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Played or Player: Education, Technologies and Organisational Politics

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Abstract This interdisciplinary work lies at the intersection of education, technology and political sociology. It is intended to contribute to the politicisation of educational technologies, something that so far seems not to have explicitly constituted a major component of the international contemporary theoretical literature. It addresses the research question: How have higher education components acted politically (and/or been politically acted upon) in relation to educational technologies? This question is addressed through a naturalistic investigation of a Saudi university, analysing interviews, observations and documents. Analysis of the raw data in line with the grounded theory approach pointes to four key themes: *Politicising Actors*, *De-Politicising Actors*, *Politicised Actors* and *De-Politicised Actors*. From these themes can be grounded a theory: that educational technologies entail a political game involving either players or played. This can imply that, in Saudi academic circles, political power appears not to have been fairly distributed. The political recommendation therefore is that there is a need, at least temporarily, for prioritisation of a 'left-wing politics' of educational technologies that seeks political fairness.

Keywords Education, Technologies, Organizational Politics, Saudi, Sociology

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Some sociologists of educational technologies recommend that the use of such technologies should be approached cautiously in a way that critically and reflectively brings to light 'the deep entanglement of technologies in education with power as exercised at different levels' (Agalianos, 1996: 3; Apple, 2004; Monahan, 2004; Selwyn, 2011a; 2011b). Following such a recommendation, more research is therefore needed that looks into the politics of educational technologies within and, indeed, across their three levels, ie. at the macro level (ie. amongst various major external and internal forces), at the meso level (among different organisational elements inside the institution) and at the micro level amongst immediate users (Selwyn, 2010). Bearing this suggestion in mind, the present article thus aims to ground a theory for education, technologies, society and organisational politics within higher education institutions, concentrating particularly on the micro and meso levels, leaving the macro level for further research. This article is thus intended to be a contribution to the politicisation of higher education in general and of educational technologies in particular.

Having reviewed the literature, it can be seen that it is widely believed that technologies in the higher education context, just like other social contexts, are (or at least, can be) politicised, being constructed to enable certain interests and thus necessarily constrain other interests (Dubos, 1970; Winner, 1977; 1980; Bijker and Law, 1992; Mackay and Gillespie, 1992; Pfaffenberger, 1992; Agar et al., 2002; Sørensen, 2002; Wajcman, 2004). Likewise, the use of such technologies is contested and therefore political (Whitworth, 2009). In short, educational technologies are, or at least should be perceived as being, fundamentally a matter of politics, whether during the process of construction or during the course of use (Al Lily, 2012). At certain times, individuals are conscious of this but at other (or even most) times they forget that educational technologies are a political issue (Al Lily, 2013a; b). However, the question that really begs an answer is: How have higher education elements acted politically in relation to educational technologies? This question has been chosen to act as the focal point of the current study.

What follows relies on existing literature to establish a general theoretical basis for the current study. Goffman (1959) refers to an association between daily life and theatre, with individuals functioning in their day-to-day life in a way similar to the way characters on stage act. Thus, Lyman and Scott (1975: 3) declare that social reality is realised theatrically; that 'reality is a drama, life is theatre and the social world is inherently dramatic.' Act II, Scene 7, features one of Shakespeare's most famous monologues, spoken by Jaques, which begins: 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts [...]' (1599-1600). This theatrical vantage point portrays

individuals in their everyday life as essentially 'actors.' Latour (1992) takes this illustration even further, thinking that it is not only humans who are the ones doing the acting in everyday life, but also non-humans (ie. resources and rules) that act, just as humans do. Yet one might disagree with this perspective, thinking that non-humans are actually neither 'actors' nor social elements, since they are actually not conscious and cannot think for themselves (Evans, 1979). Although this argument appears to make sense on the surface, it is surely the case that it is not only humans who are active participants in the network of interactions that make a situation (Al Lily, 2012). Non-humans *do* impose power and constraints and therefore deserve to be recognised as actors, at least in theoretical terms (Giddens, 1984).

We can see then that there are complicated political correlations between humans and non-humans, among humans themselves and amongst non-humans themselves. This implies that educational technologies, as non-humans, interact with other non-human elements (including other technologies) and with humans to make a situation. Another implication is that humans politically influence other humans *through* non-humans, thus turning non-humans into politicised elements. In other words, humans construct (ie. exploit) non-human elements to achieve certain political aims, essentially politicising the non-humans. The challenge, however, is that non-humans, once constructed, can appear to take on a life on their own, thereby exercising power and therefore acting upon human components and, moreover, upon those who have constructed (ie. given a life to) these non-humans. This again underlines why non-human elements should, at least analytically and theoretically, be recognised as actors.

So, the theoretical foundation of the current study puts forward the argument that academia entails human and non-human actors, who interact politically with one another to make a situation, ie. to make higher education activity. Yet, considering that social life functions based on social relationships and that there are elements doing the acting, there must necessarily be elements being acted upon by those elements doing the acting. Thus, the assumption here is that, in order for social life to operate, there must be elements acting and, in consequence, elements being acted upon. Consequently, the previously mentioned research question of the current study needs to be modified, by including the following few words in brackets: How have higher education components acted politically (or been politically acted upon) in relation to educational technologies?

2. Methodology

At the Losing Momentum Conference held at the University of Oxford in 2012, the keynote speaker Neil Selwyn showed how the field of educational technologies would benefit considerably if writers would read literatures other than their own. This could be seen as having the potential to bring not only academic advantages to the field (eg. the incorporation of innovative theories, ideas, concepts and terms) but moreover personal advantages to researchers (eg. new inspirations and opportunities to be published). Considering this suggestion, I identified two subjects from which I thought the field of educational technologies might benefit. One is action research and the other post-modernism. Action research means that an employee researches the organisation wherein s/he works (Coghlan and Brannick, 2009). I thought that action research would be important to higher education institutions (including their educational technologies) given its potential to truly stimulate organisational reforms and improvements, given that change, as it is widely believed in the Saudi context, comes from inside. Action research seems important particularly to educational technologies considering that such technologies appear to perform better if they are institutionalised through local research.

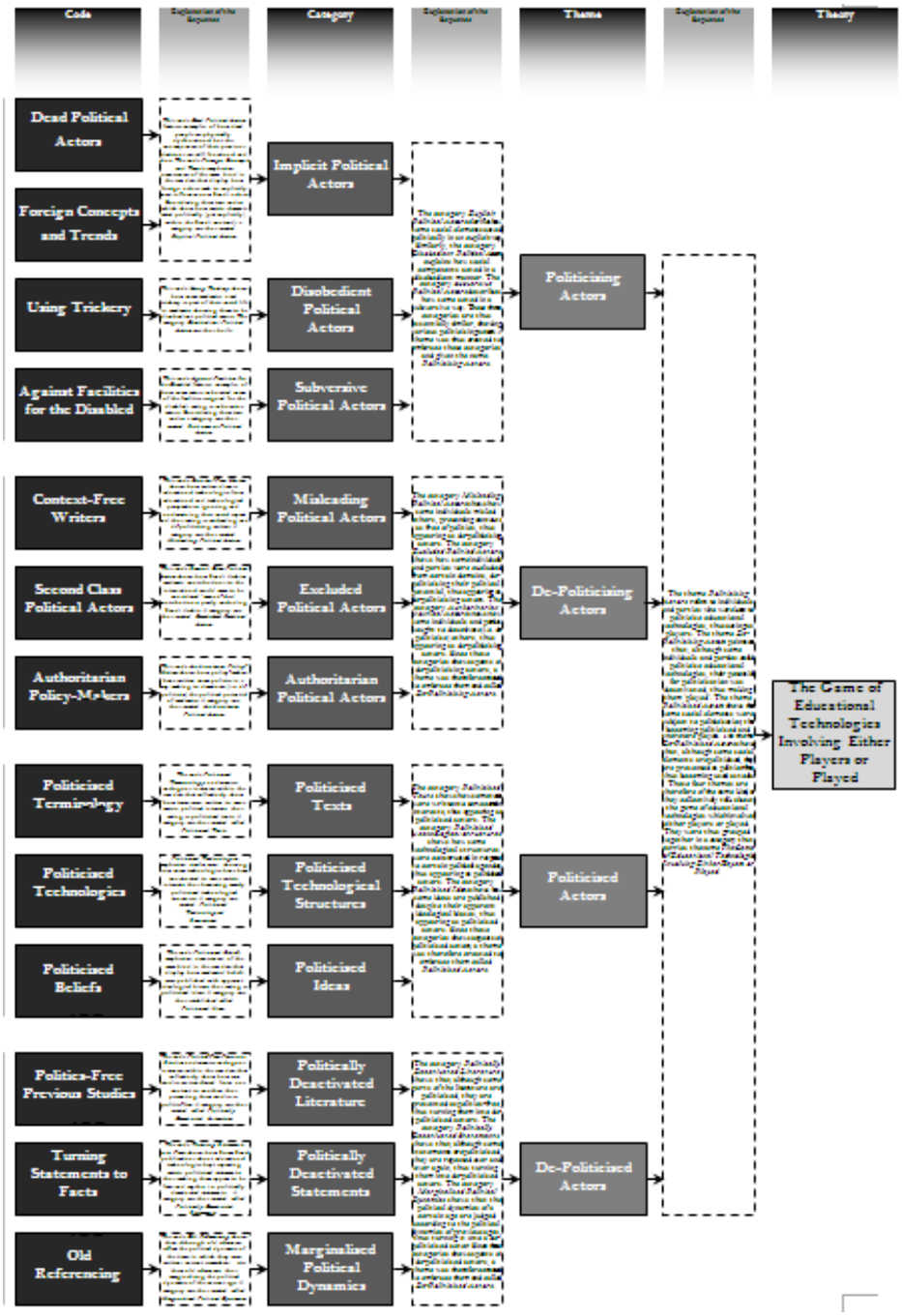
The other subject I read about was the 'hard' approach to post-modernism, which seeks to analyse pre-existing structures from a mainly destructive perspective (Breidenbaugh, 2010). I thought that this approach would benefit the field of educational technologies given that the literature on Saudi educational technologies seems to have reached a stage of stabilisation and even repetition, and therefore there is a need for a new approach taking people out of their comfort zone. Hard post-modernism is therefore a good candidate in this respect, having the revolutionary ability to question, trouble and disrupt pre-existing resources, rules, theories and myths.

Accordingly, the notions of action research and hard post-modernism were combined, acting as a methodological framework for the current study. The study involved analysing documents, unstructured observations of day-to-day activities and unstructured individual interviews with 126 undergraduates, 19 academics and six academic-managers. The female campus was excluded due to the carefully applied pattern of gender separation that exists in the Saudi context (see Jamjoom, 2009; Al-Saggaf, 2012; Al Lily, 2012). The data were analysed in line with the parameters of the grounded theory technique, following the process suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967): Data → Code → Category → Theme → Theory. Once the data were collected, I repeatedly went through them in an attempt to find 'natural analytical divisions' (Holliday, 2005: 105), bearing the research question in mind throughout. Once these natural analytical divisions were identified, I began to code the data with them in mind, generating codes. I subsequently assembled similar codes to create categories, which I grouped in turn to form themes and ultimately to constitute a theoretical proposition. In this approach, the data 'are taken as a whole and then organised according to themes, but the themes themselves are partly emergent and partly influenced by [the research question] that the researcher brought to the research' (Holliday, 2005: 108). The thematic process here was therefore iterative, as I repeatedly followed the analytical steps back and forth, in an attempt to make better sense of the whole structure (Denscombe, 2007). It

must be made clear that, since the study seeks calculatedly to politicise educational technologies, its findings are far from representative. Rather, the primary intention here is to challenge readers and hopefully take them out of their conform zone. Table 1 below shows the data after sorting.

The table may appear to show a more or less logical sequence in the analytical process, but it is important to note that I do not claim that the stages between the initial data collection and the completed data analysis occurred as 'a nice logical sequence with each stage being completed before moving on to the next' (Denscombe, 2007: 288). This table, as touched on earlier, is the outcome of engagement with a reasoning of the data that was both inductive and deductive. The reasoning and analytical process followed throughout the study were informed essentially by the belief that, in naturalistic investigation, anyone's account represents a slice from the life world and is therefore appropriate subject matter for naturalistic examination.

Table 1. The Data after Being Sorted Using the Grounded Theory Approach (NB the unreadable text in the table will be enlarged and made readable later when discussing the findings)



3. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

3.1. Introduction

Analysis of the data pointed to four themes: *Politicised Actors*, *De-Politicising Actors*, *Politicised Actors* and *De-Politicised Actors*. What follows unpacks these themes, showing how these themes were generated from various categories.

3.2. Politicising Actors (Theme)

The current theme *Politicising Actors* stemmed, as illustrated in Table 2, from three categories, namely *Implicit Political Actors*, *Disobedient Political Actors* and *Subversive Political Actors*. These categories, each of which consists of similar codes, are discussed below.

3.2.1. Implicit Political Actors (Category)

This category (*Implicit Political Actors*) emerged from a variety of similar codes. Because of the word limit and to eliminate repetition, the article concentrates on only two codes; *Dead Political Actors* and *Foreign Concepts and Trends* (see Table 3 below). These two codes are discussed in some depth below.

Table 2. Politicising Actors (Theme)

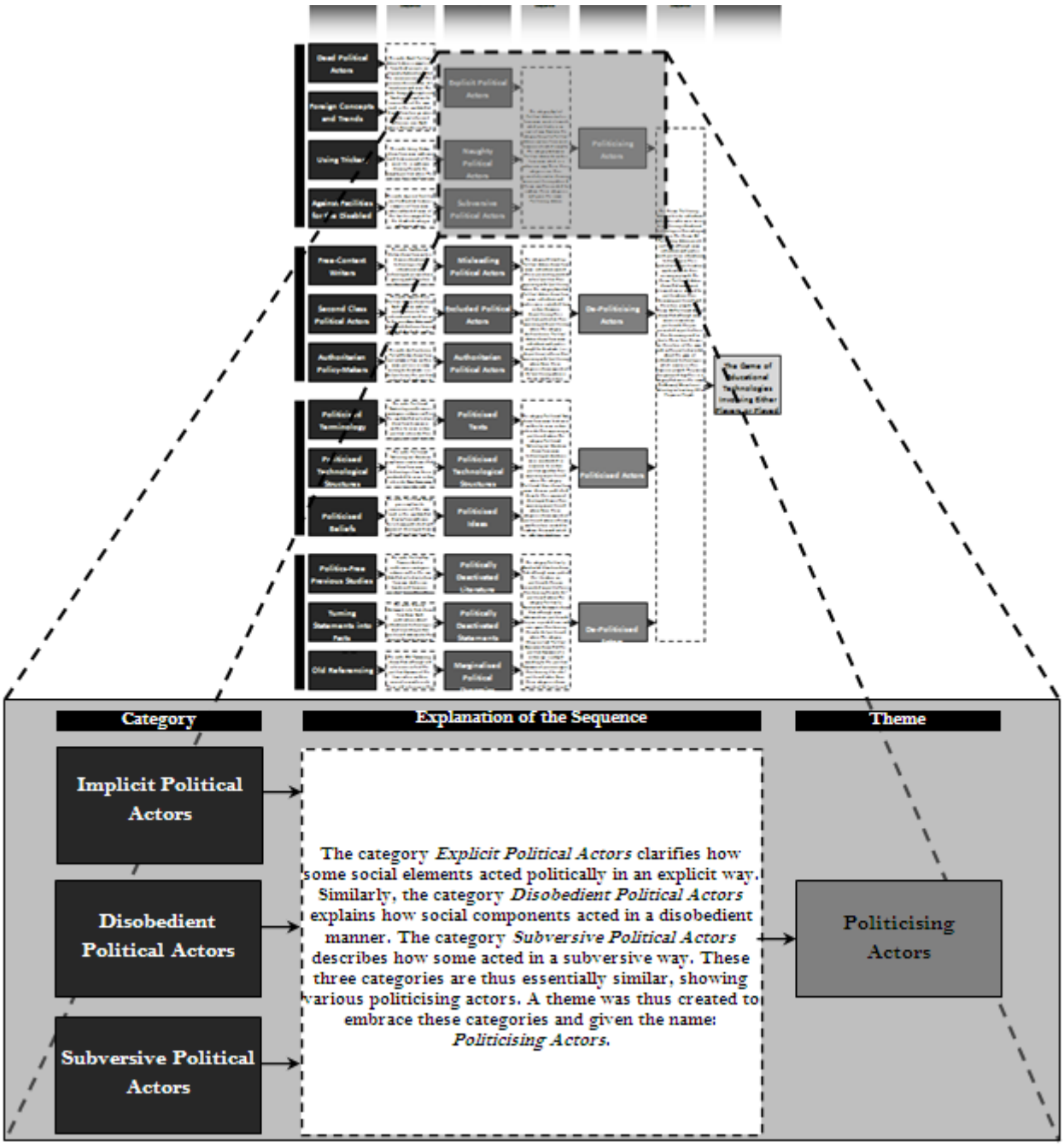
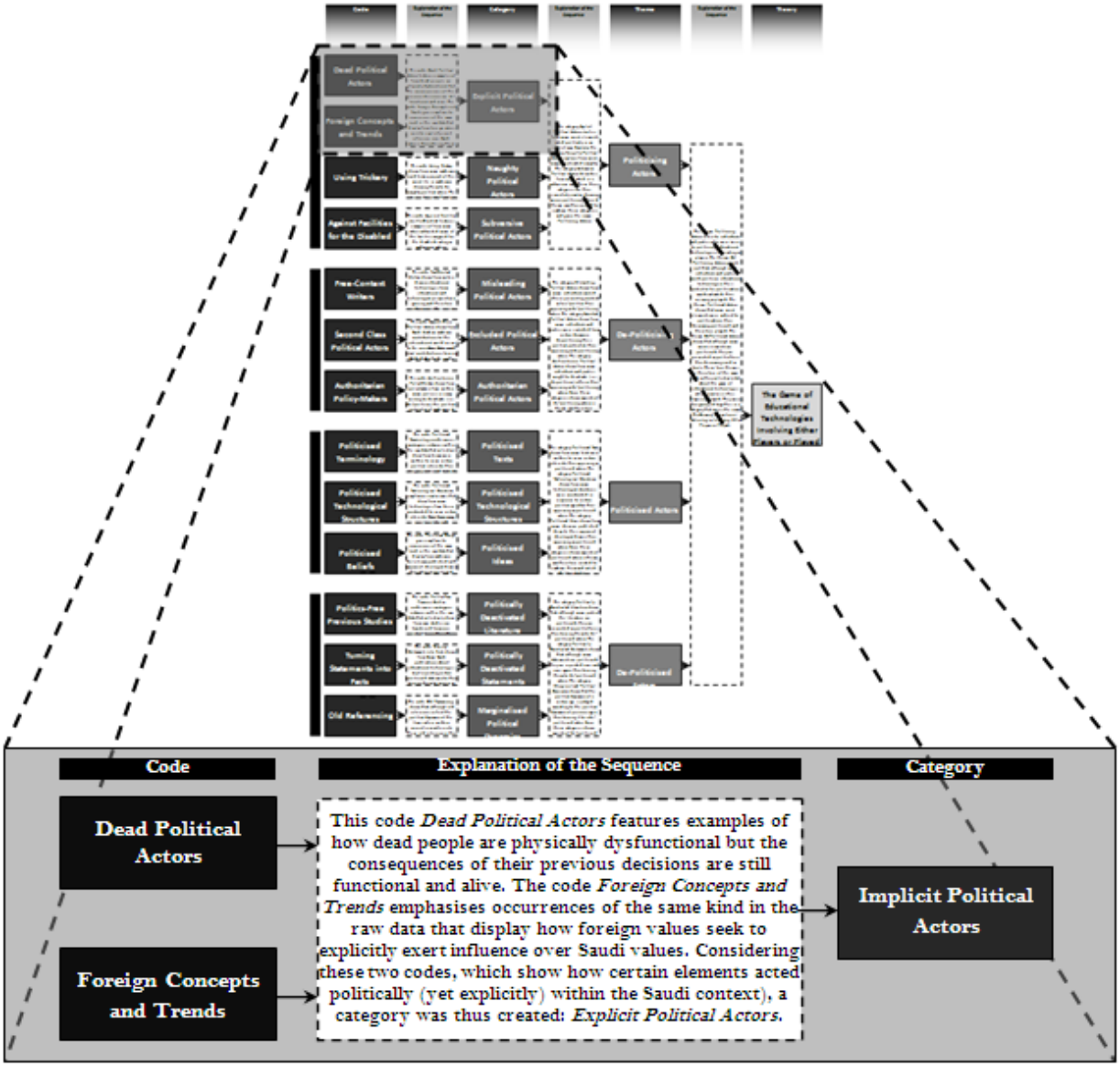


Table 3. Implicit Political Actors (Category)



Dead Political Actors (Code)

Based on various observations, it has been realised that Saudi academia has been politicised not only by explicit actors but also by implicit actors. Implicit actors include dead policy-makers, as the consequences of their previous decisions are still functional and alive despite their own demise. It was noticed during the research that many existing components of Saudi academia, including policies, regulations, structures, buildings and technologies, were not made by current generations but rather established and passed on by previous generations. This suggests that Saudi academia needs to be viewed through a hard post-modernistic lens (or any questioning stance), helping us to question, face up to and challenge what has been passed on by previous generations to the present generation. Questioning and challenging what has passed on to a generation from preceding generations is important for various reasons. One is that any decision made at a particular time corresponds to the needs and political interests and dramas of that time (Pfaffenberger, 1992), so it seems inappropriate if such a decision is merely passed on across times and generations. This argument has ideological roots in the Saudi context wherein it is widely believed that a ruling changes according to time and place.

An additional reason why pre-existing structures need to be problematised is the concern that, as structures moves on across generations, they are more likely to increasingly become taken for granted and seen as solid objects (Schütz, 1944). Such structures could even turn out to be seen as ‘sacred’ (in the words of an interviewee) for various reasons. One reason is that Saudi history is taught to citizens as being hierarchical, with previous generations being better than following generations. Thus, humanity, from a Saudi perspective, becomes worse and worse, meaning that one

should merely follow previous generations instead of challenging them since what they did is believed to be better. One more point to mention is that, culturally speaking, Saudis are not allowed to make statues of their ancestors given the belief that societies in the past reportedly respected statues of their forebears to such an extent that they started to worship them. This so much respect of Saudis to their history makes it difficult for any questioning stance to take root in the Saudi context, since such a stance is intended to challenge (ie. 'disrespect') history. Another (and more relevant) implication is that dead people must be noted as alive (yet implicit) political actors in the Saudi Arabian context, shaping current and future events and happenings. Surely this is true of any social context, considering that no culture or individual is actually free of the past, as it remains alive in language, physical spaces, genes, etc.

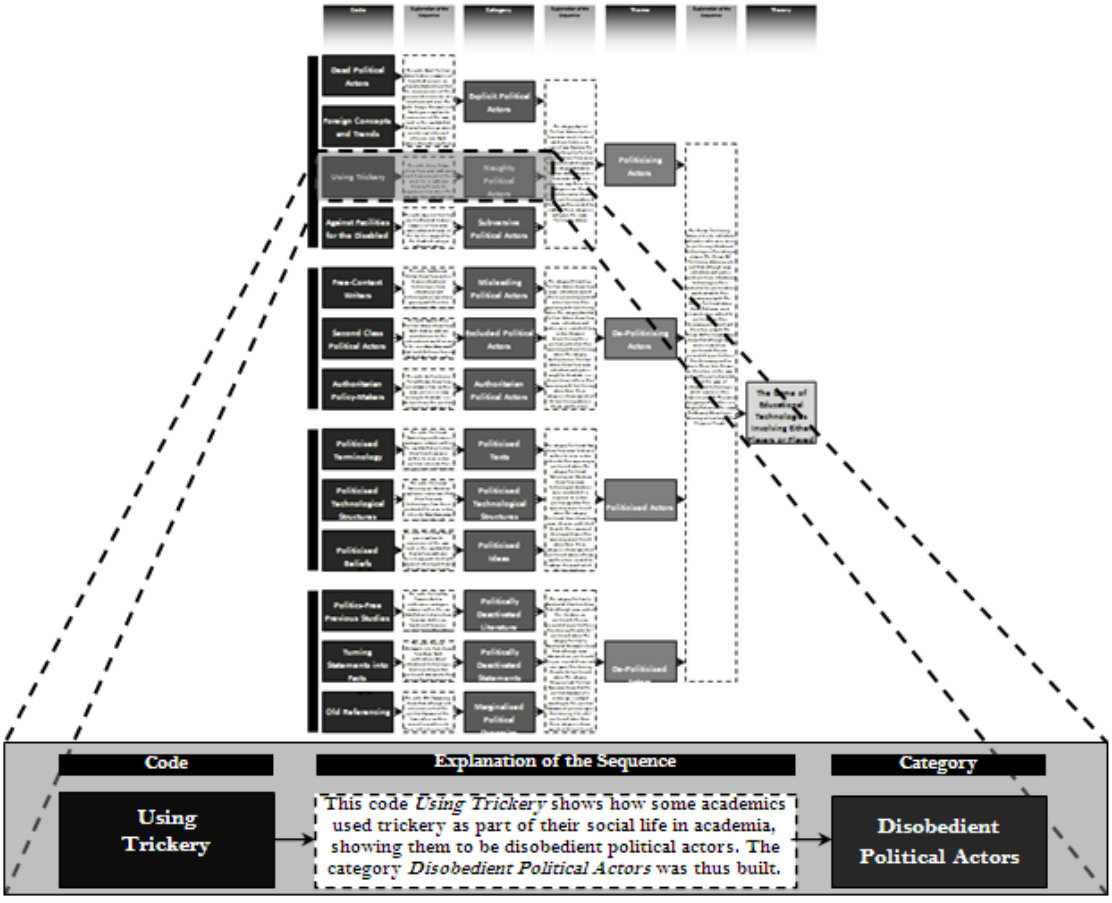
Foreign Higher Education System (Code)

Historically speaking, there have been secular attempts (be they explicit or implicit, intentional or unintentional) to politicise Saudi academia (including its educational technologies) and wider society. A pertinent example here is the introduction of the secular higher education system into the religious county of Saudi Arabia in the 1950s despite the resistance of the mosque authorities and of some citizens to this system, which was criticised by them for being secular (Arebi, 1994; Al-Aqeel, 2005; Al-Owain, 2009; Al-Washmi, 2009). Given the politically protective nature of Saudi culture, such secular attempts at times fail or get 'tamed' and filtered out, although they at other times succeed. For example, although the secular education system eventually did take root in Saudi Arabia, it has been modified considerably through the inclusion of a large number of religious courses into it, thus undermining its 'secular' grounding. Despite this resistance of Saudi society, the values of developed countries remain dominant, and some academic commentators from such countries have been annoyed by the authoritarian nature of developed societies, believing that the generalisation of developed countries' findings to the rest of the world has become a source of embarrassment (Selwyn, 2013). An implication here is that developed countries must be perceived as political actors in Saudi Arabia, attempting to exert influence over its societal culture in general and over its higher education activity in particular.

3.2.2. Disobedient Political Actors (Category)

The category *Disobedient Political Actors* is composed of various (yet similar) codes. Again, because of the word limit, only the main code (ie. *Using trickery*) is illuminated here (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Disobedient Political Actors (Category)



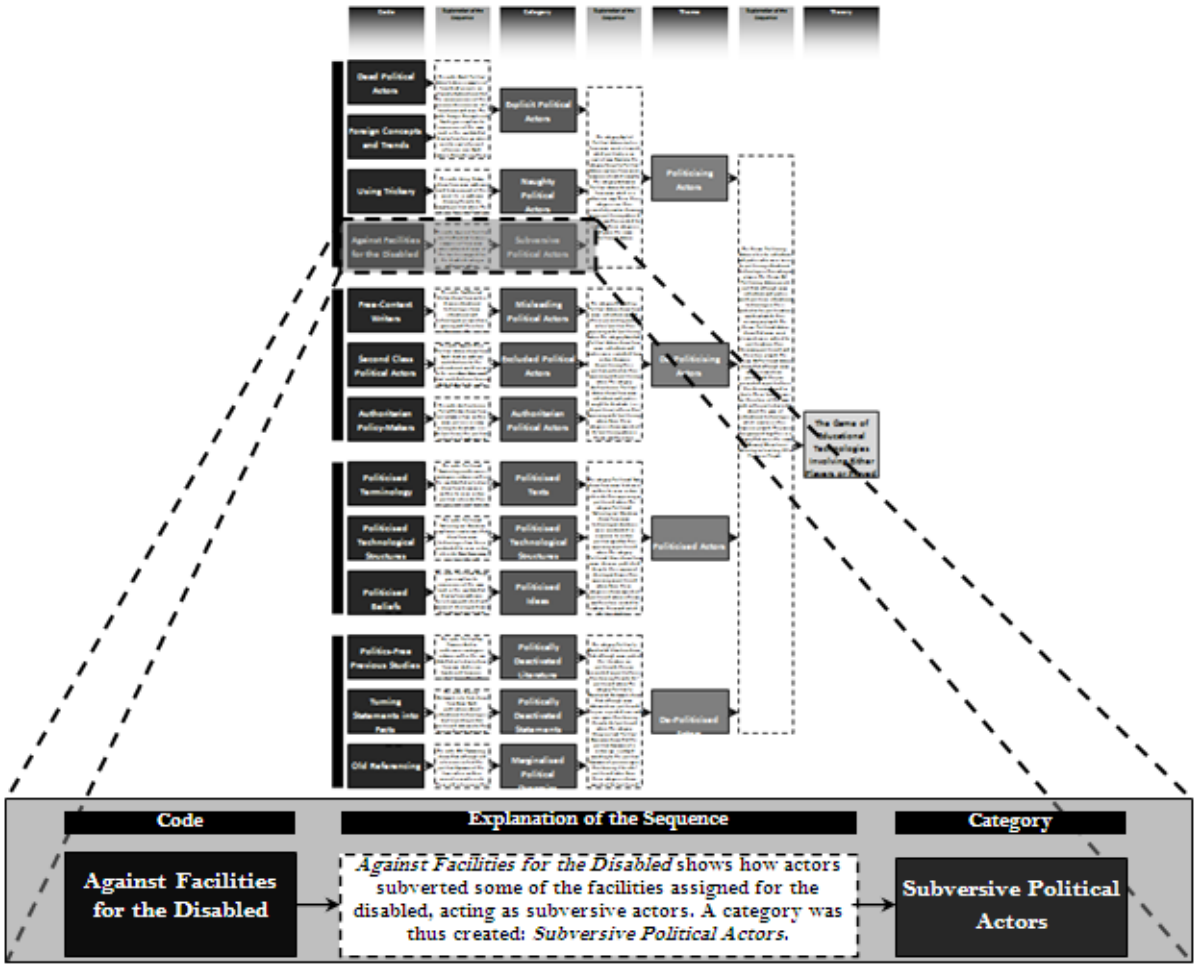
Using Trickery (Code)

The College of Education moved to a new building, wherein academics' office doors have transparent windows that enable people outside the office to look inside. Some academics, however, came to realise that the door was designed in this way in order to enhance surveillance, and therefore they covered the window with non-transparent sheets, thus disturbing political intentions and appearing as politically ill-disciplined. Other academics, however, did not cover the window but rather left on the light of the office all the time so as to trick the one looking through the window by making one think that, since the light of the office is on, then the academic must be around despite the academic actually not being. A similar example of such trickery is that some academics were reported as leaving their cars in the college's car park, although they were actually away, so as to trick their colleagues and managers by pretending that they were around although they actually were not. Other academics, however, 'do not give a damn' (in the words of an interviewee), not caring about any kind of political surveillance strategies and, moreover, not meeting their 'duties' well because they know that their job is permanent anyway (ie. that it is a state-given job and therefore it is difficult to get fired) and therefore secure, and also because of a belief in academic freedom and autonomy. Even if it has been decided that an academic is to be fired due to indiscipline, there will usually be firm social pressure on the authorities to withdraw their dismissal decision. To illustrate this social pressure, the members of the extended family of the academic being fired will keep putting pressure on the authorities to change their mind. These members will, moreover, contact the members of the authorities' families, begging them to contact their relatives who are in charge of the dismissal decision and persuade them to change their mind. Such social pressure is exercised to change even death penalty sentences for murders. These examples suggest some aspects of the drama of Saudi academia. More pertinently, they show how some academics use trickery as part of their social life in academia, making them disobedient political actors.

3.2.3. Subversive Political Actors (Category)

This category, called *Subversive Political Actors*, is derived from a range of comparable codes. What follows, however, explores only the main code, ie. *Against Facilities for the Disabled*(see Table 5 below).

Table 5. Subversive Political Actors (Category)



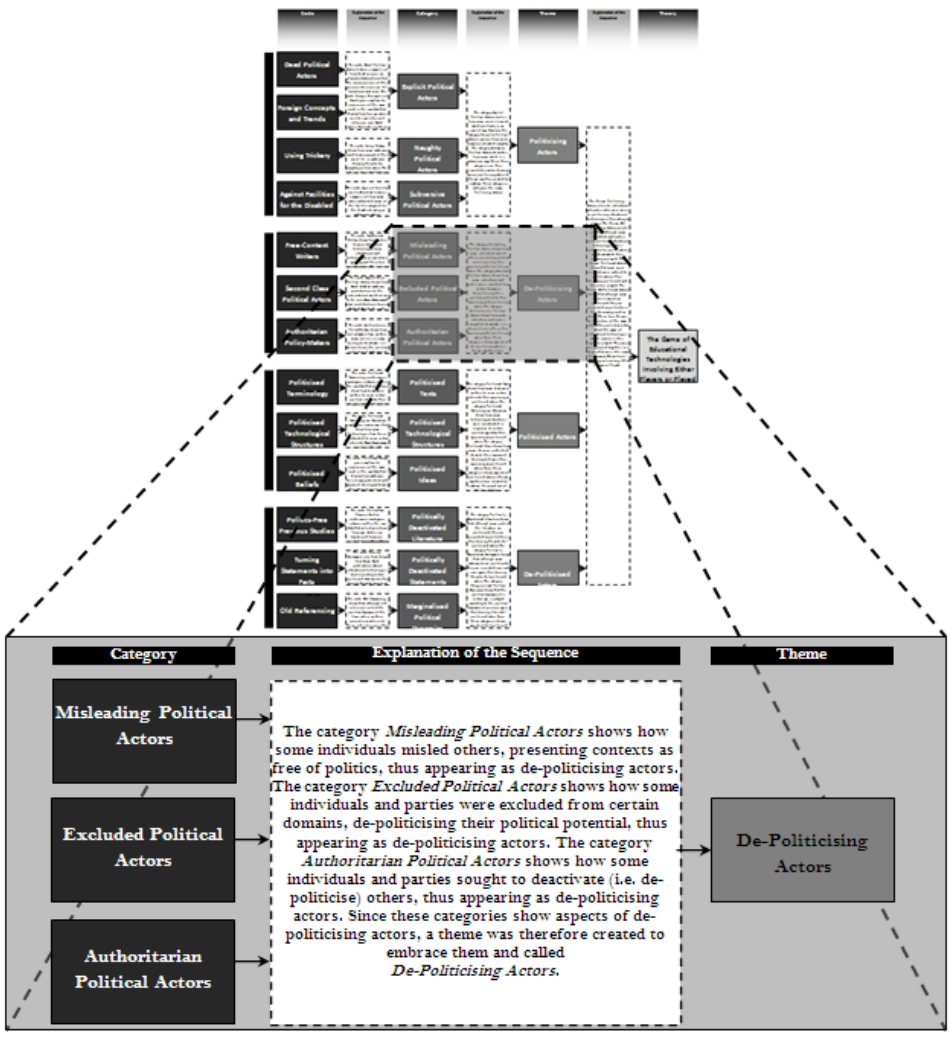
Against Facilities for the Disabled (Code)

This code is drawn from observations and formed in consideration of the existing literature. Even in developed countries, higher education institutions are criticised because, although they are places which transfer theoretical knowledge and from which expertise is sought, they are, however, still weak in applying this knowledge to themselves (Hammond et al., 1992; Garvin, 1993; Cornford and Pollock, 2003). Such institutions seem to be good at the production of theories but not at the implementation of these theories on themselves. Although the university has departments called Educational Technologies and Special Education that theorise around the importance of using technologies for the integration of the disabled into academic life, there are still limited facilities for the disabled. Despite the limited number of such facilities, some higher education actors have subverted them. Having observed day-to-day activities, I saw cars parked in a way blocking the path allocated for the disabled. There are various possible reasons behind such subversion. One could be that these subversive actors thought that these facilities were out of use since there hardly any disabled people can be seen in the university. Another reason could be that these subversive actors were just self-centred, inconsiderate and/or not civilised enough. Or perhaps these actors simply did not place the disabled at the forefront of their attention. Another possible justification is that these actors did not believe in the importance of integrating the disabled into public life. I hardly ever see disabled people in Saudi Arabia, and therefore I always wonder if this is because Saudi Arabia has few disabled citizens or whether such citizens have been isolated despite Saudi Arabia being advertised as the 'Kingdom of Humanity.' It is also possible that the subversive actors used the parking areas for the disabled because of (or moreover in angry response to) the limited parking areas for 'the abled.'

3.3. De-Politicising Actors (Theme)

The article now moves on to the second theme, *De-Politicising Actors*. This theme, as demonstrated in Table 6 below, comes out of three categories: *Misleading Political Actors*, *Excluded Political Actors* and *Authoritarian Political Actors*.

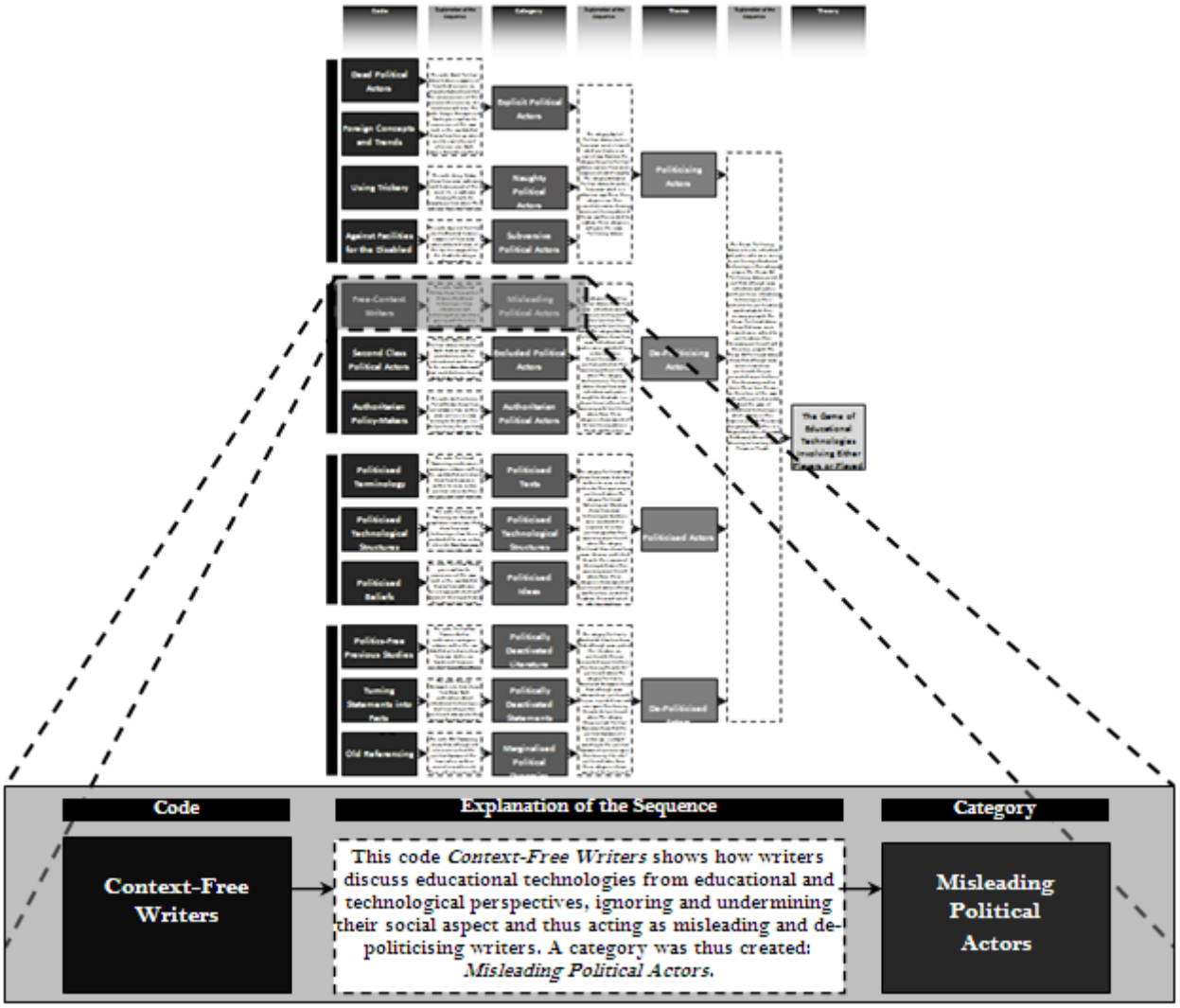
Table 6. De-Politicising Actors (Theme)



3.3.1. Misleading Political Actors (Category)

This category, entitled *Misleading Political Actors*, comes out of several parallel codes. To keep the article short, only the main code (ie. *Context-Free Writers*) is discussed below (see Table 7).

Table 7. Misleading Political Actors (Category)



Context-Free Writers (Code)

A serious limitation in many Saudi publications is that they look into educational technologies from merely educational and technological perspectives, thus ignoring their political, economic, organisational and historical dimension. Undermining the political context risks showing authors to lack deep understanding of the surroundings, appearing to be politically naïve and unaware that educational technologies do not exist in a vacuum, as well as that the social context has the power to even prevent educational technologies from having an effect or even from taking place. The Saudi academic Al Arfaj and others (2012) lay emphasis on the importance of cinemas as educational technologies, closing their eyes to the fact that cinemas do not exist and are indeed banned in Saudi Arabia. When talking about cinemas as educational technologies, the authors should have taken this opportunity to talk about the possible influence of the social context on educational technologies and to show that such educational technologies are not allowed in Saudi Arabia not because of their educational ineffectiveness but because they are not consistent with the national culture. Saudi society is a highly directed, structured and politically protected society, and hence the investigation of its educational technologies from a social perspective is therefore a must. After all, educational technologies in a certain society are associated with the many cultural and social configurations and social relations that form that society (Selwyn, 2013). This implies that researchers writing about educational technologies from only educational and technological perspectives while ignoring their politicised components could be seen as de-politicising and therefore misleading actors.

3.3.2. Excluded Political Actors (Category)

This category (*Excluded Political Actors*) stems from a number of analogous codes. However, only one code (*Second-Class Political Actors*) is discussed below (see Table 8), with the other codes to be illuminated in a forthcoming article.

Second-Class Political Actors (Code)

Leaving aside the question of how active it is, Saudi Arabia, like any other country, is a political actor in a globalised world. However, Saudi academic contributions to the international world appear to be considered 'second-class' and even marginalised, making Saudi Arabia partially excluded. Selwyn (2013) agrees with such a claim, believing that, aside from the familiar settings of the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, 'the occasional reports from "other" countries that one may come across are seen usually as marginal additions to the field' (p. vii). This means that reform is needed to overcome this classification and discrimination. There should be considerable effort to translate into English, not just the other way around. This will hopefully help reduce the domination of literature from English-speaking countries and will, all being well, help grant other literatures more voice. Saudi Arabia has put some effort into translation from English into Arabic, but they should have also considered encouraging more translation from Arabic into English.

3.3.3. Authoritarian Political Actors (Category)

This category of *Authoritarian Political Actors* comes from various related codes. Only the main code (ie. *Authoritarian Policy-Makers*), however, is covered in the current article (see Table 9).

Table 8. Excluded Political Actors (Category)

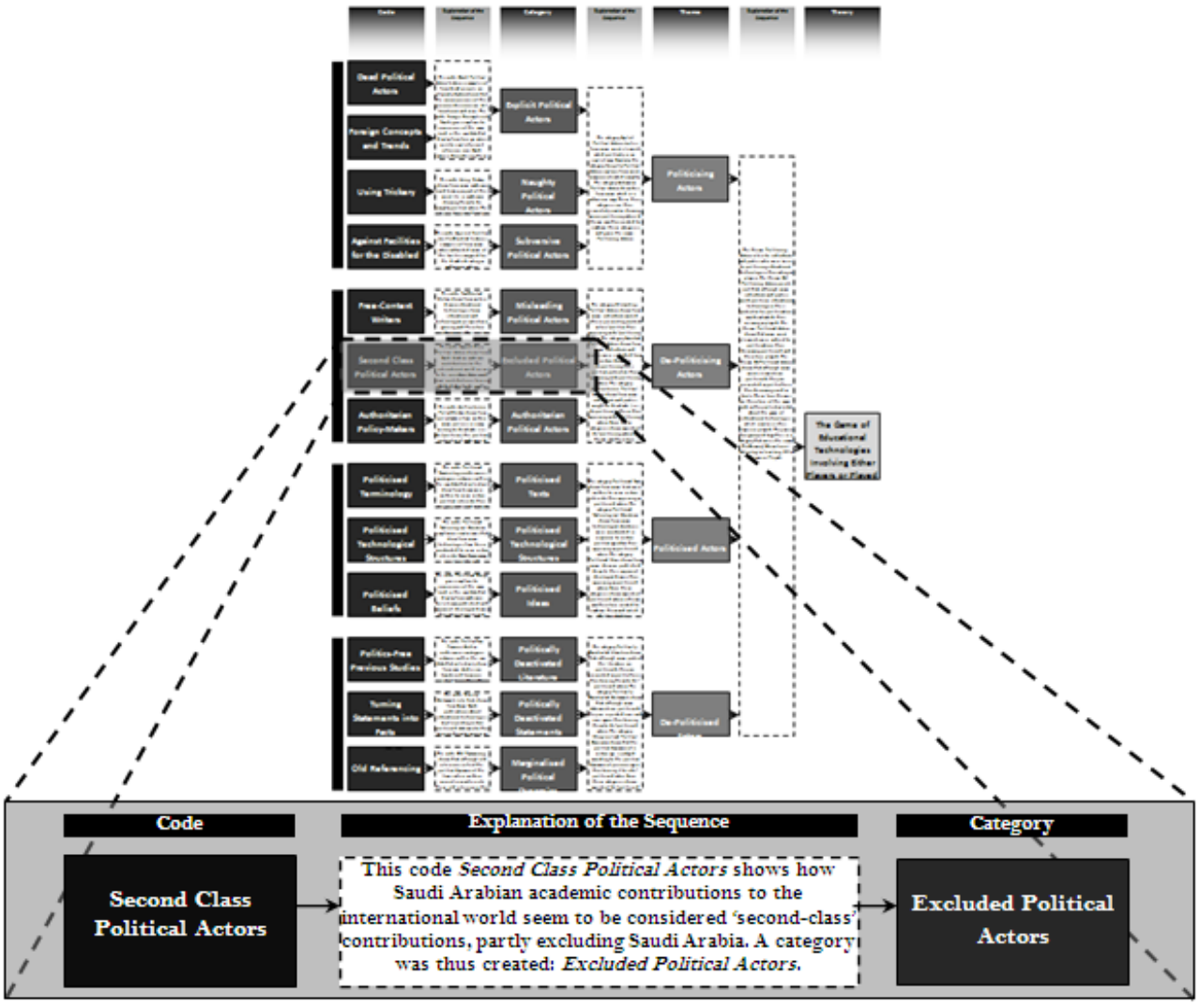
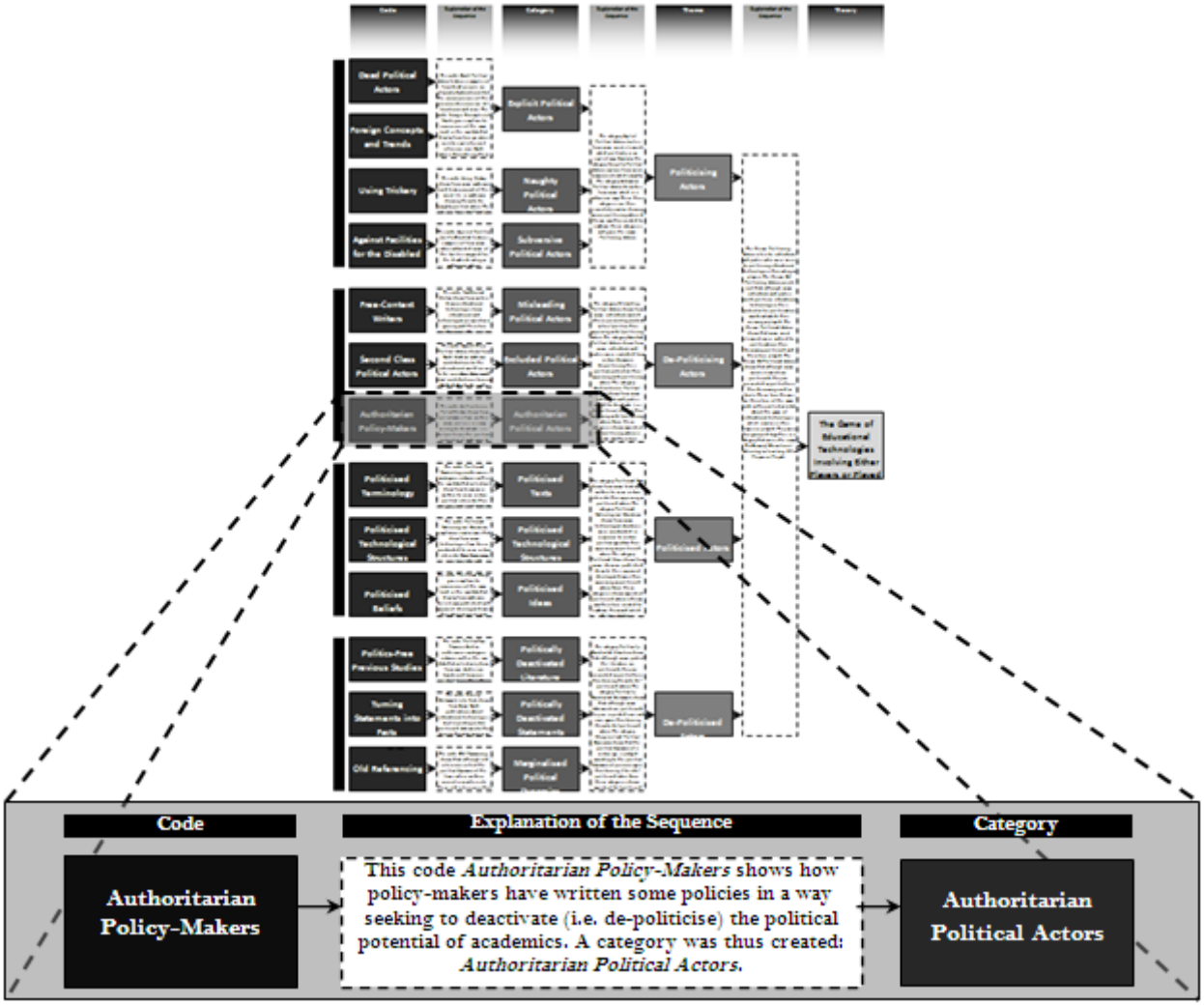


Table 9. Authoritarian Political Actors (Category)



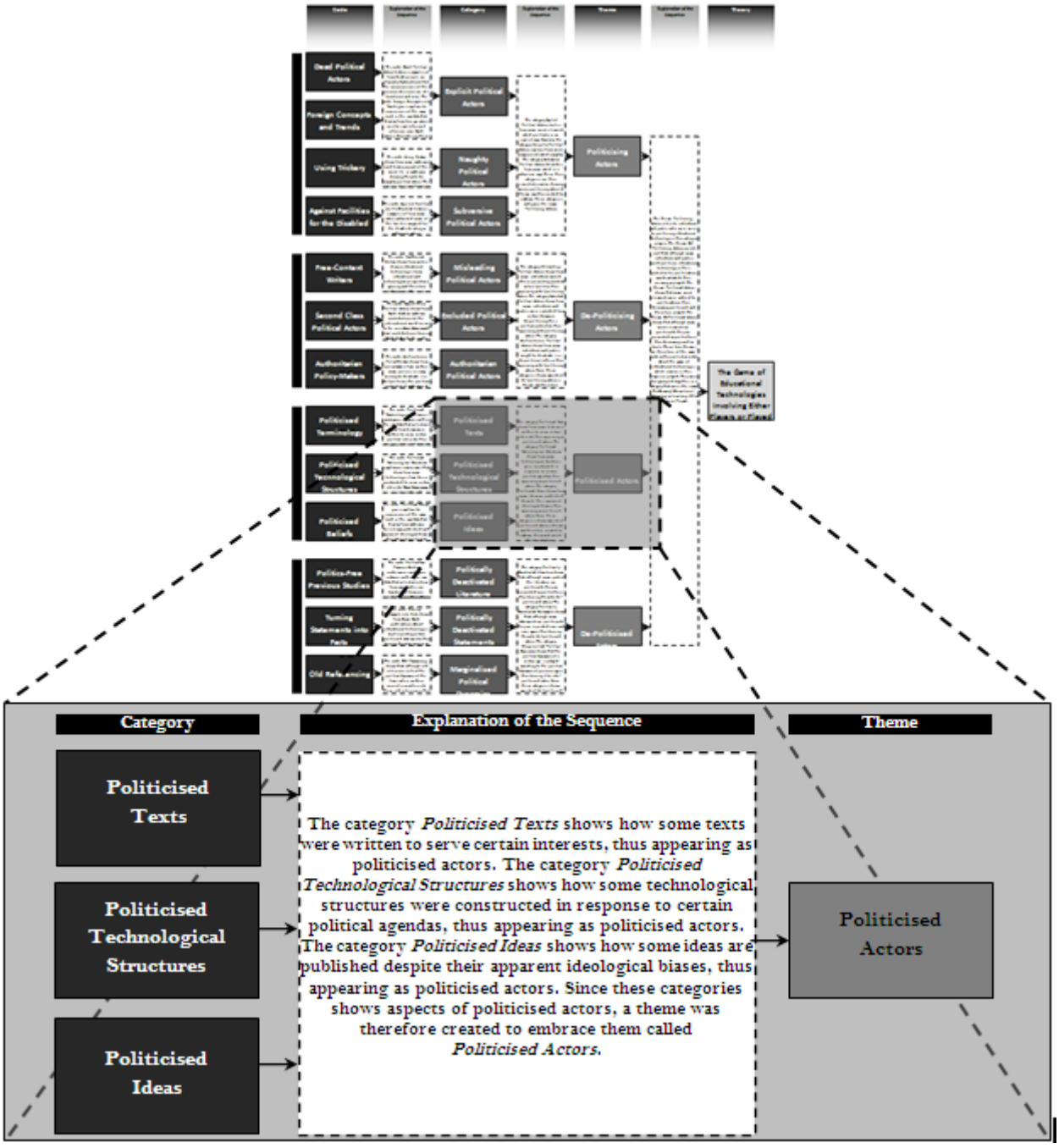
Authoritarian Policy-Makers (Code)

The Regulation of Saudi Faculty Members states that a 'disciplinary committee' can be formed to 'discipline the faculty member' and that this committee can decide on the following: 'disciplinary sanctions: warning, blame, deduction from salary, denial of bonus, postponement of the upgrade, or dismissal.' The use of the word 'discipline' here reminds us of Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish*, which talks about prisons and their structure and organisation. One might wonder why Saudi academics have not protested again the use of such a word in their organisational regulation. Saudi academics, in some way, seem to have been easily directed, regulated and disciplined, thus discouraging their political potential to act otherwise. Thus, policy-makers here seem to have acted as de-politicising actors, seeking to deactivate (ie. de-politicise) the political potential of academics.

3.4. Politicised Actors (Theme)

This third theme, labelled *Politicised Actors*, resulted, as illustrated in Table 10 below, from three categories, namely *Politicised Texts*, *Politicised Technological Structures* and *Politicised Ideas*. These categories, each of which consists of several similar codes, are expanded below.

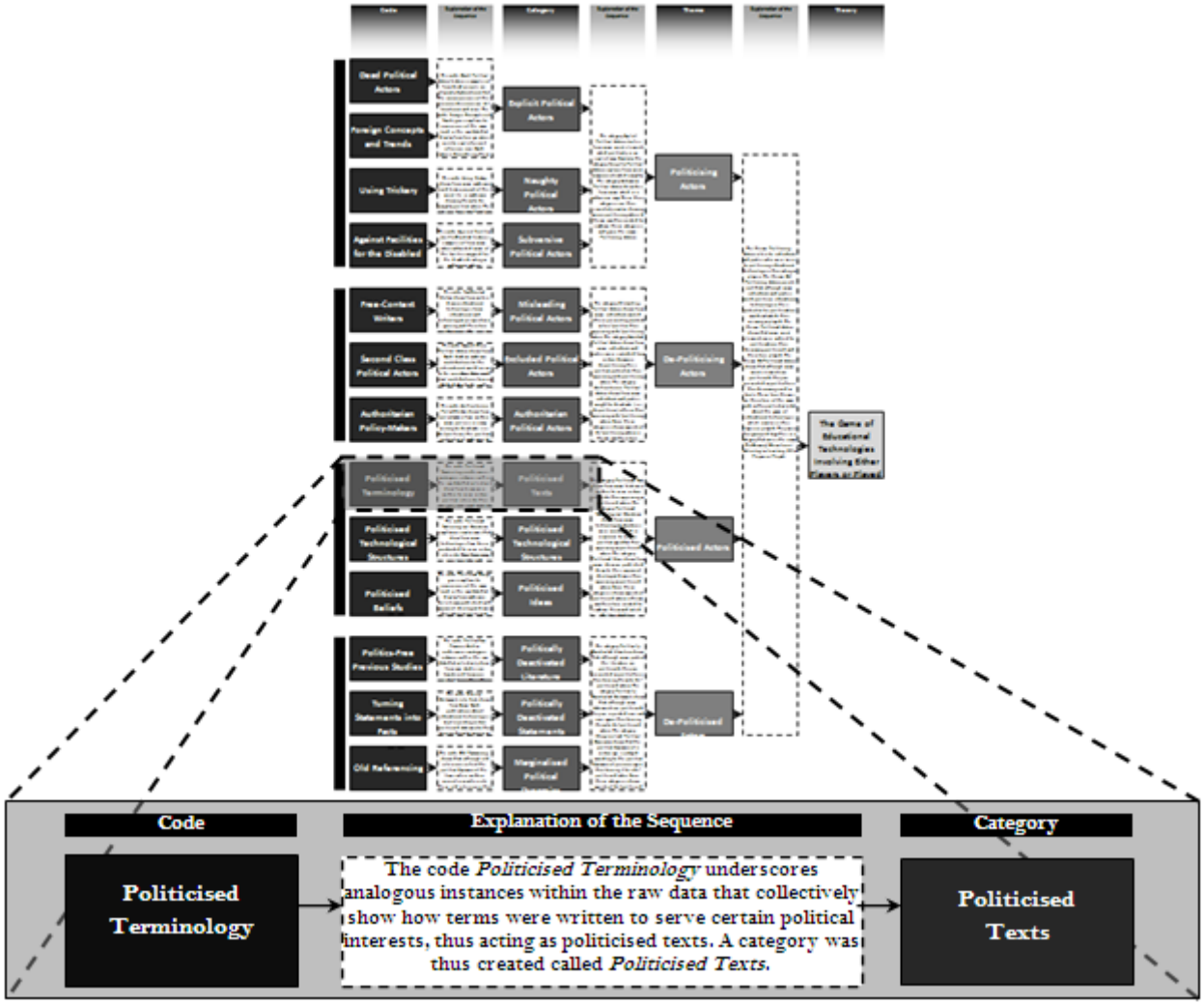
Table 10. Politicised Actors (Theme)



3.4.1. Politicised Texts (Category)

This category (Politicised Texts) covers various related codes, only the most important of which is discussed below (see Table 11).

Table 11. Politicised Texts (Category)



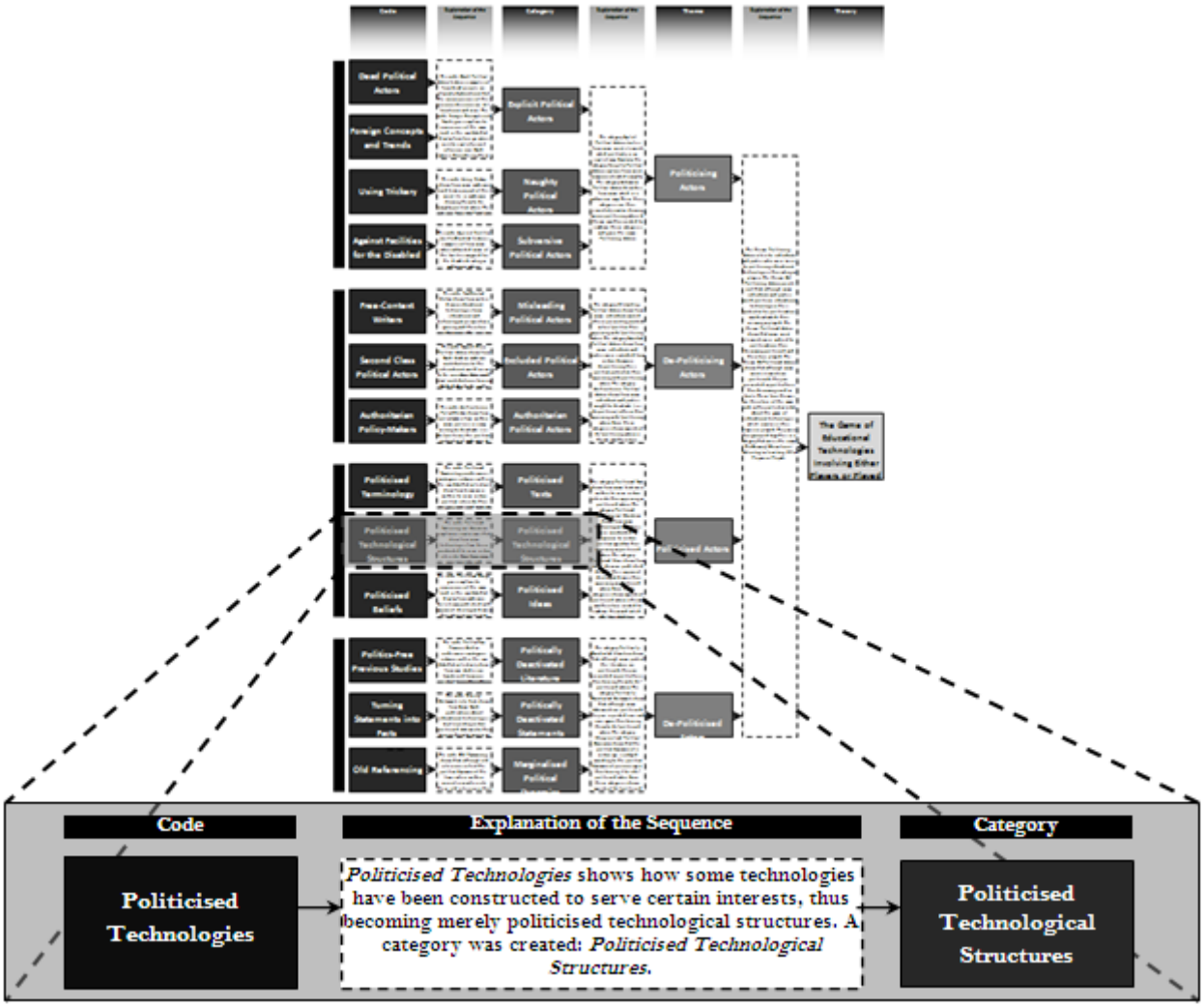
Politicised Terminology (Code)

Having analysed the data, there seemed a number of ways through which higher education activity could be politicised. One such way is through terminology, and this is why there is a whole field called 'critical discourse analysis' (Meyer and Wodak, 2009) intended primarily to help look between the lines for any underlying political intentions. Thus, terminology and texts could be seen as politicised actors in higher education institutions. Let us take the following relevant example. The university has a department called 'Educational Technologies,' yet the phrase 'educational technologies' has various political limitations. One is that not all technologies in education are necessarily educational ones, as there are anti-educational ones too. That is to say that certain technologies in education can impede education, just as much as they can enhance it. Thus, the use of the phrase 'educational technologies' means highlighting the positive aspects of technologies in education while disregarding or even denying their negative aspects, ie. the 'other side of the coin.' Another limitation is that the use of the phrase 'educational technologies' gives the impression that technologies in education influence and are influenced by education alone, which is actually inaccurate (Muffoletto and Knupfer, 1993). That is to say that technologies in education influence and are influenced by the organisational, historical, economic and political aspects of a particular society (Hutchby, 2001). Another limitation is that the use of the phrase also seems to exclude administrative technologies in education, although administrative technologies in education must be seen as being as important as educational technologies given that these two kinds of technologies interact closely with one another to make the educational process take place or not take place (Kast and Rosenzweig, 1979; Cornford and Pollock, 2003).

3.4.2. Politicised Technological Structures (Category)

This category springs from an assortment of similar codes, again with only the chief one being discussed below (see Table 12).

Table 12. Politicised Technological Structures (Category)



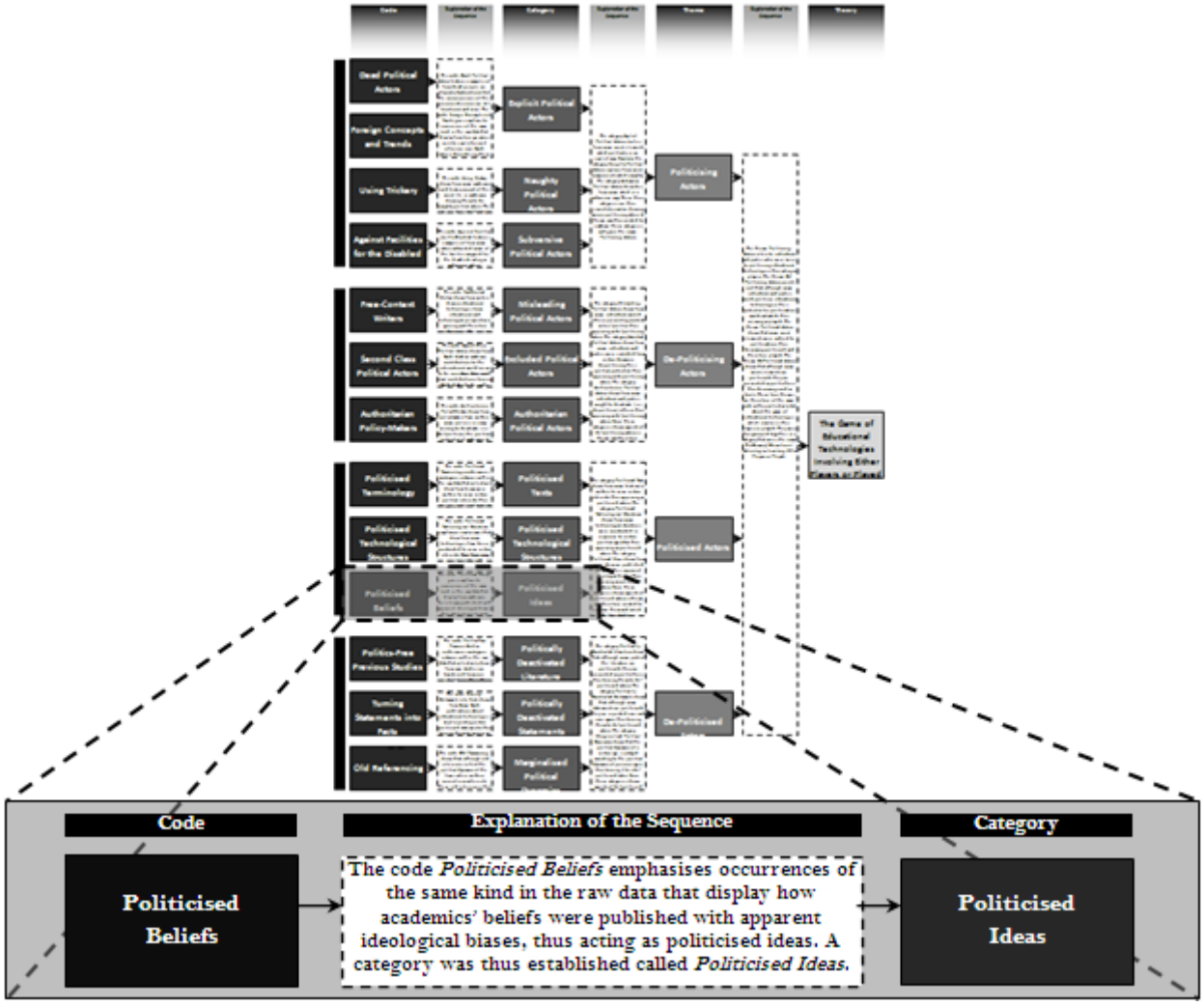
Politicised Technologies (Code)

Based on a range of observations and interviews, it is obvious that many academics 'fight' (in the words of an interviewee) to teach online courses, because this teaching is considered over-time teaching, for which extra money is granted. In online courses, exam questions are to be designed as multiple-choice questions due to the large number of online students and given that the university has bought a machine for automatically marking multiple-choice questions. Thus, although some academics do not believe in the effectiveness of multiple-choice exams, they have designed the exams for their online courses to be multiple choice for two reasons. One is that this is a condition for online teaching. Another reason is that academics get even more money when designing their exam questions in such a way. What can be seen here is that educational technologies and their ability to mark exam questions have been used to encourage and even almost to 'force' (in the words of an interviewee) teachers to design their exam questions in a certain way, imposing a considerable amount of regulation on their teaching activity. That is, giving students multiple-choice exam questions could mean that teachers have to teach students in a way that enables them to choose the 'right' items in the exam (Ritzer, 2009) rather than to become critically reflective intellectuals – an aim that education is supposed, in theory, to enable students to achieve. Thus, technologies could be politicised, having been constructed to function in certain ways and thus serve certain interests.

3.4.3. Politicised Ideas (Category)

The present category stems from a mixture of identical codes. What follows, however, concentrates on only the key code, ie. *Politicised Beliefs* (see Table 13 below)

Table 13. Politicised Ideas (Category)



Politicised Beliefs (Code)

One might argue that some part of the Saudi literature appears to be politicised. For example, some authors starts their book with the religiously informed statement: 'In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful Prayers and Peace upon His Noble Messenger.' This statement is in conflict with the secularist nature of academic publications. It, moreover, could be seen as an implicit sign of the book being religiously directed and thus politicised and of the author lacking the ability to separate his/her own religion from his/her academic works. One, however, might argue that such a religious statement might be a political trick which the author uses in such a religion-oriented environment to make the book sound as if it is written in line with the religion, although it is actually not or even goes against some religious values. Another possible reason why the author uses such a religious statement is that, since this book is written in Saudi Arabia and published by a Saudi publisher, the act of opening this book with such a religious statement could increase the number of buyers and make the target audience trust the book, given that Saudi society is, at least theoretically, a religious society. In any case, whether the author is truly religious or has just used such a statement for trickery could be seen as an indication of the book being politicised.

3.5. De-Politicised Actors (Theme)

This last theme, like the other three themes, embraces three categories: Politically Deactivated Literature, Politically Deactivated Statements and Marginalised Political Dynamics (see Table 14 below).

3.5.1. Politically Deactivated Literature (Category)

The category *Politicised Deactivated Literature* arises from a number of similar codes, although only one of these codes (ie. *Politics-Free Previous Studies*) is discussed below (see Table 15).

Table 14. De-Politicised Actors (Theme)

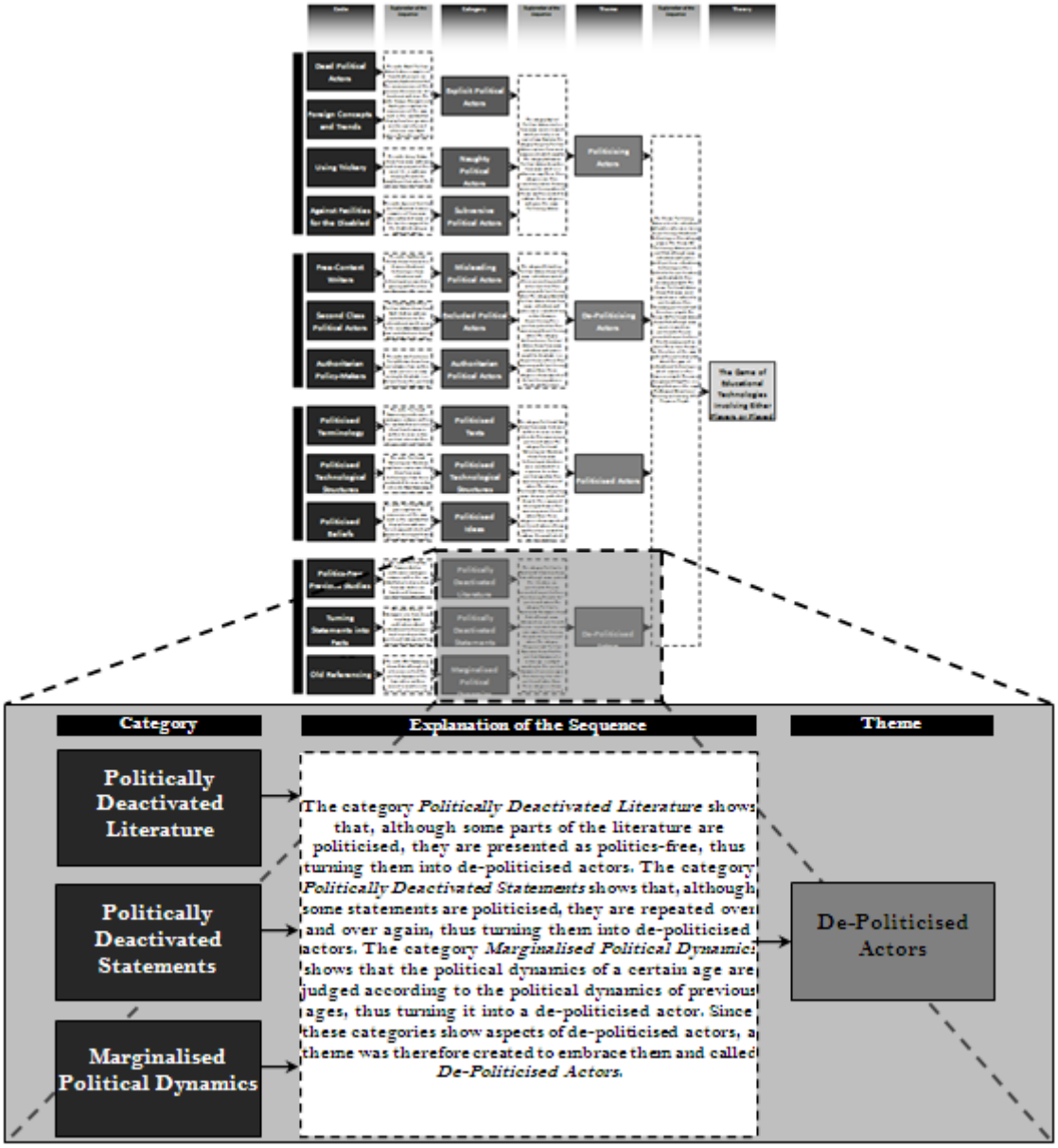
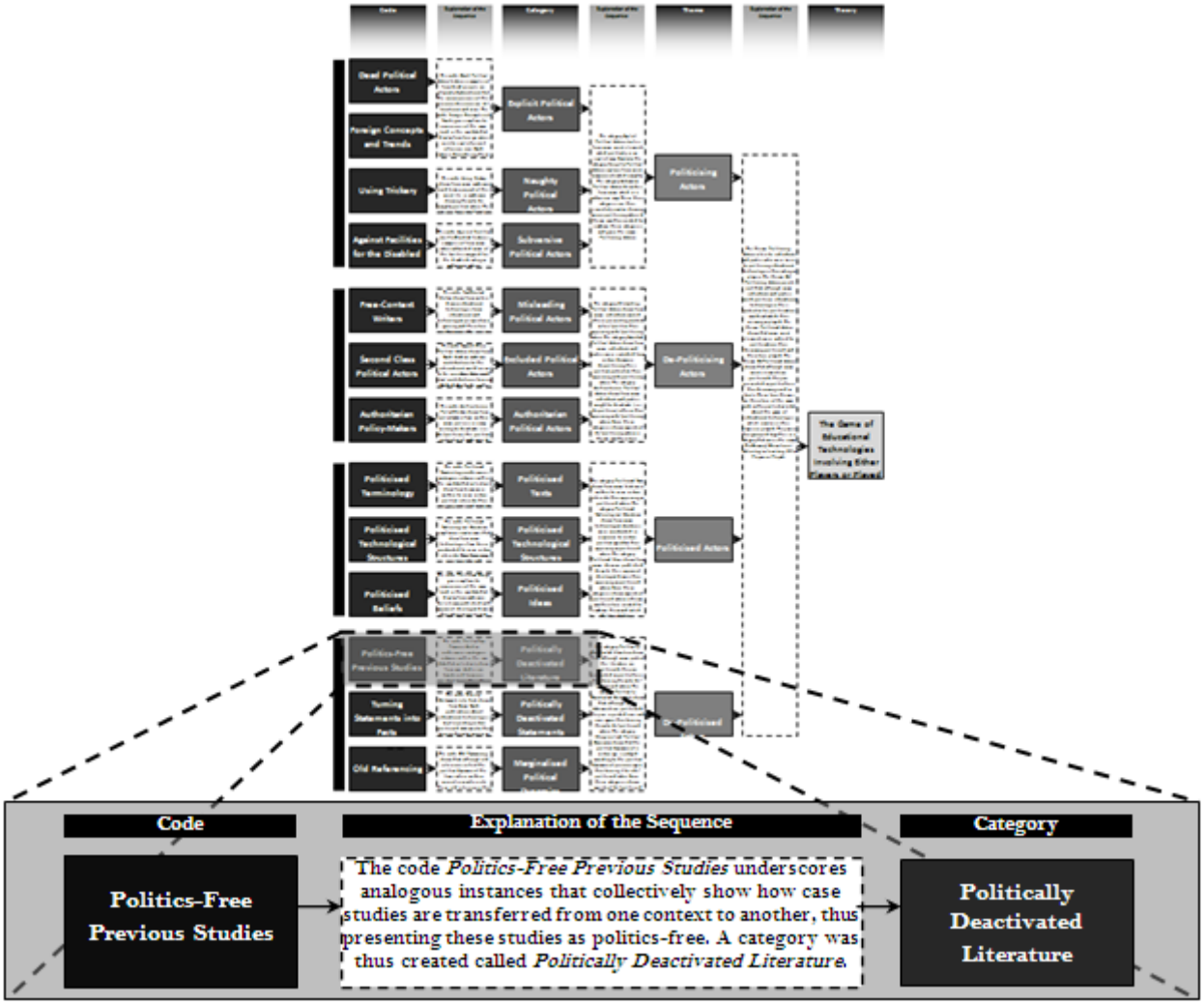


Table 15. Politically Deactivated Literature (Category)



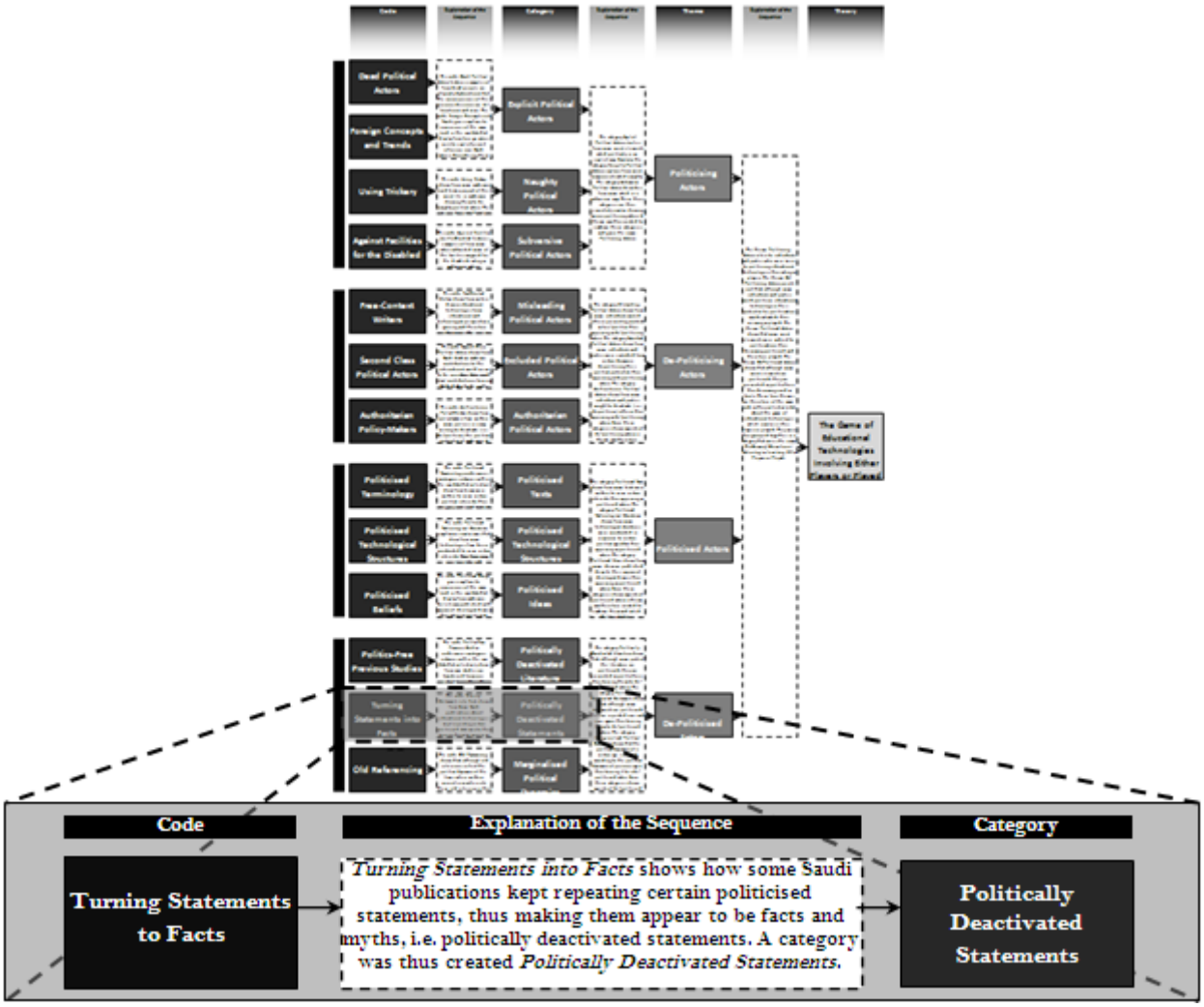
Politics-Free Previous Studies (Code)

It seems that some Saudi researchers on educational technologies believe that their literature review must contain a list of all the previous studies similar to the one being undertaken, even if these studies are non-Saudi. Yet, regardless of whether this is good research practice or not, it could be seen as a weakness that researchers merely record foreign studies without subjecting them to some kind of critical reflection and reflexivity and without critiquing them with reference to other native studies. An example in this respect is the work of the Saudi researcher Al Musa (2005), who lists non-Saudi studies, including Kuwaiti, Jordanian, Emirati and American ones, without critically and reflectively considering the differences between the Saudi context and these foreign contexts.

3.5.2. Politically Deactivated Statements (Category)

This category developed from an assortment of similar codes. One of these codes (*Turning Statements into Facts*) is discussed in some detail below (see Table 16).

Table 16. Politically Deactivated Statements (Category)



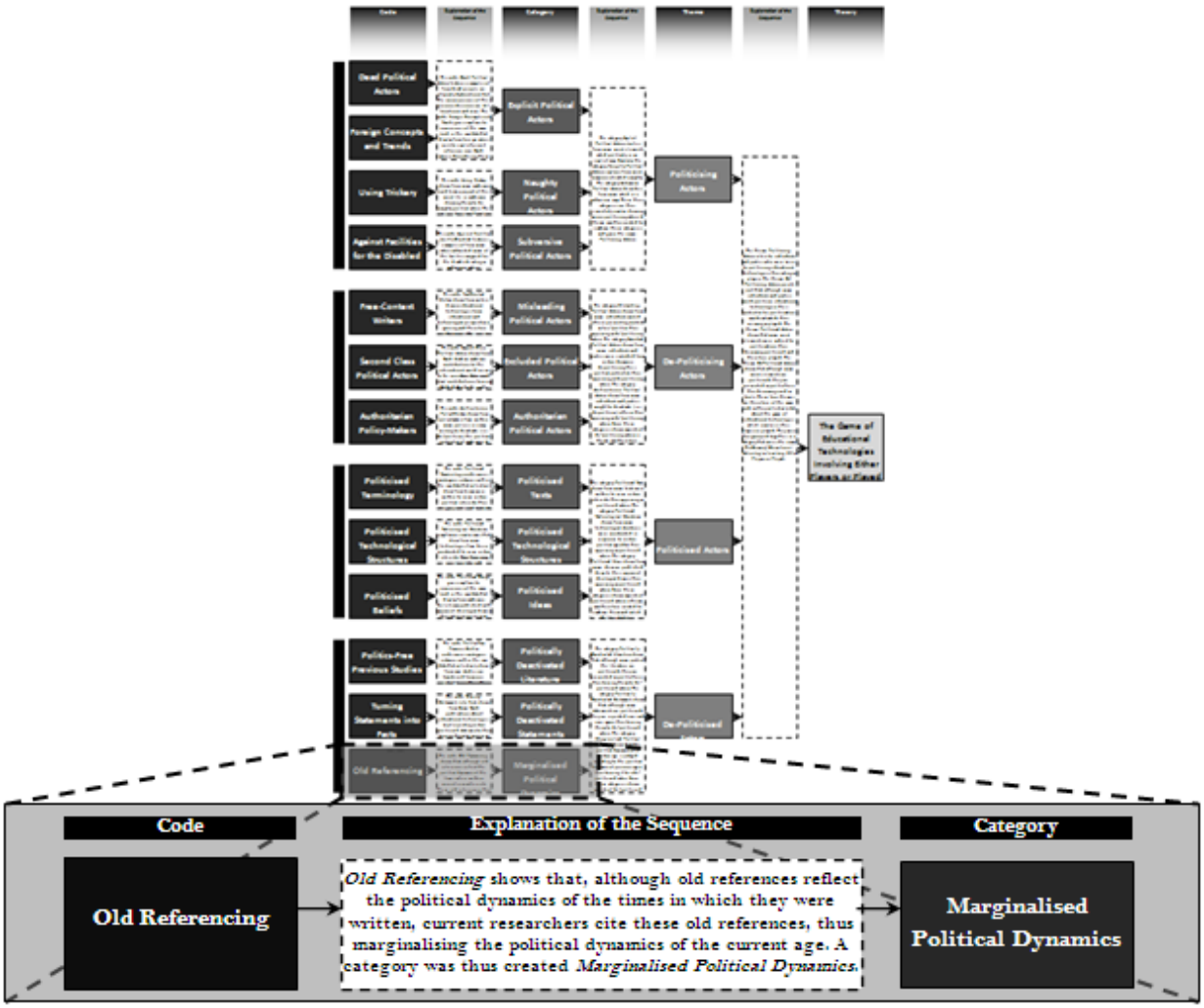
Turning Statements into Facts (Code)

While conducting the current research, I realised that some Saudi (and Arabic) publications about educational technologies kept repeating certain politicised statements, thus making them appear to be facts and myths, ie. politically deactivated statements. Qazawi (2007) states in the introduction of his book that nowadays one lives in a small global village wherein s/he influences and is influenced by it. This statement seems to have actually become a cliché with which researchers start their writings. Qazawi should have stopped here and shown that, although a certain society can be influenced by globalisation, this does not necessarily mean that this society influences and contributes to globalisation too. Qazawi should have pointed out that there are local societal and cultural factors that may challenge globalisation. It is a serious limitation in this book that the author just throws this statement out without critically reflecting on it. Moreover, Qazawi seems to not be the only Arab researcher who does not take a critically reflective, politically, culturally and socially informed perspective when viewing such technologies.

3.5.3. Marginalised Political Dynamics (Category)

This last category, named *Marginalised Political Dynamics*, results from a mixture of similar codes. This article, however, sheds light only on the main code *Old Referencing*(see Table 17).

Table 17. Marginalised Political Dynamics (Category)



Old Referencing (Code)

Each generation is expected to produce writings and theories that correspond with its political dynamics. In other words, each generation has its own political dynamics, and therefore forcing a generation into the writings and theories of previous generations (ie. into the political dynamics of previous generations) could be interpreted as a political attempt (be it made intentionally or unintentionally) to de-politicise and marginalise the political dynamics of the present generation. So, writers and theorists who merely repeat and 'ruminate on' (in the words of an interviewee) old studies and theories while not developing theories which reflect the settings under study could be seen as de-politicising and even 'deceiving' and misleading actors.

Having read widely in the Saudi literature (and Arabian literature in general) on educational technologies, it seems that, for some reason, Arabic publications, even those written recently, cite intensively English publications that were written in the 1980s. Apparently, there was a tendency for translation from English into Arabic during this decade. Al-far (2000) cites three publications from the 1950s, 20 from the 1960s, 25 from the 1970s, 84 from the 1980s and 13 from the 1990s. Citation from English publications actually reaches a peak in the 1980s. Most English references in Asqandar and Qazawi (2003) are written in the 1980s, and all the English references in Salamah (1998) are from the 1980s. From the 1990s onwards, therefore, translation seems to have actually become limited and, moreover, the literature after that period has been mostly repetitious, merely recycling what was translated after that period. In Saudi Arabia, the number of citizens sent abroad to study at higher levels in the field of educational technologies (and in education in general) was limited from the 1980s until less than a decade ago. Saudi research students who were sent abroad before the 1980s to study educational technologies made hardly any publications informed by their ongoing readings from English literature or even any publications outside their dissertations and theses. So, their dissertations and theses, which were actually written in the 1980s and before and were informed by their readings only during that period, have become reference points for the subsequent generation of Saudi researchers who did not get the chance to

study abroad and therefore could not understand English, making such dissertations and theses their window into the English literature. Many researchers, who studied abroad during and before the 1980s, seem not to cite English publications outside those they read as part of their postgraduate studies, perhaps because they might not feel confident enough with their English.

4. Conclusion

This work has promoted the belief that the fields of education, technology, society and organisational politics could work together. It has sought to address the research question of how higher education components have acted politically and been politically acted on in relation to educational technologies. This question has been answered through the application of naturalistic enquiry into a state university in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, conducting interviews, doing observations and analysing documents. Analysis of the collected data using the grounded theory approach has pointed to four themes: *Politicising Actors*, *De-Politicising Actors*, *Politicised Actors* and *De-Politicised Actors*. These themes, as illustrated in Table 18 below, have been looked into collectively, giving rise to a theoretical proposition: that educational technologies can be (or perhaps are) a politically directed game involving politicising, de-politicising, politicised and de-politicised actors, who are accordingly either players or played. This could be interpreted to imply that the dynamics of higher education activity can be (or possibly are) operated in a politically unfair way.

Having considered the table above, the conclusion of the current study is therefore that, in Saudi academia, political power appears not to have been justly distributed. This could be seen to advocate the requirement, at least temporarily, for a 'left-wing politics of educational technologies' that seeks social fairness (see Smith and Tatalovich, 2003; Bobbio and Cameron, 1997; Thompson, 1997). Activists and researchers should therefore concern themselves with identifying those who are disadvantaged, be they de-politicising, politicised or de-politicised actors. There is a need for politicians to act, at least for the time being, as 'leftists' in Saudi Arabian academia so as to identify all possible aspects of the existing unfairly distributed political power. There is, furthermore, a necessity for detailed research that seeks to predict all the implications of this political reform. It must be clarified, however, that the proposed call for *fair* distribution of power among all stakeholders does not necessarily mean a call for *equal* distribution of power among all stakeholders, thus flattening hierarchical structures.

Another recommendation is the need for reforms intended to raise the political awareness of all higher education members and also to explicitly politicise every possible aspect of higher education activity, consequently deliberately turning such activity into an active 'political battleground' (to borrow from McPherson and Whitworth, 2008: 418). The activation of previously deactivated political issues can be achieved, for example, through the notion of 'consciousness-raising,' which was a political strategy originally used by the leaders of the women's liberation movement, acting as the main function of this movement (Freeman, 1972). The implementation of this strategy in Saudi academic circles could mean that, after unearthing the politicising dimensions of a higher education institution by conducting action research from a post-modernistic approach, there should be some consciousness-raising sessions (ie. re-politicising sessions) where de-politicising, politicised and de-politicised actors are explicitly informed and moreover 'teased' that they have been subject to politicisation by politicising actors and that they should revolutionarily transform their current status from being a party to politicisation (ie. from being the played) to being politicising actors (ie. to being players).

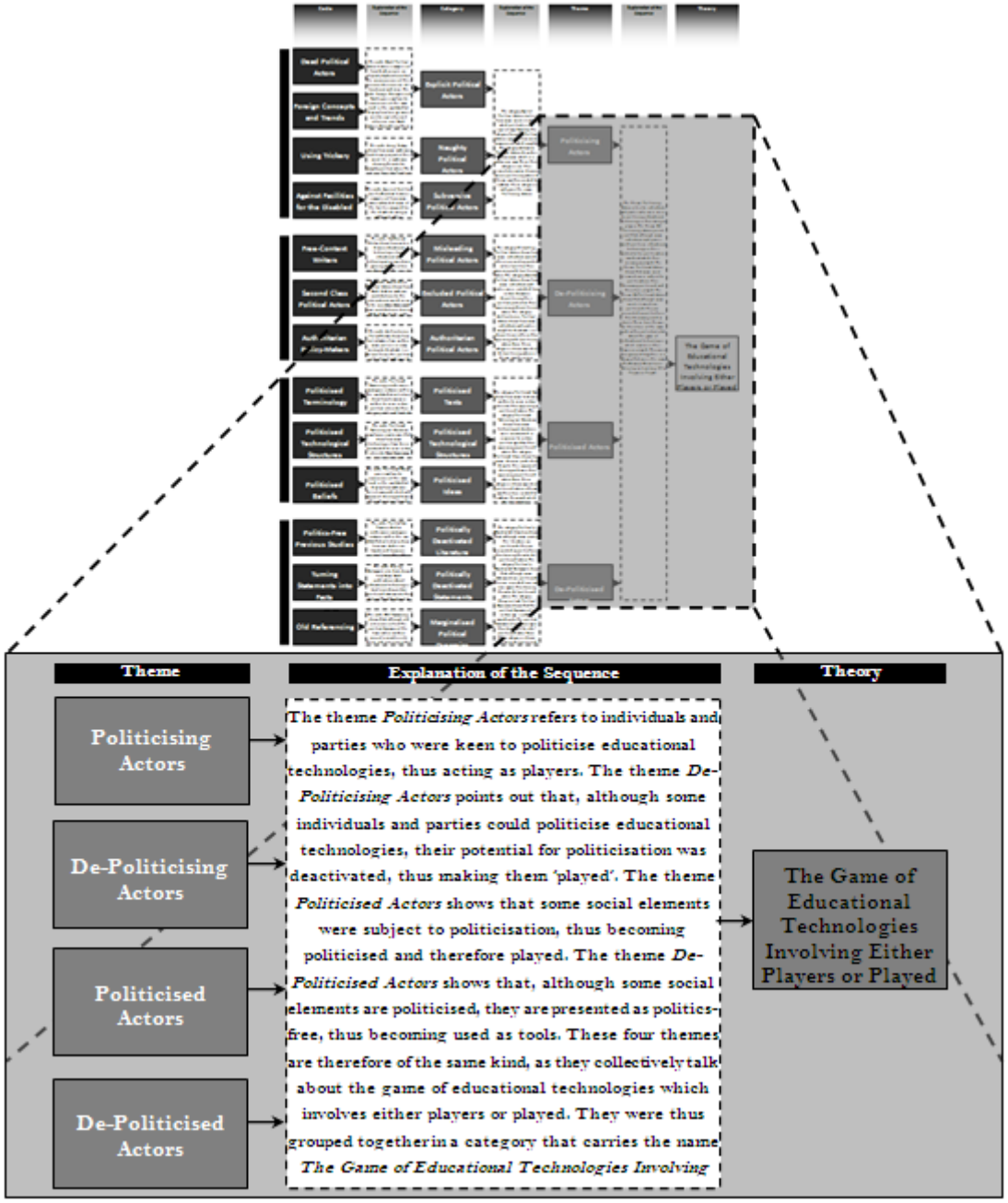
Such consciousness-raising sessions should be organised, for example, by students' unions and faculty members' unions, which although they do not officially exist in Saudi Arabia exist informally online. Organisers of such political sessions should learn from how the leaders of the women's liberation movement organised their consciousness-raising sessions. For example, what such leaders did was to wander around Europe, randomly inviting women for a quick consciousness-raising session wherein these women were asked many politically wake-up questions. In the course of consciousness-raising, a woman reacts firmly not because she has realised something new to 'bitch about' (Ruth, 1975: 299) but because she has realised something old to 'bitch about' (Ruth, 1975: 299), ie. because she has worked out something old in a new way:

"Yes," she cries, "I remember..." "Ah," she says, "I understand..." And the "Ah" arises not merely from her lips and mind, but from her entire being.(Ruth, 1975: 299)

Researchers, commentators, associations, welfare providers and the like are encouraged to be keen to take an active part in the politicisation of higher education dynamics. Yet the politicisation of anything could of course bring a risk to the 'politicisers' (to borrow a word from Gilson, 2009), especially when politicisers are not politically protected and when they aim at the politicisation of a highly structured, historically stable, ideologically conservative and politically defensive society, such as Saudi society (Al Lily, *openDemocracy*, 17 September 2012).

A political criticism that could be directed to this piece is that it is developed from a very male-centric viewpoint. Although this is a fair criticism, access to the Saudi female community by a male is actually exceptionally difficult, and hence, it is suggested that this study should be re-carried out by a female researcher. A methodological criticism of the study could be that detail is missing regarding the methodology and direct results of their research. This article, however, is part of a large project from which various articles have been submitted for publication that explicitly report the methodology and direct results of the research.

Table 18. The Game of Educational Technologies Involving Either Players or Played (Theory)



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