Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university: A qualitative case study

Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor in Education

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January 2020

Declaration

I, Richard Paterson, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other resources this has been indicated as appropriate.

Signature:

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January 2020

Word count, excluding abstract, contents, reflective statement, impact statement, list of references, appendices, but including figures and tables: 47,433.

Abstract

The role of higher education in supporting the knowledge economy by adhering to an employability led curricula is a contentious one. Countries need a highly educated and skilled population to both use and disseminate knowledge, and research centres such as universities are vital in the creation of new knowledge and the adaptation of existing knowledge to suit local, national and international demands. While education policy may be guided by national governments and their economic, social and cultural ideals, it has been argued that many valued employability skills can only be developed in genuine work situations, not in the classroom. Debates surrounding employability have taken place over recent years primarily in the global north, leaving a considerable gap in research in a more diverse range of contexts, including Central Asia and transnational education. This qualitative case study addresses the gap by drawing on reflections and observations on teaching and learning related to employability from students and lecturers on undergraduate degree courses at Westminster International University, Tashkent, a transnational university in Uzbekistan. Using activity theory as the tool for analysis, this research investigated lecturers' and students' understandings of employability pedagogy, how employability pedagogy was integrated in curricula of undergraduate degree courses, how lecturers mobilised their perceptions of employability pedagogy to construct classroom activity systems, and how students interacted within learning communities to develop their employability skills. The activity systems revealed tensions that arose out of interactions between participants and the community members, including colleagues, families and employers. Significant tensions related to issues of gender discrimination, student engagement in activities that did not

contribute to progression, and how cultural norms impacted on students'
engagement with the labour market.

Impact statement

The findings from this thesis are of relevance in both local and international contexts. Firstly, in the local context, the strategic planning of universities in Uzbekistan, public and private, are both enabled and constrained by the top-down approach of government. In cases such as this, the analysis of culturally embedded ideals allows for a broader understanding of current practice; tensions in an education organisational, as subjects of activity are pulled in different directions by competing objects, can result in systemic failures if not confronted. Secondly, in international contexts, this thesis can inform a broader understanding of how culturally embedded norms impact on learning and teaching pedagogy. This is particularly relevant to transnational education, where students encounter a distinct (in this case UK) pedagogy that they have not encountered in their previous school or university learning. Where students are required to undergo a period of academic acculturation it is also important to recognise where the responsibility for this lies, as the ability of academic staff to facilitate student development in this area may depend on their own international experience.

The use of activity theory in this thesis could also have implications for further research in the area of employability. While enhanced stakeholder involvement is generally seen as beneficial, a recognition and greater understanding of how community members contribute to shared outcomes can promote innovation and transformation in learning and teaching practices. Paired interviews also provided insights into how framing conversations around employability can elicit multiple perspectives of shared experiences. This was important when using a practice-based and practice-oriented theoretical framework that emphasises the connection

between collective human activity and the socio-cultural specific contexts where they are applied.

Ideas cannot be shared without dissemination, and there are numerous avenues to explore here. One aim of this thesis was to bridge the gap between the global-north dominated discourse on employability issues in higher education and the under-researched areas of transnational education and Central Asian higher education. This has already been partially achieved with the publication of an extended article that covers the issues in the literature review chapters of this thesis. The article 'From employment to employability: Uzbekistan and the higher education skills agenda,' was the first published article in the new peer reviewed journal 'Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasian Development'. Further impact can be achieved through a wider dissemination of the empirical findings of this thesis in international journals.

The findings of this thesis will be presented at Westminster International University in Tashkent's annual learning and teaching symposium. This could foster further engagement with university stakeholders and have the potential for impact on learning and teaching practice. Additionally, with small research grants available from the University of Westminster for collaborative projects between researchers in London and Tashkent, there are opportunities to develop and expand on themes from this research, in terms of both pedagogical applications and the use of activity theory as an analytical tool.

Contents

List of figures

List of tables

List of abbreviations

AT	Activity theory
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
EdD	Doctorate in education
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IFS	Institute Focused Study
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NTTP	National Programme for Personnel Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDP	Personal development planning
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RQ	Research question
TNE	Transnational education
UCL/IOE	University College London/Institute of Education
WIUT	Westminster International University, Tashkent
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

WIUT undergraduate degrees: BIS: Business Information Systems
                                BsAd: Business Administration
                                Econ/EconF: Economics/Economics with Finance
                                Law: Commercial Law

List of appendices

Appendix 1: Research information form

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

Appendix 3: Interview schedule 1

Appendix 4: Interview schedule 2

Appendix 5: Employability journal template

Appendix 6: Employability journal examples

Appendix 7: Pre-observation questionnaire (lecturer)

Appendix 8: Post-observation questionnaire (students)

Appendix 9: Data collection methods

Appendix 10: NVivo coding sample

Appendix 11: WIUT ethics confirmation

Appendix 12: UCL/IOE ethics confirmation

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Secondly, I would like to thank the staff and students at Westminster International University, Tashkent, for their incredible hospitality and openness during my many visits over the years. Particular thanks go to David Byers, who invited me to Uzbekistan for the first time in 2012. Also thanks to the staff in the Global English department for allowing me use of their offices, and extra special thanks to Anastasiya Bezborodova and Nora Gavalyan who arranged all the aspects of my research visits – none of this thesis would have been possible without their help and kindness. Thanks also to Katie Mansfield for her keen proofreading skills.

Finally I would like to thank my wife, Luli, who has been patient, supportive and encouraging during my times of academic quarantine.

Reflective statement on professional and academic development

In this statement I reflect on the most influential aspects of my candidature for the EdD, particularly those that influenced my professional and academic development. Before I embarked on this EdD I considered myself a lecturer, and not an academic or a researcher. Up until 2014 I was employed on a teaching contract at the University of Westminster with no research responsibility. In July 2014, due to departmental changes, I secured a lecturer position, which meant that I now had to 'do research'. I was accepted on the EdD programme in August 2014. However, after not being able to find a suitable supervisor it was decided that my entry would be deferred until October 2015. To bridge the gap until the EdD started I was offered a place on a new accelerated pre-doctoral research methods course the, postgraduate diploma Social Science Research Methods (SSRM) starting in January 2015.

PG Dip in Social Science Research Methods (SSRM) - January-December 2015

Module 1: Developing Research Questions

My role at the University of Westminster is to run the in-sessional accredited Academic English modules. In order to make the modules more effective I felt that an investigation into how students and lecturers perceived the demands of academic study would be beneficial. The reason for this was that after teaching in higher education for over 10 years I felt many students, especially postgraduate international students, were not reaching their full potential because of a basic lack of knowledge of what was actually expected of them in a UK university. The

assignment described the rationale behind creating an appropriate set of research questions to address the problem described above. This module also served as a solid introduction to research methodologies, which was further developed on the next module.

Module 2: Methods of Investigation

For this module I was assigned to a research project in progress at UCL/IOE, the Coursework Assessment Careers Project. The project and subsequent assignment influenced my thinking both as a researcher and a lecturer. The scope of the project encompassed the whole of the IOE (the main research of the project took part before the merger with UCL). From this I was able to understand how a well-conceived research project could have a positive effect on teaching practices at an institution. I developed a greater understanding of the importance of feedback in fostering student development, and this module made me more aware of research underpinning the theories. As a direct result of the knowledge and experience gained from this module I have given staff development seminars for lecturers to reflect and improve their feedback practices, integrating aspects of ipsative feedback. These seminars took place in London, and also in an affiliated institution; Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (WIUT).

Module 3 Designing a Research Study

This small scale research project drew on the research questions I had formulated in module 1. By this stage I had decided to concentrate my research on the affiliated university in Uzbekistan. A planned visit to deliver staff training to lectures at WIUT coincided with this module, so it was an ideal opportunity to give my research both a

clearer focus and an international setting. In terms of the 'so what?' factor, the setting of a transnational university provided an under-researched context, and my status as an outsider but with insider access and knowledge allowed freedom for me to undertake research there. For the research I interviewed four lecturers on the theme of academic literacies. One important lesson was how, in the writing up stages, it is important to revisit the literature review, and add items that better reflect the themes that emerged from the data. This assignment served as an invaluable pilot study for the EdD Institution Focus Study (IFS), even though my research focus was to change.

Module 4: Developing a Research Proposal

This assignment involved writing an original research proposal, and I continued with the academic literacies theme, although I had already thought about researching employability skills at WIUT. The report by Ajwad *et al*. (2014) on the skills deficit in graduates in Uzbekistan seemed to be directed at institutes like WIUT, and I felt well placed to organise my research to address this topic. However, I was already underway in the writing of the proposal for this module, so decided not to change topic for this assignment. Besides, I did recognise that exploring academic literacies at WIUT had limited mileage, and the staff training sessions I had delivered had made lecturers aware of the need for a change in approach to delivering the English for Academic Purposes modules. Although my research focus was to change for the EdD, the methodologies employed would be transferable from this assignment as they largely involved semi-structured interviews of lecturers and students.

EdD - October 2015- January 2020

Foundations of Professionalism - October 2015

Completing the SSRM course allowed exemption from the research methods modules of the EdD, but I was still required to undertake Foundations of Professionalism. There was one particular session in this module that I found valuable, which looked at the changing roles of higher education institutions in light of developments in internationalisation and globalisation, and this cemented my interest in researching employability skills at WIUT. In this module I reflected and wrote about how my professional identity and development had been shaped by forces of global changes in education. A modified version of this was published in the UCL Journal of Doctoral Research in Education (Paterson, 2016).

Institute Focused Study - January 2016-January 2017

The proposal I wrote for the IFS applied the knowledge I had acquired from the SSRM courses and the Foundations of Professionalism module. At this stage I was more confident in my ability to manage and operationalise a larger research project. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of my choice of research location was the limited time I had available for data collection. As I did not have any direct contact with students at WIUT I relied on colleagues in the Global English department at WIUT to help select participants. I had a scheduled visit to WIUT in May 2016, so I had to fit in the interviews with my other commitments, which involved giving training seminars to WIUT staff. The tight schedule of my visits meant that there was no flexibility to rearrange scheduled interviews. Feedback from my SSRM module 3 indicated that I needed to develop my skills regarding data analysis, so for the IFS I

utilised a more structured thematic analysis framework to better organise the data. Doing this made me realise that a little data can go a long way, and eight interviews of up to an hour each was ample data for this relatively small-scale study. Additionally, undertaking the data collection for the IFS helped me hone my interview techniques. While analysing the data for SSRM module 3 I noticed that on the transcripts there was too much of my voice, and I tended to interrupt the flow. During the IFS interviews I concentrated on allowing participants to talk more without interruption, even if they strayed off topic. For the IFS and the subsequent thesis I prepared detailed interview schedules, but I learnt that sometimes the most revealing data came when participants were left to talk at length. After the submission of my IFS I sought the advice of a previous EdD candidate (recommended by an IOE lecturer), with a view to publishing a modified version of it. This meeting proved enlightening, especially regarding the importance of choosing the right journal to submit to, and my article was accepted for publication in a peer reviewed journal (Paterson, 2017). Dissemination of research is as important as the production of it, and I was fortunate to have the opportunity to present the main findings from my IFS at the WIUT learning and teaching symposium in May 2017. As a result of my work with WIUT I was invited by other Uzbek universities and the Ministry of Education, to present pedagogic research at conferences around Uzbekistan.

Thesis - January 2017 – January 2020

Moving from the IFS I wanted to expand on my research into employability at WIUT. The time spent on the IFS led me to reflect on how understandings of employability skills are individual and subjective, linked to previous education and work experiences, as well as issues of self-esteem and confidence. In light of this felt it

would be worth investigating WIUT stakeholders' attitudes to the dominant skills agenda, and exploring how employability is promoted directly through learning outcomes on courses, and indirectly by providing opportunities for students to develop, reflect, record and showcase their employment-ready graduate identity. In order to do this I recognised the need for a more robust analytical tool, specifically one linked to social and cultural theory. During my work as an English language teacher I was familiar with Vygotsky's theories on the role of social interaction in cognitive development, and developmental theories where pedagogy involves mediation by peers or experienced teachers within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Through further research I discovered how these ideas had been expanded by Engeström in the form of activity theory, and that this analytical tool had not been used to explore the concept of employability in undergraduate courses. Whilst writing the proposal for my thesis I was still familiarising myself with activity theory, and many times doubted as to whether it could be successfully used in relation to employability. It was only after my review before thesis, where I received encouraging feedback on how to best move forward, that I had confidence in using activity theory. This kind of encouraging feedback (written, spoken, formal or informal) from independent reviewers, and especially from my two supervisors, has been perhaps the most influential element of my five years of EdD study. As a direct result of my experiences of being a student again I feel I have developed a heightened degree of empathy towards my own students. Students on my modules are primarily non-native English speakers, and often do not have previous experience of UK higher education. Along with my better understanding of issues related to academic acculturation (a notable feature of my findings in this thesis) I

feel I am better equipped to facilitate student learning as they embark on their own academic journeys.

In the thesis I faced logistical problems in how to collect data. My thesis proposal had indicated that interviews could take place using a conference camera link between WIUT and Westminster in London. This technology, however, proved unreliable, and additionally I felt that interviewing remotely was not conducive to establishing the kind of rapport required with participants to elicit personal responses and reflections. The inclusion of an employability journal as a method of data collection was as a direct result of previous conversations at WIUT. Reflective writing was rarely used by staff or students, so I felt that introducing this would be beneficial not only as a method of data collection, but also as a way of introducing reflection to participants as a tool for both improving teaching practice and as evidence for student learning. Participants responded favourably to the reflective element of their employability journals, and I have subsequently introduced reflective writing into all the modules I lead at Westminster in London.

In writing my thesis I found that setting small, manageable goals is the best way to make progress. I believe that the structured nature of the SSRM course was instrumental in my progress, especially when I compare my journey to colleagues who undertook less structured doctoral programmes. In September 2019, on the basis of publications achieved through my EdD studies, I was promoted to Senior Lecturer; I now consider myself a researcher and an academic.

Publications during candidature

Peer reviewed journal articles:

Paterson, R. (2016). The accidental global professional: A series of conflicts in teaching academic skills in higher education. *Educate~*, *16*(1), 3-14.

Paterson, R. (2017). 'Because sometimes your failures can also teach you certain skills': Lecturer and student perceptions of employability skills at a transnational university. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 6(3), 241-275. doi.org/10.17583/qre.2017.2583

Paterson, R. (2019). From Employment to Employability: Uzbekistan and the Higher Education Skills Agenda. *Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasian Development.*1 (1), pp. 1-22. doi:10.16997/srjed.2

Conference posters and abstracts:

Paterson, R. (2016). Lecturer and student perceptions of employability skills at a transnational university. Abstracts of the UCL Institute of Education Doctoral Poster Conference March 2016. UCL London. Mar 2016. UCL: IOE Press.

Paterson, R. (2018). Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university. Research and pedagogy in the classroom. University of Suffolk 09 Jun 2018. British Education Research Association (BERA).

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Context and rationale

The pressure on higher education institutions (HEIs) to produce graduates ready to enter national or international labour markets with the requisite transferable skills to perform graduate level jobs has never been greater. Recent global economic instability has affected the way both employers and potential employees view the role of the higher education (HE) sector, with different approaches to HE funding and strategy being implemented in the UK and further afield. With HEIs coming under criticism from governments, policy makers and employers regarding the work-readiness of graduates, HE courses are increasingly geared towards providing labour markets with suitable qualified graduates. The promotion of the employability agenda, nevertheless, could be seen as eroding more traditional roles of HE, including providing opportunities for individual betterment and promotion of cultural understanding, liberal views, diversity and open-mindedness. An emerging field of research relating to employability is in the area of transnational education (TNE) where students remain in their home country and study for international degrees. A review of TNE literature (Mellors-Bourne *et al*., 2015) noted a lack of research relating to how enhanced employability is incorporated, delivered and supported in TNE programmes. In emerging market economies such as Uzbekistan this is especially important, with the highly regulated HE and TNE sectors expected to address key skills gaps. A further issue that is not widely covered in the literature is the role work experience or extracurricular activities play in TNE learning experiences, raising questions of quality assurance in comparable home and overseas provisions.

1.2 Regional and personal positioning

Many HEIs, particularly in developed countries, are looking for ways to expand their revenue streams and gain wider international recognition. Through international partnerships, universities can generate opportunities that are not merely a competitive necessity, but can also build social and cultural connections, create new knowledge that transcends national borders and encourage meaningful dialogue and discussion. These issues raise questions about the purpose and objectives of transnational education, where students in one country can attain qualifications from institutions in another country without need for expensive travel abroad. Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), founded in Uzbekistan in 2002, is an accredited institution of the University of Westminster in the UK. WIUT has, over recent years, encouraged industry engagement, although a clear strategy of how employability pedagogy is embedded in the curriculum has not emerged. This thesis focuses on strategies related to the employability agenda that WIUT has undertaken in recent years, taking into consideration the perceptions of students and lecturers.

I am a Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster, London. In 2012 I was first invited to WIUT to deliver staff training to lecturers, and have been a regular visitor since, providing training on pedagogical issues such as materials development, curriculum design, assessment and research methods. During my visits I have developed an excellent working relationship with lecturers and senior members of staff. My relationship within the institute could be said to occupy the space between an insider and an outsider researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

1.3 Objectives, research questions and conceptual framework

The study of employability in Uzbekistan is a recent development and has been limited to general overviews of the sector relating to regional changes in government policy, such as Ajwad *et al*. (2014). Kasimova's (2011) quantitative study involving university students and recent graduates concluded that university curricula did not provide enough practical experience for students. While both studies confirmed noticeable skills gaps between those developed by graduates and those required by employers, neither investigated classroom practices. My previous research for the EdD Institute Focused Study (IFS) (Paterson, 2017) investigated the perceptions of both lecturers and students at WIUT regarding employability skills. The main findings of this qualitative study were, although lecturers and students at WIUT had similar views on the importance of embedding employability skills in classroom teaching, the purpose of employability focused pedagogy was not easily communicated to students. In addition, while both lecturers and students recognised the value of internships and work experience on developing employability skills, it was not clear whether classroom activities contributed significantly to the development of the same skills (Paterson, 2017).

Building on findings from my IFS, I identified three research questions (RQs) this thesis addresses:

1. What are lecturers' and students' understandings of employability-related concepts in undergraduate degree courses?
2. How do lecturers and students mobilise their perceptions of employability pedagogy to construct activity systems?
3. What tensions and contradictions arise from interacting activity systems?

My research is based on social constructivism and consists of a qualitative data set. The conceptual framework is informed by ontological and epistemological beliefs established by Vygotsky (1978), Engeström (1987) and Lave and Wenger (1991), who hold that social constructivism frameworks can best be explored through the study of situated human activity. The key to the development of knowledge, both theoretical and practical, is through social interaction (Kukla, 2013); many aspects of peoples' day to day realities are constructed by their own interpretations of social contexts. Therefore, any attempt to better understand motivations behind human activity should focus on the social, cultural, and historical perspectives that lead to individual or shared meanings, and how these meanings are used by individuals to make sense of their surroundings. In my research the social-cultural perspectives of participants are explored through the lens of activity theory (AT), a theoretical framework that can be applied to human practices to reveal how learning is shaped by culture and context (Engeström, 2001).

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Following the setting of the context in Chapter 1, Chapters 2 and 3 examine relevant literature relating to employability and current issues in Uzbek HE respectively. Chapter 3 also describes the specific research location, and links to Chapter 2 with discussion of how employability-related concepts are currently understood and implemented in Uzbek HE. Chapter 4 provides an account of the theoretical underpinnings of my chosen analytical tool (activity theory), and a description of the research design and data collection methods. Chapter 5 presents the main findings and addresses RQ1. Chapter 6 provides synthesis and discussion specifically related to principles of activity theory and addresses RQs 2 and 3. Chapter 7 gives an overview of the implications of this thesis.

Chapter 2 Employability and higher education

This chapter introduces the concept of employability and its connection to HE policy. While government driven changes in HE policy have reinforced the employability agenda, the acceptance of the employability skills agenda by HEIs has led critics to lament the fact that course curricula are being dictated by policy makers and employers, reigniting debates about the purpose of HE. Additionally, debates surrounding employability have taken place over recent years primarily in the global north, and there is need for research in a more diverse range of HEIs, particularly in transnational education.

2.1 The recognition of employability in higher education

Over the years the ways that employability has been described has changed according to national and international contexts. In the UK in the 1960s, after publication of the Robbins report, HEIs were advised to pay attention to the teaching of skills needed in the general division of labour (Robbins, 1963). The concept of employability remained relatively obscure until the 1990s (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), when the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) formally identified skills that should be taught on undergraduate degree courses, marking a shift towards investment in human capital and strategies for lifelong learning.

In light of the Dearing Report, a comprehensive report published by the Department for Education and Employment (UK) in 1998 recognised employability as a collective

responsibility. This report (Hillage & Pollard, 1998) produced broad definitions that entailed getting a job: ensuring key skills and an understanding about the world of work are embedded in the education system; keeping a job: maintaining employment and making transitions between roles; and getting a better job: being independent in the labour market by managing employment transitions between and within organisations. The report recognised important differences; notably government policy was not always in accordance with requirements of individuals. Hillage and Pollard (1998) also described how government policy was directed more towards the individual supply side rather than the employer demand side. For example, government policy was more concerned with the accreditation of vocational skills than the development of soft skills or personal attitudes. The key development from this was that to fully exploit their potential, prospective employees needed to consider how to best demonstrate, market, and sell their employability; possessing only vocational skills was not sufficient for individuals to successfully negotiate their way in an increasingly complex and competitive labour market.

Critics argued that narrow definitions of employability, focusing on skills and attributes, only played into the hands of government policies that addressed perceived problems primarily on the supply side. In a counter measure to this, a broader framework of employability was suggested (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). This included individual factors (competencies, skills and qualifications); personal circumstances (responsibilities, beliefs around work culture and access to resources); and demand factors (local and regional labour markets, macroeconomic

stability and employment policies). Broader definitions as suggested by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), and Thijssen *et al.* (2008), recognised the varying perspectives of stakeholders, with particular importance on the personal factors of individuals; a perfectly capable jobseeker with the necessary transferable skills to perform a job may be unable to take up a position due to personal or external factors. These could include being unable to afford childcare, or living in an area without good public transport. Subsequently, jobseekers could be less likely to find work commensurate with their skills due to a combination of individual personal circumstances and societal issues beyond their control. In most cases there were enabling support factors that need to be in place before an individual could commit to a contract of work.

Complex conceptualisations of employability have impacted HEIs, with government educational policy increasingly framing employability as a performative function of universities. Critics of this agenda (Peters & Roberts, 2000; Morley, 2001; Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Neave & Feingold, 2013) were concerned that HEIs had become tools of government economic policy. Novoa (2002) warned the concept of employability had been reinvented 'to see unemployment as a problem of uneducated people,' (*ibid*, p.14). Further criticism of the employability agenda was that it would result in graduates being mere technicians rather than intellectuals (Morley, 2001), with HEIs becoming factories that produced willing participants in the global workforce. Boden and Nedeva (2010) saw this level of state intervention as incompatible with HE systems striving to promote social justice and increased

equality of opportunity, and McCowan (2015) noted that the zero-sum game element of employability, where the competitive nature of the jobs markets favoured individuals good at obtaining employment to the cost of those who were not, did not necessarily benefit society.

The move towards neo-liberalist ideas, where competition is seen as the driving force behind progress, and people are consumers whose choices define market conditions, has also impacted on HEIs in developing nations. For example, in Uzbekistan the government has adopted reforms such as tuition fees in the public sector, loans based on student performance and establishing a non-state sector of education in the shape of transnational universities (Huisman *et al*., 2018).

2.2 Recent debates on employability and impact on higher education

Recent debates on employability have reflected its multi-faceted nature. Smith *et al*. (2014) described employability as a construct which 'grows by accretion with the addition of new sub-constructs,' (*ibid*, p.6). With no single body having control over the construct it is subject to varying interpretations from stakeholders. Sin and Neave (2016) claimed that employability 'is interpreted in the light of each interest group's concerns […] as a floating signifier,' (*ibid*, p.1). Nevertheless, Yorke's (2004) definition of employability remains the one most referred to in UK policy documentation, and in accordance with the majority of recent literature, I will adhere to this definition:

A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (*ibid*, p.8).

According to Artess *et al*. (2017) this is a useful definition as it recognises not only the personal nature of the term and that securing a job is not solely dependent on individual attributes, but also enhanced individual employability as beneficial to society as a whole. The role of context, however, in definitions of employability entails that there cannot be any single static definition; the competitive nature of individuals and companies within the job market, whether local, national or international, means employability is 'a condition that can never be fulfilled,' (Cremin, 2010, p.131). Employment levels and specific demands within the labour market are subject to fluctuations, with employers or jobseekers having increased bargaining power depending on capital demand. In their comprehensive review of understandings of employability-related concepts, Williams *et al*. (2016) recommended combining various elements to better understand employability; these were elements related to capital, identity, career management, and labour market demand.

In the UK, in 2009, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published their Future Fit study, which had recommendations for every UK HEI to undertake reflection and on current activities. The report advised 'universities and businesses need to maintain and increase their activity in developing employability skills in all students,' (CBI, 2009, p.6). With the large-scale politicisation of the employability agenda,

especially in the UK sector, exacerbated by the economic downturn in 2008, policy focused on demand-led initiatives that addressed the needs of employers.

Despite initiatives to embed employability skills in national education curricula and HE courses, there was, however, an argument that employability skills development should be concentrated more on areas where it was shown to have greater impact; among low achievers and disadvantaged groups (Belt *et al*., 2010). An important caveat to this is the lack of evidenced based information that demonstrated the long term success of any employability skills initiatives. This was especially relevant to research about graduates, where the focus was primarily on the number of graduates securing employment, rather than how they actually performed in jobs, resulting in a lack of evidence that linked attainment of employability skills with career progression (*ibid*).

The implementation of the Bologna process in 1999, aimed at assuring quality and standards of HE in signature countries, was seen as pivotal as it formalised HE qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. This included assurances of specific knowledge and skills required for a particular degree, and also gave supra-national significance to the role of HE in supporting regional economic needs (Tomusk, 2004). Although it was argued that HEIs always previously adhered to their social and economic responsibilities, neoliberal policies in the era of globalisation merely re-labelled such responsibilities as employability (Sin & Neave, 2016). More widespread access to HE, and increased competition and a drive for efficiency in the

private sector, meant that graduates found jobs markets more challenging than in previous generations (Clarke, 2008). Employability and the role of HEIs has never been mutually exclusive, but the employability agenda was encouraged as it served the dual purpose of meeting the demands of the economy in terms of producing job-ready graduates, and strengthening the role of HEIs in a new globalised context.

HE policy focusing strongly on employability was not, however, without criticism, with various arguments being put forward. These included elevating the importance of business-facing HEIs (Arora, 2015); risks of marginalising academic integrity (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Jameson *et al.*, 2012); questioning assumptions that acquiring transferable skills enhanced employability (Kalfa & Taska, 2015); and the dominance of neoliberal ideals relating to human capital (Allais, 2012; Rooney & Rawlinson, 2016). Further critiques also questioned links between HE, employability and human capital theory (Marginson, 2015). Employability has, nevertheless, become a matter of international relevance, as policy makers endeavoured to effect change in national economies by developing human capital through HE learning outcomes. Students, in particular, bore the brunt of further marketisation of HE, especially in the UK, with a lifting of the cap on fees that had been introduced on recommendation of The Dearing Report in 1998. UK universities, from September 2012, could charge up to £9,000 per year in tuition fees. With this increase it was understandable that students should want to see a significant return on their investment (CBI/NUS, 2011), especially in terms of employment prospects that all but guaranteed a salary to pay off the likely substantial debts accrued in the years of full-time HE.

In the current unstable economic climate HEIs are obliged to demonstrate to students that they offer not only good value for money, but also a distinctiveness that sets them apart from immediate competitors. These incentives play a major part in the marketing of HEIs, all of whom are competing for fee-paying students. The idea of a university having a unique selling point not only vindicates the marketisation of HEIs, but also raises the question of whether distinctiveness is a realistic goal, given that virtually all UK universities have the same goal of developing employable graduates (Paterson, 2016). Browne (2010) put forward recommendations that HEIs convince prospective students of the value of a degree; 'There will be more investment available for the HEIs that are able to convince students that it is worthwhile,' (*ibid*, p.8). The emphasis was, therefore, on HEIs to deliver more as students were paying more. These new challenges reignited the argument about the exact purpose of a university education; whether the primary object should be to foster academic inquiry and develop well rounded liberal thinking individuals, or develop work-ready and willing participants in the global knowledge economy.

2.3 Employability and evidenced based pedagogy

As a result of universities committing to the employability agenda, a wide range of strategies and curriculum enhancements have appeared aimed at developing the employability skills of graduates. These included the introduction of new courses, making changes to existing courses, or adding practical work experience. A key argument in the debate was whether the teaching of employability skills should be embedded in the curriculum, or added as bolt-on extras. The bolt-on approach to

enhancing student employability, with the teaching of employability-related skills added to a course as something extra, is also subject to dispute. Cranmer (2006) argued that employability skills teaching in universities had a limited effect on graduate employment outcomes, and that HEIs would be better advised spending resources on work experience or greater employer involvement in courses. Mason *et al*. (2009) found that although structured work experience was effective in helping graduates obtain graduate level employment, there was no clear evidence that the teaching or assessment of employability skills had a positive effect on employability outcomes. Other views, notably Rae (2007); and Speight *et al*. (2013), were less critical of employability pedagogy, maintaining that both academic learning and employability skills could be taught successfully. In a specific study of the subject of criminology, Jameson *et al*. (2012) stressed that a balance could be struck between professional and theoretical or academic learning. Furthermore, by undertaking a more creative use of practitioner discourses, students could be empowered, especially in their career management skills. A warning was also that ignoring the potential contribution from the demand side could marginalise any academic input.

There is, however, no one-size-fits-all approach that develops employability skills, or much indication about how programmes can be formatted to enhance employability focused learning outcomes (Sin & Neave, 2016). Those sceptical to the inclusion of employability as a learning outcome (Cranmer, 2006) advocated real-world work experience and increased employer involvement in course design, while proponents (Barrie, 2007; Rae, 2007; Schaeper, 2009) argued that isolating employability from

the curriculum was counterproductive, with a more integrated approach required. Conversely, Speight *et al.* (2013) claimed, according to stakeholders, that embedding employability in the curriculum negatively affected disciplinary learning. Despite these wide-ranging opinions, there seems to be consensus in much of the research that HEIs have a role to play in addressing graduate employment and underemployment.

Proponents suggest many ways HEIs can contribute to the development of students' employability, both directly and indirectly. Direct methods are those that the institutions themselves have more leverage over, such as learning and teaching practice and methods of assessment. Indirect methods focus more on providing students with opportunities to develop their employability in contexts such as work-related learning through placement and internships. HEIs can also create environments where employability and its purpose are communicated explicitly to students, although this may require some changes to institutional cultures. Pegg *et al.* (2012) made a distinction between *employment* as a graduate outcome in HE and *pedagogy* for employability. The former is something that is measurable in the shape of university published data on graduate destinations, while the latter 'relates to the teaching and learning of a wide range of knowledge, skills and attributes to support continued learning and career developments' (*ibid*, p.7). The authors recognised this as a broad definition, and that graduates were involved in a number of different employment environments that contributed to their development. The employability gains derived from HE are not, however, evenly distributed, and a variety of other

factors contribute to graduate employability. These may include factors such as the reputation of the university, gender, ethnicity, and the socio-economic background of the graduates or the graduates' parents. With disparities in these areas it is not feasible to link specific aspects of pedagogical innovation with definite employment outcomes. Additionally, treating students without mitigation of these factors might, in fact, further disadvantage those who need more assistance in successfully negotiating the labour market. What can be done, however, is to develop a pedagogy that gives the full range of graduates potential to enhance their employment prospects. This brings into question the amount of resources that HEIs invest in employability-related pedagogy. Cranmer (2006) went as far to say that resources would be better utilised in improving employment-based training opportunities, or involving employers more directly in undergraduate courses.

While debates about where, when and how employability can be successfully built into university courses continue, a question not often asked is the role individual lecturers play. Policies to promote or teach employability may be instigated at national, university, faculty or course level, but it is ultimately individuals in classrooms who bear responsibility for successful implementation. On vocational courses it might be expected that lecturers are also practitioners with a level of expertise, but they may not have sufficient teaching skills to engage or instruct students effectively. The effective teaching of employability or the successful implementation of employability pedagogy in courses is, as previously highlighted, difficult to quantify due to the problem of there not being any clear definitions of what

to measure. Where successful pedagogical approaches are reported, they are often linked to experiential learning environments where soft skills can be developed. This is not to say, however, that more traditional lecture based teaching is entirely ineffective. There is some evidence that such methods are important in developing contextual knowledge and theory of concepts related to employability, such as the wider economy or labour market conditions. In answer to the question of how students develop employability skills, UKCES (2008) concluded the main methods were; 'reflection and integration, experiential action learning and work experience,' (*ibid,* p.32). Of these, the latter can only really be acquired in genuine work situations, while the generic skills can be developed through established pedagogies such as collaborative project work, case study analysis or a variety of assessment tasks. The role of HEIs is to not only ensure that graduates make the most of their formal learning environment, but also help students develop the ability to describe the skills and achievements they have acquired (Paterson, 2017). This is best facilitated if lecturers are aware of the importance that learning environments have in skills development, and if they have the necessary pedagogic skills to effectively support the learning process. An important note here is the level of engagement of the individual student, in both the learning experience and contextualisation of self-reflection, which is discussed in the next section.

2.4 Learning trajectories and pre-professional identity

Largely since the introduction of Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidelines in 2001 and updated in 2009, HEIs have incorporated personal development planning (PDP)

in a number of guises to 'populate the employability hinterland,' (Pond & Harrington, 2011, p.5). The use of PDP as a tool for keeping track of progress, often in the form of student collated portfolios of evidence, has had mixed success. Pond and Harrington (2011) in their case study of ten UK HEIs found that PDPs were not universally adopted, and completion rates were largely dependent on whether they were compulsory as part of credit-bearing modules.

In recent years there has been considerable modelling of graduate employability, mainly at the behest of policy makers hoping to bridge the perceived gap between abilities of new graduates and skills that employers want graduates to have. While the application of more broadly defined employability models by HEIs may be of some value in certain contexts, they are often criticised for not capturing the full complexity of what it means to be work ready, and often fail to provide sufficient evidence for successful application. Furthermore, it is not always clear how these models relate to each individual's unique experience of HE. In an improvement on previous models, Tomlinson (2017) highlighted *identity capital* as one his graduate capitals, whereby graduates formed work identities and employability narratives that they could sell to potential employers. The notion of identity formation is not new in theories of career management, and in the employability literature it is considered important by some researchers who recognised that individuals build identities in line with their specific career aspirations (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2013).

In one study focusing on Law degrees, students' experience of pedagogy contributed directly to their professional identity development (Reid *et al*., 2008). In turn, the students' perception of professionalism within their chosen career also affected the way they engaged with their learning communities. Perhaps the most pertinent finding from the study was how some students 'used their pedagogical experience to develop a sense of their ability to express themselves, essentially by transforming the discipline specific material they have studied,' (*ibid,* p.739). These findings can be linked to ideas underpinning Wenger's (1999) theories of communities of practice; discipline-specific practices combined with a strong notion of professional identity facilitate pedagogies that exploit the development of professional skills (Reid *et al*., (2008). As a recommendation the authors suggested students are helped to define their own professional identities, enabling them to become work-ready, and as a corollary, become more engaged in their studies. An interesting note about this study is that the authors did not refer to employability at all*,* preferring to relate the findings in terms of professional identity development. Similarly, Jackson (2016) argued for a redefining of graduate employability in line with professional identity development. She advocated re-labelling it as *pre-professional identity*; 'an understanding of and connection with the skills, qualities, conduct, culture and ideology of a student's intended profession,' (*ibid*, p.2). This, again, is aligned to the communities of practice model, more specifically the updated Wenger-Trayner *et al*. (2014) notion of *landscape of practice*, which acknowledges the complex interaction of groups that an HE student may come into contact with. Such groups include professional organisations, student associations, and academic groups or support services provided by the university. Pre-professional identity can, therefore, be described as a

less mature version of professional identity, and students form this 'through their membership, engagement, non-engagement and boundary and peripheral interactions with different communities,' (Jackson, 2016, p.3). Each student determines their own learning landscape, having different levels of interaction with communities they encounter, depending on levels of engagement. These interactions lead to the construction of identities which are constantly evolving.

Trede *et al*. (2012), in their comprehensive review of the professional identity literature, noted that although the university's role in professional development was frequently mentioned, it was not considered the primary actor. According to the review, the role of the university in professional development was mainly to ensure participation and engagement, as well as accommodating personal and professional values. In addition, a difference was noted between academic and professional development, and that once conditions for learning and a connection with the workplace were established, universities played a weak role in professional development. Despite this, the review recommended universities had a significant role to play in helping students develop a constantly changing professional identity, and should become adaptable to fluid working environments. This was in accordance with recommendations from Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011), who made an explicit connection between identity and employability, asserting that stakeholders 'would be better employed promoting student employability indirectly through the promotion of graduate identity and well-being […] rather than directly through employability skills,' (*ibid*, p.582). Graduate identity, in this instance, can be equated

with Jackson's (2016) promotion of pre-professional identity, and also marked the shift in HEI strategy from focusing on the development of narrowly focused employability skills towards 'emphasising the higher order intellectual capabilities involved in adaptable expertise,' (Gibbs, 2010, p.42). More recent research in the area of professional readiness focused on recognition of what graduates achieved over the duration their whole degree course, including awareness of learning processes, diversity, collaborative skills, and resilience. Kensington-Miller *et al*. (2018) noted that these attributes were largely invisible from academic transcripts. Clark *et al*. (2015) observed that the exact nature of extracurricular activities were less important than the development these activities facilitated in areas such as personal motivation and interpersonal interactions, especially where no specific training was available. Critics of the employability skills agenda would no doubt welcome this as a return to the traditional Humboldtian model of HE.

2.5 The limited context of pedagogy for employability research

Debates around employability have largely been concentrated in developed countries in the global north, particularly the UK and Australia. The instigation of the Bologna process was a driver for ensuring education policy in much of Europe aligned with economic policy, and the employability skills agenda has subsequently been accepted as a factor in determining HE curricula. Evidence for the impact of employability led initiatives has also been primarily restricted to global-north countries. This is despite the fact that many of the international students enrolled on

degree courses may seek graduate employment in countries outside the sphere of influence of the Bologna ideals, or on the other side of the global north-south divide.

There have, however, been a small number of initiatives to examine employability pedagogy in the context of developing countries. For example, Gereffi *et al*. (2011), promoted the development of a global demand-driven workforce to ensure economic prosperity in developing countries. Policy initiatives such as this, however, irrespective of whether they buy in to the dominant skills agenda, mainly recommend compliance with national skills certifications based on global industry needs. Advice on how this is done includes; 'develop or enhance formal channels of communication with the private sector regarding the skills to be incorporated into the curriculum,' (*ibid*, p.15). The research, which examined the role of workforce development in several key global industries, noted that local educational institutions in the developing countries studied were not prepared enough to upskill individuals in line with global industry needs. Particularly lacking was the facility to futureproof the workforce; although the need for training in soft-skills and lifelong learning strategies had been widely accepted, many educational institutions were unable to adapt their programmes or teaching approach to deliver the necessary training. Where educational institutions fail to address the skills gap, new actors such as industry associations, private companies, NGOs or specialised government programmes may be required to provide more specific training.

Training national labour forces for the demands of industry, essentially a top-down implementation of HE curricula, has drawn a variety of responses from other stakeholders, but again, these studies have been mostly limited to global-north countries. Studies that explore stakeholder perceptions of employability in global-south contexts are rare; research in a transnational Central Asian setting indicated that students were lacking in their ability to describe their own employability narratives, possibly impinging on their ability to move from education to work environments (Paterson, 2017). Koloba (2017), in a quantitative study of South African university students, maintained that while there was a strong link between perceived employability and the employability skills of students, enhanced employability was largely determined by the state of the local labour market. Rooney *et al*. (2006), in their study of international understandings of employability, found that countries and institutions were at vastly different stages of devolvement regarding employability pedagogy. Although limited to the discipline of geography, the study acknowledged the importance of local and cultural contexts. Another study that recognised the importance of the local culture, in this case in Vietnam, was Tran (2015), where it was suggested all stakeholders, including employers and students' families 'should acknowledge the changes in society, should be aware of the cultural features at work, and should see their responsibility in the process,' (*ibid*, p.207).

One thing critiques of the employability skills agenda largely encourage is further stakeholder involvement and discussion. However, shared stakeholder understandings relating to cultural issues is rarely a feature of the global-north

dominated literature. For example, Jones and Killick (2013) recommended embedding a global outlook in disciplinary learning outcomes, but from an outward looking global-north perspective. Often the principal actors in employability discourses are presented as 'a neutral agent stripped of any specific social location, lacking gender, class position, or racialised identity,' (Stevenson & Clegg, 2012, p.42). Bailey and Ingimundardottir (2015) conducted a noteworthy study of stakeholder attitudes towards employability at the Malaysia campus of a British university.   What is interesting about this qualitative study is the finding that conceptions of employability in Malaysia were not the same as in the UK; employability was found to be a culturally based concept and academic staff should pay attention to this. Furthermore, the research highlighted universities with a multinational student body may need to 'develop multiple employability curricula,' (*ibid*, p.44). These further complexities place extra responsibility on teaching staff that are responsible for embedding graduate outcomes into the curriculum. A lack of shared understandings of the learning process that facilitate development adds further debate to the extent assessments are compatible with learning outcomes that include employability. Studies of employability-related concepts in Uzbekistan and neighbouring Central Asian countries have come to light only recently. New policy frameworks have been drawn up that invite closer links between HE and local labour markets (OECD, 2012; Ajwad *et al.,* 2014; CAEP, 2014). These policies and how they affect approaches to HE in Uzbekistan are discussed in Chapter 3.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter I described how employability has become of international importance, shaping both educational policy and approaches to learning and teaching. Also, I indicated that research in these areas is largely limited to global-north contexts, and there is a need for voices to be heard across a wider range of HEIs.

Chapter 3 Uzbekistan - higher education, employability and transnational education

This chapter outlines the development of Uzbek HE since independence, with analysis of its successes and shortcomings. The concept of transnational education (TNE) is introduced, with specific focus on how employability focused concepts are considered in both TNE and wider Uzbek HE. Finally the specific research location is described.

3.1 Uzbek higher education development: 1991 to present

The history of Uzbekistan over the past 30 years provides important information on how the nation's HE sector has undergone significant changes as the country moved to a market-based economic system. Before independence in 1991, Uzbekistan had the third largest population in the Soviet republic behind Russia and the Ukraine, around 20 million, but was one of the poorest and least industrialised (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). After independence the population grew by over 10 million, exceeding 33 million by 2018 (Governmental Portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2018). Projections indicate that the population could reach 36 million by 2025 (Akramova, 2016). Significantly, for issues related to HE, 35% of the current population are under the age of 16, and 60% are under the age of 30 (EACEA, 2017). These demographic changes have impacted greatly on government educational reforms since independence, especially with an increased demand for HE in the post-independence market conditions.

After independence in 1991 Uzbekistan had a rural economy, with agriculture accounting for 36% of the country's GDP and 40% of the labour force. Manufacturing, mining, energy and construction made up 35%, trade and transport 10%, and financial and other services 19% (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). The main shifts that occurred after independence were a 50% fall in agriculture to 17% of GDP in 2012, employing 13% of the labour force, while at the same time services increased to 50% of GDP and 60% of the labour force. The services sector had been severely underdeveloped during the Soviet planned-economy era. According to the World Bank (2014) this increase in demand is expected to continue, with the vast majority of new jobs created over the next 25 years being in the services sector. These new jobs will also require higher order cognitive skills that are expected to be developed in HE.

Participation in HE in 1989 was relatively low when compared to other Soviet republics, with only 15% of those aged 18-23 studying in HE (Mirkurbanov *et al*., 2009). The 43 HEIs in Uzbekistan at the time comprised 40 specialised institutes and three comprehensive universities, totalling approximately 310,000 full and part-time students. The average number of applicants per university place was 3.42, compared to a 2.2 average for the USSR in total, demonstrating a demand that could not be met. In the pre-independence era there was a concentration of HEIs in the capital, Tashkent, which accommodated nearly half of the republic's HEIs and 60% of the students (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). This was attributed to factors such as

the location of most manufacturing industries in and around the capital, and also to Tashkent's position as the largest regional city in Central Asia.

In the immediate years after independence the Uzbek government paid considerable attention to the HE sector, although changes were only introduced gradually. The first important step was passing the Law on Education in July 1992, which put in place the principles that emphasised the break from Soviet control; a new secular and ideology-free education system reflecting the demands of a new economic system (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). The first immediate step was the creation of 15 new HEIs by 1996, 12 of which were dedicated to business studies, engineering, law and medicine, and two specialised in foreign languages. At this time the Uzbek government was reticent to allow private HEIs to enter the picture, and several private universities failed to gain a foothold. The reason given by the law makers was that unregulated universities would lead to sub-standard HE programmes; as a precaution no further licenses were granted, and existing ones were revoked. While this investment in HE might have been seen as cautious, it is to be noted that during the transition years up to 2004, government expenditure on education remained relatively high, at around 10% of GDP. This was higher than other countries in the region and higher than other developing countries at the time (Ruziev *et al*., 2007).

The way students paid for tuition also underwent some changes, with the phasing out of the Soviet-era universally free HE. A new two-tier system was introduced in 1994 where some students would be publicly funded with grants and others would be privately funded. The number of grants was determined yearly by the demand for

HE courses and the current market conditions (World Bank, 2014). Exam results determined which students were eligible for grants, and this merit-based system is still in place today. Critics noted this was not a completely transparent process, and although students who received grants were expected to work for at least two years in the government sector there was no guarantee of placement upon graduation (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018).

In the early years after independence Uzbekistan made significant advances to becoming a market-based economy. Entrepreneurs were active in the economy for the first time, and over 4,500 joint-stock companies and a further 100,000 small private enterprises were registered (Asian Development Bank, 2004). This led to an increase in the number of workers in the non-state sector to over 70% of the total workforce by 1997. Fulfilling the demands of the new economic system required an overhaul of the education system, and this came in the shape of the National Programme for Personnel Training (NPPT) which became law in August 1997. The rationale for the programme was to create a system that upheld national values, allowed for individual development and produced highly qualified specialists. Despite these ideals, it was clear that the NPPT was still top-down in its implementation, with government led reforms not permitting HEIs to design new courses or control their finances (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018).

The NPPT was structured in three stages. Stage 1, 1997 to 2001, involved creating necessary infrastructure, including changing the legal status of some HEIs and

further development of specialist vocational institutes (college) and academic institutes (lyceums). Since only 10% of school graduates went on to HE the new structure was seen as a way of ensuring basic technical and vocational training for all (Majidiv *et al*., 2010). Stage 2, 2001 to 2005, included a review of teaching content, with focus on updating existing materials and developing online resources. There was also a restructuring of 5-year degree courses into 4-year undergraduate courses and 2-year postgraduate courses, with PhD programmes aligned with European models following the 1999 Bologna Protocol. All post-Soviet continental European states have joined the Bologna Protocol, while four Central Asian countries (Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) remain outside. Kazakhstan joined the Bologna Process in 2010. Stage 3 of the NPPT, initiated in 2005, functioned as a review period of previous implementations. An additional programme was added in 2011 aimed at improving human and physical resources and further updating IT capabilities. It is notable that the NPPT reforms did not alter the structure of junior secondary education, which remained at four years of primary education and five years of lower secondary education, covering ages 6-14.

3.2 Critique of Uzbek higher education reforms

The reforms of the NPPT, with its intentions of modernising the Uzbek HE landscape, are not without its critics. As argued by Ruziev and Burkhanov (2016), the NPPT focused on developing vocational education rather than HE. The reasons stated were that the vocational sphere needed immediate development to kick start the post-Soviet economy. At first glance the figures for participation in HE in the

years after independence show unprecedented growth and improvement. By 2015 the number of students in full-time HE had risen to 250,000, an almost 50% increase on the pre-independence total of 1989. Despite this increase, there still remained a mismatch between demand and supply. Ruziev and Burkhanov (2016) define this as 'stagnation at the "Elite" stage of expansion,' (*ibid,* p.15). These observations draw on the important work of Trow (1973), who identified general patterns in HE development, where in advanced societies HE transitions from an elite systems with low participation levels to mass or universal systems with upwards of 50% participation. There are inherent problems that occur when a country that is expanding HE provision is in a mixed-phase system, with tensions arsing from 'the continuing existence of forms of HE based on fundamentally different principles and oriented to quite different kinds of functions,' (*ibid*, p.20). Ruziev and Burkhanov (2016) identified several factors that accounted for the mismatch of supply and demand that occurred during Uzbekistan's mixed phase, these being; the cessation of evening and correspondence courses, a 10-million population growth, and the lack of flexibility in the supply of HE. Of the 310,000 students on degree programmes in 1989 around 45% of participants attended in the evenings or by correspondence (Brunner & Tillett, 2007). Figures indicated gross enrolment rates in HE fell when calculated as percentage of 19-24 year-olds from 1991 to 2014. In 2014 the total number of students admitted onto degree courses numbered around 60,000; 57,000 undergraduate and 3,000 postgraduate (World Bank (2014). This compared with the number of applicants to HE courses, which increased from 106,000 in 1996 to over 550,000 in 2014 (*ibid*). These data illustrate a challenging environment for would-be students, with an average 10 applicants for each HE place. To compound matters,

applicants could only apply to one course in one institution, and if not successful through failing the entrance exam, could not apply again for another year, resulting in more HE applications than college and lyceum graduates due to reapplications (Krouglov, 2017). When compared to other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic were expanding their HE provision to become mass systems, while 'Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with slower growth appear[ed] to be willing to remain elite systems,' (Brunner & Tillet, 2007, p.31). Recent data revealed a mismatch between HE demand and supply, with very little increase in available places in the period 2012-2016. According to official statistics from the State Testing Centre (2017), around 1000 more spaces (2.3% increase) for over a quarter of million more applicants (52.3% increase).

Currently there are 78 HEIs in Uzbekistan, which can be classified into six types; comprehensive universities (11), specialised universities (10), institutes (35), regional branches of domestic HEIs (13), academies (2), and branches of foreign universities (7). With the exception of the branches of foreign universities, which are public-private partnerships, all HEIs are state owned. Academies mainly offer postgraduate degrees, and are considered superior to universities and institutes (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). In an interesting development, Yeoju Technical Institute in Tashkent (YTIT) was recently unveiled as 'the first private university' in Uzbekistan, with undergraduate courses in architecture, engineering and business-related subjects (Tashkent Times, 2018). Figures for students enrolled in HE in 2014-15 indicated there were just under 250,000 undergraduate and around 11,000

postgraduate students. A peak of over 300,000 full-time HE enrolments was reached in 2009 (World Bank, 2014), but this was due to significantly higher numbers in the field of education. Despite the rapidly changing economic climate, reforms in HE were still 'gradualist and cautious,' (Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018, p.440). A corollary of the expansion of the vocational educational sector was an over supply of graduates in certain fields, especially education, meaning that many people reapplied for HE courses in other subjects after graduating from vocational courses. The dominance of state-owned HEIs means the state is the sole driver of reform, and this top-down gradualist approach has led to several problems which recent World Bank reports have highlighted; the main criticism being failure to align student specialisations with evolving economic conditions. EU reports showed the aspects most in need of development were improved foreign language provision and a better system for retraining academics (EACEA, 2017). These recommendations, however, do not address issues related to improving access to HE, or closing the gap between the graduate specialisations and the needs of the labour market.

According to World Bank (2014), specialisation by subject area showed that despite significant changes in market conditions, the share of tertiary students by topic of study did not reflect the needs of the labour market. Agricultural production as a share of the nation's output fell by 50% in the years after independence, while the number of students specialising in agriculture did not reflect this, falling from 9% of the student HE population in 1989 to 7% in 2012, a smaller reduction than would be expected, likely resulting in a surfeit of agricultural specialists. Other areas such as

healthcare, industry, and transport and communications also showed no significant changes over this period. The biggest changes in specialisation occurred in education, where at the peak of HE enrolment in 2009 more than 50% of HE places were allocated to this area. While it was clear that the expansion of the HE sector necessitated an increase in the number of social science and education graduates, and subject specialist teacher trainers, this expansion came at a certain cost to quality and standards (Ruziev and Burkhanov, 2018). The cost is evident when looking at the academic qualifications of HEI staff. In 2012, 32% of teaching staff at HEIs held a PhD or equivalent, while 48% did not have any recognisable degree. Additionally HE staff were poorly paid, with monthly salaries ranging from under US$400 for those without degrees to around US$580 for heads of department with PhDs; the US$480 average monthly salary of HE teaching staff was below the national wage average (World Bank, 2014). Salary payments accounted for only 37% of total HE spending in 2012, compared with a 62% average for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, and 78% for the UK (World Bank, 2014). A lack of investment in human capital could have a number of negative consequences, not least of which is the temptation for staff to take informal or illegal payments to augment their income and influence student grades.

There are current initiatives to address many of the problems mentioned previously. In April 2017 the World Bank issued a credit agreement of US$42m to support the country in raising both the quality and standard of its HE provision, with specific

focus on improving relevance to the labour market (World Bank, 2017). However, this investment does not address the current structure of HE management. The government department responsible for the implementation of the Modernising Higher Education project is the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Secondary Education. All facets of the running of HE are strictly controlled by appointed government ministries, including how investment is allocated and the appointment of senior management. This rigid structure was inherited from the Soviet era, and has proved a hindrance to HE development. In 2004 colleges and universities were described as being accountable to more than 20 different ministries and state committees (Asian Development Bank, 2004), with no significant change in the years since. The complicated hierarchical structure has caused problems for institution management staff, who find themselves without the ability to introduce initiatives at the organisation level, but at the same time are accountable for the relative performance of their institution. The top-down allocation of powers could be seen as the root of the problems that the NPPT has attempted to address, and a continuation of this will most likely limit the progress of both state and public-private HEIs.

Many of the problems that Uzbek HE faces are characterised by historical institutionalism, as the country forged its own identity in the post-Soviet era while at the same time retaining key institutional elements. The next section discusses these issues, along with other cultural perspectives that have shaped the HE landscape.

3.3 Cultural and historical perspectives

In order to form a national identity, a newly independent country will need to establish or re-introduce customs and ideals that best express desired values. In the case of post-Soviet republics this meant following the global neo-liberal agenda, but at the same time maintaining some aspects of Soviet style bureaucracy while re-establishing pre-Soviet cultural traditions. This section discusses how the mix of agendas is reflected in the current HE landscape.

During the Soviet era, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic underwent a process of *Russification*, which promoted the perceived superiority of the Russian lifestyle and language. This process included disrupting any previous cultural identity, especially Islamic ones. Soviet Muslims were cut off from their historical identity and traditions as Soviet campaigns set about changing the alphabet, types of traditional clothing, and historic institutions. Between 1920 and 1940 the official alphabet of the country was changed three times in order to prevent easy contact between Uzbekistan and other Muslim countries (Yakhyaeva, 2013). By repressing the status of Muslims, establishing censorship and removing access to cultural and linguistic heritage, a two-tier system was established whereby Russian language and culture was given superior status.

An acceptance of authoritarian dogma has undoubtedly been a part of both pre and post-Soviet education. Brunner and Tillet (2007) noted that these ideals were still evident in post-Soviet republic HE, where the dominant approach to HE 'may hint at pluralism but seeks conformity,' (*ibid*, p18). Reforms in post-Soviet Central Asian HE

were characterised by efforts to 'align HE systems with the goals of new nation building,' (Huisman *et al*., 2018, p.3), which included reinstating national languages and introducing courses in national history and culture. In this sense, the development of Uzbek HE in the post-Soviet era followed the dominant philosophy put forward by President Karimov, with the goal of legitimising authoritarian rule and acting as a practical tool for regulating, controlling and ultimately suppressing dissent within the educated elite (Rasanayagam, 2011). With a strong sense of re-establishing its cultural history, Karimov's administration set out on a course of creating 'a brand of its own HE system by blending of history, philosophy, ideology, religion and spirituality,' (Mostafa, 2009, p.100). The ideology was built on the premise of a return to Uzbekistan's golden heritage, but it has been observed that this was merely a tool by which to further suppress the populace:

> Cultural authenticity […] has produced a state of existential insecurity and vulnerability, where the actions and performance of citizens might be characterised as culturally inauthentic and therefore potentially subject to the intervention of the state security apparatuses (Rasanayagam, 2011, p.690).

Despite the fundamental changes in the ideological basis of Uzbek HE, many of the current issues and challenges are related to limited freedoms that can be traced back to the Soviet era. In many cases, however, the shortcomings have been exacerbated by a top-down approach lacking in transparency and with limited involvement of key stakeholders (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). The next section explores some of these issues.

3.4 Current issues in Uzbek higher education

This section examines issues related with the quality of Uzbek HE provision, including pedagogy, perceptions of prestige, corruption, and gender inequality. As with many other former Soviet republics, the quality of HE in Uzbekistan is managed by a state-centred system based on standards set by ministerial decree. This includes what is taught, how it is taught, and who teaches. HEIs have very little flexibility in curriculum management, with only a 5% annual change being permitted in course modifications (World Bank, 2014). This means that some teaching practices, most notably the amount of classroom time, has not changed since the Soviet era, with no discernible difference between schools and universities. Currently, in a UK or US university, for example, students would not expect to have more than 16 hours class teaching per week, whereas in Uzbekistan 36 hours is not uncommon. Students, consequently, may not have sufficient time available for self-learning opportunities, and may not be encouraged to engage in beneficial practices such as reflective learning and groupwork. Evidence for poor quality teaching practices are largely anecdotal, as students may fear reprisals for being overly critical of their universities. An example from online Central-Asia News describes the experience of students who were unsatisfied with degree courses, with lecturers reading out pages from the internet during classroom teaching, and open to bribery for good grades (Yeniseyev, 2017). While quality assurance practices are improving, it has been noted that 'there are no specific guidelines or manuals on QA,' (Krouglov, 2017, p.181). Consequently, quality assurance practices fall short of international standards (World Bank, 2014).

In the absence of reliable methods of measuring quality assurance across HEIs, Ruziev and Burkhanov (2018), constructed a 'rough guide on the diversity of quality,' basing it on their own judgments 'in terms of demand, selectivity and general public perception of prestige accorded to individual HEIs,' (*ibid*, p.452). Their rankings showed the most highly regarded HEIs were foreign university branches, with all seven achieving the top rank. HEIs in Tashkent were perceived to be of higher quality than those in the regions; only four out of 35 in the capital scored the lowest ranking, while over half of the 43 regional HEIs received the lowest ranking. In contrast to these judgments, Rikhsiboev (2017) claimed that in Uzbekistan, and in Central Asia in general, there was a negative perception, at least from policy makers, towards private education as it primarily focused on income generation for proprietors. This could account for the development of public-private branches of foreign universities in Uzbekistan being strictly controlled. While it is recognised that the introduction of educational practices from other countries can contribute greatly to improvements in quality, encourage healthy competition and benefit the local economy in terms of the employability of graduates, policy makers in Uzbekistan HE are cautious in their granting of licenses to international universities.

The topic of corrupt practices is undoubtedly a sensitive one, especially when referring to a country whose human rights record has been described as 'abysmal' by Human Rights Watch (2019). When President Mirziyoyev took over from Karimov after 25 years of hard-line rule, he took a major step by, unlike his predecessor, acknowledging the country's human rights abuses. At his inaugural speech at the

United Nations, Mirziyoyev announced that he would introduce 'a program of measures to strengthen the guarantees of human rights,' (Mirziyoyev, 2017, p.1). Making good on his word, steps have been taken to address human rights issues such as: releasing political prisoners, relaxing restrictions on freedom of expression, removing citizens from security services' blacklists, and increasing accountability of government institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Evidence of corrupt practices related to HE are commonly documented from anecdotal examples and media reports. These included the production of crib sheets to sell to students sitting university entrance exams (Rasanayagam, 2011), and bribery for advancement in universities and colleges (Yakhyaeva, 2013). The introduction of centralised admissions tests in 1993 was intended to limit corrupt practices, but did not seem to have a lasting impact. Majidov *et al*. (2010) noted that there were allegations the new system was still open to corruption, although it was acknowledged that the new system did guarantee that top scoring applicants would gain admission to the programme of their choice.

A comprehensive review of corrupt practices in Uzbek HE was described by Yun (2016). The study drew attention to the consequences of authorities not taking adequate action to suppress corrupt practices, including; an inadequately skilled workforce, damage to the notion of HE being a public good, apathy towards the experience of being a student, and the vulnerability of students who feel coerced into corrupt practice because of unrealistic expectations of performance. Interestingly,

students readily admitted that corrupt practices took place, but did not generally consider these problematic, especially if they occurred in 'unnecessary subjects' (*ibid*, p.14). Students considered more serious problems were those concerned with the quality of their education; endemic bribery was believed to be an accepted facet of their studies that sometimes made life easier.

Another issue in Uzbek HE that has drawn much attention is the concept of gender equality. Although Uzbekistan is a signatory of 1981 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, the government is yet to sign up to the Optional Protocol 2000, which allows individuals or groups of women to seek international appeal once local remedies have been exhausted (UNHR, 2014). Under the Soviet regime, education and employment of women was promoted under a policy of gender equality, and these ideals were continued under the 1997 Law on Education (Yakhyaeva, 2013). Such notions of gender equality may exist in official policy documentation, but the real situation shows areas of concern. It is well documented that gender equality is a key factor in social, economic and democratic development, but data from UNDP (2014) showed many disparities in the Uzbek education sphere. For example, only 36.4% of HE entrants were women, with the majority of these entering programmes in liberal arts and pedagogy. In the same period women accounted for only 19% of students in technical universities. These figures translated to a gender imbalance in the workplace, were women accounted for over 70% of employees in public health, education and the arts, and only 27% in public administration and management (*ibid*). From 1990 to 2017 there has been a

modest increase in female labour force participation, from 54% to 57% (World Bank, 2018). According to Yakhyaeva (2013), however, since the end of the Soviet era there has been a gradual erosion of educational opportunities for women, with increasing relative female unemployment, despite an increase in the number of women in positions of political influence. Uzbek law requires that 30% of candidates put forward by political parties must be female, and representation in Parliament has increased from 5% in 2005 to 22% in 2018 (WPL, 2018). Despite this positive shift, women are still underrepresented in other areas, accounting for only 9% of government ministers, 6.5% of cabinet ministers, 13.2 % of judicial authority roles, and 0% of regional governors (UNDP, 2014).

These inequalities may be rooted in the cultural norms of the society where women are expected to be mothers and homemakers. A family may be reluctant to invest in the education of a girl, especially if it comes at the expense of a male child's education. In 2012, Tashkent University of World Economy and Diplomacy, one of the country's most prestigious universities, had a female student population of less than 20%, in comparison to almost 50% in the first few years of independence (Yakhyaeva, 2013). It can also be noted that access to HE is largely dependent on both the social and financial status of the family; children of wealthy parents are more likely to have access to higher quality primary and secondary schools, and may also benefit from private tutoring to pass university entrance exams.

3.5 Perceptions of employability in Uzbekistan

Research into employability-related concepts is a relatively new area in the Central Asian region, and literature only began to emerge in the past 15 years. This section takes a chronological look at how employability has come to play an ever more important role in Uzbek education policy.

The reforms of the NPPT initiated in 1997 involved a radical reorganisation of the structure and content of the education system, with priority to align educational strategies to the social and economic demands of the country. At the turn of the century, as the first reforms began to take shape, it was accepted that education and training programmes were not sufficiently aligned to the needs of the labour market. For example, in 1999 up 26,000 jobs in specialist areas remained vacant, while at the same time although 73% of surveyed graduates from vocational institutions were employed only 60% of those were working within their specialisation (Asian Development Bank, 2004). The mismatch between graduate skills and employment opportunities was becoming evident and it was recommended that measures were needed to strengthen links in education, training, and employment. While the NPPT provided the legal basis for educational reforms, in its early years the rapid economic and social reforms were outpacing the changes in HE provision.

One reason put forward for the mismatch between supply and demand was the increasing number of people working in the informal sector of the economy; those employers without a contract or employer paid social security. Data from the IMF (2005) suggested that 29% of the total number of employed were in the informal

sector. The report also highlighted that due to low salaries in vacant positions, those working in the informal sector had little motivation to seek official positions, and furthermore there was a 'mismatch between the qualifications and skills of the unemployed and employed in the informal sector with those skills required for the vacancies,' (*ibid*, p.14). The root causes were a lack of flexibility in the educational and training sector; insufficient analysis of the needs of the labour market; and weak liaison between employers, vocational schools and HEIs. This had also been previously noted in the Asian Development Bank (2004) report. Nevertheless, from independence to 2005, Uzbekistan showed low unemployment and steady employment growth (Brunner & Tillet, 2007). In a comparison of Uzbek and Mongolian education reform in the post-Soviet years, Weidman and Yoder, (2010) concluded that links between employers and educators were weak, but added that the mismatch of graduates to jobs was due to 'too many students studying business, accounting, finance , law, computing, and foreign languages,' (*ibid*, p.66).

In November 2008 the OECD launched the Central Asia Initiative, with the goal of contributing to economic growth in seven countries in the region. The *Policy Handbook* (OECD, 2011) provided conclusions related to human capital development and advice for policy makers on vocational education and training to better equip graduates with skills needed for work. The specific recommendations for Uzbekistan included; increased involvement of small and private businesses in policy shaping mechanisms; strengthening of information databases through use of analytical tools to better match employer and graduate needs; and the development of a binding

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to standardised vocational secondary occupational education. The report noted the Uzbek government of the time had no plans to develop a binding NQF, which is still the case. While the NPPT went some way to standardising general education along internationally recognised frameworks, the lack of an NQF for vocational qualifications could be seen as a barrier to further international cooperation.

One of the first empirical research papers that directly addressed how the Uzbek education system could become more aligned to the demands of the labour market was conducted by Kasimova (2011). This study differed from previous research in Uzbek HE in that it specifically surveyed how students selected their university and degree, the skills they learned, and the skills they thought they needed in the labour market. Those questioned were recent graduates and new university entrants; the main findings being a lack of practical skills taught on degree courses affecting performance in the workplace. There was also disparity between the skills that students acquired and those that they thought prospective employers valued. In addition, students were unaware of the employment opportunities that their chosen degree would favour. The sample size of this study was not insignificant (342 respondents to the 17-question survey), and provided some confirmation of the need for closer links between stakeholders, as previously recommended by OECD (2011).

In 2013 the World Bank carried out detailed surveys of worker skills in three Central Asian counties; Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan. The surveys used data

from a variety of sources, including skills measurement instruments and previous World Bank data sets. *The skills road: Skills for employability in Uzbekistan* was an 'assessment of cognitive and non-cognitive skills of workers in both the formal and informal sectors, of jobseekers,' (Ajwad *et al.*, 2014, p.1). The report, which surveyed around 1500 households, evaluated the demand for skills, and assessed whether systems of education and training met the needs of current and future labour market and economic goals. The main findings confirmed previous concerns, and reported that skills gaps were hindering employment outcomes. Another issue that was highlighted was that women were underrepresented in the employment figures. The uniqueness of this research was in how it measured the use of cognitive (logical and critical thinking, problem solving, verbal ability, numeracy) and non-cognitive skills (social and behavioural). The report made several detailed recommendations, with one in particular relating to HE; encouraging entrepreneurship in tertiary education to provide graduates with market value skills. Research projects such as this on previously understudied environments are important, as there is 'a limited understanding of the differences in industry requirements and skill development processes between developed and developing economies,' (Jackson, 2014, p.3). The *Skills Road* reports on employability skills in the Central Asian region are to be commended for their thoroughness, and also for raising the awareness of the skills deficit in one the world's fastest developing economic areas.

Perhaps the biggest concern for the domestic Uzbek labour market is the large number of graduates seeking employment abroad. Figures from the World Bank (2014) estimated that up to 4 million people, comprising 23% of the working age population, were working abroad, mainly in former Soviet Republics. The reason for

this was given as poor salaries and lack of job opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers. The estimated 1 million Uzbeks with degrees choosing to seek employment abroad was evidence that the domestic labour market was not sufficient to meet economic demands, and the resulting brain drain could have further implications for the economy. At the same time, it was noted that there were not enough graduates to meet the demand of the domestic labour market, highlighting the mismatch between graduate skills and graduate jobs.

The most recent reports and policy documents reflected the same concerns, but there are measures in place to address the issues. A European Commission review of the Uzbek HE system (EACEA, 2017) provided a positive review, noting that all HEIs had a marketing department to provide information and guidance on employment seminars, job fairs, and internships. Further changes to state education standards included allowing universities to take more control of their programmes, allowing for a degree of flexibility in teaching and assessments (Krouglov, 2017). A new internationally funded project; *Internationalization and Modernization of Education and Processes in the HE of Uzbekistan (2015-2018),* builds on previous initiatives from the British Council and is set to establish new approaches to HE staff development and standardisation in teaching. These include improvement in course content, with a greater focus on language development and continuous self-study, increased development of guidelines for employer engagement, and enhancement of engagement of students and employers in teaching and learning (UWED, 2019).

3.6 Transnational higher education

Universities, because of their links to the development of the knowledge economy, have sought greater international involvement, primarily by encouraging students from other countries to come and study. This is a lucrative practice as universities often charge overseas students higher rates than local students. Another advantage for the home institution is the increased diversity of its student body, which can be further promoted as a marketing tool, giving potential home and overseas students a reason for studying there. Home students will also benefit from increased internationalisation of the curriculum, and experience more intercultural communication, all without the need to travel abroad. Yearly published rankings of the world's most international universities attract the attention of prospective students (THE, 2018). The home country can also benefit greatly as overseas students may decide to stay and work or pursue further studies, contributing not only to the economy, but also to the creation of new knowledge and research. While the benefits for the home country and individual students are clear, there are debates about how advantageous this is for the students' country of origin, especially if that country is a developing one. Countries may experience 'a net brain gain or drain effect' (Knight, 2006, p.57) as the global education marketplace encourages both students and professionals to take their skills and knowledge to the highest bidder. However, the high costs of relocating to another country to study are beyond the means of many, and visa regulations may further restrict those with the means to do so. The new global education marketplace has resulted in HEIs, mainly in the global north, developing initiatives to further their reach.

Definitions of transnational higher education have been the subject of much recent discussion (Mellors-Bourne *et al*., 2014; Healey and Bordogna, 2014; Knight, 2016; and Smith, 2017). Various names have been attached to the concept over the years with transnational education (TNE) the most commonly used. A common approach in TNE is for HEIs to establish links with developing countries where the cost of overseas study is prohibitively expensive relative to the local economy, or where capacity in the local education system cannot fulfil demand. This can permit a greater number of local people to participate in tertiary education, as many students choose TNE instead of local alternatives, leaving local universities with more available places. In addition, the risk of brain drain is somewhat alleviated as students do not leave the country, so can contribute to the home economy while studying. The gain is even greater if students remain in the home country after graduation. Further job opportunities are provided for local education staff, especially if they have been educated abroad and are familiar with overseas HE programmes and standards (Vincent-Lancrin, 2007). Despite these perceived benefits, the continued growth of public and private HEIs around the world has led to questions regarding regulation and quality control (Verbik & Jokivirta, 2005), and this is compounded with the addition of corporate providers with no previous experience in delivering HE programmes (Naidoo, 2009).

A major criticism of TNE is that it could be seen as a new form of academic imperialism (Healey & Bordogna, 2014), with the dominant countries reshaping the international HE landscape with neo-liberal values, while at the same time diluting

local influences. Ideas of academic imperialism were not ignored by Knight (2016), who acknowledged that there was an imbalance when considering different perspectives of TNE; 'Traditionally, more attention has been focused on those countries that are sending TNE programs abroad rather than the host or receiving countries,' (*ibid*, p.35). This is also evident when discussing issues related to employability.

3.7 Transnational education and employability

HEIs providing TNE programmes are required to follow quality assurance guidelines comparable to the host country's institution, including those related to enhanced employability. A comprehensive literature review by Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) described how TNE providers were addressing the development of employability. While establishing that research in this area was limited, significant findings related to the prestige value of overseas qualifications, the precedence of practical experience over theoretical knowledge, and 'conflicts between "Western" and local norms and values,' (*ibid*, p.52). Other areas of concern included whether TNE students and other stakeholders had a shared understanding of employability-related concepts, the value of locally versus internationally-gained capital, lack of participation of TNE students in extracurricular activities, and limited access to careers advice from university services. These concerns raise questions about whether the outcomes of TNE programmes are addressing the development of employability skills, particularly in contexts that do not involve work placements. Additionally, Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) noted that literature focusing on TNE and

employability did not draw clear distinctions between the qualifications needed to acquire employment and transferable skills which could be developed through enhanced curriculum design.

3.8 Westminster International University in Tashkent

Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) was founded in 2002, as collaboration between the University of Westminster in London and the Foundation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The circumstances that allowed the partnership to be created date back to 1995, four years after independence, when legislation was passed on *Concessions* which permitted reforms of some social and economic sectors, allowing limited foreign investment and public-private partnerships (Rezhapov, 2017). This legislation provided the legal basis for the partnership, resulting in WIUT becoming the second international university in Uzbekistan; the Russian Economics University opened a few months earlier in 2001 (Ruziev & Burkhanoz, 2018). Notably, WIUT was the first university in Central Asia to offer UK validated qualifications. The position of WIUT in Uzbekistan is unique in terms of TNE, as it is run as an autonomous Uzbek university. In Knight's (2016) table of TNE definitions WIUT comes under the category of *co-founded/developed universities*; 'an HEI established in the host country in collaboration with foreign sending HEIs,' (*ibid*, p.44). When WIUT opened in 2002 it had just 120 enrolled students on the Level 3 Certificate of International Foundation Studies course, and the first year of the BA Business Administration degree (WIUT, 2019). In 2009 WIUT introduced a Pre-University course to train prospective students to pass the WIUT entrance

exams, and progress onto undergraduate programmes. Currently, WIUT runs the following undergraduate degree courses:

- BA   Business Administration (BsAd)
- BA   Commercial Law (Law)
- BSc   Business Information Systems (BIS)
- BSc   Economics/Economics with Finance (Econ/EconF)

It is interesting to note that the courses offered by WIUT closely align to those that Weidman and Yoder, (2010) highlighted as contributing to the mismatch with available jobs, the only exclusion being foreign languages.

Table 3.1: WIUT staff/student numbers 2018-19

	Total	Uzbek	Non-Uzbek	Male	Female
UG Students	3653	3621	32	2395	1258
As %	100%	99.1%	0.9%	65.5%	34.5%
Teaching staff	156	151	5	113	43
As %	100%	96.7%	3.3%	72.4%	27.6%

The percentage of female undergraduate students at WIUT in 2018-19 was close to the Uzbek HE average of 36.4% (UNDP, 2014). Currently there are no official national rankings of Uzbek universities, although according to international websites WIUT is highly ranked in the country: 2/65 (UniRank, 2019), 6/87 (RankingWeb, 2019). The language of instruction at WIUT is English, although currently there is no specific language policy regarding the use of other languages around the campus.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter I provided an outline of how Uzbek HE has developed since 1991, with specific focus on cultural and historical perspectives. I also described how the global education marketplace has led to the development of TNE, and how employability focused concepts are considered in both TNE and Uzbek HE. I also introduced WIUT, the specific research location for this study.

Chapters 2 and 3 provided the context for my study, and I argued that TNE and pedagogy for employability is an under-researched area, especially when considering socio-cultural factors.   Additionally, with debates on employability primarily taking place in global-north countries, a transnational university in Uzbekistan, a developing country which is still adapting to global market pressures, provides an interesting case study. My research questions, as described in Chapter 1, are designed to best address these issues, and I chose activity theory as my analytical tool, which is elaborated on in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 Research methodology

This chapter introduces my analytical tool, conceptual framework and the specific research design and methods. I describe how activity theory has evolved, and argue that it is a valid tool for investigating the theory-practice gap in employability pedagogy.

4.1 Activity theory: description and development

Cultural-historical activity theory, more frequently referred to as activity theory (AT), evolved from theories put forward in the late 1920s and early 1930s by Soviet psychologists Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria and Alexei Leont'ev, who emphasised the role of society in shaping the minds of individuals. Their work was translated from the original Russian during the 1970s. AT has evolved over several decades of research, going through three distinct generations of development. Seen as an alternative to the Western theories on behaviourism and psychoanalysis, Vygotsky (1978, 1981), Luria (1976) and Leont'ev (1978) sought to provide a meaningful unit of analysis to connect the workings of the human consciousness with the external world. Their theories were built on the premise that interactions between the mind and the real world were determined by cultural and social factors. The first generation of AT put forward the idea of cultural mediation, where there was a direct relationship between a subject, an object and a mediating artefact (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 First generation activity theory: Vygotsky's model of mediated action (A) and its common reformulation (B) (Engeström 2018, p.47)
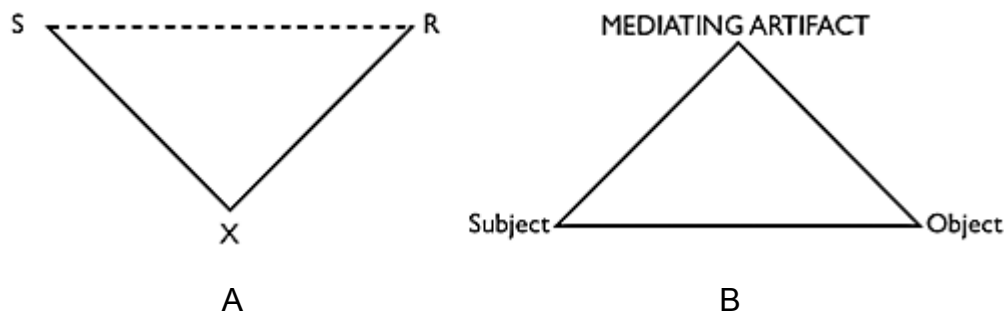
In this model a subject, which could be an individual or a group of people, uses a mediating artefact to act on an object to complete a goal or outcome. In terms of learning this could be described as a learning activity being mediated by another person, and through interaction and engagement the learner can participate in activities and reach outcomes that are not achievable if acting alone. The triangulation of subject, object and artefact was significant as it was seen as a challenge to the notion of the Cartesian self, where the mind of the individual is separate from both the body and the outside world. Acknowledging the influence of cultural artefacts on human activities was a way of stating that the actions and goals of an individual could not be understood without taking into account the influence of society itself, objects that acted on the subjects or individuals or groups who produced the mediating artefacts. Objects themselves were considered to be culturally determined, with fluid interaction between subject, artefact and object; 'cultural mediation has a recursive, bi-directional effect; mediated activity simultaneously modifies both the environment and the subject,' (Cole & Engeström, 1993, p.9). The mediating artefacts can be outward facing technical tools such as a pen or a computer, or inward facing psychological tools such as language or

mathematical systems, but also include 'mnemonic techniques […] works of art; writing; schemes; diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings,' (Vygotsky, 1981, p.137). While technical tools are used to shape and change the environment, psychological tools are used to manipulate the mental processes of individuals (Cole & Engeström, 1993). A simple example, related to employability pedagogy, could be a student (subject) gives a presentation (object) using a PowerPoint display (technical tool), using the English language (psychological tool) in order to develop confidence in public speaking, a valued employability skill (outcome). Here the object is manipulated by the subject to achieve a specific goal by use of mediating tools. This illustrates one of the main premises of AT; the use of tools to mediate and transform both human activity and learning processes.

AT was largely unknown outside the Soviet Union until the 1980s, when Scandinavian researchers, led by Finnish educationalist Yrjö Engeström, broadened the theory to bridge the gap between the subject and the wider structure of society in which it was situated. Although Leont'ev did not graphically elaborate on Vygotsky's model of the mediated act, the ideas were organised into a structure by Engeström (1987) which illustrated the role of cultural mediation, socio-cultural and historical contexts, and the concept of collective activity (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Second generation activity theory: Human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p.78).
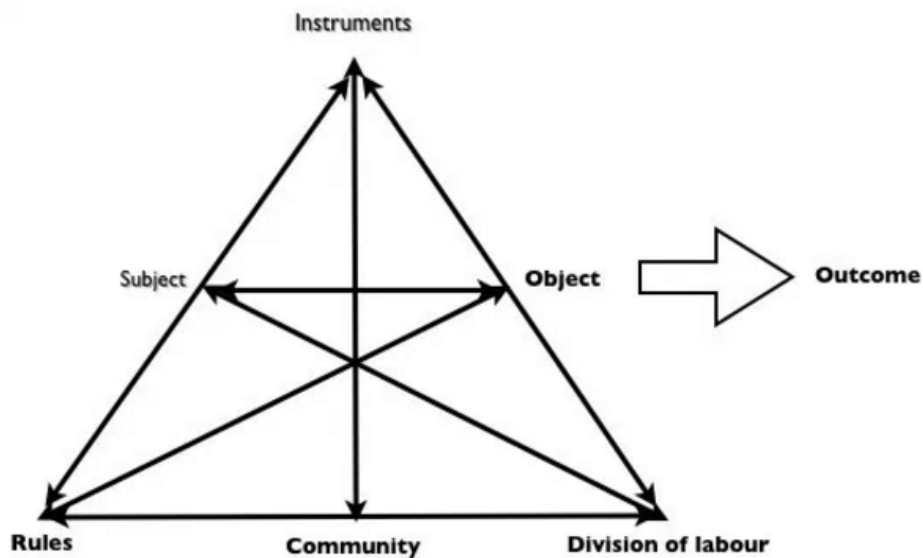
Second generation AT expanded on previous iterations by introducing additional elements; community, division of labour and rules. *Community* included anyone within the system who has an interest in the outcome, akin to stakeholders. The second generation of AT was significant in that it opened up new areas of research; where previously it had been applied to learning and play of young children in the Soviet Union, the reconstructed theory gained recognition as a 'guiding principle of empirical research,' Engeström (2018, p.46). Engeström's pioneering work in identifying tensions within the healthcare industry was pivotal in establishing AT as a tool for promoting change in societal practices. In the 1990s AT was used to investigate areas of human and computer interaction, most notably by Kuutti (1996), who recognised that activities did not occur in isolation, but were influenced by a network of interconnecting activity systems. These observations led to the development of the third generation, where the unit of analysis expanded to include at least two connecting systems.

Although activity systems are related to each other and subjects have a shared object, the different ways that subjects work on transforming the object can cause tension and conflict across systems. Beyond this it has also been suggested that 'participation in different activities is the major factor in creating consciousness and shaping personality,' (*ibid*, p.26). The interaction and conflict between activity systems, reflecting a multiplicity and diversity of objectives, tools, rules and voices was represented in Engeström's (2001) third generation model (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Third generation activity theory: Interacting activity systems (Engeström, 2001 p.136).
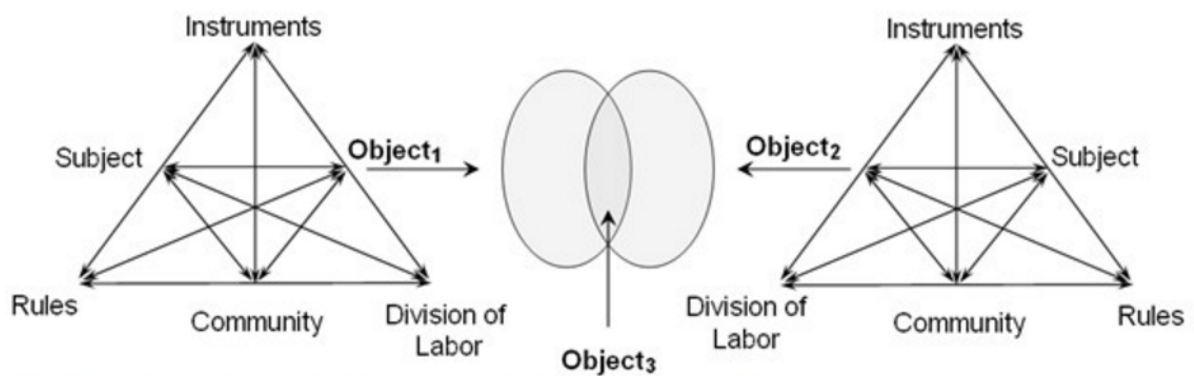
Third generation expanded to include a network of interconnecting, or joint-activity systems with a shared object that could reveal tensions across systems. It is perhaps because researchers have come to recognise the social aspects of learning that AT, especially in its third generation, has increasingly been used as a tool in educational research over the past 20 years.

4.2 Activity theory as an education research tool

It has been acknowledged that 'the strength of activity theory as a heuristic device for understanding empirical data lies in its ability to account for human activity as a dynamic system,' (Hardman, 2008, p.90). AT has been used to analyse qualitative data in a number of pedagogical areas, including writing instruction (Russell, 1995; Spinuzzi, 1996; Nelson & Kim, 2001); human and computer interaction (Kuutti, 1996; Gifford & Enyedy, 1999); method engineering (Karlsson & Wistrand, 2006); information systems (Crawford & Hasan, 2006); information management within maternity care (Häkkinen & Korpela 2007); mathematics in schools (Hardman, 2005; Jaworski & Potari, 2009); mobile learning systems (Liaw *et al*., 2010); language learning (Allen, 2010); and computer-supported collaborative learning (Timmis, 2014). A search of the literature reveals one research project that applies AT to transnational education, specifically investigating internet assisted learning (Dai *et al*., 2016), and one item relating AT to employability, with the focus on doctoral researchers (Golovushkina & Milligan, 2013). Previous use of AT as an education research tool has praised its ability to cope with complex educational systems and indirect relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed (Jaworski & Potari, 2009; Daniels, 2004). AT itself is not a methodology, but is:

> […] a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different forms of human practices as development processes, both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time (Kuutti, 1996, p.23).

By focusing on activities rather than knowledge, AT can be seen as a primarily descriptive tool, and not a descriptive theory (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Perhaps the most important assumption of AT is learning does not occur in isolation

from actions, but through interactions with the environment. Theory can be memorised from reading or direct instruction, but meaningful understanding of processes can only be attained through performance; knowing through doing. The activity itself is the unit of analysis, but it is the learner (the subject in the activity system) who is the driver of the activity (*ibid*). An advantage of focusing on the subject is that it allows for multiple perspectives, as the role of the subject in interacting activity systems can be taken by people performing different roles. Sannino *et al*. (2009) claimed that working within the AT framework has potential to unearth meaningful connections between established theories and societal changes related to, among other issues, social justice and environmental awareness.

In this thesis the subjects are students and lecturers from different degree courses, and academic support staff, who interact with each other. There are also people beyond the scope of the primary research who can influence the activity systems, for example, family and friends, and current or potential employers. An advantage of engagement with many actors for educational research is that the researcher can look beyond what happens in the classroom and consider the greater socio-cultural context. Applying AT to complex relationships between constructs and components has the potential to reveal tensions between systems that interact and compete against each other. Tensions can arise, for example, when rules restrict the use of tools which in turn can prevent subjects from acting in ways that promote learning. These tensions can be 'historically accumulating structural tensions,' (Engeström, 2001, p.137), which if resolved can result in improvements through the introduction

of more advanced systems of activity. The systemic changes that result from the more culturally advanced activity systems is described as *expansive learning*, where the object embedded in a system may be interpreted differently. Although Engeström's model of expansive learning was based on single systems, the same processes can be applied to objects across interrelated systems (Edwards, 2009).

4.3 Expansive learning

In employability pedagogy one of the aims is to bridge the gap between activities that take place in an educational setting and those that are part of the productive practice in work-related contexts. Engeström (1999) argued that one of the reasons why educators can look to AT is that it reduces the theory-practice gap as it is concerned with connections between work-related activity and language-mediated theory. If the ultimate goal of AT is to identify tensions and influence qualitative changes in practice, then people in activity systems can be empowered to critique, act and revise (Roth & Lee, 2007). As subjects transition between education and work-related practice (often backwards and forwards as students engage in part-time work and internships) they can become aware of gaps and differences in their knowledge and skills. Expansive learning occurs when previously accepted practices are questioned, and causes of tension in activity systems are identified and acted upon. Engeström (2009) argued that a longitudinal approach must be used in order to study expansive learning in complex settings. He proposed three stages of intervention to open the zone of proximal development (ZPD) of the activity system. These stages are as follows:

1. Follow the objects of activity in their temporal and sociospatial trajectories

2. Give the objects a voice by involving the clients or users in dialogues where the object is made visible, articulated, and negotiated

3. Expand the objects by organizing intervention sessions and assignments where the producers and clients construct new shared models, concepts, and tools to master their objects (*ibid, p.*327).

Such an in-depth longitudinal approach was beyond the time scale for this thesis. I am able at this stage to implement stage one and facilitate the dialogue for stage two. Stage three could be the basis of a follow-up project once the present research has been completed.

4.4 Research design

This section describes the research design and process in more detail, specifically; research approach and location, selection of participants, data collection methods, how these data were analysed, and ethical considerations.

4.4.1 Research approach

My research uses a qualitative and inductive approach to collect ideas and shared experiences, with the intention of allowing participants to describe and better understand their own unique social setting. From an interpretivist standpoint, knowledge is created through social interactions, and it is from these shared experiences new theories may emerge which can inform and perhaps improve future

practice. A constructivist paradigm acknowledges the subjectivity of participants; each participant has their own system of values and beliefs. Participants may have multiple interpretations of similar experiences, so to best explore their values and beliefs it is necessary for the researcher to work closely with the participants. Charmaz and Belgrave (1996) highlighted five layers of meanings in people's actions that researchers could seek to uncover:

> (1) stated explanation of his or her action, (2) unstated assumptions about it, (3) intentions for engaging in it, as well as (4) its effects on others and (5) consequences for further individual action and interpersonal relations (*ibid*, p.35).

These categories are particularly relevant to AT as they imply the researcher looking for meaning in action, and obtaining thick descriptions that represent the complexity of situations (Geertz, 1973).

4.4.2 Research location and participants

The location, Westminster International University, Tashkent (WIUT) was described in Chapter 3. The participants were students, lecturers and support staff at WIUT. Selection was through purposive sampling, where participants were selected 'based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions,' (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p.77). In educational research access to participants may be dependent on gatekeepers, those who control access to the institutes and people within. During my many previous visits to WIUT I had built up a good relationship with members of staff, including lecturers and senior management, and through these connections I was able to ask staff to help me find suitable participants. Most

helpful here were lecturers in the Global English department who agreed to put together a list of potential participants based on their knowledge of active students and lecturers who were likely to be willing participants. WIUT has five undergraduate courses, so I wanted student and lecturer representation from all these courses, as well as support staff with specific roles related to employability. Students were selected on the basis of course and level; two students for each course, at either level 5 or 6. This would allow students to reflect on their previous year(s) of study at WIUT during the interviews. Lecturers were chosen to represent teaching across all five undergraduate courses, preferable those who taught at least one core module. No specific criteria were identified in terms of age or level of experience. Once participants had been identified they were sent an email which outlined the purpose and scope of the research, and how their involvement would be beneficial not only to my own research aims, but also in terms of personal and professional development. The possible benefits of taking part were described on the research information form (Appendix 1). This was important information and helped participants understand that they could potentially benefit from the research. After agreeing to take part participants were sent a full version of the consent form (Appendix 2) and further information regarding possible dates of the first interviews. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality in this thesis each participant was allocated a pseudonym. The names chosen were all common Uzbek names, and to aid readers all female names end in 'a'. To distinguish student and lecturer/staff participants, all student names contain 's' and all lecturer/staff names contain 'l'. This method was used for my IFS and was useful as it not only anonymised the participants but also maintained a personal style that is in line with research with a constructivist approach reflecting individual

subjectivity and unique personal experiences. To further guarantee anonymity biographical information of participants was minimal, and specific information that could potentially identity a participant, for example the name of a company where a participant undertook an internship, was omitted. Participant information is shown in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Participant information

Staff	Subject/Area	Gender	Time working at WIUT
Odil	Economics/Economics with Finance	Male	6 years
Natalya	Economics/Economics with Finance	Female	2 years (WIUT graduate)
Yulia	Business Administration	Female	10 years
Amaliya	Business Administration	Female	8 years
Lola	Business Information Systems	Female	3 years
Vlad	Business Information Systems	Male	3 years (WIUT graduate)
Alfiya	Law	Female	1 year
Mavluda	Marketing	Female	16 years (WIUT graduate)
Elyorbek	Research coordinator	Male	6 months
Guldor	Careers Centre	Male	3 months (WIUT graduate)
Olga	Careers Centre	Female	12 Years

Student	Subject	Gender	Level
Sayyora	Economics	Female	6
Rishod	Economics	Male	5
Sitora	Economics with Finance	Female	6
Jessica	Economics with Finance	Female	5
Ansar	Business Administration	Male	5
Rashid	Business Administration	Male	5
Ishoq	Business Information Systems	Male	6
Nosir	Business Information Systems	Male	6
Munisa	Law	Female	5
Nasiba	Law	Female	5

Despite the previously mentioned gender imbalance in students and staff numbers at WIUT (Table 3.1) my research has more female than male participants. This was a conscious choice as in order to address gender issues in Uzbek society a sufficient number of female voices was required.

4.4.3 Case study approach

A case study approach was chosen as the best way of undertaking this research. Case studies are in-depth investigations involving a small group of participants, often using first-hand accounts as the primary data source. Typically, case studies are used when research questions are aimed at asking how or why, and allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. While there are several types of case study, Denscombe (2014) differentiates between discovery-led and theory-led studies; the former uses primarily description, exploration, comparison and explanation; the latter favours illustration and experiment. A further distinction can be made in the outcome of the research, which may be descriptive, interpretive or evaluative (Yin, 2017; Merriman, 1998). According to these categorisations my research was discovery-led and descriptive in that it provided narrative accounts from multiple perspectives; and interpretative, in that it developed 'conceptual categories inductively in order to examine initial assumptions,' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.377). A case study is useful for examining social behaviour in complex settings (Yin, 2017), and although not directly transferable to other settings, when carried out in educational settings findings can be used to inform future policy decisions related to both theory and practice. Case studies can 'provide powerful human-scale data on macro-political decision making, fusing theory and practice,' (Cohen *et al*., 2018, p.378).

A case study requires a bounded system, and in my research it is one university. While the many variables embedded within the system are rich for investigation, it is

clear that a university of over 3000 students is still too large a focus for a research project of limited time and scope. However, a bounded system merely provides a sense of containment, but does not specify the unit of analysis, and it is the selection of specific activity systems as the units of analysis within the bounded system that further define my research. What defines a case study is not the topic of the investigation, but the unit of analysis (Merriam, 1998). Activity systems are focused on a specific object (often categorised as a learning objective or work task), with subjects (for example students, lecturers, or colleagues) working on transforming the object (engaging in a learning or work activity) mediated by a number of tools. These tools can be physical (e.g. books or computers), virtual (e.g. software) or psychological (e.g. use of language). My research focuses specifically on the situated experiences of students and lecturers as they engage in activities that develop (both explicitly and implicitly) skills that contribute to perceived notions of employability. An important note for a case study that has an activity system as the unit of analysis is that the activity systems can transcend the bounded system; the object of an activity system cannot be limited to a fixed location as interacting activity systems take into account a broader context that may include locations outside the bounded system of the university itself. These include work, home and social settings that affect the learning or work activity. To form a broad picture of how these settings interact, a number of complementary data collection methods have been selected, and are described in the following section.

4.5 Data collection methods

A case study requires a database or chain of evidence, which, according to Yin (2017) includes primary data gathered by the researcher and the researcher's analysis of these data. In order to provide corroborating sources of evidence, data from several sources is recommended. Yin (2017) listed six data sources; documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. In the present research the following methods of data collection were chosen as being suitable for addressing the research questions; participant interviews, participant employability journals, class observations, pre and post-lesson questionnaires, teaching materials and university documentation relating to employability.

4.5.1 Interviews

These formed the majority of the data for my thesis, and were conducted face-to-face during two visits to WIUT at the beginning and end of the academic year 2018-2019. Although I could have carried out interviews remotely using Skype or similar web-based technology, I felt that communicating directly in person would provide a more relaxed environment allowing me to establish a less formal relationship with participants. Kvale (1996) outlined some key characteristics of research interviews, including regarding the interview as an interpersonal encounter, and one which should be both positive and enriching for participants. The interview is not a normal conversation, so I wanted to establish a rapport where participants felt free to express their personal experiences in a natural setting. A semi-structured interview format was used allowing for interviews to be both conversational and situational, as

topics were specified in advance and facilitated a flexible and multi-strategy approach where the sequencing and exact wording of questions was not important. What was most important was the elicitation of in-depth and useful participant responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The location for interviews was set in advance, and was either a staff office or a pre-booked classroom to ensure the process was free from interruptions. These were locations that students and staff were familiar with, and interview times were scheduled to fit in with participants' existing commitments.

The first interviews at the beginning of the academic year started with some general questions about participants' role in the university, moving on to more specific questioning about employability-related topics. A further line of questioning asked participants to recall specific learning activities that they perceived had contributed to developing employability skills, either as a learner (for student participants) or as an instructor (for lecturer participants). The technique for this part of the interview involved eliciting a minimally structured evocative account (Light, 2006), where participants were prompted to re-live their experiences in order to provide a detailed account not only of the events, but also their thoughts and feelings relating to that event. Although Light (2006) advocated a less structured line of questioning for this technique, I diverged from this by directing the participants' accounts using prompts that align with AT. For example, specific questions about: *Object*: What was the expected outcome of the activity? *Subject*: What did you know about the other learners? *Division of labour:* Was it clear to the students what their role was? The full

interview schedule for this round or interviews in included in Appendix 3. The second round of interviews took place towards the end of the teaching year. The focus of these interviews was more reflective in nature, as participants recalled experiences from the academic year, and expanded on entries made in their employability journals. These interviews were also semi-structured and again elicited minimally structured evocative accounts of learning and teaching experiences. In addition, questions were aimed at eliciting information about tensions in activity systems that I had identified from the previous interviews, participant employability journals and class observations. The interview schedules for these are included in Appendix 4. Lecturers were interviewed individually, and asked to reflect on and evaluate the lesson that I had observed. Both students and lecturers were also invited to discuss how the process of taking part in the research had shaped their outlook on employability-related issues.

The second student interviews were conducted in pairs according to degree course. This approach had a number of advantages and potential drawbacks, although literature on interview research methods tends to focus on individual interviews or group interviews and focus groups, rather than specifically pairs. Drawbacks include personal responses being reduced in a group setting, or the conversation being dominated by one participant. On the positive side, paired interviews were more convenient for logistical reasons, as during this visit I had to schedule both interviews and class observations and time was a limited resource that had to be managed carefully. There were also sound epistemological grounds for having more than one

interviewee present, for example, to provide multiple perspectives on events, or to examine how participants agreed or disagreed on certain points (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Lohm and Kirpitchenko (2014) highlighted some distinct advantages to paired interviews that was not always considered in literature that discusses group interviews; how the balance of power inherent in individual interviews could be minimised:

> Paired interviews assisted respondents in feeling relaxed and comfortable, provided a vibrant environment that encouraged respondents to build on each other's ideas and enabled them to enhance each other's stories (*ibid*, 2014, p.4).

The paired students knew each other and from my perspective appeared relaxed in each other's presence. Useful data were generated from dialogue between students that would not have been possible from individual interviews. Another advantage of paired student interviews was the help they gave each other with using English. The language of teaching and assessment at WIUT is English, but none of the participants were native English speakers. In individual interviews some students struggled to find the right word to express their ideas, but having a peer to help increased the chances of students making their voices clear without having to break up the flow of the interview through looking up a word or phrase.

I also interviewed WIUT staff who had roles related to employability, or had previous experience of research in employability-related areas. A different, less structured interview schedule was used for these participants who worked in areas such as

marketing of the university, research development and the careers centre. These were also in pairs for the reasons highlighted above.

4.5.2 Employability journals

My decision to ask participants to keep an employability journal was due to findings from my previous research at WIUT (Paterson, 2017). Although students and lecturers demonstrated some understanding of employability-related concepts, lecturers were not able to communicate the rationale behind employability focused pedagogy, and subsequently students were incapable of describing or demonstrating employability skills that would help them as they transitioned from education to work. I recognised that a more systematic approach of relating pedagogy to practice would be beneficial to both students and lecturers. Helping students develop through reflective practice is widely used in UK HEIs (Chatterton & Rebbeck, 2015), and often some form of reflective writing is included as part of assessments. Conversations with WIUT staff and students on previous visits revealed that self-reflection was an underexploited form of evidence gathering, whether as a reflective tool for improving teaching practice or as evidence for student learning. Therefore, I felt that inviting participants to keep employability journals during the course of two teaching semesters would serve as both a useful data collection instrument and a way for participants to take note and reflect on how they engaged and acted in employability-related activities.

The rationale behind the employability journal was explained to participants during the first round of interviews. It was shared using Google Docs and was accessible to only individual participants and myself. The scope of the employability journal was slightly different for lecturers and students. Lecturers were asked to make a journal entry whenever they felt an in-class activity had somehow contributed to students' employability skills. No specific instruction was given as to what constituted employability skills beyond the lecturers own perceptions and understandings; it was left completely to the lecturers to decide what to include. No pressure was put on lecturers to complete a specific number of entries. Students were asked to make a journal entry whenever they felt that they had engaged in an activity that had contributed to their development of employability skills. The context of this was not limited to the classroom, and also could include extracurricular activities, social or family events, work-related contexts such as internships, paid or unpaid work and job seeking activities such as interviews. Again, no pressure was put on students to complete the journal, although during the course of the year I did send emails of encouragement to participants, thanking them for completing journal entries.

The template for the employability journal was kept simple and elicited responses that could be analysed using categories from AT; for example, objects that participants were working on, who else was working on the objects, mediating artefacts used to transform the objects, and who helped in moving towards the final outcome. Having these guided questions was intended to highlight not only the participant's own activity systems, but to reveal how other subject's activity systems

interacted. The template for the employability journal is included in Appendix 5. Examples of completed journal entries are included in Appendix 6.

4.5.3 Class observations and questionnaires

While most of my data were reported accounts of events, having class observations permitted me to gather live data of actual teaching practice. As Robson and McCartan (2016) noted, people's actions may differ from descriptions of their actions. During the class I was a non-participant observer, although I did introduce myself to the students at the start of the class to briefly explain my reasons for being there. Before the observation lecturers completed a short pre-observation questionnaire (Appendix 7) which asked some general questions about the students and the learning environment, followed by some lesson-specific questions regarding lesson aims, rationale for the resources used in the lesson, and whether anything in the lesson contributed to students' employability skills. During the post-lesson interviews lecturers were invited to elaborate on these points. After the lesson students completed a questionnaire (Appendix 8) which mirrored some of the questions that the lecture addressed in their pre-lesson questionnaire. The intention here was to see if lectures and students had similar understandings of the aims of the lesson, and whether students felt the lesson contributed to the development of their employability skills. Further questions were aligned to categories relevant to AT, for example, levels of interaction, tools used, and rules and regulations of the classroom. The answers students gave in the questionnaire were used as corroborating evidence for my notes on the observed lessons. During the class itself I positioned myself to the side of the class out of direct sight so my presence was

minimised. In total I observed five classes and one was video-recorded by a lecturer without me present. These six classes covered all five degree courses at WIUT, with each observation lasting approximately two hours.

4.5.4 Teaching materials, module documentation and other artefacts

Lecturers provided me with the teaching materials for the observed classes. These were important as they were the tools used in mediation during a class activity. Other documentation such as course and module outlines, university marketing strategy reports, and university promotional material was gathered throughout the duration of the research and consulted to provide further information on participants' activity systems. Additional artefacts that were consulted included web pages of companies or organisations that were mentioned by participants in the interviews or employability journals. A table of data collection methods is included in Appendix 9.

4.6 Data analysis

Analysis of the data occurred concurrently with data collection. After each interview I took notes on emergent themes, and made adjustments for subsequent interviews based on these notes. This included the rephrasing of certain questions, or adding new lines of inquiry that had been brought up in previous interviews. For example, in an early interview one student mentioned how company case studies were a particularly useful learning material. In subsequent interviews both students and lectures were asked about the use of these as an effective learning resource. All interviews were transcribed in full immediately upon my return to the UK using

specialised dictation software. The software, *Transcribe,* has an auto-dictation feature where the user can repeat the words of audio in real time whereby it is converted into text. I found this method of transcribing particularly useful as the act of repeating the words of participants allowed me to mentally process the data and better recall previous transcriptions. This process made it easier to identify thematic connections across all data, and researcher notes could be added to transcripts during the transcribing process. All interview data were coded using qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (Appendix 10).

The initial categories for coding were based on the first three principles of AT (Engeström, 2001). The first principle takes *subject-object orientated activity* as the primary unit of analysis, with individual or group orientated actions. Mediation of the object occurs through the use of tools, but other factors also impact the activity system; community, division of labour and rules. The second principle, *multi-voicedness*, recognises the collective nature of activities. Within the bounded system of WIUT the actions and interactions of students, lecturers, support staff, families, friends and work colleagues all potentially influence the activity systems under investigation. The third principle is *historicity*. One of the strengths of AT is that it takes into account how activity systems can transform over time due to changes in theoretical ideas or tools that shape the activity (Engeström, 2018). In my thesis the history, developments and changes in Uzbek society were considered as playing a central role in subjects' activity systems. These developments can be both global (society as whole), or local (historical changes within Uzbek HE or WIUT itself).

After the initial coding further analysis was undertaken considering the fourth and fifth principles: *contradictions or tensions* and *expansive transformation*. In the literature researchers have used the terms contradictions and tensions to refer to obstacles or inconsistencies in activity systems. These do not necessarily represent failures within activity systems, but are opportunities to innovate and improve existing activity systems. Engeström (2001) identified four levels of contradictions, ranging from primary; within a single element of the activity system, to quaternary; between interacting activity systems. These are described more fully in Chapter 6. The fifth principle is arguably the most important as it is the agent for change within activity systems. As contradictions are identified subjects may question previously accepted norms, allowing for reconceptualisation of the object through collective action (Engeström, 2018). Through this it may be possible for participants to become empowered and initiate positive change in learning and teaching environments.

Once the interviews were coded according to the five principles, emerging themes within these categories were identified and explored. Throughout the data analysis all sources were consulted simultaneously and considered as support and evidence for the participants' activity systems. Due to the number of participants it was not possible to construct separate activity systems for all participants. Illustrative examples were taken from multiple sources to best demonstrate the activity systems of selected participants. Where possible interacting activity systems were identified, so quaternary contradictions could be identified.

4.7 Ethical considerations

While conducting the research I maintained professional and ethical responsibility to all participants. Ethical norms vary according to country, and what is acceptable in the UK may not be so in Uzbekistan. For this reason ethics application procedures were followed according to both WIUT and UCL/IOE protocols. The principal ethical considerations, as informed by Cohen *et al*. (2018) were those of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and ensuring participants were not in any way disadvantaged by taking part. Firstly, ethical approval for the research was approved by WIUT (Appendix 11). Secondly, ethical approval was granted by UCL/IOE (Appendix 12). During the selection of participants all were informed of the nature and scope of the research (Appendix 1). Once participants were chosen they were further assured that all collected data would be stored anonymously on encrypted password protected devices, and all efforts to maintain anonymity would be made. A full copy of the consent form (Appendix 2) was sent to participants prior to any data collection. Oral consent was obtained for interviews and class observations, with the same assurances of anonymity.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter I gave an overview of my methodological approach of using a qualitative framework built around the principles of AT. I described how AT is recognised as a valid tool for education research, and discussed how it has been adapted for the purposes of my research topic. I also described the methods of data collection and analysis. Additionally, I described the ethical considerations in accordance with both UK and Uzbek regulations.

Chapter 5 Findings

This chapter addresses RQ1, as findings are illustrated through participant quotations and summaries or paraphrase of typical or atypical data. I also provide an interpretive commentary where I relate findings to points discussed in previous chapters. The interpretations from the findings build into the construction of the joint-activity system, which is presented and discussed in Chapter 6.

5.1 Academic acculturation

The transformation of Uzbek society to a market-based economic system has led to new demands on HE, with educational reforms shaping the current HE landscape. Considering Engeström's (1987) fourth principle of AT, contradictions in educational activity systems are generated as new and old elements collide. This section considers participants' perceptions of Uzbek education as related to their experiences at WIUT, paying attention to tensions as potential sources of change and development. The main themes related to students transitioning from Uzbek secondary education to a UK validated degree course, and subsequently coming to terms with the different expectations and responsibilities this created. In addition, participants questioned how the cultural norms of the country fitted into a foreign academic culture, and whether the prospect of UK degree and an 'international' education afforded them employment opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

Staff and students in TNE may have difficulties in adapting to an environment that is predicated on the academic culture of the sending nation. Accounts from participants painted a marked difference between previous experiences at state schools and universities, and current practice and expectations at WIUT. For example, Ansar described his experience of secondary vocational education where he specialised in multimedia and graphics as 'like a prison' and 'stressful.' His description of a school system built on rigid rules and conformity may not seem unusual, but Ansar maintained that this was also true of state universities:

> Instead of studying there [state university] I would rather not study at all. I think the government is trying to prepare people to be employed faster - they try to make a system where people get practical skills and get employed sooner (Ansar).

As described in Chapter 3, the rationale for the NPPT was to develop a system that upheld national values and produced highly qualified specialists. Students, however, felt that focus on Uzbek values was an uninteresting irrelevance:

> There are lots of things that local university students have to study aimlessly just for the sake of studying. In other universities they treat us like children (Munisa).

These views regarding the irrelevance of certain practices at state universities were shared by students who were dismissive of local universities. The concerns were less connected with quality assurance issues (World Bank, 2014), and more to do with lack of flexibility, autonomy and relevance of courses. With local universities and state-run lyceums adhering to a timetable of 6 days a week and up to 36 hours of classes, students at WIUT may find it difficult to make good use of their time when

they only have 12-16 hours of classes a week. Odil saw this as an opportunity to gain a competitive edge over students at local universities, especially in terms of graduate capitals:

> Students can build social capital, we have different social activities and extra opportunities, students can integrate or build networking with companies and friends. Local institutions exist only for teaching, so students come to classes 6 hours a day with more than 20 modules per semester. There's no time to socialise, mobilise with other groups. They are very limited in terms of building graduate capitals (Odil).

Making the transition from a highly structured and disciplined school system provided challenges as well as opportunities:

> At WIUT there's freedom and people cannot cope with it. That's why we see a lot of people procrastinating on their assignments and doing it in the last few days or on deadline day (Ansar).

Ishoq stated that his main reason for coming to WIUT was because of the freedom it afforded him. As a Business Information Systems (BIS) student he knew he could use the time to work on developing apps, even if it was not related to his coursework. Nosir also recognised that the freedom could be used to diversify:

> WIUT gives so much freedom, you have so much time it's really up to you how you spend it, do what you are interested in, it might not be related to the profession or course […] you just start working on your own, but that's the idea of WIUT. It gives us a platform where we are independent to learn (Nosir).

Nosir gave a further example of how an Economics student who was interested in programming spent time on software development then opened his own IT company while still a student. From the data it became evident that students who came to

WIUT directly from local lyceums found it harder to adapt to the UK system than those who had already spent time at WIUT's lyceum:

> I'm a mentor for first-year students; they always ask 'Why [do] you only have a few subjects during the week? Why don't you have lots of homework? Why don't they check the homework? Why don't we have a report this semester?' We have only two assessments during the year. This seems very odd too them (Nasiba).

Yulia also described how the change in academic culture could have effects on students' behaviour, both academically and professionally:

> The employers have some pluses and minuses about our students. Yes, they graduated from WIUT and they have this different approach, independent learning, professional development, but at the same time they may be arrogant and overconfident. There is a clash if you are independent as a learner, for some employers it gives negative consequences (Yulia).

Students in my research appeared highly motivated, and tried to utilise their time to the best advantage. They did not come across as arrogant, overconfident, or lazy. This may be a consequence of purposive sampling, where students who were chosen may have been more likely to have adjusted well to WIUT. Lecturers, however, were keen to complain about students who they felt did not adjust well to a new academic culture, and often remained stuck in the mind-set of their previous learning experiences:

> There is one major challenge, the notion of autonomous learning […] primary and secondary schools are more like post-Soviet systems based on teacher instructions. Autonomous learning is not developed [students] are always waiting for instructions (Natalya).

103

Students are expected to adapt readily to a different academic culture, but it may be that lecturers have an expectation that this will be an easy transition:

> Some students can apply wider knowledge, but most of them are waiting for instructions, it's a little bit problematic. They are supposed come to the seminar after reading something, in most cases they don't do it, they think the teacher should teach, there's no need to do reading (Natalya).

Natalya thought that this would have implications for the students' future employment prospects.

> It's directly related to employability because if you think you should always be told what to do and how to do it then you'll be like this while working. If you're an employee you're always waiting for your manager to give you some exact instructions (Natalya).

In these examples the blame for the lack of adjustment to a new academic culture is placed on the students. Marginson and Rhoades (2002) argued that the cultural influences of students on an institution works both ways 'They are not only acted upon by the culture of the institution, these students themselves help shape that culture,' (*ibid,* p.304). Although this observation was in relation to international students studying in predominantly UK or US host institutions, it is still applicable in TNE. While many of the lecturers at WIUT have had international learning experiences, it should not be taken for granted that students will make a seamless transition to a new academic culture.

5.2 Understandings and attitudes towards employability-related concepts

An understanding of participants' initial perceptions of employability-related concepts served to establish the approach they may have to teaching and learning. The findings from this section confirmed that all participants recognised enhanced employability as a genuine learning aim of their courses.

5.2.1 Perceptions of employability

Individual perceptions of employability are shaped by numerous factors, including knowledge of specific academic disciplines, knowledge of labour markets and previous or current work experience. Definitions of employability-related concepts are wide ranging and complex, as echoed by participants who recognised the importance of attributes needed to both secure a job and to function successfully at work. This section summarises students' and lecturers' perceptions of employability at the beginning of the academic year, before starting their employability journals. These findings can be divided into Hillage and Pollard's (1998) broad definitions; getting a job, general skills needed in doing a job, and applying specific subject knowledge in working practice.

Firstly, students acknowledged that employability meant the ability to get a job, including the skills needed to make a CV, impress at interviews or pass company assessment centres. This was evident for Business Administration (BsAd) students, a subject that focuses on the behaviour of people in work environments, where students associated employability with performance during the selection process.

Lecturers shared similar views regarding competencies needed in gaining employment. While selling yourself was highlighted as an important skill, one problem that was identified was how knowledge of theory can be related to practice. Nosir thought that having a degree almost guaranteed a job in the IT sphere, but the qualification alone did not ensure you were able to perform satisfactorily at work. Ishoq thought that it was not easy to show potential employers that you are hard working, but you would need to prove this when you started working. This corroborates findings from my previous research (Paterson, 2017).

Secondly, students noted a difference between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. When Rashid started working in a part-time role in a project management company, the skills that he drew upon most were general computer skills, communication skills and flexibility. His work experience entailed mainly talking to people, both in person and on the phone. Although he claimed that his studies had given him a basic awareness of work based practices, the application of soft skills was not something he felt adequately prepared for. Students also mentioned the importance of interpersonal skills, specifically expressing new ideas when working on a team. Lecturers also stressed the importance of communication skills, with Amaliya emphasising that in her teaching she felt her role was to prepare students for different situations that they might encounter in the workplace, emphasising skills such as flexibility over critical thinking. Students all recognised teamwork as an important skill, but to a lesser extent on BIS, Economics (Econ) or Economics and Finance (EconF). Sayyora claimed that her understanding of the importance of

teamwork came through experience at an internship she had undertaken during the summer:

> You could perform as a serious person if you have motivation to work, show your skills. They [colleagues] will comment on it and appreciate it. I learnt that's the main criteria for good teamwork (Sayyora).

Here a key difference between working in a real company and university study was emphasised, as new responsibilities emerge. Sayyora described how being praised for real work performance motivated her, emphasising that the world of work was more serious than university study; actions had real consequences on others. Jessica also touched on this, commenting on being precise, conscientious and punctual as key skills, especially in the accounting sphere. She also noted negotiating with lecturers was the most beneficial part of her course, and that in her work experience knowledge of theories accounted for only a small part of the work requirements; 'The university gives me opportunities for self-development - all the theories that I learnt I use only about 10% in real life,' (Jessica). Odil also described a distinction between students at different levels of study; students at higher levels tended to be more involved in internships so they realised the importance of soft skills, and this was further emphasised with company visits and talks from guest lecturers that were more a feature of levels 5 and 6. In agreement with her lecturer, Sitora confirmed that time management and teamwork was developed when analysing real case study data together, but she also noted that employability was not something that had been explicitly discussed in the classroom. Munisa mentioned that in her work experience, in the international department of a sporting association, communication skills were vital. She pointed out that as she was

expected to write emails requesting information or actions it was essential she did this in a diplomatic way. During her internship Nasiba came to understand that practical skills, for example the ability to use software applications, were more important than specialised knowledge which could be acquired on the job:

> The subject skills are very narrow, the practical skills will help you more when working. You will have to do some basic things which may not require special knowledge at that time. You can acquire knowledge through the course of employment (Nasiba).

Thirdly, the application of subject specific knowledge was recognised as an important element of employability. Odil argued that in order to make progress in work it was necessary to understand the environment; how to apply subject knowledge to changing situations. He said that employability was the ability to provide on-time solutions:

> For me it's sustainability. Can [someone] sustain their job or position? They can't be promoted if they're not able to apply or use these different skills, they may not be able to make it sustainable for their career growth (Odil).

Another lecturer stated that although general skills were important and welcomed by employers, it was the hard skills that better defined a person's ability to do a job, especially in the IT sphere:

> Employers are interested in soft skills, in decision making, in justification, in articulating ideas. But you cannot hire a person who's good at articulating something but cannot program, seriously you can't (Lola).

Although during the interviews I reassured participants that there were no right or wrong answers, students and lecturers were often uncertain about the concept of employability, Sitora wanted confirmation of definitions; 'If I'm not mistaken employability is how we are good at the job market in Uzbekistan after we graduate.' Similarly, Natalya sought confirmation of her answer: 'Employability is connected with career opportunities for students. Is that right?' (Natalya). That participants were not clear on meanings of employability-related concepts is in line with the *floating signifier* notion whereby meanings are individually interpreted and open to varying understandings from stakeholders (Sin & Neave, 2016).

The preceding comments on perceptions of employability shed some light on practices at WIUT. Understandings of employability-related concepts during this first phase of data collection were largely narrow definitions of key limited skills in line with those described by Knight and Yorke (2002). Focusing on narrow definitions emphasises a top-down approach to employability, with policy makers' perceptions of supply-side deficit shifting responsibility to the individual (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Many of the participants corroborated this by framing employability in terms of selling yourself in a competitive marketplace.

5.2.2 Learning and teaching practices

In my research lecturers and students were the objects of activity. As discussed in Chapter 4, following the subjects in their education and work-related practice can reveal gaps and differences in these practices, especially if subjects are working

towards a common goal. This section discusses how different attitudes to learning and teaching can shape the nature of learning activities and reveal tensions. A common theme that emerged was how lecturers' own learning shaped the way they taught. This was best illustrated by BIS lecturer Vlad, himself a recent graduate of WIUT, who structured his classes along the same lines as those experienced as a student. His former lecturers are now his teaching peers, and he has conformed to their methods of delivering content. In his teaching he articulated clear objectives in terms of proposed lesson outcomes, and the learning environment could be described as constructivist, as he viewed learners as active participants rather than passive receptors of information:

> I'm sharing this experience. I want to make the students understand the same thing that I understand, but the way I see is not always the way you should see. They [students] might select different pathways (Vlad).

The structure of one of Vlad's modules was a one-hour lecture followed by a two-hour seminar. This is typical of the way modules at WIUT are structured. At the beginning of each module he explains that his role is not like that of a lecturer: 'I will force you to do the job for yourself; I will be facilitating rather than explaining and showing you,' (Vlad). During Vlad's observed seminar class there was first a period of brainstorming where students identified what needed to be done in terms of architectural design and then students tried to implement previously learned applications; ideally those described and explained in the preceding lecture. There then followed a practical element which was done either alone at computers or in some instances by one student at the front of the class with a projected computer screen. Vlad confirmed this was a typical seminar, and most would follow this

pattern. When asked if the way classes were structured posed any learning difficulties or challenges for students, Vlad expressed similar concerns to other lecturers:

> The main challenge is the students' commitment. They should understand that in most cases the lecturer will not provide them with 100% of the curriculum. They should dedicate most of their time for self study. We are the people who guide them through the basics, help them understand the concepts and the key points (Vlad).

When asked whether it was the lecturer's responsibility to make it clear to the students what was expected of them in terms of self study, Vlad stated that these expectations were made clear early on in students studies, in the induction week at the beginning of their degree course, or even earlier if students took the foundation year. Despite this, Vlad maintained that students frequently asked why they were doing a practice task if it was not in the assessment. Alfiya also described difficulties in engaging students, saying that they were only motivated by assessment deadlines, likely due to students' previous experience of Uzbek assessment-driven schooling.

Recognising that students were more likely to be engaged in the class activities if linked to assessments, Yulia stated that at the beginning of each seminar she tells students how what they are doing in the lesson specifically relates to assessments. Another approach was described by Amaliya, who adapted her teaching style to make content more practical and applicable to workplace situations. Amaliya also commented that when involved in some kind of work experience, whether a part-time

job or an internship, students were more engaged in the classes. However, this also raised some issues regarding the ability to manage work and studies, with Amaliya adding that some students had to leave their jobs as they could not cope with full-time study. Nevertheless, having students with work experience added a different dynamic to classroom activities:

> We were covering HR topic, a student was asking many questions, that was good because the class was interesting, and then he said 'I'm sorry I'm asking so many questions but now in my job I have to hire people and I have to think which things I can apply' (Amaliya).

A notable contradiction was raised by students when discussing their levels of participation in lessons. Nosir recalled why his attendance had suffered over the past few months:

> I started not taking classes seriously because we're working on things in real life, and then we're looking at the things that we're learning in class and we try to integrate them into a real project, but they can't be. The courses are too outdated to be implemented in real life (Nosir).

Ansar also felt a disconnection with some of his classes, but his lack of engagement was due to a combination of factors:

> I've been skipping a lot of classes this year […] if I see that there's an opportunity to learn this stuff not in two hours but in half an hour I will go to YouTube. In the classroom you're sitting with other students who didn't do their homework and they didn't read anything. They expect the teacher to explain everything, and I'd just be listening to the same stuff again and wasting my time (Ansar).

Although this was the case for one particular module, Ansar explained how in some cases it was necessary to attend the classes as the information was not accessible through other means:

> You've got to come because you've got questions. If you don't understand one minor thing you have to ask at the time otherwise you won't understand the next point (Ansar).

Ansar went on to describe another instance where motivation to attend was shaped by the ability of the lecturer to deliver the content in a satisfactory manner:

> [The lecturer] might skip some stuff and say you know this from level 3 or 4, he talks too fast and sometimes I cannot understand properly. Once I wasn't able to attend so I attended another seminar and the teacher finished all the seminar questions, he went through all of it and explained it, without useless talk. It was more efficient so I changed to his classes (Ansar).

In the pre-internet era access to relevant academic material was limited to either university resources such as books held in a library, or information given directly from lecturers to students. With the former now available on various platforms which may be external to the university, it is the latter that holds the key to retaining students' interest in attending classes. My data revealed that lecturers believed that students were more likely to attend classes if they perceived it would contribute to their ability to perform better in assessments. Lecturers realised this, and accepted attendance would drop as students became more focused on completing assessments, and less interested in the acquisition of knowledge or skills which were not considered necessary for passing the assessment. Although the acquisition of such knowledge and skills might contribute to students' ability to perform in the workplace, the short term goal of passing the immediate assessment took

113

precedence, and the method of delivering content was directed towards this aim. The acceptance by lecturers that students were strategic in their attendance, dependent on relevance to assessment, served to penalise those students, like Ansar, whose motivation for attending may not be limited to the short term goal of passing the module. During the observation of classes I noticed a tendency for students to remain largely passive, and contributed only when directly asked questions by the lecturer. When students did ask questions these were frequently related to upcoming assessments. Post-lesson questionnaires from students in the observed classes indicated that they recognised they could have contributed more to class activities. Reasons for lack of engagement in classroom activities included insufficient preparation for the lesson, being shy and lacking confidence in voicing opinions, or lack of opportunity due the nature of the class activities. In some cases I observed that the position of classroom furniture, and how students and lecturers physically situated themselves, affected participation. This theme is explored further in section 5.5.5.

5.2.3 Perceptions of embedded employability

As discussed in Chapter 2, Sin and Neave (2016) commented that there was no clear indication how degree programmes could be formatted to enhance employability. Nevertheless, all participants believed that there was a clear link between teaching employability and work-related practice. Vlad returned to one of his favourite themes, stating that it depended on the level of engagement of students, with those that were '100% involved in seminars' being in a position to apply the skills they acquired. Agreeing with his lecturer's views, Nosir said that

motivation was a key factor in whether students were able to acquire employability skills on the course, but added that teaching employability at least gave students the chance to develop more generic skills. Nasiba had similar views regarding engagement, arguing that many students were not prepared for life after graduation as they did not take a long term view:

> Many students are not prepared for future life, they're not thinking about their career during university. But if the student is concerned about his future he will take every advantage from the seminars and all the activities (Nasiba).

In one instance a lecturer underestimated the value of practical skills taught on a module. Evaluating whether the *Law Dissertation* module was of any practical value, she stated:

> If they choose to be researchers in the future then of course my classes are helpful, but I don't think many will choose this career path. Most will be practicing lawyers. You don't need research skills (Alfiya).

Referring to the same module, Munisa gave a clear example how something she learned helped in her work performance:

> The skills that we learn here like doing research, being able to separate from what is needed and what is not, this helped me a lot with my time management (Munisa).

This is a rare example of a student recognising how an employability skill is embedded in a module as an implicit learning gain, even when the lecturer does not see the relevance of the skills to work-related practice. This raises the question of whether both lecturers and students need to reflect more closely on learning outcomes. Yulia felt that reflection was useful for students, as personal qualities like

self-theories and metacognition are linked to employability. She added that some students focused only on subject understanding:

[Students] find it weird to focus on professional development activities, on self-regulation or emotional intelligence and organisational behaviour, for example emotional awareness and self-esteem (Yulia).

She went on to say that students did not often see how theoretical knowledge was linked to personal qualities, and that in seminars she tried to underline these connections. This was confirmed by Rashid, who stated that the core module *Business Communications* was the only module that highlighted the integration of hard and soft skills. Lola, however, did not see the relevance of this core module, taken by level 4 students of both BIS and BsAd. Ansar, on the other hand praised the module, in particular how it drew attention to emotional intelligence, for example, the interpretation of people's facial expressions. He also noted that it helped him to develop his email writing skills, in contrast to Lola's views.

Tomlinson (2017) discussed the perceived benefits of social and extracurricular activities in relationship to ideas of identity capital, rather than as transferable skills. Rashid commented that students, including him, did not always realise how engaging in social activities could be beneficial in improving employability skills. This was also emphasised by Odil, who felt that often students did not make good use of the social opportunities provided by the university:

Behind the social event there is networking, there is socialising and it's a chance to develop skills, at least communication skills. Students should understand and recognise that the institution exists not only for teaching

knowledge. [Students] say we have exams or other stuff to do so no time for other activities (Odil).

The problem was not lack of opportunities, but rather that frequently students saw time spent on non-academic activities as time wasted. Odil felt the responsibility for this lay as much with the lecturers and support staff as with the students, and he suggested that at the beginning of each module the lecturers should stress that they are not only sharing knowledge, but are also giving students the chance to integrate. Ansar shared a similar experience when discussing the value of being randomly assigned groups for coursework:

> In a real job you don't know who you'll have to work with. [At WIUT] we learnt because we are randomly divided into groups. We have to find a way to work with difficult people sometimes. Choosing groups is not the best option because you choose your friends. You don't feel you're in a tough situation (Ansar).

While some research has cast doubt on whether employability skills can be effectively developed within classroom settings (Cranmer, 2006), the experiences of Munisa and Ansar illustrated that the transfer of skills from academic to work practices can be achieved, even if lecturers do not perceive this to be the case. This is more in line with Rae (2007) and Speight *et al*. (2013), who argued that academic learning and employability skills were compatible.

While it is widely agreed that structured work experience is effective in helping graduates secure graduate level employment (Mason *et al*., 2009), participants also thought there should be more opportunities for real-world work engagement in their

117

courses. Several different ways of implementing this were suggested, the most popular being mandatory internships. It was also apparent that participants valued any opportunity for meaningful engagement with employers in a genuine work-related context. Examples of this included lecturers sharing practical knowledge from their own work experience (Vlad); coursework integrated with research in real companies (Ansar); and field trips to companies (Yulia):

> We organise one [field trip] to a local manufacturer. Being exposed to real production processes, seeing the HR department in reality. For example, relating to the model case studies (Yulia).

However, in a later discussion she revealed how some students viewed field trips in a different way:

> One student asked me, 'Why are we going to the hotel tomorrow?'I told her we will meet with a real HR manager; this is in the tourism class. It's not clear for them why they're taking a tour of a hotel. I was patient and explained the reasons. Actually, another student told her, these are service providers, and they will explain about the management and the structure and the services (Yulia).

This again relates to the aforementioned issues of student engagement and the perceived value of activities that are not directly linked to coursework and assessment. Views from careers centre staff also advocated further integration of teaching and work-related practices.

Cranmer (2006), sceptical of including employability as a learning outcome on courses, argued that resources would be better directed towards improving employment-based training opportunities, or involving employers more directly in undergraduate courses. Participants agreed that better communication with local

118

employers would make the courses more relevant. From the perspective of BIS, Ishoq suggested that local companies should share real examples of recent students' experiences to help course leaders shape the modules. Vlad citied how one course had been improved, but also identified the dangers of one company having a monopolising influence, providing both a lecturer and student perspective:

> The employers were involved in course design; they suggested the modules and the outcomes they wanted. I see that the updated program is much better than it was previously, but if you dedicate the time to one employer this might bring a bias which is not needed (Vlad).

Yulia described how employers were involved in round table discussions with BsAd course leaders, but these did not often lead to further clarity due to employers not always knowing what should be prioritised. Another problem that Yulia identified was how employers and the University moved at different speeds. Local business may know their own environment at the time of meeting with educators, but any changes in course structure or delivery will not have any immediate effect on employment outcomes. Firstly, the process of making substantive changes to courses must go through university procedures of quality assurance, which will likely take several months. Secondly, those students affected by changes may not be entering the labour market for several years, by which time a volatile labour market may look markedly different. Yulia also noted that employers may be in discussions with local universities that have different methods of teaching and assessment, and suggestions that employers make may not be compatible with the requirements of a UK based qualification. Ansar gave an example of how closer involvement with

employers could be beneficial, especially if students had lecturers who were currently working for local companies:

> Teachers with work experience give lectures that are way more interesting because they give examples from real life, they tell stories about what's going on and how the theories apply in reality. We don't just read cases about Nike or Apple, we are told about companies that operate in Uzbekistan (Ansar).

The main message from these comments seems to be that while employer involvement in actual course design can be problematic, more immediate benefits can be derived from combining theory with personalised evidenced-based current practice.

In the literature some stakeholders argued that embedding employability in the curriculum negatively affected disciplinary learning (Speight *et al.*, 2013), while others claimed that it does not make sense to isolate employability from subject specific content (Barrie, 2007; Rae, 2007; Schaeper, 2009). Regarding these arguments, participants across all the courses felt that there should be elements of employability embedded across all modules, although some did not rule out having separate modules that dealt exclusively with the development of employability skills. On BsAd, Amaliya felt that separating employability from the subject would be sending the wrong message to the students, and they would not be able to make the necessary connections. Several students suggested that the implicit embedding of employability skills in modules was not recognised:

> It would be more useful if [benefits of self-reflection] were stated in the aims of the lesson. It might raise our motivation and interest, because when we learn

we don't think we gain anything new, anything extra. If it is not in the exam people aren't interested (Rashid).

Rashid also mentioned his experience of self-reflection, but it was clear that he misunderstood this concept, mistaking it for self-study. This was highlighted in my previous research (Paterson, 2017); that self-reflection was rarely exploited by lecturers, and perhaps not fully understood by students as a learning tool. Amaliya recalled instances from her teaching where conversation was drawn towards self-reflection and emotional intelligence. She described how level 4 students failed to recognise these as relevant to their progress. This view was corroborated by a student:

> This [reflection and evaluation] wouldn't apply in Uzbekistan. People are not taught anything about emotional intelligence. However, I had a tutor who studied in the UK and France. She said that there emotional intelligence is more important than your whole IQ. Here they don't understand emotional intelligence. You need to understand people and how they are feeling and how you can help make their performance better. It's not only about your technical skills (Nosir).

In contrast, Amaliya's discussions on emotional intelligence with Level 5 and 6 students taking the option module *Professional Practice and Learning from Work*, proved more productive. Students on this module undertook part-time work over the course of the module, and kept an assessed reflective-learning log describing how their work experiences related to their academic studies. Such a module appeared to offer opportunity for expansive learning in complex settings, with students, through the learning log, given access to tools which could help them identify gaps and differences in their knowledge and skills. Amaliya also noted that student

engagement with soft skills development was not just a matter of motivation or maturity, but more related to whether they would gain some tangible reward in terms of progression on the module.

Ansar described his experience of a summer school unconnected to his BsAd degree, noting that the isolated nature of the two-week course meant that he could not fully engage with it or relate it to his own discipline. Students from Econ/EconF were not averse to having separate modules or courses that dealt specifically with employability, believing that students might pay more attention if it was removed from their disciplinary learning. An explanation for this was that developing communication skills was not necessary when undertaking technical tasks:

> In my subject we prefer being alone, we're thinking about how to solve problems, it's more technical. Mathematics and economic problems are difficult in a group (Sayyora).

This was view was shared by Jessica:

> We don't like group coursework we prefer individual. Otherwise it takes too much time for discussion, it's much better to write individual work, just think quickly, do analysis ourselves (Jessica).

Vlad maintained that students were less engaged when classroom activities were not directly connected to assessment, noting that students would also question the inclusion of predominantly employability-related content, and it might be better to encourage students to take bolt-on courses separately:

Students expect me to talk about programming. If we're talking about employability, we won't cover points required for the learning outcomes (Vlad).

When asked if employability could be integrated into the practical parts of the lessons, he stated that he did not think students would understand the connection:

Students might not understand how critical thinking is important for employability. But if there was a separate module or separate course, maybe this would be better because they would understand what critical thinking is, and then they can connect with other modules (Vlad).

Vlad's views here link to Speight *et al*. (2013) who maintained that employability integrated in the curriculum, whether explicit or hidden, could be perceived as being at the expense of subject knowledge.

BIS lecturer Lola recognised that students lacked opportunities to gain soft skills, and thought that more effort should be made to integrate them into the course; a view shared by students on the course. Nosir claimed the only opportunity to acquire soft skills was through the level 4 module *Academic English*, while Ishoq stated if employability was embedded in the modules then students were not aware of this. He recalled that during his foundation year employability-related issues were talked about in some classes, but 'everyone has forgotten those points.' He also add that, while knowing how to code was the most important skill for a web developer, it would always be necessary to interact with other coders to explain ideas and views. Although in many cases students did this, the importance of it was not emphasised by the lecturers.

5.3 Reputation of WIUT

Pegg *et al*. (2012) noted that initial graduate employment was influenced by the reputation of the university, at least in the UK context. Participants' recognised the reputation of WIUT played a major role in positioning students in the labour market. Three main themes are explored here; perceptions of competitive advantages, employers' assumptions, and WIUT as an international university.

5.3.1 Perceived competitive advantages

The language entry requirements for undergraduate study are the same as for equivalent entry to most UK based undergraduate degrees; 6.0 IELTS (International English Language Testing System) with a minimum of 6.0 in the writing component. Since all courses are taught in English, and the use of English is encouraged for all communication between staff and students, it is expected that students will improve their language proficiency throughout their studies. Ansar described how WIUT students performed better than those from another TNE university:

> We had a presentation after internship of what we learnt and there were students from [university X] and our university. I could see a significant difference in the presentation skills. Our students were performing way better especially when it comes to English (Ansar).

Ansar also noted that employers may expect WIUT graduates to have 'perfect English'. Other students also suggested that international companies would prefer WIUT graduates because of their superior language skills:

> At local universities there are only a few people who know English well. There are a lot of international suppliers and international partners where you

need to communicate in English. That's why they place so high emphasis on English (Rashid).

There was a belief from students that they would be favoured because of their language skills, but this could lead to feelings of complacency, even arrogance, when competing with local graduates for employment opportunities. This view was also shared by lecturers:

> Most students assume that it [studying at WIUT] helps them get a better job, especially with international organisations. I've heard this from former graduates, who are employed. If there's a student from WIUT and a student from another university, they have some kind of bonus, even if they have the same skills (Amaliya).

Assumptions of superiority, however, may be short lived, as noted by Sitora from experience in her internship at an international company:

> After studying here we think that it's easy for us to get a good job, but then we learn there are lots of other students, international ones who got a degree abroad, we need to compete with them as well (Sitora).

5.3.2 Employers' assumptions about WIUT graduates

As well as the advantages WIUT students may have from their language skills, there are assumptions that employers favour WIUT graduates for a number of other reasons. Although none of my data were from employers, lecturers and students had strong beliefs about the way WIUT graduates were regarded. For example, Yulia described employers' expectations of WIUT graduates:

When [employers] see a graduate from WIUT they have a certain kind of vision behind it, certain expectations. Yes, it can put pressure on the students. When we organise meetings with employees they told us that when they see the WIUT name they have very high expectations (Yulia).

Munisa told a story of how a fellow WIUT student secured a job in the international department of a government ministry because he graduated from an 'international' university. She claimed this fact alone made him the top choice. Although the data revealed many examples of WIUT graduates securing employment through the reputation of the university, discussions with staff who have been with WIUT since its formation suggest that the situation may be changing, and reputation is not as decisive a factor in the current climate:

When I was a [WIUT] graduate we were given preference over all other graduates. I saw job announcements which said at least two years' experience required except for WIUT graduates. It was the only international university at the time. Now I think employers realise not every graduate is the same (Mavluda).

She also noted that because the academic culture was different to local universities, employers might regard over ambitious WIUT applicants in a negative light. Other lecturers expanded on this. For example, Alfiya expressed concerns that different approaches to discipline at WIUT compared to local universities might have repercussions in the workplace:

At work there's discipline. This doesn't match the kind of discipline students have here. If you are an employer you want disciplined employees, so maybe there's some conflict (Alfiya).

Amaliya described how WIUT graduates may not be suited to jobs that do not allow for flexibility and freedom:

> In government, hierarchical and formal jobs WIUT graduates are not welcome. Reflecting on what students were saying, most don't want to work in government jobs; they believe there's too much hierarchy, they need more freedom. On the other hand they say that officials don't want WIUT students because they don't want to follow the stream. They might be too broad minded (Amaliya).

The assumption that WIUT graduates are open-minded and ambitious can work both for and against students' employment outcomes, but what was clear from the data was that the reputation of the university did have a significant effect on how students positioned themselves in job market, and how employers regarded WIUT graduates as potential employees.

When entering the jobs market graduates must match their formal technical knowledge with organisations that require such knowledge. In addition, employees may value graduates' levels of cultural understanding, especially if a potential employee can 'articulate a personal narrative which aligns to the employment domains they seek to enter,' (Tomlinson, 2017 p.345). An important point raised by both students and lecturers was that of company fit. Yulia thought that students studying BsAd were particularly suited to opportunities where they could work in the same style that they were accustomed to, and this was more likely in international organisations rather than local companies. She went on to describe that in the current transitional economy students who could apply skills and theories, but were

also able to learn in a changing environment, would be in high demand. Rashid, while agreeing that his course might prepare him well for work with international companies, felt his employment opportunities could also be limited:

> Most of our studies are based on international companies but we have a lack of local knowledge. We could be restricting our employability in the local context. When you apply for a government job they ask what you studied about Uzbekistan. Local universities study some specific subjects like history of Uzbekistan. We don't do this at WIUT (Rashid).

Differences in curricula and academic culture to local universities could have implications in terms of WIUT students' prospects in the local context. An indirect response to these concerns was given by Yulia, who argued that WIUT graduates working for local companies would need to comply with traditional work practices, but could also be influential in instigating change:

> Maybe there will be shakers who change the environment from the traditional way. But companies are also changing, using different views and opinions and feedback, if it's a traditional Soviet autocratic style then employees' opinion is not asked (Yulia).

For Law students, having an international qualification may pose problems when trying to access the local labour market. Nasiba described how she felt inadequate when being interviewed for her internship because of a lack of local knowledge: 'I was unprepared and ashamed because I didn't know some basic things about Uzbek law,' (Nasiba). Experiences such as this may undermine a student's sense of professional identity; especially in Law where the relationship between pedagogy and perceptions of professionalism are closely tied (Reid *et al*., 2008). Ansar commented that there had to be a two-way fit between employer and employee, but

also highlighted many WIUT graduates found employment in family-run businesses, especially among BsAd students. This view was shared by Guldor:

> Those who studied Business Administration with me had a lot of connections and opportunities and they are still employed by the family businesses, but in Economics and BIS they didn't have much opportunity to be employed by their families (Guldor).

Olga claimed many students are sent to WIUT by their family with the intention of returning to the family business after graduating, adding:

> The market has changed; there is an increasing demand for skills. Hiring somebody who is not skilled but has connections, those kinds of situations have diminished (Olga).

Odil also thought the local market was changing and becoming increasingly competitive, global and challenging. This being the case, companies may not be so willing to employ staff on the basis of family connections, and instead are looking for skilled and competent workers.

5.3.3 WIUT as an international university

Students may think that graduating from an international university gives them a distinct advantage when pursuing careers abroad, or even in local branches of international companies. There is recognition, however, that having the word 'international' in the name of the university may lead to some distorted impressions of what this actually means. The staff and students at WIUT are predominantly of Uzbekistan nationality (Table 3.1), and although a UK based qualification is more widely recognised globally than an Uzbek degree, it is debatable whether graduates

have had an 'international' experience. Ansar expressed concerns over this, and described how he thought his education would have been different if he had studied the same course in London:

> I think Westminster in London is an international University. A lot of students from all over the world come, the culture would be different. I would be exposed to Western culture. Here [at WIUT] it is Uzbek culture. People can't take the past away when they enter the building. They go to their homes, it is Uzbek culture, we go to the canteen it is respect culture. We have all the traditional things that still apply here (Ansar).

Here Ansar raised pertinent issues regarding whether WIUT provided an international experience, similar to those raised by De Wit and Jones (2014) who argued that international experience can also be intercultural, and not just related to mobility. Having staff with international experience is beneficial for sharing and developing good practice, but one lecturer disclosed that staff members lacking international experience, particularly if in a senior position, did not afford colleagues the same amount of academic freedom as when working in different countries. The reason for this was thought to be largely cultural, and based on notions of hierarchy:

> We have a module leader who gives us tasks that we should give to students, and sometimes I feel this does not come from within, I don't feel inspired by it, I feel discouraged. They don't give me freedom for certain subjects where I'm not a module leader. There's no policy in the university that would promote academic freedom, no one knows what academic freedom is here. I would say it's because people don't have experience of teaching in other countries (Alfiya).

Staff also commented on steps that could be taken to make the university more international. In these instances it was assumed by participants that this was a good idea:

> Being an international university we have to increase the number of international students and staff. The name is international, if we involve more international staff the idea will be changed, the programs and reputation will be improved (Mavluda).

WIUT's reputation as an 'international' university may be recognised in the local education arena, although the extent to which WIUT is international may be limited to its connections with its UK partner. WIUT may be better positioned than local universities in exploring international perspectives through course enhancements, and students can gain a competitive advantage in certain employment opportunities because of their language skills. However, as noted by Healey and Bordogna (2014), in the local context, if cultural norms are challenged by the imposition of academic imperialism and neo-liberal values, then tensions can arise.

5.4 Uzbek society and gender

In establishing a new national identity after independence in 1991, Uzbekistan sought to re-introduce cultural ideals and values to best reflect the nation's heritage and showcase its future ambitions. This section highlights the participants' views on how cultural and societal norms impacted on learning and employment outcomes.

Soviet ideals of gender equality were continued under the 1997 Law on Education (Yakhyaeva, 2013), but a lack of HE opportunities for women had contributed to gender imbalances in the workplace. My data revealed that both male and female participants had strong opinions about how Uzbek society determined roles by gender, and also how identities and expectations were mediated by societal pressures. Many of the views expressed seemed to fit gender stereotypes of the suitability of certain roles, or proclivity for certain characteristics. For example, Ansar described how, in his work experience, stereotypical views were reinforced:

> In our culture you can be masculine, you can be pushy, you can shout you can argue with somebody, and they will take you seriously. But if some girl of my age is shouting at our suppliers saying, 'You promised to deliver it on this day, why aren't you delivering?' they will not take her seriously (Ansar).

Ansar went on to give an example of how, in the company where he was working, female employees were better suited to certain roles:

> In brand marketing they had all girls because it was creative things, girls are better at this. In one case they [female employees] were looking at three pictures, all the same, and they said, 'The second one is better,' 'You don't see the difference? How can you work in brand marketing? Look carefully.' They were different colours. It was still blue but a little bit darker. The girls are more prepared for that, there are certain jobs that women fit (Ansar).

An example such as this may be reinforcing pre-existing societal assumptions about gender stereotypes. When discussing his employability journal entries, Ansar explained how a social activity of dance practice and performance helped him 'learn' more about female behaviour.

When you dance with your partner it's different because you have to be disciplined, I learnt a lot of things, I think, about my partner from this activity, and also about women, how they behave. I started seeing when they make decisions based on emotions rather than on logic, especially when they are stressed. If they make decisions when they are screaming or shouting at you when they are angry it doesn't mean she doesn't like you, she has this feeling right now, let her speak, that's it (Ansar).

Although well meaning, and an experience that contributed to the development of his emotional intelligence, this example illustrated how his assumptions of how people behave was driven by gender stereotypes. An earlier conversation with Ansar gave further insight into his view of females in Uzbek society, specifically how cultural expectations can limit opportunities:

In general [females] grow up in a culture where they were prepared to be mothers. For them a good degree is to do something in medicine because then you are more attractive for a potential husband, actually to his parents because they select you. If this girl has a degree in medicine she will be able to take care of children better. I have nieces and they don't see themselves in the business world, in politics, in this tough masculine environment. They think, 'I'm a woman I'm required to sit at home and cook and that's it.' They are blocked by this culture (Ansar).

Participants did, however, describe situations where female WIUT students did not always conform to cultural expectations:

From a cultural perspective, females unfortunately think that they should be sitting at home, and their husband can provide for the family. But the majority of females [at WIUT] probably don't have that mindset. I don't think women's job prospects are limited, but some are perceived as male jobs where women are not so welcome. Most senior managers are male; women maybe think it's

133

too hard to get into management. Maybe this is common around the world (Amaliya).

While issues of gender inequality were recognised as a societal problem, Nosir described how WIUT provided opportunities for students, both male and female, to develop skills that local universities do not provide:

Gender equality is a question [in Uzbekistan]. I believe WIUT gives a platform for women to develop in a way they can feel they're on an equal level, they're even better sometimes. In state universities they go there to find a partner and get married. Outside university I think it depends on the culture of the company. I believe that if a person can do the job that person gets the job (Nosir).

Female students painted a very different picture, with their own career ambitions inhibited by a number of factors such as parental pressure and societal expectations of the role of women:

I'm already 22 years old, [family] expect me to get married. I'm in the field of economics [...] when female graduates come to interview the first question is, 'Will you be able to stay at work more than 12 hours?' There were lots of questions about pressure within the work place, sometimes there's disagreement and the question they ask is, 'How can you handle this negative atmosphere?' Maybe it's not woman's place to argue with a man in this society (Sitora).

Additionally, Munisa commented on the lack of promotional opportunities:

Women here don't usually get promoted. They might spend a lot of time at work, but if there's a man who can occupy the same position 90% of the time it would be the man appointed. We always have to prove that we're better than men; so they'll at least have a look at us (Munisa).

These accounts illustrate the different expectations that employers have of males and females, but one narrative revealed how the prospects of a female employee could be dependent on the status of her husband. Munisa explained how both her parents worked in a large factory for the same state-run company. After doing a lot of overtime to cover for her absent (male) boss, her mother was offered a promotion. However, when the person responsible for facilitating the promotion found out that the husband worked at the same factory, and was earning approximately the same wage, the promotion was put on hold:

> A woman cannot get a higher salary than her husband. My mum was rejected because of that. I felt discriminated, and it's only this year my dad got promoted and my mum too. I think this is illogical, disrespectful (Munisa).

Another insight into how family members can inhibit the progress of female employees was described by Odil. From his own research he found one possible reason for the number of females promoted to managerial positions in the private sector. For many newly married couples it is common to live with the parents of the husband, and this domestic arrangement can put pressure on the couple to conform to cultural expectations of child care:

> From the interviews we've found [females] are limited because of the culture aspect decisions about being promoted. The mother-in-law has influence through the husband, then pressure from husband onto wife. This is a family culture aspect. Even if it's not open or visible, females may feel such pressure, they should come home at a certain time for the children. They are less likely to do extra work (Odil).

Societal pressure for females to get married and have children played a significant role in how females positioned themselves professionally. In my data there were

numerous accounts of how employers discriminated against potential female employees by asking about intentions to get married and have children. This account was typical of the experiences of females applying for jobs:

> Employers might not want to have recently married women as employees. This happened to me, I was looking for a job at a bank. They asked me if I was married, if I had children, if I had a boyfriend. Even when I was looking for a job in the [country x] embassy here in Uzbekistan, the guy [from country x] asked me if I had a boyfriend (Alfiya).

Perhaps the most telling part of Alfiya's experience was that the embassy employee, from a Western European nation, asked about her marital status, adhering to local norms of discriminating against women because of changes in their domestic situation. My data revealed instances such as this in both private and state-run companies, as well as in educational institutions. One participant even mentioned that she had been asked about her marital status during her WIUT interview, but the Uzbek person asking the question was interrupted by a non-Uzbek member of the interviewing panel. Although laws against gender discrimination are supposed to be upheld in Uzbekistan, the experiences of participants reflected a different picture, where females were judged on their suitability for employment based, at least partially, on marital status. If notions of discrimination are engrained on the culture, then this will affect females' attitude to the jobs market. Female students seemed to accept this as a factor in their career development, even to the extent where they empathised with employers who wanted to do what was best for their companies, as illustrated in this exchange:

Munisa   My female boss asked if I was going to marry anytime soon and I said not while I'm studying.

Nasiba	They always ask this. During my internship I heard my [female] boss interviewing other people for a real job, and she would always ask girls about this. In our country it's a standard question.
Munisa	It's not because employers are bad people, but the women leave the job for several years because they have families. It's a bad investment.

Due to societal pressures, females seem to be at considerable disadvantage when seeking employment or promotion. Gender discrimination was described as a cultural norm that was questioned but accepted. It is interesting to note that none of the participants, until specifically asked, discussed their gender as a factor in their career development. Employability models may build in culturally valued knowledge, embedded behaviours, and social fit, but do not often emphasise gender as a key indicator. As described by Stevenson and Clegg (2012), women may face unequal opportunity because of the practices of employers, specifically with caring duties not recognised as having considerable social value and worth. Furthermore, employability models devised in global north settings are not necessarily a good fit for labour markets in other areas where cultural influences and beliefs that reinforce cultural norms impact on employment outcomes.

5.5 Tools that shape activities

In this section I highlight any notable tensions that participants encountered with the tools used in learning activities. An important assumption of AT is that learning does not occur in isolation from actions, but through interactions. Meaningful

understanding, or deep learning, is driven through interaction with mediating artefacts, whose use can be affected by numerous factors such as rules imposed on the activities, availability and perceived usefulness. As noted by Engeström (2001), tensions can occur when restrictions on tool use inhibit the learning environment of subjects. My data, principally through the employability journals and class observations, identified many tools that participants used in activities that contributed to the development of employability skills. Physical tools included those used in the classroom to facilitate reading and writing activities such as books and paper-based handouts; pens, markers, flipcharts, whiteboards; and computer hardware, including tablets and smart phones. The virtual tools identified in the data consisted of computer software for generic use, such as *Excel* that are standard on most computers, and more specialised applications such as *Stata*, used for complex statistical analysis, or *AngularJS*, a front-end web application framework for web/app development. Psychological tools fell mainly into the sphere of language, where abilities in different languages could affect learning outcomes.

5.5.1 Access to tools

Access to information is a vital part of student learning. This information can be transmitted directly, in person, through teaching staff during timetable classes, or indirectly and virtually via university platforms such as intranet and email. Although the necessary information may be available for all students, a contradiction that the data revealed was students' ability and willingness to access it. The University of Westminster in London, like most UK based HEIs, has use of a sophisticated virtual-learning platform (Blackboard, in the case of Westminster, Moodle for many other

institutions) which acts as a repository for all course information, learning materials and assessment guidance. Understanding how to use such platforms is an essential part of student learning, and those unable to navigate them successfully will face challenges to progression. Lecturers, especially those who had teaching and learning experience in the UK, expressed concerns about the systems used at WIUT for sharing learning materials. Odil described how, on his equivalent course in London, everything was more systemised; during seminars, lecturers were mainly concerned with discussing issues that arose through students' understanding of the uploaded material. Students were often directed to discover new information themselves, and were provided with tools to do so via the virtual-learning platform. If the information existed on Blackboard, then lecturers would not spend class time on it. Students at WIUT, however, often relied on the lecturer to convey all necessary information:

> Even if it's on the system students still want you to tell them. One is the cultural attitude of responsibility; another side is how systems are created or how they are user-friendly, how it's effectively used by the students and the teachers. If students aren't ready it's very difficult to make students more independent learners (Odil).

These issues are connected to previously discussed notions of academic acculturation, but a further complication needs to be considered. Although WIUT provides the same qualifications and learning outcomes as Westminster in London, the means of delivering those outcomes and the tools available to do so are not equal. Blackboard is a subscription based platform, and not presently used at WIUT. Access to materials is limited to the WIUT intranet, and in some cases lecturers add materials to their modules through WIUT Moodle, but according to Odil there was

considerable confusion regarding which system should be used. Although Moodle has been available to WIUT since 2017 it is not centrally maintained by any WIUT staff, and the person initially charged with training staff left without being replaced. Conversations with WIUT staff and students revealed that while students liked using Moodle, it was not promoted by the university and was not used for all modules.

Student access to information was problematic, but tensions were also identified in how teaching materials were shared among work colleagues. In AT, division of labour relates to how tasks are distributed within the activity system, and instances in the data reflected power structures among teaching staff. Examples of this were described by Alfiya and Amaliya who both recalled examples of how module leaders did not provide adequate notice of the content of the weekly lectures, meaning lecturers could not relate the subsequent seminars closely enough to the preceding lecture.

> There are problems with the module administration. My first class is on Tuesday, I just follow the material we are sent because usually we've just received this material on Monday afternoon, so I say [to module leader] 'Can you send it beforehand so maybe we can contribute and develop?' We don't even know the topic by Monday afternoon (Amaliya).

Considering that communication skills and working in groups was considered one of the key employability skills by lecturers, it is perhaps ironic that at a teaching level failures in these areas could negatively impact the quality and relevance of some classes. Additionally, Amaliya claimed modules with a high turnover of teaching staff tended to suffer in terms of quality, as communication between the module leader

and new teachers was less effective than on a module that had a stable teaching team.

5.5.2 Language as a learning tool

English is the language of learning at WIUT, but may not be the working language used by graduates as they pursue careers, especially if they find work in Uzbekistan rather than abroad. In the field of economics, Odil stated that students who could speak both Uzbek and Russian would be in greater demand in the local jobs market. This view was shared by Jessica, who as a non-Uzbek speaker found her job prospects limited:

> I know only Russian and English, and many companies have employees speaking only Uzbek and a bit of Russian. They prefer Uzbek speaking people, the number of companies I can apply shrinks (Jessica).

These experiences tie in with ideas of new nation building (Huisman *et al*., 2018), but in this case the elevated status of the national language were to Jessica's disadvantage. Rashid, who in his internship had to coordinate with construction workers who spoke only Uzbek, said that non-Uzbek speakers would find this challenging, and Vlad claimed that speaking Uzbek would be an advantage when entering the local IT field. A common problem highlighted by participants was the difficulty of translating key concepts from English into Uzbek or Russian. Vlad recalled how he tried to learn a new programming language from a Russian book, but could not understand anything even though it was in his native language. Similar experiences were described by students across all five degree courses. Sitora

reported how she faced difficulties in an interview situation because of her inability to translate key concepts from Russian:

> During the classes we use English, but when I communicated with HR of companies, they said they use Russian and Uzbek. They even gave me a list of Russian terms and phrases and asked me to translate to English. It was really difficult; I didn't know the words that were specifically related to economics (Sitora).

Munisa described a similar incident while interviewing for an internship at a local law firm:

> I got asked questions like, 'Do you know what "pinyar" [пеня] is?' This is 'penalty' in contract law but I didn't know it in Russian. It's funny that there was a language barrier, but it was in my own language (Munisa).

Students with experience of working in the local jobs market reported challenges that arose from having English as the language of instruction in their studies. Outside the class, around the university campus, students acknowledged that they almost always spoke either Russian or Uzbek, and this was also the case when chatting to friends in class, or discussing class activities when not directly communicating with staff. During one class observation I noticed that a student was disengaged from the lesson and was only concerned with her mobile phone. I discussed this with the lecturer after the lesson and was informed that this student was an international student who did not speak Uzbek or Russian, and despite attempts to involve her in the classes by asking all students to use English, she remained aloof. Without talking directly to the student concerned it is not possible to make assumptions about other reasons for the lack of engagement, but students who do not speak either Uzbek or Russian may feel excluded from class conversations that are not in

142

English. Field notes from class observations and data from post-observation student questionnaires also revealed insights into language use. It was evident that students spoke English in class when addressing the lecturer or completing tasks that had a performance element such as relating information to the rest of the group. I observed that students often spoke in either Russian or Uzbek when discussing exercises in pairs or small groups, when lack of English vocabulary prevented students from successfully expressing their ideas, or when asking fellow students for further explanation or clarification.

5.5.3 Computer-related artefacts

Being computer literate is an essential feature in the development of employability skills. Although it might be taken for granted that the post-millennials largely comprising the student population at WIUT are adept at navigating the internet, using common software and working with social networking apps, my data revealed several tensions regarding how acquisition and application of technical knowledge was perceived by students, lecturers and employers. Students studying BIS work with a number of different C-family programming languages such as Java, C-Sharp, Objective-C, and AngularJS. Ishoq said that knowing Java and AngualrJS was the minimum for any web developer job. However, the versions of these applications that were used in modules were not always the most up-to-date ones. Nosir and Ishoq expanded on this during a discussion about the AngularJS framework they used in their work projects:

| Ishoq | [WIUT] taught us AngularJS, the first version, but currently we're using AngularJS7, in our [work] projects. AngularJS is four years old. |

Nosir	It was the debut of the Angular framework, but there was a lot of feedback from the development community. They developed it again from zero. That's how different it was.
Ishoq	There's no connection to the original AngularJS anymore.
Nosir	We asked if we could use AngularJS7 in our coursework, the lecturer said ok, but when I was working on the project I realised I couldn't do it with AngularJS 7, I had to go back and use AngularJS.

Although lecturers said they would try and use more up-to-date versions, according to the students the classes were still using versions that were five or six years behind those they were using at work, and they could not see the point of working with these older versions. The courseworks students were given could be completed using the older versions, but it was easier to write the code from scratch. This was because using the older framework meant that the code they had written could not be integrated into other systems. The students felt that if the framework used in the classes was only two years behind the latest release, then those using it could feasibly keep up with the latest working practices.

It was not only BIS students who were required to use software in their work experience. Nasiba explained that during her internship she was expected to use Microsoft Excel to compile a database of clients and cases. Knowledge of this, she thought, would have been more useful than any specialist legal knowledge, and not having used it in her course meant that she had missed out on acquiring what she considered to be a vital practical skill. Students studying Econ/EconF used the

software package Stata for analysing statistical data. In his internship Rishod was expected to use MATLAB, a similar package but one he considered superior to Stata. Although not familiar with MATLAB, Rishod was able to use the general techniques he used in learning Stata, and apply them to MATLAB. Although knowing MATLAB was not a prerequisite for his internship, he felt that learning it should be an option for students on his course. In addition, he felt that it would be helpful if the course were more forward thinking in terms of the software applications that were taught. To compensate for this he said he asked colleagues at work what the latest trends were, and what software was likely to be used over the next few years.

5.5.4 Case studies

Case studies, as described by participants, were documented records of real-life or hypothetical situations faced by businesses. Two tensions regarding case studies were identified; firstly, the availability of local cases; and secondly, the way cases were used in learning activities. Rashid described how in his Marketing module he worked with international case studies of companies, but these did not prepare him well for his internship in the marketing department of a local company. Students and lecturers commented that local case studies were not easy to acquire; a major reason being companies preferring to keep information confidential. Yulia also claimed that the local data they did receive was not always complete or trustworthy:

> For the seminars we tried to work with local data but this is problematic because some data is not available from the state-statistics committee, and anyway we don't believe that it's true data (Yulia).

She acknowledged some local companies were quite open and came to the university to speak to students, but most would not share case-study data. Odil added that he tried to include more local cases in his seminars, but the process of gathering information was time consuming, and the available data were usually incomplete. Odil also linked the use of case studies with the development of soft skills, explaining that at higher levels the cases were more complex and challenging, and application of subject knowledge alone was not enough to provide adequate solutions.

While participants expressed a desire to work with case studies, there was some criticism by lecturers about how students approached case-study tasks. Amaliya described how students were not prepared to read the documentation for international case studies:

> Students are not interested in reading even if it's one page. If we give it to them beforehand they don't read it, the problem with them is it takes time. Sometimes they just say, 'Tell us what the case is about and then we'll discuss it,' (Amaliya).

Ansar, however, explained that the way case studies were presented was not stimulating for the students. He complained that students were not instructed how to approach the cases presented to them:

> We've never been told how to read a case. We're given a case study of Nike and then we discussed what Nike did, that's it. We weren't given cases with certain problems; we weren't proposing solutions to problems (Ansar).

Ansar also suggested how case studies could be both more appealing and practical; at other universities, specifically one in Moscow, he explained how they had case

study championships where companies came to the university and introduced cases for groups of students to work on and provide solutions. According to Ansar this was beneficial because it allowed students to develop their understanding in a pressured but fun environment, and had a number of corollaries:

> Firstly they teach how to approach and analyse case studies, how to develop a strategy depending on the situation. To get a good position at an international company sometimes you have to pass the assessment centre and if you aren't prepared for that it will be difficult. Students also have the opportunity to show themselves off to the company and then [companies] select the best and hire them (Ansar).

Participants affirmed that case studies were an important resource that could help students develop subject knowledge and soft skills, and even provide access to employment opportunities. Although international case studies are available from such databases as Emerald or Ebsco, the relevance of those to the local business environment was not always evident to students, and the way they were presented did not always adequately engage students.

5.5.5 Physical tools that shape classroom dynamics

This section relates to how students and lecturers physically positioned themselves in classroom activities, and how the physical environment of the classroom had the potential to impact student learning. The organisation of physical tools such as classroom furniture impacts instructional behaviours and communicates levels of formality and interaction expected in a classroom setting. During class observations in a number of different classrooms the seating arrangement was in spaced rows of desks, with each desk seating two students. In all except one class students sat next

147

to someone of the same gender, the exception being when two students arrived late together. Row arrangements support a top-down approach to teaching, with circle or cluster arrangements better suited to promoting active learning. In the post-observation interviews lecturers, when probed, commented on the seating arrangements. Yulia expressed her dislike at the furniture layout for both seminar and lecturer rooms, adding that it was not possible to move the desks or chairs and she did not feel she could ask students to move furniture as it was not their job. She compared the current seating arrangements to those in schools, and complained this was not suitable for group work or student-centred learning. In response to this Yulia did say that she would raise the issue of room layout in a future course meeting.

5.6 Community and multi-voicedness

The second principle of AT, multi-voicedness, allows for an analysis of how voices within activity systems can influence and act on the objects of activity. My data identified several key members of the learning community that influenced, either directly or indirectly, the development of students' employability skills. Discussions with students confirmed they believed the responsibility for employability development was their own, but they also relied on support from others in their learning community. In the first generation of AT, Vygotsky (1981) advocated a mediational approach where subjects developed understanding through the influence and interaction of tools and individuals within the ZPD. In the students' activity systems, this included interaction with peers and lecturers. Additionally, socially mediated actions can involve subjects from outside the immediate learning

environment whose actions can facilitate cognitive change within a collective context (Engeström, 1987).

5.6.1 Guest lecturers

My data indicated several instances where the involvement of guest lecturers within learning programmes had a significant effect on students' ability to reflect on their expectations, and in many cases develop their own employability skills. When students join a degree programme they may do so without knowing how the subject relates to work-based practice; this was the case of Jessica, who started her EconF degree without a realistic impression of how it related to employment prospects:

> We had two practical lectures from head of HR of [local] supermarkets on human resource management. In one lecture I learnt so much about employability. It totally shifted my mind about what employers want (Jessica).

She went on to explain how she learnt more from a guest lecture than she could from being the most active student in a regular discussion-based seminar. These views were corroborated by other Econ/EconF students, who also described how they had kept in contact with some of the guest lecturers. As well as gaining some insights into work-based practice, communicating with guest lecturers also fostered students' networking abilities and engaged them with opportunities to develop their social capital. Examples such those illustrated here were invaluable in helping students cultivate their identity in line with their desired career trajectories (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017); empowering them to be proactive in the labour market through engagement with the experiences and personal narratives of professionals.

It was not only the participation of guest lecturers that impacted on students' employability. In his employability journal Ansar documented an activity where he organised the recruitment of alumni to appear as guest lecturers:

> I worked with a production manager […] It was a valuable experience as I learned that it's not easy to keep audiences interested and involved and at the same time pay enough attention to the guests (Ansar).

Working on the same project, Sitora explained how in the process of contacting potential guest lecturers she gained valuable experience in a number of areas:

> I talked to the HR of companies so I know what kind of skills students should have when they want to work with particular companies. Now I have good experience of working with HR of these companies (Sitora).

As emphasised by Tomlinson (2017, p.342) access to wider networks can be 'significantly enabling' as students engage with the gatekeepers to employment opportunities.

Many lecturers come into education from a professional background, and although policies to promote employability can be introduced at national, university, faculty or course level, implementation often lies with the lecturers in the classroom. If lecturers do not translate their professional experience into meaningful classroom practices then opportunities to learn within the ZPD are potentially lost. My data revealed students appreciated instances where lecturers connected their own work experience, past or present to current student learning. In addition, by drawing on the expertise of alumni willing to share their experiences with current students, it may be possible to bridge the gap between the theories taught in class and the

employability skills needed in the workplace. Yulia described how collaboration between lecturer, guest lecturer and alumni created a successful learning experience for students:

> We invited guest speakers and our former graduates who are engaged in the tourism industry. Having the practical experience of my colleague, who worked in travel agencies, and my experience, plus another alumni working as a consultant in the World Bank, we have this blend of practice and theory from different sectors (Yulia).

When lecturers tried to close the perceived gap between theories taught in class and work in practice, students recognised it as a valuable learning experience.   Within AT, learning is thought to develop through the physical relations between people, and activities such as the one described above position the development of employability skills not only as an active individual construction process by the students, but also a process of acculturation through the shared experiences of lecturers, alumni and employers. The acquisition of employability skills in this sense is through interaction between subjects, as well as interaction between subjects and the objects of the activity. As described by Reid *et al*. (2008), links between communities of practice and pedagogy to develop professional skills create strong notions of professional identity.

5.6.2 Extracurricular activities and work experience

While having work experience through paid employment, internships or volunteering is well documented as an effective way to develop employability skills (Cranmer, 2006), participants recorded many other activities in their employability journals. These included attending job interviews, organising club and conference events,

151

mentoring new students during orientation week, and various social events. This section draws on examples from these contexts that created notable tensions around the theme of multi-voicedness.

Nasiba attended the WIUT drama club for two years, and during one of these years she was assistant to the director, an experienced WIUT lecturer. This role included organising the rehearsal schedule, preparing the rehearsal rooms, and reporting problems back to the director. These tasks helped Nasiba develop many skills, including teamworking, motivating peers, managing stress, developing practical solutions, and time-management. When asked if these skills could have been developed in classroom situations she thought it was not likely, especially those skills that involved working with others, as class activities tended to be more individual. For Nasiba, drama club was a social activity which she enjoyed very much and profited from in terms of personal development, with both the organisational and performing aspects helping her improve her confidence. Her parents, however, did not see it this way:

> My family are really against drama club. My mum asked me not to go next year, she asked me to find some useful job that will help me in the future. When I finish university, I won't have such an opportunity, and this is the time I would like to use it. My family don't think it's a useful activity, they didn't come and see the play, they don't take it seriously (Nasiba).

This lack of family support for non-work or study-related activities caused distress for Nasiba. Interestingly, none of the male students reported lack of support for extracurricular activities from families, whose choices were unchallenged. Families

152

may be reluctant to invest in the education of female children (Yakhyaeva, 2013), and this example highlighted the perceptions that parents had about the value of extracurricular activities. Although participants in the drama club received a certificate of appreciation at the end of the year, something which can be shown to prospective employers as recognition of participation, this was not the case for all activities that students participated in. For example, Munisa described how her work at a sporting association was undocumented:

> I didn't sign any contract. They wouldn't let me put anything in what they call their labour book. I didn't get any recognition; no one would believe that I worked there. It was a good experience, but I didn't get any money or formal employment record (Munisa).

Participants noted that official documentation of activities was something that was often required by prospective employers, and these were sometimes given by WIUT for outstanding achievements in extracurricular activities:

> If we do something outstanding we get some certification of participation or acknowledgements. During interviews we can explain to employers what we've done, but without official papers they would not take it seriously. They really want proof of what you've done; a certificate from the university (Sitora).

These examples illustrated how even though extracurricular activities may play a vital role in student development, lack of support or official recognition can underplay their relative importance.   Clark *et al*. (2015) ascertained that most employers felt (in the UK context) that the choice of which extracurricular activities to pursue was not important, 'less important than what one does within that activity is how well one communicates one's achievements to recruiters,' (*ibid*, p.144). My data confirmed that students believed that their extracurricular activities were beneficial for

developing skills, but employers often required documented evidence of achievements.

5.6.3 Cultural norms in local work practices

In the post-Soviet era the restoration of traditional Uzbek values became the focus of everyday life. Many of these values were developed through increased deference to traditions of Islamic education, especially those associated with tolerance, respect for elders and subordination to authorities (Yakhyaeva, 2013). In my data there were two key examples from students that highlighted tensions regarding respect from elders. Ishoq and Nosir own an IT company where they take on contracts to develop software for local companies, specifically transportation management systems. In one particular contract with a local government office they were asked to reduce the cost of the work:

> They wanted to decrease the price and reduce the time for the job. They think programming is easy, they say: 'You're young, not experienced, and don't need a lot of money.' They want us to do our job, but they don't want to pay us. They were saying, 'We're doing you a favour,' (Ishoq).

When asked what they thought the reasons for this were, they were certain it was cultural, and as young and inexperienced workers they were not respected by older people, even though the students' level of technical expertise was far superior. The 'older' people in this case were still only aged around 30, but Nosir went on to explain how current graduates were better equipped to deal with technological problems:

To solve the problems they are faced with, new technologies have to be used, and who knows those things? Only the young people, but they don't understand that (Nosir).

These examples illustrated employers often viewed students as subordinates, when in reality it was the students who had superior skills and knowledge. Ishoq and Nosir compared this with their experiences at a *hackathon,* an event where coders form teams, build programs, pitch ideas and provide solutions for potential investors. Over 48 hours, teams consisting of programmers, designers, marketers, entrepreneurs, and project managers develop creative ideas into working prototypes. One particular event was held in Tashkent:

The Estonian organisers helped us all the time. Regardless of our age; they wanted us to succeed in our projects. So what I want to say is Estonia compared to Uzbekistan, they give more emphasis on their youngsters (Nosir).

As a caveat to this, Ishoq and Nosir remarked they had recently been contacted by a thirteen-year-old asking for an internship at their company: 'He knows as much as we do, we're going to call him,' (Ishoq).

5.6.4 Relevance of WIUT careers centre

In order to have access to work opportunities, students may depend on a number of different sources. These can include family connections, networks developed through interactions with peers, and contacts that are provided by the immediate learning environment, either directly through lecturers in timetabled classes, or indirectly through the university's careers centre. The WIUT careers centre was set up in 2007, but, as acknowledged by those currently working there, did not change

155

much until recently. In the academic year 2018-19 it developed some new initiatives where employability was:

> […] looked at from the perspective of personal and professional development of the students, and potentially growing collaboration with the faculties in terms of embedding employability skills in the curriculum, broadening the engagement of employers with the university (Olga).

My data suggested limited effective use of the careers centre, so these developments were much needed. The first problem was the way information was communicated. Although the careers centre claimed to have around 2000 followers on various social networks, it was not clear how many of these were current students. Rishod noted that much of the information received from the careers centre was 'spam'; a lot of content was sent but it was difficult to see what was relevant. Students' first encounter with the services offered by the careers centre was often when they were required to do coursework that involved investigating local businesses. This point relates back to previous comments from lecturers regarding increased student engagement when tasks were related to assessments. Staff at the careers centre recognised that there was limited awareness among lecturers and students of the kinds of initiatives they were promoting, but they hoped that new ideas, such as an enhanced alumni network, would to lead to a centre that inspired and engaged, rather than one seen as the distributor of general information vaguely related to work.

5.6.5 Critique of employability journal entries

By completing entries in their employability journals participants were able to highlight the kinds of activities that they thought contributed to the development of employability skills. A comparison of entries by course gave a further insight into how lecturers and students understood how employability was embedded in the courses, and how students recognised the importance of extracurricular and social activities not directly connected to their course.

In their journals BIS lecturers included activities that were largely concerned with writing computer code, while using tools such as computers projectors and whiteboards to share and discuss information. Activities were mainly individual, although the development of teamworking skills was mentioned where students were expected to learn from each other's work. The skills which students developed in these activities were, according to lecturers, hard skills related to coding, game development, project planning and the application of specialised models. Connected activities such as reflecting on feedback were also noted as helping to develop areas of metacognition and more general analytical skills. In contrast, students recorded journal entries that were almost exclusively focused on extra-curricular activities, work experience, and real life experiences. These included the previously mentioned cases of the *hackathon* event, negotiations with clients, and interactions with colleagues in genuine work situations. The principal reason for not recording classroom activities in the journal was the use of outdated software and lack of soft skills developed in class-based learning.

Similarly, lecturers on Econ/EconFin focused more on the technical skills and less on communicative skills. Students also recognised that their classes did not have a significant amount of social interaction, except during some tutorials. The use of databases for research purposes was noted as a valuable skill, although students commented that in order to navigate these successfully, they required more specific training relating to language. Both Rishod and Sayyora included activities in their journals that were passive and solitary, such as reading books and watching video tutorials. Rishod included out of class social interactions with peers when organising groupwork. He commented that learning about other students' knowledge and abilities helped him realise his own capabilities, specifically linking this to the development of his social capital. This included informal discussions with friends regarding job opportunities, increased knowledge of potential workplaces leading to an enhanced awareness of the jobs market and his own positioning towards it. Sayyora's journal also included activities that related to her own positioning in the jobs market, in this case home research looking at the average salaries of graduates in her discipline, although she did not link this to a particular employability skill.

Lecturers and students on Law recorded classroom activities that focused primarily on spoken communication, argumentation, and critical written and spoken skills. Alfiya noted in her journal that these were important general employability skills applicable to any line of work, not just the legal profession. Munisa documented how role plays in class activities, with help from peers, contributed to her increased confidence in negotiating. This was put into practice when she made the decision to

leave her part-time job after not being given an official contract. The factors she mentioned here were an increased awareness of her worth in the jobs market and enhanced self-assertion. An interesting point here is class activities that contributed to these skills were undertaken in English, but practical application of them was in Russian. In addition, she noted that the skill of time management and prioritising contributed to her decision to put her academic work before all other commitments. In terms of extracurricular activities, Nasiba noted how her duties with the drama club contributed to her negotiating, teamworking and organisational skills. She linked these skills to being of importance in both producing academic assignments and preparing legal documents.

Lecturers and students on BsAd emphasised activities that involved teamworking and practical skills, often combined. For example, Yulia detailed an activity that involved teams of students making a 'product' (in this case artistic designs fashioned from post-it-notes). In the activity students were allocated roles as either workers or managers, with the former giving appraisals on the latter in terms of their organisational and motivational skills. Yulia added that activities such as this can develop many integrated skills, including communication strategies and time management skills. Students on BsAd placed a greater emphasis on social and extracurricular activities. Ansar included a wide range of out-of-class activities in his journal, including social meetings in cafes to discuss coursework (problem solving, teamworking); rehearsing for a dance performance (time and stress management, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills); and organising a programme of guest

lecturers (negotiation, presentation and communication skills). Rashid noted how his role as mentor to first year students improved his leadership, planning and communication skills.

5.7 Summary

This chapter gave voice to participants, with precedence given to areas relating to employability where tensions arose. RQ1 was addressed, with lecturer and student understandings of employability-related concepts illustrated through quotation, summary and analysis. Individual or group actions can be seen as relatively independent, but when examined in the context of interacting activity systems, historically accumulating structural tensions can be identified. These tensions are further explored in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 Synthesis and Discussion

This chapter addresses RQs2 and 3 by drawing together the findings from Chapter 5 in a joint-activity system showing how employability was developed by students, how lecturers mobilised their perceptions of employability to facilitate the development of students' employability skills, and how tensions and contradictions arose from the joint-activity system.

6.1 The joint-activity system

The second principle of AT, multi-voicedness, acknowledges subjects have their own complex intertwining lives and histories, each representing multiple points of view, interests and conventions (Engeström, 1987). The activity systems described in this chapter represent a model for third generation AT, reflected in two overlapping systems of students and lecturers within the bounded system of the university. Movement and collaboration in an activity is fluid, and the principle of multi-voicedness allows consideration of how some voices might have more prominence over others, even though those voices may be less active in the activity system. For example, the parent of a student paying the education fees may be hegemonic in deciding the student's future, irrespective of the students' wishes. In this sense the object of an activity can be affected by voices from outside the bounded system, as these voices can create tensions that impact on the subject and the object of the activity system.

The object of the students' activity system was the goal of learning, which included subject-specific and general learning, both of which contribute to the award of a degree. Graduation from the university with a degree was the ultimate outcome of the students' activity system. Learning was demonstrated in improved performance in assessments that contributed to the award. However, much of the learning, for example in areas of self-development and non-subject-specific soft skills, was derived from the multitude of experiences in which the students engaged, and was often not measurable against the grade-related criteria of assessments. Lecturers had two objects; firstly, the delivery of effective teaching, which facilitated the learning of students; and secondly, the improvement of teaching practice that would result in better student learning and personal career progression.

All student participants recognised the development of employability skills as a key element in their academic development, irrespective of whether this was an explicit outcome of their degree course. Likewise, all lecturer participants claimed that developing students' employability skills was an integral part of their teaching, although the extent this was made evident was not always clear in the learning activities. Taking this into account, the development of students' employability skills can be considered as a shared object in the joint-activity system. Figure 6.1 is a representation of this activity system, where subjects had different and multiple objects in their separate activity systems, but a shared object in a joint-activity system. In order to keep the visual representation of the activity systems as clear and simple as possible, I have combined all the possible individual activity systems

of the participants across the five degree courses into the joint-activity system of all students and lecturers who took part in my research. This approach was also taken by Golovushkina and Milligan (2013) in the activity system of employability development of doctoral students. The joint-activity system portrays a representation of the complexity of collective, tool-mediated, object-orientated activity at WIUT. Some elements of the joint-activity system may be more relevant to certain subjects; for example, a lecturer who studied or taught outside of Uzbekistan would have a different perspective on cultural norms than someone without international experience. Likewise, a Law student used different learning tools than a BIS student.

Figure 6.1: Joint-activity system for students and lecturers on WIUT undergraduate degree courses. Based on Engeström (2001)
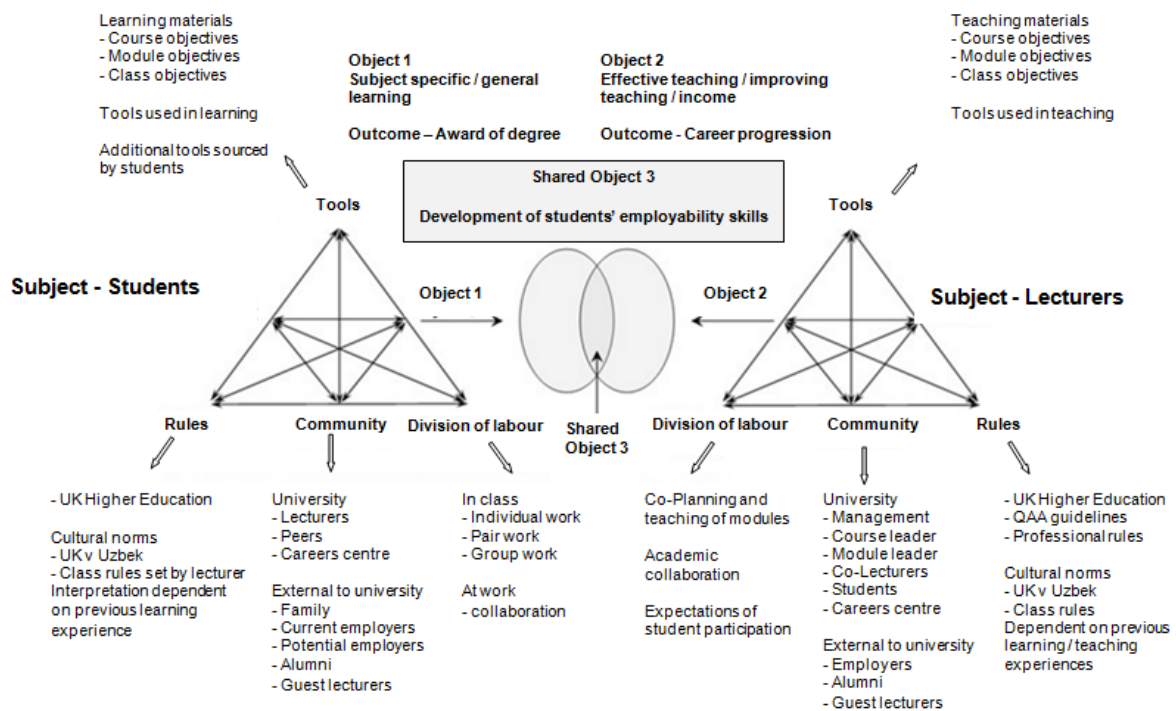
The joint-activity system Figure 6.1 illustrates interaction between lecturers and students, and shows how both worked towards different objects (1, 2), but with a shared object (3); the development of students' employability skills. The respective outcomes can be considered the points at which subjects exit the activity system. For students this is graduation, while for lecturers it may be considered as more cyclical, where the object of improving teaching and gaining experience may result in career progression. This progression may be dependent on other factors outside this joint-activity system, for example engagement in research or finding alternative employment.

The tools which were used in achieving these objects were supplied by the lecturer in the form of course, module and class objectives which helped define the object; or were tools used in the manipulation of the object, for example, computer hardware and software. While the lecturers or the university provided tools for the students to use, students sometimes sourced their own tools for help with their learning, but not all students had the same access to these tools. Students and lecturers were expected to adhere to rules within the university, both academic and social. The academic rules were stipulated by UK HE regulations to regulate student progression. Other rules, such as expected behaviour in classes, were dependent on individual lecturers which varied according to their previous learning and teaching experiences. Rules were also open to varying interpretations from students depending on their expectations.

The community within which the students and lecturers operated covered two areas, those within the university and those external to it. Although the university has a physical location (WIUT is located on one enclosed campus) the subjects of the activity system were part of a wider learning community which included families, current and potential employers, and alumni, all of whom potentially influenced the subjects and changed the ways they acted upon objects. The extent to which members of the community influenced subjects was also dependent on how much power they exerted, and a subject's position within the power structure potentially led to tensions.

Division of labour in the joint-activity system illustrated the roles assigned to, or taken by, students and lecturers. For students, roles were negotiated in the learning context or arbitrarily decided, either by the lecturer or the learners themselves. For lecturers, roles such as planning, preparation and teaching of modules were assigned according to academic hierarchy. In classes, roles assigned by lecturers to students depended on factors such as expectations of student performance, including specific knowledge of how students interacted with each other. A useful distinction to be drawn here is how students perceived their roles at university differently from work contexts. While the division of labour in class activities were classified in terms of being individual, pair or group, in work contexts they were more frequently described as collaborative.

Fundamental to the application of AT is the examination of tensions and contradictions that exist within activity systems. Systemic tensions arise as different

elements of an activity system interact, and an understanding of these tensions can identify inefficiencies in the learning process. In addition, better understanding can provide opportunity for promoting empathy among stakeholders, inspiring innovation within the learning community (Engeström, 2009). Figure 6.2 expands on Figure 6.1 and shows contradictions that were identified in the joint-activity system of lecturers and students. According to Kuutti (1996, p.34), the term contradiction is used to indicate 'an unfit within elements […] between different activities or different development phases of [the] same activity.' He notes that these contradictions show themselves as 'problems, ruptures, breakdowns and clashes,' (*ibid*). As an activity system develops and expands these contradictions can become more systemic and affect learning actions. The tensions in Figure 6.2 are each listed against one of the corners of the subject's activity system triangle. Further analysis of these connections, using Foot's (2014) discussion of the role of contradictions in learning actions as a guiding principle, has revealed different levels of contradictions.

The joint-activity system represents the complexity of subjects working on shared objects, and illustrates how social and cultural factors can shape participation and performance. The next section highlights the tensions and contradictions within the joint-activity system, specifically those related directly to the development of students' employability skills.

Figure 6.2: Joint-activity system for students and lecturers on WIUT undergraduate degree courses showing tensions and contradictions related to employability development. Based on Engeström (2001)
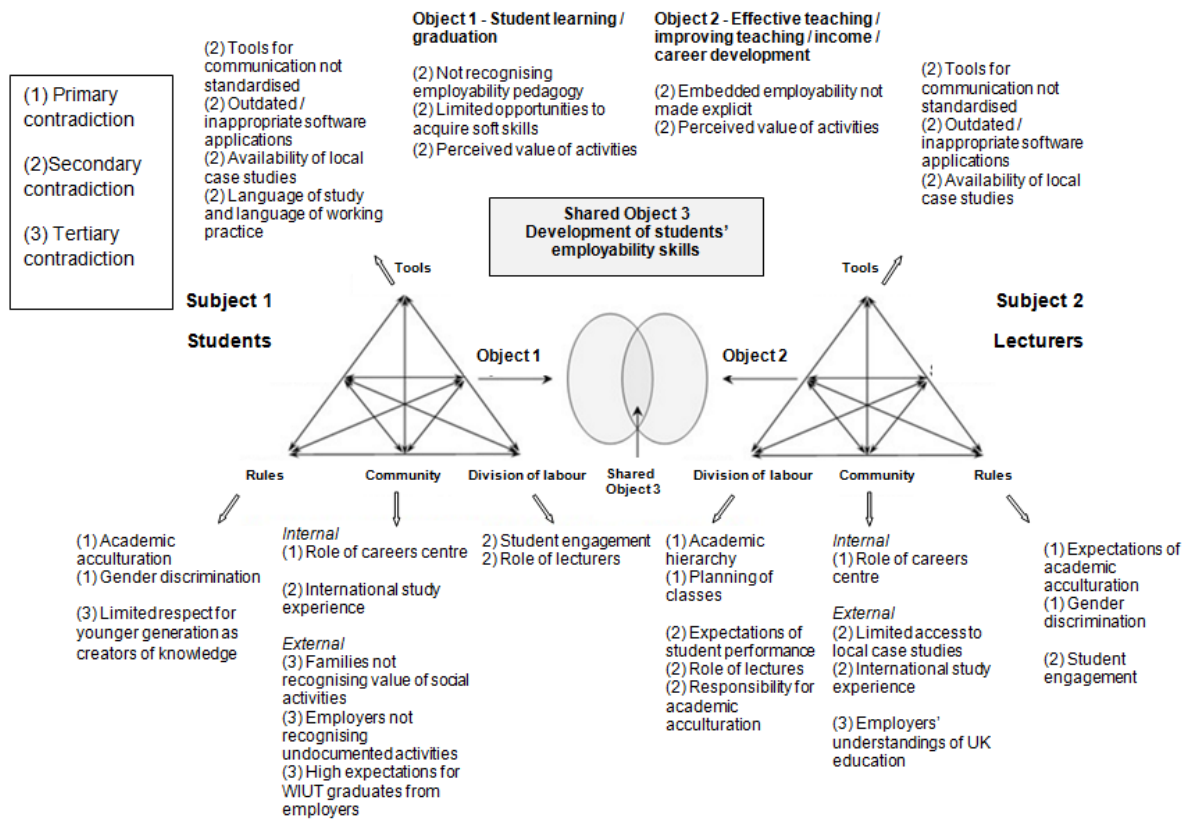
6.2 Primary contradictions

Engeström (2001) identified four levels of contradictions and these are elaborated on here with specific reference to my findings. Primary contradictions in activity systems are best understood when related to the economic concepts of value and exchange. Work and workers are considered as commodities in a capitalist economic system, and internal contradictions in activity systems are represented when there are discrepancies between the values of exchange within the six nodes of the activity system triangle (Engeström, 1987). At WIUT, lecturers are employed to provide education to fee paying students, and they work within a socio-economic system that

gives financial reward for their services. However, increasing operational costs that are inevitable in a developing market-based economy with a high rate of inflation, 16.5% in 2019 (IMF, 2019), means the university is continually forced to reassess how to balance its limited resources with the objects of its principle activities; providing education and generating enough revenue to sustain operations. At the same time, the objects of the students; learning, graduating and improved employability, can only be achieved if the needs of the lecturers in the joint-activity system are met.

6.2.1 Academic hierarchy

A notable feature of primary contradictions is they are 'continually present and serve as a foundation for other levels of contradiction,' (Foot, 2014, p.340). In addition, while these contradictions can be addressed and temporarily resolved, the primary contradiction will always remain. Examples of this include tensions related to academic hierarchy, as superiors place more and more demands on their charges. Tensions may be temporarily or individually resolved over a short period of time, but each lecturer's dynamic relationship with module or course leaders affects the perceived value and exchange value inherent in the system. Primary contradictions are permanent in the joint-activity system, and as new subjects continually join and leave the joint-activity system, the primary contradictions keep the joint-activity system in a constant state of tension which is evident in everyday contexts. Such primary contradictions included the perceived lack of academic freedom of some lecturers, responsibility for the academic acculturation of students, and that teaching materials were not made available to lecturers sufficiently in advance of classes.

Kontinen (2013) described how, in a learning cycle, primary contradictions are evident in the 'need stage' (p.113), where subjects were engaged in the process of questioning. This was evident in my data, as the employability journals were intended to help participants reflect on and reconsider their learning and teaching objectives. The interviews also provided a platform for participants to voice concerns, some of which revealed primary contradictions where subjects were required to take on unwanted roles, or had to act in ways against their core principles or beliefs. For example, when lecturers were obliged to use teaching materials they did not believe were fit for purpose, or when students unwillingly attended classes because they thought not attending would look bad for them, even though there was no attendance requirement. Engeström and Sannino (2010) noted that the object of an activity will always have these internal contradictions, but practical engagement with such contradictions is necessary for expansive learning.

6.2.2 Gender discrimination

Despite being a recurring theme in my data, gender discrimination was not a topic that participants readily raised. When prompted, however, they were prepared to share experiences. This in itself suggests that discussions around gender discrimination are not in the public domain, and female participants seemed to accept the *status quo* as a feature of Uzbek society. Uzbekistan is a signatory to the 1981 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, but the experiences of female of participants did not demonstrate equality in employment opportunities. As a systemic tension this can be attributed to the *de*

facto undervaluing of females in the workforce, largely due to restrictions that stem from societal expectations of the role of women regarding childcare.

While male students were mainly confident in their pursuit of establishing a professional identity and gaining the necessary skills, females were more likely to feel inadequate and underprepared, especially when considering a list of skills or attributes by which to measure themselves. Female participants, both students and lecturers, accepted that if they chose to pursue a professional career then this decision would likely be challenged by family, and the expectations of women's abilities and potential was limited by the cultural norms. The societal pressures exerted on women were evident as female students undervalued their own contribution and value in both work-experience contexts and in extracurricular activities. This is in agreement with Stevenson and Clegg (2012), who argued that such undervaluing inhibits the development of professional identities and social capital. Although gender parity in education is a priority of the incumbent government, Central Asian countries do not have a track record of promoting feminist ideologies, as this is thought to be 'an idea born purely of Western propaganda and absolutely not suitable for the Eastern Muslim societies,' (Yakhyaeva, 2013, p.299).

6.2.3 Responsibility for academic acculturation

In TNE it has been acknowledged that students and staff may face challenges as they acculturate to a UK HE system (Smith, 2017). Data from lecturers indicated an

assumption that students' acculturation into a different education system was supposed to be addressed during the brief induction week, but many students were still expecting lecturers to behave the way their teachers had in school. This primary contradiction stems from one of the tenets of TNE; that education programmes and institutional capital can be transferred to a different place (Leung & Waters, 2013). There may also be challenges associated with opportunities for students to feedback their experiences due to cultural norms regarding giving and receiving critiques, with a lack or support or training in such matters leading to unheard student voices. The TNE toolkit (Smith, 2017) addressed ways UK HEIs could help travelling staff acculturate to new working environments, but there was little mention of academic acculturation of students, or advice on with whose responsibility this was. Furthermore, acculturation of local staff to UK HE norms also needs to be factored in. This primary contradiction led to secondary contradictions regarding expectations of student performance and understandings of the role of the lecturer, addressed in section 6.3.2.

6.2.4 Role of careers centre

In its mitigation, the careers centre at WIUT, at the time of data collection, was in a transitional period, and students' and lecturers' limited awareness of its services was possibly due to this. Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) reported that TNE students viewed careers support services as a place which could help them find employment, rather than a resource to increase their employability. My data showed that students primarily used the careers centre, if at all, towards the end of level 5 when looking for intern opportunities, or requiring company information for coursework research.

There was little consideration that the careers centre could be a hub for developing skills. This is possibly due to students' low expectations on matters regarding career guidance, with support coming primarily from family. The future aim of the new careers centre is to communicate its services more clearly to lecturers and students, and initiate collaboration with alumni. In accordance with Trede *et al*. (2012), WIUT was not the primary actor in developing students' professional identity, acting more as a bridge between academic and work-related practice.

6.3 Secondary contradictions

Secondary contradictions arise when two or more nodes of an activity system interact and create conflict. If these conflicts are ignored they may escalate and create a double bind where all possible solutions are equally unacceptable to subjects, defined as 'a contradiction which uncompromisingly demands qualitatively new instruments for its resolution,' (Engeström, 1987 p.175). When secondary contradictions are identified, preferably at an early stage before they escalate, there is potential for subjects of the activity to confront the issues and rethink practices to alleviate tensions. Examples of secondary contradictions were most prevalent when tools constrained the subject in moving towards the shared object of the joint-activity system.

6.3.1 Contradictions between subjects and object of activity

i. Students not recognising employability pedagogy

Although the data established subjects were working towards a shared object; the development of students' employability skills, the degree to which this was recognised varied. For example, in two observed Law classes both lecturers noted in the post-observation questionnaire that there were elements of the lesson that contributed to students' employability skills, including communication and presentation skills, critical thinking and teamworking. However, 17 of the 30 students present thought that the lessons did not contribute to their employability. In a BsAd lesson, where the main focus of activity was group research and presentation, only three of 12 students identified group work or communication as a skill that was developed in the lesson, despite all members of the class participating in the presentation element of the lesson. In this class the aims of the lesson were made explicit by the lecturer at the start, but several students missed this as they arrived late. Although the general learning outcomes were described, there was no mention of how the practical elements of the lesson were linked to employability. An interesting point noted from one Law student's post-observation questionnaire was the lecturer providing examples from his own work experience was a valuable element of the lesson. Data from student interviews confirmed this, especially if the lecturer was currently engaged in work-related practice. The lack of recognition of embedded employability was not only limited to classroom practice, as evidenced by students not wanting to take part in field trips to local businesses as they did not see how it would contribute to coursework marks.

ii. Limited opportunity to acquire soft skills in Business Information Systems

Comparison of course documents and interview data revealed further contradictions related to the development of employability skills. This was evident on BIS, where descriptions of learning outcomes included working effectively in teams, negotiating, using communication to persuade and convince, and reflecting on outcomes and personal experience to improve performance. In the interviews, BIS students recognised these as key employability skills, but did not record any examples of these in their employability journals when referring to classroom activities. In contrast, the employability journal of Vlad made many references to these learning outcomes. In mitigation of this, course documentation claimed that the course was designed to offer opportunities to engage with industry before graduation, so that students could develop skills alongside the ones from the rest of the course. This course, perhaps more than others at WIUT, is based largely on hard skills, specifically programming and coding. The lack of opportunities to acquire soft skills in BIS core modules was offset by participation in external activities, such as the previously discussed *hackathon.*

iii. Subjects' perceived value of activities

Students confirmed they were less likely to attend classes that did not relate directly to coursework, and lecturers recognised and accepted this. In several classes that I observed the lecturers told me beforehand that there might not be many students present due to coursework deadlines and the proximity of exams. As observed by Massingham and Herrington (2006), non-attendance does not always equate to reduced student performance, but if a trend towards non-attendance is allowed to

continue at WIUT, then this may become the norm. My data suggested that students were strategic in their attendance, but also retrospectively valued class activities that were later found to be applicable in work-related practices. An example of this was Munisa reflecting on skills that she acquired in a research based module, despite the lecturer not recognising how this could be related to employability.

6.3.2 Contradictions between rules and division of labour

i. Expectations of student performance

ii. Different understandings of role of the lecturer

iii. Student engagement

The connection between these three contradictions is a lack of common understanding between students and lecturers of each other's role in the learning process. A shared understanding of roles is fundamental in pedagogical practice; for example, lecturers frequently commented on the lack of student reading, while students complained about boring classes. Although it could be argued that these general complaints are not linked to employability, I would argue that an acceptance of the skills agenda and a focus on individual responsibility is a contributing factor. While many lecturers emphasised their role was as a learning facilitator, it was evident that many of their students still did not fully grasp this. As mentioned previously, these tensions likely arose from the primary contradiction of responsibility for academic acculturation, and interestingly was not only limited to students; my data showed several cases of lecturers bemoaning the fact that, due to a lack of overseas teaching or learning experience, colleagues were delivering classes in an

authoritative and didactic fashion that was not demonstrating a pedagogical distinctiveness that TNE is associated with. In line with findings of Mellors-Bourne *et al.* (2015) there was a link between the involvement of staff with international experience and pedagogical distinctiveness. An awareness of this distinctiveness, however, was a contributing factor in students choosing WIUT. Here lies the contradiction; students chose WIUT for its pedagogical distinctiveness yet often failed to adapt to the learning environment; or students adapted to the learning environment but were discouraged from participation because of rote teaching techniques from some lecturers. In interviews I raised the question of the *Student Charter* (University of Westminster, 2019), a document published by the University of Westminster in London aimed at informing students of what was expected of them as members of the university learning community. I was not surprised that none of the participants were aware of this, as from my own experience very few students or staff in London knew about it either. The charter is a contract learning document that emphasises how students can benefit from a coordinated approach to supporting the development of employability-related skills, helping them become highly employable, globally engaged, and socially responsible (*ibid*, 2019). Points on the charter include; engaging in and contributing to activities, attending and participating in all learning activities, and proactively engaging with systems to improve the university. It is unlikely, however, that exposure to the Student Charter would resolve the contradictions discussed here. Students might benefit more from an understanding that engagement itself can lead to improved levels of employability through the process of learning.

6.3.3 Contradictions between tools and community

i. Language of study and language of working practice

WIUT students often had a competitive advantage over graduates from local universities regarding English language skills. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that the students were, in most cases, required to acquire and demonstrate their subject knowledge in a foreign language, and additionally learn new concepts and theories that may not directly translate into local languages, or conform to local cultural norms. Students entering WIUT may only have the minimum IELTS English language requirement, and although it is expected that language skills will improve in three years of study, the environment is not comparable to the full immersion of international students studying at a UK university. To exacerbate this, students noted that some lecturers did not possess strong English language skills. From my observation of classes, students spoke English when addressing the lecturer, but often spoke either Uzbek or Russian when working together in pairs or groups. Students reported they rarely spoke English outside the classroom, and anecdotally, from my many visits to WIUT over the past seven years, I have almost never heard students speaking English in non-teaching settings such as the canteen, study rooms or around campus. Outside the university, students involved in internships or in part-time jobs noted that English was rarely used in the local environment, and several admitted the inability to translate key concepts or ideas into Russian had caused problems during interviews or work situations.

ii. Tools for communication not standardised

Methods of communication between lecturers and students were an area of contention, with no standardisation in the use of Moodle or the university intranet. Factors that contributed to this included a lack of central maintenance and insufficient promotion of the benefits of using such platforms. Despite students expressing a willingness to engage with Moodle, my data revealed many lecturers were not proactive in using it. Reasons for this could stem from the primary contradiction of academic hierarchy, where there was no agreement about how Moodle could be best utilised across a course or modules. This contradiction of lack of standardisation in communication also impacted on the effectiveness of other areas of the university that related to employability, for example, promoting the services of the careers centre, or notifying students about work opportunities. The tool that was frequently cited in student employability journals as a source of useful information was *Telegram messenger*. However, although there were over 2000 subscribers to the careers centre *Telegram* channel it was not clear how many of these were current students and more likely to benefit from employability-related notifications.

iii. Availability of local case studies

Case studies were recognised as an important learning tool, but limited availability of local company data meant a tendency to use international companies. Findings in this area were in line with previous studies that have shown students' perception of the value of case studies can be culturally dependent (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010). For example, when working with international cases, students' lack of practical

experience and a background of passive learning might constrain learning outcomes. In addition, students who do not intend to seek employment abroad might not see the relevance of working with abstract data bearing little perceived relevance to the local environment. Lecturers also acknowledged use of local case study data was compromised by lack of transparency with the available data, although with funding opportunities becoming available for those willing to produce local case studies, and more transparency in the local business customs, this contradiction may become less problematic in the future. Here, the willingness of alumni currently employed in the local labour market to feedback and engage with current students could play a vital role.

6.3.4 Contradiction between tools, object and community

i Outdated/inappropriate software applications

This contradiction mainly affected BIS students, who were expected to become proficient in a number of computer applications. Not giving students opportunities to work with current versions of applications could hinder them in the jobs market, especially if versions used in class are several years out-of-date. One of the learning outcomes on BIS level 6 is to analyse current trends in technology and suggest appropriate resources and tools for business problems. Interestingly, the level 6 participants appeared to be doing exactly this in their working practice; using AngularJS7 to solve real problems in the contracts they were working on. As it was not possible for students to use this version in their coursework they felt limited in what they could achieve. These students may not, however, be representative of the rest of the cohort; and those not engaged in real working practice may face greater

179

challenges as they enter the jobs market. Students on other courses shared the view that a more forward-looking approach to the use of computer-related tools would serve them better in their employment prospects.

With constant updates and innovations in software, web applications and frameworks, graduates who are forward thinking in terms of computer artefacts will be at a considerable advantage when it comes to both acquiring and performing in a job. The courses at WIUT were relatively static in the use of computer-related artefacts, and although students' hard skills were developed when using the available artefacts, an increased awareness of current market standards would help when transitioning to working environments. While it was understood that resources might not be available to purchase licenses for software, or update the existing hardware, students who engaged in internships and work experience could feed back current trends to their courses.

6.3.5 Contradictions between community and object

i. International experience

Internationalisation of learning programmes has been a goal of universities over recent years (Jones & De Wit, 2012), with many universities measuring their degree of internationalisation in terms of ranking points for the number of overseas students and staff (Jones & Killick, 2013). At WIUT in 2018-19 the number of non-Uzbek undergraduate students accounted for less than 1% of the student population, and only 5% of the total teaching staff were non-Uzbek (Table 3.1). By quantifying

internationalisation, universities are in danger of not considering the educational benefits to students of having a diverse learning environment that incorporates multi-cultural values. Both students and staff noted, however, that although WIUT offered a radically different learning experience to local universities, it was not a substitute for mobility. Additionally, different levels of international experience of lecturers manifested themselves in primary contradictions such as academic hierarchy and notions of academic freedom. Despite this, and also despite many WIUT staff and students not having the opportunity to study, work or even travel abroad, there is an argument that WIUT does produce internationalised graduates due to the promotion of multi-cultural values. As discussed by De Wit and Jones (2014), interpretations of what internationalisation means should be reconsidered, to include the development of employability skills through an internationalised curriculum in local contexts.

Students studying for an international degree in their home country face some unique challenges. Firstly, although it may be the intention of the host institution to expose students to a culturally different learning experience, there may be no immediate motivation or pressure to adapt other social norms of UK HE. For example, in the classes I observed there was no compulsion, by either lecturers or students, to start on time. Students arrived throughout the first 30 minutes of lessons; when questioned about the policy regarding latecomers, lecturers frequently mentioned that in Uzbekistan nothing starts on time. Although students were open to a diverse range of influences offered by UK validated degree, they were also still immersed in the familiarity of local surroundings. These observations were similar to

the findings of Sin's (2013) study of Malaysian students at a UK branch campus university, where there was 'a tendency to subscribe to a culture of complacency where the local and known were accepted and reproduced while the new and foreign, although welcomed, were not actively sought after,' (*ibid*, p.858). Secondly, students at WIUT encounter a limited diversity of foreign nationals of both students and lecturers, possibly a contributing factor to the aforementioned tensions relating to acculturation. In addition, there were conflicting forces at work, especially when changes in Uzbek HE policy at the end of the Soviet era were directed towards rebranding to express cultural philosophy, ideology, religion and spirituality (Rasanayagam, 2011). It could also be argued that that transnational universities such as WIUT may be eroding national cultural identities, with a new homogenised culture emerging though a process of westernisation (Sin, 2013). This is evident in education systems that promote acculturation via imported curricula, learning and teaching methods, and English as the language of instruction.

6.4 Tertiary contradictions

Tertiary contradictions arise when members of the community introduce a culturally more advanced object into the activity system (Engeström, 1987). The reason for introducing a new object is often to 'find relief from one or more secondary contradictions and the tensions stemming from them,' (Foot, 2014, p.340). Tertiary contradictions, in addition, can lead to new stages of development whereby the activity system is redefined.

6.4.1 Families not recognising value of social activities

In the joint-activity system, tertiary contradictions arose when members of the extended community had conflicting ideas on the value of activities that contributed to the attainment of employability skills. Kontinen (2013) cited an example whereby parents of a school pupil tried to make him study seriously instead of playing with friends. In this example the parents were trying to reinterpret the object so it was more beneficial to the development of the child, while in the WIUT activity system it was the learners who had a more culturally advanced model (a better understanding of the employability skills needed, and how to acquire them) than their families. Students tried to introduce the more culturally advanced model, but were challenged due to preconceptions of members of the extended community, most notably families and employers. By way of comparison, Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) described a marked difference in attitudes towards extracurricular activities between overseas students at UK universities and those studying in their home countries on transnational degree programmes. It was reported that international students frequently participated in sports, student societies, or other campus-based social activities, while those in TNE rarely did so. Although this difference could be due to access or availability of extracurricular activities in branch campuses, Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) observed that transnational students were more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities if the study environment resembled a UK campus setting. This is very much the case of WIUT, which is enclosed on a single campus setting. Despite extracurricular activities being actively promoted at WIUT, tensions arose when a student's family failed to recognise the acquisition of social capital through such activities was a valid learning object in itself. An important note here is these

tensions affected mostly female students, which recalls points made by Yakhyaeva (2013) regarding a more positive and unquestioning parental attitude towards investment in male education.

6.4.2 Employers not recognising undocumented activities

By keeping the employability journal students were able to record activities they perceived as enhancing their employability skills. Students' keeping track of their personal development in the form of a portfolio of evidence (PDP) has been shown to be more successful when made compulsory and linked to assessments (Pond & Harrington, 2011). However, employers, especially in emerging market economies such as Uzbekistan, may be suspicious of potential employees who can only produce self-reported examples of work readiness. Evidence from my data suggested that although students recognised how and to what extent they had acquired employability skills in various non-academic contexts, it was not easy to relate these to potential employers without official documentation. During a three-year course of study a student is likely to develop, in addition to disciplinary skills, other graduate attributes such as effective learning strategies and social aptitudes which may be absent from official transcripts (Kensington-Miller *et al*., 2018) and difficult for students to describe to potential employers (Paterson, 2017). Kensington-Miller *et al*. (2018) distinguished between visible and teachable attributes (those which are assessable and can be evidenced in assessments), and invisible attributes (those which are difficult or even unethical to assess) such as time-management skills or other personality qualities. In their research they suggest their SEEN framework (specify, explain, embed, nudge), which provides a tool for reflection and

learning, and if shared with employers can make them aware of previously unconsidered attributes. While this framework encourages a broader approach to curriculum mapping and embedding invisible skills in courses, it does not elaborate on how employers can be informed, beyond equipping students with the appropriate vocabulary to describe their experiences. Clark *et al*. (2015) argued that the nature of the extracurricular activity itself is not important; what is more important is how gains from activities are successfully communicated to employers. However, no description was given of the evidence employers required beyond graduates being able to communicate achievements, rather than list activities. As highlighted by Sitora, without documented evidence, many employers in Uzbekistan do not recognise self-reported achievements or personal attributes.

6.4.3 Employers' understandings of UK education

This contradiction arose out of different views on how employers should position themselves regarding the development of WIUT's degree courses. Lecturers were at times wary of having too much input from local employers who might make suggestions about changing course content and structure to fit their own idealised version of what a good employee should be. In addition, making substantive changes to a UK accredited degree course can be a lengthy process, and, as noted by lecturers, local employers are prone to changing their minds quickly. In line with recent literature (Artess *et al*., 2017; Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2018), students and lecturers were favourable towards increased employer involvement in providing work-based learning programmes. Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) reflected on reasons why many TNE programmes neglected increased employability as a learning

outcome, and this included lack of employer engagement in design and delivery of courses. Notwithstanding concerns expressed by participants regarding monopolisation of course content and learning outcomes, it was generally agreed that the most beneficial ways for employers to be involved in the pedagogical aspects of courses was by providing guest lecturers or allowing company visits, although as discussed in a previous secondary contradiction, students did not always recognise value in such visits.

6.4.4 High expectations from employers

Reasons why employers may favour graduates from TNE include perceived prestige of foreign education systems, and an enhanced multi-cultural and international outlook when compared to local graduates (McNamara & Knight, 2014). In my thesis participants felt this was true of employers' attitudes towards WIUT, but also noted the hierarchical nature of local work practices might not suit students accustomed to a relatively undisciplined study environment. An interesting comparison can be drawn with Sin (2013) and Malaysian TNE. Here it was observed that overt demonstrations of UK cultural capital could be interpreted as being pretentious and work against applicants in local jobs markets. It was suggested that positional advantage could be achieved through moderation; by employing 'local and foreign embodied cultural capital in appropriate amounts and combinations to build stronger inter-personal relations,' (*ibid*, p.861). Historically, WIUT students have experienced some preferential treatment in the local jobs market, but with increased competition from other local TNEs or returning overseas graduates, WIUT graduates can no

longer rely on employers valuing the recognised brand of the university above demonstrable skills and experience.

The perceived worth of a UK qualification varies across geographical locations (Sin, 2013), and if employability skills are embedded in learning programmes in TNE, then the skills acquired must also be relevant to local markets (Mellors-Bourne *et al*., 2015). This recommendation emanates from findings in TNE environments where graduates were disadvantaged as their degrees were perceived as lower value than local equivalents (Leung & Waters, 2013). Although this specific example from Hong Kong appears opposite to Uzbek TNE, concerns arise regarding the reinforcement of social inequality in HE. In Uzbekistan, however, it is local university students who risk being marginalised as more TNEs enter the frame.

6.4.5 Limited respect for younger generation as creators of knowledge

It could be argued that this is a culturally embedded primary contradiction, but as the evidence was from a limited number of participants I have designated this as a tertiary contradiction; it is the students who are introducing a more culturally advanced notion of employability which is not based on preconceived notions of societal hierarchy. Attitudes to status in post-Soviet Uzbekistan have reverted to more historical notions in line with Islamic values of subordination to elders and authority (Yakhyaeva, 2013). Two instances of this emerged from the data; firstly, a Law student not receiving an official contract or payment from an employer; and secondly, BIS students not being treated with respect when delivering a work project.

These students found themselves in difficult positions as the cultural norm was not to challenge or question those in positions of power. The BIS students were frustrated in that it was clear they possessed superior knowledge, and as they had a registered business it was only fair they should profit from this. However, with local work practices appearing to prioritise seniority over actual abilities, those entering the labour market from TNE environments might find the cultural capital accrued at university less valued when applied in a local context.

6.5 Quaternary contradictions

Quaternary contradictions arise when new methods or practices are introduced to an activity system, resulting in transformation of the object. Often these occur when efforts are made to solve issues raised from tertiary contradictions, causing further contradictions between neighbouring activities (Foot, 2014). Historical quaternary contradictions likely arose when the Uzbek government introduced the NPPT, and when TNEs such as WIUT arrived in the local HE environment, bringing with them different models HE delivery, including new perspectives on learner autonomy and student-centred learning. Foot (2014), noted that quaternary contradictions could be identified by observing how changes to the object of an activity system affect 'relations with the activity systems that receive the output of the central activity system or are otherwise affected by its outcomes,' (*ibid,* p.341). An example of this in action, in relation to the WIUT joint-activity system, could be as HEIs embraced the employability skills agenda and HE policy geared itself towards fulfilling a government's economic policy, increased marketisation and competition among both

local and international HEIs affected attitudes of employers towards recruitment processes.

6.6 Opportunities for expansive learning

The fifth principle of AT is expansive transformation, where there is a collective effort to change the nature of the activity and 'the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities,' (Engeström, 2001, p.137). Transformations can occur when contradictions are identified and subjects question previous behaviours and challenge accepted norms. Subjects may be better enabled to challenge previously accepted norms when learning is considered a collective endeavour rather than an individual goal. Subsequently, as the object of activity is interpreted in a different light, a more culturally advanced activity system can emerge, leading to expansive learning as subjects are better positioned to enact positive change in learning and teaching environments. Engeström (2001) identified several forms of expansive learning, including transformation of the object, movement into the ZPD, cycles of learning, boundary crossing and network building, and formative interventions. Several contradictions and tensions were identified within the joint-activity system of students and lecturers, and through understanding these it may be possible for subjects to become empowered. The areas of expansive transformation that related most closely to my data were transformation of the object, and boundary crossing and network building.

6.6.1 Transformation of the object

The shared object of the joint-activity system was the development of students'
employability skills. Subjects were motivated to participate in activities because they
had unmet needs, and engaging in activities would move them closer to meeting
these needs (Kuutti, 1996). However, the meanings that subjects ascribe to the
object can affect the way they engage with the activity (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy,
1999; Yamagata-Lynch, 2007). A contradiction that emerged in this area was the
degree to which students engaged in activities that could potentially enhance their
employability. Motivations that students had for participating in an activity, whether
classroom based or extracurricular, was dependent on the value they placed on the
activity in relation to the final outcome. However, if the final outcome of the students'
activity system is the award of a degree, then there needs to be a clear link between
how developing employability skills directly contributes to this outcome. Students'
strategic attendance and engagement in activities is predicated on the final outcome
(award of degree), and not necessarily the shared object (development of
employability skills). While this may be descriptive of many students, participants in
my research, through the process of keeping the employability journal and reflecting
on their activities, were better able to relate the objects of activities with the outcome.
For example, on all WIUT undergraduate degrees, except BIS, one of the learning
outcomes is: *To produce graduates who are confident in developing the personal
and intellectual attributes necessary for success in employment,* although there is no
specification where or how this will occur. Perhaps what is needed is clearer
indication to students that learning on a degree course comprises both process and
final product, and personal and professional development are in most cases

190

embedded in learning activities, although not always explicitly. This is something that both students and lecturers need to acknowledge.

An example of transformation of the object was perhaps best exemplified in the employability journal of Sitora (Appendix 6). One of Sitora's entries described a meeting with her final project supervisor, where the supervisor encouraged her to think about the project as a reflection of interests and future plans. The motivational language used by the supervisor, and the references to how his own personal development was hindered at the same stage of his education due to a lack of guidance, was instrumental in Sitora re-evaluating her own motivations:

> Before talking to him my motivation was to get the highest mark from the dissertation. However, he changed my view on how the final project should affect my future (Sitora).

Sitora also noted the discussion helped her develop additional employability skills such as negotiating skills, setting long term goals, and time management. In the subsequent interview, which took place four months after the journal entry when Sitora was nearing completion of her project, she explained how she had changed the original topic of her dissertation to focus on something more relevant in the current climate, but it was the also the act of reflecting on the meeting and logging it in the journal that clarified her true objectives; proactively engaging in processes that would help her gain a competitive advantage in the labour market. In this sense the object of the activity was transformed from solely gaining a high mark to fully engaging in the process of developing employability skills. Enhanced employability

was not merely a corollary of the activity, but a fully-fledged object as important as the final outcome.

Other participants also stated that keeping the journal helped them consider learning activities in broader terms. For example, Ansar, prior to keeping the journal, thought that employability was only about having an attractive CV and good technical skills. As he analysed his activities in more detail he recognised employability could be related to many of his non-academic interests. From a teaching perspective Vlad described how reflection on practice led him to incorporate more group activities. In relation to his perception of employability, he explained that previously, like Ansar, he was concerned with only technical skills, and this had shaped his notions of what a good employee was. Subsequently he recognised that in the IT sphere different skills were also valued:

> Maybe subject specialism is not so important […] maybe someone can't do specific things in coding but has good research skills, or good networking skills, and by using those he can work out with colleagues in the office how to do new things (Vlad).

Vlad also felt keeping the journal helped him develop as a teacher, enabling him to reflect on his lessons and evaluate them in terms of being more student-centred. He stated that after five journal entries he realised that 75% of the class was him explaining things. To rectify this he focused more on the outcomes of the lesson, which he felt enabled more room for creativity. Sayyora took an economist's view of keeping the journal, saying that she could now weigh up the opportunity cost of activities that she pursued, evaluating their usefulness for her future career. She was also more aware of learning outcomes of lessons and how these related to overall

course objectives. Rishod felt that concepts relating to employability had become more transparent, and as a result was more aware of the kinds of skills employers were looking for, and which ones he needed to improve. This highlights that, although students had a common object of improving employability skills, their relative importance was subjective. Rishod also described how writing the journal helped him recall many useful things he had done that year:

> In the previous two years I did many activities, but there came a point when I realised I haven't done anything useful. With the journal you have this list of cumulative activities, and you can assess yourself. The journal asks really good questions. It addresses the premise of the activity. Why are you doing it and how can it be helpful? (Rishod).

Munisa explained how keeping the journal helped her evaluate the impact of decisions. She believed that without the journal it would have been difficult to understand the employability skills she possessed and those she needed in her chosen career. She even expressed the intention of continuing the journal, not just for employability, but for overall decisions in her life. These testimonies highlight that keeping the employability journal contributed to the development of students' identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017). The graduate identity approach (Holmes 2013) was put forward as a realistic and practical way of students presenting themselves as credible future professionals. Employers are not likely to be impressed with graduates who can only describe the requisite skills for a job, requiring instead candidates capable of 'demonstrating or warranting how these constitute practices appropriate to future work-related roles and practices,' (*ibid*, p.551). However, in the Uzbekistan context, this brings the argument back to the tertiary contradiction of

employers not recognising undocumented evidence. This also relates to attempts to implement PDPs as a tool for logging activities to create a portfolio of evidence to present to employers. Such ideas have not been met with universal acceptance, with students reluctant to comply if not contributing to a final grade or award (Pond & Harrington, 2011).

6.6.2 Boundary crossing and network building

Opportunities for innovation in learning and teaching can often be found in collaborative activities that take place across networks. Transporting concepts or instruments from one discipline to a seemingly unrelated one to initiate expansive learning, described as boundary crossing, encourages practitioners 'to give help, to find information and tools wherever they happen to be available,' (Engeström *et al*., 1995, p.332). This connects with two relevant areas; interdisciplinary study, and collaboration between university and employers.

Opportunities for expansive learning already exist at WIUT, and several of the secondary contradictions may find potential solutions if the benefits of boundary crossing are clearly communicated. For example, while BIS students and lecturers felt there were shortfalls in the provision of soft skills, a lecturer on two of the interdisciplinary core modules (*Business Communications* and *Fundamentals of Management*) described how BIS students, unlike BsAd students, often did not engage with the modules due to a perceived lack of relevance for their future career. Amaliya rationalised the modules by explaining to students that career development

should not only be limited to IT skills. She related how several BIS students had work experience along with students from another local transnational university, where the non-WIUT students had superior programming skills but lacked presentation or communication skills. She then explained to the students that the competitive advantage that WIUT students could gain over the other students was superior people skills, 'We are preparing you to be managers to those programmers, they can work for you, you can supervise them and present what they've done,' (Amaliya). This kind of boundary crossing, involved students moving into unfamiliar domains, although still within their existing activity systems. Only through the mediation of the lecturer were they able to develop a new collective concept of employability skills and real-world application.

Current students who engage in internships or have jobs meet real challenges in the workplace; Engeström *et al*., (1995) argued that participation in multiple contexts and communities of practice may result in expansive learning opportunities. Similarly, students or groups of students can 'act as crucial boundary-crossing change agent[s],' (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p.13) and facilitate interaction between workplace and educational contexts. This can also include the sharing of artefacts, such as more advanced versions of computer software, as well as implementation of information sharing protocols such as organising guest lecturers, or developing learning activities. An example of how these opportunities may be exploited was the *hackathon* event, where participants were able to build graduate capitals (Tomlinson, 2017) through interaction with both peers and more experienced international

experts, without the societal and hierarchical obstacles that may inhibit development in the workplace.

Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration at WIUT, according to my data, were rare, although there were some missed opportunities. Yulia described a lesson where BsAd students on a core module had a guest lecture from the deputy Minister of Innovation regarding the use of technology and IT tools in developing tourism opportunities for Uzbekistan. There were no BIS students invited to this lecture despite the topic being related to emerging technologies. One such technology was the use of augmented reality postcards for marketing purposes. This seemed like an ideal opportunity for interdisciplinary study, and even interdisciplinary coursework, where BIS students could design apps to be used in promoting tourism, and the BsAd students market them. Such an activity would entail interdisciplinary learning and innovative outward facing assessments, with genuine potential end-users for the knowledge, products and services that students create.

6.7 Summary

This chapter drew together findings from chapter 5, and contextualised them in a joint-activity system that addressed RQs 2 and 3. Various contradictions were identified, and while it is important to recognise that many of these may be the result of natural process relating to existing socio-cultural norms, by recognising their existence participants may be in a better position to question existing practices. The implications of these findings are discussed further in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

7.1 Overview and implications of findings

Previous studies regarding employability were largely restricted to HEIs in the global north, and research on employability in Central Asia has only begun to emerge very recently, with none relating specifically to TNE. The aim of this thesis was to investigate, from multiple perspectives, perceptions of employability-based pedagogy, and how these perceptions related to learning and teaching practice, assessment, work-based and work-related learning and staff and student engagement in university activities. These issues were explored using Engeström's (2001) model of third generation activity theory to describe a joint-activity system that revealed tensions and contradictions.

The findings have not been intended as a critique of WIUT, as the analysis of contradictions of systemic features were put forward in order 'to avoid value judgments about the desirable direction of change, or, evaluating different voices in terms of "*right*" or "*wrong*",'(Engeström, 2005, p.12-13). When contradictions were identified in activities this represented an opportunity for positive change in teaching and learning practices. Recognition of the multi-voicedness of interacting activity systems can both strengthen conversations and increase stakeholder cooperation (Foot, 2014). In addition, the act of finding solutions to contradictions presupposes that they have been understood, acknowledged and articulated, and in turn can lead to the development of more advanced strategies (Engeström, 2001). It is also important to note that contradictions uncovered in my data existed *a priori*, and will

continue to exist, if the *status quo* is maintained. Once participants are aware of such contradictions they may then question current practices and invite cooperation from stakeholders. Additionally, UK based definitions of employability may not translate to developing countries such as Uzbekistan where there is a more rigid system of government central planning, so reconceptualisation may be required by stakeholders. Students in my research framed their understandings of employability around narrow definitions relating to generic skills, and related these to their own experiences. In many cases the availability of employment opportunities was affected, either positively or negatively, by socio-cultural factors such as gender discrimination, hierarchy based on seniority, family influence, employers perceptions of TNE, and language skills in Uzbek, Russian and English. The experiences of students demonstrated that the value of cultural capital is not always consistent across a wide range of contexts, and the acquisition of behaviours more consistent within a UK HE environment may not be directly transferable to local environments.

Lecturers, although recognising the role they played in shaping students' employment prospects, were more concerned with the levels of student engagement in class activities, irrespective of whether these were perceived as beneficial to students' employability. Student engagement in activities was predicated on whether they related assessments, which was recognised by lecturers who, in many cases, framed classroom activities to reflect this. Attempts to relate activities to work-related contexts were more effective when students made connections with their own work experience, or when lecturers were able to link theories with current or recent

practice. The ability to do this, however, was dependent on the lecturer having sufficient teaching skills to effectively engage or instruct students.

In several instances there was a lack of understanding from both students and lecturers as to where pedagogy for employability was being implemented, indicating a contradiction between expectations of roles. Nevertheless, the data revealed instances where pedagogy for employability was both recognised and valued, notably when guest lecturers were involved. A corollary of guest lecturers' contributions were the skills practised and honed by students who organised the events. Student engagement with employers in this manner served to develop key graduate capitals (Tomlinson, 2017), including social capital (networking), and identity capital (forming proactive strategies). In agreement with UKCES (2008), students best developed employability skills (outside of work experience) when engaged in activities that encouraged reflection, integration, and experiential action learning. Additionally, by recording experiences in their employability journals students were better positioned to reflect on their actions, and subsequently evaluate and relate them to their own personal employment narratives. As recommended by Reid *et al*. (2008), when students are helped to define their own personal identities, it better enables them to be both engaged in their studies and become work-ready. This relates to Jackson's (2016) recommendations regarding the development of students' pre-professional identity; a move away from restrictive narrow views of employability towards recognition that enhancing employability is a shared responsibility. In addition, this thesis has related the perceptions of stakeholders to

rarely addressed cultural issues, and acknowledged students are not neutral agents (Stevenson & Clegg, 2012). The Uzbek government's top-down gradualist approach to the development of HEIs, with the state as the sole driver of reform, has arguably hindered the development of an HE pedagogy that gives graduates the opportunity to fully develop their employability, with transnational universities such as WIUT also facing challenges. Central to this is the lack of shared understandings among key stakeholders; while students and lecturers at WIUT may have developed a more global outlook regarding cultural issues, if these are not shared by other stakeholders such as employers or students' families, then contradictions such as the ones revealed in this thesis may nullify enhanced employability skills attained through an internationalised curriculum.

The data also conveyed how participants were part of diverse landscapes of practice (Wenger-Trayner *et al*., 2014), involving complex interaction with groups, including professional organisations, student associations, social networks and support services. By completing the employability journal students were better able to reflect on these interactions, with interviews revealing that support services provided by the university were not fully recognised or promoted by lecturers, and subsequently underexploited by students. Mellors-Bourne *et al*. (2015) noted that TNE partnerships frequently delivered less employability development in their overseas campuses than in the UK. While criticism of the skills agenda has been a feature of HE discourse in the UK for several years, such discussions are not common in Uzbekistan. Although this thesis did not make a direct comparison of strategies to

build student employability in London and Tashkent, further collaboration that has the goal of enhancing the conceptualisation of employability skills and development, including staff development opportunities, would certainly be welcome. Based on the main findings, I offer ten recommendations that could be considered by WIUT policy makers which may lead to both better understanding of employability-related concepts and more effective embedding of employability in the curriculum. These recommendations largely align with those described by Artess *et al*. (2017), but also extend to include a broader cultural outlook that includes all stakeholders. There are a number of ways that policy makers at WIUT and connected stakeholders can respond to these recommendations. These can be in the form of strategies, frameworks or other institutional narratives for future practice.

1. *Communicate a broader understanding of employability-related concepts that considers the local cultural context.* This can be facilitated by making explicit the idea that employability is not fixed to a particular time, place or event, but is a work in progress that extends from education to working practice, with recognition that the availability of jobs is not a function of the employability of people. Although local cultural practices may not change in the short term, employers should focus less on attributes that support a planned economy (obedience, loyalty, and hard work) but value skills that support teamworking, taking initiative and being adaptable and proactive, alongside language, communication and interpersonal skills. This broader understanding of employability-related concepts can be emphasised by WIUT staff during events that connect with local employers.

2. *Incorporate interdisciplinary activities and assessments that foster connections between employability outcomes and academic disciplines.* Several opportunities to expand this were discussed in section 6.6.2, where a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary learning opportunities could link to innovative outward facing assessments, synoptic assessments that connect across modules, and fostering closer connections between courses. These can be particularly exploited in areas connected to the growing tourism sector in Uzbekistan.

3. *Encourage reflective practice and relate this to learning outcomes and assessments.* In order to derive maximum learning gains from experiences students should be encouraged to reflect and articulate on activities and where possible make connections with work related practices. This can be encouraged by explicitly linking reflection to the learning outcomes of class-based activities, and the inclusion of reflection as part of assessments to help students manage and assimilate learning as a process rather than a product.

4. *Devise strategies that enable students to make connections between class activities and desirable employment outcomes*. The employability journals kept by students went some way to encouraging reflective practice and linking learning and extracurricular activities to desirable employment outcomes. As an extension to this each course could encourage students to keep an employability skills portfolio to record the perceived usefulness of activities, and subsequently the collated experiences could be mapped against the university's expectations and fed back into future course design. Such a project could be facilitated by students with work experience and, where possible, alumni, having greater involvement in backward

course design, where content and process are predicated by the desired learning outcomes.

5. *Ensure teaching staff are able to articulate how learning outcomes relate to employability.* This recommendation could be achieved as a corollary of other successful strategies, but there are some simple steps that WIUT could take to improve the transparency of how learning outcomes and desirable employability outcomes overlap. Primarily, course leaders need to ensure embedded employability in courses is framed in language that both lecturers and students can easily understand. While employability models might be considered too abstract, the language used to describe desirable employability skills, including such notions as reflection, pre-professional identity, social and cultural awareness, resilience and adaptability, can be more closely linked to practical examples that students engage with in their regular learning or extracurricular activities.

6. *Promote effective academic acculturation as a process of new learning experiences.* Academic acculturation should be regarded as a lengthy process that continues throughout students' time at WIUT. While no doubt valuable, the short induction period where students are informed of differences in learning practices should be considered as only an introduction, and students should be systematically supported in academic acculturation throughout their time at WIUT. There is currently a mentoring system in place and this could be formalised and extended to include staff, especially those without international teaching and learning experiences.

7. *Develop strategies to promote the value of extracurricular opportunities that enhance employability, and communicate these to employers and families.* The benefits of participating in extracurricular activities are frequently generic and transferable across a number of work-related practices. Additionally, clearer communication to stakeholders (including families and employers) of the complementary benefits of academic study and extracurricular activities needs to be prioritised. Again, close links with alumni who have direct links to the local labour market is key to developing appropriate and effective strategies.

8. *Provide students with connections to alumni/lecturers with current labour market experience.* Students need support in how to become better informed in terms of career building, especially those who do not have large social networks or connections to employment opportunities. Considering WIUT courses, particularly BIS, have a strong link to the technical side of developing digital networks, it would be beneficial if student creativity was harnessed to explore how to better engage with employers and alumni. Any developments in this area could also be linked to students' skills portfolios.

9. *Effectively coordinate and communicate employability guidance through the careers centre.* It was clear from the data that this area was in transition and development. While several channels of communication were being used, including social networking platforms, a review of which channels are favoured by stakeholders could be undertaken to establish the most effective ways of communicating employability related information. There is also potential for students as innovators and co-creators to raise the profile of the careers centre through their

digital entrepreneurial skills, and this could also be the focus of a project that students work on as an outward facing assessment with practical benefits to WIUT as a whole.

10. *Promote internationalisation in terms of multi-cultural values.* Internationalisation need not be centred on student mobility, as this can be limiting in terms of recognising the outcomes of the learning experience. Promoting internationalisation at home utilises the international and professional experience of WIUT staff, and considers learning contexts as an effective means to develop globally aware students with transferable language and communications skills and competencies. Enhanced social and cultural awareness, although not currently high on all Uzbek companies' list of desirable employability skills, are likely to increase in importance as more nuanced understandings of employability in a global labour force come to the fore.

7.2 Original contribution and value of study

This thesis has original value in both local and international contexts. In the local HE context research in areas of employability is relatively new, where planning in both the public and private sectors are constrained by a top-down approach from government and the institutes themselves. To this extent, the recognition of culturally embedded tensions in HE has been largely ignored. This thesis has revealed how a broader understanding of current learning and teaching practice, specifically recognising a bottom-up approach where students and lecturers relate their personal experiences, can identify systemic failures that need to be addressed. The

understanding of employability and its relation to pedagogy in HE in Uzbekistan has traditionally focused on discipline specific skills and generic attributes that must be explicitly taught and formally assessed or documented. This thesis has confirmed that students' work readiness is influenced and enhanced by many indirect factors that are not explicitly taught, evaluated, recorded or even recognised.   The fact that much of the student experience that contributes to enhanced employability neither appears on academic transcripts nor is formally recognised by employers is a major issue which can only be addressed through closer collaboration between   students, lecturers and employers, with alumni acting as the bridge between them.

In international contexts this thesis has relevance to TNE around the world, where the student experience can be both enhanced and limited by the implementation of a pedagogy that is distinct from the local norms. Previous studies connecting TNE and pedagogy have focused primarily on the experiences of the sending institutions rather than the host or receiving countries. This thesis has considered a less explored perspective in TNE where both students and the majority of lecturers are adapting to new academic practices that challenge previous assumptions of teaching, learning and working. These issues also extend beyond the university setting, where practices promoted within the TNE setting challenge local traditions of family culture, societal hierarchy and gender politics. Future studies in and around TNE may consider disparities in access to cultural capital, and how societal inequalities prevent shared understandings of the value of non-academic achievements. Such issues will differ in scope and importance in countries where

TNE is becoming an influential part of the HE landscape. Specifically regarding employability, this thesis has raised local questions that may have importance in international contexts; whether there is a shared understanding of how employability can be embedded in curricula that needs to serve both the needs of the local jobs market and the aspirations of students who see themselves as future competitors in the global employment arena.

7.3 Limitations of the research

As my research involved only one university, with a small number of participants, the transferability of the findings may be limited. Additionally, the successful teaching or embedding of employability pedagogy in any course of study is difficult to measure as there is no clear indication what to measure beyond quantifiable data on levels of employment, and these data are not indicative of how successfully graduates have performed in the labour market. The purposive sampling offered less depth than purely random sampling, but to ensure active engagement in the research participants were chosen according to their desire to participate in the research. While participants were willing to expand their discussions to include the experiences of others, first hand testimonies, particularly from students who were less engaged in their studies, would have yielded further insights. In addition, this research did not include direct contributions from employers, although participants did share accounts of their interactions with employers. Additionally, interviewing in a second language (English) might have limited participants' ability to express complex thoughts and ideas.

7.4 Future Research

In developing AT researchers should not just pass their findings on, but should actively help 'turn new ideas into practices,' (Blackler, 2009, p.34). Engeström (2009) advocated a longitudinal approach to AT, with the third stage of intervention involving organising sessions where new conceptions, tools and shared models are negotiated by stakeholders; my professional role, lying between insider and an outsider researcher, may allow me to facilitate this. One potential avenue is a direct comparison of London and WIUT students' experiences on the same degree course, focusing on the student international experience of a multi-cultural UK university and its TNE counterpart. AT could also be applied to such a study. Additionally, perspectives from other universities in Uzbekistan, both transnational and local, could be researched.

7.5 Summary

This thesis identified tensions related to employability development through evidence-based investigation, the recognition of which by key stakeholders could lead to innovation and transformation in learning and teaching practices. Perhaps the most salient aspect of the research was the application of AT to the discussion of employability. The importance of this lies in making connections between collective practices; with a variety of people, including direct stakeholders and members of the wider community, contributing to shared outcomes, bridging communication gaps, and facilitating conversations that foster both empathy and action.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research information form

Participant Information for Lecturers and Students at University of Westminster, Tashkent

Title of Study: Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university: A qualitative case study.

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher:
Richard Paterson - **r.paterson@westminster.ac.uk**

1. **Invitation**
   You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decided it is important for you to understand why the research us being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

2. **What is the project's purpose?**
   The purpose of the project is to explore how employability pedagogy is understood and delivered on undergraduate degree courses WIUT. An in-depth understanding of employability pedagogy will help facilitate the development of good practice across undergraduate courses at WIUT.

3. **Why have I been chosen?**
   You have been chosen because you are a lecturer or student on WIUT undergraduate courses, and your opinions and experience are relevant to the aims of the project.

4. **Do I have to take part?**
   It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to. If you decide to withdraw you will be asked what you wish to happen to the data you have provided up that point.

5. **What will happen to me if I take part?**
   The research will take place from April 2018 until February 2020, although your participation will only be required during the data collection period until May 2019. During this period I would like to interview you two times, for not more than an hour each time. The interviews can take place when I am visiting WIUT, or via WIUT's video conference equipment. All interviews will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you, and during regular university hours. The interviews will consist of open-ended questions regarding teaching and learning at WIUT. In addition I would like you to keep an employability journal where you make notes on any activities relating to the teaching and learning of employability skills. This journal will be shared only with me on a secure platform. At the end of the research all participants will be invited to a group discussion to reflect on the project.

6. **Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**
   Any audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

7. **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no foreseeable risks for you taking part in this research. However, if any unexpected discomforts, disadvantages or risks arise during the research, these will be brought immediately to your attention.

8. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**
   By taking part in the study it is hoped that you will gain a broader understanding of employability-related concepts. This in turn may lead to lecturers developing their ability to successfully integrate employability pedagogy into their classroom activities, and students increasing their awareness of how employability skills are acquired in both classroom and extracurricular activities.

9. **What if something goes wrong?**
   If you wish to raise any complaints regarding the research process, or any serious adverse event arising from the research process, then you are advised to first contact me at the email address given above. If you prefer you can contact:
   Bakhrom Mirkasimov of the WIUT Research Ethics Committee - bmirkasimov@wiut.uz.
   The Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – ethics@ucl.ac.uk.
   All complaints will be handled in the strictest confidence.

10. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**
    All the information collected from you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications.

11. **Use of Deception**
    The full aims of the project will be explained to you at the outset of the research. There will be no intention to deceive or mislead you regarding the purpose of this project.

12. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**
    The research is primarily for my EdD thesis. There may be further publication and dissemination through journals and conferences. No individual participant will be identified in any report or publication resulting from the research.

13. **Contact for further information**
    For further information contact me at the following address:
    Richard Paterson
    University of Westminster
    309 Regent Street
    London W1B 2HW
    +44 (0)20 7911 5000
    r.paterson@westminster.a.uk

    If you agree to take part in this project you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a copy of your signed consent form.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR WIUT STAFF AND STUDENTS IN RESEARCH STUDY

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university: A qualitative case study.

Department: Learning and Leadership

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher: Richard Paterson - r.paterson@westminster.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: Lee Shailer - data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to be that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study

		Tick Box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction *[and would like to take part in (please tick one or more of the following)*	
	Interviews	
	Participant journal	
	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data at any time up to the completion of data collection on 31 May 2019	
2.	I consent to the processing of my personal information (this will include only your name and any other personal information you give during the duration of the project). I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation.	
3.	**Use of the information for this project only** I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified *(unless you state otherwise, because of the research design or except as required by law).* I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
4.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.	
5.	I understand the direct/indirect benefits of participating.	
6.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study.	

7.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
8.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I may receive a copy of it if requested.	
9.	I consent to my interview being audio and video recorded and understand that the recordings will be: - Stored anonymously, using password-protected software - Kept on secure devices up to ten years after successful completion of the EdD	
10.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
11.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
12.	I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.	
13.	**Overseas Transfer of Data** I understand that my personal data will be transferred to the UK and the following safeguards will be put in place: - Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in the information sheet - Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way	
	No, I would not like to be contacted	

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Appendix 3: Interview schedule 1

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - questions and prompts (for interviews of 45-60 minutes)

These questions are for course leaders and lecturers on core modules, so questions will be adapted to suit

Part 1: General introductions (Warm up)

Introduce myself. Make sure participant is informed about nature of the research and issues of consent and confidentiality.

Ask the participant some general questions about their work.

- What do you teach?
- Do you have a particular approach to your teaching?
- What do you particularly enjoy about teaching?

Part 1: CONCEPTS OF *EMPLOYABILITY*

What does the term 'employability' mean to you?

How is this related to teaching and learning?

Probe: Let the participant talk about this

Prompts

- Is this a term you are familiar with?
- What skills do you think students need when they start working?
- Are some skills more important than others?
- Do you think there is a difference between subject knowledge and general employability skills? If yes, what do you think are the main ones?
- Do you think the students on your course are prepared adequately for the working environment? If not what else do you think they need to do to be better prepared?

Are you familiar with any employability models? How do you know about these? How do they relate to your teaching/students?

Part 2 - UZBEKISTAN CONTEXT

Tell me about teaching in Uzbekistan. How is it different to the UK/other contexts?

What are the challenges of delivering a UK course in Uzbekistan?

How does this relate to employability? Is it an important factor in your teaching?

How do the following relate to the employability of your students?

- Reputation of the university
- Gender of student
- Ethnicity/nationality
- Economic status/background

Part 3: EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FRAMEWORK AND PEDAGOGY

Show employability skills framework list

Are you familiar with the skills listed here?

Can you think of a lesson or part of a lesson where you addressed one or more of these skills?

Can you give some examples?

Part 4: THE ACTIVITY INTERVIEW

Discuss and define what the activity is for this person and resolve any questions before continuing

Activity of interest

Is the nature of the activity clearly stated? Is it clear how this is related to other activities? How and when do you check whether the learners have interpreted this correctly?

Objective

What is the expected outcome of the activity? Is the end product a presentation, a report, a theory or a combination of these (or other) elements?

What criteria will be used to evaluate the quality of the outcome? Is this specified to the learners?

How will completing the objective move the participant toward fulfilling the intentions of the individuals? Lesson/course/degree/job

Subjects

What do you know about the learners? What are their backgrounds? Do they have shared beliefs? How ready are they? Do they currently have the skills/knowledge needed to carry out the activity?

What are goals-motives of the activity and how are they related to goals- motives of others and society?

Tools (mental or physical)

What tools are needed to complete the activity - can be anything e.g. pens/laptops

Do the learners need support in selecting and using the tools that might be useful to use?

Any specific training needed?

Rules and regulations

What are the cultural norms involved? Rules of society/ rules of the classroom - are they related? Are these all shared? (e.g. who can speak/when/to whom?)

How mature is the group? How formally are the rules of interaction stated?

Is the activity compulsory or optional? Is the nature of the task something the learners would expect to carry out as part of their studies? How can difficulties due to any conflict in expectations be overcome?

What are the implied rules or roles for each member of the group? What if someone breaks the rules?

Division of labour

What is the division of labour within the activity?

Is it clear to the students what their role is? Who decides? How do the students demonstrate they have understood their role?

Do the participants all know each other's' roles? Do they currently have the skills/knowledge needed to carry out the activity?

Is there a need to support the learners in understanding and carrying out their expected roles?

Community

What is the nature of the learning environment? Is it at class/course/university level? Is the community based on any professional level e.g. a kind of job? What are the learners' expectations in relation to community? How can their roles be supported?

Are the students involved in other communities of practice outside this one? Do all communities value the goals of the activity?

Outcome

How will learners know if they have achieved the outcome?

What perceived rewards await the subject if or when it accomplishes its goal?

How can feedback be provided to support the achievement of the outcome?

Is the assessment of the outcome aligned with the nature of the task?

What is the expected outcome of the activity? Is the end product a presentation, a report, a theory or a combination of these (or other) elements?

What criteria will be used to evaluate the quality of the outcome?

Part 5: Employability Pedagogy

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - Elaborate for each one

- Teaching employability skills on modules does not affect employment outcomes (students getting a job)
- Students need more real-world work experience in their courses
- There should be more employer involvement in course design
- It is not useful to have employability completely separate from the course curriculum
- Having employability embedded in the curriculum negatively affect disciplinary learning

Appendix 4: Interview schedule 2

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - questions and prompts (for interviews of 45-60 minutes)

Lecturers postlesson:

Tell me what happened in the lesson

Did everything go according to plan?

What do you think your students thought of the lesson?

PART 1 - How has your academic year been? (Students)

- In what areas have you made improvement?
- What has helped you improve - academically and in terms of employability?

PART 2 - Employability Journal

Tell me about your journal

- Are there any kinds of learning activities that you think contributed significantly to your employability?
- Expand on this
- How did you evaluate whether something contributed to your employability?

Classroom activities - Your modules

Has your outlook on classroom activities changed over the past year? Are you more/less demanding? Why? Are you more conscious of learning outcomes/connections to employability skills?

External activities - WIUT related or social

Has your outlook on external activities changed over the past year? Why? Are you more conscious of connections to employability skills?

Employability Journal Questions

PART 2 - Employability Journal

Tell me about your journal

- Are there any kinds of learning activities that you think contributed significantly to your students employability?
- Expand on this
- How did you evaluate whether something contributed to their employability?

Classroom activities - Your modules

Has your outlook on classroom activities changed over the past year? Are you more/less demanding? Why? Are you more conscious of learning outcomes/connections to employability skills?

External activities - WIUT related or social

Do you promote any external activities for students? Has your outlook on other student activities changed over the past year? Why? Are you more conscious of connections to employability skills?

Part 3 - Probe further about individual entries in the journal

Activities / tools / rules / community / division of labour

Subject as historical agent

- In what settings do you feel student employability skills are enhanced?
- Do you think students behave differently in university vs external settings? How? Why? e.g. use of language / languages / confidence / formal-informal interactions
- How do students past experiences affect their ability to acquire new employability skills?
- How do students learn best? How do you know this?

Subject-tool-object

- Are there any tools that you feel are particularly useful in helping your students develop employability skills?
- Language as a tool - How does your use of language help /hinder you in different learning activities? What about other people's use of language?

Subject-rules community

- How has your interaction with others helped you develop employability skills? What role do other students play in the development of employability skills?
- Are student's ever critical of each other's' performances? Why/why not?
- Are teachers ever critical of each other's' performances? Why/why not?
- What are the main barriers that may prevent students from achieving their objectives?

- Thank and ask if any more questions

Appendix 5: Employability journal template

Activity summary: Briefly describe the activity: Where? When? What? Specific skills developed:
Your notes
Describe your learning experience in more detail. Tools used/who helped/
Please consider these questions for reflection: What did you learn on a personal level? How does this link to your academic development? How does it relate to your development of employability skills?

Appendix 6: Employability journal example (student)

Activity Summary 1

Date: 11/15/2018

Briefly describe the activity:

Discussion with supervisor: As a Level 6 student I am actively working on the my final year project.

Where: Not university premisses, in the office of my supervisor who works at the same time in the ************* .

What: Discussion with supervisor

Specific skills developed: Negotiation, setting long term goals, organizing the project, time management (planning the process of working on the project).

Describe your learning experience in more detail

 As I came to the office of my supervisor, his first question was how I see myself in the long future. His question made me think of my long term plans and future employability. He used pen and one pencil to make me think of the future, as he draw a map with starting where I want to see myself. His gestures and motivational phrases impressed me a lot. "Final year project should not be only a long long essay, it should fully reflect your interests and plans. Nobody told me this when I was at your age, therefore I lost years and years while looking forward the area I want to work on. However, it should not be the case for you. Think of your future now, and choose topic accordingly".

What did you learn on a personal level?
Before talking to him, my motivation was to get the highest mark from the dissertation. However, he changed my view on how the final year project should affect my future.

How does this link to your academic development?
This talk and working process directly related to my academic development, as I am working on the dissertation.

How does it relate to your development of employability skills?

Firstly, I started actively thinking of my future goals and employability. We have discussed with supervisor my future employability and set the long term goals. He has explained the ways how and why I need to choose particular area to focus on at the early stage. In the rapid growing world being an expert at the particular field and developing specific skills gives a competitive advantage in the labor market. Therefore, he advised to not generally work on the dissertation or looking forward to finish the university and get the job, but to choose the field.

Appendix 6 (continued) Employability journal example (lecturer)

Activity Summary 2

Date: October 31

Briefly describe the activity: Job evaluation exercise

Where: HR seminar WIUT, IB 301

What: Reward management topic, job evaluation methods

Specific skills developed : analytical, communication, subject specific, decision making, evaluation, reasoning , numeracy

Reflection

Describe the activity in more detail:

the first part of the exercise is that students worked individually and focused on calculations of the weightings of compensable factors of job evaluation . then they had to work in groups and made a task and job evaluation point method to plot the salaries for the positions mentioned in the case

Which tools used? handouts with tables, calculators

Who helped? students worked in groups of 4 or 5, lecturer monitored the process

How does this link to students' academic development?

this exercise teaches them to use one of the methods in job evaluation. this is also used for their assessment and this topics interrelate several issues of HRM subject

How does it relate to their development of employability skills? this activity help them to develop their analytical skills needed to evaluate the positions used in the case. all the instruments were provided for them to practice. They also used their communications skills to persuade that they choose the right. they also had justify their answer.

Appendix 7: Pre-observation questionnaire (Lecturer)

Pre-Observation Questions

Teacher:	Module:
Level:	Date:

General Class Information
1. Briefly describe the students in this class.
2. How does this lesson fit into the course/semester in general?
3. How would you describe the learning environment of this class?
4. What do you know about students' cultural backgrounds, interests, language proficiencies that support the development of the learning experience?
Specific Lesson Information
5. What are your aims for the lesson? What do you want the students to learn?
6. How do you plan to engage students in the content and promote meaningful learning? What will you do? What will the students do?
7. How will you assess students' knowledge throughout the lesson? How will you know if students learned what you intended?
8. Describe the instructional strategies that will be used in the lesson
9. What is the rationale for selecting the resources used in the lesson? How will the resources support the learning outcomes?
10. How will you establish routines and procedures (transitions, communication to students about acceptable behavior during individual and group work, etc.)?
11. How will you model and acknowledge appropriate behaviour in a classroom?
12. How will you organize the classroom (if appropriate) to support teaching of learning (grouping of students, circles, etc.)?
13. Is there anything in this class that contributes to the development of student's employability skills?

Appendix 8: Post-observation questionnaire (Students)

Post-observation student questionnaire

Please complete this in as much detail as you can

Module _____

1. How would you describe the learning environment of this class?
2. What were the aims of this lesson? What did you learn?
3. What instructions did you receive from the lecturer in this lesson?
4. Who did you interact with in this lesson?
5. How do you feel you participated in this lesson?
6. In what ways do you think you could have contributed more to this lesson?
7. What language(s) (other than English) did you speak in this lesson? When? Why?
8. What resources did you use in this lesson (this can include anything, e.g. pens, computers, books etc.? Were these appropriate?
9. How did you know what was appropriate behaviour during the stages of the lesson? (e.g. during group work).
10. Was there anything in this class that contributed to the development of your employability skills?

Appendix 9: Data collection methods

	Student	Lecturer	Total
Semi-structured interviews	n20	n18	n38
Employability journals	n10	n8	n18
Employability journal entries	n62	n41	n103
Pre-lesson questionnaires (Lecturers)		n6	n6
Post-lesson questionnaires (Students)	n78		n78
Lesson observations			n6

Appendix 10: NVivo coding sample

Appendix 11: WIUT ethics confirmation

WESTMINSTER
INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN TASHKENT

An Accredited Institution of the University of Westminster (UK)

April 20, 2018

Dear Mr. Richard Paterson,

On behalf of the Ethics Panel at Westminster International University in Tashkent, I would like to express my gratitude for submitting your application for Research Ethics Consideration. Your research project "Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university: a qualitative case study" sounds very interesting and promising. We have carefully reviewed your application, proposal letter, research instrument and other study documents.

We approve the survey to be conducted in its presented form in compliance with the University's Research Ethics Policy. The Ethics Panel expects to be informed about the progress of the study and any changes to the approved study documents should be notified to the Ethics Panel.

We confirm that none of your study staff members was present during the decision-making process of the meeting. With the Panel's best wishes for the success of this project.

Please indicate your confirmation by signing this letter and returning it to Akhtem Useinov (a.useinov@wiut.uz), Research Administrative Officer, no later than May 4, 2018.

Sincerely,

Bakhrom Mirkasimov

Dean of Research and Postgraduate Courses

I understand the terms and conditions as described in this letter.

██████████████   30/04/18

Richard Paterson   Date

Appendix 12: UCL/IOE ethics application/confirmation

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

 *<u>Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process</u>

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you <u>must</u> be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office <u>before</u> you submit your ethics application for review**.

If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

For further information see Steps 1 and 2 of our Procedures page at:
https://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/procedures.php

Section 1 Project details

a.	Project title	Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university: A qualitative case study.
b.	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)	Richard Paterson 39045711
c.	*UCL Data Protection Registration Number	Z6364106/2018/03/1 4 05/03/18
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	Susan Taylor
d.	Department	Learning and Leadership
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD ☐ EdD ☒ DEdPsy ☐
f.	**If applicable,** state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	n/a
g.	Intended research start date	April 2018
h.	Intended research end date	February 2020
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in *If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be **required** before ethical approval can be granted: http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx*	Uzbekistan. Visits to Uzbekistan are undertaken as part of my professional role at the University of Westminster. For these trips full travel insurance is provided by AIG, and a full risk

		assessment is carried out before each trip

j.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes ☒	External Committee Name: Westminster International University, Tashkent
	No ☐ ⇨ *go to Section 2*	Date of Approval: 20/04/18

yes:

  − Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
  − Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

☒ Interviews
☒ Focus groups
☐
Questionnaires
☐ Action research
☒ Observation
☐ Literature review

☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review ⇨ *if only method used go to Section 5.*
☐ Secondary data analysis ⇨ *if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.*
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☒ Other, give details: Participant reflective journals

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

This is an EdD Thesis study which investigates, in a localised context, lecturers' and students' perceptions and implementation of the pedagogy of employability. The context is Westminster International University, Tashkent (WIUT), a transnational university in Uzbekistan. In the 21st century it has become widely recognised that employability skills are a valuable asset that graduates must acquire to secure graduate level employment. The embedding of employability skills into course and curriculum design is aimed at reducing the perceived shortfall in the ability of graduates to perform tasks needed in the workplace. The forces of internationalisation and globalisation mean that employers the world over are looking for graduates with additional skills in areas such as social intelligence, cross-cultural competency and transdisciplinarity. By qualitative data analysis, this study will generate new perspectives on the pedagogy of employability, with implications for stakeholders in transnational educational institutions.

The research will focus on lecturers and undergraduate students. The sample size will be chosen to reflect a range of disciplinary contexts:

- Ten lecturers comprising two from each five undergraduate degrees taught at WIUT: BA Business Administration, BSc Business Information Systems, BSc Economics, BA Commercial Law to address RQs 1, 2 and 3.
- Ten students comprising two from each of the above degree courses; students to address RQ 4.

Participant selection will by way of purposive sampling and through participants volunteering to take part.

The proposed research questions (RQs) are as follows:

1. What are the lecturers' understandings of employability pedagogy in undergraduate degree courses?
2. How do lecturers mobilise their perceptions of employability pedagogy to construct classroom activity systems?
3. How do lecturers perceive that employability pedagogy is integrated in curricula of different undergraduate degree courses?
4. What kind of awareness do students have of the use of employability pedagogy in their undergraduate studies? Does this vary according to degree course?

There will be four methods of data collection:

1. Semi-structured interviews

Lecturers and students will be interviewed at the beginning and the end of teaching period. Interviews will be constructed, transcribed and analysed using categories drawn from Activity Theory (AT), which specifically addresses subject position, tools, object, rules, and division of labour. Interview questions will address issues relating to classroom pedagogy, learning strategies and other activities that foster the development of employability skills.

2. Classroom observations

Observation of classroom activities will take place during scheduled lesson times, and will be video recorded with the consent of lecturers and students. The observation will be non-participant where I will not be involved in the activities. Classroom observations will also be analysed using an AT coding schedule, drawing on previous coding schedules for observing classroom practices developed by Hardman (2008). AT has developed from Vygotsky's (1978) developmental theory where pedagogy involves mediation by peers or experienced teachers within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Engeström (2014), building on Vygotsky, emphasised the role that power and control influence over practice, with activity systems themselves being considered units of analysis.

3. Learner journals and lecturer journals

Students will complete a learner journal during the period of taught classes (October to April), where they will write a reflection on any activities undertaken that they perceive as being relevant to the development of employability skills. Lecturers will also keep a journal of reflection on classroom activities that they perceive contribute to students' employability skills. All journals will be analysed using an AT coding schedule. These journals will be shared only with the researcher, through a secure online sharing platform.

4. Focus groups

After the teaching period and completion of journals participants will be invited to a focus group to discuss the project. There will be one for lecturers and one for students. These will be audio recorded.

Previous case studies investigating students' perspectives of employability have focused primarily on graduate destinations (Holmes, 2013). The value of this thesis may be that it will explore the way both students and lecturers understand and manage their own perceptions of employability pedagogy in relation to current practice at their university. In addition, the approach that I am taking is using a

framework that has not previously been applied to employability pedagogy (Activity Theory). The new application of this theory may add to the literature on Activity Theory as a tool for qualitative research.

Section 3 Research Participants (tick all that apply)

☐ Early years/pre-school	☒ Adults *please specify below*	
☐ Ages 5-11	☐ Unknown – specify below	
☐ Ages 12-16	☐ No participants	
☐ Young people aged 17-18		

NB: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

Section 4 Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call;   involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes ☐ *	No ☒
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes ☐ *	No ☒
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes ☐ *	No ☒

* *Give further details in* **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

Section 5 Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments.***

Section 6 Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a.	Name of dataset/s		
b.	Owner of dataset/s		
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes ☐ No ☐	
			If no, do you have the owner's permission/license? Yes ☐ No* ☐
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes ☐ No ☐	
		Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes ☐ No* ☐	
		Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* ☐ No ☐	
		Will you be linking data to individuals? Yes* ☐ No ☐	
e.	Are the data sensitive ([DPA 1998 definition](#))?	Yes* ☐	No ☐
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
g.	**If no,** was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
h.	**If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes ☐	No* ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments.***

Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	**Data subjects -** Who will the data be collected from? Staff and Students from Westminster International University, Tashkent
b.	**What data will be collected?** Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected Interviews, classroom observation recordings and learner journal entries
c.	**Disclosure** – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to? Project supervisors
d.	**Data storage** – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick*, encrypted laptop* etc. All data will be stored on reseacher's encpted password controlled laptop and USB storage. Student journal entries will be shared with researcher only through a password protected shared online platform. *Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS

e.	**Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?	Yes ☐ No ☒

f.	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? The data will be kept on researcher's laptop or encrpted device for a period of up to ten years after successful completion of the EdD Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are: Yes - all data stored on encpted password protected devices Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.) No

Section 8 Ethical issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

− Methods − Sampling − Recruitment − Gatekeepers − Informed consent − Potentially vulnerable participants − Safeguarding/child protection − Sensitive topics	− International research − Risks to participants and/or researchers − Confidentiality/Anonymity − Disclosures/limits to confidentiality − Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection) − Reporting − Dissemination and use of findings

Recruitment of participants is on a voluntary basis. Participants in the study will be informed as to the purpose of the research, and will complete a consent form. If participants prefer they may give oral consent upon reading the project information and consent forms. All participants will be reassured that there is no intent to deceive, and they will not suffer any harm, nor will there be any harm in terms of personal and professional development. There will be minimal inconvenience to research participants. All interviews will take place during regular university hours, and participant journals can be completed at any time that is convenient for participants. Participants may benefit from taking part in the study by developing a more acute awareness of how the development of employability skills is embedded in WIUT courses. Participating could help students to better relate their university experience to the needs of future employers, and help lecturers develop classroom activities that better fulfil employability focused learning outcomes.

The research will be disseminated in various forms, both during and on completion of the study. This will include conferences and submissions to peer reviewed journals. Research participants will be informed of any publications, should they be interested in the results of the study.

Participant contributions to the research are anonymous, and all collected data will be accessible only to the researcher on encrypted password protected devices. After the interviews have been transcribed the text, if requested, will be sent to the participant to verify as a genuine representation of the conversation. Participants will be able to withdraw from the research, without giving a reason, at any stage up until

251

31 May 2019. If this is the case all previously collected data from the participant will be deleted and not used for the study. The data will be kept for a period of up to ten years after successful completion of the EdD, whereupon it will be deleted from all devices.

The topics for discussion in the interviews and focus groups will be focused mainly on issues relating to teaching, learning and employability. The social and cultural context within which these discussions take place is an integral part of the study. While I understand that Uzbekistan society may not enjoy the same freedom of expression in the media and political circles as Western democracies, it is not anticipated that participants will raise issues relating to politically sensitive topics that have been subject to censorship from the state run media. During the interviews I will not raise issues that may be considered politically sensitive. However, in the event that participants do raise politically sensitive issues that are not deemed relevant to the research, these sections will not be transcribed or included in the data set for analysis.

In my previous published research on WIUT (Paterson, 2017), the institute was not anonymised. With agreement from the WIUT Ethics committee it is anticipated that this will also be the case in this study.. Participants will be informed that all efforts to assure anonymity when disseminating the findings will be taken, including the use of pseudonyms.

I have undertaken numerous visits to Uzbekistan over the past six years. Each time I have been covered by University of Westminster staff insurance policy, and have conducted the University approved risk assessment survey. These are always preconditions of Westminster staff for travel to Uzbekistan. There is minimal risk to visitors to Uzbekistan, as long as long as local customs are respected. Westminster provides all staff with an updated visitors guide before each trip, ensuring that any new regulations regarding safety are met.

Section 9 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached		
a.	Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research *(List attachments below)*	Yes ☒ No ☐

	If applicable/appropriate:		
b.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	☐	Yes
c.	The proposal ('case for support') for the project	☒	Yes
d.	Full risk assessment	☐	Yes

Section 10 Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.
☒   ☐

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.
☒   ☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the   course of this project.
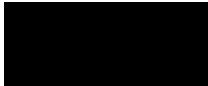
Name	Richard Paterson
Date	30/04/18

Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor **must** refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Coordinator (via ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC.

Also see 'when to pass a student ethics review up to the Research Ethics Committee':

http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/policiesProcedures/42253.html

Student name	Richard Paterson
Student department	Learning and Leadership
Course	EdD
Project title	Perceptions of pedagogy for employability at a transnational university: A qualitative case study.
Reviewer 1	
Supervisor/first reviewer name	Susan Taylor
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	Richard has given consideration to any potential ethical issues.
Supervisor/first reviewer signature	⬛
Date	30 April 2018
Reviewer 2	
Second reviewer name	Sara Bubb
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	No
Supervisor/second reviewer signature	⬛

Date	30/4/18	
Decision on behalf of reviews		
Decision	Approved	☒
	Approved subject to the following additional measures	☐
	Not approved for the reasons given below	☐
	Referred to REC for review	☐
Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC		
Comments from reviewers for the applicant		

END OF APPENDICES