commented that the 40 minutes were insufficient for them to complete the assigned tasks and also that the worksheets for each unit of work were too much for the students. The teachers remarked that different tasks were done on a single theme for more than two weeks which left the students bored. The documents I gathered at the Atoll School provided evidence for this:

I looked at the thick worksheets for the week. It was stapled and bound into one. It had about 12 pages: three comprehension passages and questions; writing practice worksheets; and grammar worksheets. The theme was Heroes.  
(Journal Entry, August 2009)

On the other hand, unlike the City School, the school administration, the teachers and parents of the Atoll School showed more commitment to the school community. The community was very close knit. As evident from the interviews, the school management and most of the school teachers were locals, and were closely bound to the island and the school community supporting Wheatcroft (2005) report on connectedness. The teachers showed a lot of enthusiasm and motivation in the school, and commented that the parents played a very important role in the teaching and learning of the students. According to Colcough's (2005) (2005) report, community and parental support in the education of children is crucial in creating a quality learning environment. In addition, the teachers and students of the Atoll School communicated and updated their social and academic agendas through the use of the intranet which was missing in the City School.

At the Atoll School, the school administration, teachers, parents and students had the zeal to compete to become the best school in the nation in order to achieve the best results in the national and international examinations. The City School and the Atoll School shared similarities in their way of doing things. The teachers taught in a teacher-centred, examination-oriented approach and teaching time and classroom noise were seen as problems for them. On the other hand, the City School lacked school connectedness, community management and support from the students, parents and teachers in the teaching and learning in the school.

Several sources of data also acknowledge the limitations of classroom instruction, which leads to students and parents opting for private tuition. While researchers consider it difficult to find out about private tuition in the Maldives, I went into a student's home and found out first-hand information on this shadow education. Moreover, according to Bray (2010), "even when the focus has been defined with clarity, reliable data may be very difficult to secure. One challenge concerns the ability and willingness of potential respondents to provide data, and another concerns the instruments for securing those data" (pp. 5-6). Although these difficulties are present, I was able to research private tuition and as is evident from my findings, the reason for private tuition stems from the unfriendly physical settings of the classroom, whole class teaching and learning, lack of teacher autonomy and the pressure of instructional time in the classrooms. This is consistent with previous studies (Foondun, 2002; Nazeer, 2006), namely that some of the reasons for selecting private tuition arise from the nature of the classroom as well as teaching and learning in a mass classroom.

Most importantly, the physical setting of private tuition is dynamic and responsive to learning opportunities. In private tuition settings, the students learn in the comfort of their homes, as indicated in Chapter Six, in their bedrooms (converted to a learning space), in the living room or in the kitchen. As the data suggested, the learning space of the private tuition is more private and personal. The students felt more relaxed and enjoyed their learning:

... the coziness of the room. As the students are learning in their own homes or their friend's home, they feel a sense of comfort there. They sit in comfortable chairs and with the air condition on, the students learn contentedly. Also, they seem more relaxed in their casual clothes than the uniforms. (Journal Entry, August, 2009)

Another noteworthy factor was the agency of the students across several dimensions of the private tuition settings. Firstly, the students got individual attention, in accordance with Bray (2010), and they learn according to their own needs and expectations. They could freely ask questions similar to Nazeer's (2006) finding, without having fear of making mistakes and without feeling shy and embarrassed. Secondly, the students could get individual feedback from the teachers and spend as much time as they wanted on understanding concepts. Finally, they also had the freedom to choose what they wanted

to learn and who they wanted to learn with. Kwo and Bray (2011) also support the findings that students can have a choice “over who becomes their tutor while they have no choice over who becomes their teacher” (p. 20).

Further, the teachers also have agency in the private tuition settings. The findings indicate the degree of autonomy of the teacher as a positive factor. The teacher becomes their own boss and has the freedom to choose the learning material for the students. Additionally, when comparing the teaching time in the classroom and the time within private tuition settings, the teachers were very satisfied that they could use as much time as they wanted on any topic, ‘till the student understood a lesson.’

## **Research question two:**

### ***What are the forces that shape classroom and private tuition practices?***

As evident in the findings in this study, many factors shape the classroom and private tuition practices in the Maldives. Features within the schools include the school hierarchies, involving teachers in decision making, authoritarian teachers, classroom layout as well as external pressures on the teachers and school due to imposed curriculums and final examinations.

As with Canagarajah (1999), the ethnographic methodology applied here helped me to focus on the “micro social level of everyday life” (p.6) of all the participants. In my observations and interviews with teachers, I found that hierarchy in itself may not be enough if it is the strength or force by which the order is maintained that shifts innovation. The teachers were expected to conform to the expectations of the heads of departments. In the City School, for example, the fact that the senior managers played a prominent role in the decision making for the teachers and that all teachers were using the same worksheets meant that teachers were under some pressure to use them extensively. It was clear that by abdicating their decision-making powers to the head of department, and following their instructions, the teachers in this study believed that they were, to some degree, doing what was expected of them. This echoes Wheatcroft’s (2005) report that identified the teachers’ “lack of participation in decision making” (p. 25) as a concern. According to the report, teachers had many good ideas to impart, for

instance about school organisation and the curriculum; but, they rarely found any chance to share such decisions.

The extent to which departmental dictates acted as a decision-making structure is typified by the following interview exchange of a teacher from the City School:

Naomi: ... we are preoccupied with the examination. Everything we teach and the worksheets and the practice we do with the students are for the benefit of the examination.

Interviewer: examination?

Naomi: Yes, and the real teaching, because now our teaching, as I've said, is more on helping those learners to practise for the exam. We do the same worksheets for all students because the department wants us to do. It is safe. You know this very well, Miss! [Smiling]. I am telling this because it is you.

[As can be noted from chapter four, my relationship with Naomi was that of a colleague and her supervisor- prior relationship. And there is a shift in tone here.]

*Interviewer: Safe?*

*Naomi : [very quietly, coming closer to me] Yes, to play it safe, because, after all, it doesn't matter whether you have been teaching effectively, your learners understand everything, but if you haven't covered what the department wants from you, then you are not a good teacher before their eyes. Therefore, you have to be a good teacher to the department...it is the same still!*

From what Naomi shared, it is evident that nothing has changed from before and it has been the same. “Still” here shows that from the time I worked with them, the way things were done in the department has remained the same as before.

As is evident from the interview excerpt above, examinations are another factor that shapes the classroom practices of both schools. Teachers teach to the examination as ‘the heads of departments stress the importance of getting good grades for the school.’ The teachers are expected to ‘produce good results’ in order for the school to be ranked

as the ‘top school’ in the nation. The teaching and learning in the school is largely based on the end-of-year examination for the lower grades while the grades tens are prepared for the GCSE examinations. This supports Shareef’s (2010) finding that teaching in the Maldives has a ‘strong emphasis’ on examinations (p. 3).

The students also relied very much on notes given by teachers so that they can memorise or learn them ‘by heart’ for the examinations, similar to Cangarajah’s (1993) Sri Lankan students who preferred written notes so they could use them to learn for the examinations. Evidence from the interviews with teachers also exposed the fact that the parents’ main concern was getting excellent results in the examinations. According to the teachers working in the City School and the Atoll School and some parents, parents expected the teachers to give a lot of work to the students each day; as proof of this, they wanted to see any form of notes or work done each day in students’ note books. This reflects the parents’ beliefs about learning. Parents demanded that teachers provide notes for students so they could be assured that the students were occupied and that time was not wasted in school every day.

By contrast, unlike the City School, the Atoll School administration and teachers were very supportive and respectful and very much involved in the decision-making of the teaching and learning in the school. According to the teachers, the school managers and the head of department talked to them informally regarding issues of teaching and learning; for example, when compiling a scheme of work and deciding on teaching units for the week, the heads of department consult the teachers before a final decision is made. This contrasts with Wheatcroft’s (2005) finding in another island school, where teachers complained about not receiving enough support from the school management in terms of teaching and learning in the classrooms.

As is apparent from the findings, and question two above, time was another important issue and a factor that shapes the teaching and learning in the classrooms. This is confirmed by studies conducted by Shareef (2010) and Mohamed (2006). Shareef’s classroom observations showed that teachers had problems in implementing different teaching methods due to factors such as limited time. Due to the time pressures, teachers feel forced to make students sit silently and listen to them talk most of the time. Time is managed in the classroom in such a way, so that teachers can quickly give instructions on a certain worksheet, give a quick explanation on a certain topic and then

for students to attempt the worksheets. The findings also showed that the teaching style in the classroom was authoritarian revolving around teacher control. This supports Gall's (2009) observation of Maldivian teachers' authoritative nature when he attended some schools in the Maldives. In addition, it aligns with Shahzad et al.'s observation of teacher-fronted classrooms.

The teachers in the Maldivian classrooms preferred to stand in front of the classroom doing most of the talking while the students sat passively in rows, showing respect, silently, obediently listening to the teacher or taking down notes. Teachers did not encourage group or pair work in the classroom as the classroom would become noisy. Therefore, teachers believed that teaching using a traditional approach was the best way to teach in these classrooms similar to Adam's (2004) findings. As Kumaravadivelu (2003a) claims, satisfactory attention has not been given to the teaching area that matters the most, namely, classroom methodology.

The study also revealed that all schools need to be able to create good results as there is a lot of pressure from the parents, the society and the media. Shareef's (2010) study on Maldivian classrooms confirms the demands for good grades from schools by parents. At the same time, the forces that shape the classroom practices play a major role in compelling the participants to choose private tuition. It is evident from the observations, interviews as social practice and my field notes that the quest for private tuition by the participants from both the schools is determined by a number of factors. Firstly, this finding echoes those of Foondun's findings on classrooms that had the structural deficits like crowded classrooms impeding teaching and learning in the schools (2002). The situation is further worsened by the rigid syllabuses, pressure from departments, the loss of instructional time and examination-oriented teaching. Teachers are not content with the regular pay and the complexities of the demands mean the families feel the students' needs have not been met during their regular school hours. Teachers resort to private tuition so they can get additional income in order to make a decent living for their families. According to a number of studies, tutoring can be the result of teachers' direct or indirect attempts to secure additional income, in developing countries, where they earn a low salary. From the interview data and lesson observations, I was also able to ascertain that another reason teacher opted to give tuition is due to peer pressure.

As evidence suggests, parents seek private tuition for their children because the teachers are not performing well in the classrooms (Lee, 2011); because they are not able to help their children to get good grades; and because they want to prepare their children for the GCSE examination that determines their future career opportunities. At one interview, a parent shared the following, stressing very firmly:

I went to my daughter's parent teacher meeting and the teacher was showing my daughter's marks to me saying...look...here, reading- this marks, writing- this marks...not good! And he told me that I should look for private tuition for my child. (P.I.2 – City School)

This resembles the findings of De Silva (1994) who reported a similar state of affairs in Sri Lanka where teachers 'openly suggest' to pupils and parents to seek private tuition. Parents are clearly influenced by the teacher's voice (Bray, 2003; 2010) when opting for private tuition. There was also an element of a wakeup call and fear; parents, in such cases (as cited by De Silva and Bray) became alarmed at this suggestion by the teachers and so they went on to look for the very best teacher for their daughters. From my conversation with the parents, the best teachers are the most popular teachers who can help bring good results for their children. Information identifying who are the most desirable tuition teachers circulates among teachers and students.

In addition, private tuition is also shaped by the nature of the regimented classrooms of the mainstream schools. In the private tuition settings, I observed that the students get one-to-one sessions in the comfort of their own homes. Private lessons enable better teaching and learning conditions, more individual attention and closer relations between students and teachers. This is supportive of the argument put forward by De Silva (1994) who shared the benefits of private tuition. He observed that tuition can help remedial teaching to be accepted according to students' individual needs. From the interview data and lesson observations on my occasional visits to the student's home, I found the teacher– student relationship seemed to be, at the same time, both more personalised and more professional than in the formal system. In the private tuition settings, teachers care about their performance, since competition is fierce and their reputation is the most important investment they have in order to establish a network of clients and they also have agency and access to decision making rights. It is also

important to note that students profit from the option to freely choose private tutors according to their abilities.

## **Research question three:**

### ***How do participants entwine their beliefs and practices in classroom and private tuition settings?***

As indicated in Chapters Four and Five, the interactions with the teachers, the observations and field notes confirmed that the teachers from both the schools frequently criticised the teaching time in the classroom. The participant teachers believed that the classroom teaching time was not sufficient for them to complete their tasks. For instance in the City School, in one of Naomi's comprehension lessons, she had to very quickly distribute the comprehension worksheet and say 'this is your work for the day, read the passage carefully, read the questions and try to complete it on time.' The students had 35 minutes to complete the task. However, because of the limited time, they were not able to finish it and so Naomi had to ask them to continue it the next day.

It is clear from above that there is little distinction between teaching and preparing students for the examination. Naomi did not carry out any teaching but simply directed the students to do the comprehension exercise. In such lessons, hardly any time is used doing things like pre-reading or while-reading questions and a relatively short time is devoted to discussing new words. The teachers felt there would be no time for students to attempt the comprehension questions if they held discussions and so they instructed the students to start answering the questions straightaway, in order to help them practise for the examination. Therefore, in the end, this lesson had little teaching content. Such beliefs about examination practice were prevalent in all the teachers' statements about the discussion of passages. Gopal, for example, asserted that 'practice makes perfect' and he did not want to waste time. Commenting on her practice, Maha explained that she always made the students read the passage quickly and answer quickly as that was what was expected in the examination.

The pressure of time also directed the teachers to use a teacher-dominated approach in the classroom. In order to keep pace with classroom time, the teachers preferred to take



control of the class so they could keep the students quiet and go on with the lesson within the time available.

All teachers reported in the interviews that the uniform worksheets were safe for them, even though they sometimes wished to do something different with the students. Naomi mentioned that once she wanted to use different activities with the students and the head of department did not approve this as the other students of the grade would not be doing it. Therefore, a practice emerged among teachers which avoided innovation, meaning that the modes and methods of teaching and their scheduling were pre-determined by the head of department.

Apart from the 35 minutes and uniform worksheets, an additional pressure is the completion of weekly tasks on time. The findings also show that the teachers were obliged to complete the assigned tasks for the week as closely as possible or they would need to utilise another teaching lesson from the next week to complete the task. In the Atoll School, the teachers were burdened with bulky worksheets based on one theme which they found difficult to complete within the given time frame. It was also the teachers' responsibility to help the students to learn to use time efficiently in the examination. In order to do this, the teachers constantly reminded the students of the importance of the examination.

It is clear from the observations and interviews that the classrooms seemed like a rehearsal for the examination behaviour where, every day, the students do the same thing, without making any noise, sitting quietly, trying to finish everything on time, doing individual work and with worksheets that have been vetted and assigned from a higher source. Overall, the teachers are pressured by both time and examinations in the classroom teaching and learning as well as attending extra-curricular activities.

Prejudiced by the normal everyday routines of the classroom, all the participants agreed that private tuition was something very useful (Abadzi, 2009). My observations and the interviews with teachers, students and parents indicate the reality that students do their real learning in the private tuition lessons. This echoes Nazeer's (2006) finding of the Maldivian society's belief that students can do well only by receiving private tuition.

There may be various explanations for such beliefs. The parents felt that the teachers in the mainstream classroom did not perform well in the school (Bray, 2010; De Silva,

1994; Foondun, 2002; Lee, 2011) so they looked for tutors who performed much better in private tuition. The parents put a lot of faith in the teachers they sought for private tuition. I observed that the pool seemed to be the same. At the school, parents did not have any confidence in the teachers' teaching but, in private tuition settings, it was different.

One parent shared that, "I trust the teacher to teach everything my daughter needs to know. He helps her very much. Even last term she got a good grade compared to before." According to the parents, the teachers are paid to do their best for their children and they want their children to pass the examinations with flying colours. This is consistent with Nazeer's (2006) findings in his study in the Maldives that parents sent their children for private tuition in order to get better results in the examination.

Moreover, teachers felt less pressured in the private tuition settings, as they had fewer burdens than in the schools. In the students' homes, the teachers also felt more relaxed and friendlier away from the constant monitoring by the school heads. In my observations, I saw a significant difference in the teaching and learning in the private tuition settings. The teachers' explanations were more learner-centred (Bray, 2007) and they dealt with the students with ease and liberality. They were able to use the time more efficiently, using their own materials, designed according to the student's ability and expectations, to teach what was not comprehended in the classroom.

## **Research question four:**

***How do participants perceive and interpret their actions in relation to classroom and private tuition practices in a variety of settings?***

### ***Teachers***

Based on the interviews and observations of teachers from both schools, teachers believe that being an authoritative figure in the classroom is the best method to teach in the classroom; it is proper, appropriate, and seen as the only feasible way to be a teacher in those circumstances. The teachers have several reasons for this as mentioned by some teachers below:

We need to be very strict in the classroom. We do not have time for chit chats. Of course we ask the students sometimes...how they are and all that...but we need to move on with our lessons, you see! And there is the fact of time.

[We were sitting around a desk and talking, and the teachers were trying to exhort and get my approval]

We do not have time, therefore, we need to see that the students are doing their work, sitting quietly, and walk around, checking if they have opened their books, started writing...or else they will not do their work. We have a lot of work to be completed by the end of the week...sometimes we do not finish because the students are very slow. (Group of grade 10 teachers, City School)

These pedagogical practices are closely related to their role as an authoritarian figure.

As Huxley (2008) concludes, all countries in the Asian region still rely on teacher-centred classrooms by drilling and memorising facts, in order to pass the examinations.

One teacher from the City School mentioned:

Group work...we can't do group work...such a waste of time! Exams are getting closer and we need to see that they know how to answer questions within the given time, Miss! And if we make them to sit around the desks...the noise they make... (N.I.2 - City School).

### ***Students***

Before I go any further, I would like to consider the most obvious feature about students that I discovered in the classroom as noted in my observations in a typical early morning class:

The students sat at their desks looking at the teacher. Some listening to the teacher. Some gazing away from the teacher. Some, with their thoughts elsewhere. Some were seriously listening to the teacher. There was one student scribbling on the desk. Almost all the students looked dull and bored. (Journal entry, June, 2009)

This was what was seen most of the time on the students' faces; mostly in the City School. In the Atoll School, there were times that students were more active participants;

therefore, they remained less bored. However, the evidence from both the schools suggests that students did not have an option - rather than being actively involved in the lessons, they had to listen passively. The students had a reason for this behaviour as well:

If we talk, even with my friend next to me, Sir will shout. (A.I.2 – City School)

We will always have to listen to what Sir is explaining.... If we want to say something, we need to take our hands up and wait. (S.I.1 – Atoll School)

It's so boring...every day the same kind of thing. (M.I.1- City School)

This shows that the teacher was being very authoritarian and controlling. The above picture contradicts Kumaravadivelu's (2003c) concerns with the persistence of cultural stereotypes around Asian students in the TESOL profession. The students in the Maldivian classroom also have the same behaviour as the Asian students who are "obedient to authority...and who do not participate in classroom interaction" (p. 710) but not because of the choice of the Maldivian students but because they did not have the opportunity to participate.

### ***Parents***

As evident from the findings of the City School, parents felt the teachers in the classroom were not efficient, lacked motivation and did not pay much attention in school. Some parents interviewed complained that "teachers are not teaching well in the classroom; they do not give attention to the children" (P2. I.1). This may be due to the situation as stated by De Silva (1994), who pointed out the exhaustion of both the teachers and students in Sri Lankan mainstream schools as they lack enough rest, working from morning until evening every day of the week (in both the school and private tuition sessions), weekends, including holidays, consequently, making them less productive in the classrooms. The teachers failed to perform well in their teaching and did not do much explanation of lessons but just made the students do all the work. This finding also echoes Nazeer's (2006) finding when he could not conduct workshops with teachers on weeknights as most of the teachers had private tuition sessions on weeknights and weekends. A number of parents also felt that "although we complained about teachers' inefficiency, the school administration (City School) did not give much importance to the issue" (P1.I.1).

Another issue that became clear from the findings was the discipline and social problems of the students, of the school, and the community. The parents stated their concern that “I do not want to send my daughter to remedial classes after school, in their school. The children behave so naughty in the school. The roads are not safe in the evenings, lots of violence going on, drugs... and we can’t be walking up and down to drop and pick them, I have two more children to look after...also teachers do not come on time...” (P4.I.1). Here, parents expressed their fear to send their children to remedial classes and felt that home based setting of private tuition was safe and unproblematic.

As reflected in illustrations gleaned from Chapters Four, Five and Six, participants perceive and interpret private tuition as the primary site of learning. As stated elsewhere, teachers see private tuition as an option for gaining an additional tax free income and also as a place where they can be their own boss, by using their own materials and where they can confidently help the students achieve good results in the examination as they can spend as much time as they want in teaching the lessons. The teachers here did not need to be teacher-centred as they did not have pressure from the school, for instance, to complete tasks on time or to do a particular worksheet etc. As Dang and Rogers (2008) assert, private tutoring can offer lessons that are more individualised than in mainstream schools in a more flexible manner. They also added that “for most students, tutoring is investment rather than consumption” (p. 8).

In reviewing my observations and interviews, I learnt that the Maldivian parents see private tuition as something that is very important for their children because they “feel the teachers give more attention to tuition than in regular classrooms” (Parent, City School) , and some parents view tuition teachers as much better at helping their children as they are not confident enough to help them. There are also parents who mentioned they “do not have enough time to spend with our children because I have to work to earn and also if tuition helps them to get good grades so that they can go to the higher secondary school, win a scholarship...” (Parents’, City and Atoll Schools). Parents’ investment in private tuition is very high as they want their children to achieve a good future. According to Bray (1995) in another context, parents feel that tuition is a good investment as without tuition, they feel that their children would be left behind and they also believe that “levels of education are closely linked to levels of future earnings,” (p. 16). Bray’s findings align with private tuition settings in Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries where parents invest in their children by sending them to private tuition

classes day and night; while spending billions per year for tuition alone so that their children can get better jobs in the future.

## Conclusions

This research project has focused on classroom practices in the English language teaching and learning contexts in the secondary classrooms of the Maldives, and it would be valuable to begin my conclusion with a restatement of the reason for such a focus. As stated in the literature review (p.16), English plays a major role in transforming the identities of many aspects of the region. Hence, it is noteworthy to state that in the Maldives, English has become a major influence in the teaching and learning contexts; the modern English-medium school system has expanded and the traditional system is gradually being upgraded. However, problems remain in the teaching of English. While this research did not hope to account for the very varied successes of school students in the Maldives, it did examine practices in the classroom that were problematic and the issues provided by the solution of private tutoring. Parents and students prefer to learn English in and out of the classroom in order to achieve their best to gain excellent grades to be able to gain entrance into outstanding universities and also to strengthen their chances of good employment opportunities at home and abroad.

The method of investigation involved the marriage of ethnography with interview as social practice, and as revealed in the study, this has enriched my research in helping to illuminate the complexities involved in teaching and learning in both classroom practices and private tuition settings in the Maldives. Interview as social practice has helped me inform the readers about the circumstances of the research process and enhanced the persuasiveness of the study, particularly the participants' willingness to share and respond honestly and openly to the questions that were asked. The inclusion of interview as social practice as part of my research design has brought many things to light, in investigating classroom and private tuition practices in the Maldives. The prior relationships and the previously formed acquaintances I had with the participants allowed me "to access resources that might not have been available in traditional interviews" (Garton & Copland, 2010, p. 548). Most importantly, I was able to bring the voices of the participants of the City School, the Atoll School and the private tuition

settings to the foreground in an informative way that has not been reported through using other research strategies (Clark & Robertson, 2001).

Through the use of the ethnographic method of data collection and interview as social practice, I was able to uncover the issues related to the classroom practices in the two classroom settings and the private tuition settings. Clearly, the teachers and students in the City School are under a great deal of stress to deliver the curriculum in a timely manner. One of the main reasons is that teachers feel pressure in different ways in their classroom practices. The rigidly governed subject committee prohibits enthusiasm for innovation which affects the teaching and motivation of the teachers. Also, the sustained mini examination sessions of teaching and learning are found to be a stress for both the teachers and the students. The teachers are also concerned about the physical structure of the classroom which is another hindrance to them placing students in groups and pairs, as they feel that the classroom becomes noisy and unmanageable. While the research literature shows utilising group work as an effective teaching method, teachers in the Maldives do not see this as effective because of the lack of time in the classroom. The study also revealed that in response to the pressure they felt to complete tasks on time, teachers preferred to dominate the classroom, making it a teacher-centred learning space, which leaves the students dull, bored and tired of monotonous lessons. The teachers in the City School also shared the concerns of a hierarchical origin where the teachers are not involved in the decision making on teaching and learning matters, unlike in the Atoll School. Due to these reasons and in combination with low teacher salaries, Maldivian-based teachers are more concerned with their financial problems, and as a result, look for extra sources of income to improve their living standards. Therefore, in order to overcome these pressures, a great number of teachers spend most of their free time- mornings before school, evenings after school and weekends - on private tutoring by going to students' home or tuition centres, in which they provide learners with what they miss in the mainstream classrooms. One of the most telling findings of this study is the number of students who agree that the dull and boring nature of lessons in the classroom and the fact that there is a lack of individual attention by the teachers, are main factors that lead them to private tuition. Due to these causes, students and their parents seek private tuition in order to learn individually, with greater flexibility and comfort, and to understand the lessons in a more meaningful manner.

It is evident that Maldivian schools take particular action to solve the problems that teachers and students face in the process of effective teaching and learning in the mainstream classrooms. Moreover, teachers should be provided with opportunities to gain some hands-on experience, along with confidence in teaching English language lessons more innovatively. It is imperative that attention should be shifted towards teaching using a more student-centred method whilst providing students with the opportunity to be more active learners. Also, most importantly, the school management and senior staff need to involve teachers in the decision making relating to teaching and learning in the classrooms.

On the basis of the findings, this study confirmed that teachers in the Maldivian classroom do things the way they do because it is what is expected of them. Accordingly, the solution to the problems with classroom practice in the Maldives is contingent upon the betterment of the above mentioned complications. Thus, special attention to these complexities for teachers in ensuring better classroom practice should be taken into consideration and finding a solution would be valuable for teaching and learning in the Maldivian classrooms and beyond.

## The way forward

As this study was carried out, it became evident that many new questions remained unanswered, which could serve as research questions for future related studies. Some of these questions are given below as recommendations for further research:

1. How do students prefer to learn English in Maldivian classrooms? The answer to this question would offer important information for head of departments and teachers and help them cater to the needs and interests of the learners so they can make informed decisions relating to classroom practice.
2. How can teachers teach the English curriculum using a more student-oriented rather than examination-oriented method? Exploring this question is worthwhile since this study has shown the extent to which English teaching in the Maldives is led by an examination-oriented method reflected in the style of lessons which neglect the development of the learners' competencies.



3. How do parental attitudes about schools impact on the use of private tuition?

Answers to this question could help the schools improve what is possible in terms of new teaching and learning approaches.

4. How well does the government understand the political, social, economic, and educational factors that shape private tutoring causes and effects? Exploring this question would help the government to find appropriate responses to the prevailing use of private tuition in the Maldives.

5. How can the government monitor and regulate the use of private tuition?

This would help us locate best practices for both schools and the private tuition industry.

## Final note

To conclude, it is important to say that in conducting this study, I found teachers in the secondary classrooms of the Maldives to be extremely committed professionals with a strong sense of duty and care for their students. Additionally, all teachers were very keen to get involved in the decision-making process of the teaching and learning in the classrooms. However, they were more or less expected and constrained to deliver a more uniformly focused curriculum in accordance with school authorities.

As I reflect on the examination-oriented teaching and learning I observed, I find that the current approaches allow little or no learning of English to actually take place in the classrooms. Therefore, when children enter professional life, they generally do not feel confident to speak, read and write English. A further consequence of the singular focus on examinations is the mushrooming of privately run examination preparation tuition centres and tuition teachers, where learning is markedly different to what is possible in classroom settings.

The findings of the study also suggest that assisting teachers in their professional development, enabling a more conducive environment for teaching and learning, and allowing teachers to be involved in the decision-making could lead to more inspired teachers and less regimented classrooms.

Because more proficient teachers are usually more effective teachers, language educators need opportunities to grow in language proficiency and in knowledge and awareness of cultures. Thus, some of their growth opportunities should be in special settings and/or abroad. They also must be familiar with and skilled in the use of a proficiency-oriented approach to instruction. Given the constantly changing nature of language and culture, all teachers must have opportunities to update their knowledge and practices. The evolving research base in second language teaching requires that teachers keep abreast of effective instructional practices. Professional development programs need to be structured such that it involves different innovative teaching skills, using authentic materials, involving the communities in the learning, reorienting teachers towards group and pair work so that they understand the dynamics and the noise that it creates are part of the learning and it is not disruptive or challenging to the teacher's expertise or abilities in classroom control. In addition, the means and methods of teaching already used in the private tuition could be encouraged into the mainstream classrooms.

Moreover, teachers must be able to adapt to school restructuring. For example, they need to be aware of how they can continue to teach effectively despite challenges such as low language proficiency combined with longer class periods in which students can tire long before the end of class. In addition, teachers often must utilize special skills in order to conduct classes where students with varied linguistic proficiencies are found.

Communication and teamwork are at the heart of learning and change between student and student, student and teacher, teacher and teacher, teacher and parent, and teacher and other stakeholders. Communication and collaboration between practitioners and policy-makers are also vital, and I believe that researchers can contribute helpfully to this dialogue as well. The Atoll School had many features which would appear to provide an excellent environment for such a productive dialogue.

In summary, despite all the frustration, the teachers and students voiced, this study suggests that all participants enjoyed reflecting upon their practices and were keen to contribute to reform and change. The processes within ethnographic research and interview as social practice methodologies were excellent tools to gain insights into the realities of both classroom practice and private tuition settings in the Maldives.

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: Approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee



**Massey University**

FILE

22 September 2008

Maryam Mariya  
15 Keiller Place  
PALMERSTON NORTH

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT  
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR  
(Research Ethics)  
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Dear Maryam

**Re: Practices of Teaching Reading in the Maldives**

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 22 September 2008.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:**

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia V Rumball (Professor)  
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and  
Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics)

cc Prof Cysthria White  
School of Language Studies  
PN231

Prof Paul Spoonley, Acting HoS  
School of Language Studies  
PN231

Massey University Human Ethics Committee  
Accredited by the Health Research Council

