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Maldivian teacher educators' cultural embodiment and the shaping of ICT habitus in their pedagogical practices

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Abstract

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been widely discussed as a means of understanding cultural habits and practices in various contexts. This article identifies some of the characteristics of Maldivian teacher educators (TE) in terms of their habitus when they incorporate information and communication technology (ICT) in their teacher education programmes. In the Maldives, education is, broadly, teacher-centric and exam-focused. The TEs have this deeply ingrained in their teacher education practices. The findings, generated through an ethnographic approach using narrative interviews, observations and focus group discussions, suggest that TEs generally adopt ICT to make their own roles more efficient without necessarily changing their pedagogy, thus embracing teacher-centrism. This article highlights issues linking cultural capital and the formation of specific ICT habitus within this context, thus contributing to understanding of habitus as it applies to teacher education in the Maldives.

Key words

Culture, habitus, teacher educator, pedagogical practice

Introduction

Learning to teach is a continual process of forming habits, routines and practices, often through professional reflection (Schön, 1987). In the Maldivian context, where education is mostly characterised as teacher-centric and exam-oriented (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004), the focus for teacher educators (TEs) is deeply influenced by the cultural and social capital of forming habits, routines and

practices, but not necessarily involving reflection on them. So, while TEs focused attention on designing teaching, some literature suggests that a focus on designing learning is more appropriate with ICT (Mooij, 2009; Park, 2009; Richards, 2006; Wright, 2010).

A considerable body of literature discusses teacher learning and professional learning about teaching, particularly drawing attention to a theory and practice 'divide' in the teaching profession (Beijaard, Korthagen, & Verloop, 2007; Korthagen, 2010). These authors argue that this 'divide' is about the difference between some teachers' practices and what they may have learned about theories of learning. In other words, they may learn about socio-cultural and co-constructive ways of learning, but actually persist in teacher-centric and student-passive modes of instruction. This perhaps suggests that Maldivian TEs' professional reflection about ways of teaching and articulating what it means to teach with ICT is underdeveloped in their practices.

Some authors argue that teacher learning develops through thoughtful reflective practice (Go, 2012; Mortari, 2012) or collaborative teacher learning practices (Doppenberg, Bakx, & Brok, 2012). However, Pedder and Opfer (2011) argue that teacher professional learning also involves the teacher's individual experiences, orientations, and beliefs. These shape a way of teaching. Thus, the Maldivian teachers' own educational learning has profoundly influenced the formation of their teacher education practices and habitus. When TEs have similar educational backgrounds, for example, it is likely that these influences will collectively and individually impact on how they themselves teach. This means that cultural embodiment and previous learning experiences may be deeply implicated in their teaching practices. Some researchers argue that a certain way of practice (habits or routines for example) in teaching could be embodied through the individuals' own religious and cultural experiences and upbringing (Cheng, Cheng, & Tang, 2010; Kukari, 2004; Wong, 2005).

This article addresses some cultural influences affecting Maldivian TEs' learning experiences using ICT in their teaching.

The research context

This research centres on the Republic of Maldives, an archipelago of 1190 coral islands located in the Indian Ocean in the South Asian region. Maldivians practised Buddhism until AD1153, when an Arab scholar successfully converted the King of Maldives to Islam (Faiz, 2007). Thus, Islam has been practised in the Maldives since the middle of the 12th century.

Since Maldivians are Muslims, Islamic religious principles and practices are deeply embedded in Maldivian education practice. This is embodied as practices such as teachers using a Muslim worldview to help students understand principles and concepts in specific subject areas. This is particularly true in Islamic studies and the recitation of the Qur'an. These principles are also exerted in the kinds of discipline structures in schools. From the 1920s, education became more formal with the development of curriculum and the establishment of teacher education. Early education in the Maldives is described as *Edhuruge*, a private home system where learning to recite the Qur'an and learning to read/write the local language took place. This was a private tutoring system of learning/teaching in which the tutor emphasised rote learning rather than understanding. Because of this strong influence, notions of pedagogy centred on what it means to be a learner have not necessarily been at the forefront of educational thinking in the Maldives compared, for example, with New Zealand where student-centred pedagogies are enshrined in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007).

From the 1960s, the British schooling system has influenced the structure of the Maldivian education system. This system is divided into four levels, as shown in Figure 1, which correlate to British levels of schooling and broadly link to international variations. Structural changes, however, did not necessarily change pedagogical practices in the Maldives. Thus, rote learning and teacher-centrism

demonstrates the strong influence of the earlier teaching of Islamic religious principles. This is evident in the literature on Maldivian contexts, which suggests that teaching in Maldivian classrooms is concentrated on 'rote learning', memorising facts and content (Nazeer, 2006). Mohamed (2006) argues that Maldivian schools are examination-oriented, and teacher talk-time is remarkably high. Shareef (2010) confirms this by observing a focus on transmitting knowledge. These studies point to a highly specific educational background that is probably true of TEs in the Maldives and that was also the focus of my study.
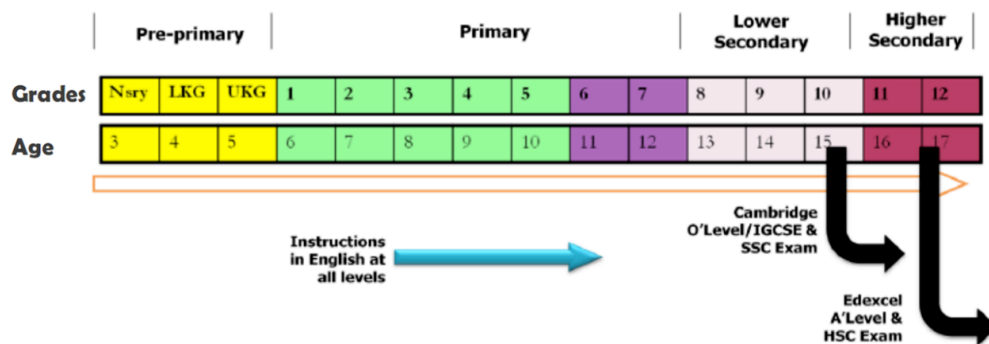
Figure 1.   Structure of school system in the Maldives

(Source: Maldives Ministry of Education, 2010)

Given that the TEs in this study are Muslim Maldivians and have grown up in the Maldives education system regardless of whether their teaching qualification had been gained overseas, a focus on habitus helps understand why these TEs use ICT in the way they do.

Bourdieu's habitus as a lens

Considerable research about people's practice links with Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Joas & Knöbl, 2011; Lau, 2004; Roland, 2002; Schmidt, 1997). Bourdieu's work on habitus, field and capital(s) is a lens that helps to understand Maldivian TEs' practice. Bourdieu's theory of habitus sheds light on how individual TE's practices are unconsciously influenced by their inculcation into cultural practices common to learning the Qur'an in the Maldives, which leads to the overwhelming focus on rote learning and teacher-centric pedagogical practices. According to Bourdieu, habitus is

> a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72)

Bourdieu here states that habitus is a product of socialisation. This may be due to the enculturation of a family's cultural practices and in the Maldives can be applied to how children learned the Qur'an. Bourdieu (1977) argues that individual's options for action are initially determined by childhood, family, and school-life experiences. These experiences teach people about how to think or act in certain ways. Joas and Knöbl (2011) argue that Bourdieu's explanation needs to account for how circumstances and influences change habitus, particularly within professional spaces. Therefore one's early habitus does not always define what happens in the future but can still exert influence. Roland (2002) used the term "social agents", referring to individuals who work through both their physical and mental habits, which suggests that habitus should not be understood as an inscribed machine.

Bourdieu also refers to habitus as a strategy "enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82). Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) argue that individuals' habitus is generated through everyday activities, and to a certain degree form through interactions which in turn shape people's practices. This view helps us understand the notion of agency among teacher educators in the Maldives. In this research, most participants became teacher educators before ICT tools were readily available. So, with the advent of these tools and the institution suggesting that the use of these tools is to be part of 'how things get done around here', it implied that teaching practices were expected to change. In tandem with this, TEs' understanding and habits were also expected to change through the use of these tools.

Jenkins (1992), however, argues that internalising practice is complex, articulating this through Bourdieu's (1993) sense of game. Lamaison and Bourdieu (1986) suggest that the degree of internalisation of practice in habits can be described as a game because it implies defined rules, just as an institution has rules of practice. In the research project discussed in this article, the concept of game applies to the participants' choice of particular ICT facilities or tools for teaching and learning. When these ICT tools worked as expected, the TEs were more likely to make them part of their everyday professional work, integrating them into the rules of the game, that is, their pedagogical practices. However, Schmidt (1997) argues that desires and emotions can play a part in this adoption and thus affect the degree of adoption. So some TEs will refuse to use a tool again if they feel it has jeopardised their professional practice; for example, they may avoid using the internet if they perceive its slow speed as a barrier to their way of teaching.

Given this scenario, we are also looking at ideas around agency, structures and cultural practice (Pachler, Cook, & Bachmair, 2010), although this article focuses mainly on cultural practice. An institution is a culture where certain logics of practice are institutionalised. Here, the institution becomes a social space where TEs act upon "strategic possibilities" (Bourdieu, 1993), which refers to the individual's actions as being dynamic and fluid—in this case, within the TE institution. This means that "action generally adheres to a practical logic, which is often shaped by routine requirements" (Joas & Knöbl, 2011, p. 12). Gunter (2004), for example, who applies Bourdieu's theory to understanding how schools as organisations and the leaders within them operate, believes understanding the social reality of practice is important when locating the logic of practice. In the context of this research, TEs use the technologies because they are provided and so they appropriate them as vehicles for delivering their teaching. The mutual understanding among TEs therefore, becomes a logic of practice, where they position the one who does not use these tools as 'sort of the odd one out' in the institution, and cement an institutional practice related to ICT. Naidoo (2004) suggests that in some academic disciplines, individuals can reconceptualise what it means to practise in a given context. This helps understand why some TEs consider some colleagues to be the 'odd ones out'.

Therefore, the ICT tools inside the teacher education context of this research take on the cultural understanding of the TE context as part of their own practice including the institutionalised conception of pedagogy and how these tools should be used within this TE context. Roland (2002) explains that Bourdieu uses forms of capital to explain habitus and its socialisation process. Herein, capital can be understood as forces or resources that make individuals take different directions. Bourdieu outlines three types of capital: social, economic and cultural (Grenfell, 2007). *Social capital* can, for instance, relate to the physical or virtual resources available to individuals in a given context. In the Maldivian teacher education context, the physical and virtual resources available include ICT tools, teaching spaces and Wi-Fi access. However, TEs' use of these facilities depends on how they understand these tools and resources within their professional life.

Economic capital also influences the participants' practices. Economic capital depends on the wealth of the institution as well as the affordability and quality of resources available to it. The institution in question exists in a small island country that does not have many of its own natural resources, so the

economic context of the country influences what the institution can afford to provide to its professionals. Notwithstanding the economic constraints, ICT tools have been provided and there is therefore a strong obligation on staff to use them.

Using the notion of habitus as a lens, the research was designed to understand the TEs' lived professional experiences in the Maldivian context.

Research design

This ethnographic doctoral study examined eleven TEs' professional lives in relation to their perspectives and use of ICT in their practices.[3] Therefore, this study was about making sense of their lived reality (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The 'hanging-out' approach was used in order to provide "thick descriptions" about their cultural context (Geertz, 1973, p. 10) and their professional context in order to generate an overview about the TEs' lived experiences and what factors shaped their ICT habitus (Serrant-Green, 2007). The process of ethnography is summarised in Figure 2. This clarifies the activities carried out by the researcher, the doctoral student.

During fieldwork, the researcher was an insider-researcher hanging out with participant volunteers. Before undertaking the project, the researcher was a colleague of the participants. Therefore, the religious, institutional, and professional culture were already familiar. This enabled her to observe, see, interact, explore and clarify various issues related to the teacher educators' practices. She also participated in a range of activities such as teaching and discussions of issues and concerns related to their use of ICT at the institution. In order to manage this insider role, she kept a field journal of reflections about these activities as well as the defined data-gathering tasks. This 'hanging-out' approach supported her exploration and understanding about their practices. However, she was mindful of being reflexive and transparent throughout the fieldwork and the later analysis. One strategy she adopted in her journal was the use of three types of reflection: reflection on action, reflection in action, and reflection through action (Schön, 1983). This meant that her journal had to be mindful of who 'they' (the participants) and 'I' (the researcher) were when writing about incidents, conversations and everyday activities.

The fieldwork was conducted in one teacher education institution out of three such institutions in the Maldives. In the fieldwork the researcher had two phases. In the first visit, eleven TEs were interviewed out of fifty volunteers. After completing the interviews, six participants allowed the researcher to observe their classroom practices. In the second phase, eleven months later, focus groups discussed the preliminary findings. The researcher spent five working days per week for two months on site with the participants in order to hang out with them, as illustrated below.

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[3] Data were originally gathered in a doctoral research project. This paper was synthesised from specific data by both the student and her supervisor. The student is thus labelled as the researcher who collected data in this project.
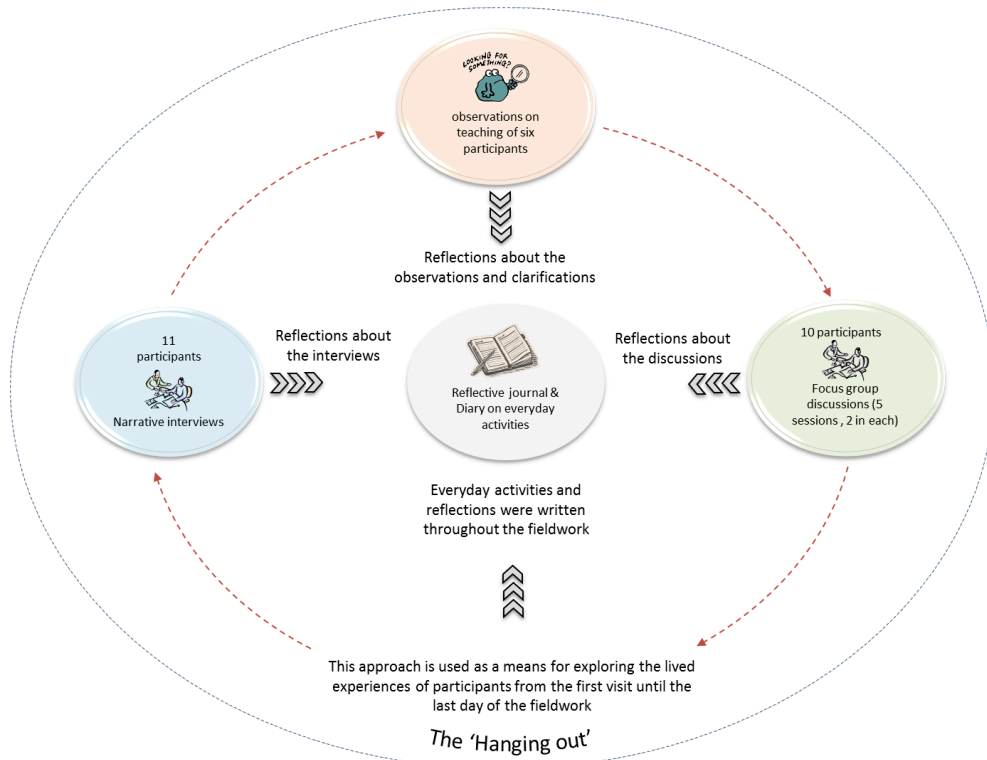
Figure 2.   The process of ethnography synthesised from the researcher's journal entries

The analysis was generated through an iterative process using Seidel's (1998) qualitative data analysis model: notice, collect and think. This process initially made it easy for the researcher to develop emerging themes from the data. With these initial themes, the researcher worked iteratively within and across data. In order to mitigate Seidel's (1998) notion of the 'blind spot'— described as 'things perhaps misunderstood' or 'not realised'—the researcher used the thinking aloud approach with her supervisors and other doctoral colleagues to clear her thoughts. In addition, Buckley and Waring (2013) suggest a diagramming strategy helps a researcher to become reflexive and transparent in their research process. The researcher thus used diagramming to make sense of and synthesise emerging ideas about how the participants' practices may have been formed, using Bourdieu's (1977) habitus as a lens. Further, this lens was iteratively checked in the diagramming to highlight the relationship between TEs' social and cultural norms and their later formed practices. Early cultural practice such as reciting the Qur'an without understanding was the foundation of the Maldivians' shaped habitus. This was strengthened by their learning experiences of accepting knowledge from teachers, which influenced their conceptualisation of pedagogies. This supports Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) argument regarding practices of cultural reproduction. Therefore, habitus as a concept explaining such reproduction is a suitable lens for this analysis. Themes were generated using this lens of analysis and some of these are outlined in the findings below.

Research findings

This section examines the following themes: acceptance and benefits of ICT tools, issues for teacher educators in using the ICT tools provided by the institution, and adopting PowerPoint (PPT) as a means of delivering teaching.

Acceptance and benefits of ICT tools

The TEs accepted specific ICT tools because of the perceived benefits for making their practices more efficient. One TE, for example, said:

> Earlier, I always need to print notes and provide the materials to students, but now we don't need to do that, we can just upload the soft copies in the student share folder. (TE1, interview)

In one of the focus group discussions, two TEs talked about the idea of ease:

> TE7: It is easier to teach now. Say, for example, when students are given something to read, it could be given through online, shared material in their Dropbox or put into the student-share folder. We can just go to the class without doing much. We can proceed with explanation and discussion.

> TE8: That makes things much easier for teaching. It also saves our time in terms of doing photocopies for all students. We sometimes used to have many students in one class. If we make photocopies for all it takes time. (TE7 & TE8, focus group discussion)

TE5 and TE6 also talked in the focus group discussion about this notion of ease:

> TE5: I guess things became much easier these days, when it comes to teaching.

> TE6: Yeah, I remember before these things became available, it was very difficult to carry heavy OHP sheets to classrooms and explain [them] one by one.

> TE5: I believe no one is interested to carry [in carrying] bulky books and heavy materials in their hands when they go to class. I would prefer to use eBooks and helpful material and PDFs which are readily available online for my teaching. (TE5 & TE6, focus group discussion)

TE3 also raised this notion of ease and efficiency by talking about how her use of PPT, in particular, made her professional life easier:

> Now you see, I don't need to have a lesson plan on a piece of paper. If I put everything in the PPT there is a logical flow, see the organisation, if any picture is put in the PPT student can see it, and [the] student[s] can go into a discussion. It's easy for me to get my thoughts together, and plan my lesson as well. (TE3, interview)

This focus on PPT as a tool for teaching will be addressed shortly in a later theme (adopting PPT as a means for delivering teaching).

For these TEs, the main perceived benefit of using PPT was that it was making their jobs easy and more efficient. These comments explain the reasons for their ICT adoption and how they realised the benefits of it in their practice. These comments also highlight their teacher-centric thinking and transmission-oriented pedagogy.

Issues for TEs in using the ICT tools provided by the institution

While the institution provided broadband and particular tools, using them was not without challenge. TEs demonstrated their ability to work around the obstacles by being adaptable. This habit of finding workarounds demonstrated their persistence and resilience. Participant TE7 explained her strategies:

> ... if I have a problem which I cannot easily sort out I will always find a way to work it out…. When I get stuck, I would seek the help from someone … if the support is

> available, it would be good. Now mostly, if I find any difficulty, I would go on Google, read about it and sort it out by [on] my own. (TE7, interview)

In her reflective journal, the researcher described one staff member's struggles when things did not work. This scenario was written about TE10 when she was in her room preparing for her teaching.

> ... I [the researcher] went to remind my participant about her classroom observation time. When I got in, I saw her occupied dealing with her computer system. I stayed in her room for a few minutes. She was trying to download something for the class. Every time she presses the download button, the system gets stuck. After restarting a couple of times, she called the media staff to seek help. According to her she needed to get it downloaded because the classroom where she was going to teach has no internet access. (Field journal, 2 February 2012)

TE6 also shared some challenges:

> There are great challenges in terms of using ICT in Dhivehi [the local language] with these systems. It is very difficult to use. But I try to use it a great deal. I create PDFs or slides that I can upload. I started using Dhivehi on Facebook, and I also upload great amounts of material in websites that are related to teaching so that it can be useful for our students who study in local language. (TE6, interview)

TE5 explained how keen he was to change his teaching in terms of trying out different things regardless of the challenges that he had to face:

> When I started teaching here, I learnt to use these tools more in my classroom teaching. More particularly, using internet for creating better learning environments, and prepare material for my teaching. It became a new learning every day. I started giving assignments for students [so] that they [could] use these tools in their own learning as well. Particularly, in this subject [name removed] there are great challenges. It is hard to get material on it. I also made students use Skype to learn…. (TE5, interview)

These quotes from TEs identified how they coped with everyday issues and obstacles, developed workarounds and demonstrated varying levels of professional agency. The adoption of ICT tools and the teachers' adaptation to specific tools such as PPT made them form specific habitual practices in their teaching. It is worth noting, however, that the way they used the tools reinforced, rather than disturbed their teacher-centric focus.

Adopting PowerPoint (PPT) as a means for delivering teaching

A key finding was the prevalence of PowerPoint as the prime teaching tool. TEs often described how they used PPT to deliver the information the same way they would have taught without it. The researcher noted in her journal that her participants became "PowerPoint lovers", something that the interviews with the eleven participants reinforced. A journal note on a classroom observation of TE7 demonstrates this trend across all observed lessons:

> In an activity, the TE7 emphasised strongly on making students learn the definitions by repeatedly asking [them] to write [the] exact words mentioned in the original definitions. She did not ask the meaning [of the words] that the students might [have] understood differently, rather [she] repeatedly tried to make them recall the words mentioned in the definitions. (TE7, classroom observation)

One TE highlighted the benefit of having a PPT prepared for her teaching:

> When ICT is incorporated it becomes so much easier to deliver the lesson. All the information I want to explain can be put in the slides. I don't need to think much about it once the presentation is made. It also helps to organise my ideas when explaining. It is helpful for both the teacher and the learner. I think it helps the teacher to explain, and for the students because they get the slides as hand-outs. Mostly, all the important points and examples will be covered in it (TE3, interview).

Lastly, TE1 described how she uses PPT:

> I believe it is easier for me to cover the content in the class, when it (PPT) is used. It makes [it] easier to go back and forth while explaining. It also helps me to see the whole content that I need to explain in the lesson (TE1, interview).

These examples show how PowerPoint has become a major tool for delivering TEs' teaching. It also links directly to the notion of ease and efficiency of their teaching practices. This also highlights the teacher-centric nature of pedagogy in the Maldives as discussed earlier. The next section discusses the teacher-centric pedagogy by drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has outlined some of the influences Maldivian TEs' own learning experiences have on shaping their teaching and ICT use dispositions. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) as an analytical lens, we were able to come to better understand why the TEs' pedagogical practices appear not to have changed much with the advent of ICT tools. The teacher educators' early learning experiences—particularly the embodied notion of rote learning—continued to be mirrored in their pedagogical practices. This contrasts with emerging literature on the inclusion of ICT tools in learning contexts, where more student-centred practices have begun evolving (Wright, 2010). Bourdieu (1977) views habitus as evolving from and being shaped by schooling and cultural practices. This also aligns with some researchers' arguments in terms of people forming specific practices in teaching that embody their own cultural and religious upbringings (Cheng et al., 2010; Kukari, 2004; Wong, 2005). Pachler et al. (2010) reiterate this point in identifying the intimate link between people's agency, structures and cultural practices and their level of appropriation of ICT tools.

Individuals' habitus becomes present practice influenced by past experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). According to the findings of this study, the Maldivian TEs adopted ICT to deliver their teaching rather than thinking about its uses for student learning (examples can be seen in conversations with TE1, TE3 and TE7). Bourdieu (1977) states that "agents are possessed by their habitus more than they possess it" (p. 18), but perhaps not through conscious attention to predetermined "roles", "rules" or "models" (p. 17). These views explain how individuals' early backgrounds can become the routines of later everyday activities, including in pedagogical practice. This could mean that the TEs continued with their embodied pedagogical practices without much thinking about pedagogies that might more suitable when using ICTs than their usual teacher-centric ones. Perhaps this is a doxa which is taken for granted. Thus, TEs' everyday habit of going along with the advent of the ICT tools without recognising the best use of them for learners links to the formation of a teacher-centric habitus regardless of how they use ICTs in their teaching.

Bourdieu (1977) suggests that doxa is an embodied notion that is unconsciously believed and practised. He also claims that "in the absence of the perception … one consciously applies the code which is good for everyday…, for the deciphering of familiar object" (Bourdieu, 1968, p. 3). So, regardless of the TEs' overseas education on appropriate pedagogical approaches to ICT use, their practical pedagogical knowledge was formed in their context of practice (Maldives) and that overrode any theoretical knowledge because it was born of habit, practice, culture, history and religion.

Loughran (2010) affirms that practitioners do not necessarily consider whether the ways they teach are always in line with specific learnt knowledge about teaching. In other words, changes to TEs' pedagogical practices may occur slowly because of overlaid cultural practices. The finding of efficiency and ease demonstrates that the ICT tools in and of themselves did not bring any change to practices beyond adoption. ICT tools, such as PPT, merely replaced older technologies, such as a blackboard. In other words, chalk and talk has turned into PPT and talk.

Bourdieu's (1990) 'sense of the game' helps explain an important aspect of individuals' shaping of specific practices. He states: "The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 734). This means TEs' adoption of specific tools such as PPT may have formed through everyday uses. They made choices that linked directly to their pedagogical practices: ICTs were about ease and efficiency in teaching rather than student learning. Grenfell and James (2004) claim, for example, that field structures are constituted according to logical principles and practical sense (*sens pratique*). Thus, TEs' sense of agency or game was predicated not on the notion of pedagogy, but on making their professional lives easier. So, TEs' habitus of teaching with PPT is shaped by the degree of reflection and the personal/professional benefits ICT might have for their teaching (Go, 2012; Mortari, 2012). In other words, they continued to concentrate on their needs as teachers rather than their students' needs as learners. Thus, their level of agency was inwardly focused, which may relate to what they think about what pedagogy is about, in turn linking it to their own early experiences of rote learning (discussed earlier), which in turn became habitus and doxa about pedagogy.

In conclusion, the findings identify that (1) PPT is a dominant mode, linking closely to transmitting information and a teacher-centred pedagogy; and (2) although the institution has provided ICT tools, it has not necessarily altered the TEs' pedagogy. Students continue to lack opportunities to use the tools instead of the staff. This perhaps reinforces deeply held views over teacher as expert, learner as novice, and the transmission of information from one to the other. This replicates TEs' childhood experience of learning to recite the Qur'an. Thus, Bourdieu's notion of habitus, doxa and field help us understand the forces at work in Maldivian teacher educators' practices when using ICT.

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