

The Appropriation of Western Management  
Concepts and Methods in Omani Higher Education

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September 2017

To

Mohammed Al Jabri,  
my amazing husband and the greatest source of encouragement.

## **Abstract**

The government of Oman continues to invest heavily in Western management methods and experts. While there is increased interest in exploring ways to maximize and align such Western importations in the developing state of Oman, there is a lack of research on how Omanis actually perceive and negotiate Western philosophies. Scant attention has been given both to the imported nature and the impact of Western methods in education. This study employs a mixed methods research strategy, comprising an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to examine the specific ways people at different levels of the Omani education system understand and appropriate Western methods.

The study proceeds progressively through three levels of penetrating analysis: a quantitative-qualitative analysis of the questionnaire (n= 168) that identifies the perceptions of end users; a content analysis of the interview data (n= 17) that identifies the perspectives of an elite group of top officials, decision makers and senior managers in higher education institutions; and an additional Foucauldian discourse analysis of the same interview data designed to identify the specific narratives and rhetorical strategies adopted by the interviewees as they reflect and are influenced by their level of power and positions.

The study reveals that end users of the system use a variety of arguments and narratives: identity defensiveness, scepticism, pro-Western pragmatism, the adoption of a middle position, or topic avoidance. However, the elite interviewees approach the practice with narratives of defence, disapproval, compliance or tension, which are influenced by their level of authority within the higher education landscape. This wide disparity of views reflects the continued division in Muslim-Arab thought towards the West and the continued dilemma of how to reconcile the demand for modernisation whilst preserving traditional Islamic culture. The study findings contribute to the general field of international education and the specific issue of the extension of Western management methods in Omani education. Finally, the study adds to the understanding of Omani society as part of the broader Arab Middle East.

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## List of Abbreviations

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| BE    | Basic Education                                      |
| CAS   | Colleges of Applied Colleges                         |
| EC    | Education Council                                    |
| GCC   | Gulf Cooperation Council                             |
| GHE   | Government Higher Education                          |
| HE    | Higher Education                                     |
| HEIs  | Higher Education Institutions                        |
| LAS   | League of Arab States                                |
| LC    | The Language Centre (at SQU)                         |
| MoARA | Ministry of Awqaf (Endowments) and Religious Affairs |
| MoE   | Ministry of Education                                |
| MoHE  | Ministry of Higher Education                         |
| OAAA  | Oman Academic Accreditation Authority                |
| OAC   | Oman Accreditation Council                           |
| PBE   | Post-Basic Education                                 |
| PHE   | Private Higher Education                             |
| QM    | Quality Management                                   |
| SQU   | Sultan Qaboos University                             |
| TQM   | Total Quality Management                             |

## Acknowledgements

*"All the praises and thanks be to Allah, who has guided us to this, and never could we have found guidance, were it not that Allah had guided us" (Qur'an 7:43)*

First and foremost, I wish to express my deep appreciation to my supervisor, Dr John Issitt, for his extensive support and step-by-step guidance throughout the PhD journey. Dr Issitt has shown great confidence in my capabilities as a researcher and his valuable advice and remarks have definitely shaped the final form of this thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr Duncan Jackson for being part of our thesis advisory panel. His seemly questions and pertinent insights must be acknowledged.

I am grateful to all the participants, who took part in the two phases of the study, for their cooperation and the valuable information they have shared with me. I also wish to thank those who agreed to participate in the pilot studies and the colleagues who helped check and validate the codes and translations.

I would like to thank Mr Juma Al-Toobi and my friends Ibtissam Al Harrassi, Nada Al Harthi and Aziza Al Maashani for assisting me with the scheduling of many of the interview appointments. I would also like to extend my thanks to my other friends, Suha Issac, Sanja Bilic, Omaniyya Al Harthi, Jokha Al Ghafri and Badriya Al Brashdi, for their prayers and words of encouragement.

Thanks to the members of my family, my mother, father, sisters and brothers, whose continuous support, unconditional love and prayers have made the journey easier.

Finally, this work would not have been possible without the generous funds of the government of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to pursue my career goals and also for allowing me the academic freedom to investigate the topic of my interest.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1. Background to the Study

In my capacity as an English language foundation course coordinator at the Language Centre (LC)<sup>1</sup> at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) from September 2010 to September 2013, I was part of the LC's middle management. I was familiar with the administrative, social, and academic issues related to students and teachers as well as curricula and policies. On many occasions, I was challenged to react in certain, even unexpected, ways. Running a programme of about 35 teachers and 650 students and dealing with day-to-day matters left me with questions: did I do my job effectively and efficiently? and did I contribute to the organisation's overall success? I was responsible for the course I was managing. I tried to think of new methods and techniques to manage the course, teachers and students so in the end the outcomes, especially the academic achievement of students, were better. Investigating modern management techniques, I was led to the concept of quality management (QM) and most specifically the philosophy of total quality management (TQM), defined as a "management approach of an organization centred on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organization and society" (Pfeifer, 2002, p. 5).

Quality management (QM) techniques, and TQM in particular, have drawn a lot of attention for the past decade in a wide range of industries and service sectors in Oman, be it in education, health, construction, banking or telecommunications, etc. However, particularly in HE, policymakers have seriously contemplated using TQM to address the issue of low quality of higher education institutions (HEIs). Accordingly, by government direction quality assurance (QA) units were required by all HEIs to ensure and enhance the quality of the system's administrative and academic operations and hence the quality of graduate outputs that supply the national and international job markets.

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<sup>1</sup> Now part of the newly structured Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS) that provides English, Maths and IT courses to new students joining SQU.

This project initially started as an investigation of TQM in Omani higher education (HE), particularly at the LC at SQU. A preliminary review of existing literature in the field showed that the topic has been investigated to some extent by Omanis. However, almost all of the studies, mainly master's dissertations published in Arabic and a few English PhD theses, explore the topic from a similar axis: examining the feasibility of implementing TQM within a specified organisational context to improve its processes. Most notably, PhD studies by Al-Ghanboosi (2003) and Al Nabhani (2007) recommended the adoption of the philosophy in Omani education and generated a context-specific TQM model and a framework for its implementation to enhance general HE services, at SQU in particular, and the Omani Ministry of Education (MoE) Central Headquarters, respectively.

These studies produced for Arabic speaking audiences have one point in common: they all assume that QM standards are the way forward for the improvement of educational systems and other organisations in Oman, but their realisation requires radical changes, most significantly cultural. For the philosophy of a 'quality culture' to work in a developing country like Oman, QM had to be 'borrowed', mostly from developed countries, rather than grown from indigenous experiences. That is why such models are largely promoted and implemented by government direction.

Intrigued by these facts, my interest was led towards the bigger field of policymaking, most specifically the decision to import models and concepts, managerial or otherwise, that originated in Western developed countries into developing countries, a topic that has received little attention within the Omani context despite its strong relevance to the historical context of the educational establishment in the country. One preliminary challenge to the research was the delicacy surrounding Omani policymaking, a topic that is attempted very carefully by whoever, whether writers, researchers or the general citizenry, for they can be seen as 'negatively' criticising the government (Al'Abri, 2016).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Formal education in Oman is relatively young, the year 1970 being its official beginning. Before 1970, there were only three primary schools, but since the present ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said took power in 1970, education has expanded significantly. To jump start the provision of school education, Oman imported teachers, curricula, textbooks, etc.

from other Arab and Gulf countries. Oman did not have a proper HE system in place and only a rudimentary form of tertiary education was offered by some government colleges and vocational institutes to meet domestic needs of health, teaching and technical skills. Omani people sent their children to other Arab countries to continue their education. In addition, the government adopted a scholarship programme and also sent secondary school graduates to mostly Arab countries, and to a very limited extent, some Western states such as the UK and the USA.

Omani HE started when Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the first and only state-owned university in the country, was established in 1986. SQU was heavily influenced by Western, mainly American and British, systems and degree programmes were imported accordingly. However, importing HE was most noticeable in the 1990s, when Oman founded private HE, whose institutions were required to partner with foreign counterparts mostly from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010).

Education increased quantitatively in the 1970s and 1980s, but in the 1990s, focus shifted to quality of education due to globalisation and economic, political and cultural changes at the local, regional and global levels (Al'Abri, 2011). Reform plans, initiated and carried out by the government, started by gradually phasing out the old three-stage school education systems (primary – preparatory – secondary) into a ten-year basic education (BE) system, consisting of two cycles and followed by a two-year post-basic education (PBE).

One of the most prominent features of BE, a model borrowed from Canada, is its concept of mixed gender classes, which, upon its implementation, generated wide-scale concerns among Omani parents. However, the government ignored these complaints and has been trying to make the system work in the Omani context. Yet, Omani students' academic achievements continue to be quite disappointing locally and worldwide according to latest international assessment reports such as TIMSS<sup>2</sup> and PIRLS<sup>3</sup>.

Global pressures have also demanded reforming Omani HE; most importantly, quality issues of the system in Oman, as well as in other Gulf States. One of the main routes used

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<sup>2</sup> TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) is a series of international assessments that test students' knowledge in maths and science

<sup>3</sup> PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) tests 4<sup>th</sup> graders' reading achievements.

by these countries to improve HE was through emulating advanced Western systems, albeit with different approaches. In Oman, a national quality agency, Oman Accreditation Council (OAC), was established in 2001 and later upgraded to Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) in 2010. Various quality assurance systems and frameworks were sourced from mainly Australia and Britain (Carroll, Razvi, Goodliffe, & Al-Habsi, 2009). Today, however, despite these imported Western models, the status of HE quality, remains problematic.

Even though the policy of importing or borrowing is claimed to have played a major role in the ‘sophisticated’ (Carroll et al., 2009) and ‘innovative’ (Knight, 2013) approach to the expansion, mainly quantitative, of higher education in Oman, three decades after the foundation of the first public university, questions remain about the utility of imported Western philosophies and their impact on the overall development of Omani higher education. For example, in respect to the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in most HEIs, Wilkins (2011) notes that the greatest obstacle to the achievement of most Omanis in vocational training is their ability to grasp and communicate in the English language, thus arguing that it is neither essential nor appropriate to deliver all HE programmes in English. Another concern is in the fact that Oman imports a variety of models and programmes from a host of countries, depending on official contracts or experts hired by the government, which adds monumentally to the challenge of contextualisation and standardisation.

Generally, in spite of its exponential growth, the contours, regulations and optimal benefits of cross-border education or “the movement of people, knowledge, programs, providers, policies, ideas, curricula, projects, and services across national or regional jurisdictional borders” (Knight, 2007, p. 24) are not exactly clear for any host country, most significantly if the latter is a developing one like Oman. Indeed, cross-border or transnational HE critics point out that the phenomenon can be viewed as a form of ‘new-colonialism’ that benefits the foreign knowledge providers far more than the receivers (Wilkins, 2011) or the ‘buying’ countries. Donn and Al Manthri (2013) argue that the education reforms in the broader Middle East are often borrowed philosophies functioning as a ‘quick-fix’ policies for education systems to deliver desired results. However, the authors, who emphasise that these experiences ‘rarely travel well’ and deliver “political and social desperation”, call for the trend to be further investigated



(2013, p. 9). Therefore, this study attempts to penetrate the local environment to analyse and understand the realities and dynamics of what is going on.

### **1.3. Aims and Significance of the Study**

This study aims to explore the use of imported Western methods and models in the Omani higher education context, but from a specific perspective. It attempts to investigate how they are negotiated and appropriated by different segments of Omani society; in other words, it tries to identify what values are operational and how people position themselves in relation to the practice of importing Western models, with a special emphasis on the discourse of HE quality management. Taking this precise stance in examining the topic has not been attempted before and this study sets out with the prime assumption that people and stakeholders have different orientations in respect to this practice. Understanding people's stances and thoughts on the matter can inform HE policymaking in Oman and help in designing a more transparent and united vision of the 'historical' policy of importing foreign knowledge, technology and science.

The significance of this study is threefold:

1. The study is not an assessment of Western methods or their technical effectiveness in HE, which is the usual path undertaken by most studies tackling the topic. Rather, it is an account of the views of HE policymakers, professionals and students. It is their complex thoughts and mind-sets that the study is exploring in relation to the immediate Omani cultural, religious and historical background as well as the larger Arab and Islamic heritage. This is a major contribution to Omani, Gulf and Middle Eastern studies, as the findings shed light on contemporary mentalities in the region towards Western influence at a very turbulent time in Western-Middle Eastern relations.
2. The overall findings of the study and the particular 'human' narratives of negotiating Western methods add an important layer to the understanding of the discourses of knowledge transfer, cross-border education and the policy of importing experiences and systems, especially QM techniques, from developed English-speaking countries to the developing states of the Arab Gulf.
3. The study employs a mode of Foucauldian discourse analysis (See section below) in the second stage of interview data analysis, a strategy that is rarely used in

academic research in the region. This provides a unique methodology in approaching and understanding the intricate interplay between power and knowledge in Omani and Middle Eastern societies.

#### **1.4. Research Questions and Approach**

The study has developed the following major research question:

How do people in different levels of the Omani education system perceive, negotiate and appropriate the use of Western management concepts and methods in HE?

This is further divided into two sub-questions based on the categories of people or population sample:

1. How do end users e.g. students, professionals and administrators perceive, negotiate and appropriate the use of Western concepts and methods in the Omani education system?
2. How do decision makers and top managers in different vital organisations and HEIs perceive, negotiate and appropriate the use of Western concepts and methods?

To that end, the study utilises a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to find answers to the two sub-questions, respectively, in what comprises a two-phase sequential mixed methods methodology. Quantitative and qualitative tools and procedures are then used to process and analyse the collected data. What distinguishes the methodology is that it goes through progressive deeper levels of analysis. Accordingly, the findings are presented in successive proportions, moving from Findings I of the questionnaire data (Chapter Six) to Findings II of the content analysis of interview data (Chapter Seven) and ending with the most complex set of findings III that have emerged from applying Foucauldian categories to re-examine interview data (Chapter Eight).

Foucauldian discourse analysis (e.g. Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Willig, 2013; Wooffitt, 2005) provides a critical approach of the analysis of discourse by describing and

emphasising power relations in society through language and behaviour. This approach has been reported as being a significantly useful tool in terms of allowing a focus on the processes and practices in difficult policy planning issues (Sharp & Richardson, 2001) as it allows for the treatment of the uniqueness and specificity of each context and discourse. In the field of education, this approach has begun to provide ways to unpack complex elements of modern educational institutions, such as schooling, curriculum design, leadership and policy-making (e.g. Ball, 2013; Deacon, 2006; Gillies, 2013; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998; Thomson, Hall, & Jones, 2013). Given that the main study's interviewees consisted of authority figures in HE, it was fundamental to the main study to capture the power relations and roles of the identities of these officials in the discursive production of policymaking, management and quality within the wider Omani education context. Therefore, Foucauldian discourse analysis was considered and used to tease out the ways the interviewees spoke of, dealt with and negotiated the use of Western management methods.

## **1.5. Structure of the Thesis**

After this introduction, the thesis is divided into nine further chapters.

**Chapter Two** introduces and analyses the profile of the Sultanate of Oman, discussing its main historical, political, socio-economic transformations. By doing so, the readers are drawn closer to the macro-level representation of the context of study and the events that have directly or indirectly influenced the educational landscape, especially the policy of importing foreign, mainly Western, experiences.

**Chapters Three and Four** review existing literature on the key issues that have moulded Arab and Muslim thought and perceptions of the West, the transfer of Western knowledge and the cultural issues associated with that transfer. While **Chapter Three** considers Arab thought, **Chapter Four** tackles key areas of Islamic and Muslim thought. Both chapters offer a critical and thorough grounding of the subject treated to anticipate factors that could influence the questionnaire respondents' and interviewees' negotiation and appropriation of Western management methods.

**Chapter Five** explains the research design and methodology. Once the choice of theoretical paradigm and approach is justified, the chapter describes the two phases of the study in two separate sections: the questionnaire and interviews.

**Chapters Six, Seven and Eight** present the findings of the study. The results of the quantitative and qualitative parts of the questionnaire are delineated in Chapter Six. Chapters Seven and Eight consider interview findings.

**Chapter Nine** discusses the main findings of the study.

**Chapter Ten** is the conclusion and it summarises the main findings, outlines the implications of the study, puts forward some recommendations to inform Omani policymaking in HE, highlights the study's contributions, notes the limitations and offers suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter Two: The Sultanate of Oman**

### **2.1. Overview**

The formal state of the Sultanate of Oman, as it is now officially known, saw the light on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1970, with the overthrow of Sultan Said bin Taimur by his only son and heir, present-day Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. For Omanis, the period following this day is conveniently termed ‘renaissance’ as it removed them from an era that was more likely similar to the dark ages, characterised by an isolation from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula and the world and a deterioration in almost all forms of social, economic and political life. The significant changes and remarkable reforms, especially in education, that came after the 1970 bloodless coup d’état created a path for the country to enter the modern world and an opportunity for all Omanis to start afresh.

To come to grips with current Omani context with its complicated, yet unique, socioeconomic, cultural and political conditions that have shaped Omanis’ perceptions and ways of thinking, an approach similar to the one used by a plethora of scholars tackling Oman will be adopted. Hence, this chapter begins with a discussion of the geography and its influence on the robust history of the country before moving on to examine the sensitive role of religion in shaping the polity of Oman. Then, a comparison between pre- and post 1970 Oman is made in terms of drastic socioeconomic, political and educational transformations. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **2.2. The Geography of Oman and its Role in Shaping its History**

Oman, which occupies the southeastern portion of the Arabian Peninsula (Figure 2.1), has been described as “virtually an island unto itself” (Allen, 1987, p. 50) because it is flanked by desert and sea. Regional geography has played an important role in shaping Oman’s long and rich history (Rippenburg, 1998), be it during the time of its two-century long maritime empire from the middle of the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (Kelly, 1980) or its seclusion from the rest of the world for the greater part of the twentieth century.

**Figure 2. 1** Map of Oman



**Source:** Nations Online Project 1998-2014

The massive, hot, desolate desert acted as a natural barrier to any form of interaction with the rest of Arabia (Rippenburg, 1998). So, Oman shifted its focus to the sea, hence becoming the principal maritime power in Arabian waters from the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1650 to the assertion of Britain’s supremacy in the Gulf in the nineteenth century. Exposure to foreign cities and markets especially in India and East Africa via the sea (Allen, 1987) has had influence on Omani history and people.

Yet, local geography has played the strongest role in determining the development of Oman’s social and political history (Zahlan, 1998). Two distinct geographic areas typify the country: the coast and the interior (Gonzalez, Karoly, Constant, Salem, & Goldman, 2008). This geographic division marked a schism between the imamate in the interior and the sultanate on the coast with the existence of two nations and two rulers: the Imam in Oman and the Sultan in Muscat. The Imam - a title of more spiritual connotation- was elected as the religio-political leader in the interior of the country. On the other hand, an ancestor of the currently ruling Al Busaid dynasty adopted the title of Sayyid (Lord) in the coastal city of Muscat (Zahlan, 1998). To this date, the interior continues to be more conservative than Muscat in respect to Western influence.

### **2.3. The Role of Ibadhism in Shaping the Polity of Oman**

The separation between the interior and the coast which lasted for decades not only shaped Omani politics, but also instigated social stratification. The roots of this split lie not in the physical geography per se, but in the religious precepts of the Ibadhi (also Ibadi) doctrine, third to Sunni and Shi'a Islamic schools of thought. It is the official and dominant sect in Oman, whose community members include the Sultan. According to the CIA World Factbook, Omani government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation, but it is estimated that 75% of Omanis are Ibadhi Muslims, whereas the remaining 25% are either Sunni, Shia or non-Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013-2014).

Even though Ibadhism “has been, and continues to be, the country’s most powerful unifying force” (Allen, 1987, p. 52), it was also a factor contributing towards tension and civil wars due to rivalry between tribes over religious discord about the office of the Imam, which was primarily religious, but gradually developed to include the politics of the country (Kelly, 1980). Feuds among tribes and continuous civil wars weakened the country and subjected it to foreign invasion, the latest of which was the interference of the British in the internal affairs of Oman, which heightened after the death of Said bin Sultan in 1856 (Allen, 1987). In 1913, there was a strong anti-Muscat uprising by the conservative ibadhis and tribal leaders who wished to restore religious values and revive the Imamate. In 1920, a treaty, which granted the Imamate autonomy, although limited, was reached with British assistance between Sultan Taimur bin Faisal (reigned from 1913 to 1932) and tribal leaders.

Sultan Said bin Taimur, who succeeded his father in 1932, inherited a poor country and ruled with direct control and rigid austerity policies leading the country to slowly drift into isolation and backwardness. His chief objective was to free Oman of Britain’s control, “keenly aware as he was of the humiliation that both his father and grandfather had experienced from the British as a result of the financial conditions of the country” (Rippenburg, 1998, p. 45). On the one hand, pleading poverty as an excuse, he adopted strict financial policies and refused to initiate improvements. On the other hand, and in the light of the nationalist revolutions sweeping the Arab world, he was opposed to education and any sort of economic or social change because of his fear of the outcome of Western modernisation. When he was urged by the British to build primary schools,

he replied, “That is why you lost India, because you educated the people.” (Kelly, 1980, p. 119). Because Sultan Said’s rule was “a medieval anachronism” (Rippenburg, 1998, p. 45), the Omanis revolted twice, in the fifties and the sixties. Eventually he was overthrown by his son in a palace coup d’état on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1970, signalling a new era of development and openness to the West and the rest of the world.

## **2.4. The Establishment of a Modern State**

The young Sultan Qaboos bin Said has been described as a “renaissance man” (Lefebvre, 2010, p. 111) with “more cosmopolitan and progressive views” compared to his father’s “conservatism and isolationism” (Rippenburg, 1998, p. 49). He unified the country and began to exploit oil revenues to establish a functioning modern state.

### **2.4.1. Socioeconomic Transformations and Current Challenges**

Socioeconomic changes are the most obvious of Sultan Qaboos bin Said’s accomplishments in the domestic context. Prior to 1970, Oman lacked almost all infrastructure, offering only rudimentary services and there were hardly any Omanis with any education. So, incipient ministries for social services such as education, health and public works were created and staffed with Omanis returning from Arab countries and Gulf states. The background of these officials has influenced early educational policies, which resembled those in other Arab and Gulf states.

By the mid-1980s, infrastructure such as a transportation system, a telecommunications network, a new port, an international airport, electricity-generating plants, schools, hospitals, desalination plants and low-cost housing were established all over the different regions of the country (Gonzalez et al., 2008) with the help of oil revenues that attracted foreign, especially Western, companies and expertise. These transformational steps marked the inception of a modern country, hence the term “Omani Renaissance” (Oman Ministry of Information, 2013).

Arab oil states, which include Oman and the other Gulf states, have been classified as “rentier states” (Beblawi, 1987; Rippenburg, 1998). A rentier state is one that derives all or a significant portion of its national revenue from rents or external income. In this sense, the Gulf states are ‘oil rentier states’. Oman seems to fit the rentier model even though the early development of the state’s politics and economy exhibited signs that

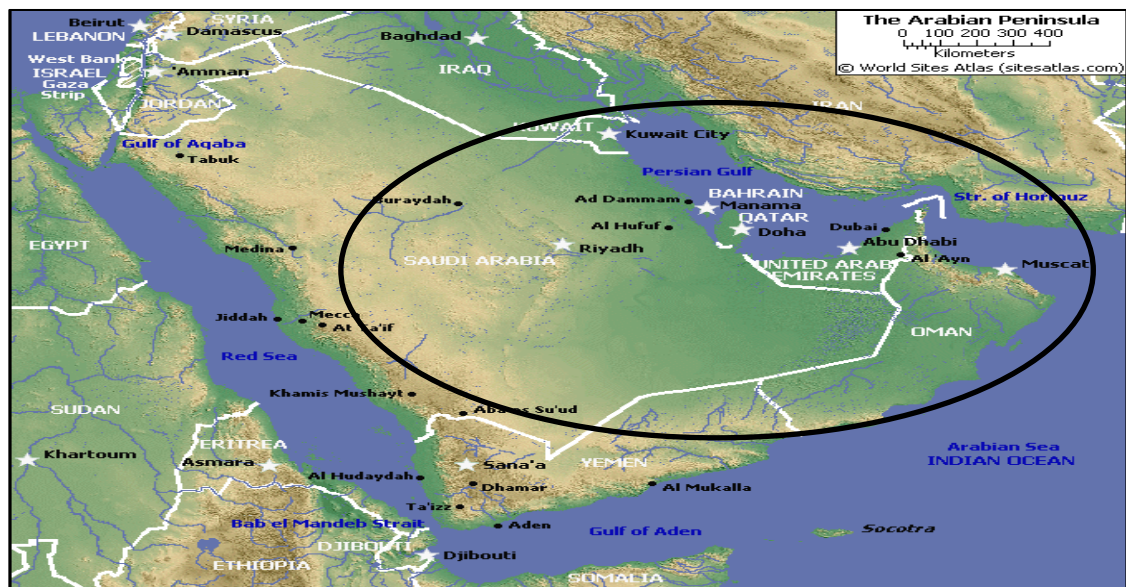


made Oman different from its neighbours (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000). First, Oman has always had smaller oil reserves, which are dwindling and continuously creating financial constraints on the government. Second, contrary to its neighbours, Oman has other resources such as fisheries, agriculture and minerals. In addition, because of its important strategic location and its long seafaring heritage, Oman was linked to the civilisations of antiquity such as Mesopotamia, India and China, which helped the Omanis of antiquity to engage in a variety of activities such as navigation, trade, mining, and agriculture (Oman Ministry of Information, 2013). Third, the strong influence of and need for the traditional tribal elite and merchant class, especially in the pre-coup Oman, have helped keep a *laissez faire* or an open approach toward economy in the post-coup Oman. For the above reasons and most specifically the latter, Allen and Rigsbee (2000, p. 113) have once argued that Oman has had “a very un-rentier-like economy”. In other words, it has not necessarily corresponded to “the example *par excellence* of rentier states” as stated by Beblawi (1987, p. 53).

Oil was indeed a revolution that has helped alleviate the economy of Oman and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Figure 2.2) which also include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It has promoted their status in the world at large as these countries started buying the services of especially the West to modernise their states in all forms. However, becoming the wheel whose revenues drive all economic and social development processes, oil was no longer a revolution, rather a phenomenon. Indeed, “the oil phenomenon has cut across the whole of the Arab world, oil rich and oil poor” (Beblawi, 1987, p. 62). Displaying symptoms from both sides of the coin, Oman is not an oil poor state, nor is it as rich in oil as its neighbours.

Realising this fact early on, the Oman 2020 Vision Conference was held in June 1995 to outline a comprehensive roadmap to plan the country’s future economy up to the year 2020, by finding ways to achieve financial balance and sustainable growth, without depending on fluctuating oil revenues. Vision 2020 set out strategies for diversification, privatisation, industrialisation and human capital development, which have not yet been achieved.

**Figure 2. 2** The Six GCC Countries (circled area within the Arabian Peninsula)



**Source:** World Sites Atlas (sitesatlas.com), 2008

The biggest dilemma facing the leadership in Oman continues to be the development of Omani nationals to meet employability levels and skills demanded by the labour market which has always depended on foreign labour. According to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) (2016b), the population has reached around 4.4 million by mid 2016, recording an increase by 1.1 million from 2011. Out of this, Omanis currently account for only 55% while the number of expatriates has risen rapidly from 39% in 2011 to 45% in 2016. The most critical issue the report shows concerns the Omani youth and children (those under the age of 29), which together represent the biggest segment in society constituting about two-thirds or 65% of all nationals. According to a report by Oxford Business Group (2016), this ‘youth bulge’ provides a challenge to policymakers in Oman, and the rest of Arab Gulf States, because of its effect on vital sectors such as welfare programmes, education and labour market. In Oman, the situation is quite alarming since not only is a large segment of Omanis economically inactive, but also because of the disturbing high unemployment rates among the economically active, officially estimated at around 12%, as reported by Muscat Daily on April 8, 2015. However, the actual figure might be higher since it is one of the indicators the government of Oman does not disclose publicly. Unemployment of Omani citizens, according to the Central Bank of Oman (June 2012) is the single most important problem faced by the country, amounting to the level of a crisis.

The government has initiated several plans to reduce the negative impacts of unemployment, one being an Omanisation policy, which is a strategy to ‘nationalise’ the workforce by creating job opportunities for Omanis in different economic fields, especially in the private sector. Traditionally, the public sector, or the government, where Omanis are concentrated, has been the major and largest single employer of nationals for the past four decades. However, with the increase in population, it has become saturated and unable to absorb the thousands of young Omanis entering the job market every year. Although executing the Omanisation process has had several benefits, there has been dissatisfaction among nationals that the policy is providing low-level jobs to young Omanis, reserving better positions to foreign, especially Western, expatriates. However, private sector establishments, where Omanis are underrepresented, argue that finding qualified nationals is one of the main and critical challenges facing them (Pourmohammadi, 2014, Apr 06).

Aware of the well-known shortage of skilled labour in Oman, which is occasionally attributed to low quality education systems, officials from the Ministry of Manpower have asserted that the focus of the Omanisation program is not only to create jobs for locals, but also to develop them by training Omani citizens to do work that was previously done by expatriates. Another measure taken by the leadership to develop human resources and to break the mismatch between the output of the education system and the requirements of the labour market is through devoting substantial funds to a number of educational reforms, especially through importing Western models that have proven successful in their countries (to be discussed in a subsequent section).

Today, Oman is a high-income developing country (The World Bank, 2014). By 2012, it scored a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.731, ranking it 84th out of 187 countries and placing the Sultanate in the high human development category (United Nations Development Programme (UNPD), 2013). Even though this incredible development has been attributed to the government’s colossal undertakings to ameliorate the levels of school mass enrolment, literacy rates and health services (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014), problems with the quality of education have yet to be tackled.

In the social realm, although Oman is identified as an Arab, Muslim country, it is ethnically and culturally diverse, which is largely due to its history of maritime trade.

With such a heterogeneous population, Oman displays a wealth of diversity in ethnic groups and languages. Peterson (2004b) writes that ethnic identity in Oman is defined by language or sect, or both. He notices that when differences in language or sect disappear, assimilation of the various ethnic groups into the bigger community ensues. He argues that as the various groups mix in different spheres such as residential areas, the workplace and education, ethnic identity probably seems to decline. In addition, the influx of expatriates, who remain to be part of the workforce, but not of the society (Beblawi, 1987), has made this social fabric even more complex. With regard to religion, even though not all Omanis are Ibadhis, Ibadhi traditions have strongly influenced their life. Conservatism and puritanism are still evident in their basic manners (Rippenburg, 1998). Notwithstanding the diverse nature of the country, Oman generally enjoys a healthy ethnic and sectarian cohesion, which has often been used to show its uniqueness in comparison to other Arab states.

Yet, examining the contemporary social and cultural structure of the Sultanate, Al-Azri (2013) notes the significant role tribal organisation has played in shaping the identity of the country and its people. Alliances, which have strengthened some tribes and weakened others, have been sought throughout the troubled history of Oman. Because of this tribal tradition, which has survived into the present day, social stratification emerged. A hierarchical structure of tribal leadership as well as divisions within tribes can still be found. Tribal leaders exhibit their power and influence over their subjects according to their position within the leadership hierarchy. Within tribes, some groups are marginalised and thus have less important status. Even though both inequality in social status and economic affluence have survived into modern day Oman, Omani people still take pride in their tribes, a belonging that forms an important social identity. Throughout their history, Omanis have depended on their tribes, especially their superiors, for economic needs and protection.

Tribal identity is of paramount importance to Omanis, but not so much as the family, which is the nucleus of the societal institution, for “the family, rather than the individual, constitutes the universal block of the community” (Moghadam, 2003, p. 11). On the one hand, Rippenburg (1998) observes that Omani society very much remains paternal in the loyalty between father and son in the family and among tribesmen in the larger tribal unit. On the other hand, although the traditional family in the Middle East is patriarchal

in its primordial form, Moghadam (2003) explains that social change has disrupted and weakened the patriarchal organisation. This is particularly true in urban areas where women enjoy a degree of independence and freedom due to their attained level of education and type of profession.

Even though this cultural shift can influence the perceptions of Omani people towards the use of Western models, a general pessimism can be witnessed throughout Al-Azri's (2013) examination of current social, political and cultural structures in Oman. He criticises the social changes that have been fashioned by the oil boom. To him, the surface shows modern infrastructure, innovative products and advanced technology, but deep down exists a conflict between change and traditional cultural and religious values. Furthermore, he points out that a discriminatory and patriarchal culture is still reflected in the social and political systems of the state. He further observes that socio-political structures of the pre-1970 era have largely remained unchanged in spite of the unprecedented economic developments and modernisation processes.

#### **2.4.2. Contemporary Political Conditions**

In comparison to its neighbours in the Gulf, not only is Oman unique in its geographical and social diversity, but its political experience is also quite different. Oman has been proclaimed an independent state since 1650, after Omanis victoriously evicted the Portuguese from Muscat (as well as the African Coast and the Indian Ocean) after an occupation that lasted for 140 years (Allen, 1987; Gonzalez et al., 2008). It is the oldest independent state in the Arab world ("Oman Profile," 2013, Oct 26) and has enjoyed relative autonomy for the most part of its modern history.

Even though Oman does not have a constitution, a constitution-like document was promulgated through a royal decree in November 1996 for the first time in the history of the country. 'The Basic Law of the State' or *The White Book* defines the government as *sultanic*, stating that the monarchy is hereditary among the male dependents of Al Said family. The document also outlines functions and divides powers of authorities. Furthermore, it recognises the rights and personal freedom of the individual (Oman Ministry of Informtaion, 2002). In Part III -Public Rights and Duties, Article 17 states that all citizens are equal and that no discrimination against them should be made on

account of “gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status” (Oman Ministry of Information, 2002).

Several Western writers (e.g. Allen & Rigsbee, 2000; Katz, 2004; Rippenburg, 1998) and reports (e.g. Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014) seem to agree that Oman is an absolute monarchy, where the Sultan possesses total monopoly, holding the positions of prime minister, defence minister, finance minister, foreign affairs minister and chairman of the central bank (Katz, 2004). Sultan Qaboos’s approach was to maintain the political status quo (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000; Rippenburg, 1998), but his progressiveness and willingness to sense that a wind of change was blowing through the area has earned him the epithet ‘renaissance man’. Peterson (2004a, p. 125), a historian and political scientist specialising in the Gulf, stresses the fact that Oman is a “seeming anomaly” in the region with an independent political direction. He highlights that in spite of the modest oil reserves, the country has been able to start entirely from scratch and achieve remarkable political as well as social and economic developments over a short period of time. Yet, ‘starting from scratch’ has been through a policy of reliance on adapting ready models from abroad, in particular from Western developed countries as it was a quicker route.

Three decades ago, Hisham Sharabi (1988) classified all contemporary Arab societies as ‘neopatriarchal’, a term he used to describe hybrid societies that combine a traditional system of patriarchy and a distorted modernisation. According to the classical theory of social change, capitalism is essential for the transformation of a society and it is thus linked to modernisation. However, Sharabi (1988, p. 5) emphasises that Western capitalism introduced in the Arab world has been far from being “autonomous”, rather “distorted, dependent capitalism”, bringing about a hybrid social class or a ‘neopatriarchal’ culture. Willoughby (2008), nonetheless, argues that because of the significant changes in the Gulf states in terms of the increased educational attainment of national women and accordingly their improved presence in the labour force, neopatriarchy appears to be undergoing major transformation, perhaps even declining, showing signs of a more fertile environment for Western ideas. In addition, Peterson (2005, p. 5) finds it extreme to view Oman in relation to the conception of neopatriarchy. Instead, he explains that Oman, and the other Gulf countries, can best be characterised as “post-traditional states”, revealing elements of both modernity and tradition in new ways. This notion is reinforced by Sayyid Badr bin Saud Al-Busaidi, the current minister

responsible for defence, who clarifies that the modernisation of Oman is a gradual process, in which traditional values and structures keep evolving. He affirms, “Oman is not chasing some grand illusion of uniform modernity”. In other words, Omani “democratic institutions may not necessarily look quite like democratic institutions from elsewhere in the world” as Oman will pursue modernity in “an Omani way” (Al-Busaidi, 2008, p. 129 & 132). For example, Oman’s ‘parliamentary institution’ has evolved differently. A bicameral house, the Council of Oman (Majlis Oman), is made up of two chambers, the State Council (Majlis Ad-Dawla) and the Consultation Council (Majlis Ash-Shura or Shura Council). The former is an upper house whose members are appointed by the Sultan from prominent Omani figures with high levels of expertise in different fields, whereas the latter is a lower cabinet, a consultative assembly, whose members are ‘democratically’ elected by Omani citizens. Although the Council of Oman had previously been purely an advisory body, in 2011 the Sultan expanded its role and granted it new legislative and regulatory powers. Much as ministries draft laws and Omanis offer their input through the Consultative Council, the enactment of laws still rests singly on the Sultan, who is the ultimate arbiter.

Implementing the ancient Omani tradition of shura (consultation) in the government through the Consultative Council can be a positive indication that Omani citizens are provided with a greater opportunity to influence government decisions and national projects, but it is still “not democracy” (Symons, 2008, p. 50). Moreover, while municipal councils exist in all governorates, to date, political parties and platforms are banned, unless deemed apolitical.

In brief, the haphazard, unplanned path to economic and political development observed in the seventies and eighties has gradually adopted a slower, more rational and more cautious approach (Peterson, 2004a). Major socioeconomic transformations have been accomplished. The ‘welfare regime’ has provided nationals with extensive social services and accordingly Omanis’ quality of life has improved significantly in terms of education, health, life expectancy and income (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014). On the other hand, political reforms, although gigantic, have not been as radical. Freedom of assembly and speech is restricted and discrimination against girls and women in societal and family law could be still found (United States Department of State, 2012) in spite of the fact that Oman is regarded to be one of the leading countries in the Gulf with respect to gender

equality and women empowerment. Yet, such a complex patriarchal social structure, which is based on tribalism, sectarianism and the extended family, is incompatible with modern democratic values (Al Rumaihi, 2008). In addition, and typical of many developing countries, the evolution in social and economic atmospheres facilitated the minimal bureaucracy that existed during the *ancien régime* of Said bin Taimur and made it grow (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000).

## **2.5. Education in Oman**

Prior to 1970, hardly any formal education existed in the country. A mere three schools with 909 male students and one technical/ vocational school provided the only institutional type of education. In 1970, the government geared all its capabilities to establish a formal system of school education. In the beginning, efforts chiefly focused on developing primary education. By academic year 1977-1978, 53% of Omani students in the related age group were enrolled in primary schools. A decade later, in academic year 1989-1990, nearly 100% were enrolled. A meteoric rise in the number of enrolled females was also witnessed in the same academic years, from 37% to 97%, respectively (Gonzalez et al., 2008). During the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, tertiary education was not available. It was not necessary, as there were not many secondary school graduates. The easiest and most cost-effective solution at the time was to send students on state-sponsored scholarships to study abroad (Al Shmeli, 2011). As a consequence of the rapid expansion of pre-tertiary education, which has since been made available free of charge to all Omanis, the number of secondary school graduates rose significantly and the government was left in a dire predicament. In 1986, the first and only public university, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), was opened, followed by several state and private colleges and universities.

As a result of Oman Vision 2020, which emphasised the development of a qualified indigenous human capital base to replace the foreign workforce and reduce the population imbalance, a comprehensive programme of educational reforms was planned. Even though the drastic improvements in education represent one of the most salient features of the Omani renaissance, they have still achieved mixed outcomes in terms of quality, as will come later.



### **2.5.1. The Development of Pre-Tertiary Education in Oman**

The development of the Omani pre-tertiary education system seems to have undergone three distinct stages (Issan & Gomaa, 2010). The first stage in the 1970s saw a rapid quantitative development represented by the fast provision of schools. This was the starting point of formal mass schooling and female education in Oman. An Arabic school education system including curricula, methods and teachers was borrowed from other Arab countries (Al Balushi & Griffiths, 2013). In the 1980s, during the second stage, efforts were focused on improving the quality of education, especially by implementing modifications to the curriculum. However, the third stage, which started in 1995 following the recommendations of Oman Economic Vision 2020 conference, took a different course of direction. Fundamental changes were instituted to the structure and curriculum, and a new Basic Education (BE) system, a model imported from Canada, was introduced in academic year 1998-1999. This system would operate concurrently with the existing 12-year primary-preparatory-secondary education system until the latter gets phased out completely. The new ten-year Basic Education, which is a two-cycle system, comprises a four-year Cycle 1 and a six-year Cycle 2, with Cycle 1 being a co-education system taught by female teachers only. A Two-year secondary school system completes the educational ladder of the new public education in the Sultanate (Oman Ministry of Education, The Oman National Commission for Education, & UNICEF, 2001).

So, in a relatively short period, the Omani government was able to provide universal access to education. Primary school net enrolment for the period from 2008 to 2011 reached 97.6%. In addition, total literacy rates among adults during the same period was 86.9%, with a youth literacy rate of 97.4% and 98.2% among 15-25 year-old males and females, respectively (UNICEF, 2013). However, the educational system did not exactly succeed in creating well-developed human resources that could thoroughly satisfy the needs of the emerging economy and the growing labour market, and subsequently provide the public with increasing chances of social and economic mobility.

### **2.5.2. Pre-Tertiary Education and the Enduring Dilemma of Quality**

The Arab Gulf states, including Oman, invested considerable amounts of oil revenues in ambitious plans to establish a modern completely-free-of-charge school education system, as part of the “newly-created welfare state” (Bahgat, 1999, p. 129). However, in

his attempt to evaluate the education systems of these countries, Bahgat noted the imbalance between the economic progress and social development, which created “unique” educational systems, whose curricula were dominated by two characteristics. First, the focus was on humanities, especially Arabic and Islamic studies. Second, academic learning, rather than vocational and technical training, was emphasised. This mirrored “the dilemma that these societies face - how to reconcile the requirements of modernization with their traditional values.” (1999, p. 131).

The *Arab Human Development Report*, published by the United Nations Development Programme (2003), discussed the cardinal obstacle of knowledge deficit in the Arab World and claimed that education gains, although impressive, were still modest in relation to human development compared to other developing countries. Arguing that the most pressing challenge facing the region was the declining quality of education, the report recommended that Arab countries undertake serious reforms of their education systems in order to improve quality at all levels. In fact, major reform plans had already been implemented in the GCC countries before the publication of this report, such as the above-mentioned reforms adopted in the Omani education system. The quality of school outcomes in Oman, however, remains below international standards. Oman participated in four international studies to evaluate educational achievement for grades 4, 6, 9 and 10. The results of the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) studies indicated low students’ achievements in the subjects considered, namely Arabic, science, mathematics and life skills (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2010/2011). Realising the strong impact of economic and technological globalisation on education and the importance of high educational standards on any nation’s socioeconomic progress, a wide range of plans to upgrade education quality continue to be designed and adopted in the country. For example, despite an anticipated deficit, an estimated expenditure of OMR 2.6 billion (US\$ 6.7 billion), which constituted 18.6% of Oman’s 2014 total public budget, was announced to be allocated to the education sector (Times New Service, 2014, Jan 04).

### **2.5.3. Higher Education in the Arab World and the Gulf**

Beginning in earnest only in the 1950s, mass higher education (HE) in the Middle East is considered a relatively recent phenomenon (Eickelman, 1992). Although in the post-oil Gulf States university education is developing rather fast, the entire Middle East North

Africa (MENA) region is still grappling with serious challenges. The World Bank (2008) report ‘The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa’ claimed that the heavy investment in education in the region has not really paid off, for the region still lags behind other developing countries as regards economic productivity and growth. Attributing this to lack of a ‘quality’ education, the report highlighted the need for further reforms to match the requirements of the economy and bridge the gap between education and employment. The same observation was actually made two decades ago by Coffman (1996, p. 16), pointing out that “strengthening the link between university studies and the needs of the job market” was a common issue receiving momentous attention throughout the Arab world. For the six members of the GCC, nevertheless, this was and still is of high priority, as expensive foreign skilled workers still outstrip the indigenous workforce.

Compared to the wider Arab world, the landscape of the nascent HE in the Arab Gulf nations has been changing rapidly. The dramatic rise in the populations of the GCC states, characterised by a wide youth base as well as the growing populations of the expatriates’ children, necessitated that Gulf governments shift their attention in the mid-1990s away from primary and secondary education to tertiary education instead (Coffman, 2003). Privatisation of this sector was seen as a practical solution. Over the past two decades, the Arab Gulf has been witnessing an exponential increase in the number of private higher education institutions (HEIs), which are either purely local or affiliated with foreign universities, mostly Western ones. Authorities have also regarded privatisation, which opens the door to competition, as a means to bring about quality instruction of international standard and thus equip local graduates with the required skills to join the dynamic labour market, particularly the private sector. Generally, HE in the Gulf is characterised by a dominance of the American educational model (Coffman, 2003) and a reliance on foreign (Arab, Asian and Western) academics, as there is a well-known dearth of local academics.

#### **2.5.4. Development of Higher Education in Oman**

Moving from no formal HE system in 1970 to 69 private and public HE institutions (HEIs) by 2016 according to data issued by the NCSI (2016a), the Omani HE system is considered one of the fastest growing in the world. The development of HE has gone through several key stages, as Table 2.1, adapted from Baporikar and Shah (2012),

illustrates. The system was inaugurated in 1986 with the opening of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the first and only public university in the country to date. Gradually, few other public HEIs in the form of specialised state-owned colleges were opened. Public HE, which has been completely free of charge, has placed a huge financial burden on the government, especially with the increase in the number of student enrolments and the decrease in oil prices. So, to meet the country’s demand for higher education (HE) while containing its costs, the government’s strategy was to legalise private HE in 1995 and ‘aggressively promote’ the expansion of private HEIs (Ameen, Chapman, & Al-Barwani, 2010, p. 88). However, these local institutions were required to twin with foreign ones to guarantee quality. This policy of international affiliation, or ‘outsourcing’, has been adopted by some countries on the basis that it provides credibility and capacity development (Al-Barwani, Ameen, & Chapman, 2011). In addition to these avenues of tertiary education, the government also awards annual scholarships to the best-achieving students to study abroad. However, this approach, according to an article on University World News, does not reinforce local institutions (Therin, 2011, Jul 17).

**Table 2. 1** Development of HE in Oman

| <b>Phase</b>       | <b>Characteristics</b>  |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Pre-1970</b>    | No formal HE  |
| <b>1970s-1980s</b> | 1980: Opening of SQU, only state-owned university<br>Establishment of public colleges with emphasis on vocational education and training, especially in health and teaching |
| <b>1990s</b>       | 1994: establishment of MoHE<br>1995: establishment of private HE; import of foreign programmes  |
| <b>2000s</b>       | New Phase: establishment of quality management and assurance measures and policies  |

Importing programmes through affiliation helped with the rapid expansion of particularly private HEIs, but there was a significant concern about the discourse of ‘quality’ in various forms. Therefore, a new phase began with the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) in 2001, which was later upgraded in 2010 and renamed Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) and given the responsibility of

regulating the quality of HE in Oman to “ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards, and to encourage higher education institutions to improve their internal quality” (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, 2016). In the process of building a national quality management system, a diverse range of quality frameworks and assurance systems were imported from Western countries, mainly the UK and Australia (Carroll et al., 2009).

#### **2.5.5. Current Status of Omani HE**

Currently, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), established in 1994, is the institution responsible for the HE system in the country, regulating both public and private institutions. However, a number of HEIs fall under the jurisdiction of other government bodies, namely the Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Royal Oman Police and Central Bank of Oman. According to latest data issued by the NCSI (2016a), Oman’s relatively diverse HE system is home to more than 130,000 students compared to 80,000 in 2009 (Al Shmeli, 2009). Although Oman registered an immense increase in gross enrolment rate from 21.1% in 2008 to 28% in 2013 (Liu & Mutinda, 2016), it is still insufficient. Thus, the government’s goal of achieving an enrolment rate of at least 50% by 2020 (Al Shmeli, 2009), seems unrealistic given the high percentages of youth population.

#### **2.5.6. Internationalisation and HE in Oman**

Even though the study does not highlight the topic of globalisation per se, internationalisation has direct relevance. These are related concepts, but not interchangeable. Globalisation, or how local events are influenced and shaped by global contexts and vice versa, has been widely discussed in relation to HE, in particular to show how global economic and academic developments have affected policymaking in many countries, noticeably changing the face of national education systems in developing countries. These responses, that is the policies and reform initiatives, to the forces of globalisation come in the form of internationalisation (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In Oman, policymakers have adopted several reform plans, to realign the Omani HE system to local social, economic and political schemes as well as to pressures from regional, mainly the GCC, and global actors, such the UN and World Bank. These national, regional and global factors have been extensively analysed by Al'Abri (2016), who notes that regional and global factors do not necessarily underplay the powerful and

critical role of the government given that Oman has a “hierarchical, top-down and state-centric policy making” (2016, p. 154).

Perhaps the most vivid manifestations of internationalisation in Omani HE can be observed through a policy of borrowing or importing. Implementing an American credit-hour system, adopting English as a medium of instruction and publication in most HEIs, using Western curricula, textbooks and technology, building affiliations with foreign HEIs, recruiting academics from foreign, especially English-speaking countries and establishing quality management (QM) systems and accreditation programmes that originated in the West are some key examples of a straightforward policy of borrowing. Implementing these policies, and many others, comes as part of the various strategies undertaken by the government to improve the quality standard of Omani HEIs, raise the competence of the local citizenry and prepare them to compete in the local and global job market.

## **2.6. Summary**

This chapter has introduced the context of the study. It has given an overview of the major historical and political events that continue to shape the country and its people today. The year 1970 has been a landmark and a turning point in the modern history of Oman, as it was the beginning of a modern state with a new social, economic and political landscape. Educational developments are among the most striking transformations, which were not possible without the revolution of oil. Higher education began officially in 1986 and has been expanding rapidly ever since. It can be said that the entire Omani HE system started as a borrowed structure from developed nations, specifically the USA, the UK and Australia. Despite colossal efforts to develop quality management (QM) programmes, also imported from Western developed countries, there are still general concerns about ‘quality’ and with what that means and how it is to be secured in Omani HE.

Now that the local context has been laid out, it is of utmost importance to examine the literature on the long history of the West and the Arab world, with its tensions and conflicts, which has contributed in moulding the mentality of Arabs and the way they perceive the West in order to explore and understand how they negotiate imported Western methods applied in their HE systems.

## Chapter Three: Arabs and the West

### 3.1. Overview

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat;* (Kipling, 1899)

Kipling's 'The Ballad of East and West' is still often quoted to comment on the striking differences between Eastern and Western cultures, suggesting their incompatibility and implying the existence of a 'clash'. This famous quote, however, does not end there. The next two lines state that diverse geographical borders, race and cultures become superficial or even of no significance when 'two strong men stand face to face', no matter what their origins are.

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the  
earth!* (Kipling, 1899)

Yet, Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilisations' thesis, published a century later, reiterated once again the possibility of a collision. To him, "the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic." Rather, "the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" and religious (1993, p. 22). There has been a plethora of works by Western scholars who attempted to discuss and analyse the east, be it the so-called Near, Middle or Far East. Whether their objective was to bridge the gap between the West and the rest of the world or to merely illustrate the basic distinctions between the two entities, such scholars tend to 'typify the Orient'. Edward Said (1979) criticises the inaccurate cultural representations of the Orient, especially of the Arabs and Islam, which he claims were created by imperial sentiments and the concept of 'the inferior other'.

This chapter will examine the vast literature on the major issues that have demarcated the Arab-Western narrative. It will first give a general idea of the Arab Middle East,

focusing on Arab culture and society, probing the modern historical context of the region and outlining some of the most prominent features of contemporary Arab thought. Then, important cultural issues of identity, diversity and disunity will be explored in hopes of identifying the possible realms of conflict that could colour Arabs' conceptions and perspectives, including those of Omanis', towards Western culture and Western methods implemented in HE. Next, main issues related to economic development, which is an important factor in HE policies, especially concerning borrowing Western models, will be explored and addressed in reference to both the Arab Gulf States and the larger Arab World. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **3.2. Arab History, Culture and Society**

It is important to make clear the distinction between the 'Arab Middle East' or 'Arab world' and 'Muslim world' to eliminate any confusion and prepare for a deeper analysis of the fundamentals of Arab culture and history.

Even though geographically and culturally the Arab World and Muslim World represent two completely different entities, with the former being part of the latter, Arabs and Muslims/ Islam are oftentimes intertwined due to three facts. First, Islam was born in and spread from an Arab land (present time Saudi Arabia). Second, Prophet Mohammad was an Arab. Third, Arabic is the language of the book of Islam, the Qur'an. However, numbers could also attest to this association. While it is true that 62% of all Muslims (approximately 1.6 billion adherents representing about 23% of the global population) reside in the Asia-Pacific sphere (Desilver & Masci, 2017), Islam does not form the majority of the people here. In contrast, 93% of the people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are Muslim, albeit amounting to only around 20% of all Muslims worldwide.

#### **3.2.1. The Arab League**

The League of Arab States (LAS) or the Arab League, founded in 1945 (LAS, n.d.), is officially composed of twenty-two member-states from North Africa, Southwest Asia, the Horn of Africa and Palestine (See Figure 3.1) - Syria has been suspended since 2011 due to its ongoing political crisis. In the early years of its inception, the two most pressing issues that dominated the agenda of the Arab League were related to assisting Arab States that were still under foreign colonisation get their independence as well as preventing the



creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Presently, its main purposes have extended to include the strengthening of ties between member-states, safeguarding their independence and coordinating policies and collaboration. In addition, achieving cooperation in political, economic, cultural, social, communication and health affairs is a major aim. Arab culture is also an important issue on the LAS agenda. For example, one of the various specialised organisations and institutions emanating from the League is the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), officially established in 1970. This organisation is primarily concerned with the advancement of the Arab culture through the development and coordination of the fields of education, culture and science among Arab member states at the regional and national levels (ALESCO, n.d.).

**Figure 3. 1** Members of the League of Arab States



**Source:** BBC News - Profile: Arab League Overview, 5 November 2013

### 3.2.2. Basic Geography and Demography

The LAS region, commonly known as the Arab World, stretches from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean and from Anatolia to Sahara Desert, an area of contrasting habitats and varying climates. Although the region has terrains of plateaus, fertile lands and mountain ranges, more than 80% is covered by arid deserts (Barakat, 1993). In his book, *The Arab World, Society, Culture and State*, Arab sociologist Halim Barakat describes the distinct environmental configurations of the region and emphasises their historical contribution

to the different living patterns that have emerged, namely rural, urban and Bedouin; hence, helping to stamp them with “distinctive cultural identities” (1993, p. 28).

The total population of the Arab World is estimated at 377 million people (The World Bank, 2015). The region has been categorised as relatively young in age, with the majority of the population in many countries under 25 years of age. The total youth population, between the ages of 15 to 24 years, is one-fifth thereof, or about 20%. In fact, having had a history of high fertility, the population of young people in the region more than doubled in the past thirty years. This has caused changes to the age structure, aggravating several challenges, most significantly of which is unemployment, currently estimated at 30% (Mirkin, 2013). The region’s “youth bulge” phenomenon, which makes it one of the most youthful parts in the whole world, is considered “the most evident and challenging aspect” of the Arab world demographic profile (AHDP, 2009, p. 3). This demographic change is thus believed to have been a critical factor in exacerbating the recent youth-led revolutions that swept large parts of the Arab World (Mirkin, 2013).

According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) reports, Arab countries vary significantly in human development indicators, from low to very high (UNDP, 2014). Arab states have made great progress in literacy rates between 1990 and 2012, rising from 55% to 78% among adults aged 15 years and older and from 74% to 90% among youths aged between 15 to 24 years old. However, these countries are home to 6.6% of the total global illiterate population (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, September 2014) and the quality of HE in the Arab world is poor and falls short of the needs of the society at large (Wilkens, 2011).

Even though the prevailing majority of Arab nation citizens are Arab and Muslim, small non-Arab minorities like Kurds, Berbers, and Armenians are found. There are also sizable followers of other religions and faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, Druze, Samaritan, Yezidism and others. Sometimes these ethnolinguistic and religious divisions influence their people’s view to the bigger Arab nationhood, as the former “lack a sense of being Arab” while the latter may “consider themselves Arabs with some qualifications and reservations” (Barakat, 1993, p. 34).

### 3.2.3. The Arab Identity

Even though ‘identity’ indicates differences, rather than similarities, such as ‘east and west, ‘us and them’, it is still used as a naming or a reference criterion to distinguish things and people or even to show their uniqueness. Historians and scholars (See e.g. Feghali, 1997; Mansfield, 1985) seem to agree that the designation ‘Arab’ is difficult to define. In addition, Feghali (1997, p. 347) points out that the labels ‘Arab’, ‘Middle East’ and ‘Muslim World’ have been used interchangeably, especially in Western media. She asserts that this “erroneous” practice contributes to “a lack of differentiation between and broad stereotyping” of the diverse groups of people that exist in the area. However, some Western media has begun to notice the ambiguity of the term. For example, an article in the *Economist* (July 23, 2009) asserts that ‘Arab’ is ‘a slippery term’ and notes that being an Arab represents a ‘loose identity’. Still yet, Luciani and Salamé (1990, p. 404) simplify it to mean “any individual whose native language is Arabic”, which also seems to be the customary definition among the general Arab public. The original Arab was the Bedouin from Arabia (Hitti, 1948) or in other words nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Later, the wider meaning that an Arab is one who speaks Arabic was revived in the twentieth century especially during the prominence of Arab nationalist movements (Mansfield, 1985). That is why debates arose when the “more African than Arab” (Harik, 1990, p. 1) states of Somalia, Djibouti, the Comoros Island and to a lesser degree Mauritania joined the Arab League. In fact, arguments regarding the criteria are still being posted in online discussion forums, for article I of the Arab League Charter, which states that “any independent Arab state has the right to join the league” (n.d., pp. 8-9), has left the term ‘Arab’ undefined. This division in opinion between the majority of citizens in the Arabic-speaking world and the Arab League seems so simple on the face of it, but it is rather complicated, as it suggests not only a confusion over the term ‘Arab’, but also a deeper ‘identity confusion’. For this reason, this review and discussion is mainly limited to the remaining eighteen Arabic-speaking countries.

Hourani’s statement that Arabs are “more conscious of their language than any people in the world” (1983, p. 1) places emphasis on the Arabic language as the mainstay of Arabs’ sense of national identity (Harik, 1990). However, the Arabic language, let alone geographical positioning, cannot be the primary or ‘real’ criterion to identify Arabs because of the diversity that exists in the Arab World. Some writers have instead

attempted to describe elements of shared commonalities, or in Barakat's diction "objective conditions of unity". According to him, in addition to the Arabic language, some of the essential building blocks that bring Arabs together are "shared culture; the Arabs' sense of their place in history, and their sense of belonging; similar economic interests; and the looming presence of external threats and challenges that face Arab society" (1993, p. 4). Thus, the interplay between historical context and culture is important to understand the *status quo* in the region.

#### **3.2.4. A Brief History of the Modern Arab World**

The Arab World's central position at the intersection of the three ancient continents, namely Asia, Africa and Europe, has always made it strategically important. Not only has the region witnessed the successive birth, life and death of many of the world's oldest great civilisations such as the Akkadian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Phoenician, and Egyptian among others, but it has also been frequently referred to by historians as the 'cradle of civilisation'. These pre-eminent empires unified the region and left a great historical legacy whose consequences have survived to the present time (Barakat, 1993). Added to that is the region's reputation for being the birthplace of the world's three major Abrahamic religions. The prized location, wealth and legacy of the Arab-Islamic civilisation have attracted foreign interests, in the form of occupation first, and 'meddling' (Barakat, 1993) in their affairs nowadays; hence, the ongoing conflict and difficult history.

The link to colonial legacy in the Arab Middle East is a prerequisite to the understanding of any modern Arab state (Ayubi, 1995), Arab thought and society. At the outset of the twentieth century, most of the Arab world was under Ottoman rule. The revolts of Arab subjects against the Ottoman Empire/ Muslim Caliph in the nineteenth century could have constructed the roots of twentieth century Pan-Arabism and Arab nationalist ideologies. Initially, these anti-Turkish, nationalist attitudes called for cultural equality, but the Arab revolt of 1916-1918 was more of a political awakening following the disintegration of Ottoman Empire and the impact of British and French hegemony over large parts of the Middle East (Ayubi, 1995).

Abou-El-Haj (1982) reports that scholarly materials on the Ottoman era of Arab history, albeit small in quantity, could be divided into three periods. Arab scholarship up to 1918 is generally positive towards the Ottoman sultanate as it was regarded the heir of the Islamic caliphate. However, during the period of 1918-1950, Arab attitude and scholarship production shifted towards the call for total independence from the state due to Turkification policies introduced by the Young Turks. The last period from 1950 seems to be influenced by Arab nationalism that assumed the unity of Arab history and considered the entire Ottoman era as a time of decay not worthy of serious attention.

Ayubi (1995) laments the practice of disregarding the Ottoman-Arab history, or accusing it of decline, as it has had noticeable impact on the state and political traditions of many Arab countries. This era, he writes, “included some praiseworthy manifestations of a remarkable skill in organisation and administration, and some very interesting innovations in the area of statesmanship that included, among others, the elaboration of a dynamic system of socio-cultural pluralism.” (1995, p. 66). Nevertheless, at the end of his short description of the history of the Arabs, Hitti (1948) does not conceal his surprise that “excessive taxation and oppressive rule” exercised by the Ottomans left the Arabs unable to produce any creative work in art, literature and science. The (Muslim) Arabs, before not too long ago, were exporters of great knowledge in sciences and humanities, but during the long-established Ottoman suzerain, the once glamorous Arab capitals of mighty empires and cultural enlightenment, namely Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus, gradually faded and the whole Arab land was in “a state of eclipse” (Hitti, 1948, p. 196).

Although the British and French encouraged the Arabs to break away from the Ottomans and the British even promised to support the liberation process, the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement was concluded to the dismay of the Arab peoples, who regarded it, and still do, as an act of ‘betrayal’ (Fattah & Fierke, 2009). The fragmentation of the vast Ottoman Empire led to the European occupation of most Arab countries. This colonial era literally ‘remade’ the Middle East, as it roughly created the boundaries of the present-time states. British and French colonialism differed in terms of political style; the former emphasising economic concerns and depending on indirect rule while the latter accentuating cultural matters with direct rule. In practice, however, both “were equally interested in maximising economic gain from their administered territories, and they

were both equally proud of their own culture and contemptuous of Arab-Islamic culture” (Ayubi, 1995, p. 89).

In the pursuit of independence, different movements emerged in the region. Pan-Arabism is an example of Arab nationalist ideology, mostly attributed to (Western-educated) Arab intellectuals, developed in the twentieth century and had at its core the objective of unifying the Arabs into a single nation with the Arabic language as its basis. Anti-British and anti-French sentiments were on the rise, and a wave of public revolutions eventually enabled these countries to secure their sovereignty (most of them between the 1920s and 1940s) and to start establishing their state systems. However, the post-colonial period has not paved the way for development programmes, as the two Gulf wars, the destruction of Iraq, and the ongoing turmoil of the recent unprecedented social uprisings have instead prolonged the state of confusion in the Arab world.

Two of the most memorable and humiliating events that had a powerful psychological effect on Arabs are related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first is the “disastrous defeat” (Ayubi, 1995, p. 144) in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, whose end saw the creation of the state of Israel and which is considered by Arabs as ‘an-nakba’ - ‘the disaster’ or ‘the catastrophe’. The second is the humiliating tragedy of the Six-Day war of 1967, labelled by the Arabs as ‘an-naksa’ or the ‘setback’, whose result increased the territory of Israel and whose aftermath continues to be a major point in the ongoing Arab-Israeli dispute. The catastrophic experience of failure in both wars resulted in the failure of the ‘one Arab nation with one language and one culture’ concept and progression. On the one hand, nationalism emerged mainly to gain independence and once achieved, the movement began to die gradually. On the other hand, as Harik (1990, p. 2) states, “Arab nationalism as an ideology, more so than Islam, denies legitimacy to the state system. The true and natural state is considered to be the national state whose authority is coterminous with the nation, the nation being defined as the people of one language and one culture”, but in his opinion the Arab states are so diverse to conceive a true natural nation.

### **3.2.5. Contemporary Arab Thought**

The legacy of colonialism was not limited to such matters as economics, politics and administrative centralisation. Social science historian Iliya Harik (1990, p. 18) maintains that being subjugated to foreign powers for hundreds of years has affected the mind-set

of Arabs and Muslims in general in that Western colonialism “undermined their sense of security and confidence”. Contemporary Arab thought materialised in a transitional period as they were struggling for national independence. Educated Arabs believe that a crucial responsibility has been placed on them to help their society “defend and identify itself” (Barakat, 1993, p. 241). Overall, the Arabs have always been aware of the calamities and hardships enveloping their present and threatening their future. The numerous internal and external challenges facing the Arab communities have produced, fashioned and preoccupied the ongoing debates. This is why Arab thought is not detached from social and political activity. On the one hand, these debates view the West as “an exploitative and repressing force” (Barakat, 1993, p. 241). On the other hand, they recognise the strength of Western modern institutions and ideas and question the need to borrow from the West in order to help revive Arab society. The controversy lay and still lies in finding ways to borrow while keeping Arab identity, culture and traditions intact; in other words, to modernise without being Westernised (Barakat, 1993).

Barakat (1993, pp. 239-241) examined conflicting trends of thought “as these emerge from the Arab search for an alternative order in the context of Western domination, exploitation, and confrontation”. Even though different Arab movements have aimed to investigate roots of the failure and ‘backwardness’ of Arabs in order to find realistic ways to achieve development, they have reflected deep divisions. Over the years, contrasting trends of thought have been dominating the Arab rhetoric of ‘*nahdha*’ or renaissance/revival, for example traditionalism versus modernism, liberalism versus conservatism and secularism versus Islamism. Another major objective of most of these efforts, if not all, has been to end the dependency of their post-colonial societies and countries. Hourani (2013, p. 377) describes how nationalist governments considered economic development and self-sufficiency essential in achieving ‘real’ independence. However, in the course of achieving economic growth, most of the newly independent Arab states relied on foreign aid and investment first and later on loans, which resulted in increased dependence on the industrialised capitalist West. Even though there has been some economic interdependence between oil-rich Arab countries and the industrialised world for decades because of oil, Arab societies continue to be mainly consumers. Today, the world of technology together with the power of knowledge have proven how more dependent these societies have become on the West.

### **3.2.6. Arab Culture and the Issues of Diversity, Exceptionalism and Division**

The non-Arab Ottoman Empire triggered a sense of “cultural discontinuity and alienation” among Arab subjects, which was then reinforced by Western colonial powers (Ali, 1996, p. 9). Accordingly, for almost two centuries, the rigorous debates that Arab thinkers have been engaged in have been mainly about “cultural identity, cultural decline and cultural renewal” (Kassab, 2010, p. 1) because changes in the political order and economic institutions cause societies to change, and as societies change, so does culture.

In Western and sometimes even in Arab scholarship, one common issue is that of diversity. In Western orientalist perception, the Middle East, especially the Arab part thereof, is a ‘mosaic society’ or, in other words, a culturally complex society characterised by sectarian conflicts. From an Arab point of view, Barakat (1993, p. xi) challenges the overarching mosaic model and states that “Arab society is not a mere mosaic of sects, ethnic groups, tribes, local communities, and regional entities. Rather, it carries within it the potential for both unity and divisiveness.” Barakat argues that while “Arab society has historically been highly heterogeneous”, Arab countries are positioned differently on “the homogeneity-heterogeneity continuum” (1993, p. 15) and cannot be explained simply by the mosaic structure approach. In addition, he refutes the conception of Arab society by Western orientalists as ‘static’ and emphasises its dynamic, transitional nature since the nineteenth century.

Another closely related issue, which has been extensively discussed in the literature, is that Arabs are divided (Luciani & Salamé, 1990). In fact, the state of disunity is a matter of recurring concern to all Arabs. In this respect, in orientalist tradition, as presented earlier, most of the attention is entirely allocated to communal and religious sectarianism, which are believed to influence everything in society starting from politics to economics. Although most Arab writers and analysts seem to lament this Arab fragmentation, they do not view it in the same way as orientalists do. There is an initial agreement to the existence of an original, ‘grand imperial design’ leading to the ‘geographic fragmentation’ of Arab countries (al-Naqeeb, 1990), which ultimately prevented their (cultural, political, and economic) unification, even after independence, but different meanings are also attached to Arab division when states are taken independently. To Barakat (1993), in some Arab countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, which enjoy a relatively homogenous structure as far as communal and religious gaps are concerned,



social class cleavages are more relevant. Barakat's analysis of the socioeconomic inequalities and their effects led him, about two decades ago, to correctly and astonishingly predict "the first Arab popular revolution to take place in Egypt or Tunisia" (1993, p. 21). Investigating society and state in the Arab Peninsula, al-Naqeeb (1990, p. 119) talks about "the alarming tribal, sectarian and social fragmentation" that exists in the Gulf, and which, according to him, gets strengthened, not weakened as expected, by the rise of education and mass media in Gulf communities, as the latter lead to more tribal consciousness. The millennia-old Arab world, with all its complexities, is indeed expected to be nothing but extremely divided. Luciani and Salamé (1990) appropriately point out that division is a reality found in all countries and all societies, as this is the rule rather than the exception.

A relevant theme that naturally springs to mind is 'Middle Eastern exceptionalism'. The Arab Middle East has been constantly referred to as an 'exceptional case', compared to the rest of the world or at least to 'Third World' countries. Issues of gender, democracy, economic stagnation, social development and even the likelihood of conflict have often been tackled in reference to 'Middle Eastern exceptionalism' (e.g. Aarts, 1999; Sørli, Gleditsch, & Strand, 2005). However, researching the causes of conflict in the Middle East, Sørli et al. (2005) conclude that there is nothing unique or 'exceptional' about the region. According to Gran (1998, p. 6), exceptionalism is "a potentially valid categorization" in some cases, but it could become "part of the larger problematic of representation of self and other" with "its rather blanket application to all things Middle Eastern".

Even though the Arab world is geographically, politically, economically and culturally divided into distinct sub-regions, that is North Africa, the Arab East and the Arabian Peninsula, there is a common cultural discourse. Overall, there is consensus among Arabs, particularly self-reflective thinkers, of the importance of protecting and preserving Arab culture as it defines and represents the Arab identity and Arab society, especially at a time when writers and analysts have begun to discuss and bemoan such critical phenomena as "cultural crisis" (e.g. al-Naqeeb, 1990, p. 125) and 'cultural malaise' (Kassab, 2010). Hence, one of the initiatives to assert, celebrate and promote the cultural heritage of Arabs is through the establishment in 1996 of the *Arab Capital*

*of Culture* programme, proposed by the Arab League, in collaboration with UNESCO. Each year a single Arab city is recognised as the Arab cultural capital.

### **3.2.7. Arabs and the Issue of Duality Towards the West**

The elements of location and colonisation have brought the Arab world into contact with a multitude of foreign people, allowing the natural process of new ideas to be exported and imported. However, the process of organised borrowing from other nations, especially the West, began to take place post-independence. It first started in the form of military and security dependence on the West, particularly on the United States of America. In the 1970s, as the oil wealth in some Arab countries, especially in the Arab peninsula, increased, so did their dependence on the West. They relied on industrial countries for “capital goods and technical expertise which they needed for economic development and for building their armed forces” (Hourani, 2013, p. 421). Subsequently, Arab states, which were struggling to improve the social and economic conditions of their people, began to ‘modernise’ their countries and a big part of this modernisation process was understood to come through borrowing different kinds of Western advanced inventions, knowledge and even conduct.

Although openness to the West is regarded as normal in the time of globalisation of information, in the Arab world there has been fear of the consequences. As knowledge and information are transmitted from culture to another, inevitably changes to the social, cultural and value structures may occur, albeit in variation from country to country and in quicker form in urban areas than in rural ones. In the Arab world, this process and phenomenon has been met with a combination of excitement and apprehension. For example, Haywood (Cited in Buchanan, 1997, p. 216) notes that by the end of the eighteenth century, when most of the Arab land had fallen under some kind of Western domination, “Arabs grew fascination and repugnance for Western technology and culture at the same time”. He then argues that this “schizophrenia continues to feed the conditions of Arab-Islamic suspicion toward all carriers of Western sources of information”. This view is also shared by some Arab writers, especially those with a secular voice. Examining the socioeconomic and political conditions of Arab societies, Sharabi (1988, p. 23) concludes that the attempts to modernise these societies have resulted in what he calls ‘neopatriarchal’ societies, which are “essentially schizophrenic”, characterised by “the absence equally of genuine traditionalism and

authentic modernity”. He explains that this ‘neopatriarchy’ or “distorted modernization” is a product of the marriage between Arab patriarchy and European modernity or in Sharabi’s words, “internal heteronomy and external dependency” (1988, p. 23). Moreover, Barakat (1993, p. 25) argues that Arab societies are in transitional mode and that they are neither modern nor traditional, an indication of a “distorted duality”. A more recent example is the argument made by El Alaoui (2011, p. 6) who maintains that in the past the Muslim Arab world “recognized that they were part of the intellectual legacy of all mankind” and that the “capacity for intellectual openness and engagement” is a treasured aspect of the Arab and Muslim history. However, current “Islamist” movements, which call for a “return to religious orthodoxy”, resist the so-called ‘Westernisation’ of Arab Muslim Societies. El Alaoui, too, argues that there is “a kind of schizophrenic lived experience” in the Arab world, which is predominantly Muslim, in that the people “consume the culturally profane” such as different types of technology, media and Western literature in their private lives but assert their Muslim identity in public (2011, p. 8). Overall, Arab societies “continuously experience the duality between east and west, tradition and modernity, religious and secular” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002).

### **3.2.8. The Case of the Arab Gulf States**

The Arabian Peninsula has also had its share of foreign colonisation. The region came under foreign tutelage in the eighteenth century and was then “reduced to dependencies of the British Crown” (Harik, 1990, p. 19). In the case of Oman, even if it is historically regarded as “the oldest independent Arab state”, Britain has dominated its politics and foreign affairs since the mid nineteenth century (Davidson, 2012, p. 37). Between the 1950s and 1970s, and even after its withdrawal from the region, Britain, seen as ‘protector’, helped these countries develop their modern states. More than forty years on, the legacy of Britain remains in the Arab Gulf in the form of its defence structure that continues to exist to this date (Onley, 2009).

While the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) share some common cultural characteristics with other Arab states, such as language, religion and Arab identity, they are still different from the rest of the Arab world. The discovery of the oil wealth in the first half of the twentieth century resulted in “the experiment of the rentier state” (al-Naqeeb, 1990, p. 99). Oil revenues have had the leading role in the drastic economic

transformation of all six countries, which is rather considered a super modernisation trajectory (Davidson, 2012). However, this has been viewed differently. On the one hand, the region is applauded for its modernising strategies and keeping pace with globalisation. On the other hand, some view this modernisation as superficial, as the region is still in its essence backward and dominated by traditionalism and strong tribal heritage (Alsharekh & Springborg, 2008). Added to that is the categorisation of the countries as being ‘liberalised autocracies’ (Davidson, 2012). Indeed, more than any other part of the Arab World, the GCC countries have profited the most from their contact with Western knowledge and modern technology, but in their attempt to bring together their notions and practices of patriarchy and Western modernity, these Western-looking, traditional societies have also managed to be good examples of the ‘neopatriarchy’ theory of Sharabi (1988).

Now, a brief examination of the literature discussing the role of economic developments in defining the current state of Arab Gulf States and their HE systems is timely. In this age of global neoliberalism, HE is believed by governments to be closely linked to economic development and hence a key player in policymaking (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

### **3.3. Economic Challenges in the Arab World and Arab Gulf States**

The Middle East, “one of the most sensitive geopolitical regions in the world” (Davidson & Smith, 2008, p. 97) is witnessing major political crises that are severely affecting the economic environment in the region. Particularly in the Arab Middle East, it seems like a new story of disorder, but it may be the same old mayhem the Arabs have been living in for decades, only changing its ‘façade’ and getting murkier. It has become unclear what the essence and the goal of the fight are. How much of the Arab Spring is still a struggle for more freedom, and socio-economic and political reforms? Is it a revolution against corrupted incumbent governments and monopolistic practices of mercantile elites? or is it a declared war against the West’s new post-colonial modernisation models claimed to be threatening Islamic values and national cultures, added to its fixed representation of a ruthless imperial era? What started as a promising Arab Spring in 2011 turned into prolonged, relentless instability that has created political and sectarian divisions and even more chaos in the region to the extent that not only are millions of Arabs and Muslims lost in this gloomy present, but also a positive future for certain countries cannot be formed anymore. The questions have no solid answers. However, the

obvious adverse effects are many, one being the contracting state of the economy in most parts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

### **3.3.1. Oil Economy and Transformation of the Arab Gulf States**

Oil and the Arabian Gulf appear to be two inseparable topics to the extent that many a time the former has become a label of the latter. According to Peterson (2009), the Arab Gulf States have gone through three economic transformations, unsurprisingly all connected to oil. The initial stage took place between the 1930s and 1960s with the discovery of oil. This in turn assisted one of the poorest areas in the world to establish basic economic and social infrastructure needed for the installation of modern countries. The Arab embargo during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War resulted in what is termed the ‘oil shock’ of 1973-1974, but from the perspective of the oil-abundant Arab Gulf States this effected an “oil boom” (Ewers & Malecki, 2010, p. 494) that lasted to the early 1980s. Oil prices tripled and the governments’ investments on infrastructure and socioeconomic projects multiplied, witnessing the second phase of economic transformation characterised by an enormous improvement in the standards of living of their citizens. The third transformation triggered by the hike in oil prices in the first eight years of the twenty-first century, especially the spike of 2007-2008, created “national incomes at record levels” (Peterson, 2009, p. 2) and motivated more development projects.

Reliance on natural resource wealth has been widely criticised by scholars. Such concepts and scholarly models as ‘oil-led development’, ‘the natural resource curse’, ‘Dutch disease’, ‘rentier model’ and ‘l’état-providence’ or ‘welfare state’ have been associated with different countries worldwide, but more to unlock the mysteries of the Arab Gulf States. In the case of the latter countries, it is claimed that oil dependence has brought about negative consequences, such as slow economic growth, inability to diversify, unemployment, weak state institutions and inequality. Casual observations and sometimes empirical studies have shown that resource-rich countries have not had a sustained economic growth compared to those poor in resources (Sachs & Warner, 1999, 2001). By and large, the economic performance of mineral-exporting states has been “disappointing” (Eifert, Gelb, & Tallroth, 2003, p. 40). Analysing the economic state of these countries, Eifert et al. (2003) point to the possibility that this might be related to the way oil wealth is managed. Based on insights from political science and previous academic work, they group regimes in oil-exporting countries into one of five categories:

a mature democracy, a factional democracy, a paternalistic autocracy, a predatory autocracy or a reformist autocracy. They explain that although a country may belong to one of these groups, it could still mix features from more than one, as the classifications are not necessarily rigid. They give different examples of each group. For example, Norway represents the first, Latin countries like Ecuador and Venezuela the second, Nigeria (under military rule) the fourth and Indonesia during Suharto's early rule represents an example of the last group. What matters here is the third group, which is represented by the Arab Gulf States. A paternalistic autocracy is an 'état-providence', with high government expenditure and commitments that, according to the authors, may generate fiscal problems in the long term. Typical characteristics include persistent reliance on oil and a huge public sector that has crowded out the private sector, which has not been able to exploit its full potential in the national economy. These governments, nonetheless, have been credited with successful development programmes, a long policy horizon and political stability. This classification clearly indicates a general relationship between economics and politics. It also implies a more specific link between oil and political structures, an argument supported by Ross (2008, p. 107), who stresses that oil-based economies have induced "atypically strong patriarchal norms, laws, and political institutions", which impede democracy and gender equality. Furthermore, highlighting the powerful economic role of the state in the Arabian Gulf, Ayubi writes:

Put crudely, the state's function is to produce patriarchy, tribalism and ethnic domination in ways that are compatible as possible with the preservation of an oil-exporting economy and the circulation of its revenues. (1995, p. 224)

Some scholars, however, adopt a different fresh stand, shying away from the 'stereotypical' oil rhetoric. In his book, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Foley (2010) argues that, in the time of globalisation, the Gulf states are just 'normal' societies that face challenges like many other countries. Their socioeconomic and demographic concerns are not different from those in European nations. What is more, he argues that many of the current critical political and socioeconomic issues predate the oil era. The notion of a welfare state, for example, existed in Saudi Arabia prior to the 1930s. Connections with the Indian Subcontinent go back to the British Raj rule and South Asian workers have been significant in the region's commerce ever since.

According to a book review by Determann (2012, p. 144), Foley's approach, which deliberately emphasises aspects other than the common topics of Islam and oil, "is laudable" and "introduces new directions of research on the GCC" countries.

### **3.3.2. Post Oil Economy in the Arab Gulf States**

Amidst the huge oil controversy, the Gulf countries have started pursuing new economic directions that are not petroleum-based. This reaction, however, does not come as a mere response to a controversial phenomenon, but because when oil prices collapse, they cause anxieties. The decline in prices in the mid-1980s was a wake-up call that strategic planning was needed, but it was the 2009 oil crisis that made Arab Gulf leaders realise that oil was not a dependable commodity, especially that the supplies are in fact finite (Peterson, 2009). Yet, the transition into a 'life after oil' has not been without problems. The Gulf States have been confronted with many challenges. The most pressing of all are the scarcity of non-oil resources and the shortage of skilled nationals, two issues frequently reported in publications discussing the area. As the geopolitical instability lingers in the MENA region, oil prices will continue to fluctuate giving rise to a number of rather hard-to-predict economic consequences.

Based on oil wealth, Peterson (2009, p. 4) divides the six states into two groups: those with "considerable surplus income" include Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE and those that need to replace oil income in the next few years include Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a bizarre case; Peterson (2009) states that its population is growing fast making its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita among the three lowest despite it being OPEC's biggest member and the world's largest oil exporter (Arnsdorf, 2014). Regardless of the size of proven oil reserves in individual states, it is expected that oil will have a lesser role in the economic future of the entire region (Foley, 2010). To that end, all GCC countries have started to adopt numerous strategies to diversify the economy and thereupon the leap towards a post-oil economy has already begun.

A lot has been written on the region's efforts to achieve economic diversification. The process is not new though. It started decades ago. One of the two concerns that led to the foundation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 was related to economic issues; the other was security (Ayubi, 1995). The similarities in the political and economic systems, in addition to their common cultural identity, acted as strong

catalysts. Since the union's inception, a lot has been achieved on various cooperation levels, such as political affairs, military, security, economy, legal affairs, media, human resources and environment. With regard to the economic aspect, an economic agreement between all six members was signed in November 1981, and then comprehensively revised and signed in 2001. The revision was ordered to "bring it into line with the new developments in GCC joint economic action and to complete the requirements of economic integration among the Member States, taking into account the new global economic environment" (The GCC Secretariat General, 2004).

Various diversification strategies and policies have been planned and incorporated all over the Arab Gulf. These involve establishing state-owned investments in the form of sovereign wealth funds (SWFs), developing natural gas and non-energy industries like tourism and banking, creating trade entrepôts such as the case of Dubai, reinforcing privatisation, and boosting foreign investments (Azzam, 2002; Peterson, 2009). However, two elements are critical to create a sustainable diversified economy: human capital and a body of knowledge. The massive wealth of the Arab Gulf states has helped import both labour and knowledge, but the former has always been a challenge, as the region continues to rely extensively on expatriate workers, both skilled and unskilled. Table 3.1 provides the percentages of nationals and non-nationals in the region as of March 2015. The latter is not a straightforward mission either and can be such a lengthy process because knowledge, for example ideologies, technology and skills, must be mastered and adapted to the local context before being able to amass a local body of knowledge.

In an attempt to assess the strategies of the Arab Gulf States to transition from pre-industrial (resource-based) to post-industrial (services- and knowledge-based) economies, Ewers and Malecki (2010) question whether a 'catch up' or even a 'leapfrog' is possible, and whether money (i.e. oil wealth) alone is enough. The authors describe that the standard, normal economic development path starts from dependence on resources, to industrialisation, and finally to dependence on services. Currently, the best practices are services-, knowledge- and innovation-based economies, which form a post-industrialised stage, already attained by leading industrialised countries. Although Saudi Arabia with its intermediate industrialisation is following a more traditional, but cautious path, other countries, such as the UAE (Dubai in particular) and Qatar have opted for a



quicker non-orthodox pre- to post-industrial leap (Ewers & Malecki, 2010). Despite achieving some success in their efforts towards setting up an economy beyond oil, the leapfrog into a knowledge economy has provoked doubts. The authors claim it is difficult to describe the economies of the Arab Gulf states as industrial or production-based, as they have not been interested in being competitive in industry, nor can they be seen as post-industrial since they have never experienced real capitalist industrialisation (Malecki & Ewers, 2007). However, given the enormous economic development projects adopted by the Arab Gulf states to diversify their economies, which could be regarded as a scheme initiated to displace the 50-year-old rentier model (Hvidt, 2011), perhaps the “unique” context of this region, especially the Dubai model, could present “yet another unconventional model”, resembling the unconventional economic trajectories followed by other newcomers such as Singapore, India and even China (Ewers & Malecki, 2010, p. 504).

**Table 3. 1** Total Population and Percentages of Nationals and Non-nationals in GCC Countries (National Statistics 2010-2015)

| Country              | Date/ Period  | Total Population  | % in Total Population |               |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
|                      |               |                   | Nationals             | Non-Nationals |
| Bahrain              | Mid-2014      | 1,314,562         | 48.0                  | 52.0          |
| Kuwait               | 31 March 2015 | 4,161,404         | 30.8                  | 69.2          |
| Oman                 | 25 March 2015 | 4,149,917         | 56.0                  | 44.0          |
| Qatar                | April 2010    | 1,699,435         | 14.3                  | 85.7          |
| Saudi Arabia         | Mid-2014      | 4,149,917         | 67.3                  | 32.7          |
| United Arab Emirates | Mid-2010      | 8,264,070         | 11.5                  | 88.5          |
| <b>Total</b>         |               | <b>50,359,763</b> | <b>51.9</b>           | <b>48.1</b>   |

**Source:** Gulf Labour Market & Migration (GLMM) program, 2015

### 3.3.3. Current Economic State in the Arab Gulf States

While economy in large parts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries is agonising over the rising geopolitical tensions, a few such as Egypt and Tunisia are slowly stabilising, as the newly released Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) report shows. In contrast, the GCC States are doing much better. According to the GCI Report 2014-2015 (Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2014), which measures and overviews the

performance of 144 countries, all six GCC countries are ranked among the first 46 most competitive economies in the world, albeit five of them losing several positions.

The GCI report identifies three stages of development and uses twelve pillars to assess the productivity and competitiveness of an economy. In terms of the development stage, an economy could be *factor-driven*, *efficiency-driven* or *innovation-driven*. The twelve pillars range from basic components to drivers that are more sophisticated. Each pillar determines a different aspect of competitiveness and is a key element to one of the three stages. Institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education are the basic requirements to establish a factor-driven economy stage. However, to achieve an efficiency-driven economy, enhancing drivers, that is higher education and training, good market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness and market size, are necessary. Finally, realising an innovation-driven economy requires innovation and business sophistication factors.

Institutions and higher education, two focal elements of this research, constitute the basic pillars of a factor-driven and efficiency-driven economy, respectively. On the one hand, the quality of institutions is a basic requirement and includes indicators related to government policies as well as attitudes towards markets, such as management of public finances, bureaucracy and transparency, which ultimately play a strong role in productivity and hence growth. Higher education and training, on the other hand, is an efficiency enhancer sub-index and is a crucial key to move up to the second stage, an efficiency-driven economy. This criterion comprises aspects related to tertiary enrolment, the quality of education and on-the job training.

In this year's edition of the GCI, Oman has lost thirteen positions slipping to 46<sup>th</sup> rank, which is critical to its way forward. The country came in at 33<sup>rd</sup> in 2013-2014 and 32<sup>nd</sup> in 2012-2013. With the current position, it is at the bottom among Gulf Arab states, with the UAE gloriously securing the 12<sup>th</sup> position in the world and taking the lead in the MENA region. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are ranked 16<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup>, consecutively. The report classifies Oman, along with Bahrain and the UAE, as one of 24 economies in transition from efficiency-driven (second stage) to innovation-driven (third stage). Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are still transitioning from factor-driven to

efficiency-driven economy. *Times of Oman* (September 3, 2014) reports that there is an overall decline in Oman's key competitiveness indices and the most problematic factors include poorly educated workforce, inefficient bureaucracy, restrictive labour regulations and poor work ethics. Policymakers in many countries have benefited from the analyses and insights of the GCI to make necessary changes in order to enhance their competitiveness (Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2014). Accordingly, *Times of Oman* indicates that even though the Sultanate benefits from the basic requirements of doing business and enjoys a high level of macroeconomic stability, reducing bureaucracy and red tape, improving the education system and achieving a more diversified economy are some key areas that require more emphasis.

#### **3.3.4. The Role of Education in Promoting Economic Development**

The GCI results show a connection between the quality of education and sustained economic growth. One way to explain this is through the theory of human capital, which proposes that investment in people could result in economic benefits for both the individual and the society at large (Sweetland, 1996). According to famous economist Gary Becker, education is one of the "recognised investments in human capital" (Becker, 1980, p. 232), for it improves people's knowledge, skills and their overall economic capabilities (Schultz, 1961).

As a form of formal organised education, higher education is directly linked to the labour market, be it public or private. The dissemination of existing knowledge and the generation of new knowledge takes place at and through universities and research centres. Even if the main purpose of tertiary education (education in general for that matter) is not economic, the demand for HE comes from the fact that the public regards it as a "major determinant of economic growth" (Sweetland, 1996, p. 356). Authorities also recognise HEIs as the producers of both knowledge and a well-qualified labour force that would ultimately supply the market of the country and enrich the (work) culture, notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the quality of output produced, which is "a significant problem" (Geraint, 1990, p. 20). A recent report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the state of higher education confirms the financial as well as non-financial (e.g. better health, low crime rates and longer life expectancy) benefits of tertiary education (OECD, 2013). Furthermore, A 2010 report released by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of

Government documents the growing role of universities and higher education systems in motivating economic development initiatives in different American states, which is likely to reinforce the move into an innovation economy (Shaffer & Wright, 2010), something that all Arab countries, but particularly those in the Arab Gulf, aspire to achieve.

Reading the dynamic East Asian model, Mathews and Hu (2007, p. 92) argue that universities played a very special role in the great catch-up development experience of East Asia, “not as drivers of innovation, as commonly viewed in the West, but as shapers of human capital formation”. Malecki and Ewers (2007) have identified Singapore and Malaysia (both in South East Asia) as two of three potential role models for development in the Arabian Peninsula. Davis and Hayashi (2007) have even gone so far as to claim that the GCC countries are indeed looking to Singapore as a role model for economic development. In a similar pattern, and part of a nation-building policy, which revolves around human capital development, the Gulf monarchies have indeed invested heavily in the expansion, privatisation and westernisation (more precisely Americanisation) of higher education (Mazawi, 2001).

### **3.4. Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the available literature related to central issues relevant to the Arab world and the Gulf states. The main points are that the historical legacy of the region, language, culture and economic concerns are all important aspects to Arabs’ identity, mind-set and their overall approach towards the use of Western methods. The history of colonisation and then post-colonial fragmentation, has impacted contemporary Arab thought within the discourse of revival or ‘nahdha’ in ways that reflect the division in their dialogue, swinging between extremes: traditionalism versus modernism, liberalism versus conservatism and secularism versus Islamism.

At the core of any revival movement, culture has been significant. Issues of cultural identity, cultural decline and cultural renewal have stirred a debate that has lasted for almost two centuries, particularly among Arab thinkers. Connected to culture is the ‘duality’ or ‘schizophrenia’ phenomenon discussed in the literature in respect to the region. Some scholars have argued that a twin feeling of fascination and repulsion exists among Arabs in the way they view Western knowledge, technology and culture.

Consequently, distorted modernisation processes in the Arab Middle East have led to a theory of ‘neopatriarchy’ in that Arab societies are neither authentically traditional nor genuinely modern.

The GCC area is one of the most stable and Western-looking in the Arab Middle East and has one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing economies around the globe. Yet, it is still considered by many as being very conservative. To many, it seems that these societies are modern on the surface, but deep-down a tribal heritage coupled by a patriarchal system and a strong tradition of nepotism exists and is even strengthened by the state to maintain the preservation of an oil producing economy. In the early 1990s, neo-liberals called for significant economic changes in the region in order to overcome the widely-agreed-upon negative effects of rentierism (Hvidt, 2011), hence the myriad diversification reform programmes initiated by the governments of these monarchies. Sceptics, on the one hand, still doubt the ability of these countries to manage their oil wealth and channel it in the right direction to integrate in the global economy. Optimists, on the other hand, point to the economic prosperity of the area. For example, de Boer and Turner (2007, p. 8) acknowledge the visible influence of the thriving new economies of the Gulf monarchies, which “could shape global investment flows”. Added to that is the geopolitical significance of the region, whose stability is vital for gulf energy flows. Yet, having one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in the world poses monumental challenges, particularly to Oman where unemployment rates among nationals are one of the highest compared to its neighbouring kingdoms. Thus, economic concerns are key in the agenda of HE policymakers in Oman.

The next chapter will discuss the controversial topic of Islam since in the Arab Middle East and especially in the Arab Gulf, there is a thin line between culture and religion.

## Chapter Four: Islam and the West

### 4.1. Overview

At the heart of any culture, there lie language, values, tradition, and religion. Of these, religion is the first central element that distinguishes people of different cultures, whereas language comes second (Huntington, 1996). Based on this general premise Samuel P. Huntington produced his thesis of ‘the Clash of civilisations’, which concluded that the next world conflict would not be between states but between cultures (Huntington, 1993). Considering that the differences between civilisations are the products of centuries, Huntington argued that they are far more fundamental than the gaps in political ideologies. These differences emerge from the varying views of people on issues like “the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state ... as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy” (1993, p. 25). Even though he classified the world’s major civilisations into seven or eight, Huntington condensed his thesis into a clash between two major cultures, namely Islam and the West, asserting that the former had “bloody borders” (1993, p. 35) and represented the greatest of danger to peace in the world. Naturally, reaction towards the thesis varied greatly. For example, prominent scholars such as Edward W. Said rejected the hypothesis and referred to it as ‘the clash of ignorance’ (Said, 2001, October 22). Similarly, the thesis has not been well-received by scholars of Islam, for it demonises the religion and its adherents, overlooking the many facets of Islam and the vast differences of Muslim countries and Muslim people (Robinson, 2002). All the same, the simplistic yet exaggerated hypothesis is still being debated in major contexts and until now there is strong belief among many on the existence of a clash or incompatibility between the core values and beliefs of Islam and the West (Esposito, 1999, pp. 2-3), represented by modernity, democracy, individualism, liberty, equity, human rights and gender issues. To some commentators, it is not a mere clash but “an essential conflict between competing visions of morality and ethics” (Abou El Fadl, 2001).

In the light of the above brief introduction, this chapter will examine Islam in relation to colonialism, democracy, modernisation, Westernisation and secularisation. A brief look into the theology and ethics of Islam will reveal whether these dimensions of Islam could

play a role in the perceptions and appropriation of Western methods. The chapter ends with a summary.

## **4.2. Islam's Role in the Arab Middle East and the Islamic World**

Islam was born in the seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula at a time of commercial and intellectual prosperity, but the Arabs of Makkah (Mecca) were divided into competing tribes. Notwithstanding the difficulties it faced, Islam succeeded in uniting the disparate tribes of Makkah into a single, vibrant nation (Ali, 1995; Esposito, 1999). Fourteen hundred years later, Islam in the Arab world continues to be an influential force that regulates and moulds personal and group behaviour as well as ascetic and worldly tendencies (Ali, 1996).

Islam emerged as a message of religious and social reform in Makkah. The Qur'an, the holy scripture of Muslims, came to challenge the polytheistic practices and socioeconomic and political order prevailing in the region. Islam denounced injustice and created a "religiopolitical community" (Esposito, 1999, p. 28). Inspired by the teachings of Islam and armed with an ultimate cause of spreading the religion, the disparate bedouin tribes of Arabia united and overcame the greatest empires at the time, namely the Byzantine in Rome and the Sassanid in Persia. At one point, the Islamic Empire was "greater than Rome at its zenith" (Esposito, 1999, p. 29). The expansion of Islam was also the expansion of the Arabs, their language and their cultural values (Almaney, 1981).

From the eighth to the eighteenth century, Islam had the greatest civilisation on earth in respect of both creativity and expansion (Robinson, 2002). Two long processes that are central to the cultural history of the Middle East are Islamisation and Arabisation of the people, the latter being more remarkable. Nonetheless, the two processes did not occur simultaneously nor jointly in some countries. For example, Iran was Islamised but not Arabised, while Egypt was completely Arabised but a Christian minority remained (Zubaida, 2009).

Islam is regarded by Muslims as a comprehensive way of life. Nowadays, it is "the most pervasive power and powerful transnational force" (Esposito, 1999, p. 2) worldwide, a religion of over a billion and a half people from diverse cultures in the Middle East,

Africa, Asia, Europe and America. To them, it is a religion of “faith that nourishes and transforms their lives, one that offers a sense of community, solidarity, and peace” (Esposito, 1999, p. 24). Islam had the ‘same thing’ as Christianity; it preached a “universal message and mission” (Esposito, 1999, p. 23), but it was still different, successfully expanding in significant numbers. Esposito explains that it was normal to find anything different challenging to understand, and so Islam was inevitably viewed as an “evil empire”, a challenge to global stability (1999, p. 2).

### **4.3. Islam and the Challenges of the West**

The real threat of Europe, and the West in general, was not to be experienced until the late nineteenth and twentieth century, when Islamic civilisation was enveloped by Western powers characterised by capitalism-driven forces and the so-called ‘Enlightenment’ thought and culture. The Muslim community of believers, Ummah in Arabic, that had walked for many centuries “hand in hand with power” started to crumble (Robinson, 2002, p. 309). Esposito (1999, p. 49) explains how the West “constituted a singular challenge to Islam politically, economically, morally, and culturally”. European colonialism threatened Muslim faith, identity and history. There was an overwhelming presence and superiority of the West in all aspects, be it economic, political, or military. It was a “Christian cultural” superiority (Esposito, 1999, p. 49).

For the most part of modern history, Muslim heartlands were under Western influence, dominance or direct rule. Robinson (2002, p. 309) explains how the changes in the Muslim world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries made Muslims suffer various feelings that ranged from a “tremendous sense of loss to a deep bitterness and rage at their powerlessness in the face of the West” despite the admiration felt by many towards the achievements of the latter. To him, this significant development constitutes an important aspect of the Islamic history. Even in recent years, some analysts of the Muslim world have argued that Islam has been suffering a ‘crisis of identity’ since the 1980s. Again, they base that assumption on the collapse of the Islamic civilisation, which has left the millions of Muslims entrenched with feelings of alienation, anger and injury (Abou El Fadl, 2001, p. 28). To the majority of Muslims, Western domination came to deepen the scars originally left by the Crusades, the major event that shattered the Muslim-Christian relationship. The Crusades, which were military expeditions lasting from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, were (and arguably are) still remembered as



an earlier indication of the aggressive imperialism of the West and its hostility towards Islam and Muslims. Under Muslim rule, other faiths (Christians and Jews) co-existed with Muslims in peace for five centuries, before Crusaders came to create “an enduring legacy of distrust and misunderstanding” (Esposito, 1999, p. 38).

#### **4.4. Islamic Revival in Response to Western Imperialism**

Western colonisers brought enormous changes to the Middle East and the entire Muslim world, beginning from the creation of a ‘nation-state’ to various social and economic changes. Zubaida (2009, p. 145) argues that the “implantation” of Western models of modern nation states in the Middle East has produced different patterns of states. He contends that the salient role of Islam in Middle Eastern politics has raised questions about the compatibility of imported ‘nation-state’ models (2009, p. 121), for Islam does not separate between the state and the religious institution. Additionally, modern Western-style educational institutions, which were one of the processes of development that helped the expansion of the hegemony of the West (Ayubi, 1991), were rejected and condemned as alien elements threatening Islamic beliefs (Esposito, 1999).

Since the penetration of Western social and cultural symbols into the Muslim world challenged traditional values and practice and made the already established sense of alienation even more profound (Abou El Fadl, 2001), there was a series of Muslim reactions to Western imperialism. Bernard Lewis (2010) describes the Islamic responses as varying from acceptance and imitation to rejection and revolt. Likewise, Esposito (1999, p. 49) notes the general “rejection and confrontation to admiration and imitation” response, maintaining that a “mood of conflict and competition” between the two cultures still prevails. He stresses that particularly in the twentieth century, Western colonialism “would dominate the history and psyche of Muslims, and ... affect relations between Islam and the West” (1999, p. 44), creating both political and spiritual crises.

Taking a more critical stance, Abou El Fadl (2001) argues that the main intellectual response to resist the challenge of Westernisation and modernity in Islam has been ‘apologetics’, with efforts to defend Islamic beliefs by emphasising Islam’s supremacy and compatibility. He claims that the effects of such an ‘apologetic’ response descended from self-worth and intellectual self-sufficiency into “moral arrogance”, becoming a habit and producing a culture that “eschewed self-critical and introspective insight, and

embraced the projection of blame and a fantasy-like level of confidence”. He, however, points out that “Muslim apologetics tended to be opportunistic and rather unprincipled”, who “presumed the superiority of Islamic tradition, but marginalised this idealistic image in everyday life” (Abou El Fadl, 2001, p. 33). Yet another opinion argues that Muslims were divided into two groups: those who adopted the ‘complaint’ tone against Western power, and those who called for constructive action, as Western knowledge and influence were regarded ‘a constraint’ rather than a channel to progress (Robinson, 2002, p. 318). Discussing one of these Islamic responses, Esposito (1999) lists four forms: rejection of Western ideas and practices such as Western education; withdrawal in the form of immigration; succumbing to secularism and Westernisation movements; and Islamic modernism, which took a middle ground in an attempt to bridge the gap between Muslim traditionalists and secular reformists. The common thing about all these forms was the view that Western ideas were alien and had to be either rejected or accommodated.

After independence, the relationship between Islam and the West was more of a kind of grand emulation and less of a conflict. The success of the West and its superiority led rulers in many Muslim countries to adopt a secularisation and Westernisation process, especially in the realms of education, military and bureaucratic reforms. These changes were not public-led, but imposed by rulers and top state leaders. For example, modern school systems modelled on European standards as well as teachers were imported and installed. The result was an educated, Western-oriented elite. In some Muslim countries, the colonialists’ language and culture were so influential to the extent that foreign languages became the official languages of the government and university education, such as the case with French in North Africa and English in Pakistan (Esposito, 1999). In a sense, Western rule was replaced by Muslim leaders with secular Western principles. Islamist movements represented a threat to those secular rulers. Islamists found a real danger in Western civilisation, but the secular elites in their society were their real enemies, as the latter group collaborated with the West and allowed the waves of Western influence to strike (Robinson, 2002).

Islamic revival was not a mere nostalgia to the past. Even though Islamic movements emerged as more of a social than political movement, many then visualised an Islamic state to be the way to create an Islamic order (Esposito, 1999). As they provided a means of coping with the present and the future and a “battle of oppressed and exploited masses

in their revolt against internal despotism and foreign hegemony”, they developed into anti-state (Ayubi, 1991, p. x). Islamic movements are not necessarily anti-Western, or anti-democratic. Rather, they are movements to correct the decay in Muslim communities, as they perceive it, and to challenge the outdated regimes and institutions (Esposito, 1999). However, Robinson (2002) believes that Islamic revivalism, with its profound roots, was a movement that preceded Western hegemony in the Muslim world. Its goal was to renew Islamic society from within, an internal *jihad* (struggle), not an external force. Regardless of how Islamic revival began, the West was always viewed by Muslims as a “destructive force and a false model of progress”, a theme that was embraced in many leading dialogues that, for example, led to the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran (Robinson, 2002, p. 311).

Overall, the contemporary resurgence of Islamic practices and trends were not only a way to return to the glorious past, but also a critical experience of soul-searching and a quest for a new social formula that was more authentic, more effective, more rooted in an Arab/ Islamic heritage and less dependent on the West (Ayubi, 1991; Esposito, 1999). Interesting is the fact that modernisation, in the form of use of technology and new communications, has had a double effect. It introduced modern secular culture, but also played a great role in revitalising Islam in both society and politics, reawakening its principles in personal as well as public life.

#### **4.5. Islam and the Dialogues of Modernisation, Westernisation and Secularisation**

Ever since ‘Christian capitalist’ West started to advance towards the Muslim-Arab world, particularly from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims have engaged in a debate over the cultural and political role Islam should play to stand against, or if necessary to adapt to, the challenges of the West (Ayubi, 1991, p. 48). One important or rather urgent issue was the process of development, which was frequently linked to two ‘cultural’ notions: Westernisation and secularisation.

According to Ayubi (1991, pp. 48-49), development is a process to reach maximum potential, but for this to happen the effectiveness of its objectives should be defined within a society’s “cultural frame of reference”. He argues that when development involves a bunch of ‘imitative’ activities, such as the case in many Third World countries,

this may result in intensive feelings of alienation. He gives the example of development in the Middle East, which was not a completely ‘natural’ process, as it did not correspond to domestic intellectual, social and technical improvements. Instead, development started as an act of defence against colonial powers of the West, which was later reinforced by the latter to serve their interests.

Modernisation processes, through impact from the West, started in the Muslim World at the end of the nineteenth century and then the pace accelerated throughout the twentieth century. These processes began with economic changes, which were generally welcomed as they facilitated life, and because they usually do not entail any “serious emotional strain” (Hitti, 1962, p. 88). However, as economic transformation invites social changes, and in turn, the two (socio-economic) changes pave the way to political disorder, social transformation was considered “more painful” (Hitti, 1962, p. 89). Transformation in the social structure of society implies a measure of intellectual adaptation, which may ultimately bring about religious changes. For example, Pakravan (1980, p. 117) reports that economic development in the Middle East, which was made possible by oil revenues in the 1950s and 1960s, was accompanied by growing signs of Westernisation and “a parallel decline of religious and traditional values”. He maintains that since Islam was viewed as a “backward force” that obstructed the path of development, the shortest way to modernise was by absorbing the values of the powerful Western civilisation, i.e. economic, political and cultural modernisation.

Modernisation, in the sense of introducing and adopting Western-like institutions, technologies and ideas, was equivalent to Westernisation (Hitti, 1962). In fact, improvement in the developing countries was based on a modernisation theory that associated it with Westernisation and secularisation of society, as secularisation was regarded a “sine qua non for modernization” (Esposito, 1999, p. 7). According to Ayubi (1991, p. 49), modernisation is “an extremely confusing” and “potentially misleading” concept, especially when linked to Westernisation, as the latter is merely a process of ‘borrowing’ of certain cultural and social customs and habits that might not only be alien, but also not superior. Secularisation, on the other hand, which is also frequently associated with development, is a very Western concept that emerged as a solution to free the state from the control of the church. Islamic history, however, has never gone

through such process, and thus secularisation in some Muslim countries is a modern phenomenon (Ayubi, 1991).

Modernisation processes in newly emerging Muslim countries were initiated and guided by a few indigenous elites and their foreign advisers, who were both Western-educated and Western-oriented, whereas the majority of Muslims “did not internalize a secular outlook and values” (Esposito, 1999, p. 7). For example, British, French and American Catholic and Protestant missionaries initiated the modernisation of education. Westernised education is one of the most important among the boons presented by the West to the Muslim world, as it deals with intellect, which is the source of all changes (Hitti, 1962). On the political level, the concept of nationalism, a unique phenomenon and dynamic force introduced from the West and led by Christian rather than Muslim Arabs (Hitti, 1962; Nasr, 1980), was “undoubtedly the most explosive” (Hitti, 1962, p. 91). Projecting secular beliefs, recognising geographical borders and defining economic values, modern Arab nationalism was a movement not only alien to Islam, but it also clashes with its core principles. Islam does not know any geographical frontiers, emphasises spiritual values and demands utmost loyalty from its believers. Both Muslim elites and Western experts viewed religion as hindrance to change in Muslim countries (Ayubi, 1991). So, reformers started to question Islamic law or ‘*Shari‘a* (also spelled Sharia and this latter spelling will hereafter be used for ease of reading). The results were met with success with regards to some practices, for example abolishing religious courts in Turkey and polygamy in Turkey and Tunisia, but failure with others such as attempting to abolish the practice of fasting (Hitti, 1962, pp. 91-93). In general, attempts to use Western formulas, such as socialism, Marxism, pan-Arabism or nationalism did not succeed in the Muslim-Arab countries. In addition, Western capitalism was rejected as being part of the problem for the contracting socioeconomic conditions in many a country. The result has been some kind of a crisis of duality, as admiration and resentment towards the West co-existed in the Muslim World (Esposito, 1999), and still do.

In short, modernisation is accepted, but Westernisation or secularisation is condemned, as the latter ‘twin process’ did not only change culture and values, but it meant over-dependence on the West. Putting this perception to the test, Ayub, Kassim, and Zain (2013) conducted a self-administered questionnaire among 237 Saudi and non-Saudi

respondents from the city of Jeddah. The objective of the study was to examine the radical but incremental changes introduced by the Saudi Arabia government under the slogan ‘modernisation without Westernisation’. The results showed strong support for modernisation, but only some support for aspects of Westernisation, implying a degree of negativity to the latter. Both modernisation and Westernisation are acceptable so long as they do not interfere with the basic beliefs of Islam. The authors argue that even though it is not easy to distinguish between the two processes, it seems that modernisation is linked more to economic, political and educational changes, whereas Westernisation is viewed more as cultural (Ayub et al., 2013).

All the same, some writers (Huntington, 1996; Inglehart & Welzel, 2009) maintain that modernisation and economic development are processes that do not require or effect cultural Westernisation. Instead, Huntington (1996, p. 37) argues that modernisation creates “feelings of alienation and anomie”, which lead to an identity crisis, an answer to which is usually found in a “return to indigenous cultures”, often in a religious form. This is why he believes that “the global revival of religion” and particularly the Islamic Resurgence in the 1990s are directly linked to modernisation. He concludes that the argument of modernisation equals Westernisation is “misguided, arrogant, false, and dangerous” (1996, p. 28).

#### **4.6. Islam and Democracy**

Arthur M. Schlesinger once wrote that “ideas of individual liberty, political democracy, the rule of the law, human rights, and cultural freedom . . . These are European ideas, not Asian, nor African, nor Middle Eastern ideas, except by adoption” (Cited in Huntington, 1996, p. 35). Huntington (1996, p. 34) further emphasises that individualism is a unique characteristic and “the central distinguishing mark” of Western societies, compared to collectivism, which prevails in most non-Western societies.

Indeed, many question the compatibility of Islam and democracy. For example, secular-minded people, including those originally Muslim, regard Islam to be a static religion, “doctrinally and socioculturally, hence anti-modern and retrogressive” (Esposito, 1999, p. 260). Others view Islam as antidemocratic because governments in many Muslim and Arab countries are considered authoritarian: either dictatorships or monarchies with one political party or no opposition at all. Moreover, institutions of civil society are weak.

However, these conditions also exist in other parts of the World that are neither Muslim nor Arab.

Esposito (1999) argues that democracy could have different meanings to different people and cultures, and that even if Muslims accept the idea of democracy, they may differ in its approach and definition. First, Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) consists of and promotes a tradition of *shura* (consultation), *ijma'* (consensus), *ijtihad* (independent interpretation or reasoning) and *qiyas* (deductive analogy), which are, in some respect, similar to and could potentially help establish the so-called 'democratic' values. Second, Islamists (those who call for a return to Islamic fundamentals) and Muslim intellectuals have argued that Islam supports equality and pluralism of community. They contend that although Islam is the ultimate religion, it acknowledges Christianity and Judaism as *ahlu adh-dhimma* (protected people) who are free to worship. Finally, in many Muslim countries, democratic values, such as the openness and transparency of governments, have been accepted as an integral part of modern political thought and practice, albeit not truly achieved.

Stepan and Robertson (2003) reviewed two sets of independent data produced by the Western-based Polity Project and Freedom House, covering the period from 1972 to 2000 and analysed the electoral competitiveness (not equivalent to democracy but a required condition for it) in both Arab Muslim-majority countries and non-Arab Muslim-majority countries. The results were so striking that they concluded that it is an 'Arab' more than a 'Muslim' democracy gap. Thus, they warned of theorising about a democracy gap in Muslim countries and then attributing it to the nature of Islam. Islam, by itself, cannot explain why Arab Muslim-majority countries lag behind in democratisation process. Trying to make some sense of the data, the authors ruled out high ethnolinguistic fragmentation in the Arab world, which, according to an old hypothesis in social science, is inimical to democracy. To understand the particularities of these countries, they decided to look at Arab history. Many Arab states are new creations cut out of the Ottoman Empire, then occupied, and configured by European (Western) powers. The notion of a political identity in the form of a modern 'nation-state' in these countries was weak after independence, especially due to the Pan-Arabism or nationalism ideology. The 'Arab nation' or *al-watan al-arabi* was the core element of

national identity. This coupled with what is labelled as ‘the Arab-Israeli conflict’, the authors argue, have shaped the distinctive political identity of the region.

In fact, the only example of an ‘original’ Arab-Islamic democracy can be seen in the Omani experience. Ghubash (2006), who argues that “Western democracy does not necessarily provide an exemplary alternative to the way other societies function” (2006, p. 3), has extensively studied the Omani democratic model, whose origins stem from the traditions of the moderate, tolerant Ibadhi doctrine of Islam. He praises how in the course of its political development “Omani society had conceived and elaborated its own appropriate democratic paradigm, taking account of the cultural and religious environment and the prevailing values” (2006, p. 203). This unique Omani model, attributed to Ibadhi Islam, has also been reported by Omani authors. For example, Al-Farsi (2013, pp. 17-18) maintains that while the democratisation process in the Arab world is quite applicable to Oman, the latter remains “distinctive in so far as it is the main centre of a unique form of Islam which has its own philosophy, political norms, and cultural perspectives: Ibadism”. The way Omani context, in particular its religious culture, differs from the rest of the Arab world is thus expected to play a role in the way Omanis perceive Western methods, perhaps towards more acceptance.

#### **4.7. Muslim Borrowing in the Past and in Modern Times**

Muslim countries are accused of being stagnant both by insiders and outsiders, but this has not always been the case in many ways, as Muslims led science until the middle ages (Ayubi, 1991). As Islam spread to and made contact with many cities in Europe, Africa and Asia, Muslim rulers recognised their limitations. So, Muslims started borrowing freely from other major civilisations and new ideas were ‘Arabised’ and ‘Islamised’ (Esposito, 1999). However, this record of borrowing was eclectic; Muslims took what they valued and disregarded all that would conflict with Islamic fundamental precepts (Huntington, 1996). After all, they had a great empire and possessed a sense of openness and self-confidence. They had the advantage of being masters, not servants; leaders, not followers; colonisers rather than colonised (Esposito, 1999). Since there were no threats to their political autonomy and cultural identity, Muslims enjoyed a “period of great creativity”, building upon their received knowledge and creating their own contributions to the world (Esposito, 1999, p. 38).



In modern times, however, the capitalist transformation of Muslim countries was “distorted and incomplete” (Ayubi, 1991, p. 58). Analysing the Arab Muslim context, Samir Amin argues, once again, that “a certain dualism has established itself within the Egyptian, and subsequently the Arab Muslim, culture (which has continued more or less to the present), whereby dogmatic or at least conservative hermeneutics of Islam are juxtaposed with pragmatic, piecemeal borrowings from the modern sciences” (Cited in Ayubi, 1991, p. 59).

At this point, an examination of the basic theology of Islam and Islamic ethics is imperative to help unearth the roots of potential conflict, if any, between Islam and Western values to find out whether Islam influences the way Omanis negotiate Western methods in their higher education structures.

#### **4.8. The Theology of Islam**

Islam means surrender or submission to the absolute will of one God (Allah) in both “individual and community life” (Esposito, 1999, p. 27). The primary Islamic sources are first the *Qur’an* and second is the *Sunna* or *Hadith*, which includes teachings in the form of sayings or doings of Prophet Mohammad. Muslims believe that the Qur’an is the direct word of Allah and is thus “eternal” and “inalterable” (Hitti, 1962, p. 13). There are also secondary sources such as *ijma’* (consensus) and *qiyas* (independent reasoning), among others.

Just like the prophets before him, Mohammad came as a religious reformer, who did not preach a new message to the people of Arabia and the world (Esposito, 2002). Rather, he called the people to return to worship the one true God. “Man is not a mere animal. He is the highest of all that is created” and the soul aim of man is “a progressive achievement of life divine, which consists in the gradual acquisition of all divine attributes- all intrinsic values” that can be summarised under: “life, unity, power, truth, beauty, justice, love, and goodness” (Sharif, 1959, p. 42).

There are pillars of Islam and pillars of faith. The pillars of Islam, which represent the acts of worship and practice of devotion, are five. The first is bearing witness (confession) that ‘there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is His slave and prophet’. The second is doing the five daily prayers. The third is fasting throughout the month of

Ramadhan. The fourth is obligatory almsgiving. The fifth and final is pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime for those who are able to do so. Thus, the laws of worship are undisputable. The pillars of faith include belief in Allah, His angels, the revealed books (the Torah, Zaboor (Pslams), Injeel (Gospel/Bible) and the Qur'an), His messengers, the Judgement day and Allah's predestination.

Most of Islam's theology, argues Hitti (1962), deals with the first and most important belief or article pertaining to the oneness of God (Allah) and that Prophet Mohammad is a messenger of God and is a human being. The verse "Say, Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds" (Qur'an 6:162) could be used to summarise the theology of Islam.

Sharia law principles and directives come directly from the Qura'n and Sunnah. Esposito (1999, p. 32) argues that Islamic law is comprehensive, but not rigid and that "the dominant discipline for defining or delineating faith" in Islam was law rather than theology, for the latter is more of a Christian discipline.

Islamic fiqh (jurisprudence) is so tremendous that Ayubi (1991) claims that in the same way as the Greek civilisation is defined by its philosophy, the European one of science, Islamic civilisation is defined as one of fiqh. There are several schools of jurisprudence thought in Islam, which were founded after the death of Prophet Mohammad. They differ according to the process of interpretation, consensus and analogy the learned jurists developed to facilitate for Muslims the application of the principles and regulations of the Islamic Sharia.

In its essence, Islam is a religion with no sacraments, no priesthood, no organised church, no hierarchy, and no apostolic succession and there is no separation between State and Church or between religious and secular laws (Hitti, 1962; Lewis, 2010; Sharif, 1959). It is the business of all believing men and women, Muslim or non-Muslim, to enjoin what is considered right and forbid what is considered wrong (Sharif, 1959). No organised class that mediates between God and man is found in Islam. Yet, there is a body of *'ulama*, or men versed in theology, the Qur'an, Hadith, fiqh, the Arabic language ... etc., who teach and guide Muslims, but do not control them (Hitti, 1962). Moreover, even though there is no such a thing as asceticism in Islam, periods of "temporary withdrawal

from society and devotion to spiritual discipline” exist. Islam encourages a more balanced approach to life. “But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters” (Qur’an 28:77).

In brief, the above discussion on the theology of Islam does not suggest that Muslims’ basic ‘relationship with God’ can be a source of conflict with Western values.

#### **4.9. Islamic (Work) Ethics**

“Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded” (Qur’an 16:90).

Islam is “a religion with a strong work ethic” (Esposito, 1999, p. 54). Compared to Christianity, a faith with very few regulations, Islamic Sharia contains principles that regulate every aspect of life, from the relationship of Man to God (*‘ibada* or worship) and every other human relationship or worldly dealings (*mu‘amalat*). For its holistic nature, Islam is considered by Muslims as a way of life (*dunya wa din*) or world and religion (Ayubi, 1991, pp. 50-51), as belief and life are not separated in Islam. Islam has a collective sense of unity (Harik, 1990). For most Muslims, Islam, not country, race, ethnicity or language, is the ultimate basis of identity, which has a significant effect on shaping their self-awareness (Lewis, 2010).

The “state has no cultural autonomy from the society; it has an emphasised moral content which does not recognise any separation between private and public ethics” (Ayubi, 1991, p. 23). According to Rabi’, the main values in the Islamic state is not freedom and equality, but justice, which is an “enveloping cloak”, meaning that one should be honest and true with everyone and in every aspect of his life, whether with family, at work or in the wider community (Cited in Ayubi, 1991, p. 24). Islam is not a private or individualistic religion, but a belief system and a “social religion” that stresses collective public morals and organises practices of social life, especially the family, which is considered the essential unit of the society (Ayubi, 1991, p. 36)

However, religion is not the same as people, for people do not necessarily practice religion the way it teaches. Religion, including Islam, has gradually become more of a personal or individual matter. Islam has been widely interpreted, not only by jurists who have knowledge of the religion and its science as it should be, but also by the layman. For example, Maxime Rodinson observed how “Muslims make themselves different images of Islam according to the social strata to which they belong, the sort of education they have received, their political affiliation and even their individual temperament. But everywhere the dominant, almost unchanging image is of Islam as guardian, guarantor, surety, and protector of traditional morality” (Cited in Ayubi, 1991, p. 34).

#### **4.10. So, Are they Islamic or Arab Values?**

Arab-Muslims take pride in their values and always quote Prophet Mohammad who said, ‘I was sent to perfect good character’, a suggestion that Arabs had already possessed good traits before Islam. Almaney (1981, p. 10) argues that in spite of the disunity that appears between Arabs, there is “an unmistakable unity of style” in terms of cultural traits, irrespective of their economic status, educational level, political orientation and even religion. He explains that when Islam started to spread to neighbouring lands, the people in these territories began to adopt Bedouin customs and manners. Noting that the intensity of these traits would vary from country to country and even from one area to another within the same country, Almaney (1981, p. 16) lists hospitality, pride, honour, rivalry, revenge and emotional responsiveness to language as common traits. Further, he observes “an alternating pattern of extremes” in Arabs’ behaviour. “Pride can quickly turn to self-condemnation, secretiveness to absolute openness and friendliness to hostility”.

Over the years, the social life in Arab-Muslim societies has changed in many respects, economically, culturally, politically and educationally in a way that is more modernised or secularised (Ayubi, p38). Examining the nature of Islamic management practices in Arab countries, Branine and Pollard (2010, p. 712) conclude that management in the region is “informed and heavily influenced by non-Islamic traditional and national cultural values and norms of different countries and by Western management thinking rather than Islamic principles”. In addition, traditional values that are more Arab than Muslim have endured, such as tribalism, nepotism and the honour-shame culture. For example, Arabs are more concerned about shame than guilt, as shame represents their

status in society and is more of a social accountability than guilt (Ayubi, 1991). Indeed, there is a high degree of dissonance, and conflict between the traditional values (usually in villages and rural communities) and the ‘modern’ values that govern organisations in cities and urban communities (Ayubi, 1991).

#### **4.11. Summary**

This chapter has discussed the controversial topic of Islam in an attempt to create a link to the study and comprehend the bigger picture. Islam, which has attracted a lot of attention from both outsiders and insiders, has served as a means to discover ways to unlock the people from the Middle East, particularly Arabs, and understand the way they think and deal with others, more specifically with the West.

The literature review provided in this chapter indeed points out to the influential force Islam plays in the lives of Arab Muslims. It is not just a comprehensive way of life, but also continues to be a source of conflicting sentiments that affect policymaking in many of these states. To millions, Islam is a symbol of pride because of the magnificent past of a centuries’ long Islamic civilisation that triumphed over the Western civilisation in all aspects of social, economic and scientific arenas. To many others, it is a source of inferiority and alienation because of the current state of deterioration and backwardness prevailing in most Arab Muslim societies.

The importance of Islamic history and values to this study is that ever since Islam lost its grandeur to the colonisers from the superior capitalist West, who brought and installed their Western systems and institutions in the Arab Middle East, a mood of conflict has existed within Muslims and Arabs. On the one hand, there has been rejection, revolt and confrontation by those who have felt that the Christian West represents a threat to Islamic values and traditions. On the other hand, there has been admiration, acceptance and imitation on the side of those who have aspired to achieve modernisation, which has been seen by many as a process of Westernisation instead. In response to this wave of Westernisation, a third group has also existed reflecting the main stance of intellectuals in the region, who have adopted an ‘apologetic’ dialogue in an effort to defend Islamic philosophies by emphasising Islam’s supremacy and compatibility. Finally, some scholars argue that the gap between the West and Arab Middle East is not an ‘Islam gap’

as much as it is in fact an ‘Arab gap’ effected by the colonisation and then reconfiguration of the region by Western powers, which all have moulded the Arab identity.

The next chapter presents the methodology and methods designed for the study based on the thorough groundings in the subject provided in this chapter and the previous ones.

# Chapter Five: Research Design and Methodology

## 5.1. Overview

This chapter (see Table 5.1 for an overview of the methodological design of the study) first introduces the theoretical paradigm (constructivism) and examines the literature and philosophy behind the selection of this framework. Then, a description of the approach (qualitative dominant mixed methods) is presented along with a rationale for the decision to employ it. Next, step-by-step procedures of data collection and analysis for each of the two methods of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews are explored in detail in separate sections followed by a discussion of issues related to reliability and validity. Finally, ethical issues of the study are considered. The chapter ends with a summary.

**Table 5. 1** Overview of the Study's Methodological Design

| Framework/<br>Paradigm            | Approach  | Data Collection Methods |  | Data Analysis<br>Methods   |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|--|--|
|                                   |   | Tools of<br>Inquiry     | Types of<br>Instrument   |  |
| Constructivist/<br>interpretivist | Mixed<br>methods:<br>Predominantly<br>qualitative<br>with<br>quantitative<br>data | ▪ Survey                | ▪ Closed-<br>ended<br>questions<br>▪ Open-<br>ended<br>questions | ▪ Statistical<br>analysis<br>▪ Content<br>analysis                                   |
|                                   |   | ▪ Interviews            | ▪ Semi-<br>structured<br>interview<br>guide                      | ▪ Content<br>analysis<br>▪ Discourse<br>analysis<br>adapting<br>Foucauldian<br>tools |

## **5.2. Research Paradigm (Constructivist/Interpretivist)**

To investigate how people at different levels of Omani education systems negotiated and appropriated the use of imported Western management methods in HE, it was vital to consider the context of the situation and the backgrounds and perceptions of the target participants. Thus, a constructivist (often combined with interpretivist (see Creswell, 2009, 2014; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) approach was selected to guide the research. The goal of this philosophical framework or paradigm is to understand human experience with an underlying assumption that knowledge is socially constructed. In other words, constructivist epistemology suggests that the understanding of the ‘real’ world is a construction of human’s experiences and perspectives (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), which produce “subjective” meanings that are “varied and multiple” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8).

Methodology-wise, the constructivist researcher relies on the views of the participants and inductively generates meanings from the data collected during the research process (Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, interaction between the researcher and participant is central to constructivist research and essential for the understanding, interpretation and re-construction of the multiple realities, i.e. the participants’ perceptions and experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Even though qualitative methods, such as interviews, document reviews and observations, are predominant in the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2015), the constructivist researcher can blend both qualitative and quantitative strategies to investigate a topic, an approach labelled as mixed methods (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). While pragmatism has been advocated as the paradigm that provides the primary philosophical framework and anchor for mixed methods research (Biesta, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Mertens, 2012), the latter can be partnered with any paradigm (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), as it embraces multiple paradigmatic stances (Greene, 2008) because of its paradigmatic pluralism (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

## **5.3. The Study’s Research Approach & Design**

Johnson et al. (2007, p. 129) define mixed methods research as “an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research).” A key feature of this approach is its methodological pluralism or eclecticism (Johnson &



Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), which allows the researcher to select, mix and integrate the most appropriate techniques from a multitude of qualitative and quantitative strategies in order to study a topic of interest and better answer research questions. Compared to mono-method, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) report that mixed method research helps conduct effective investigation frequently resulting in superior research. In addition, Gorard and Taylor (2004, p. 7) assert that combining methods improves social science research, including education, and “often has greater impact, because figures can be very convincing to policy-makers whereas stories are more easily remembered and repeated by them for illustrative purposes”.

#### **5.4. Type of Mixed Methods Approach**

Different designs of procedure for mixed methods research have been advanced and classified depending on various dimensions, most importantly time ordering and weighting or emphasis of the approach (Creswell, 2009, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) stress that the design depends on the researcher, who must creatively make the decision whether to work chiefly within one dominant approach or not and whether to carry out the inquiry using the different selected methodologies concurrently or sequentially. They explain that an important tenet of mixed methods research is that researchers should consciously create more user specific designs that effectively answer their research questions.

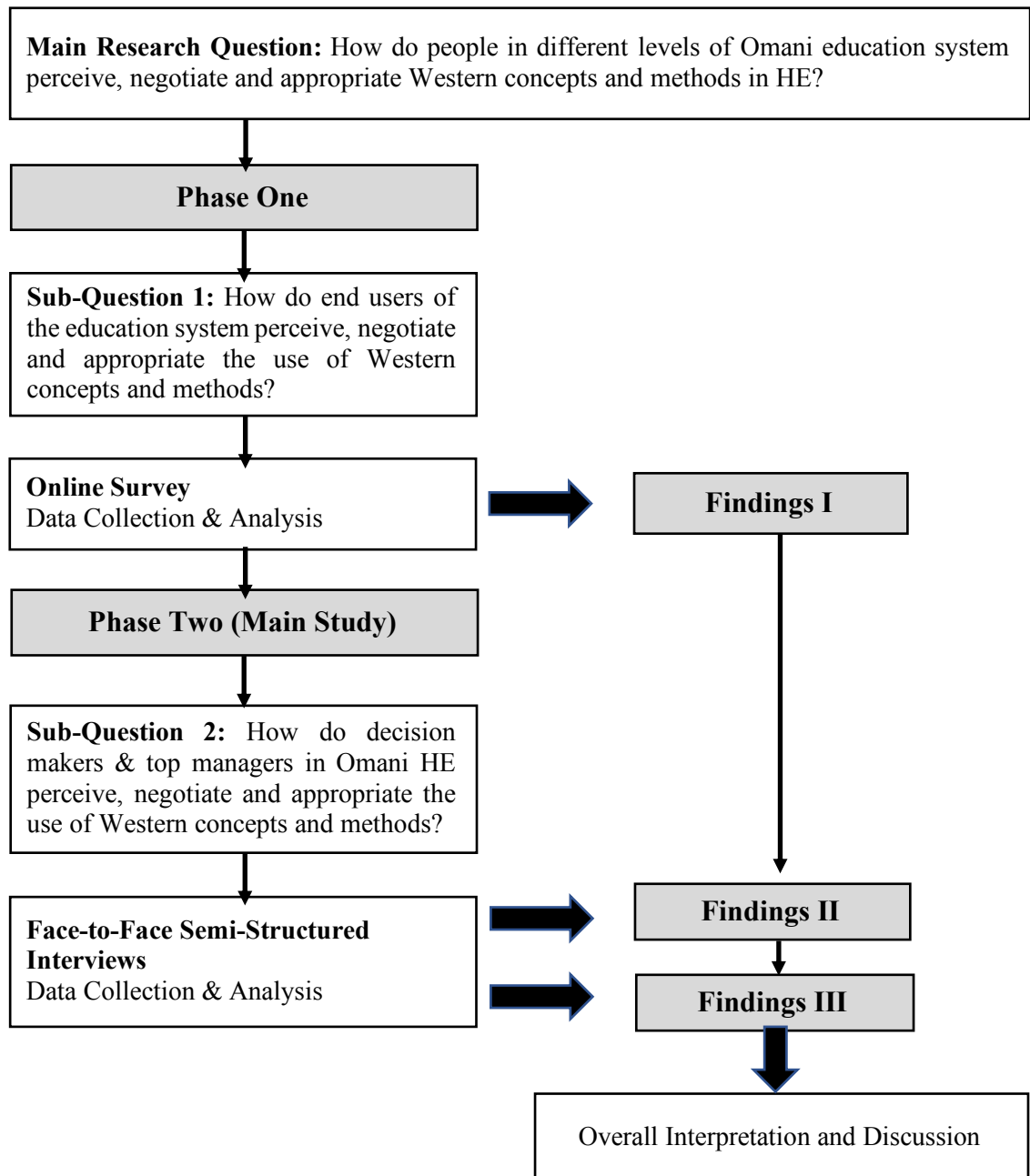
Drawing from the typologies described in Creswell (2009, 2014), Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Johnson et al. (2007), a sequential qualitative dominant mixed methods approach was judged to be the best design to guide this research. A qualitatively driven mixed methods design is defined by Johnson et al. (2007) as the following:

Qualitative dominant mixed methods research is the type of mixed research in which one relies on a qualitative, constructivist-poststructuralist-critical view of the research process, while concurrently recognizing that the addition of quantitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects. (2007, p. 124)

Consequently, this study’s methods design started with an exploratory quantitative method followed by a second dominant qualitative phase. First, an exploratory survey questionnaire was employed to give a voice to end users of the education system and

capture any possible patterns of attitudes on the topic. Then, qualitative face-to-face elite semi-structured interviews with people in management and decision-making positions constituted the main tool of inquiry. Combining these two methods was essential to consider multiple perspectives to gain a deeper and wider understanding, corroborate results and provide fuller answers to the main research question. Figure 5.1. provides a map of the study’s structure and sequence of methods.

**Figure 5. 1** The Study’s Structure and Methods



## **5.5. Phase One: The Survey Questionnaire**

Questionnaires are a popular and practical tool of survey research used to gather information from a lot of people by asking simple and specific structured questions. They provide quantitative descriptions of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of a particular population by studying a sample of that population, hence allowing the researcher to generalise and make claims about that population (Creswell, 2009). They are rarely sufficient on their own, but are of great value if used alongside other methods (Gillham, 2007) as is the case with mixed methods research.

For the purposes of this research, a survey questionnaire was used as a preliminary first step of research targeting as many current and previous end users of the education system in Oman as possible since the policy of importing and implementing Western concepts and methods in Omani HE system directly impacts them.

### **5.5.1. Aims of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was developed with the following broad aims:

1. To explore the phenomenon from the point of view of end users in terms of:
  - a. their familiarity with the policy and practice of importing and using Western methods in Omani HE system.
  - b. their thoughts and feelings about the utility of imported Western methods in Omani HE.
2. To work as an exploratory look at patterns of responses (ideas, views and attitudes) that people may have.
3. To put together a more complete picture of the complex realities of policymaking in Omani HE.

In addition, this initial exploratory phase provided a lead into designing and conducting the elite interviews with people in management and decision-making across the education systems.

### **5.5.2. Development of the Questionnaire**

This process involved different stages, namely identifying the sample population, deciding on the topics, drafting the questions and answers, designing the layout of the questionnaire and piloting the tool.

#### **Deciding on the Sample Population**

The target population or sample frame comprised adults aged 18 and over currently or previously involved with HE in Oman in whatever capacity, be it as students, employers or administrators. Any person under that age would not have had access to HE yet and their knowledge would be rather inadequate.

This population consisted of a large number that ran into thousands and included Omanis and non-Omanis, both males and females. So, taking a sample was the only practical way of surveying the population. The most desirable technique to get a truly representative sample is to use random or probability sampling (Creswell, 2009; Gillham, 2007) because it ensures equal probability of any eligible individual to be selected as well as the ability to generalise results to a given population (Creswell, 2009). Randomisation techniques, which required assigning a code or a number to everyone in the population and then randomly selecting codes or numbers to be included in the sample, was impractical and in fact unnecessary. The survey worked as a tentative, exploratory look to obtain an idea of the range of ideas people have about the use of Western methods in Omani HE. In such case, non-probability or non-random sampling was rendered satisfactory. Hence, convenience sampling was employed to get a wide range of people in the sample based on willingness to take part in the survey. Yet, no potential respondent was identified by name, age, occupation, geographical location or any other means as text messages and emails were sent out to a variety of potential respondents.

The desired final sample size was targeted at between 150 to 250. This proportion would be sufficient to provide a meaningful analysis.

#### **Deciding on The Topic Areas**

To explore the general perceptions of people towards the use of Western methods and the extent of their utility in the Omani higher education system, various topic areas were

first set down accordingly. However, the following topics were eventually used to draft the survey questions:

- the appropriateness of education at both levels of school education and HE (how much they meet the needs of society)
- the extent to which education systems in Oman incorporated the Islamic values and social traditions of Omani society
- the degree to which government and private HE institutions (HEIs) reflected the respondents' values, goals and views
- the management of education systems
- the importing of western methods, including management methods, in Omani education system
- the adoption of quality management systems and philosophies in Omani HE

It is worthwhile to note that the topics were ordered in such a way as to allow the questions to move from general to more specific.

### **Construction of the Questions and Answers**

At the beginning of this stage it was necessary to decide whether the questionnaire should be conducted in English, Arabic or both. Considering that English has been adopted as the medium of instruction in most Omani HEIs, respondents were expected to be able to answer a simple questionnaire in English easily. Hence, the original version was made in English but later used to produce an Arabic version, as it was less complicated to translate from English instead of developing two versions simultaneously. Providing the questionnaire in both languages guaranteed access to a wider range of respondents.

### **The Closed-Ended Questions**

These were split into: questions of fact and questions of opinion.

#### ***Questions of Fact (Demographics)***

Based on their probable relevance to the topics being explored, the following basic personal details were chosen:

- Nationality
- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Current occupation

The purpose of building these categories into the questionnaire was to plan an analysis based on subgroups.

### ***Questions of Opinion (The Questionnaire)***

Questionnaire items did not come from other sources neither were they adapted from previous questionnaires, since there was almost no or limited research about the topic. They were developed particularly for the study; the questions stemmed entirely from the abovementioned topics (see Deciding on the topics) and were based on the Omani context.

Subsequently, the final form of the questionnaire (See Appendix B and Appendix C for English and Arabic versions) consisted of eleven closed-ended questions.

### ***The Open-Ended Item***

Although open-ended questions are more difficult to answer and analyse, it was still crucial to add one at the end of the questionnaire to give the respondents space to supply their own individual points of view in their own words, without being restricted to predetermined responses. Such a strategy does not only introduce variety, but can also produce unanticipated responses that can lead the researcher to think more deeply about the topic (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). Thus, the question was broadly formulated to get the respondents' general feelings and how they appropriate the use of Western methods.

### **The Answers**

Probable responses to the closed-ended items were constructed using the following two approaches:

### ***Likert Scale***

All but one closed-ended question had this response format. Two important issues were

considered in the construction of this type of rating scale: the mid-point option and the format in which the responses were going to be presented.

1. Initially a five-point scale with a middle category (a sixth point 'I don't Know' was later added based on feedback from the pilot stage) was drafted so as not to force respondents to choose between a negative or a positive answer because they may genuinely be neutral or indifferent toward a topic. Garland (1991) has indicated that eliminating the mid-point category in a rating scale can minimise social desirability bias, where respondents choose a middle category to appear helpful or to seek socially desirable answers. However, this is less likely to occur in online surveys (Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Fowler, 2002), which was the mode chosen to conduct the study's questionnaire, due to the absence of the interviewer. Moreover, it has been indicated that allowing a middle category was preferable in survey research because denying the respondents a middle alternative would be "artificial and potentially annoying" (Aldridge & Levine, 2001, p. 113), but most importantly because it can improve the validity and reliability of scale as people would not randomly select an option closest to what might have been a middle option (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). Finally, a five-point scale was found to be adequate and more appropriately suited to the constructs instead of a seven-point scale, which is regarded as being redundant because respondents do not usually use the whole scale (Gillham, 2007).
2. Verbal, rather than numerical, scales were used throughout the questionnaire. Compared to a continuum of numbers with adjectives at each pole, words seemed much easier to be processed by the respondents, a point also supported by Krosnick and Presser (2010), who argue that the respondents' task may prove more difficult using numerical labels.

### ***Selected Responses***

This was mainly used to formulate responses for questions about personal details in addition to one opinion item. The 'Other' category was sometimes included in case respondents wanted to supply a different answer.

### **5.5.3. Designing the Questionnaire**

Because of its cost effectiveness, ease of data collection and analysis, the survey was administered through the Internet. Google Forms, a computer-based platform, was used

to create the online questionnaire because it provides an unlimited number of survey responses for free. In addition, the researcher had previous experience using this tool and found it extremely efficient and user-friendly.

An important point that needed special consideration was whether to place personal details at the beginning or at the end of the questionnaire. It is often recommended that demographic questions be held back till the end of the questionnaire because starting with them could be “potentially off-putting” (Aldridge & Levine, 2001, p. 116). Nevertheless, the alternative of placing demographic questions at the beginning looked more practical and nonthreatening, since they were quite basic and easy to answer.

#### **5.5.4. Pilot Testing the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was tested on people who resembled the final target group. The subjects included eight Omani graduate students (four male and four female) in the UK, who were available and willing to cooperate. An invitation email, with specific instructions of the procedure and a link to the online questionnaire, was sent to them. A feedback form (See Appendix A) was attached for them to complete and return after they had done the questionnaire. They were told about the time the task would take (around 20-30 minutes) and were reminded to fill in the survey as they would under normal circumstances. They were given two weeks to complete the task and encouraged to contact the researcher had they any queries. A reminder was sent a day before the survey and forms were due.

#### ***Feedback from the Pilot Test***

All subjects completed the online questionnaire, but only seven feedback forms were sent back. Since the aim of the pilot test was to evaluate the clarity of items and workability of the online questionnaire, analysing the results of the questionnaires was meaningless. However, to improve its effectiveness, comments and suggestions from the feedback forms were summarised, compiled and analysed. The following are the most important and valid issues that arose from the pilot test feedback forms and needed to be considered.



- Rating Scale: the “I don’t know”

The most significant decision stemming from the pilot stage feedback was whether adding the “I don’t know’ category could enhance the effectiveness of the instrument. Reviewing the literature revealed various stances on the topic. Even though Krosnick and Presser (2010) argue there is evidence that the “I don’t Know” alternative does not improve scale measurement, the “I don’t know” answers can be legitimate due to some respondents’ lack of adequate knowledge about a subject (Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Fowler, 2002). Taking into consideration that the questionnaire was exploratory in nature and familiarity of the Omani education system’s end users with certain subjects might be low, it was only plausible and reasonable to include the ‘I don’t know’ category to allow respondents to express their uncertainty if that was the case. In fact, lack of knowledge toward a topic is a natural part of social reality and if those who offer a ‘no opinion’ on a matter form a sizable percentage, this can constitute a result or finding in research (Aldridge & Levine, 2001).

- Wording/ language

Overall, the subjects indicated that the questions were clear and straightforward, but there were some sporadic comments about word choice, which were studied and dealt with individually in relevance to the research aims and questionnaire objectives.

#### **5.5.5. Re-Testing the Questionnaire (Post-Pilot)**

Once valid feedback comments were incorporated and the questionnaire improved, it was re-piloted before the official data collection. Five of the previous subjects (two male and three female) who participated in the pilot test were approached again to take the questionnaire and give any general feedback. Overall, the feedback suggested that the instrument was well-focused and was going to give the information it was designed for.

#### **5.5.6. Translating the Questionnaire into Arabic**

The task of translating the questionnaire into Arabic was undertaken by the researcher and the new Arabic version was then presented to two people to check and validate the language and style. To seek careful proof-reading, the subjects included one female Omani familiar with the context of study while the other a male Arab unfamiliar with the context. Overall, their feedback suggested that the questionnaire was well-developed.

Very few comments to improve the language were given and valid insights were appropriately incorporated.

#### **5.5.7. Data Collection**

Given the popularity and wide use of smart phones and mobile social media applications in Oman, text messages, with a proper introduction and invitation to take part in the online questionnaire, were personally sent via WhatsApp<sup>4</sup> mobile application to a wide range of people, namely friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Those were also kindly asked to forward the message to their network of people to get a higher response rate. This personal approach to delivering questionnaires has been listed as a basic rule to maximise the chance for questionnaires to be returned (Gillham, 2007). Nevertheless, the more formal method of sending out emails was also used in case respondents were not comfortable enough filling in a survey on the mobile phone.

Initial response rate was not high, so the message with the link was re-sent reminding people to complete the questionnaire if they had not done so and to help spread the message and link. This is one of the disadvantage of questionnaires because people do not usually show immediate interest and enthusiasm in responding to surveys and questionnaires although mobile phones have made the process of dissemination and collection easier and faster.

#### **5.5.8. Data Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)**

A hundred and sixty-eight (168) responses were received from both the English and Arabic versions, 99 and 69 respectively, forming a moderate yet reasonable rate. However, due to suspicion that two respondents may have sent their reply twice, as one entry from each version was identical in every aspect to the succeeding response, only one of their answers was kept while the other discarded to eliminate any repetition, which could misinform the results. Furthermore, one single entry, which came from a non-Omani participant, was removed to create a homogenous sample of Omanis only. Eventually, the examination and analysis of the questionnaire was carried out with the remaining 165 responses and was undertaken in two stages: quantitative (demographics and closed-ended items) and qualitative (open-ended item).

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<sup>4</sup> WhatsApp is a freeware and cross-platform instant messaging service for smartphones.

### **Quantitative Analysis Methods and Tools**

Initially, SPSS was employed to prepare and analyse the quantitative part. However, this was later abandoned because it proved superfluous. Considering that the data was only nominal and ordinal, this allowed for non-parametric instead of parametric approaches. So, rather than running inferential statistical analyses, descriptive statistical analyses were found to be more suitable for this type of the data, as the main objective of the questionnaire was to look at general perceptions and trends instead of making statistical inferences about the population. Even though the researcher was aware that factor analysis could have been an option, it was not essentially meaningful. Consequently, neither t-test nor ANOVA (analysis of variance) were conducted, for they may only be done after a factor analysis has been completed. In addition, there was no need to apply a normality test, as the questionnaire did not have any interval or scale data. Having said that, Excel was quite apt as an analytic tool at this stage to generate perfect descriptive results needed for the study and was thus used instead.

Several steps (See Table 5.2) were followed in processing the quantitative part of the responses, namely data preparation and coding, manual data check, running data analysis tests, and finally data presentation. The most painstaking task was integrating results from both Arabic and English versions of the questionnaire to create one Excel sheet because it was not possible to combine the two Google Forms into one form to produce one database. So, Arabic data were manually inputted into the Excel sheet that had data of the English questionnaire. Then, a meticulous process of checking each cell with the original data was carried out to correct any accidental slips. Fortunately, no issue with missing data was encountered since the online questionnaire was designed in such a way that a response was required for each item before proceeding to the next question.

Demographic characteristics based on subject descriptors were created first and data was reproduced and displayed in summary form. Regarding closed-ended items, the number of responses collected from the different subgroups was not well balanced. So, overall percentages were calculated for each question, but where possible a cross tabulation was performed to see how the results of the question were influenced by certain subgroups. Alternatively, a filter was also used for some cases to analyse the data by narrowing the focus to one specific subgroup to see how the people in that subgroup responded to the question. Data was then grouped to be reported, highlighting salient results and patterns.

Those findings will be presented and discussed in the first part of Chapter Six: Findings I (The Questionnaire).

**Table 5. 2** Quantitative Analysis of the Questionnaire

| <b>Process</b>                        | <b>Description</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>1. Data Preparation and Coding</b> | <p><b>English version questionnaire:</b><br/>Responses were downloaded from Google forms into excel format; open-ended question responses were extracted to be separately analysed using qualitative techniques. Then responses were coded by assigning a numeric value to answers returned from questionnaire participants to facilitate data processing and analysis using Excel. The assigned values ranged from 0 (negative response) to 4 (positive response), 9 for ‘other’ and 99 for ‘I don’t know’.</p> <p><b>Arabic version questionnaire:</b><br/>Arabic responses were simultaneously translated and manually inputted cell by cell into the same excel sheet with the English-version questionnaire responses. Then, responses were also coded following the same method as above.</p> |
| <b>2. Data Check</b>                  | Arabic-version responses were printed out and cross-checked cell by cell with the data manually entered into the English-version sheet to make sure no accidental slips took place while inputting data. Any discovered mistake was corrected.  |
| <b>3. Data Analysis Tests</b>         | An exploratory data analysis was applied to look at what is in there in the data. First, the process started with descriptive statistical analyses for the personal details, followed by analysing each of the closed-ended questions.  |
| <b>4. Data Presentation</b>           | Looking at the most salient results and general trends, a report of the findings was produced in the form of paragraphs, tables and graphs. The results were later examined in relation to findings from the open-ended question and interview data findings to come up with meaningful inferences and answers to research questions.   |

### **Qualitative Analysis of the Open-Ended Item**

Naturally, text data from the open-ended question was approached using qualitative methods. Out of the 165 respondents, 109 preferred not to give any comments. No particular pattern was found to explain why they chose not to express their views. The logical reason might be that they did not have anything to say or the common factor of time constraint in survey taking. Additionally, seven comments were discarded because they did not make any sense (See Appendix D for all comments of respondents). Thus, the remaining 49 comments were approached using a basic content analysis, with the aim of finding emerging patterns or themes. The analysis process is delineated in Table 5.3.

### ***Content Analysis Approach and Tools***

A conventional approach to qualitative content analysis where “coding categories are derived directly from the text data” was adopted to allow “categories and names for categories to flow” from the text comments of the respondents instead of the use of preconceived categories based on a “pre-existing theory” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277 & 1279) or framework. In other words, emergent rather than a priori coding (Stemler, 2001) strategy was adopted.

The analysis was first attempted using NVivo to generate the codes and categories, but this seemed like “doing violence to the data” (Gillham, 2007, p. 64). As the text began to be chopped too finely, the emerging codes did not make sense nor did they seem to satisfy the aims of the study. The value of this information lay in identifying how these people negotiated and appropriated the use of Western methods in their HE system. Therefore, not small codes, but bigger categories in the form of patterns of views and general orientations of respondents were more relevant and hence more conducive to the research aims. That said, the unit of analysis was the entire comment given by the respondent. Subsequently, NVivo analysis was discarded and a simple content analysis was carried out manually supported by graphs and tables generated using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word. The findings revealed that the respondents were divided into one of five categories: identity defensiveness, scepticism, intermediate position, pro-Western and topic avoiders. These will be presented and discussed in the second part of Chapter Six: Findings I (The Questionnaire).

**Table 5. 3** Content Analysis of the Questionnaire Open-Ended Item

| <b>Process</b>  | <b>Description</b>  |
|---|---|
| <b>1. Data Preparation</b>                            | All comments were extracted from both versions of the questionnaire results and assembled in one place. ‘No comment’ responses were deleted. At this stage, all comments with text were considered for analysis.  |
| <b>2. Preliminary Examination of Data</b>             | Overall and thorough reading and re-reading of all comments was done to get a sense of the whole and notice any general observations. Initial analysis and observations were noted down.  |
| <b>3. Grouping, Coding and Categorisation of data</b> | Comments were cut and spread out on a big table. Then, each comment was read and re-read to get a sense of the view provided by the respondent. Similar comments were grouped together. For each group, codes and categories (themes) were developed. At this stage, invalid comments were removed. The justification of excluding them was provided. |
| <b>4. Organisation of Data</b>                        | Categories/ themes were organised and presented in graphs and tables. Translation of Arabic comments took place concurrently.   |
| <b>5. Reliability and Validity Check</b>              | An Omani PhD student, who is familiar with the context but has no knowledge of the content of study, was approached to peer-check and verify the codes, themes and translation of the data.   |
| <b>6. Data Presentation</b>                           | Results were presented and discussed.<br>Later, a comparison and cross-referencing with interview results were conducted.   |

## **5.6. Phase Two: The Qualitative Interviews**

The second stage and the main part of the research was purely qualitative. The study primarily set out to learn how imported Western management methods in Omani HE system were perceived, negotiated and appropriated by decision-makers and managers across the sector. So, the purpose was to discover the experiences and thinking of those ‘elite’ people and how they interpreted the policy and utility of those methods and

philosophies in relation to the historical transformations of Omani HE system. Consequently, the most appropriate approach to proceed was through engaging in qualitative field interviewing.

### **5.6.1. The Semi-Structured Interview Approach**

Three major types of interviews are often identified, namely unstructured, semi-structured and structured (See e.g. Berg, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The unstructured or unstandardised interview is completely informal and conversational, in which questions emerge spontaneously from interactions during the interview whereas at the opposite extreme is the formal structured or completely standardised interview, which follows a rigid interview protocol without deviating from the order or wording of questions. The semi-structured or semi-standardised interview is located somewhere in the middle of the continuum and employs an interview protocol or guide with a number of pre-specified topics and questions, but the interviewer has the freedom to digress and probe as needed.

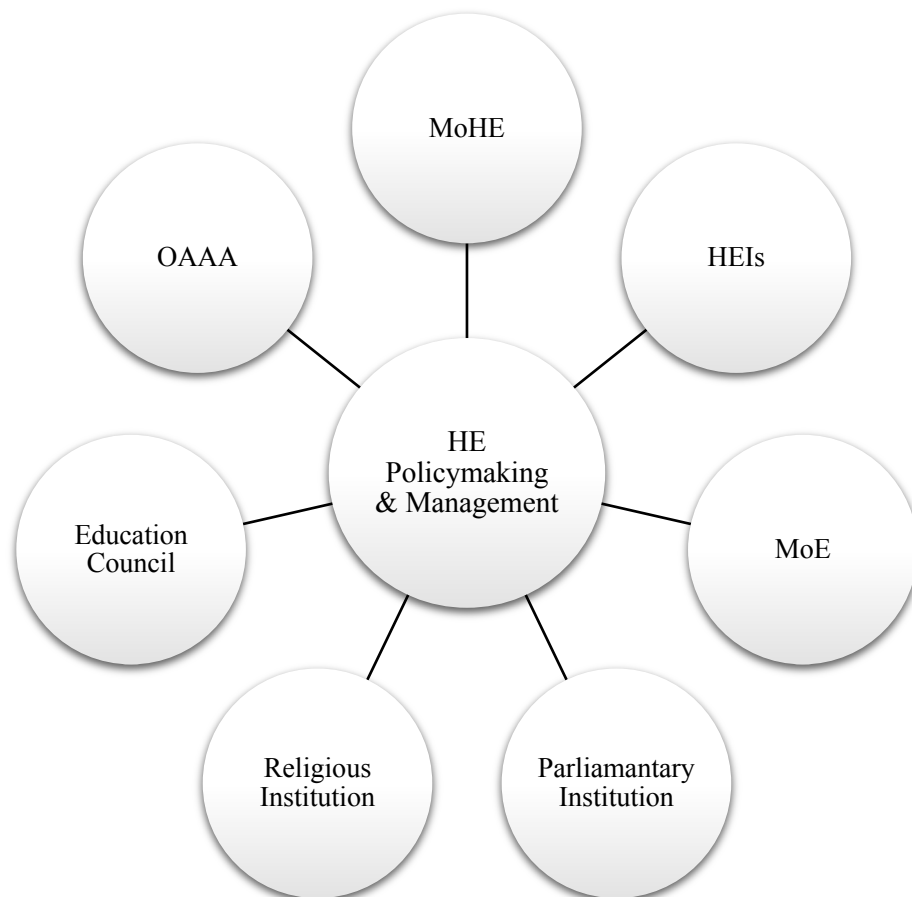
This last type of interviewing was selected because it best fit the goals of the research and the type of subjects, for the researcher can rely on a set of pre-prepared open-ended questions to conduct in-depth interviews while at the same time giving the respondents latitude and flexibility to articulate their views and structure their responses within a framework of their own reasoning and vocabulary. Moreover, the importance of the semi-structured approach has been highlighted for elite interviewing. For example, Aberbach and Rockman (2002, p. 674) argue that highly educated people, elites especially, “do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions”.

### **5.6.2. Selecting the Participants**

To investigate the use of Western methods in HE, respondents had to come from the different sectors of the HE system, namely the Ministry of HE as well as HEIs, both private and public or government. However, to get a fuller picture of the topic and best understand the topic treated, respondents must also come from other organisations believed to have a direct or indirect link to HE policymaking and management. An initial list included these institutions (Figure 5.2):

- The Ministry of HE (MoHE)
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- The Ministry of Education (MoE)
- Oman Academic Accreditation Agency (OAAA)
- The Education Council (EC)
- Parliamentary institutions: the State Council and The Shura (Consultation) Council
- The religious institution represented by the Ministry of Awqaf (endowments) and Religious Affairs (MoARA), as there is no such thing as a ‘religious institution’ in Oman

**Figure 5. 2** Initial List of Institutions for the Main Study’s Interviews



Accordingly, purposive, or judgmental (Babbie, 2008; Berg, 2007), sampling was used to identify appropriate individuals to be included in the study. This sampling technique



is mainly used in qualitative studies, but is also quite common in mixed methods research (Creswell, 2009). It is employed to seek focus and select those subjects or cases that best illuminate the research topic (Babbie, 2008; Berg, 2007). As such, a thorough search for information about high-level decision-makers and top administrators in the above listed institutions was done on the Internet accompanied by extensive personal inquiries. This helped generate a list of information-rich cases to conduct in-depth interviews. At this stage, it was not a primary concern to include an equal proportion of both male and female decision-makers and managers since the number of latter group is relatively small in what has been normally regarded a traditionally male-dominated arena. Still, however, whenever a female decision-maker and/or top manager was identified as a potential subject, she was included on the purposively selected but provisional sample. The next step was how to gain access to those people and acquire their consent to be interviewed.

### **5.6.3. Gaining Access to the Respondents**

Gaining access was far from being straightforward and in fact a costly enterprise. Sending emails from the UK to the respondents in Oman was not the perfect nor the best way of doing this since most probably no response would have been received. To secure the appointments for the interviews, this had to be done in the field. Once in Oman, the researcher used any available information on the institution's website or the telephone directory or in many cases her personal connections to acquire contact details, either office telephone numbers or mobile numbers for each of the potential subjects. Then, calling each subject or each subject's secretary at a time, the researcher introduced herself and the institutions she was affiliated with in the UK and Oman, briefly described the nature of the research and politely requested an appointment for a one-hour interview. The phone call was followed up by an email that repeated the request in a more formal manner, and attached a couple of documents: an official letter previously signed by her supervisor requesting respondents to assist the researcher in her data collection phase (See Appendix E) and a consent form with all the details pertaining to ethical issues, such as confidentiality and anonymity (See Appendix F for English version and Appendix G for Arabic version). Additionally, some requested to have a look at the interview prompts, which were supplied to them in an email. Sometimes, it was difficult to get access to the participant and thus the request, along with supporting documents, were handed to the potential respondent or their secretary by an acquaintance who either knew

the respondent in person or worked at their office. In other easier cases, the researcher visited the subject in person at their offices and took the appointment for the interview.

While scheduling the appointments for the interviews, it was important to remember to:

1. keep an exact record of the dates and venues.
2. schedule only one or a maximum of two interviews per day.
3. leave ample time between interviews to help with moving from one location to the other or in some cases to travel from city to another.
4. prepare to make sudden adjustments due to unexpected circumstances, for example a second visit in case of cancellations or busy schedules.
5. Prepare to find replacements, if possible, if a participant drops out.

The gap between the appointments and interviews was almost three months since the researcher had to return to university in the UK. Although almost all consent forms were signed, changes were still unavoidable since participants had the right to decline to do the interview or withdraw at any time. This indeed happened and will be discussed later in the section on challenges.

#### **5.6.4. Final List of Interviewees**

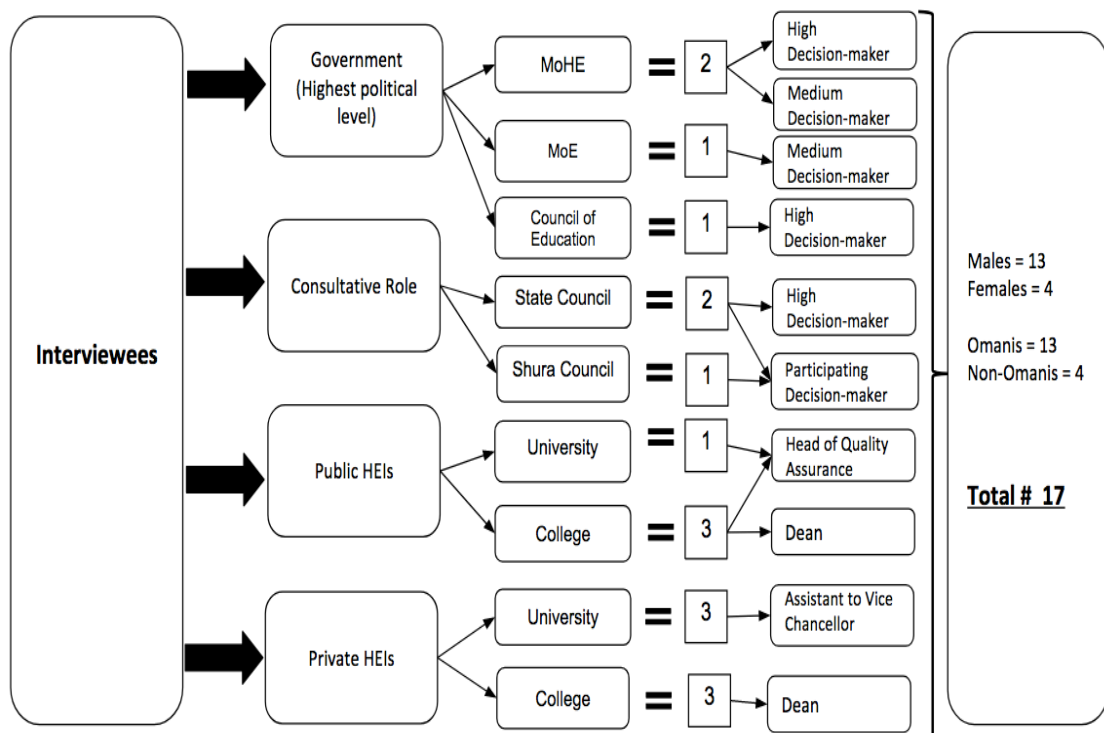
Interviews with participants from all the listed institutions were secured, but there were issues with two cases:

- OAAA: It was already a difficult task getting in touch with and pursuing people from (upper management of) OAAA. Once this was done, they demanded that a formal request be submitted along with the research proposal so that a person can be nominated for the interview. Most significantly, this in a sense defied the purpose of the study. Indeed, it was inevitable for any subject to be somewhat influenced by their institution's philosophy and policies, but it was still critical to assume that they first and foremost will conduct the interview representing themselves as decision-makers and top managers. Moreover, this was time-consuming, especially that the researcher was making many other interview appointments concurrently, and so unfortunately the pursuit had to be dropped.

- MoARA: Despite persistent attempts, the request to conduct an interview with a participant from MoARA was rejected, the main reason being that MoARA had nothing to do with HE. The researcher repeatedly explained that since Oman was a Muslim country, it was fundamentally important to the study to listen to the perspective and stance of an upper administrator and/or a decision-maker from what could in a way represent the ‘religious institution’ in the country. They first suggested that the researcher approach other institutions such as the Iftaa/ Fatwa Office and the Faculty of *Sharia* (religious) Sciences. Then, they requested to see the interview prompts, which were sent to them. Nevertheless, they still thought the topic was not relevant to them and rejected the interview. They did not even entertain the suggestion of providing written answers to the questions in an email.

Figure 5.3 shows the final list of interviewees, which consisted of seventeen participants. Any identifying information was removed to emphasise the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants’ data.

**Figure 5. 3** The Main Study’s Interviewees



### **5.6.5. Preparing the Interview Guide**

A semi-structured interview, sometimes labelled ‘the interview guide approach’ (Johnson & Turner, 2003), consists of predetermined topics or open-ended questions that are listed on an interview guide or schedule. Developing an interview guide is often time-consuming, but it is a crucial stage to the quality of the study (Rabionet, 2011) because it helps the researcher/interviewer achieve comfortable interaction with the interviewee (Doody & Noonan, 2013) and provides them with an opportunity to elicit more accurate information and useful data.

Referring to several sources (Berg, 2004, 2007; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rabionet, 2011) that provide some guidelines on how to plan and develop a successful interview guide, the study’s interview guide was crafted. It involved two major steps:

1. Developing the specific interview topics and questions
2. Designing and formatting the overall guide

#### **Developing the Interview Topics**

This involved yet another layer of steps. Even though Berg (2004, 2007) suggests that all broad categories should be outlined first, usually compiled from a reading of the literature, followed by developing sets of questions for each category, in this study these were reversed. Since the topic, especially given the particular context of study, was under-researched, the questions were tailor-made to hear the ‘stories’ of the participants. To this end, it felt more natural to develop a myriad of questions, which were in turn used to generate the specific topics of investigation. These topics were then carefully discussed with the researcher’s supervisor, revised and refined to construct a shorter and more comprehensive list, which ultimately included:

1. General information (Demographics)
2. Rationale of the policy (of importing Western methods and philosophies)
3. Process:
  - a. Planning (e.g. selection criteria)
  - b. Implementation (e.g. accommodation or localisation)
  - c. Evaluation
4. Conflicts and inconsistencies

Even though in a semi-structured interview the order of the questions may vary, the above preliminary order of topics seemed like a logical sequence to begin with.

### **Drafting the Questions**

Bearing in mind that this was a semi-structured interview, where the participant is supposed to do most of the talking, only one to three questions were drafted for each topic. However, probes were also incorporated to encourage explanation or elaboration from the participants under the assumption that the researcher's job was to dig out more information as the situation dictated.

Adopting the styles of questions described by Berg (2004, 2007), the interview instrument included four types of questions: essential, extra, probing and throw-away questions. The last type of questions appeared at the beginning of the interview guide and were used to ask about demographics but were also sometimes sprinkled throughout the interview depending on the situation. Then for each topic, essential, extra and probing questions were built. Essential questions elicited specific information central to the study. Extra questions were generally equivalent to the essential questions but worded differently to measure influence of any variation in question wording. Probing questions or probes, such as "Why so"?, "In what ways"?, "How is that?" and "Could you tell me more about this?" were occasionally used to elaborate on a response or elicit a more complete answer to essential questions.

Since the participants were sophisticated and highly educated with high positions in the country, there was no issue regarding the style or level of language used. In addition, the researcher and participants shared almost the same cultural background and this was expected to ensure a more effective communication.

Nevertheless, thinking about the content and special terminologies, such as management, policymaking and total quality management, questions were drafted to be clear enough to convey meaning accurately to the participants so they should know what was expected of them and communicate their attitudes and opinions honestly and completely. In addition, given that a qualitative interview is basically and essentially a conversation with a purpose (Babbie, 2008), it was easy to eliminate the possibility of any confusion by simply clarifying any unclear point, question or terminology.

### **The Language of the Interview and Guide**

The guide and questions were first developed in English since the entire research was conducted in English. Then, the interview guide and instrument were translated into Arabic by the researcher herself and the translation was checked and verified by an Omani male research student. The interviews were mainly going to be conducted in Arabic, but since the participants were highly educated, they were expected to code-switch between Arabic and English. The researcher was thus prepared to carry out the interviews in whichever language the participants desired. For the final interview guide, see Appendix H and I for English and Arabic versions.

### **5.6.6. Piloting the Interview Guide**

The guide was first examined several times by the researcher's supervisor, who was familiar with the study, to make sure that all questions necessary to obtain answers to the research questions were included. In addition, a research student, who was familiar with the context of study, scanned the guide in English and Arabic to validate the translation as well as to check for any cultural-specific issues. This step was also vital to discover any problems with the sequencing, language and wording, such as poorly-constructed questions, sensitive words or statements with bias. Then came the important stage of piloting the interview, whose purpose was to evaluate whether the instrument would work as expected and whether the kind of information being sought would be obtained. However, the main objective was to practice the skill of interviewing managers and decision-makers.

It was difficult to find people that matched the exact sample to do the pilot study. Five people who were similar to the participants, in terms of being highly-educated managers, were contacted relying heavily on personal connections. This was not an easy process, as one of those people declined and two could not make it due to their busy schedules. Eventually, only two pilot interviews, with a head of department from a government HEI and the MoE, were conducted.

### **Feedback from the Pilot Interviews**

Despite being a time-consuming process, the pilot study was constructive, especially in terms of engagement with the participants and the manner used to conduct the interview and ask the questions. However, several issues/ suggestions emerged from the pilot and

were seriously considered during the preparation for the data collection stage. These included:

1. Time: it was important to stick to the one-hour time frame, as both pilot interviews went a little over the time limit prescribed in the consent form (1 hour 20 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes).
2. Language: code-switching between Arabic and English was frequently used and was thus anticipated.
3. Wording issues:
  - a. the word ‘philosophy’ seemed to be a bit ambiguous and needed to be explained to participants as people might not know what philosophies were being borrowed from West. Other words, such as ‘experiences’ and ‘practices’, might be better options and should be highlighted instead.
  - b. The word ‘Western’ might need explanation.
4. Content: both pilot interview participants discussed the topics in relation to their field and background. This brought up a very important issue that responses and overall content would be heavily influenced by the participant’s experience. This meant that the first five minutes should be exploited to learn more about the participants’ knowledge and experience in order to ask the right kind of questions. After all, as the interview was semi-structured and loosely designed, it should not be strictly confined to previously prepared prompts.

#### **5.6.7. Conducting the Interviews**

Overall the main study’s data collection stage was smooth and can be divided into three: before, during and after the interview.

##### **Before the Interview**

To ensure the success of data collection, a lot of preparation was done prior to conducting the interviews. For example, interview guides were printed in both Arabic and English and learned beforehand. Moreover, tape-recorder was constantly checked before each interview. However, in case of refusal to do tape-recording, a checklist and a summary sheet were also prepared to help record the main issues.

Given that the participants were highly-placed, researcher anxiety was a major issue, especially in the first days of data collection. However, practising interview questions

before each interview helped a lot in building and restoring confidence. Arriving early for the interview was also crucial. Once several interviews were successfully completed, this feeling was almost gone.

### **During the Interview**

At the beginning, the researcher explained the aim of the interview, how long it would take (around one hour, unless the participant had agreed to grant a specific amount of time) and how it was going to be conducted, mainly tape-recorded as prescribed in the informed consent form. She assured them that the study had received ethical approval and reminded them of the confidentiality of the data and their right to withdraw at any time. She gently checked whether the participant had any queries before proceeding with the interview.

The interview started with basic questions about the subject's background information before moving on to the research questions.

It is worthwhile noting that almost all of the interviews were done at the participants' offices and were all tape-recorded to minimise data loss, make sure information gathered was accurate and to actively engage in the conversation since note-taking could be distracting.

### **After the Interview**

As soon as the interview was over, the researcher did her utmost to reflect on the interview and incorporate any useful techniques to prepare for the next interview. At this stage, it was not possible to do any transcribing because the researcher had to travel long distances between the interviews.

### **5.6.8. Data Collection Difficulties**

The biggest challenge was understanding the value of and richness in the participants' information. After the first two or three interviews, the researcher felt disappointed that she was not getting useful or complete responses to answer the research questions. However, reflecting on this early on, the researcher realised that the participants shared a lot of valuable but different information based on their own experiences and perspectives. The depth of their responses was thus expected to generate richer findings.



Another big challenge had to do with power-relations. Most of the participants were highly-placed decision-makers and/or top managers in the country. The manner and style with which to conduct and steer the direction of the interview was a major undertaking and official titles had to be used all the time when addressing them. Interrupting for any reason had to be done with utmost care and politeness.

A final big challenge was trying to cover the interview guide prompts while engaging in natural authentic communication. The researcher was sometimes forced to ignore the interview guide to establish rapport and show interest in what the respondents said. It thus felt awkward when she had to come back to her questions. However, with practice, the researcher was more comfortable at steering the direction of the interview.

Other minor technical issues included:

1. Finding replacements: a week before each interview, the researcher called the participants to remind them of the interview and confirm the date, time and venue. However, one participant had changed job and the researcher had to request from the new appointed person to conduct the interview instead. Luckily, they agreed to grant her an interview.
2. Rescheduling: some participants had to reschedule due to busy timetables. The researcher had to accommodate such changes.
3. Managing travel time: some interviews were in different cities and researcher had to make long trips by car or plane to conduct some of the interviews.

#### **5.6.9. Data Analysis (Content Analysis and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis)**

One weakness of interviews lies in the analysis process, which can be time-consuming (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) and problematic (Bell, 2010) because of the overwhelming amount of conversation data. Management of qualitative data, albeit a formidable task, is a vital component in the early stages of analysis and can make the analysis of a huge set of data go more smoothly and efficiently.

Managing interview data (See Table 5.4 for a summary of the data management and analysis process) started with downloading, renaming and systematically arranging all audio material in one huge file, saved in several locations for safe-keeping. This was followed by the conversion of raw data into text. There are different techniques for

creating a written record of audiotaped interviews (Holliday, 2007), mainly selective and verbatim transcription. Some authors assert that the latter type is not necessary especially in content or thematic analysis, which aim at identifying common ideas and interpreting meanings from the data (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). All the same, verbatim transcription was selected and employed because it was the best technique to capture the message the way it was exactly spoken. Considering the criticality of the current research, as the interviewees consisted of a group of highly educated government officials and educational managers, their contribution had to be taken wholesale and in a comprehensive way. Furthermore, since code switching between Arabic and English constantly occurred during most of the interviews, verbatim transcription guaranteed that nothing got lost in translation. More importantly, verbatim transcription established a feeling of personal closeness with the data that led to conducting a keener analysis. Having said that, the use of field notes during and immediately after interviews, a technique frequently considered and is sometimes reported as superior to solely relying on verbatim transcription of verbal data (Wengraf, 2001), was not considered since it posed some kind of threat. Interviewing top political figures in the country and people with high positions in higher education meant that an absolutely accurate record based on evidence was a safe strategy to follow.

It is worth mentioning that for ethical and confidentiality purposes, each participant was assigned a pseudonym represented by the letter P for participant followed by the number of interview. Numbering was not done hierarchically nor randomly, but according to interview sequence for easy referencing. For example, the first interview participant was coded P01 and interview/ participant 17 was coded P17.

### **Data Analysis Tools**

Manual coding was chosen over NVivo for the same reasons listed in the section about Questionnaire Data Analysis. Microsoft Office was used to develop a coding framework in which all codes and categories were later transferred and organised for the presentation and discussion of results.

**Table 5. 4** Interview Data Management and Analysis Process

| <b>Process</b>                                   | <b>Description</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>1. Raw Data Preparation &amp; Arrangement</b> | All audio files were transferred into one file and renamed chronologically according to the date of interview, no information was given for the participants' identity. Copies of the file were saved in different locations to minimise loss. |
| <b>2. Transcribing Recorded Interviews</b>       | Verbatim transcription was used to transcribe the recorded interviews. Once all transcription was completed, a re-check was done. Each and every transcribed interview was re-checked for any slips or missed information.                     |
| <b>3. Filing Transcribed Data</b>                | Each transcribed interview was named as per step #1 and saved separately. Then all material was arranged in one file. Copies of the file were saved in several locations.  |
| <b>4. Conducting a Sample Analysis</b>           | A preliminary analysis of the textual data was carried out to come closer to the data and understand the wealth and richness of material. This step was important in the subsequent steps, particularly developing the codes for analysis.     |
| <b>5. Performing Pass One of the Analysis</b>    | Each interview was independently coded and analysed using:   |
| <b>6. Performing Pass Two of the Analysis</b>    | a. qualitative content analysis<br>b. discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian tools   |
| <b>7. Presentation and Reporting of Results</b>  | The findings were summarised and presented to answer research questions.   |

### **Approaches to Interview Data Analysis**

In the beginning, only a qualitative content analysis technique was planned. Nevertheless, conducting a preliminary sample interview analysis revealed that this approach was not enough to capture the complexity and richness of the data. Consequently, each transcribed interview was processed at two different levels of depth,

the first using content analysis and the second much deeper layer involved a discourse analysis using Foucauldian categories.

### ***Pass One: Content Analysis***

Content analysis, a basic tool that is widely used in qualitative research (Holsti, 1969; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2013; Weber, 1990) to manage and reduce textual data into more manageable categories and themes was initially planned to scrutinise the interviews and address the second sub-question. This approach, which is broadly defined as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14) perfectly fit the study design. Initially, predefined codes (general themes) were generated based on the research topic. However, emergent categories and topics (more specific themes) were also allowed to flow directly from the data. This is a conventional inductive approach used when existing research literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which was the case in the present study. The many categories and themes that were developed from applying pass one analysis will be presented and discussed in Chapter Seven: Findings II (Content Analysis of Interview Data).

However, the multifaceted rich data had a much deeper layer that qualitative content analysis was not able to achieve by merely breaking the text into small units of themes (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Thus, finding another pass that could explore the statements of the respondents and identify the ways their identities and the power they possessed were manifested in their dialogue or the ‘discourse’ was vital to increase the rigour of the analysis and provide a more dynamic and detailed account of the data. Accordingly, discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian tools was selected and adapted to focus on the important issues of power and knowledge.

### ***Pass Two: Discourse Analysis Applying Foucauldian Categories***

Realising the complex roles performed by the participants as decision-makers and managers with an authority that ranged from low to highest political level of power, an archaeological exploration of how these people negotiated the use of Western methods in HE was expected to reveal a range of approaches and values that relayed the participants’ identities and their complex roles within the larger discourse of Omani HE policymaking, HE management and HE reform. To that end, an in-depth analysis that

focuses on the relationship between power and knowledge was needed to produce richer findings, an aim that led the researcher towards adapting Foucauldian tools.

Foucauldian discourse analysis has been reported as being a significantly useful tool in terms of allowing a focus on the processes and practices in difficult policy planning issues (Sharp & Richardson, 2001). His tools have been adapted and used in various fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, law, history, medicine, ecology, public relations, management and education (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000).

Two specific studies (Bourke, Lidstone, & Ryan, 2013; Thompson & Mockler, 2016) that borrow from Michel Foucault's (1972) archaeological analysis tools were found to be useful to guide the present analysis in that they also explore policymaking issues, but in relation to the specific Australian educational field.

In the first study, Bourke et al. (2013) employed open-ended questions to interview twenty teachers from Queensland, Australia, and investigate their experiences regarding the redefinition of professionalism within a discourse of prevailing performativity in the Australian educational landscape. Subjugating the statements of the teachers to Foucauldian archaeological analysis, the authors found that those teachers' reactions to the performative climate varied between compliance and resistance. It seemed that the teachers played different "truth games" of professionalism, enacting their roles in six ways of some acceptance but increasing resistance: unresisting acceptance, passive resistance, subtle resistance, assertive resistance and aspirational resistance. The authors concluded that their archaeological excavation provided evidence for "the counter-discourses to the currently internationally pervasive performative climate" (Bourke et al., 2013, p. 1).

The second study by Thompson and Mockler (2016) also adopted a Foucauldian approach of discursive production to investigate and analyse how Australian school principals perceived and negotiated the processes and technologies of the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The authors conducted open-ended interviews with thirteen primary and secondary school principals from three different states in Australia. A Foucauldian archaeological exploration of the principals'

responses revealed that they perceived NAPLAN through three techniques: affordances, tensions and paradoxes, which reflected their complex roles as principals.

Piecing together the approach to analysis and categories or themes from the above two papers, the current discourse analysis undertook a similar, but adapted path. A different set of categories emerged apropos the context and type of respondents. The findings revealed that within the discourse of adopting Western methods in Omani education, the respondents employed dialogues of defence, disapproval, compliance and tension, which will be presented and discussed in Chapter Eight: Findings III (Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Interview Data).

There is no space and no necessity for an extended discussion of Foucault's analysis here since the study is not an epistemology on Michel Foucault. I have adopted his ideas because a practical use of his categories and techniques yields a more penetrating and revealing account of the subject treated. I have used the above Australian models unproblematically and without sustained critical treatment simply because they guide me to use Foucault's ideas and yield deeper insights and analysis of the issues and motivations at stake.

### **5.7. Reliability and Validity of the Study**

Reliability (also dependability) and validity (also trustworthiness) (See e.g. Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) are central aspects to determine the quality of any research. Even though they are rooted in the positivist paradigm and hence quantitative research, they are also used in the naturalistic or qualitative approach, albeit differently (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability refers to the degree to which the results obtained using a research instrument are consistent or stable over time while validity refers to the extent to which the research methods and data address and measure the research topic they intend to measure (Babbie, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Denscombe, 2003; Golafshani, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In other words, reliability and validity reflect how dependable and accurate the research methods and results are.

To achieve reliability and validity in the present study, many strategies were adopted. Most significantly, the study blended both quantitative and qualitative methods using an online survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, respectively. Mixed

methods approach to research enables researchers to improve the validity and reliability of their findings (Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Mertens, 2015). Second, even though the study was predominantly qualitative, both phases were equally stressed at all levels of design, procedure and analysis to increase the rigour of the study. Third, explicit accounts of the entire process including major decisions and challenges were provided in earlier sections in the chapter. According to Denscombe (2003), issues pertaining to reliability, especially in qualitative research, can be dealt with by delivering an explicit description of the aims of the research, how the research was undertaken, and most crucially the rationale behind key decisions, such as sampling.

These strategies as well as additional ones adopted to achieve the reliability and validity of the study are described below in no particular order.

- Holding several extensive in-depth discussions about the design with the supervisor and other research students.
- Pilot testing both instruments: the questionnaire and the interview guide. The questionnaire was also re-piloted after implementing feedback from the pilot study.
- Using an online survey tool, namely Google Forms, and Microsoft Excel to generate the statistics from the questionnaire data. This strategy was used to reduce potential threats to “statistical conclusion validity” and hence to draw more accurate inferences (Creswell, 2009, p. 162).
- Frequent in-depth discussions about the analysis and the coding procedure with the supervisor took place at all levels of the process.
- Codes emerging from data of the questionnaire’s open-ended item were checked and verified by a person familiar with the context of study. Uniformity of interpretation across people can improve reliability and validity of results.
- Interviews were all recorded and transcribed. Analysis and interpretations were only based on the transcribed recorded conversations to minimise subjectivity as much as possible. Denscombe (2003, p. 190) reports that one disadvantage of interviews is that “consistency and objectivity are hard to achieve” owing to the uniqueness of context and individuals, which can have “an adverse effect on reliability”. All the same, this characteristic improves the validity of the results since “data can be checked for accuracy as they are collected” (Denscombe, 2003,

p. 189). After all, validity is one strength of qualitative research (Babbie, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

Since most priority or weight of the study was placed on the qualitative interviews, it is worthwhile allocating some space here to discuss relevant validity issues in relation to the analysis of interviews.

### **5.7.1. Constructivism and Validity Issues**

Since a constructivist/interpretivist researcher does not attempt to uncover a single truth, but multiple meanings, from the realities of the participants, seeking outside verification of their analysis or their identified themes is not a concern. Ponterotto (2005, p. 130) contends that another researcher examining the same data may unearth different themes, but both analyses may be correct; thus, it is left to the reader to judge the rigour of the research based on its 'thick description'.

### **5.7.2. Role of the Researcher**

Denscombe (2003) suggests that one way of increasing confidence in the validity of qualitative research is reporting the role of the researcher in the study. Unlike quantitative research, which tends to emphasise objective numerical data that exist independently of the researcher, hence detachment of the latter, involvement of the researcher in data collection and data interpretation are highly emphasised in qualitative research as the researcher is considered an integral part of the instrument.

In the present study, the researcher conducted the interviews, transcribed the recorded conversations and analysed them without seeking consensus from other researchers. However, extensive discussions with the supervisor guided the analysis process, leading to the adoption of two different passes of investigation, content analysis and an alternative discourse analysis using Foucauldian categories, to attack the data and uncover the realities of the participants. It must be noted that while the researcher recognises the influence of the researcher's self on the process, any instances of biased interpretation and reporting were avoided as much as possible and findings were compared with existing knowledge and other contexts.



## **5.8. Ethical Considerations of the Study**

Ethical guidelines as directed by the University of York were followed and ethical approval was granted by the Department of Education Ethics Committee prior to undertaking both phases of data collection: the questionnaire and the interviews.

### **5.8.1. Informed Consent Form**

Consent was sought from all people who participated in the study.

1. An electronic informed consent, which was placed after the introduction to the online questionnaire, provided all respondents with the 'required' question to select either 'Agree' or 'Disagree' to take part. Had they preferred not to proceed, they were instructed to simply leave the page with no data being collected. Anonymity was maintained.
2. In the case of interviews, all potential participants who were approached for an interview were provided with a brief introduction, both verbal and written, along with an official letter signed by the researcher's supervisor and an informed consent form and they were encouraged to ask any questions they may have. It was important at this stage of scheduling appointments to keep a record of the participants. So, if the participant was willing to grant the researcher permission to conduct an interview, they were requested to sign a consent sheet, writing in their details and specifying a convenient date (and venue) for the interview. The consent form detailed the procedure of the interview (type and time), means of storing and handling of the data and the uses of the data. A week before each interview, the participant was contacted to remind them of the appointment and confirm the date and time of interview.

### **5.8.2. Confidentiality of the Study and Data Management**

Several procedures were followed to ensure that the confidentiality of the study was maintained at all stages of data collection and analysis:

- Questionnaire responses and data were anonymised.

- Interview participants were given pseudonyms to conceal their identities. However, personal data was assessed and judged as identifiable or not on a case-by-case basis. Any identifiable data was made anonymous accordingly.

During the recording of the interview, the participant had the right to decline to answer any question and request the recording to stop, at any time, and for that recording, or part thereof, to be withdrawn from the study. In addition, they had up to seven days after completion of the interview to withdraw their agreement to participate, and that at that point any information they did not want to be used would be destroyed.

## **5.9. Summary**

In this chapter, the research methodology and methods were discussed. Constructivist/interpretivist theoretical frameworks guided the study's design, which adopted a sequential qualitative-dominant mixed methods approach to investigate the topic. A first quantitative phase implemented an online questionnaire that targeted a population of end users of the Omani HE system, including graduates, current students, teachers/ lecturers and administrators. A second phase of semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposefully selected sample of highly placed officials, including decision-makers and managers, coming from institutions that had a direct or indirect influence on the Omani education sector. Analysis of the questionnaire data involved quantitative and qualitative methods whereas content analysis and discourse analysis using Foucauldian categories were adopted to attack the interview data. Reliability and validity issues were also presented and discussed in the chapter in relation to both instruments. No major problems were encountered regarding ethical issues since the study involved adult participants. Following the same structure of data collection and analysis, the findings will be presented progressively in three chapters:

- Chapter Six will tackle the findings of the questionnaire, both quantitative and qualitative.
- Chapter Seven will go one level deeper to present and discuss the findings of the interview data content analysis.
- Chapter Eight will go much deeper into the analysis and present the findings of the discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian tools.

## Chapter Six: Findings I (the Questionnaire)

### 6.1. Overview

This chapter is a discussion and analysis of the findings of the survey questionnaire, both quantitative and qualitative, in an attempt to elucidate the viewpoints of respondents and provide full answers to the first sub-question:

How do end users of the education system in Oman perceive, negotiate and appropriate the use of Western methods in HE?

The chapter is divided into three main sections. First, a description of the respondents and general findings about their characteristics and distribution are provided. Second, categories emerging from the closed-ended items, which were processed statistically, are presented and discussed. These themes, pertaining to pre-defined topics, reveal the viewpoints the respondents expressed about factors influencing the use of Western methods and the utility of these methods in the Omani education system. Third, the findings of the qualitative open-ended item, that is the comments communicated by the respondents, are also presented thematically based on the categorisation stage of the content analysis process. The chapter ends with a summary.

### 6.2. Description of the Questionnaire Participants

The general distribution of the 165 Omani participants by subgroups was as follows:

- **Gender:** Female respondents formed a large majority (80.6%) of the sample compared to male respondents, who made up the remaining 19.4%. Some research has indeed shown that gender differences do exist in survey response and nonresponse behaviour. Generally, the likelihood of women participation is higher than that of men, especially in conventional modes of paper questionnaire administration (Groves, Dillman, Eltinge, & Little, 2002), and to a limited extent in the comparatively newer form of online-administered surveys (Smith, 2008). That said, the researcher, as a female, might have managed to attract more attention from women respondents.

- **Age Group:** Respondents aged 31-40 constituted 77.9% of the population, followed by those aged 23-30 (26.7%), and 18-22 age group (16.4%) whereas only 9.1% identified themselves as belonging to the age group 40-51. No participant belonged to the age group 60+.
- **Education Level:** Of the 165 participants, 97 subjects or 58.8% were holders of a bachelor's degree, 20.6% had a master's degree, 11.5% received a technical/vocational training diploma, and only 4.2% completed a doctorate degree while 3.6% were secondary school or General Diploma graduates. This is quite a normal distribution especially in an Arab Gulf state where completing a first cycle HE degree is becoming very important. In addition, there are more people with a master's degree than the highest and more prestigious, but more demanding doctorate degree.
- **Type of HEI:** 132 people (80%) reported that they studied in a government HEI in Oman, compared to only 16 participants or 9.7% who studied in a private HEI in Oman. Again, this distribution could be considered logical, for the majority of young people in Oman prefer to go to a government rather than private HEI in Oman. The remaining 10.3% of respondents studied in 'other' countries, mainly the UAE, Egypt, the UK and the USA.
- **Occupation:** 53 respondents were schoolteachers (32.1%) and 44 were students at HEIs (26.7%), representing the first and second largest proportions, respectively. Taking into consideration that the majority of the sample at hand was comprised of women, it was expected that the number of schoolteachers would be higher than other subgroups since schoolteachers in Oman are more likely to be women. Forty-three respondents (26.1%) identified their occupation as 'Other' and as expected, only a small group consisted of administrators at school (4.2%) and at a HEI (3.6%).

Table 6.1 shows the numbers and percentages of the respondents according to each demographic category.

**Table 6. 1** Demographics of the Questionnaire's Respondents

| <b>Category</b>                      | <b>Subgroup</b>                          | <b>N</b>   | <b>%</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--|------------|----------|
| <b>1. Gender</b>                     | Male                                     | 32         | 19.4     |
|                                      | Female                                   | 133        | 80.6     |
| <b>2. Age</b>                        | 18-22                                    | 27         | 16.4     |
|                                      | 23-30                                    | 44         | 26.7     |
|                                      | 31-40                                    | 79         | 47.9     |
|                                      | 41-50                                    | 15         | 9.1      |
| <b>3. Highest Level of Education</b> | Secondary School/ General Diploma        | 6          | 3.6      |
|                                      | Technical/Vocational                     | 19         | 11.5     |
|                                      | Bachelor's                               | 97         | 58.8     |
|                                      | Master's                                 | 34         | 20.6     |
|                                      | Doctorate                                | 7          | 4.2      |
|                                      | Other                                    | 2          | 1.2      |
| <b>4. Type of Tertiary Education</b> | Government in Oman                       | 132        | 80       |
|                                      | Private in Oman                          | 16         | 9.7      |
|                                      | Other                                    | 17         | 10.3     |
| <b>5. Current Occupation</b>         | Student at college/university            | 44         | 26.7     |
|                                      | School teacher                           | 53         | 32.1     |
|                                      | Teacher/ lecturer at college/ university | 12         | 7.3      |
|                                      | Management in school                     | 7          | 4.2      |
|                                      | Management in college/ university        | 6          | 3.6      |
|                                      | Other                                    | 43         | 26.1     |
| <b>Total n</b>                       |  | <b>165</b> |          |

### 6.3. Findings of the Closed-Ended Items

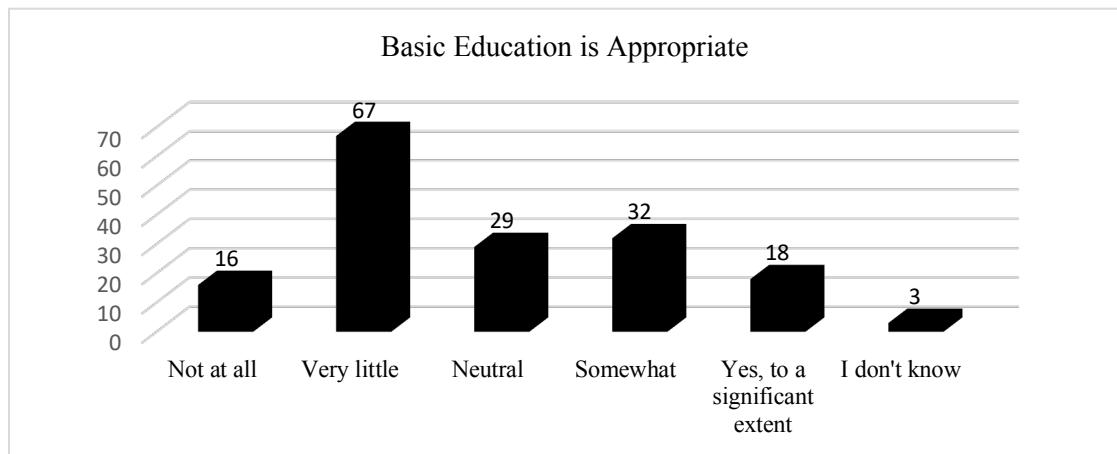
#### 6.3.1. Appropriateness of Omani Education Systems

Question 1 investigated how appropriate the Omani education system was at both levels of school education (SE) and higher education (HE). The results were as follows.

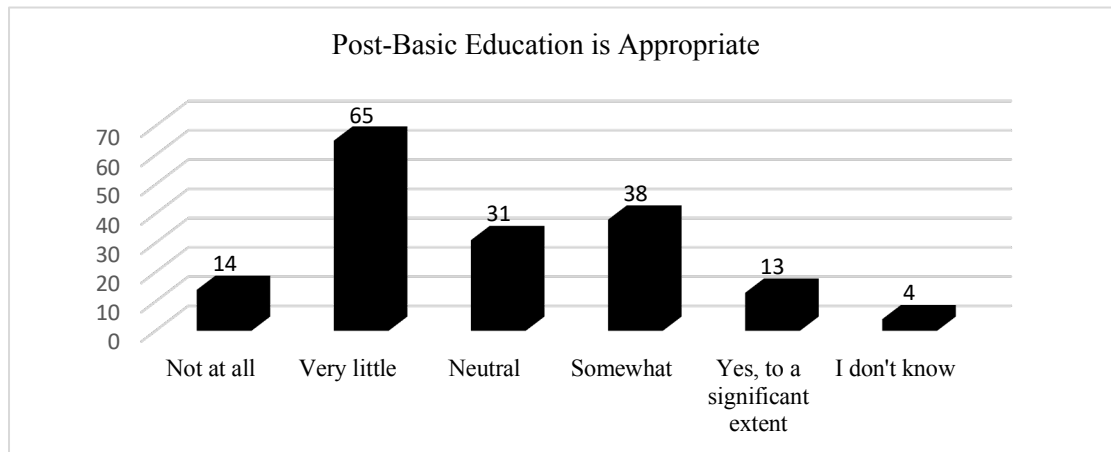
##### *First: School Education (Basic and Post-Basic Education)*

Although the responses, presented in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 spread throughout the scale, half of the population viewed the SE system at both Basic (16+67=83) and Post-Basic (14+6=79) levels as either inappropriate or a little appropriate. Specifically, a majority 40.6% (n=67) felt that Basic Education (BE) ‘very little’ met the needs and requirements of Omani society while a similar and very close percentage of 39.4% (n=65) felt the same about Post-Basic Education (PBE).

**Figure 6. 1** Appropriateness of Omani Basic Education (BE)

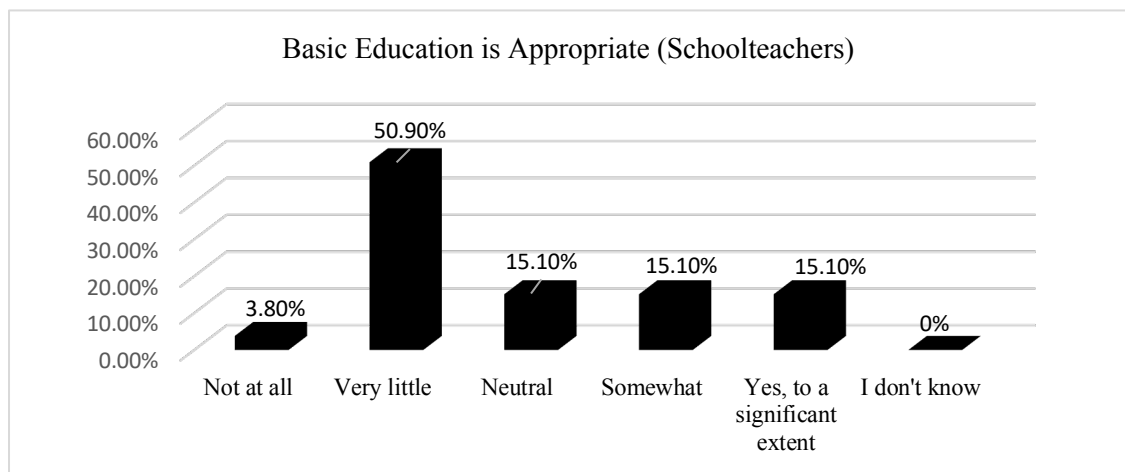


**Figure 6. 2** Appropriateness of Omani Post-Basic Education (PBE)

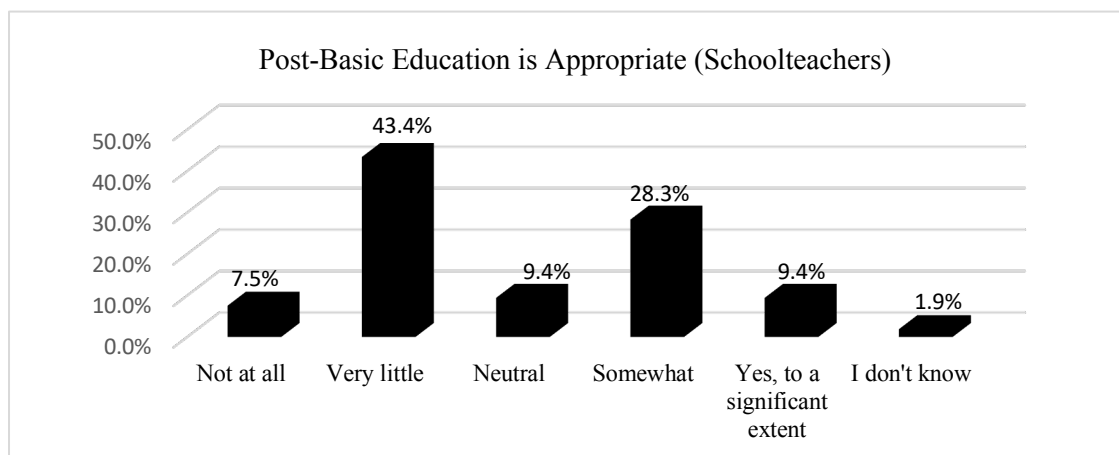


Limiting the focus to schoolteachers, a group directly linked to the school system, Figures 6.3 and 6.4 show that this subgroup (total n=53) was not entirely content with the appropriateness of the system of which they are considered major contributors and end users. A little over half thought that BE (54.7%) and PBE (50.9%) were either completely inappropriate or appropriate only to a very little degree.

**Figure 6.3** Schoolteachers' Views about Appropriateness of BE



**Figure 6.4** Schoolteachers' Views about Appropriateness of PBE

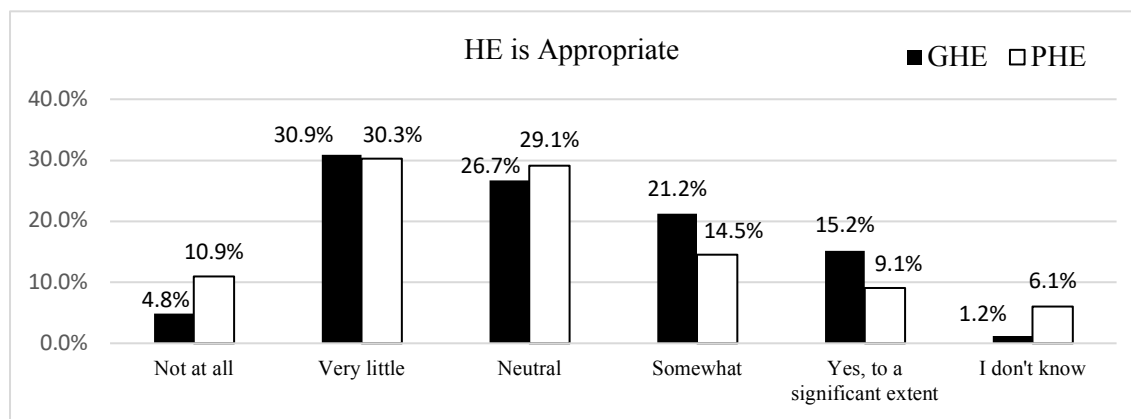


The above results indicate a huge degree of dissatisfaction with these systems, whose concepts were imported from Western countries as part of the government's efforts to reform school education in Oman (Issan & Gomaa, 2010)

### Second: Higher Education

Regarding the appropriateness of Omani higher education (HE) system, many chose to stay on the fence as Figure 6.5 illustrates. Even though a big number thought that both government HE (GHE) and private HE (PHE) systems were appropriate only to a very little degree (30.9% and 30.3%, respectively), many remained neutral with a percentage of 26.7% and 29.1%, respectively. Whilst this may reflect one problematic aspect about the middle category on the five or seven-point Likert Scale, the result can still count as a legitimate indication that the respondents were unsure about the appropriateness of HE. However, the results also suggest that people were slightly more positive about GHE than PHE, reflecting that the former embodies more ‘home-grown’ values and aspirations.

**Figure 6. 5** Appropriateness of Omani Higher Education (HE)



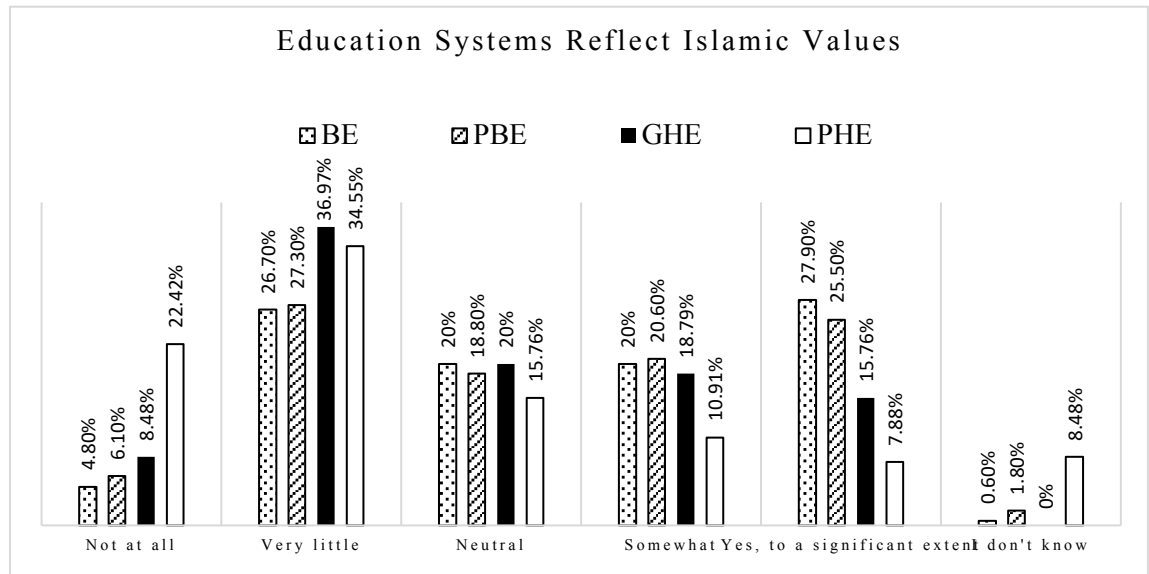
GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

### 6.3.2. Education Systems and Islamic Values of Omani Society

Question 2 dealt with the extent the different stages in the education system reflected Islamic values that are considered a major pillar in Omani society and an important source of Omani culture and value system. A basic comparison of all responses, displayed by the graph in Figure 6.6, demonstrates that respondents believed HE was generally less concerned with Islamic values than SE. Of the two HE sectors, PHE was thought to be the farthest from incorporating these values, with 22.42% of the population indicating that it did not take them into consideration at all.



**Figure 6. 6 Education Systems and Islamic Values**

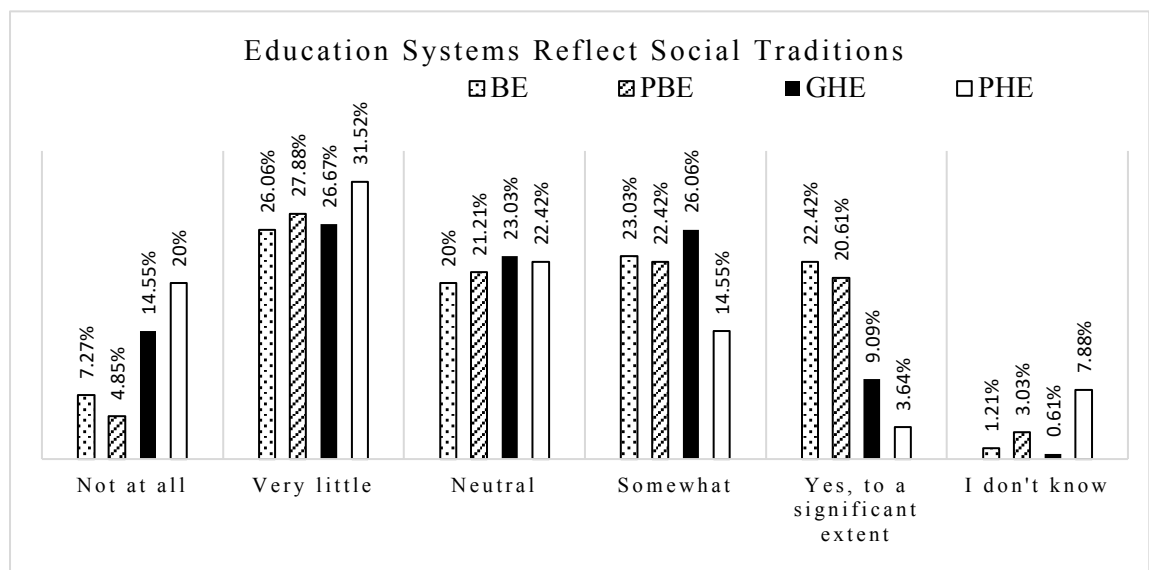


BE= Basic education; PBE= Post-basic education; GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

### 6.3.3. Education Systems and Social Traditions of Omani Society

Figure 6.7 displays the views of the respondents about how much they thought the different education systems took into consideration the social traditions of Omani society (Question 3). Similar to Islamic values, respondents believed that social traditions were reflected the most in school education, particularly BE system. PHE, once again, was believed to be the system that mirrored social traditions the least.

**Figure 6. 7 Education Systems and Social Traditions**



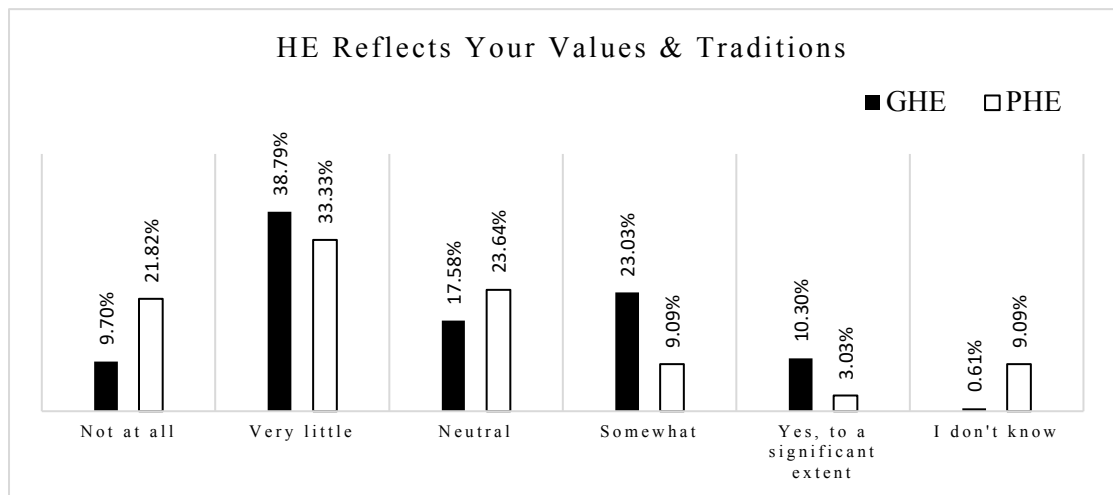
BE= Basic education; PBE= Post-basic education; GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private H

### 6.3.4. HE and Respondents' Values, Ambitions and Opinions

#### *HE and Respondents' Values and Traditions*

Regarding their personal values and traditions, 38.79% and 33.33%, respectively, reported that government HE institutions (GHEIs) and private ones (PHEIs) reflected their values and traditions to a very little degree. 21.85% believed PHEIs did not at all consider their values and traditions. On the positive side of the scale, GHEIs fared better in this respect as 23.03% believed that the former 'somewhat' took account of their values and traditions and 10.30% thought that GHEIs reflected them to a significant extent. Figure 6.8 offers a comparison of the two sets of results.

**Figure 6. 8** HE and Respondents' Values and Traditions

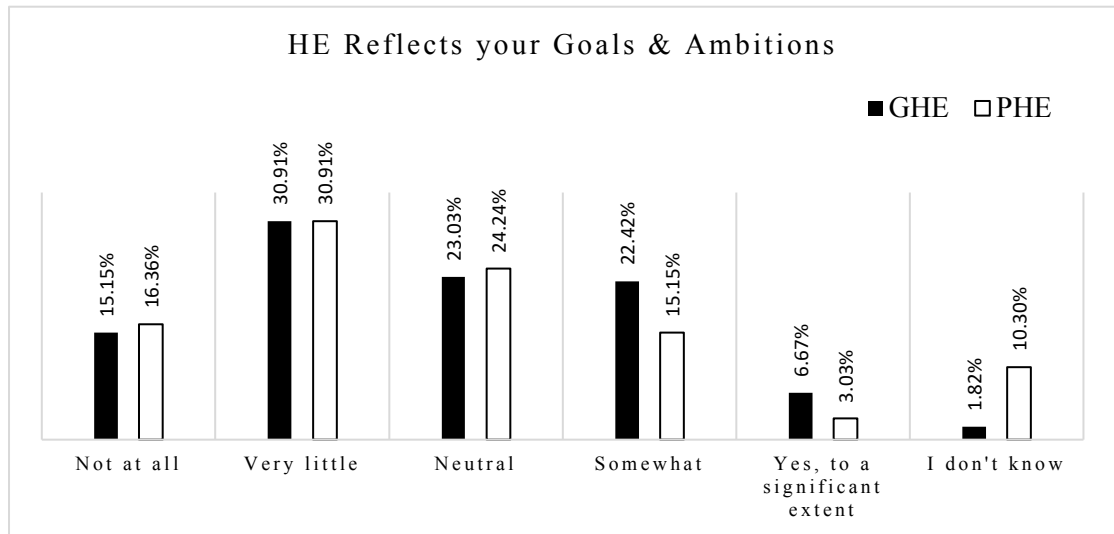


GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

#### *HE and Respondents' Goals and Ambitions*

Attitudes about personal goals and ambitions gave identical or almost identical results for the two systems at the negative side of the scale, for example, 30.91% expressed that both GHEIs and PHEIs reflected their goals and ambitions only to a very little degree. Overall, more people felt that Omani HEIs did not represent their goals and ambitions, as Figure 6.9 shows.

**Figure 6. 9** HE and Respondents' Goals and Ambitions

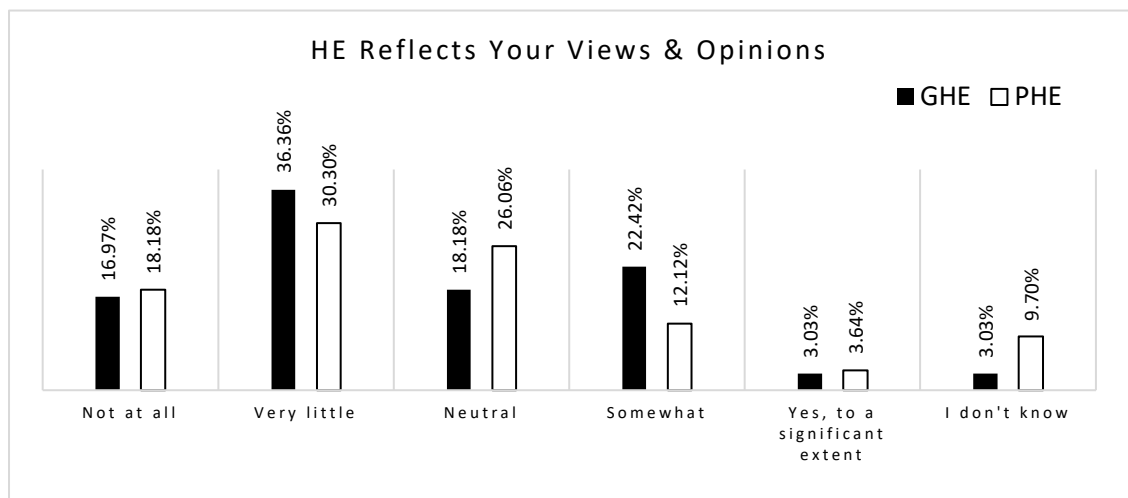


GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

*HE and Respondents' Views and Opinions*

The third category probed whether HE reflected the respondents' views and opinions (Figure 6.10). 36.36% felt that GHE very little reflected their opinions while 30.30% believed the same about PHE. Overall, the results indicate that Omanis do not feel that HE considers their views to a satisfactory level.

**Figure 6. 10** HE and Respondents' Views and Opinions

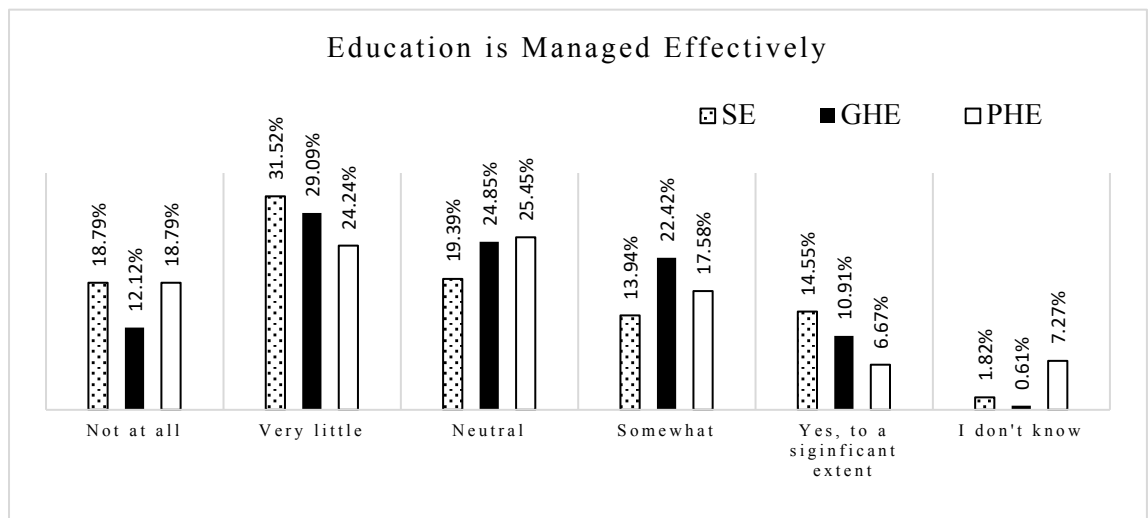


GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

### 6.3.5. Management of Education Systems

The next set of results demonstrate how effectively the respondents believed the education system in Oman was managed at its different stages. A comparison of all viewpoints shows inconclusive results. However, it can be seen from the graph in Figure 6.11 that more people were leaning towards the negative side of the scale with SE believed to be the least effectively managed system.

**Figure 6. 11** Management of Omani Education System

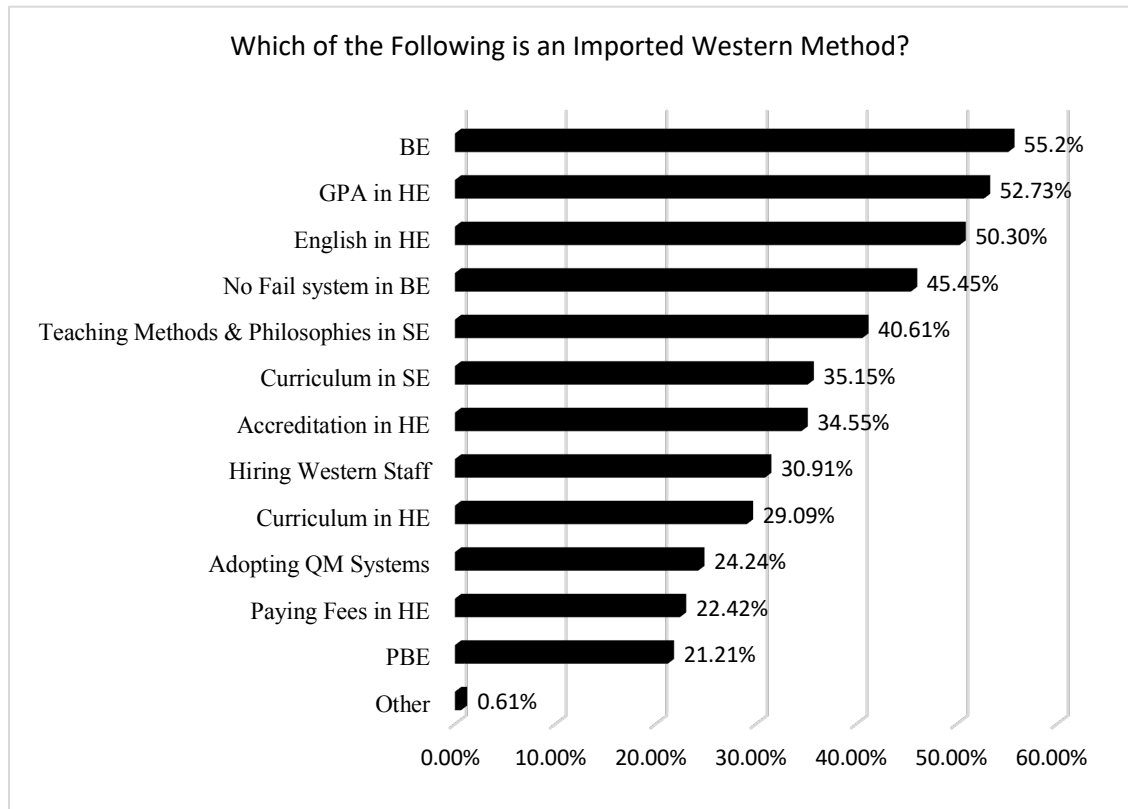


SE= School education; GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

### 6.3.6. Imported Western Methods in Omani Education System

Question 7 provided twelve examples of systems, methods or policies already implemented in the Omani education system to see which of them the respondents considered to be 'imported' from Western countries. The graph in Figure 6.12 lists them in descending order, according to the selection of respondents.

**Figure 6. 12** Imported Western Methods in Omani Education System



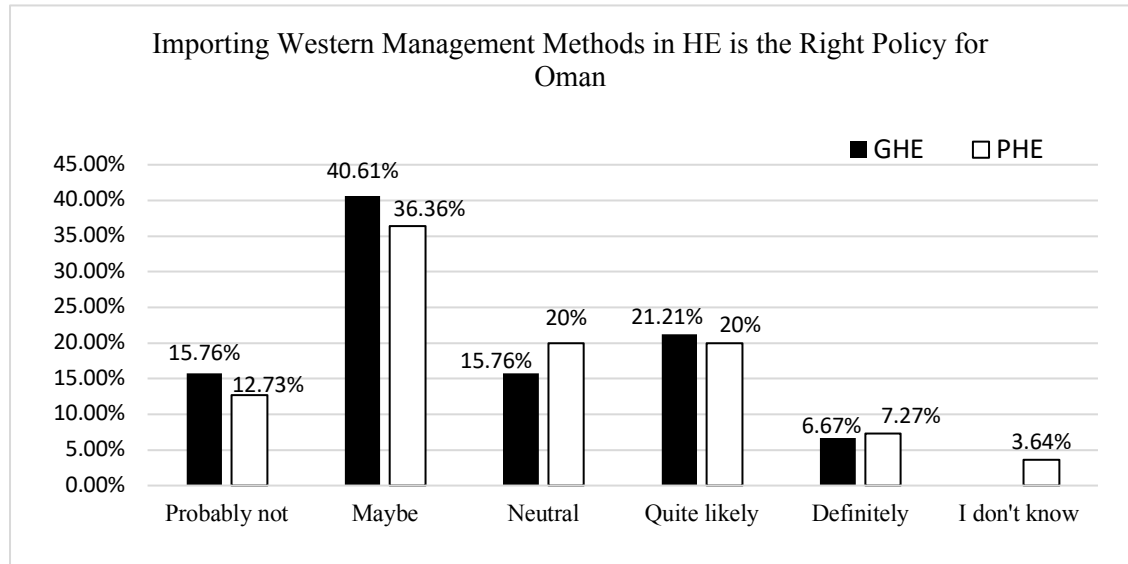
In the top three spots with more than half of the participants viewing them as ‘imported Western’ systems came Basic Education (BE) first with 55.2%, followed by GPA or credit hours system in HE (52.73%), and then using English as a medium of instruction in HE (50.30%). Only 34.55% believed accreditation programmes in HE, which are in fact adopted from the Australian education system, were imported. Moreover, the adoption of quality management (QM) models and philosophies came in tenth, with a percentage of 24.24%.

**6.3.7. The Policy of Importing Western Management Methods in Omani HE**

The respondents’ perceptions about the policy of importing Western management methods and implementing them in HE were quite similar for the two divisions of Omani HE, as illustrated in Figure 6.13. However, slightly more people thought that the policy may be the right thing to do in GHE (40.61%) than in PHE (36.36%). However, more people believed that it probably was not the right policy for the former than the latter (15.76% and 12.73%, respectively). Around 20-21% of the respondents thought it was quite likely the right policy for HE whereas only around 7% were definitely supportive

of the policy. In short, the varied views suggested that Omanis were not absolutely certain about the policy.

**Figure 6. 13** Importing Western Management Methods in Omani HE



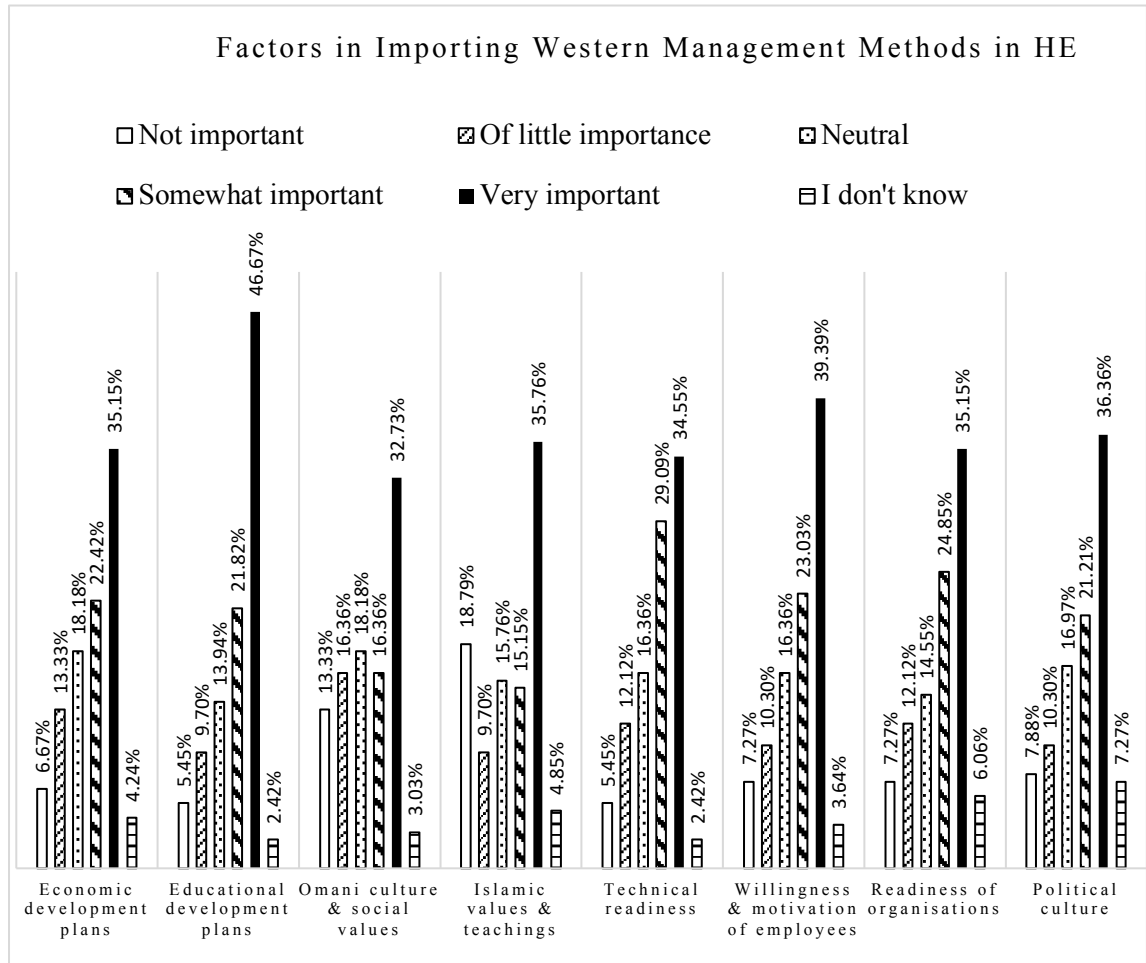
GHE= Government HE; PHE= Private HE

### 6.3.8. Factors Influencing Implementation of Western Management Methods in Omani HE

Regarding factors that might play an important role in the adoption and implementation of Western management methods in Omani HE, 46.67% of the respondents considered educational development plans as the most significant factor. The second most important factor was willingness and motivation of employees (39.39%), followed by political culture (36.36%) and Islamic values and teachings (35.76%).

One striking observation about the results (Figure 6.14), however, is that Islamic values and Omani culture and social values came at the top of the negative side of the scale as being unimportant factors by 18.79% and 13.33%, respectively.

**Figure 6. 14** Factors Influencing Importing Western Management Methods in Omani HE



The variation in the attitudes of the respondents might suggest that:

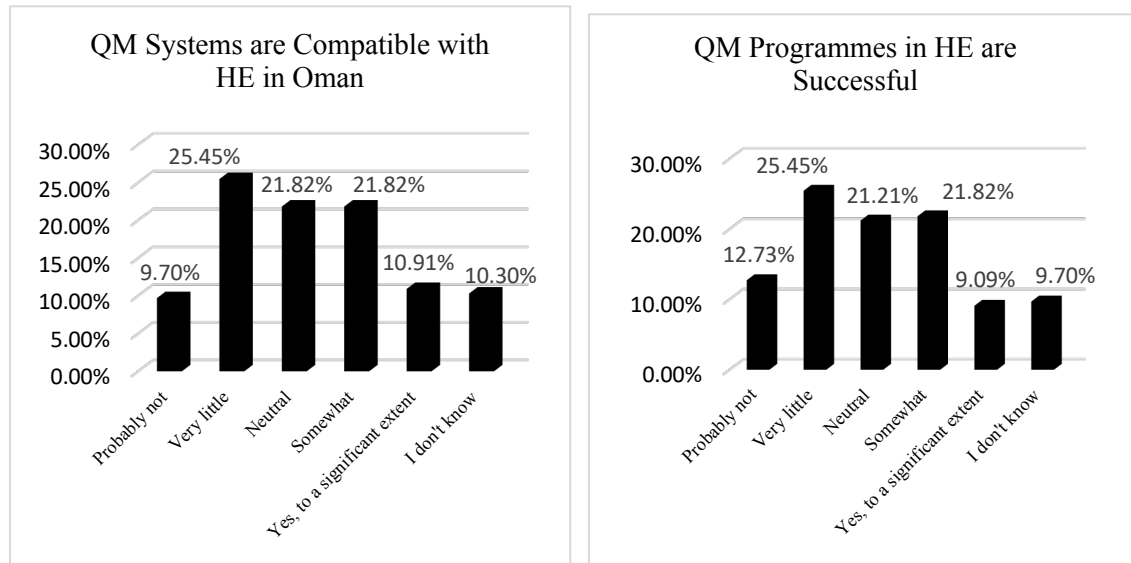
- The public is not always well informed about the processes involved in the implementation of imported methods in their institutions or in the education system at large.
- The public is not aware how various factors impact the process of borrowing.
- The public possesses a more or less pragmatic attitude that downplays the role and influence of religion and/or culture in education.

### 6.3.9. Compatibility and Success of Quality Management in Omani HE

The respondents also expressed their opinions about how compatible and successful they believed quality management (QM) philosophies and programmes were in Omani HE.

A comparison of both results (Figure 6.15) produced similar patterns of views, which may be suggestive of the existence of a strong link between compatibility and success. However, the results were inconclusive since about 21- 22% of the respondents preferred to stay neutral while approximately 10% reported that they just did not know. This had an impact on the overall results, which were scattered along the scale.

**Figure 6. 15** Compatibility and Success of QM Systems in Omani HE



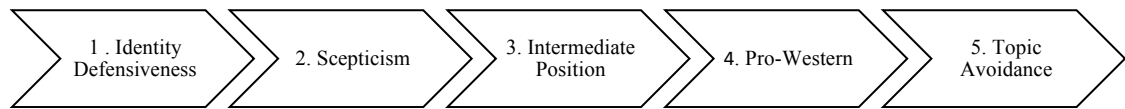
QM= Quality Management

#### 6.4. Results of the Open-Ended Item

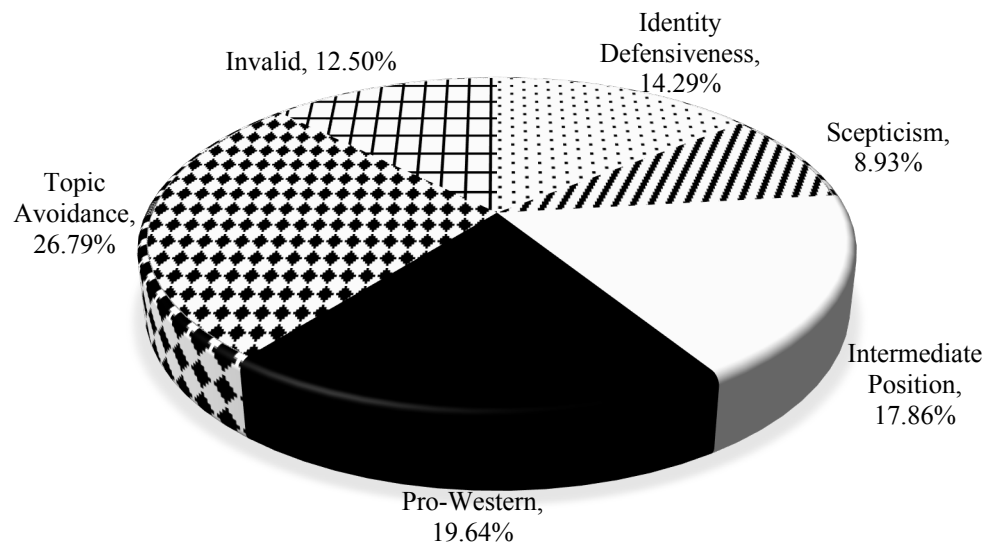
The text comments inputted by the respondents were analysed for any manifestations of common meanings, viewpoints and patterns. The analysis revealed a visible range of perspectives and values the participants expressed in respect to the use of Western methods. Accordingly, these views were classified into five main categories: identity defensiveness, scepticism, intermediate position, pro-Western and topic avoidance, as Figure 6.16 illustrates. Figure 6.17 further presents the weight of each category in relation to all comments.



**Figure 6. 16** Viewpoints about the Use of Western Methods in Omani Education System



**Figure 6. 17** Viewpoints by Percentage (All Comments)



#### 6.4.1. Identity Defensiveness

The first group includes the ones who showed signs of identity defensiveness, be it the classical type of cultural or religious, or the less classical linguistic identity. This group is characterised by a strong nationalistic projection and belief that philosophy should originate from the country’s religion, language and cultural value system. While one respondent asserted that it “must emanate from the philosophy of the state and from Islamic principles and take into consideration customs and traditions”, another insisted on using “whatever related to our religion and customs and not to copy paste everything.” Highlighting the educational system, one participant believed that “our education system should be empowered by our values, culture and religion. It should represent our identity at all levels”.

Accentuating ‘curriculum’, one participant stood firm that “curricula plans must be based on foundations and principles from the Omani society and not from other societies”. Moreover, a respondent cautioned officials and decision makers in the country to “stay away from importing traditions and customs incompatible with our culture and religion”. The association of the concept of ‘Western’ to the use of English as a medium of instruction in Omani higher education institutions was also observed in this group. One participant, for example, wondered why “a lot of universities do not teach graduate courses in Arabic” and questioned, “so where is the application of religion and Arabic in our institutes and universities?” This could be an indication that, in addition to culture and religion, language is regarded as one major representation of national identity.

Out of this group, nevertheless, this final response was the most intriguing. Not only did the respondent “advise” the researcher not to make “big assumptions” about “Western influence on our educational policies”, but she also warned the latter from falling into “that trap of mono-thinking and Western imperialism and its influence on our thinking and practice”, as this implied that “we are powerless followers to the West”. This respondent felt that this study was not “empowering” Omanis and that it would “lead others to believe we are blind followers to the West. We as a country and individuals need to be accountable for our decisions for ourselves and our country.” Such expressive choice of terminology, which was nowhere to be found in the survey items, could be suggestive of a certain type of Arab mentality in relation to the region’s historical connections with the West.

#### **6.4.2. Scepticism**

This group shared similar attitudes with the first one (identity defensiveness), albeit not as extreme. Here, the people were less defensive about their culture, religion and language, but more sceptical about the policy of importing Western methods as they questioned their effectiveness and utility in the Omani context. For example, one respondent described the policy and process as being “random following of new systems without analysing and finding out the extent of their suitability and quality to this society”. Similarly, another, who specifically referred to the grading on curves systems, which are believed to be adopted from the West, described the latter as “a random philosophy that may not give the students their right”. “Western philosophy may not work with us in Oman” was one more response that insinuated a state of uncertainty

about the policy, thus suggesting that “we need a philosophy that suits our students in teaching and preparing curricula”.

Once again, the issue of language appears among the views of this group. For instance, one participant doubted the functionality of English for some graduates, openly stating that she did not think “an Islamic studies, maths or Arabic teacher should study courses in English as they will not benefit from them in the future”. Likewise, another pointed out how “Western philosophies do not say that teaching in higher education MUST [stress in original comment] be in a foreign language”, which, according to the respondent, “is not compatible with the system in Oman”. Calling it “compulsory use of English in higher education”, the same respondent believed it prevented “undergraduate students from achieving their potential goals”. To this respondent, “blind adoption”, should not be considered as Omani and Western contexts are different. To defend her argument, she gave the example of the adoption of a longer school day, which she believed was more convenient for Western weather but not as effective to teachers and learners in Oman’s hot weather.

#### **6.4.3. Intermediate Position**

In contrast to the previous two groups, the people in Group 3 adopted a middle position. Notwithstanding the flexibility in their reaction, reservations about culture and religion kept recurring, for they predominated the concepts of adaptation and accommodation mirrored in the attitudes of the majority of this group. Two respondents, for example, were with the view of taking from the West “the useful” that is commensurate with “our religion, customs and traditions” with the second cautioning policymakers “not to bring the idea fully without revision”. A third person equally agreed that, “in case of interest in the application of Western methods or philosophies, they must be compatible with the Omani nature in terms of religion, values and morals. Other experiences should not be taken as a whole, as they may not fully correspond to the nature of the region.” Furthermore, a fourth respondent asserted that it was “not the method but how to apply it to specific society with specific culture and religion” was what mattered. Talking about the management of educational institutions, a fifth respondent stated that “one size doesn’t fit all”, hence the need to consider different factors such as “customs and attitudes of people”, keeping in mind that “adapting Western systems might need much more time to be successfully implemented”. Not only did one respondent call for the “development

of the idea of Western management in line with the culture and values of Islam”, but also encouraged “attracting scientific, intellectual cadres with a powerful personality who can provide constructive criticism, without favouritism or flattery, provided that they are not in conflict with religion and Omani values”.

Nevertheless, compatibility with Omani context was not the only factor expressed in the views of this group. “We have to use in Oman whatever policies proven that they are successful”, argued one respondent. However, not only was the term ‘successful’ left undefined, but it was also detached from any geographical domain, suggesting benefit from successful Eastern models as well. “We have to make use of other people development as long as they don’t contradict our environment”, added the same participant. “It is very important to get use of successful management experience”, similarly stressed another participant, urging for “continuous evaluation, adaptation and follow up of the plans and application” to arrive at “acceptable standards”. What is more, one respondent emphasised the importance of commitment to the application process. “Yes if we implement it, we should follow it”, she stressed, adding that “the community should be aware about it”.

Summarising the position of compromise among the people of this group, one final participant argued that while the “philosophy must originate from the society itself, Western management can be used in the Omani education system in line with the philosophy of society.”

#### **6.4.4. Pro-Western**

This group was guided by a pro-Western outlook, demonstrating a practical business-like approach that prioritised educational and/or socio-economic benefits and improvements that could be obtained from importing Western methods.

While one respondent gave a general remark that Omani education systems should have “a little management from Western philosophies”, another was more precise about the kind of management systems. This respondent believed that the “goodness and strength of society stem from the power of its educational systems”, hence the need in Omani higher education for “strong management systems that are in line with international quality systems that strictly apply the principles of governance and accountability”.

A couple of respondents preferred to support the application of Western methods by trivialising the power of Western influence on the Omani context. On the one hand, one participant who acknowledged the superiority of Western countries as being “more advance[d] than us in Oman” felt that there was “no harm to take the Western philosophy and adopt it accordingly”. On the other hand, the other respondent, who anticipated rejection or perhaps even feelings of repulsion, reassured Omanis that it was “not a shame using Western methods and ways”, because it was only an issue of selecting “the right way at the appropriate stage”.

Sentiments of sheer and simple excitement about certain imported Western approaches also emerged as a sign of a pro-Western stance. An English language supervisor commended “a new method in teaching reading and writing to C1 students called Jolly Phonics”. “It is amazing. It works very well”, she enthusiastically explained. Referring to modern technology, which is widely believed to be a Western product, another respondent not only called for the need to cope with “modern technology all around us”, but also encouraged Omanis to enrich their students with “up to date new methods” and make them “aware of the importance in tracing the new technical aspects in their study”. Finally, some went ahead to directly propose what they hoped to be imported from the West and applied in the Omani education system. The list, which included Western experts, ranking system, language, teachers and student counselling, is described in Table 6.2.

**Table 6. 2** Methods and Systems to Import from Western Countries

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Highest Education Level</b>        | <b>Occupation</b>                | <b>Things to import from the West</b>  |
|---------------|------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| F             | 31-40      | Master's degree                       | Chemist                          | <i>A good guidance for students from grade 10 until entering university is something we hope they adopt from Western countries.</i>  |
| F             | 31-40      | Master's degree                       | School teacher                   | <i>The use of ranking system among colleges and universities should be applied, especially for private education colleges.</i>   |
| F             | 23-30      | Master's degree                       | Student at university or college | <i>I think we need experts from the Western countries and there should be high standards in choosing those people not any foreigner is good.</i>   |
| M             | 23-30      | Technical/vocational training/diploma | Student at university or college | <i>Help students develop the language and learn the language of others.</i>  |
| M             | 18-22      | Technical/vocational training/diploma | Student at university or college | <i>We prefer bringing British or American teachers as they are native speakers of their mother tongue, whereas Indians, Filipinos and others pose some problems for students because of their broken English language.</i> |

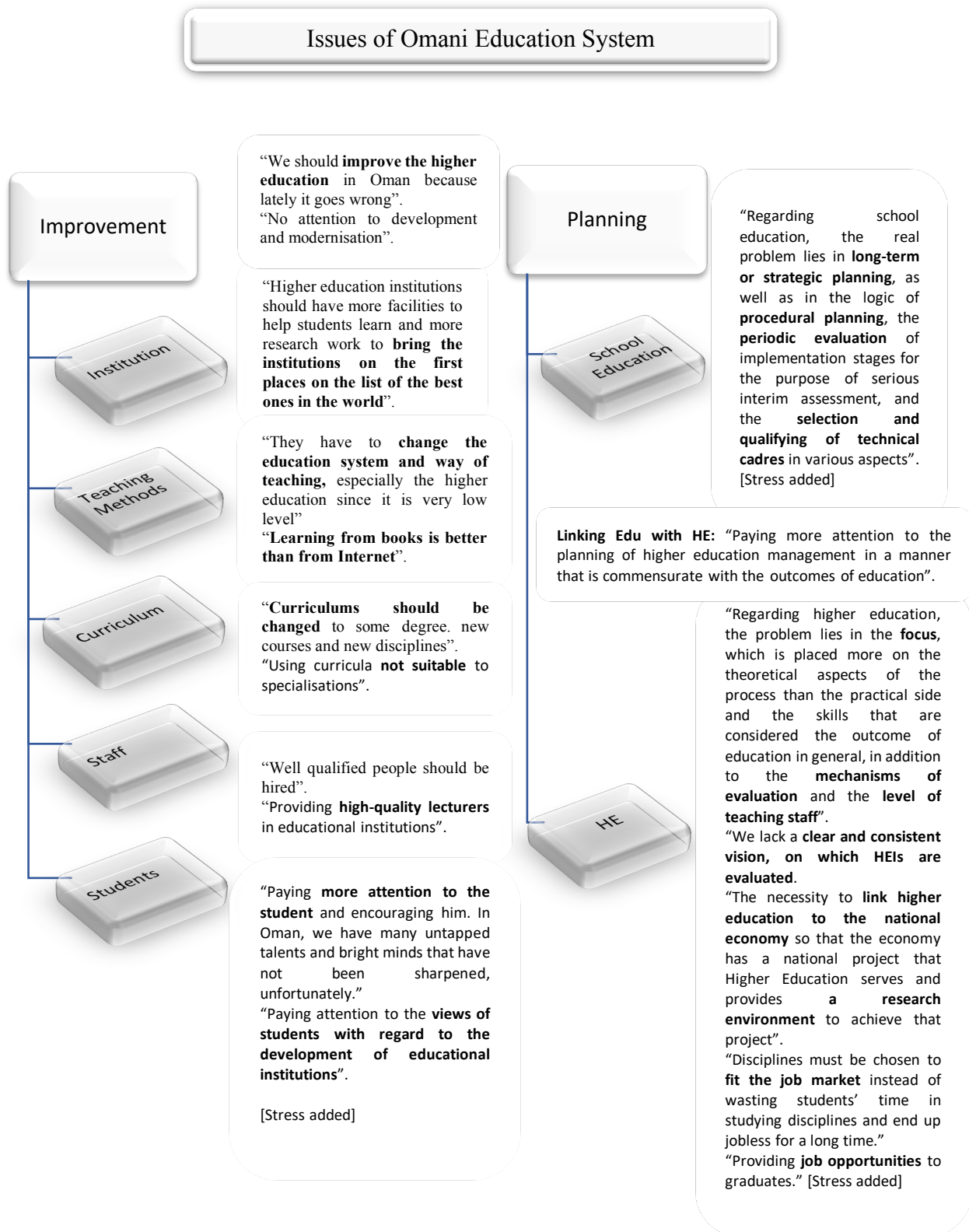
#### **6.4.5. Topic Avoidance**

Instead of answering the question, the people in this group avoided talking about the use of Western methods and rather expressed their tensions about some pressing issues they believed to exist within the current education system. This could be interpreted in two ways in relation to the subject at hand. One possibility is that they were indirectly criticising the desire and tendency of policymakers to import Western methods and models, when it was more imperative to find solutions to existing problems first. Alternatively, Western methods and philosophies already imported into the education system have not really improved the situation, and perhaps have even helped exacerbate certain existing issues or even bring about new problems. For example, one particular comment in which the respondent stated that “learning from books is better than from Internet” reflects a more traditional way of thinking as the respondent encouraged going

back to the old ways of teaching using books. This in a sense may suggest disapproval of new 'Western' methods of teaching, which advocate the use of Internet and technology in the classroom.

Figure 6.18 lists the issues expressed by this group, which could be all reduced under two overarching themes: 'improvement' and 'planning'.

**Figure 6. 18** Avoiders' List of Issues with Omani Education System





## 6.5. Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed the first set of the study's findings, those of the questionnaire, divided into two sections: quantitative and qualitative results.

Based on the respondents' answers to the first quantitative part, the following general points and conclusions can be made about the respondents' viewpoints regarding the current education system and the implementation of Western methods and philosophies:

- The respondents believed the various levels of the education system were mostly inappropriate and did not quite meet the needs of the Omani society.
- They mostly believed that Islamic values were not well reflected in the Omani education system, particularly in HE.
- They thought the education system did not fully incorporate the social traditions of Omani society.
- Generally, HE did not satisfactorily reflect the respondents': a. values and traditions; b. goals and ambitions; and c. views and opinions.
- Out of the various policies and methods adopted in the Omani education system, more than half the respondents believed that Basic Education, GPA system in HE and using English as a medium of instruction in HE were imported from the West. Other programmes and philosophies were also regarded as Western but to a lesser degree, such as teaching philosophies and curricula in school education, accreditation and quality management, among others.
- The majority of the respondents were not sure that importing Western management methods in HE was the right policy for Oman.
- The participants thought the five most important factors influencing the application of Western methods were:
  1. educational development plans
  2. willingness and motivation of the employees in HEIs
  3. political culture
  4. Islamic values and teachings
  5. economic development plans; readiness of organization (tied).

The analysis of the second qualitative part or text comments expressed by the respondents revealed that they were divided into five groups in their approach to negotiating the use of Western systems and philosophies:

- The first group was defensive about culture, Islam and the Arabic language. They strongly believed that education models and philosophies should emanate from the state's value system.
- The second group was sceptical about the utility of Western methods and questioned their suitability and compatibility to the Omani context.
- The third group held an intermediate position that in case of the government's interest in Western models, the latter should be accommodated to fit the Omani context.
- The fourth group held pro-Western values and encouraged the use of these methods as they believed they would benefit and improve the quality of the Omani education system.
- The people in the last group avoided the topic and instead expressed their tensions concerning different current problems and issues with the Omani education system.

The next chapter will go a bit deeper to present and discuss the study's second set of findings.

## **Chapter Seven: Findings II (Content Analysis of Interview Data)**

### **7.1. Overview**

This chapter will present and discuss the results that were gathered from the content analysis applied to the interview data. These constitute the first half of the answer to the study's second question: how do decision makers and senior management people in Omani HE negotiate and appropriate the use of Western methods? First, a description of the respondents will be provided. Then, the findings will be divided into three themes based on the respondents' viewpoints on the rationale of the practice, the process and potential conflicts. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **7.2. Description of the Interview Participants**

The study's 17 participants were divided into four groups according to authority level in relation to HE:

**Group A:** Senior decision makers in the education arena, be it general or higher education

**Group B:** Parliamentary/ consultative role in decision making

**Group C:** Institution-level senior managers and decision makers in public/ government HEIs

**Group D:** Institution-level senior managers and decision makers in private HEIs

The members of the first two groups are further identified by the level of power in decision making in education: high (H), medium (M) or participating (P). Table 7.1 provides a summary of the interviewees by group. The list included three females and four non-Omani respondents, who belonged to Groups A, C and D, but for fear that such details can be identifying, they have not been supplemented here.

**Table 7. 1** Groups of Interview Participants

| <b>Group A</b>           |            |            | <b>Group B</b>     |               | <b>Group C</b> |                           | <b>Group D</b>               |                   |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| MoHE                     | MoE        | EC         | State Council      | Shura Council | Dean           | Quality Assurance Officer | Assistant to Vice-Chancellor | Dean              |
| P02<br>(M)<br>P06<br>(H) | P07<br>(M) | P13<br>(H) | P05 (P)<br>P10 (H) | P15 (P)       | P11<br>P16     | P08<br>P17                | P03<br>P09<br>P14            | P01<br>P04<br>P12 |

MoHE= Ministry of Higher education; MoE= Ministry of Education; EC = Education Council

### **7.3. Views on the Rationale for Importing Western Methods and Systems**

One observation is that participants' views on the rationale were influenced by their sector and/or their specific job/ position reflecting the role the background of the participants played in the way they understood and negotiated the topic. This was not only mirrored in their answers, but also in the way they approached the answer. For example, most of the people in Group A were comfortable using the pronoun "We", identifying themselves as segments in the education decision making landscape whereas, as expected, respondents in the other groups, especially Groups C and D used the label "they" or "officials" to discuss the rationale. See Table 7.2 for a summary of the rationale findings.

#### **7.3.1. Factors related to the Historical Development of HE in Oman**

The most frequently mentioned rationale or reason for borrowing Western methods and systems was related to the local historical development of HE, and education in general, in Oman. The respondents mentioned several factors that incited, influenced or even demanded the adoption of Western systems and these mainly included: the nascent state of HE, affiliation in the private sector and the policy of adopting English as a medium of instruction in HE.

### *Nascent State of HE – Faster to Import*

Basically, the respondents reported how prior to the 1980s, a HE system did not exist in Oman and that the faster route was to import from already existing systems. P17 summarised the whole story stating, “seeing that the country [Oman] did not have its own system, instead of wasting years in creating a system from scratch, it was a good idea to actually borrow from other countries”. However, other respondents also added a few details to the origins of this importing story. For example, P16 noted that this was an “old practice” dating back to the early stages of the school education system in Oman, which was brought from other Arab states, a borrowing policy which continued when HE began in the country. He gave the example of the foundation of the Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS), whose project was surrendered to a New Zealand (NZ) experts’ company by the Omani officials in order to save time. Moreover, P13 pointed out that at the beginning the government depended on a scholarship programme for tertiary education and the students who were sent to some Arab states and Western countries such as the US, the UK, and other European countries, ultimately had a role to play in the initial decision to import from outside.

In short, importing from the West was about taking a shortcut to accelerate the establishment of a HE system. However, P10, a parliamentary official with high decision-making powers, explained that because it was easy to get things that were ready, this gradually developed into a “pattern we got used to in the region”, not only in Oman.

### *Affiliation: A Faster Path to a (Quality) Private HE System*

Another angle in the historical development of HE rationale that many respondents gave as a strong reason for the practice of importing Western models was the policy of affiliation of local private HEIs with foreign ones, which was imposed by the government to ensure a quality private HE sprung in Oman in the 1990s. This, subsequently, brought other support and quality management programmes.

For example, P06, a senior decision maker in HE, mentioned that Oman “did not have an accreditation authority or ... a system in place” for HE. So, “if you are affiliated with a certain university abroad, it would want to protect its name and therefore it would provide the assistance to ensure that quality is maintained and become self-regulatory”, P06 rationalised. Supporting this opinion was P12, dean of a Private HEI, who stated that

“the rationale behind it is that it was compulsory from the ministry of HE regulation that you have to have a Western well-known partner to establish your HEI”. He explained, “When we established private HEIs in Oman, we had a Western partner to bring in the academic programmes. With that, we also brought different academic support systems and different academic quality system management and the processes and procedures. All that in the first instant was all brought from outside and we built in here local capacity, using those modules”. Similarly, P14 argued, “I think the vision of the MoHE is that you don’t start from scratch and they have to approve”. He explained, “let’s say the partnership that you are going to let’s say make an academic affiliation with university X or Y, it has to go through them first and they study it, is it worth it? Or are you just selecting somebody? So, their vision is that you start with a quality-based [HEI], you don’t start from scratch”. Moreover, P13 said that when private HE was established, affiliation with foreign institutions came as a government directive, which was important to benefit from these institutions and “guarantee the least standards of quality” in Omani private HEIs.

However, other respondents saw affiliation to be only a faster means to an end, regardless of the quality level. In this sense, this justification is directly related to the first rationale of creating a shortcut to founding a general HE system by relying on the affiliate HEI to manage and be responsible for its local partner. For instance, P10 stated that the policy of affiliation “had its circumstances” largely because there was no “vessel” ready in Oman to contain HEIs, mainly colleges. Likewise, P01 believed that the main explanation for imposing affiliation was because HE in Oman was new and colleges were just beginning to exist.

#### *Adopting English as a Medium of Instruction in HE*

Also related to the first rationale of historical development of the Omani HE, is the powerful auxiliary factor of the adoption of English as a medium of instruction (and sometimes also communication and correspondence) in HE. According to some respondents this has strongly influenced the decision to import (or to continue to import) methods and systems from Western, especially English-speaking countries. P03 pointed out that three to four decades ago HE was previously delivered in Arabic, but this later changed, particularly in the year 2000, due to Western-educated officials who replaced old officials educated in the Arab world. However, P06, telling a different story,

elucidated that from the beginning “a strategic decision was made to teach in English because of the lack of good learning or teaching materials” available in Arabic. So, instead of waiting for materials to be translated, “obviously we went to the West”, P06 justified. All the same, P07 rejected the notion that the use of English in HE was ‘strategically imposed’ by the government and insisted, “it’s by default more than being an official decision”, referring to other factors such as historical political ones and lack of expertise in Oman and Arab World. Moreover, P13 argued that there were “specific circumstances” for the adoption of English to deliver HE since in the past the original management of vital sectors such as finance, banking, Omani market, job market and big factories, etc. was foreign and they were, and still are, run in English. This necessitated that graduates be familiar with English, he justified. By ‘specific circumstances’, P13 most probably meant the aftermath of the 1970 coup and the foundation of the modern state and its major apparatuses with the help of the British.

In short, the course of establishing and developing an Omani HE had great influence, both directly and indirectly, and mainly consciously, on the initial disposition of officials to import Western systems and models of all sorts.

### **7.3.2. The Declining state of HE in the Arab World**

The second rationale was an external motive that inspired Omani officials to search for knowledge in the West, that is the declining state of HE in the Arab World coupled by an insignificant scientific contribution in the Arabic language. This reason was communicated by two of the respondents, who were top decision makers in the education arena in Oman.

Viewing Arab education systems to be heavily dependent on the traditional method of rote learning, P06 recognised how Arab universities were nowhere to be found among the best 500 in the world, which to her represented the “source of best practice” where people go and “therefore we take that”. She reasoned how the countries of these top universities have managed to utilise science and technology to improve their economies, believing that this was “what we need to do”. In response to whether borrowing quality frameworks from Western countries was easier and faster, P06 subscribed to the fact that there was “no point in repeating [sic] the wheel” adding that most of the Arab countries did not have accreditation systems to begin with and Oman had to look somewhere else.

Even though she acknowledged the important status Arabic has always had in Omani culture and history, she regraded teaching only in the Arabic language to be a way of “closing ourselves in”.

Furthermore, P07 summed up the rationale behind the policy of borrowing models and concepts from the West to be “looking for the best and most advanced” ideas. He explained that in the 1970s and 1980s officials first went to Arab countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan and Jordan to borrow their systems and curricula. However, when the Arab Gulf States began to develop impressively, they, Oman included, had to turn to the West for knowledge because Arab countries did not have anything more to offer the Arab Gulf states. Moreover, P07 argued that “even now when you [sic] have become independent and able to make changes, you’ve reached a stage where there’s no production in the Arabic language in the scientific field in particular”. This meant resorting either to constant translation or adopting the English language and it was easier for many people to go for the second option, especially that English was widely used in Gulf states due to foreign labour, in addition to its being a global language, P07 clarified.

### **7.3.3. Historical-Political Legacy with the West**

Some interviewees gave another justification that was attributed to the historical and political connections between the Arab World and the West.

P07 bluntly stated, “It was of course because of the historical connection and legacy ... we do not look at colonial legacy but to the legacy of Western presence in the East”. He subscribed to the fact that colonisation played a major role in the choice of language, such as French in North Africa and English in the ones that were under British rule. He, however, argued that Arab Gulf States were not under direct British colonisation, but they inherited the Jordanian and Egyptian systems, both colonised by the British.

On a different level, P11 indicated that prior to 1994, health HE in Oman was following a British modular system, with a British person in charge of it, which was later replaced by the 1994 syllabus that adopted an American system, adjudged to be “the best”, as it synchronised the theoretical part with the laboratory and practical content and was “a logical development of learning”, P11 argued. These developments in Omani health HE



may hint at the influence of the historical-political links between Oman and Britain and also connections between Oman and the USA.

#### **7.3.4. Advanced Western Experience and Expertise**

Western experience was also reported by many of the participants to be a factor influencing the policy of importing systems and methods from Western countries into Omani HE. P17 argued that “it’s totally fine to get from someone else as long as that person is experienced and mature”, for “you don’t have to reinvent the wheel”. Likewise, P03 reported, “so they [officials] said, ‘instead of starting where the others started, we should start where they ended’. Of course, the others are the major industrialised countries, where education has reached the top, so they began importing Western ideas”. P07 justified that since at the time there were no experts in Oman, there was the alternative of looking abroad, either in the Arab World or in Europe and because Omanis had strong relations with the British, they looked for experts there, which in a way influenced the implementation of English as the language of many degrees in Omani HE. P11 pointed out that the 1994 health syllabus was very much an Omani product “designed collaboratively using local and international expertise”, explaining that the local expertise included Omanis and non-Omanis living in the country while international experts came from World Health Organisation (WHO).

Moreover, P13 noted that when a HE system began to operate in Oman, authorities benefited from the Western experience in the form of “many concepts ... many procedures and practices in place in Western countries ... experts”. He described how Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the first public university in Oman was founded with international experts and consultants specifically from the US and the UK to build its systems, be it academic, administrative, technical or even those related to admission, registration and library. To P13, these systems were perhaps “completely lifted from Western universities” that had “accumulative, ancient experiences and good practices”, and this was the reason SQU started strong, he noted. P13 further explained that as the American system emerged to be more flexible and the closest to Omani environment, it was adopted over the British system at SQU as a step to standardise the system; subsequently, SQU, and hence the American system, became a model to follow by other Omani HEIs.

Concerning the topic of affiliation, P04 stated, “officials had a point of view, which could be right, that we had a new beginning. Affiliation gives us a kind of learning that we benefit from the experiences of others.”

### **7.3.5. Western-Educated Omanis**

This fifth rationale is closely related to the above given rationale, as Western-educated Omanis represented a vehicle to transport Western knowledge and philosophies.

P10 affirmed that one of the justifications for the practice of borrowing was people from the region who would go to study in the West and would feel comfortable with certain orientations that they would try to bring them back and apply them in their home countries. Similarly, P03 explained that old officials in HE were educated in the Arab world and naturally adopted Arab ideas. However, “the official is now a graduate of a foreign country and when comparing the education in Oman and Arab World with the one he took in America or the UK, etc. he started thinking, we have educational issues for whatever reasons, and so they started importing Western ideas”, P03 asserted.

### **7.3.6. Developed Countries Success due to Education Systems**

For P15, the rationale behind going to the West for methods and philosophies was based on the premise that “countries such as Finland, the USA, the UK or Japan, these countries are very advanced and their development began from education”. To that end, “Omani officials also wanted to keep pace with these models to create a breakthrough in the Omani education system” P15 explained. In the same way, P04 reasoned, “people see that developed countries have succeeded because of education, development has succeeded because of education and the happiness of people is because of education” pointing out that officials in Oman tried to imitate that and even “sometimes try to bring Singapore’s model on the grounds that Oman becomes like Singapore”.

### **7.3.7. Directed by Need (Solution Finding)**

P02 was the only participant to maintain that the rationale was directed exclusively by need. “I think that the basis is the need ... I think we don’t import a thing because it is successful in the West. We think of solutions to existing problems in our educational system, in the management of our education system and we try to find different solutions”.

It must be noted that this opinion, which emphasises solution finding, directly contradicts the previous ones that suggest admiration for the successful experiences of Western educational models as a reason for copying or benefiting from the West.

### **7.3.8. Influence of Internationalisation**

P08 stressed that internationalisation, hence competition, was the main factor for borrowing from the West, especially when it came to quality management and accreditation programmes. She argued and elucidated that:

- “This is global knowledge and experiences”.
- Omani HEIs “are aiming to develop their context to achieve international competitions in terms of their graduates... academic staff”.
- “accreditation is an international issue”.
- “quality and competencies of graduates... also an international issue”.
- Omani HEIs were seeking accreditation “at international level not only as an institution. Also, the programmes which are offered should be accredited at [an] international level”.
- “most of the [Arab] universities that have gone ahead ... have already work[ed] with international accreditation institution[s] because they don’t want to rank at the bottom of the international ranking”.

Rationalising the specific policy of affiliation with foreign HEIs, P10 further justified that the former helped give the local institution an “international character”, facilitating in a sense, for Omani students, the future process of pursuing higher studies in the West.

### **7.3.9. New Systems Must Have a ‘Point of Reference’**

This was yet another rationale mentioned by P09, who felt strongly about it. He contended, “In fact, every system in the beginning must have a specific reference” and reiterated, “certainly each beginning must have a reference”. He justified, for example “Tunisia ... referred to the French school, almost 100% is French school, but slowly the Tunisian school started to create some specificities”. He felt that this practice of referring to other models was “very normal”, as the programmes could be adjusted as required along the way, stating that the MoHE oversaw this through the OAAA, which “modifies things so Oman has its formula or its own character”. Moreover, pointing out that

accreditation programmes were taken from the Australian and British models, he further argued, “All people refer to others. This is a necessary thing to do and adjustment is done over a long term. It’s not a shame”. “So, I imagine Oman is on the right track”, he believed.

Nevertheless, Ayubi (1991, pp. 48-49) argues that the objectives of any development process should be defined within a society’s “cultural frame of reference”. A development that involves mere ‘imitative’ activities may not be a ‘natural’ process and may actually fail to reach maximum potential because it does not correspond to domestic intellectual, social and technical improvements. To him, this what has actually taken place in many of the Arab World countries, where development has rather followed an ‘imitative’ and ‘unnatural’ trajectory.

#### **7.3.10. Ostentation or Showing Off**

The final rationale for importing from the West was ‘ostentation’ or ‘showing off’, as P10 put it. He argued that the whole phenomenon of importing from the West has morphed into a display of ostentation or boasting of wealth, not only in Oman, but in all other Gulf states. That is, he was subtly insinuating that officials in the wealthy Arab Gulf states have been competing which state attracted or borrowed better programmes and models. Although it was surprising for this to come from P10, a high-ranking decision maker in the country, it can be said that perhaps his authority and power might have been the reason why he was at ease bringing this up.

**Table 7. 2** Summary of Results: Views on Rationale for Importing Western Methods and Systems

| <b>Rationales for Importing from the West</b> |  |
|---|--|
| 1   | Factors related to the Historical Development of HE in Oman:<br><i>a. Nascent state of HE – No System in Place</i><br><i>b. Affiliation: A Faster Path to a (Quality) Private HE System</i><br><i>c. Adopting English as a Medium of Instruction in HE</i> |
| 2   | The Declining state of HE in the Arab World  |
| 3   | Historical-Political Legacy with the West  |
| 4   | Advanced Western Experience and Expertise  |
| 5   | Western-Educated Omanis  |
| 6   | Developed Countries Success due to Education Systems   |
| 7   | Directed by Need or Solution Finding   |
| 8   | Influence of Internationalisation  |
| 9   | New Systems Must Have a ‘Point of Reference’   |
| 10  | Ostentation or Showing off   |

#### **7.4. Views on the Process of Importing Western Models and Systems**

The participants also offered their views on the stages usually found in any process, namely planning, implementation or execution and evaluation, although oftentimes one aspect crossed into the border of the other. The participants’ perceptions met regarding several points, but there were some noticeable contradictions in the way they perceived or understood (the realities of) the practice of borrowing or importing Western methods and systems in the Omani context.

##### **7.4.1. Planning**

Numerous issues came up in relation to the planning phase, chiefly focusing on factors influencing the selection of models and systems. See Table 7.3 for a summary of these findings.

## **Western Consultants/ Experts**

Participants were divided into three camps with regard to the role of Western consultants and/or experts in the planning, for example the choice of the Western model, system or programme.

### *Acknowledging the Influence of Experts on the Type of Models*

The first camp, from Group C, simply acknowledged the fact that Western consultants or experts were indeed involved in the selection of specific models. P11 accredited their general contribution stating, “benefiting from foreign expertise” was in all processes of “planning, execution and evaluation” in health HE. Moreover, P16 pointed out to the important part NZ experts played in the adoption of a NZ model for CAS. P08 also recognised the role of Australian consultants in the establishment of OAAA stating, “I think at the beginning, most of the consultants they invited were Australian and I think that the Australian model is more relevant to Omani context because... in Oman you have different provinces, different areas, remote areas and so forth” although she then confessed, “The justification is not clear!”. It must be noted here that this group did not consist of any of the top decision makers in the sample.

### *Criticising the Role of Foreign Experts*

The second camp, mainly from Group B, was a bit sceptical about the impact of foreign/Western experts. The strongest criticism to experts came from P05. Although he believed that the consultants “hired” by the government had a big role in the selection process, he had suspicions about their real contribution to the development of Omani HE. He openly accused them of “shopping around all over the place” with a “specific template” that they had “developed through other consultation in other countries”, which was “their selling point”. P05 revealed, “They are in advantage”, as “they already have some data” and “can tell you to some degree that they know more than you, and actually they don’t”. He urged, “if you want to get information from this consultant, you have to raise the bar. You have to challenge him and to know yourself what do you want to do”, concluding with a very strong allegation that “we don’t know” what we want to do. Suggesting the existence of a “foreign consultant complex”, he insisted that “till date we have not benefited from those consultants that come here ... we see them in front of us every day but we have not been able to cross that barrier that OK we have enough from you. We have some people to depend on”.

P15 was slightly less critical, but he also believed that foreign consultants were not necessarily equivalent to 'quality'. He stated that "these houses of expertise are foreign and so they will bring foreign models. We know that when we hire a house of expertise, we tell them what we want and they do as you ask. In the end, you pay money and they receive money. It is no longer an issue of quality". Drawing a comparison between Oman now and some decades ago, P15 subscribed to the fact that "perhaps in the 70s and 80s we needed to bring houses of expertise", but he felt that "now we are experts and our expertise as Omanis is better in our environment and context".

#### *Experts Have Limited Role: Guided by Government*

The third camp consisted of people from Group A and B - those with high and medium decision-making authority in education and HE. They asserted that experts and consultants did not work without guidance and supervision. For example, P07 argued, "it's no longer a matter of them [experts] bringing a product ... we agree with any company for example ... helps us with the thing for which we are lacking facilities or experts ... but one of the conditions is that you train Omanis so they take the place once they [experts] leave. This is a general policy with us". P02 did not assert his opinion as being the general policy or rule in the education field like P07 did, but spoke hypothetically of what should be exercised. "Western and International experts ... I appreciate their efforts and I benefit from their experiences a lot but it must not be on the expense of capacity building inside any country". P10 also described the role of experts as that of: a. assessing goals and plans and b. translating realistic goals/plans into actions. He clarified that the Supreme Council for Planning was the body that sets goals and objectives for Oman, while the role of consultants would be limited to evaluating those plans whether achievable or not and then transforming the realistic ones into actions. He pointed out that "to leave things to the consultants is difficult; they are not from the local environment and do not particularly know the obstacles or challenges faced by these plans".

#### **Economic Development Plans: Alignment with the Job Market**

It was mainly Group A respondents who underscored national economic development schemes in the planning and selection of Western methods.

To start with, P13 indicated that the needs of the job market and development projects, which outlined the programmes and hence specialisations to be offered in HE, determine

the Western models and expertise to be imported. P07 also asserted, “Always, as an education system, we are affected by national economic strategies”. To him, “education is a cause and effect of social change, so it is a cause of economic change and an effect of economic change ... it is therefore a common relationship ... in school education, you are usually supposed to focus on general skills but when you go to HE, you are supposed to concentrate on specialisation skills that lead you to job market”. Sharing the same opinion, P02 pointed out alignment with job market as one of the most important factors. “It is a must on the government. This is not a choice. Otherwise there will be no such thing as economic development and then no social development. So, I think caring about the welfare of the individuals start with aligning the HE with the job market” P02 stated.

These views somewhat reflected a ‘welfare’ mentality prevalent in the vision of Omani administration to the extent of it being almost adopted as a ‘HE philosophy’ in Oman.

### **Reputation of the Foreign/ Western Model or Experience**

Another point that Group A respondents stressed in the planning stage was the “reputation” of the foreign country or institution from which to import systems, models, programmes and even experts. This reputation was based on the following two criteria:

#### *Great Economic and Educational Development*

P06 stated that “looking at and visiting countries that have done wonders for their economies” was what Omani officials did when considering a model. However, she explained that these “countries of repute” did not necessarily have to be located in the West because other Eastern countries such as Japan and Korea were competing with the West in this regard. Like P06, P10 elaborated that not only the West, but also Asian countries such as China, Singapore, Japan and Korea have become great examples in their development of education and societies adding that there were now Omani students studying in these countries and learning their models, with the aim of later applying them in Oman.

#### *Official International Reports and Records*

Another criterion determining the reputation of foreign countries was the reports produced by international influential organisations, for instance, P10 pointed out that the World Bank and UNESCO reports impacted their decision to import a certain model. In



addition to these reports, P06 stressed that “quality and a proven track record” was also an important criterion, maintaining that not any new institution, but one which was accredited and had very reputable programmes and degrees was sought. Similarly, P07 also emphasised the vital role international reports played in decision-making, especially in the selection of international expertise and added that performance tests such as TIMSS and PIRLS helped open officials’ eyes towards countries such as Finland, Korea, Japan and Singapore. Nevertheless, P07 explained that in spite of the fascination with international reports and records, officials in Oman were more inclined to opt for the USA and the UK models because of the language element, as “it is easy to bring things in English than to bring them in Chinese or Japanese”.

### **Western-Educated Omanis**

Omanis educated in the West, who appeared previously as one rationale behind the policy of importing Western systems and concepts, were also listed as a factor in the selection of models by some participants, predominantly from Group A. P06 argued that Omanis who went abroad to study, came back with various concepts to be implemented in Omani HE. This also recurred in the interview with P07, who underlined the role of this influential group and debated, “When people study in Europe and the USA and when they bring back models from the West, automatically it will be easy when you bring the culture. Why did they give you free scholarships in the past? Because you will be educated there”. He added, “This is the way... bring education system. That means you’ll be aware of that country... You will love it or you will respect it, but at least you understand it [sic]”, explaining “somehow this mindset will be easy later on, especially with globalisation and commerce”. P10 further supported this opinion that ‘Western-educated students’ played an important role in the selection process of experiences.

### **Foreign Affairs and Personal Connections**

Two participants also listed foreign connection as one game player in the planning process. P10 explained that choosing a specific model was done “mostly on personal connections” while P07 mentioned the role “foreign affairs”, represented in economic and political factors, sometimes played in the type of partnership agreements made between Oman and other countries, which again reflected the historical side of the relationship and policy.

### **Sensible and Feasible Option**

The final decision on a model came down to the fact that it was a practical and feasible option in terms of cost and cultural appropriateness. P02 insisted that rather than being “a perfect option”, importing a solution from anywhere in the world was conditioned by being “sensible” financially and culturally. The other respondent, P13, pointed out that for example when a HEI was considering implementing a new programme, which could be imported and adopted from foreign HEIs, it would be required to submit a feasibility study before permission would be granted by the government.

**Table 7. 3** Summary of Results: Planning - Factors Influencing Selection of Western Models

#### **Factors Influencing the Selection of Western Models, Systems and Experts**

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|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Western Consultants/ Experts                              |
| 2 | Economic Development Plans: Alignment with the Job Market |
| 3 | Reputation of the Foreign/Western Model or Experience     |
| 4 | Western-Educated Omanis                                   |
| 5 | Foreign Affairs and Personal Connections                  |
| 6 | Sensibility and Feasibility of Model                      |

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#### **7.4.2. Implementation**

The most discussed topic in this regard was the notion of ‘accommodation’, which was labelled in different ways by the respondents, such as localisation, customisation, fine-tuning; modification, adaptation, adjustment, contextualisation and ‘Omanisation’. All felt it was an indispensable step due to cultural and contextual differences or the ‘specificity’ or ‘peculiarity’ of Omani society. However, one participant relayed a completely opposite way of thinking.

#### **Adaptation is Essential**

To begin with, all the officials in Group A justified the approach of accommodation and argued it was actually the tradition followed by the government in Oman.

P02 first contended that “localisation” was vital for the success of any borrowed ‘solution’; that is, it should go through “some kind of development, adjustment and

update” to give the system, model or concept a “local touch”. He reported that such practice existed even in Western countries, for example the Germans benefited from the American experience, but they added “their own German touch”. P06 also discussed at length the strategy of “customisation”, “adjusting” or “fine-tuning along the way” and stressed the fact that “when we take these things, these curriculums and degree courses, we do customise them”. She maintained that for instance now people “can hardly recognise” the CAS, which had a deal with a consortium of NZ universities to launch the colleges’ programmes. She commended with zeal the customisation process the CAS have since gone through and regarded it a “dynamic development”. In addition, P13, believed that accommodation in the form of modifying, altering or introducing new courses to fit the Omani context and culture was a necessary procedure since he anticipated that certain components of the original model might be inappropriate due to differences in culture or the country’s development needs.

Acting in more of an advisory capacity, P05, from Group B, warned that “borrowing international models and implementing them in Oman sans accommodation and Omanisation is wrong”, suggesting it was an indispensable prerequisite for the potential success of the application of any imported models. Moreover, P04, from Group C, advised, “I should take the whole system, but I should modify it”. In other words, “take the package as it is but apply modifications to it to fit the Omani environment. This is fine. There’s no harm in this”. He cautioned, “the flaw is when they [imported Western experiences] are implemented literally. If you do so, they will not work. So, if you want to get benefits out of them, you must make modifications and improvements to suit the Omani environment”. However, “if you take something as it is, it will fail miserably ... the programmes that we take from Europe cannot be applied in the European way in Oman; it’s impossible ... because there is a specificity to Oman. So, you adjust these programmes to fit your specificity”.

Reporting actual practice, P16, from Group C, discussed the case of CAS, pointing out that the NZ model was not transferred in its entirety. An adaptation process was undertaken because “the difference in the environment is very important” P16 reported. He maintained that in any programme, system or curriculum, there would be fundamentals but also “peculiarities of the society” that came with the original model. Subsequently, some parts in the NZ model were removed, some added and others

updated to fit the Omani context, P16 narrated. However, P01, from Group D, stated that the affiliated HEIs in Oman were allowed to apply only “simple modification to suit the Omani environment”. He clarified, “all colleges can make a maximum 25% of adjustment or modification to study plans, not more than that ... because eventually the certificate is issued from the parent university, signed by the college dean and the university chancellor”.

P12, from Group D, elucidated that at their respective institution implementation of an imported model went through two cycles: experience followed by contextualisation. While the first cycle of experience involved using Western methods as they were, the second cycle involved an adaptation process by “contextualising all the systems into the Omani systems ... it was adapting those systems into the Omani context after learning and understanding those Western systems” he clarified. He further described the second cycle of adaptation, “So, you take irrelevant stuff from the Western curriculum and put in Omani [stuff], and that also has a system for how to do that. It’s not randomly done. We have to go through different quality measures and systems and procedures in order to be able to ... because you are talking about the academic standards. The content has to be of the same standard”. However, the respondent highlighted the fact that contextualisation remained at the level of the content of the curriculum, not the quality systems, as it was the same system regardless of geographical location. “For example, you have [an] assessment board system in the UK. You copy exactly that. You have an external examiners system, you have to bring the external examiners system together in here. You have classroom observation, you have to do it in here. You have teaching peer reviews, all that. It is configured in one system, so you don’t contextualise that”.

### **The Opposite Opinion: Adaptation Corrupts the Imported Model**

P14, from Group D, disagreed with all the other respondents as he believed that Western methods and systems should be implemented without being changed, modified or adapted. He firmly and knowingly stated, “perhaps I have a very different opinion” that “you bring it all, put it all. Don’t change anything because this modification that we make is the cause of the problem”. He argued, “application should be the same because when they transform it, it gets corrupted and does not bear any fruit”. He questioned the capabilities of those responsible of the adaptation process, “who sometimes makes the modification? The unqualified person. He makes the modification from a security

background, a political background, an economic background. Here starts the problem ... the old council of HE had member owners of private universities and colleges. They don't go together, as if I am a merchant and minister of commerce", he claimed. P14's bold opinion may suggest a possible conflict of interest in HE, as the people who played a role in the sector's management and decision-making were the same people who owned private HEIs, thus his lack of faith in the accommodation process.

### **7.4.3. Evaluation**

The participants who offered their views on the evaluation of the imported systems and models, be it their take on the process or their own personal assessment of what was going on, produced disparity and divergence in attitude that ranged from positive to extreme negative.

#### **Positive Perceptions of the Evaluation Process**

On the positive front were P06, P10, P11 and P16.

#### *Acknowledging Evaluation Cycles and Guidelines*

P06 noted that there was "always follow-up and evaluation" for what might work and what might not work for Oman. Giving more specific details, P11 described a cycle of evaluation with radical assessment taking place once every five years to find out whether the objectives were met and whether the outputs met the needs of the healthcare system in Oman. P11 also noted that with the establishment of OAAA, the evaluation process in 2008/2009 examined whether "we were on the right track" and whether the syllabus was in line with the standards of Oman qualifications framework. Furthermore, P16 evaluated the experience of CAS, which completed ten years since the contract with NZ, "we have become a heritage to the NZ system", clarifying that "the curriculum between now and the one we brought in 2005 is almost unrecognisable. The difference between them is big ... we have added and developed according to what fits Omani context, Omani curriculum, Omani student, local community institutions, and commercial and industrial community and institutions". Overall, P10 acknowledged that in HE "we succeeded a lot".

### *To Err is Human*

P06 admitted, “We are Omanis, [we] are not ashamed to say we’ve made a mistake. We correct these mistakes along the way. There is no such thing as perfection especially in HE. Perfection is a virtue of Allah”. She reported that there were degrees of mistakes ranging from “wrong or slightly wrong or a bigger degree of wrong”, but there was “always scope to correct it” and internal committees to take care of this. P10 also recognised that ‘some did not work’, especially in private HE because ‘they brought things in a way that did not fit with the environment and they failed, so these were changed’. Having said that, P10 pointed out that this problem was not limited to Oman, as it also existed in all GCC countries.

### *Benefiting from External (Western) Evaluators and Models*

P06 stated, “sometimes when we need expertise we call on international organisations, UNESCO, the World Bank” and many other international organisations to provide experts to come and work with Omani authorities. “Sometimes we bring outside evaluators [who] come and tell us what is going wrong, how are we doing and so forth” she disclosed.

P11 also talked about the major transformation of shifting from a 3-year nursing diploma to a 4-year bachelor’s degree, which was a major plan by the ministry, but actually directed by a WHO recommendation for the whole GCC region. Moreover, for the planning of their programmes, P11 explained, “we designed our programme and sent it to the university of California to be evaluated. You may ask, why the University of California? Because we have a relationship; the dean there came to Oman as an expert and worked here for some time. She helped design the nursing programme at SQU and she knows about the context. So, we thought we should send it to someone who knows the context to evaluate it for us and they sent us back some feedback and we modified it”.

### **Negative Perceptions of the Evaluation Process**

On the negative side were P04, P05 and P15.

All three respondents, from groups B and D, believed that an evaluation plan for imported Western models and systems was either poor or lacking. They also offered their opinion

regarding several projects and models that were borrowed from foreign and Western countries, some even accusing the overall HE management of being ‘random’.

#### *No Real Evaluation; Poor Quality*

P04 claimed, “evaluation as a concept, there isn’t. Officials talk, etc. but to say an external evaluation committee where they bring people, I haven’t experienced this.” Talking about his own experience, he stated, “locally, I have not been offered a project to give my expertise ... for us, as deans, to give our opinion on a certain matter. I talk from my experience now, but if there was evaluation that I don’t know about, I cannot answer you”. Overall, P05 stated, “If you assess education, you [will] see that there’s not a lot of quality and the proof is that we are still depending, we are still importing technology”, in an indication that the practice of “importing” was a sign of failure. Similarly, assessing the consequences of the policy of importing and applying Western, or foreign, philosophies and systems, P15 expressed his dissatisfaction with the status of Omani education, be it general or HE, as the recent PIRLS and TIMSS indicators as well as global competitiveness reports were disappointing. He clarified that perhaps due to improvement as compared to the past, “in recent times perhaps we have not sensed this; to the contrary, we have felt there has been improvement and better quality” but this to him did not mean that the situation was any better.

#### *The CAS Model: Randomness in Management and Vision*

P05 considered CAS a non-Omani system, a version that “came ready” from NZ. To him, this move was not studied well as he questioned, “What is the difference between applied science and technical education and vocational education? There has been a duplication”. Analysing how CAS replaced the old teachers’ colleges, P05 argued, “We thought ... that we are solving the problem, but we create[d] another problem. We have a deficiency in the number of teachers”. To him, such a model, despite being owned and operated by the government, reflected some kind of “randomness in vision” and “lack of planning”, he asserted.

P05’s opinion was also shared by P15, who questioned the decision of the government to phase out the teachers’ colleges and open up new specialisations, such as graphics and design, in the NZ-borrowed CAS. He believed that such decisions were not “well-studied” and were imposed on students without being given any options to choose from.

### *The Basic Education Model: A Failed Experience*

According to P15, Basic Education represented a clear example of the failure of imported Western systems. First, he pointed out that the fractional or selective application of the original model resulted in poor student outcomes represented in serious literacy problems. Second, P15 stressed that the Western model took away most of teacher's authority, leading to teacher frustration. He clarified that due to the adoption of a Western style of schooling, the teacher "has no right to punish any student", to the extent that "the student complains against the teacher and the latter is a defendant in court while the student is watching". "What more humiliation and insult than this!", P15 expressed his disappointment with the status of the teacher.

### *Affiliation: A Business Producing Low Quality Results*

Assessing the affiliation system, P05 contended that "affiliation in general, that you take the name [of the Western university] and put it for the sake of a degree is useless, waste of time and waste of money". Maintaining that it was not a solution, he revealed, "When it comes outside their border, it's a business", whereas for "us, it's a degree. It's not knowledge nor skill. It's a degree". He emphasised, "if this is the kind of affiliation, this is internationalisation ... and it's money. It's a business".

### *Western Experts: Low-Impact Reports*

Questioning the impact of international development reports such as those done by foreign experts from the World Bank and UNESCO, P05 claimed that "our problem is that we enjoy things, especially when we read it [sic]". He explained that these experts come, "stay one year, two years, etc." in the host country, and then produce their reports in "a nice readable book". "What was applied?" he wondered, after "they consulted and [did] surveys and brain storming sessions". He replied, "because no one has lived it ... and no one has told them, so now we finished this project, how do we implement it?"

## **7.5. Views on Potential Conflicts and Inconsistencies**

The topic of potential conflicts that could affect the utility and sustainability of imported Western methods seemed to cause conflict by itself. The respondents, who were divided about the subject, can be classified into four groups:



1. No Conflict or Clash: Those who categorically objected to the premise of and the likelihood of conflict or clash.
2. Not Conflict or Clash but Differences and Gaps: Those who specifically rejected the proposition of conflict or clash, but still mentioned differences, gaps, and challenges either openly or embedded in their speech.
3. Conflicts inevitable, adaptation required: Those who subscribed to the possibility of conflict and clash between the two systems and cultures which can be solved through adaptation.
4. Conflicts may cause failure of adopted system: Those who believed conflicts and gaps could affect the successful implementation of imported systems.

#### **7.5.1. No Conflict or Clash**

Four respondents, three of which were female, believed there was no clash or conflict at all and that this subject was either irrelevant or a normal thing to the importing and implementation of Western systems in Omani HE. These people were especially confident that Western quality management was in line with Omani values and Islamic precepts.

To begin with, P06 categorically rejected the possibility of clash. She clarified that since this was a very important issue, anything feared to be threatening basic Omani values would not pass in the first place, as there were many councils and committees that were aware of this. Laughing, she indirectly alluded to religious bodies that would protest if anything of the sort was to be adopted. Then, dismissing the whole issue as insignificant, she asked “what values?”, arguing, “We are a very tolerant society, more so than other people. So, you know, there must be something really nasty for us to say absolutely not allowed and you can’t do this”, she added.

P17 also maintained that in her experience, there was no “barrier”, for example, she indicated that gender inequality did not exist in Omani HE, and that opportunities and treatment depended on hard work. However, the respondent acknowledged that in the past, there was female-male segregation and inhibition by female students to participate in front of the male students, but she pointed out that this ‘culture’ was changing.

Moreover, P08 stressed that Western philosophies of quality were not in contradiction with the fundamentals of Islam. She justified her opinion using well-known Muslim quotes, maintaining that “our religion says, ‘he who performs a job, he should perform it in perfect manner’ and ‘all of you are shepherds, and each of you is responsible for his flock’”. She added, “values of quality assurance are ingrained in Islamic teachings ... embedded in our culture”. She also rejected the term “obstacles”, but acknowledged that “challenges” were a natural thing to happen in the application of QM, since employees “are not aware of the benefit ... ignorant or they don’t know about it”.

The last one in this group, P14, had a special opinion on the matter. He contended that the academic side was separate from Western cultural influence, which to him was unavoidable not necessarily through importing Western methods and systems in HE, but due to various channels in society such as the media, the Internet, social media and even the country’s policies. He stressed, “we have no problem. As I told you, I’m speaking about the academic side, not culture”. He argued, “you have no control. What the student does not see here, he will see on the net, on TV, on the mobile, in the newspaper, in magazine. Our TV channels are bad, the films that are shown by official TV channels are bad ... you know we have bars in Oman. So, what is this? Why did you bring this? Either you take it all or you leave it all”. He further analyzed the context, “As I told you, we have to take the technical side, we have to take it all, but the culture aspect, we have our own culture. We didn’t bring a Western culture. SQU has brought an American system, has its culture changed? We [his respective HEI] now have an Australian academic system since 1997, but has the culture changed?” Nevertheless, at a different point in time during the interview, he pointed out to inappropriate material found in some textbooks. He said, “look at what private schools teach. My son was going to a private school here. They brought them a textbook with kissing images!” in a clear sign of his objection to such content. In fact, P14’s was a contradictory opinion that was hard to place, but was added to this group because of the initial viewpoint he articulated.

### **7.5.2. Not Conflicts, but Differences, Gaps and Challenges**

The people in this group also rejected the subject of ‘conflict’ or ‘clash’, but still used other milder words such as ‘difference’, ‘challenge’ or ‘gap’ to discuss the topic. However, while some discussed these differences openly, in the others’ speech they were rather embedded.

P02 dismissed the likelihood of any conflict or inconsistency between Omani and Western cultures stating that “quality, even if it started as a Western concept, is one of the fundamentals of Islam”. He clarified: “perhaps we have not set frameworks for the concept like the West did ... guidelines and standards to arrive at a certain stage of quality, but I think there is no clash at all with our Islamic and Omani culture in particular”. However, at a different occasion, he claimed. “I believe that public participation has become a necessity, but we must differentiate between where the system of governance has arrived in the West and where it is in the Arab countries... we may have become accustomed to the rule of a different system. Participating in society exists, but in ways that may be different from those in the West”, suggesting an embedded strong political difference that could affect the application of Western concepts. Furthermore, he believed that importing a “formula” was difficult because the “characteristics of human being, the culture of human being, the education of the human being at any two different countries are different”.

While P16 argued that imported quality systems did not clash with Omani culture, his examples revealed another truth. On the one hand, he maintained that “quality means improvement or development”, so “you have no issues with any system of quality. It remains for this managerial system to be compatible with the policies, legislations and systems in the country” and he reassured that “TQM never clashed with the improvement of managerial work in Oman”. On the other hand, however, he insisted that importing any managerial system, TQM or otherwise, must not clash with “the environment, politics and historical heritage” of the country. Comparing Oman to NZ, the respondent emphasised that “the environment here differs, the heritage differs, religion has an impact, all these traditions and customs have an impact ... so this reflects when we want to transfer any programme, managerial or technical. You must consider the environment you belong to”. Thus, recounting details of the CAS experience, he explained, “When they brought the NZ system, there were a lot of things that we did not accept. Where did they go? We replaced them with things that match [the context]”. Subscribing to the opinion that “taking from the West must be codified”, he advised, “Of course when you want to benefit from any society, you have to separate the wheat from the chaff, right?”

The next two opinions were so shocking in the degree of their similarity. Both respondents, who were from the private HE sector, believed that clash did not exist

because HE culture was universal. P09 claimed “there is no such a thing as Western culture. Now we talk about global culture”. He explained, “now all people speak almost the same logic, in the same language. We teach in English, in this university almost 80% or more courses are taught in English... almost all books, standards and teachers are foreign ... you can say it’s universal teaching. Perhaps in varying degrees, but what is practiced in other countries is also practiced in Oman”. Likewise, P12 maintained that management systems were “universal in a sense because ... managing people here and there is all the same”. He further assured that “quality system is built around everything in the Western society, in the Western universities, so you bring everything together” and justified, “there’s no challenge because you brought the entire package with you with its curriculum, the system, the regulations, the procedures, the content, everything is one pack”.

To the both of these ‘neo-liberals’, however, the problem lay in the human element, be it student or employee. First, P09 pointed out, “you can bring an idea from an American programme, but the human resources that will deliver these projects, materials and monitor them and so on must be at a high level”. He argued, if these human resources were below the required level, “you do not achieve the performance of the programme and the same features in a country where human resources are ready and at high level”. He further reiterated, “it’s almost the same tool, same programmes, same books, same objectives, but the tool might differ according to the people and universities, but we can no longer say that there’s a clash. No, there’s no clash, but if there are things that might touch the civilisation and culture, we stop them”.

In almost the same manner of reasoning, P12 argued, “only what differs is the people that you are managing”. He explained, “People who you are managing are from different culture, they have different background. They have different training. They have different, you know, behaviour and attitude. Only you have to understand all these differences in people, but principles remain the same. It is the same book that you study in management here you study in the West”. However, he still reported “challenges” with two aspects: Omani culture and the contextualisation process. Regarding the first aspect, he argued, “For example, I tell you, in Omani culture we are very touched into the hierarchy. If you are the boss, that means you have all the authority. That is the mentality ... people come to me for example, they say you are the authority, you can do things.

They do not understand that we have a system. OK. That what I can do, my subordinates also can do because they have delegated authority. But the people do not understand, they think if we come to the top authority, we'll get things done". Believing "it definitely is a conflict", as "you are going against the habits and norms of the people", he asserted, "you have to be firm in your [management] approach". He advised, "we have to educate people in the process. It's a challenging process because you are trying to change the culture and thinking pattern of people". Another challenge P12 reported was in contextualising certain aspects of the curriculum irrelevant to Omani culture. He explained, "when you are teaching in business management and you talk about Tesco ... Sainsbury's. These are all companies that are not relevant here ... so you have to change them into the local brands and that actually has created a big challenge at the beginning because it is not easy ... because you don't have local case studies. We don't have an industry that is open that people can go and see and know. So, there were challenges to really contextualise, but at the end you had to do so. That's how we did it".

This group also included the opinion of P07, who rejected the proposition that conflicts existed, and minimised the importance of Omani people's "emotional" reactions to the implementation of Western-imported Basic Education. To him, those people forgot all good things about the system and instead focused on the trivial concept of "mixing males and females", which protestors believed threatened a fundamental pillar of their cultural and religious norms. Talking about why these concerns were not taken into consideration, P07 replied: "No, there is a difference between the satisfaction of a rational customer and a temperamental customer", adding that taking the majority's opinion "depends on having a society that you managed to teach and generations and generations and generations, hence the person has become capable of making a rational, not an emotional, decision". He then compared Cambridge University, which was celebrating its 800 years old when Sultan Qaboos University was completing 25 years since its establishment, commenting: "see how 800 years have done to the mentality of people?". This opinion suggested that Omani citizens were not regarded by officials to be mature enough and well-informed to participate in the educational decision-making landscape.

Having stated the above opinion, P07 still nonetheless listed several differences in HE systems, philosophy and vision between the two cultures, which sometimes seemed to

demonstrate deep conflicts. Discussing the implementation of quality measures, P07 insisted “our problem is that we focus on the product more than on the process”. He also described how in Western countries “they prepare you for life and work, but they don’t prepare you for a specific job. That’s the difference”. In contrast, here in Oman, “you are forced to close some specialisations ... we closed archeology and philosophy and this is the mistake”, P07 noted. He explained, “the difference between the West and the East and some of our states, why do we close these specialisations and they don’t close them in the West? Because in the West, the student pays ... Here, the government pays”. P07’s opinion reflected the status and concept of the ‘welfare state’, which was expected to provide everything to the citizens including jobs, forcing the former to close specialisations which did not create jobs.

### **7.5.3. Conflicts Were Inevitable, Not Necessarily a Disadvantage**

The three respondents in this third group accepted that in the course of importing systems from the West, conflicts were inevitable, a situation wherein adaptation was mandatory.

The first respondent, P13, noted that conflicts in HE systems were inevitable because of differences between cultures, as “there is a lot that is unacceptable in Omani society”. He, for example, indicated that the policies which Western countries placed regarding education, programmes, specialisations as well as dealing with students and teachers emanated from Western culture and were in line with their job market or development needs. Also, regarding TQM application, P13 maintained that the HE quality system in Oman was built internally and “gradually according to Western models and in proportion to what fits the Omani environment”, confirming a tradition of adaptation, accommodation and “orientation”. He listed the following two examples that distinguished Omani management from Western management philosophy:

#### *Flexibility and Tolerance of Omani Management*

In Omani management culture “we always have an open-door policy ... in some Western management they say no, even if they are available. They tell you that you must have prior appointment and the subject of the meeting should be known in advance ... whereas in Omani management, they tell you no, I have 10-15 minutes, I can chat with them and understand their problem. So, there’s tolerance from the culture”, especially if the people

were coming from long distances. In this case, he argued it was a sign of respect “to welcome them and clarify things even if the matter was not part of my department”.

#### *A Tradition of Patriarchy*

P13 affirmed the existence of a culture of patriarchy, where common people showed respect for people in authority and those with honorary titles such as ‘sheikh’ and ‘wali’, who in turn responded to people’s requests. He clarified, “let’s say patriarchy even at the level of government, there’s always a patriarchal look ... towards the community ... and this structure exists and perhaps has its advantages in that it simplifies a lot of matters and also abridges the relationship between individuals and groups and even between higher officials and normal citizens”.

The other respondent in this group was P10 who underestimated the effect of cultural and religious elements in the Omani education field, but still admitted that “planting things unconsciously” would cause problems, adding that “we cannot possibly import a thing that is not compatible with our religious Islamic fundamentals, a concept which has almost been lost in the West”. Instead of talking about conflicts or inconsistencies, he pinpointed several “gaps” that existed in the Omani context and which in turn could work against the successful application of imported Western methods.

#### *Gaps in the Philosophy of the Role of Education in Society*

##### Double-Role of School:

Highlighting the bigger role the school plays in Oman and Arab world compared to that in Western countries, P10 argued that parents in the West, as per laws and regulations, were responsible for raising their children, while schools only gave them an education. However, in Oman and the rest of Arab World schools were expected to play a double role, that of education as well as moral upbringing. So, since the school’s focus was not solely on academics, this, to him, reflected one dimension of the concept of quality in education.

##### Arabs’ versus Western View of the Importance of Having a HE degree:

P10 argued, “the West has come a long way. To some, a [HE] degree is no longer viewed as the only criterion [to get a job or advance in a job]. An individual [to them] is good in

his work, not what degree he has completed. They have reached a stage where they look at science differently than us”.

#### *Gap in Social Awareness Level*

P10 revealed that social awareness in Oman has not reached the degree where students and people in general were responsible for their educational choices and realised that the government could not employ them all. This, again, is closely related to the ‘welfare state’ mentality.

#### *Gap in Development*

P10 acknowledged the longer path of development in the West compared to the relatively young and short path of development in Oman and all Arab states, which might cause a gap in the transfer of knowledge. Hence, to import these fully-developed concepts and models from the West required adaptation and accommodation.

#### *Gap in Work Culture and Mentality*

##### Graduates’ Readiness for Work:

P10 observed that in the West, specifically in Germany, graduates were not expected to be completely ready for work, hence the training and preparation programmes. However, in Oman, according to P10, employers expected a new graduate to be comparable to someone with a 15 years’ experience.

##### Heavy Bureaucracy as an Outcome of Foreign Labour:

P10 argued that bureaucracy was not a bad word, but rather a form of organising work. However, he maintained that the current concept of bureaucracy as it was practiced in Oman was not a result of Omani education, but an effect of expats who brought their heavy bureaucracy and planted it in the Omani work environment. To combat this, P10 proposed that surveillance, a technique of Western quality assurance, be adopted to monitor the efficiency of performance everywhere.

The last respondent in this group, P01, stated, “We want the progress they [Western countries] have and we want the modern concepts, but there’s a section that contradicts, intersects with Islamic concepts”, advising that “practically to be on the safe side, we have to pick and choose”. He argued that two essential points played a role in the



importing and application of Western systems and models: culture and scientific material.

#### *Culture of “Third World Countries”*

He maintained that the “culture of third world countries” differed from that of the West and hence adjustments were required. He explained, “in terms of almost all the models that are used whether managerial, statistical, computer science models, the West has preceded us but we can’t take the model as it is applied in France or the USA and adopt the same here in Omani environment. Some adjustments must be made to the model and so I don’t recommend taking the models as ready templates”.

#### *Scientific Material*

P01 identified scientific material as the second point of difference. He explained, “the culture level of the HE student [in Oman] is not the same as the culture level of the foreign HE student and this is due to the input that comes to us. For example, the input that we get in primary or secondary school is not the same as that of a student finishing secondary school in the UK or USA”.

#### **7.5.4. Differences Lead to Conflicts that May Affect the Application of Western Methods**

The last group consisted of P03, P04, P05 and P15 who questioned the policymaking process in terms of the readiness of society and suitability of the educational institution to receive Western concepts and methods. What characterized this group was the firm manner by which the respondents expressed their opinion and the strong language they used.

Pointing out to a serious “gap” between general education and HE, which was created after importing Western ideas into the Omani system, P03 used the following metaphor to express his viewpoint:

“they started importing Western ideas and there was a gap because first the environment was not ready, everything uninitiated because these [ideas] began there [in the West] I don’t know since hundreds of years. It might be a continuous culture ... we took it from its environment as if we took a fish from the sea, pulled it out from its environment and

brought it here. We put it in a different environment. Of course, we don't know, will this environment receive it? Will it [the fish] be able to live in the new environment? We didn't do this!"

P03 further explained, "for example, concerning HE, we moved from delivering Education in Arabic to education in English. OK, did we prepare general education to be linked to HE in English? Certainly not. So, there was a gap between general education and HE, one system in Arabic and the other in English. The culture of general education was Arabic, everything Arabic ... When the student goes to HE, he needs a bridging course". He argued that the students were lost between the two systems and thus the output quality was low. He summed up the point, stating "this is the experience that we fall in. We brought a new method, but we didn't prepare ourselves and it was tough".

*Question over society's readiness for gender equality*

P03 clarified, "my principle is that the woman is like the man; there's no difference between them at all". However, he questioned the society's readiness to accept such a concept using yet another metaphor:

"You're not importing a car for example. We have the roads and we can import the best type of car. We don't have a problem either even if it broke down and we couldn't fix it. It won't impact the environment, the culture, the society or the individuals because it's a car or a computer or an AC or a machine or a telephone, etc. ... Now if we brought for example the culture of gender equality and applied it strictly. OK. Is the society that we live in suitable for the equality that exists in the West?"

In addition, he wondered, "is the nature of woman in our culture, not only in our culture, but in general, is her nature like the nature of man? Can she do what man can do and vice versa?"

Giving an example of Western exchange students at his respective HEI, P03 recounted how they requested to be accommodated together, which was against Omani norms, but which they had to fulfil. He thus argued, "when you transfer this culture, you are

supposed to consider your environment, especially in education. Transferring it as it is, it will collide with our traditions and customs”.

P04 also debated, “what prevents the literal application [of Western programmes and methods] is the difference in customs, traditions, values, and religion. We are Muslim” stressing the latter. One major thing he pointed out was the fear for girls from Western freedom. P04 described, “Western societies do not have the social bonds that exist with us ... the girl after the age of 18 must find a home for herself. Her father is no longer responsible for her. Now such a thing does not happen in our countries ... so let me be frank with you, too much freedom like in Europe, we don’t want that in our countries. We are clear about what we say”. He restated, “I don’t want my daughter walking in the street naked ... in the UK the education system gives her freedom from childhood. She sleeps over at a boy’s house and he sleeps over at hers. These things must be excluded because they clash with our religion, customs and traditions. So, the main issue is that if we import any programme as it is, it cannot fit our region because the social concepts are different. The customs and traditions are different. We cannot give up these things, be it in Oman or elsewhere”, P04 emphasised.

The last two responses reflected a lot of dissatisfaction with and disapproval of the unrealistic policies as the respondents (P05 and P15), belonging to the parliamentary Group B, believed there were many areas of difference or conflict that were not taken into serious consideration by the government and education officials while contemplating the implementation of Western models in the Omani context.

#### *Educational Gap*

P05 strongly stated the fact that there was a development gap in education between Oman and Western countries that it was practically impossible to apply the same methods. He underscored how Western education systems were more advanced, rationalising that “their system is working for them and that’s why you [sic] have progress. Everything is cumulative. Some universities are 200 years old and more. Cambridge and Oxford were not born overnight”. He reminded Omani officials that “We shouldn’t forget we are a lot behind them”, especially that “we haven’t [even] agreed on basic things” in education, for example “we are still debating about school days”. In addition, P05 highlighted that “we don’t have NASA, research centres and excellence centres. The country is not yet

ready". For these reasons, he suggested a more realistic transition by creating "a link between the past and present" instead of "a high jump that does not serve what exists now".

P05 also talked about a cultural mind-set gap represented by a "culture of dependence on government" in Omani society. On the one hand, society is dependent on government for services and opportunities, such as job and education. On the other hand, private HE is dependent on government support, such as internal student scholarships, without which "they cannot survive" P05 asserted. He thus stressed that it was vital to change this mind set. In fact, this opinion seemingly reflected one form of patriarchy found in Oman and the rest of Arab region, where government is expected and believed to play the role of the head of power and provider of main services, including job opportunities.

The other respondent, P15, acknowledged the existence of a host of conflicts and inconsistencies that have caused the failure of some imported systems and models, and which might still influence the application of future ones.

### *Cultural and Social Conflict*

#### Gender Relations:

One major issue that P15 stressed was mixed gender classes, which were introduced with Basic Education from grades 1-4. He described how female teachers constantly complained to him about the difficulty of controlling the boys in class. On the one hand, he believed boys needed male teachers because of their innate nature. On the other hand, P15 also pointed out that even boys felt embarrassed of having a female teacher. P15 narrated how parents in his area went to the minister's office to protest the application of the system to the extent that they said they would stop sending their children to school.

#### Family Size:

This particular point revealed how even tiny things mattered in the transfer of models. P15 argued that family size, which distinguished Omani society from those in the West, negatively affected the application of the Western model of Basic Education. "Perhaps this system is implemented in other advanced countries ... because the family has one or two children and parents are available full-time for them" to help them with their schoolwork, he contemplated.

### *Linguistic Conflict*

Language was another area that P15 brought up as a source of conflict to the application of Western borrowed methods, and a measurement of the failure of the education system. He highlighted the important role language played in the development of any nation, giving the examples of Japan, China, France, Russia, the UK, etc. He explained that these states were “creative in their own language”, not in a borrowed language such as English, which to him created a literacy problem among Omani students. The student “must be strong in Arabic first” and the basic skills of reading and writing, he stressed, instead of overburdening them with what he called “complementary stuff”, meaning English.

### *Political/ Democratic Conflict*

Obedience to Authority:

P15 reported that the people who protested against the new Basic Education system, with its concept of mixed gender classes, which “were applied overnight without consulting anyone”, had to comply. He stated, “in the end we, as citizens, have to obey the authorities”, suggesting that the final decision was that of the decision and policy makers, regardless of the public’s opinion.

Student Advisory Councils - A Formality:

P15 regarded the newly established student advisory councils in HEIs as “just a formality”. While he did not believe that students would be even given the chance or power to exercise any decision making, he still felt they were not mature enough to be able to make sound decisions that benefit the student community and society at large. So, gradual change was his recommendation.

### *Technical Conflict/ Gap in Resources*

P15 thought that Western countries had better and advanced facilities that prepared students to go into and excel in a system like Basic Education. In comparison, he clarified that the application of this new system in Oman encountered a major infrastructure problem characterised by a shortage in the number of teachers as well as classrooms, which made the implementation of certain important features and philosophies of the original Western model impossible.

## 7.6. Summary

This chapter has presented and analysed the second set of the study's findings, which comprised the content analysis results of the interview data, divided into three main themes:

1. **Rationale:** the respondents' views produced ten possible rationales that could justify the reasons or the origins of the practice and policy of importing Western methods in Omani HE. These included factors pertaining to the historical development of the Omani education system, the declining state of HE in the Arab World and limited scientific production in Arabic, historical-political legacy of the Arab Middle East with the West, the advanced experience and expertise of the West, Western-educated Omanis, the proposition that education led the development of Western states, solution finding, influence of the internationalisation wave, having a reference to build new systems and finally the competition to show off the wealth of the countries in the Arab Gulf.
2. **Process:** this theme had three categories, namely planning, implementation and evaluation. The respondents expressed a wide range of opinions about these matters. They believed several key elements influenced the planning and selection of any Western model, mainly Western consultants hired by the government, economic development plans and the job market, reputation of the Western country or model based on international reports and standards, Western-educated officials, foreign affairs and personal connections and finally the sensibility of the option in terms of its cost and cultural compatibility. Implementation to the most of them had to go through an adaptation and accommodation process. Evaluation of imported systems was either poor or lacking to some while it was successful to others.
3. **Conflicts:** perceptions about potential conflicts between Omani culture and Western culture that could affect the application and utility of Western models were diverse. While one group categorically rejected the proposition of conflict or clash, another preferred to use the word gap or difference instead. A third group acknowledged the likelihood of conflicts which could be eliminated through

adaptation and localisation. A fourth group, however, regarded conflicts to be barriers to the success of Western methods.

The next chapter will present and discuss the final set of the study's findings that emerged from the second and deeper discourse analysis of the interview data.

## **Chapter Eight: Findings III (Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Interview Data)**

### **8.1. Overview**

This chapter will present the findings that emerged from the Foucauldian discourse analysis of the interviews. This is the third and final layer of the study's results, which together with findings II (content analysis of the interviews) explore the ways decision-makers and top managers in Omani education system negotiate and appropriate the use of Western models in HE. The practical use of Foucauldian categories, guided by Bourke et al. (2013) and Thompson and Mockler (2016), produced a new set of categories (narratives) that differed from the general notions of acceptance, resistance and paradoxes that appeared in the two model studies. The present study's interviewees approached the 'discourse' of Western methods in Omani HE using four 'narratives': defence, disapproval, compliance and tension. They exhibited these narratives by using specific 'discursive strategies', which they further supported by specific examples. These categorisations are more fitting to the study as the interviewees can be seen approaching the topic from the degrees of power they hold, be it in policymaking or management, in the wider Omani education context. Here I have used these narratives, and discursive strategies as categories and sub-categories, respectively, for discussion. Table 8.1 provides an illustration and overview of the findings. The chapter ends with a summary.



**Table 8. 1** Overview of Findings of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

| Discourse Narratives  | Use of Western Methods in Omani HE   |   |  |  |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|--|
|                       | Defence  | Disapproval   | Compliance   | Tension  |
| Discursive Strategies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Normalising the practice</li> <li>2. Linguistic assertion</li> <li>3. Relevance to Islamic principles</li> <li>4. Oman: a unique model</li> <li>5. Authority assertion</li> <li>6. 'No point reinventing the wheel'</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Western models do not serve education in host country</li> <li>2. 'Inferiority' towards Western experts and English language</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. through acknowledgement of MoHE's efforts</li> <li>2. by emphasising improvement and change</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal tensions</li> <li>2. Observed tensions</li> </ol> |

## 8.2. Defence

That all the respondents in Group A (P02, P06, P07 and P13) immediately assumed a defensive approach towards the discourse of Western methods in HE was not at all unexpected, as they held powerful and sensitive positions in the larger context of decision-making in education and HE in Oman. Given that he had high levels of power as well, P10 from Group B also used the same tactic. What was unexpected, nevertheless, was to see how some respondents from Groups C and D shared the defensive narrative although their strategies varied a bit compared to the ones used by Group A and Group B members. This 'narrative of defence' was manifested in the use of the following discursive strategies: normalising the practice, linguistic assertion, establishing relevance to Islamic principles, showcasing the unique model of Oman, authority assertion and 'no point starting from scratch'.

### 8.2.1. Normalising the Practice

The widely used technique was 'normalising' or 'making normal' the practice of importing or borrowing Western experiences and concepts by means of:

### ***Comparison with Other Countries, Especially Developed Ones:***

By showing that other countries especially Western developed ones also imported and benefited from other experiences, several respondents with medium to high levels of decision making power tried to illustrate that such a practice was a normal thing in the discourse of education policymaking. P02 generally stated, “I believe that benefiting from others exists even in Western states”. For example, P07 noted that “The US brings some Singaporeans. Why? They don’t have Americans?” to prove that borrowing and learning from others was exercised even by a powerful country like the USA. Additionally, P06 explained that advanced Asian countries such as Japan and Korea also benefited from the West and argued, “these are not in the West but definitely they are heavily influenced by the West”. She also tried to normalise the specific policy of affiliation adopted by the Omani government by mentioning that some Indian institutions were “very high-quality institutions in affiliation with Western institutions of repute”. Moreover, P13 contended that “Singapore ... Malaysia and other countries like Japan and China and others benefited from Western experiences ... Lately, also Vietnam has achieved a good level in education, an advanced level in education no one expected it. It benefited from modernisation and improvement in its educational system based on best practices in the Western system”.

In short, the technique of normalising a practice through comparison with other countries could be viewed as a ‘political’ strategy that decision-makers might resort to due to the complexity of their roles and positions.

### ***Conferring a Universal Character to the Practice:***

This normalising strategy could somewhat be attached to the tactic of making comparisons with other countries, so together they both give more ‘legitimacy’ to the practice of importing of Western, or more politically-correct ‘universal’, concepts and methods. For example, P06 specifically pointed out that the credit hour system adopted in Omani HE was not American because it was also implemented in other countries such as Canada and Australia. She further added, “there are other colleges [in Oman] ... linked up with Jordan ... and Jordanian universities like Yarmuk also have the semester system ... most of the Arab world, if that was the case. It would not be Oman alone”.

### ***Historical Legacy of Mutual Transfer:***

This final normalising technique was used to highlight that the legacy of transfer and borrowing of knowledge was mutual, albeit at different times in Islamic and Western history. By remembering how in the past Western civilisation heavily benefited from the Arabs, who were at the time more advanced and more powerful, the respondents implied that learning from stronger and more developed nations was both a goal and a natural instinct. For example, P02 stated, “We are fascinated by the West to a certain extent because they have evolved, developed and so. One day they were also fascinated by Arab and Islamic civilisation”. Likewise, P07 defended the practice, “Any person is looking for the best and advanced ... For example, when we look at the years of the (superiority) [sic] of Arab civilisation, we find that the West drew from the Arab civilisation. Why? Because it was simply a lot superior and advanced and so you are always looking for the superior.” In addition, P10 argued, “I look at it differently. I see that especially in education there are no boundaries in the world ... When colonisation came to our region, it brought researchers who benefited from the Islamic and Arabic culture and till now they teach it in their universities ... They have a lot of good things and we also have good things ... we must benefit from them.”

### **8.2.2. Linguistic Assertion**

The second narrative that was predominantly used by Group A respondents to signal their defence of the practice of importing Western and foreign methods was through linguistic assertion such as objecting to the use of certain terminologies. For example, discussing the ‘policy’ of using English as a medium of instruction in HE, P07 stressed, “Don’t use ‘policy’. What do you mean the ‘policy’ of HE in the English language?” In addition, he did not agree with the use of the word ‘importing’ to refer to Basic Education, which was originally a Canadian system, and disputed, “First of all, I don’t know if I do agree with you, the word importing.” When the researcher wondered what he would rather use, he replied, “Not in this case”, arguing that “when you look at the word ‘import’, you bring it as it is and you apply it as it is ... I wish that happens but this can’t be ... this is the problem is that you try to bring ideas and adapt them here”, suggesting that once adapted, an idea could not be called ‘imported’.

Another respondent, P06, expressed frequent reservations about the use of certain terminologies. For instance, she argued, “I don’t think you could say we’ve imported fully something” and preferred to call it by other ways:

- “*know what’s the latest*”: She argued, “So, there’s nothing wrong with it. You know I don’t call it importing. We want to know what’s the latest”.
- “*made use*” and “*utilised*”: She stated, “Having said that, of course we ... made use or utilised best practices”.
- “*benefited*” and “*influence*”: She emphasised, “So we benefited from them ... but I wouldn’t say we imported a Western management concept. More so, I would think so there is an influence in the curriculum and examination systems and grading and whatever”.

Talking about affiliation with Western HEIs, P06 further used some kind of linguistic manipulation. She argued, “by the way academic affiliation does not necessarily mean importing Western concepts. You are mixing two things together” but then she stated, “loosely then you can say it took the Western style, I would say, of HE rather than the Western management concepts” or even “academic management rather than Western systems of management”.

P11 was the only one among Groups C and D to stress her reservation about the terminologies of “importing”, “Western” and “system”. For example, she stressed, “We don’t say that we have imported ... we have benefited from foreign expertise in the development of Omani curricula.” She also argued, “We don’t say Western ... perhaps there are new strategies in learning that were not used and we benefited from the West”. At some point, she even requested that the use of the word ‘system’ be avoided and contended, “Let’s avoid the word ‘system’; we say that it’s an approach and working methods”.

### **8.2.3. Relevance to Islamic Principles**

Several respondents from different groups also purposefully associated the concepts of ‘learning from others’ and ‘quality’ to the teachings of Islam in what seemed to be a way to defend the practice and demonstrate its relevance to and roots in Islamic culture.

For example, P07 chose to quote from the Quran (12:76), “over all endued with knowledge is one, the All-Knowing” and explained, “meaning that you have needs and

you bring those people [Western expertise], learn from them but do things by yourself with their consultation, with their help”. Another respondent, P11, highlighted that the concept of *itqaan* (doing work in perfect manner) was part of Islamic teachings and quoted a well-known saying of Prophet Mohammad. She stated, “importing this approach and these methods from the West, I don’t think it’s wrong because ‘he when he works should perform it in perfect manner’ [Prophet Mohammad’s saying]. So, even adopting quality assurance, that it is a Western approach ... I don’t agree with that since our *Sharia* [Islamic Law] urges us to perfect our work from planning to execution and see its result”. Quoting the exact same saying, P01 argued, “quality is not a Western concept; it’s already an Islamic concept as it was mentioned in the Prophet’s saying, ‘he who performs a job should do it in perfect manner’. So, performing a job well is quality”. He reasoned, “if we go back to our Islamic values, we’ll see that they urge us to perform a job in perfect manner ... all that Western countries have done was setting criteria to measure performance ... so all HEIs in Oman or in other Arab states have adopted the quality system”. Likewise, P12 stressed, “the quality system is not a Western philosophy because we have it in our religion and it is built-in in our *Sharia* system that ‘He who performs a job should perform it in perfect manner’, so you have to be professional in your work ... maintain it to a higher standard ... give your best. These are all Islamic teachings”.

In fact, this approach of responding to Western methods by emphasising compatibility with Islamic teachings sounds familiar to an argument made by a Arab-Muslim scholar. Abou El Fadl (2001), who claims that the main intellectual response to resist the challenges of Westernisation and modernity in Islam has been ‘apologetics’, maintains that the efforts to defend Islamic beliefs have focused on emphasising the religion’s supremacy as well as its compatibility with Western ideologies. However, there is still a difference with the current study. Although the respondents in this group tried to explain that some imported Western philosophies, mainly quality management, were in fact important Islamic principles and hence could easily fit in the Omani education context, they did not particularly refer to the ‘supremacy’ of Islam, definitely not at the present time, and they certainly did not use an ‘apologetic’ defensive tone. They seemed to be merely stating facts about Islamic beliefs that have somewhat been overlooked.

#### **8.2.4. Oman: A Unique Model**

Another defensive technique was showcasing that Oman was a special example compared to other Arab states, suggesting that what might not work in other places might easily work here, mainly because of its tolerance to others and seriousness in maintaining the specificity of society.

Praising the Omani model, P02 stated, “Omani society lives in harmony and accepts the other, who can be non-Omani ... Oman is different ... this peculiarity, I believe, is because we have been able to find no place for fanaticism and sectarianism” adding that this “positive difference I think is often due to our educational curricula from kindergarten to HE, which call for harmony and tolerance ... I think it’s a model ... Oman should export ... if this style and this life in Oman was applied in many other societies, the world would live in harmony”. He maintained, “In Oman, we have imported many things, but we were able to maintain the specificity of our society”.

Whether borrowed concepts may affect Omani identity and culture in the long run, P07 reassured, “I doubt it. Why? Simply because we have passed the stage of influence ... [due to] the politics of the country in the preservation of identity”. He insisted that in spite of all the developments and modernisation witnessed in Oman, “we are still the same. Yes, our mentality has changed but we still keep our identity”. Suggesting that the government was monitoring the importing process, P10 referred to the phenomenon of ‘baroque arsenal’ (See Donn & Al Manthri, 2013) and implied that this “fever caught by other Gulf states” was not allowed in Oman.

Also asserting the exemplary case of Oman was P16 who maintained, “Omani society is open, and benefiting from others’ experiences that preceded us is an existing principle, but when we do, we go back to our fundamentals ... religion, norms, history ... being selective is the foundation of importing ... systems and expertise from all around the world”. Talking about these fundamentals, P12 emphasised, “You see, strong cultures, strong values will never ever be frightened by the others because when you have solid pillars, nobody will shake you”. He justified “first of all, we as a Muslim society. Secondly, we as a country, we are very diverse. We have people from all different backgrounds and our country has been in connection with other civilisations for a long time. So, where’s the impact? You tell me. Where is the fear? ... for example, our

relationship with the West, with England is very very [sic] strong, back through in history. Look at the Omani society. Are we Westernised? Do you see any sign of British [influence] in the street?” He also analyzed how “the Islamic civilisation has taken from the Indian civilisation, but we have taken all the knowledge and good things. We did not take their worshipping of idols. We have to be sensitive. We have taken from China. We have taken from the Greek. All these different civilisations have taken from each other and then they developed”.

#### **8.2.5. Authority Assertion**

This was also a strategy of defence used by a couple of respondents of high power. In a very strong message to HEIs that might refuse to adhere to the concept of quality assurance and management, P02 stated: “those institutions do not respect themselves and they should not continue ... yes, there should be discussion, there should be modification so to satisfy the majority ... we cannot separate the government from the society. So, I think if the society says we want quality ... those institutions that do not want to be on board should close their doors [sic]”. P06 also argued, “yes we’ve taken advantage of certain systems that we think, as Omanis in management positions, that [sic] will work in Oman” and further expounded, “We are planning now the University of Oman and we are contracted with a company that brought in Stanford research institute. So yes, we want to learn from others. There’s nothing wrong with that ... the final decision is ours”.

#### **8.2.6. ‘No Point Reinventing the Wheel’**

The last strategy in the narrative of defence category is ‘start where others stopped’. This statement seemed like a basic conviction among many respondents in respect to importing models. P06 argued, “Yes, obviously there is no point in repeating [sic] the wheel”. Similarly, P12 asserted, “that’s always been the practice that you start where the others you know stopped. You don’t go and start from zero!”. Subscribing to the futility of inventing local models compared to the utility of those ready-designed in other foreign countries, P02 asked, “Why do we need to reinvent the wheel?” adding, “If somebody did it and it proved to be good, why should I come up with a solution from scratch?” Supporting this opinion, P04 also affirmed the futility of starting from scratch and argued, “Science is accumulative. I cannot build from zero. So, if there’s something available, why don’t I benefit from it? Benefiting from others is not a shame or something to be criticized for”. P07 also instructed, “start from where others stopped, but take into

consideration the context where you are in”. Finally, P17 advised, “my concept is it’s totally fine to get from someone else as long as that person is experienced and mature ... you don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

This has in fact been confirmed in the literature as a slogan adopted by the Omani government in both the early development and later in the reformation of various sectors such as health, education and even modern management systems, a motto that was inevitably applied to the political structure as well (Al-Farsi, 2013).

### **8.3. Disapproval**

Several respondents expressed their strong disapproval towards the practice of importing certain Western models, a response which sometimes paralleled a direct ‘narrative of attack’ on officials and policymakers. Their reactions were too critical, constituting the opposite side of the argument. Two of the respondents belonged to Group B, representing the parliamentary/ consultative side; in other words, the voice of the public. Hence, it was not entirely surprising for such statements to come from them. The others, from Groups C and D, respectively, voiced serious matters concerning borrowing ideas in HE.

The main strategies used to communicate the narrative of disapproval was by showing how Western models did not improve education in the host country and by accentuating the presence of an ‘inferiority’ towards Western experts and English language.

#### **8.3.1. Borrowed Models Do Not Serve Education in Host Country**

P05, who widened the scope of the problem to include the larger Gulf region, disputed the practice, “If you go to Gulf states, if you take Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, all are borrowed experiences. I don’t think they improve education because they don’t exactly serve the country they are in”. Specifically referring to what he described as “arsenal box<sup>5</sup>, like weapons that come in a box”, he clarified, “either they are expired, obsolete and they don’t know what’s inside and if they’re not obsolete, they are not opened or they are taken as they are, exactly. These borrowed things even in education this doesn’t serve the education in any country”. He disapproved the practice of borrowing whole models and proposed, “we should not seek things that are easy, that is [sic] borrowed,

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<sup>5</sup> The respondent was referring to the concept of ‘baroque arsenal’ used in Donn and Al Manthri (2013).



even if we increase our publication, even if we do some research in some areas”. Concerning the specific case of CAS, P05 assumed that “the objective may be noble that we want to have a college in every governorate. We identified [a] certain thing ... NZ model. We turned teachers’ colleges to Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS)”, but he contended, “We thought, but this is my opinion, that we were solving the problem, but we create[d] another problem. We have a deficiency in the number of teachers”.

Another respondent, P15, also expressed his disapproval of the way Western methods were implemented in Oman, stating, “In my opinion, importing systems, models and experiences are good for guidance only and not to be applied”. For example, “they brought Basic Education system in Oman and said that the students in a class in the elementary level I think should not exceed 26, and that there should be a flying class<sup>6</sup>, and a system of automatically passing grades ... Unfortunately, we haven’t applied but very little. When we wanted to apply the concept of the flying class, we were hit by reality, that classrooms were not enough. With regard to 26 students, teachers and classrooms were not sufficient. We haven’t applied but automatically passing grades and mixing boys and girls.” He ruled that the system was “a disaster. If applied this way, it’s a disaster.” Furthermore, P15 reported how Omani officials wanted to borrow developed Western models to create a breakthrough in education, but he stated, “I believe they are hasty, as this process must be gradual in the development of education. We cannot bring a powerful model while our financial capabilities cannot afford this, neither do our social and societal norms approve of this”.

Remarkably, both P05 and P15 envisioned a future model for Omani HE by exploring the past. “We should design. We should have a model that take us ... the history of Oman. What did they do in the past and how do you link to the new education system”, P05 proposed. To him, anything beyond that was “a luxury”. P15 also found a solution in the glory of the past. “When the Sultanate was at the peak of its glory, it did not import scientists or teachers ... it had its own style and was able to spread Islam to East Africa and the Indian Subcontinent ... they did not need any expertise from abroad”, he contended. Strikingly, these two attitudes are in line with a conclusion made by Ghubash at the end of his extensive research on the Omani Islamic democratic experience. He

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<sup>6</sup> A concept in BE where the students move or ‘fly’ from classroom to another to attend a certain lesson or subject.

writes, “Oman cannot win the future without adopting its own past. To shut the door on the past would be to shut the door on truth itself, on the sources of Oman’s identity, on its civilisation” (2006, p. 203).

All the same, the opinions of the two respondents along with Ghubash’s recommendation do not fall far from an overwhelming Arab Muslim mentality that still extols the old Arab Islamic civilisation, which was once a rival to the Western civilisation.

### **8.3.2. ‘Inferiority’ Towards Western Experts and the English Language**

Another contentious issue that the rest of respondents in this group protested was reliance on Western experts instead of local competencies. Regarding it “a very critical issue”, P08 claimed, “we have another issue, which is hidden. It is not clear that usually we think if you are a local expert, you are not that competent as the international expert though the international expert who comes to your country takes everything from you. This is a very critical issue”. It seems that the main advantage these Western experts have is mostly linked to the English language, which is also another critical issue P08 insisted to highlight. She asserted, “we have to think that producing research in Arabic is not a weak point for the academic staff. It should be considered a strong point because they are producing for their society. You know, the Chinese, the Japanese most of their research is in their language”. Labelling it as “inferiority”, she urged, “So sometimes you know we need to get rid of this inferiority”. In fact, this particular issue has recently been reported by Al'Abri (2016). Investigating the architecture of policymaking in Omani HE, he confirms the dominating status of English in Omani HE policies. For example, he notes that “SQU did not promote some of the academic faculty because their publications were mainly in Arabic. Academics are forced to publish in English to be promoted” (Al'Abri, 2016, p. 193) .

Furthermore, P03 also used a similar approach to express his disapproval in respect to this topic. He claimed, “The problem is that we had Arab experts ... because the Arabic language was no longer needed, the English language has been adopted, and the new approach has become Western or European, hence they brought foreign experts”. He further argued, “foreign experts don’t have anything to do with Omani environment. They think they are coming to plant this seed in this country regardless of its

surroundings and this is the problem”. To him, this was all about money. He explained, “go to any of these countries, when they sense that you have money, meaning you don’t have an issue with money, they sell you the highest they have in price, even in arms and cars, in everything ... they tell you, we’ve given you the best that we have, but the problem is that their best is not our best and this is something we are suffering from”. Another respondent who also believed this was an issue they were suffering from was P04. He expressed his disapproval using a metaphor to show that foreign experts were just like marketing salesmen, stating “Don’t they come to market cars and tomatoes? It’s the same thing. OK, you have a good project but have you tried to look at the Omani market ... the mind of Omani student? We are suffering from these issues”.

## **8.4. Compliance**

This third category, which mainly comprised respondents from Groups C and D, differed from the first theme of ‘defence’ in that the people here did not express a narrative of defence as much as they demonstrated their approval and compliance with Western-imported methods. Their statements of compliance mainly reflected an overall acknowledgment of MoHE’s efforts or specific observations of improvement in HE in general or at their respective institutions.

### **8.4.1. Compliance through Acknowledgment of MoHE’s Efforts**

Several participants extended their support to the entire practice by applauding the efforts and changes taking place in HE, indicating that they had confidence in the policymaking processes. For example, P03 argued, “In the past, decisions were imposed, but lately they [MoHE] also started to think about engaging them [stakeholders]. Also, because the education council has completely changed ... everywhere there’s involvement of community ... so there has been changes in the last 5 years after the events of the Arab Spring”. He also mentioned that “till date education in Oman did not have a law for education at all, no strategy, no philosophy, no laws.” He added, “it’s only ministerial decisions that regulate [issues] on a daily basis ... now we are working on a law for education and HE”.

P04 also recognised the same positive changes. He reported, “Now Oman is making strides that show great improvements ... bold steps in making a law for education in

general ... the ministry also started to take notice of student advisory councils and has set up a law for them ... also academic promotions, they made a law for academic promotions for all colleges and universities". This, in his opinion, was proof that "the ministry has become more mature". He also remarked the transparency exercised by the Ministry in that "the law [of education] was presented in the newspapers and people made comments and observations about it" and that "they exercised a lot of openness in that they depended on other people. They consulted us regarding student advisory councils and the law of education. They consulted us in everything".

Besides P03 and P04, P09 also maintained, "there's no such a thing as Eastern and Western. The ministry is working to develop these issues specially [equity, access for all, popular participation, etc.] by producing legal texts, in light doses ... now we have student advisory councils and elections, and so on. There's gradual transition in the adoption of such things". P09 also acknowledged, "Certainly we attended all the seminars conducted by the ministry including that of the education law. There's consultation ... we contributed and gave our opinion if they sent us documents, laws. We reply and tell them if something helps or doesn't of course based on our own views. Yes, there's communication". Likewise, P12 acknowledged, "whatever decision or policy or law that affects us [private HEIs], the ministry consults us first. We discuss it together. We work together as a team actually ... we have access to the highest authority in the country if we have any issues".

#### **8.4.2. Compliance by Emphasising Improvement and Change**

These included a feel-good attitude about borrowed methods such as affiliation with Western HEIs, quality management and accreditation.

P11 observed change due to accreditation and audit process arguing, "overall I say it led to improvement because many aspects were overlooked. We took them as unimportant but when they were put in the quality guidebook, we paid attention and we found them important although we could not fulfil some of them". She even reported what can be seen as 'forced compliance' regarding inapplicable items. "When the [HE] institute defines it [an item] as inapplicable, the [OAAA] agency took this into consideration but at some point, it may say 'why is this not applicable? You have to do it'. So, we have to do something", she described. Another respondent, P17, also narrated how the audit

process was “very good”, since “We got a lot of affirmations and a lot of recommendations as well, which meant that to some extent we were on the right track”, noting that OAAA “basically suggested ways for us to improve and we are working on those areas”. P14 also praised the OAAA framework, stating “let me say it is a good step in the path of academic accreditation ... what I like and feel is good is that the OAAA is applied on all and this is a good thing”.

Discussing TQM, P16 endorsed the managerial system “even if it was imposed. As I told you what is the definition of TQM? Eventually it is improvement and development. Anything that improves and develops, has quality, let’s say, it is always the best. TQM is a ladder, let’s say top of the ladder in the types of existing management. Right?”. Hence, he argued, “there’s no harm in applying TQM in institutions”. The respondent further described, “as a management policy in the college ... we have committees to develop the quality system, we have strategies emerging from quality that we follow, we have periodic meetings ... all of which fall in the interest of what is called TQM”. On the same topic, P17 witnessed, “So quality assurance starts from the first day that you join in this college. So, you’re expected to comply with the procedures and the policies that they had put in place as part of quality management and quality assurance. So, they would monitor our teaching. They would assess or praise our teaching itself and basically suggest improvement actions. Not only that. They would guide us in the best ways to get the best of teaching.” The respondent believed, “I was lucky enough to not just be given the task of teaching, I was also assigned as quality assurance coordinator ... so in that way, I got the chance to expand my quality assurance reach. So, I was not just focusing on how to improve teaching. I had to focus on how to improve the department in general” and “I had to be involved in strategic planning” and “we had to help in basically improving the operations at the department”. P17 further recognised how Deming’s ADRI quality cycle (Approach – Deploy – Review – Improve) “is a very successful concept here” and “We are doing it in everything ... even when we teach, we try to apply it”.

Furthermore, P01 acknowledged that “it has become a complete conviction [among people in HE] that the application of quality standards contributes to the improvement of the institution”. An opinion backed by P12 who argued, “I don’t think that we have faced any issue with quality ... because every society will accept a good quality”. P03

described, “of course now when we talk about quality programme, everything is measured. It’s a must ... for example regarding satisfaction, we offer entertainment or accommodation services, we have to take the students’ feedback on accommodation and we give them a questionnaire ... you see we are a service sector. People buy a commodity, which is education. So, we must take their opinion. We have many questionnaires and surveys and they are all monitored by numbers”.

Another area where respondents also expressed their compliance was affiliation with foreign and Western HEIs. For example, P01 acknowledged that imposing this policy was good, affirming that “when the report [from the parent university] arrives, a copy of which we had already sent to the ministry of higher education, we meet at the college board ... to discuss weaknesses listed in the report and find ways to overcome or get rid of them to learn from others’ experience, which is the parent university, and so when affiliation was imposed on colleges by the ministry of higher education, it was a good thing” because “they in the USA are often at the top of knowledge”, P01 asserted. P12 also complied with the policy of affiliation and argued, “yes, it is necessary when you are starting. It is a must in fact and that’s why it is imposed on the HEIs” since “having an academic collaborator is a good thing because this is like you are having an outsider eye looking at you, to advise you, to mentor you, to guide you. You know we have developed because of this relationship”. He stated, “It’s a completely Western type of culture of operation if you look at it, but it is run by the locals and taking the local environment into account”.

Talking about whether the Western model was appropriate for the Omani context, P03 ascertained, “can the Western model be applied here? I tell you, yes, and it is supposed to be applied because it has many useful things for us, the society and the economy. I mean many. And it’s mature. They matured and arrived at stages, you know the experiences they have gone through. They didn’t jump ... They have gone through experiences and reached a conviction that this is the best practice.” He expressed his compliance, “So, we have no problem bringing the best from them ... we are not supposed to bring everything and we are supposed to prepare the ground [environment] before we bring that thing. I mean the entire ground must be prepared to bring it and guarantee its success. If we do this, I prefer Western models than the others” even though he maintained that other non-Western models were also good. “Of course, we regard

Japan as from the West. China has almost become part of the West. So, there are [other] models. Korea, Singapore and Australia, all are developed models. If we brought these and applied them in our daily life, we will benefit from them but we also have to eliminate many things in our culture, which are harmful”, he argued.

P12 summed up the discourse of compliance, “You see, there is no, what to call, force influence. First of all, we are all Western-educated anyway. We studied in the West, so we bring eventually the Western philosophies and Western experiences because that’s the nature ... and if you look at the institutions, who are the managers and the management of the institutions there, majority are actually Western-educated. So, there’s no forcing element in there. It’s by nature of the practice and also because of this partnership. That also has created the culture, the Western culture”.

## **8.5. Tension**

The final category or narrative dealt with personal and observed tensions that the respondents communicated through their statements.

### **8.5.1. Personal Tensions**

Problems with quality, accreditation, affiliation, regulations, and MoHE over-control were conveyed.

To begin with, P04 believed that in “even Western countries, you have British and American universities. Don’t think that everything we bring from America is good and every American university is good.” He described his tensions with both quality and accreditation, which to him were merely attractive titles, without substantial benefit. He stated, “See I have been working in quality management since 2005 ... The title is attractive, but the truth is it’s useful for organising regulations and work, but Allah knows it does not affect the output much ... it’s more, what they call it donkey work, I mean written work and filing and so on”. Regarding accreditation, he noted, “till now from what I’ve seen, we are currently working on institutional accreditation. It’s mainly organising work”. Another respondent, P03, also pointed out to student difficulties as a result of the gap created by importing Western systems, which affected the quality of the HE system, “We actually import university programmes from Britain, America, Canada, Australia, and so on. So, when I give the student a course to study in English,

engineering, business ... etc., the student has a problem, s/he can't comprehend the same language ... the content". He expressed his tensions, "you have to lower your quality, your expectation as a teacher, as a university because if you don't, all students will fail and so we have lowered ourselves with the student, meaning the whole system has been lowered to go with the student. The lower the student is, the lower the system, so the outputs will of course be weak".

P08's tensions were generated by the regulations that hinder the application of quality measures. She observed, "you have some let's say a regulation which will hinder you to take decision on certain aspect" of quality management and assurance. She, for example, expressed her frustration at the Omani Civil Service Law, "if an Omani is not competent and his annual assessment is very weak, the higher administration does not have the right to kick him out. The Civil Service Law protects him".

Even though P01 believed that affiliation was a good thing, he complained that it was depleting the local HEI's financial resources, saying, "Of course affiliation comes with fees. Annually, we pay big amounts to the parent university". He expressed his tension that "they [parent HEI delegates] come spend around a week. We book a hotel for them. They meet with the dean, the college board, academics, and students. They check examination notebooks, test questions, and finally when they leave, they write a report". Similarly, P04 claimed, "Based on my 4-year experience here in the sector, some affiliations started to take a materialistic approach, especially foreign universities". He questioned the cost-effectiveness of such policy, "They [foreign universities] just give you the name [of university] and take amounts of money from you and sometimes do not offer ... much in return of the money they take". Furthermore, he noted that affiliation with foreign universities "has become a kind of control over some colleges, etc." and proposed, "I therefore wish for the Ministry of Higher Education to think not as much about academic affiliation but about cooperation. Come visit me and take a report and get a reward, but do not strangle me. You are killing me this way!", he reiterated his tensions about the over control exercised by affiliate universities.

Over control was also the biggest tension that P14 had, but it was the over control of private HEIs by the MoHE. He clearly stated, "in fact what we don't like is that sometimes you think the ministry is over-controlling ... they interfere with even the name



of the college. You are doing an OAAA. Ok. Let it work. I mean you set an OAAA ... but at the same time you are interfering”. A few of his statements also expressed his tensions about the lack of clarity in terms of the philosophy and vision of HE operations. He exclaimed, “I mean if you are saying that the market is already saturated with private HEIs, then why approve new ones? Isn’t this a contradiction? So, I think there’s no philosophy on which this is based”. He stated, “Quantity rather than quality, which is totally different, totally wrong I mean. The philosophy on which this is built upon I don’t know”.

### **8.5.2. Observed Tensions**

Observed tensions chiefly focused on staff resistance towards quality management measures.

P08 reported staff resistance as a challenge to the application of quality management and accreditation. “If you talk about accreditation, some of them [staff] say we have been teaching for 20 years at this university ... what is needed of me? ... This will not add anything”, the respondent narrated a scope of the problem. The respondent thus believed that “You have people who need to be acculturated to make them aware of the [benefits of] quality. You tell them no longer, now no university in the world in my opinion is just run like this. No control on it. There should be a kind of control to measure the effectiveness and achievement of the academic staff, the admin staff”. She also stressed that “even if you develop the [education] law, you develop the regulations, still you need to work hard to change the mentality of the people, whether within the institutions of within the community”. P11 also observed that “especially those used to the old system faced challenges shifting to a new system” and she subscribed to the fact that “any change will have some resistance in the beginning”. Regarding the application of TQM, P16 mentioned that there were observed “hindrances, cultures” that influenced the reaction of the target population particularly staff, reporting that 90% of the academic staff in CAS were “expats with certain culture, specific teaching methods ... their knowledge”. He further explained “in some departments some staff had 33 years of experience. For you to take them from state to another, you must do it gradually ... train them ... perhaps for them to accept it, you must convince them gradually”.

## 8.6. Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed the final findings of the study, which were obtained from the second stage of interview data analysis. Using Foucauldian categories to interpret the statements of the respondents, it was revealed that high-profile decision-makers and top managers in the Omani education landscape negotiated and appropriated the use of Western methods using four main different narratives that also relayed their level of power:

1. Those with the highest levels of authority assumed a defensive approach using the following discursive strategies:
  - a. normalising the practice by: establishing comparisons with other developed countries, conferring a universal character to the practice and highlighting the historical legacy of mutual transfer between the West and Arab Islamic civilisation.
  - b. linguistic assertion by objecting to the use of certain terminologies such as ‘importing’, ‘policy’ and ‘Western’ and choosing to use words like ‘benefit’, ‘utilise’ and ‘know what’s the latest’.
  - c. establishing relevance with Islamic principles by quoting from the Qur’an and Prophet Mohammad’s sayings and comparing Islamic concepts such as ‘itqaan’ with ‘quality’ to show compatibility with Western methods.
  - d. Showcasing the unique model of Oman by demonstrating its tolerance to others and ability to benefit from foreign models while maintaining the specificity of its society.
  - e. asserting authority in their attitude and statement.
  - f. adopting the slogan ‘no point reinventing the wheel’ by describing the futility of starting from scratch and inventing local models when ready-designed ones are quicker to implement.
2. Those mostly belonging to the parliamentary group adopted a narrative of disapproval to attack the policy and policymakers by describing how Western methods did not serve education in Oman and the Gulf region and by emphasising the serious condition of ‘inferiority’ towards Western experts and the English language.

3. Those from public and private HEIs, with no policymaking power but high institutional power, showed their compliances by acknowledging the efforts of the top authority, i.e. MoHE, as well as by stressing various improvements in HE.
4. Those from public and private HEIs also used a narrative of tension to communicate personal and observed tensions with a variety of practices related to Western methods.

Now that all the findings of the study have been delineated in great detail, the next chapter will review them in terms of points of connection and also in relation to relevant literature.

## Chapter Nine: Discussion

### 9.1. Overview

In the previous three chapters, the findings were presented and discussed in sequence moving from one level of analysis to the other one to gain a more systematic and deeper understanding. However, this chapter will attempt to reverse the process; it will try to connect the dots and see the forest for the trees. To that end, the final categorisations that materialised from the data of the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews will be put next to each other and compared to explore the presence of any points of similarities and/or differences. Discerning overall patterns will help readers see the broader picture in the way the different segments of the people in the context of Omani education negotiate the use of Western methods. The chapter will also review and analyse important relevant issues in the literature in relation to the overall findings of the study. The chapter ends with a summary.

### 9.2. Themes: Points of Connection

Before proceeding with the comparison, it is useful to remember how the different groups of the study's respondents ascribed different meanings and ways of negotiations to the phenomenon of using Western methods in the education, especially HE, system in Oman. Table 9.1 illustrates these categories.

**Table 9. 1** Questionnaire and Interview Respondents' Appropriation Methods

| <b>The Questionnaire Respondents (A)</b><br>(end users of the system, such as students, teachers, school principals, administrators)        | <b>The Interview Respondents (B)</b><br>(decision-makers in the (higher) education sector and top management across HEIs) |
|---|---|
| Group 1: Identity Defensiveness<br>Group 2: Scepticism<br>Group 3: Intermediate Position<br>Group 4: Pro-Western<br>Group 5: Topic Avoiders | Group 1: Defence<br>Group 2: Disapproval<br>Group 3: Compliance<br>Group 4: Tension                                       |

It must be noted that the analyses of the data collected from the two instruments were not done simultaneously, nor did one affect the other in the categorisation process. The themes on the right column (B) emerged independently long after the ones on the left column (A) were confirmed. Having said this, however, the questionnaire did serve as an exploratory investigation on the context to find out the reactions and perceptions of the people at the receiving end of education services towards the use of Western methods, with which they had daily contact. Hence, the questionnaire data helped with the construction of the interview guide and the probes.

A comparison of the two sets of categories shows that points of connections exist between: identity defensiveness and defence; pro-Western and Compliance; and scepticism and disapproval.

### **Identity Defensiveness versus the Narrative of Defence**

Notably, some respondents from both of the study's population samples used a defensive approach, albeit guarding different things. The ones belonging to the end users' population were very defensive about their identity in terms of religion, culture and language believing that Western methods were, in a sense, threatening their values and customs. Representing the voice of the public citizenry, they projected a nationalistic perspective and called for educational philosophies to be empowered by the society's culture and traditions. In contrast, the respondents comprising top decision makers in the educational arena defended the practice of importing systems from the West. Their defensive rhetoric served to normalise the practice as other major countries adopted it as well and benefited from it. Remarkably, the other justifications they gave almost mirrored a response to the identity defensiveness arguments. First, they justified that Islamic principles were not in contradiction with the specific Western models that Omani officials have imported, particularly quality management since quality as a concept (itqaan) represents an important teaching in Islam. Second, they argued that Oman with its unique religious tolerance and its millennial tradition has been able to maintain a distinctive solid national culture and was almost immune to external forces or foreign cultural influences. In fact, several scholars (Al-Farsi, 2013; Funsch, 2015; Ghubash, 2006) have confirmed a uniqueness state to Oman compared to the wider Arab Middle East largely because of its Islamic tradition of Ibadhism, Oman being its main centre, its democratisation process characterised by a top-down Shura (consultation) system and its

adherence to a gradual modernisation process that takes into consideration Omani traditions and culture.

With this important difference clarified, it can be noted that the narrative of defence shared similarities with the pro-Western group from A.

### **Pro-Western and the Narrative of Compliance**

Both these groups were supportive of the use of Western philosophy and appreciated the superiority of Western countries' knowledge, science and technology and the maturity of their experiences. In other words, these respondents represented a segment of the society guided by a pragmatic Western outlook that prioritised the benefits and gains expected to be achieved through the implementation of Western systems and programmes. Both groups used a similar strategy wherein they trivialised the influence of certain Western concepts and models and counted them as 'harmless'. Instead, they reported successful experiments with some Western models such as specific teaching methods, accreditation programmes and quality management. One point, however, distinguished the two. While the compliance group, comprising top managers from both private and public HEIs, recognised that some imported policies and systems, like affiliation and quality programmes were 'imposed' by the government, they still observed their positive results. Furthermore, these HEIs top administrators employed another compliance technique that did not directly correspond with the topic at hand, i.e. the use of Western methods in HE, but one which echoed an important aspect of HE politics in Oman. These people demonstrated a form of compliance to upper authority by applauding the overall efforts of the MoHE and the changes gradually taking place especially in terms of increased communication and consultation with them regarding different HE matters and policies, such as the education law underway and the newly legalised student advisory councils.

### **Scepticism and the Narrative of Disapproval**

These are the last themes that also exhibited some strong points of connection. Both groups approached the topic with a strong sceptical attitude about the utility of the implementation of imported methods, especially those forced upon them and upon Omanis in general. They were particularly against 'random' and 'blind' adoption of anything Western, unless it was carefully studied and analysed in relation to the Omani

context in terms of various elements such as culture, religion, infrastructure and financial ability. They even suggested that some of the practices and policies of the MoE and MoHE already in place were lacking clear vision and transparency. For example, talking about language, while the first group (Scepticism) criticised the ‘compulsory’ adoption of English in HE and pointed out to its pointlessness to certain jobs, some respondents from the other group (Disapproval) expressed their disappointment and frustration because of the inferior status given to Arabic as a language of publication and research in the Arabic-speaking country of Oman compared to the superior status that English, a foreign language, enjoyed in the country’s HE system. The criticality of the Arabic language, which also resonated in the voices of the identity defensiveness respondents, has indeed been greatly emphasised in the literature because of its prominence in Arabs’ sense of identity (Harik, 1990) as they are “more conscious of their language than any people in the world” (Hourani, 1983, p. 1). Hence, if Arabs feel that their language, and for that matter their identity, is threatened by any Western method or system, objections and resistance are not unlikely.

Other philosophies also criticised by some of the respondents in these two groups were the ‘overnight’ implementation of the Basic Education system with its ‘imposed’ concept of mixed gender classes and the long school day that did not take into account the hot climate of the region. Moreover, some of the respondents who expressed their disapproval reported serious issues with Western experts and imported models and philosophies such as affiliation, accreditation and quality management. In brief, the respondents from both groups did not view Western concepts and models to be necessarily the best formula for the Omani education system since they might be too advanced, context-specific or perhaps already ‘obsolete’.

### **9.3. Points of Connection with Arab and Muslim Thought**

A careful analysis of all nine categorisations emerging from the current study’s findings reveals some remarkable links with both historical and contemporary thought in both the Arab and wider Muslim world as reported in the literature despite claims from some respondents of the defence group that Oman is a unique and special case within the wider Arab World.

First of all, the overall viewpoints of the respondents towards the use of Western methods in Omani (higher) education were widely divided, ranging from acceptance to criticism on one side and from defence to disapproval on the other side. This deep division in Arab-Muslim attitudes towards the West, its culture and knowledge has long been documented by many scholars, be it during Western imperialism or post-independence. In the Arab World, for example, Arabs have struggled to negotiate the dialogue of modernisation often relating it to unaccepted waves of Westernisation (Barakat, 1993) and so contrasting patterns of thought have dominated the discourse of revival of Arab societies. This has sparked a dualism of movements: modernism competed with a dialogue of traditionalism, liberalism was confronted by conservatism movements and secularism found a rival in Islamism.

Even within Islamist movements, whose resurgence has been in search of an authentic formula rooted in the Arab-Muslim heritage and doing away with reliance on the West, the same fragmentation has been observed. For example, Lewis (2010) notes that Muslim reaction to Western imperialism varied from tolerance and imitation to refusal and revolt whereas Esposito points out that there has been a general atmosphere of “rejection and confrontation to admiration and imitation” (1999, p. 49). Additionally, Robinson (2002) describes the schism in Muslims’ approach to Western influence and power with one half using a radical complaint tone while the other half instead adopting a modernist dialogue towards constructive action to benefit from Western knowledge and develop Muslim societies.

In brief, the categories that emerged from the study are not only evidence that profound divisions in Arab thought still continue to exist in the present time, but that almost the same patterns of mind-sets appear to be maintained throughout the Arab World, even in Oman, seemingly counted as a ‘different’ case. With such deep divisions in their arguments and the general dialogue of Western methods, realistic solutions to achieve development in the Omani education system with or without the transfer of Western knowledge can hardly be agreed, let alone achieving self-sufficiency, an ultimate goal of many a government in the larger Arab Gulf context.



#### **9.4. Is it an Arab Schizophrenia or Not?**

Efforts to adopt big Western concepts and formulas, such as socialism, Marxism or nationalism have generally failed in the Muslim-Arab countries. Moreover, Western capitalism has been regarded as being part of the problem for the withering socioeconomic conditions in many of these countries. The result has been a crisis of duality where sentiments of both admiration and resentment towards the West have co-existed in the Muslim World (Esposito, 1999). In fact, several scholars have claimed that in the Arab Muslim world this experience of split has aggravated into a state of ‘schizophrenia’ (See e.g. Buchanan, 1997; El Alaoui, 2011; Sharabi, 1988). That is, on the one hand, Arabs are enthusiastic about Western science and technology, but on the other hand they loathe Western culture. However, this is an extreme statement. In the current study, nothing in the respondents’ perceptions and ways of negotiation has indicated any degree of repugnance to the West per se. While the findings do show that the participants were split in their perspectives, even those who criticised the use of Western methods or those who were defensive of their Omani and Arabic identity did not have anything in particular against the West. Rather, their criticism mainly fell in the category of policymaking in the country. They had suspicions about the soundness of the rationale behind the practices and decisions of the ministries of both education and higher education.

That said, however, there was awareness in the respondents’ attitude of the differences and superiority of Western science and models, but this, to them, did not necessarily suggest a superiority of Western culture. Omanis, and for that matter Arabs and Muslims, continue to have much pride in their own values. Hence, culture and religion cannot be completely detached from other vital sectors like education, health, economy and politics. So, to go abroad for Western models that can bring progress and development in all levels of the society while protecting the local identity continues to be an ongoing debate and controversy. This is the essence of the duality and split in the mentality of the Arab people. Arabs are not schizophrenic nor distorted because the majority understands this duality between traditionalism and modernity. However, striking a balance between traditional values and imported Western liberal attitudes remains a challenge. One has to be abandoned for the other to attain maximum benefits of Western knowledge and this does not seem to be happening any time soon.

## **9.5. An Islamic Compatibility or Conflict?**

Discussing the issue of conflict between Islam and Western philosophies is a major undertaking, for this has been an ongoing controversy. In addition, it is not solely nor entirely what this study is about. On the whole, it is safe to say that none of the respondents adhered to the ‘clash of civilisation’ as such between Islam and the West, a clash that could be an obstacle to importing and implementing Western philosophies in education or elsewhere. Even though the respondents’ viewpoints were divided into four groups in relation to the subject of potential conflicts between Omani cultural and Islamic values and imported Western systems, they did not suggest, whether directly or indirectly, that flaws existed within the Islamic value structure that could subsequently form a hindrance. The first group simply and categorically denied the possibility of clash or conflict whatsoever. The second suggested there were only gaps and challenges between the two cultures. These gaps were mainly related to political, cultural and human elements. The third group believed cultural, social and economic conflicts were inevitable, but not necessarily a disadvantage, and could easily be reversed through a process of adaptation and adjustment. Even with the fourth group that subscribed to the likelihood of failure of Western models due to various contextual factors, Islam was not an issue. For them, it was mostly the failure of adequate planning and preparation. Concerning the common topic of gender relations, the respondents regarded it more as a cultural and social difference rather than an Islamic thing.

From a different but closely related angle, however, a key point that requires special mention is the Omani Islamic model of Ibadhism and its ‘potential advantage’ in the discourse of the application of Western methods. Even though the respondents did not exactly refer to the characteristics of Ibadhism, many praised the Omani model, specifically its tolerance to others. Some noted that because of this distinct difference from other countries in the Arab World, Oman can be a more fertile place to plant Western seeds, that is to import Western models in the educational arena. In fact, several authors in the literature have attributed this specificity of Oman to Ibadhism, which has heavily contributed in shaping the polity of the modern state. Most notably, Ghubash (2006, p. 7) insists that Oman’s course of politics, culture and history is eccentric and that this eccentricity lies in the foundations and operations of Ibadhism, which has produced a unique Omani democratic model that centers around consultation and consensus and which obeys “as faithfully as possible the values of a moderate, tolerant

Islam and the noble Arab traditions”. It can be said that since the Ibadhi school of Islam has, for the duration of its history, been marginalised by the dominating Sunni mainstream, the Ibadhis have isolated themselves and ultimately turned out to be less extreme and more tolerant to others, as is the case with any peripheral group.

That said, nevertheless, in the context of study and based on the statements and indications of many respondents, Ibadhism seems to be playing a double role, that of catalyst and shield. On the one hand, several respondents described that the Omani (socio-religious) model has generally been tolerant and accepted ‘the others’, irrespective of their cultural or religious background, meaning that the use of foreign and Western models, systems and even experts should not be expected to face any barriers to enter the Omani higher education. To the contrary, they would rather be welcomed. For example, P02 stated, “Omani society lives in harmony and accepts the other, who can be non-Omani ... Oman is different ... this peculiarity, I believe, is because we have been able to find no place for fanaticism and sectarianism”. He argued that this “positive difference I think is often due to our educational curricula from kindergarten to HE, which call for harmony and tolerance ... I think it’s a model ... Oman should export ... if this style and this life in Oman was applied in many other societies, the world would live in harmony”.

On the other hand, statements suggesting that the power of Ibadhism has worked as a shield against any unwanted Western influences were also present as it constantly fortifies and reinforces the Omani Arabic and Muslim identity. These respondents argued that despite contact and benefit from other cultures, Oman has been resilient to foreign influence because it has had solid foundations and because the government has adopted a policy of prudence selecting only what was safe to borrow that would not affect Omani identity and culture. For example, P07 reassured, “we have passed the stage of influence” and maintained that in spite of all the developments and modernisation witnessed in Oman, “we are still the same. Yes, our mentality has changed but we still keep our identity”. P16 also argued, “Omani society is open, and benefiting from others’ experiences that preceded us is an existing principle, but when we do, we go back to our fundamentals ... religion, norms, history ... being selective is the foundation of importing ... systems and expertise from all around the world”. Furthermore, P12 emphasised, “You see, strong cultures, strong values will never ever be frightened by the others because when you have solid pillars, nobody will shake you”. He justified “first

of all, we as a Muslim society. Secondly, we as a country, we are very diverse. We have people from all different backgrounds and our country has been in connection with other civilisations for a long time. So, where's the impact? You tell me. Where is the fear? ... for example our relationship with the West, with England is very very [sic] strong, back through in history. Look at the Omani society. Are we Westernised? Do you see any sign of British [influence] in the street?"

## **9.6. The Role of Western-Educated Officials and Elites**

The literature investigating the Arab Muslim history of dependence on the West has scholars precisely identifying the influential role of Western-educated elites in the transfer of Western knowledge to their original countries. To begin with, in the course of pursuing independence, the big ideology of pan-Arabism, developed in the twentieth century with the purpose of unifying the Arabs into a single nation with the Arabic language at its core, was introduced from the West and led by Western-educated Arab intellectuals, mainly Christian rather than Muslim Arabs (Hitti, 1962; Nasr, 1980). Then, post-independence, Esposito (1999) describes how modernisation processes in the newly emerging Muslim states were introduced and channelled by a few local elites along with their foreign advisers, who were both Western-educated and Western-oriented. It must be noted that while both Muslim elites and their Western experts viewed religion as hindrance to change in Muslim countries (Ayubi, 1991), the majority of Muslims "did not internalize a secular outlook and values" (1999, p. 7).

Remarkably, this same theme has recurred in the statements of many of the respondents, which clearly attests to the critical role this slice of society has in the broader discourse of Western methods in the Omani education system, for they are often associated with the decision making and administration landscape at all levels in the country. Many of the respondents associated Omani Western-educated officials to both the rationale and the selection of certain experiences, models and philosophies from the West, such as using English as a medium of instruction and publication in HE. Moreover, some respondents complied with the practice by showing how they, as Western-educated Omanis, brought back Western experiences by choice. For instance, P12 stated, "You see, there is no, what to call, force influence. First of all, we are all Western-educated anyway. We studied in the West, so we bring eventually the Western philosophies and Western experiences because that's the nature ... and if you look at the institutions, who

are the managers and the management of the institutions there, majority are actually Western-educated. So, there's no forcing element in there. It's by nature of the practice and also because of this partnership. That also has created the culture, the Western culture".

In short, although current Western-educated officials do not necessarily adopt secular beliefs, they continue to play an influential role in the practice of borrowing Western concepts and experiences in the Arab world.

## **9.7. Summary**

This chapter has reviewed and discussed the main findings of the study in an attempt to exhibit the bigger picture. First, points of connection between the major categorisations that emerged from both the questionnaire and interview data were compared. The analysis shows that respondents from both the end users group and the decision makers and managers used a defensive rhetoric to underscore different values. While the first category emphasised the importance of safeguarding national culture, religion and language from Western influence, the other was more concerned about demonstrating the soundness of the practice as being a normal approach followed by developed as well as developing countries, besides it being a historical legacy in the Muslim Arab world. The comparison also reveals that the pro-Western and compliance narratives emerging from the questionnaire and interview findings, respectively, were similar in their pragmatic outlook that stressed the gains from using Western models, regardless of being imposed on them. The final point of connection was found between the theme of scepticism used by end users of the system and the narrative of disapproval relayed by the people in management positions across HEIs. Both groups expressed their doubts about the practices of decision makers and top officials in the field of education and harshly criticised some borrowed experiences such as affiliation and quality management philosophies.

Relevance of the findings to the literature has also been established. First, the wide division in the study's respondents' ways of negotiating the topic reflects a similar history of fragmentation in the Arabs' perspectives towards the West. The respondents' means of negotiation and appropriation have also confirmed that the same patterns of thoughts ranging from acceptance to rejection have more or less been maintained in the

region within the larger discourse of transfer of Western knowledge and culture. Regarding the longstanding controversy between Islam and the West, no strong evidence in the respondents' statements has been found to support any clash between Islamic values and Western philosophies, which could ultimately interfere with the utility of the latter in Omani education systems. However, the findings did point to the fact that Ibadhism, being a moderate religious doctrine, can be an advantage to Omanis in this matter as it can be a factor and an opportunity to change, although this can be compromised due to it also being a guardian of national culture and identity.

Finally, the findings attest to the powerful role Western-educated officials and elites in Oman and the broader context of the Arab Middle East continue to play in the history and practice of importing from the West.

## **Chapter Ten: Conclusion**

This study has attempted to respond to the growing phenomenon, which has morphed into a policy, of importing Western methods, models, philosophies and sometimes whole systems in Omani pre-tertiary and tertiary education systems. It has investigated how people from different levels of the Omani education domain perceive the borrowing of such concepts and how similarly or differently they negotiate and appropriate their use in higher education. It has attempted to consider various viewpoints on the different levels of the education ladder. To that end, it adopted a ‘bottom-up’ inquiry approach. It began at the wider base by surveying the opinions of end users such as students, teachers and administrators through an online questionnaire. Following that, interviews were conducted with top administrators across private and public HEIs, namely assistants to university vice-chancellors, deans and quality assurance officers. In addition, parliamentary members from both the Shura council and State Council as well as several top officials and decision makers at the highest political level were interviewed. Given its scope and depth, this study is crucial as it addresses an area for which there is a complete lack of research and evidence. With current flaring tensions between the Middle East and the Western world, this study is also timely because higher education is inevitably influenced by local, regional and global political and economic discourses. In this chapter, I summarise the main findings of the study, highlight some important implications for policy and practice in Oman, state the major contributions to knowledge, list the limitations of the study and identify some possible directions for further research.

### **10.1. Summary of Main Findings**

In the first phase of the study, 165 respondents answered 11 closed-ended items as part of a short online questionnaire, which gave the context and background to the study by exploring the perceptions of the general public, mostly students and professionals, towards the use of Western models and methods.

First, the quantitative results revealed a host of initial findings:

1. The majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the different levels of the education system in that they did not sufficiently meet the needs of Omani society

nor did they adequately reflect its Islamic values and social traditions. Moreover, most of the respondents believed that the higher education system did not entirely mirror their personal values, ambitions and opinions. These are important preliminary findings since many aspects of both school and tertiary education are in fact Western-borrowed experiences, such as the basic education model (BE), adopting English as a medium of instruction in HE, QM techniques and affiliation. This is a clear indication that there is ambiguity from various degrees about the functionality and utility of these borrowed or imported experiences: neither are society's norms and values satisfactorily embodied nor are Western democratic values that stress the individual's opinions and goals realised, which point towards a 'double failure' of the practice.

2. Part of the policy of importing Western concepts involves adopting management techniques such as QM, QA and TQM. When asked whether this was the right policy for Omani higher education, the majority of respondents thought otherwise. Apart from suggesting that the people are not entirely convinced by the effectiveness of the policy and practice, there is lack of confidence in the suitability of Western management in Omani society, whether it be cultural, organisational or infrastructural.
3. According to the respondents, of the factors influencing the implementation of Western management philosophies, educational development schemes were the most important. Second to those is the willingness and motivation of employees. In third and fourth place came political culture and Islamic values, respectively. Surprisingly, economic development plans, which are often used by officials and policymakers to justify the improvement of education to be in line with Western advanced models, came only in fifth place, tied with organisational readiness.

Second, the content analysis of responses to the open-ended item revealed that the respondents were divided into five major groups that showed how they negotiated and appropriated the use of Western methods:

1. The first group was strongly **defensive about Omani identity**. To this group, educational systems should be empowered by "foundations and principles from the Omani society and not from other societies". This nationalistic view put weight on domestic values of culture, language and religion and warned against 'copying' from



or ‘following’ the West, suggesting resistance to Western imperialism and rejection of Western cultural influence.

2. The second group was **sceptical** about the adoption of Western philosophies and questioned their suitability to Omani context. For example, the specific policy of delivering most degree programmes in English in HE was described as ‘compulsory’. This group insisted that there were instances of “blind adoption” of Western methods, which reflected “random” planning that lacked sincere analysis of what was both good and applicable for Oman.
3. The third group tried to find a **middle ground** despite cultural and religious reservations. The respondents believed that benefiting from Western countries can improve the education system in Oman, but they suggested developing Western ideas through adaptation or accommodation to be aligned with Oman’s values and traditions.
4. The fourth group advocated a pragmatic **pro-Western** position. The respondents believed these philosophies posed ‘no harm’ to Omani society. To them, it was not ‘a shame’ benefiting from Western philosophies, technologies and expertise, which were ‘more advanced’ and proven to be ‘successful’.
5. The last group included **topic avoiders**. These expressed concerns with a variety of educational matters, indirectly insinuating that importing Western models either did not do much to improve Omani education or that they brought about the current problems.

In the second and main phase of the study, interviews constituted a major source of evidence that can refine the understanding of the practice. The 17 top decision makers, senior managers and parliamentary personalities interviewed were all closely involved with Omani education.

Content analysis of the interview data exposed several dimensions in respect to the policy:

1. The respondents provided a host of reasons and factual events that justified the rationale behind the policy. Factors related to the historical development of Oman’s education and seeking shortcuts to establish a formal system from scratch was the most frequently reported reason. Other motives included the declining state of HE

and insignificant scientific production in the Arab world, the region's historical-political legacy and connection with the West, the advanced state or supremacy of Western knowledge, Western-educated officials in Oman, internationalisation and 'showing off', among others.

2. The respondents listed a number of elements that affected the planning and selection of Western experiences, namely Western consultants, economic development agendas, reputation of Western country/ model, Western-educated Omanis, foreign affairs/ personal connections and finally how feasible and sensible the choice is. Remarkably, Western-educated Omanis were reported as both influencing the rationale of the practice as well as the selection of the models, suggesting the crucial role this group of people plays in the policymaking landscape of HE.
3. Regarding implementation, all the respondents, but one, believed adaptation was fundamental because they subscribed to the 'idiosyncrasy' of Omani society and culture. The remaining interviewee, however, rejected the modification of Western methods as this process corrupted the original model. He also expressed his suspicions in the qualifications and motives of those doing the adaptation.
4. In respect to the evaluation of adopted models, the views varied. While a group confirmed that an evaluation process existed and praised the follow-up and modification cycles, the other lamented the poor evaluation process or the lack of it, pointing to serious issues with imported concepts such as BE, affiliation, CAS and also Western experts.
5. The respondents were divided into four camps according to their negotiation of the important topic of potential conflicts between Omani and Western values:
  - a. Those who dismissed the likelihood of conflict and believed it was irrelevant.
  - b. Those who dismissed the likelihood of conflict but mentioned that different gaps, challenges and differences were encountered.
  - c. Those who viewed conflict as part and parcel of the process, yet not necessarily a disadvantage.
  - d. Those who maintained that conflicts existed and could work as barriers to the application of imported experiences.

Discourse analysis using Foucauldian categories was also used to examine the interviews and yield richer insights. The analysis revealed that the respondents created their ways of appropriation according to their position and level of authority.

1. A narrative of **defence** was predominantly assumed by those with the highest level of decision-making powers, as they were directly involved with its procedures and processes. They employed several discursive strategies to defend the policy. They endeavoured to normalise the practice in various ways mostly by establishing comparisons with other countries, in particular advanced ones such as the USA, that have also utilised a similar approach. They also showed signs of linguistic as well as authority assertion to stress their knowledge of the practice. They attempted to relate some concepts such as quality to Islamic principles. Another defensive strategy was demonstrating the unique example of Oman as a tolerant society, which they believed acted as a strong catalyst to the application of Western methods. Finally, they promoted the slogan of ‘no point reinventing the wheel’, which is in fact a motto adopted in Omani policymaking in various other sectors apart from education.
2. A narrative of **disapproval** was mainly expressed by parliamentary members to attack some of the policies and methods that were imported from abroad and which they believed created problems. They also criticised the way Western models were implemented, disregarding the readiness of Omani context in terms of infrastructure, culture and mind-set.
3. A narrative of **compliance** was embraced mainly by respondents from government and private HEIs, who held institutional authority but not policymaking power. They demonstrated their affordance by acknowledging the efforts of the MoHE as well as testifying to the progress witnessed in Omani HE.
4. A narrative of **tension** was used by a number of respondents from government and private HEIs to communicate both personal problems with imported models of QA, accreditation, affiliation and over-control of higher authorities as well as observed problems with staff resistance to the application of QM standards.

## **10.2. Implications for Policy and Practice in Omani Education**

The first implication of this study is the significance of adopting a policy of transparency in importing specific Western and foreign systems, models, curricula, experts, etc.

Efforts that concentrate on communicating to the concerned people, stakeholders and the general public the government's rationale behind adopting any foreign model can be instrumental in the sustainability of the practice. Therefore, this study recommends that a clear vision on the philosophy of adopting foreign experiences be drafted within the country's education law.

A second significant implication stems from the particular statements of disapproval, tension, scepticism and identity defensiveness. Doubts about the outcomes of Western experiences and frustration with what some people regard as 'imposed' policies can ultimately result in strong resistance, indirectly if not straightforward, to adopted Western systems and concepts in Omani education. The findings hint at fear and rejection of Western influence on Omani Arabic and Islamic identity in spite of the government's reassurances that "there is a process of development, in which the traditions of Oman's culture keep evolving" and where democratic institutions "are evolving as traditional Omani institutions" (Al-Busaidi, 2008, p. 129). While top authorities in education, and the country as a whole, count on the factional cohesion and tolerant nature of Omani people, it can be said that Omani society is still conservative. For example, the legacy of importing from other civilisations and societies has resulted in a form of borrowed modernity that appears on the surface of a strong hierarchical tribal structure (Al-Azri, 2013). Accordingly, the research findings confirm the need for policymakers to perform a reality-check. Regardless of the type and magnitude of adaptation, it does not always guarantee successful implementation. Western experiences should not be imposed. Seeking people's involvement and participation in this regard is recommended as it can give more legitimacy to the practice. This can subsequently secure, to a great extent, their collective collaboration towards the achievement of desired benefits from applying Western models.

A third practical implication derives from the particular findings on the evaluation of Western experiences applied in Omani education. Even though the study falls short of fully exploring the process of evaluation, the way the respondents' viewpoints varied in this sense raises caveats that concern the efficacy of the process as well as the effectiveness of already adopted Western philosophies. Even if the government has adopted a slower, more rational and more cautious approach in using Western experiences, this does not cancel the need to internally and periodically revise and assess

the latter. In this sense, the study recommends that officials pay special attention to the topic of evaluation, which needs to be addressed in conjunction with the planning and implementation of Western systems. Whilst reports produced by international organisations and external experts can be instrumental, a detailed evaluation plan in terms of frameworks, mechanisms, people in charge, scope, frequency and consequences needs to be developed and effected, in consultation with local HEIs.

A final implication of the study originates from the rationale of ‘starting where others stopped’. Although this is a useful strategy in terms of being quick and easy, it does not come without its consequences. While the financial expenses that go into buying Western methods and knowledge are substantially huge, this is not the biggest concern. It is dependence or actually overdependence on ready-made experiences that constitutes the problem. On the one hand, it risks failing to take account of specific cultural and religious elements of the host context and to identify their role in the development of any new system or model. More importantly, on the other hand, it limits the creativity of importers as everything is easily made available to them. Both innovation and contextual factors are crucial and if reliance on foreign concepts and methods continues in the same fashion, Oman will not be able to inspire its people to find the route of development that is most appropriate to its needs and values. Thus, it is recommended that the government limit reliance on importing Western and any other foreign experiences and expertise and instead encourage innovating models that originate from the needs of the country and that work within the framework of the society’s value system.

### **10.3. Contribution to Knowledge**

The most substantial contribution to knowledge from the present study is in the originality and novelty of its approach to researching the use of Western concepts in the Omani HE domain. To date, most research has sought to investigate Western methods, such as quality management and TQM, as potential solutions to improve Omani education systems, analysing their tools and procedures and attempting to accommodate them to fit Omani culture. However, this particular research has probed into how people appropriate Western philosophies in their immediate institutions and the larger Omani contexts. The result has been an enormous amount of insight into the dynamics of the policy and practice, which add to the field of international education and policy borrowing, especially in the Arab Gulf. Furthermore, the study findings provide adequate

evidence that local elements such as native language, culture, religion, history and politics remain important in influencing the ways Arab Muslims understand and use Western knowledge and technology in their lives. The specific information collected from the study contribute immensely to the huge corpus of Middle Eastern studies, but more to Omani scholarship, in particular in relation to its education system.

Finally, the study has proven that applied-Foucault in the specific context of using Western concepts in Omani education has worked. Although the study does not benefit fully from the depth and breadth of his ideas, a practical use of his categories adopted to carry out an alternative and deeper analysis to the interview data has offered a richer layer into the understanding of the subject treated, particularly the influence of the respondents' positions and level of power in their approach to negotiate the topic. In this sense, Foucault's ideas can help go beyond the superficial understanding of policies and their processes into shedding light on the ways people use to appropriate foreign knowledge and science adopted in other contexts.

#### **10.4. Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research**

One limitation that could have added to the specific understanding of the subject treated would have been to include the voices of someone from the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) and to a greater extent from what is considered the religious institution in the country, namely the Ministry of Awqaf (endowments) and Religious Affairs (MoARA). However, while the former requested a formal application process, the latter simply declined. Given the limited time, I had to abandon both. However, for future research the study could be further extended to explore the perspective of the religious institution, which is usually either completely disregarded or viewed, unfortunately equally by the institution itself and outsiders, as irrelevant to HE. In the case of transfer of Western knowledge into the Arab Middle Eastern region, it is substantially crucial to take account of the stance of the religious institutions, especially in the more conservative places, to come to grips with the complex realities of the phenomenon.

The other limitation of the study, which was beyond the research scope and focus, was to examine the attitudes of the respondents based on gender. This was not possible in the present project due to the lack of a balanced sample. Nevertheless, future research could

attempt to investigate whether and to what extent gender patterns exist in the way people negotiate the use of Western concepts and methods by developing questions that concentrate in gender differences and subsequently planning a well-balanced sample to achieve that purpose.

For future research, this exploratory study raises the opportunity to be extended to other Gulf states since the phenomenon of importing Western models is also common in other Gulf states, particularly in Qatar and the UAE. Even though other Gulf states are culturally similar to Oman, the findings of this study cannot be generalised because of the differences in the socio-economic and political transformations in the region as well as the differences in HE policy approaches adopted by each state in learning from Western experiences. Comparative research in the same line of methodology, i.e. investigating people's, in particular nationals', perceptions on the policy, can constitute a major source of intelligence on how Gulf states are similar or different in their trajectories to improve their HE systems.

## **Critical Reflections on the PhD Journey**

This PhD has been an amazing and rewarding experience, but the journey was not entirely smooth. Research books, which describe how conducting a PhD can be such a cumbersome and challenging project, do not particularly underscore or detail the messy realities of what actually happens, specifically during qualitative research. This is especially true of the interviews in this study, where things did not go as it was initially planned. The research methodology and interview guide were carefully chosen and designed to investigate the perceptions about borrowing and implementing Western management concepts in Omani HE, with a focus on quality management. It was indeed anticipated from the outset that researching any aspect of HE policies in Oman would entail considerable risks, for example eligible subjects declining to participate, or questions being answered partially or eschewed completely by the interviewees.

Although key prompts were answered, few interviewees refused to opine about the topic and preferred to talk in general terms. Some tried to steer the conversation to talk about their own individual experiences and emphasise specific policies and issues related to the practice of borrowing. Even though this was frustrating at first, soon after I realised that what they were relaying was extremely critical and very much relevant as it revealed how the topic of borrowing Western concepts into Omani education was much bigger and deeper than I envisaged. Quality management appeared to be only one level of a multi-layered reality of Western borrowing. Thus, the interaction with interview subjects shaped the research focus and allowed me to explore and analyse opinions about other important Western-imported methods and systems, such as basic education, academic affiliation, and accreditation. As a researcher, this was an opportunity too valuable to miss. Capturing the multiple realities of the respondents and allowing them to materialise contributed to the overall robustness of the study.

However, I faced the most decisive turning point while attempting analysis of the interview text. The complexity of the data necessitated using an additional method of analysis to complement the preliminary content analysis, which was found to be insufficient on its own. This was not part of the initial design, but it was a route that I had to venture to tease out the numerous approaches the interviewees used to negotiate the use of Western management methods. Long discussions with my supervisor about



this led me to consider Foucauldian discourse analysis to re-examine the data. I was nervous about using it because I had no prior knowledge nor practical experience in Foucault's work. After two months of extensive reading about Foucault, I adopted and adapted the strategy and used it to penetrate the data. As a researcher, this has given me confidence in appropriating and moulding different methods of analysis as required by the topic treated. Most notably, I realised that a research topic and/or methodology that one starts with can develop and evolve significantly as the project progresses, framing up a more insightful and substantive doctoral thesis.

Finally, it is ironic how in my investigation into the perceptions of Western methods in Omani HE, a Western-derived analytical tool, i.e. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, was deemed the best alternative to gain new critical insights into the topic. Indeed, this approach revealed how people's perceptions about applying Western methods in the Omani education context, were governed by different measures and frameworks related to shared cultural backgrounds and individual experiences, but most importantly their level of power in the government and the institution they belong to. Tensions and conflicting opinions seemed to be existing realities in the narratives of policy making and management of Omani HE. Perhaps in the same way that I resorted to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to undertake a more effective analysis, policy makers in Oman tend to import or 'make use of' Western methods and systems to improve the education system.

## Appendices

### Appendix A Questionnaire Pilot Study Feedback Form

| General Questions  | Your Feedback and Suggestions |
|--|-------------------------------|
| How long did it take you to complete the survey?<br>Was the consent form clear and appropriate?<br>Was the description of the survey simple & clear?<br>Do you have any concerns about the personal details asked? |                               |

**Now Answer these questions about each Item.**

| Item # | Was the item understandable? i.e. Was the question clear and straightforward? | Was the scale used to answer the question adequate & appropriate? | Was the item written in such a way that you could choose only one response? | Did you find the item offensive or inappropriate in any way? | Any other comments or/and suggestions about the item? |
|--------|---|---|---|--|---|
|        |   |   |   |  |   |

## Appendix B Questionnaire (English Version)

### Western Management Methods in Omani Higher Education

Dear participant

Thank you very much for your time. First, please read the brief description and informed consent sections. If you wish to continue to take the questionnaire, please select the 'Agree' button at the end of the consent form.

\*Required

#### Brief Description of the Questionnaire

I would like to ask you a few questions on your opinion about the management of the education system in general and higher education in particular in Oman. Please answer the questions according to what you know and what you think.

You will be asked to answer a short online questionnaire that has two sections:

Part 1: Personal Details

Part 2: The Questionnaire

The task should only take around 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

The data will be anonymised and will be handled according to data storage and protection guidelines of the Department of Education, University of York.

Data will be securely stored for 3-5 years after completion of the PhD study on a password-protected computer, and only the researcher involved in this study will have access to these data. As the data will be anonymised, you will not be identified in any presentations or publications, which may come from this study.

If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please contact the researcher at [saab502@york.ac.uk](mailto:saab502@york.ac.uk), or/ and the chair of the Ethics Committee at the Department of Education, University of York, Dr Emma Marsdon at [emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk](mailto:emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk).

#### Electronic Informed Consent

I have read the description of the questionnaire that I am being asked to take part in, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that the anonymised data will be kept in an archive accessible only to the researcher and that it will be used solely for research purposes: PhD thesis, conference presentations and publications.

I understand that this study has received ethical approval following the procedures of the Department of Education, University of York.

Please select your choice below. Clicking the "agree" button below indicates that:

you have read the above information

you voluntarily agree to participate

you are at least 18 years old

If you do not wish to participate, please click the 'disagree' button below and leave this page. Thank you in advance.

Sabah Al Balushi

PhD Student

University of York

Do you wish to continue with the questionnaire?

- Agree
- Disagree

### Part 1: Personal Details

1. Are you? \*

- Omani
- Non-Omani

2. What is your gender? \*

- Male
- Female

3. What is your age? \*

- 18-22
- 23-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? \*

- Secondary school (General Diploma)
- Technical/vocational training/diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Mastre's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Where did you do/ are you doing your bachelor's degree of college diploma? \*

- Government institution in Oman
- Private institution in Oman
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What do you do now? \*

- Student at university or college
- School teacher
- Teacher/ lecturer in university of college
- Management job in school
- Management job in college of university
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: The Questionnaire**

1. Do you think that the current Omani education system at the following levels is appropriate: it meets the needs and requirements of Omani society?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                                | Not at all            | Very little           | Neutral               | Somewhat              | Yes, to a significant extent | I don't know          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Basic Education (cycles 1 & 2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Post-Basic Education (Cycle 3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Government Higher Education    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Private Higher Education       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |

2. Do you think the following Omani education systems take into consideration the Islamic values of Omani society?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                                | Not at all            | Very little           | Neutral               | Somewhat              | Yes, to a significant extent | I don't know          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Basic Education (cycles 1 & 2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Post-Basic Education (Cycle 3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Government Higher Education    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Private Higher Education       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |

3. Do you think the following Omani education systems take into consideration the social traditions of Omani society?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                                | Not at all            | Very little           | Neutral               | Somewhat              | Yes, to a significant extent | I don't know          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Basic Education (cycles 1 & 2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Post-Basic Education (Cycle 3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Government Higher Education    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Private Higher Education       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |

4. Do you think that government higher education institutions in Oman reflect the following?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                          | Not at all            | Very little           | Neutral               | Somewhat              | Yes, to a significant extent | I don't know          |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Your values & traditions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your goals & ambitions   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your views & opinions    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Do you think that private higher education institutions in Oman reflect the following?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                          | Not at all            | Very little           | Neutral               | Somewhat              | Yes, to a significant extent | I don't know          |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Your values & traditions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your goals & ambitions   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your views & opinions    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |

6. Do you think that the current Omani education system is managed effectively at the following levels?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                                | Not at all            | Very little           | Neutral               | Somewhat              | Yes, to a significant extent | I don't know          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| School Education (Grades 1-12) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Government Higher Education    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Private Higher Education       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> |

7. In your opinion, which of the following is an imported Western method in the Omani education system?

\* Tick all that apply

- Basic Education system
- Post-Basic Education (Grades 11 & 12)
- Teaching methods and philosophies in school education
- Certain aspects of the curriculum in school education
- No fail system in Basic Education
- GPA system in universities & colleges (credit system)
- Using English as the language of instruction in higher education
- Type of curriculum in higher education institutions
- Hiring teaching staff from Western countries
- Paying money to study at a higher education institution
- Adopting quality management systems
- Accreditation programmes in higher education
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you think importing Western management methods in the following Omani Higher Education systems is the right policy or way for Oman?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|                             | Probably not          | Maybe                 | Neutral               | Quite likely          | Definitely            | I don't know          |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Government Higher Education | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Private Higher Education    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

9. In your opinion, how important are the following factors in the policy of importing Western management models in the Omani Higher Education system?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

|  | Not important         | Of little importance  | Neutral               | Somewhat important    | Very important        | I don't know          |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Economic development plans   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Educational development plans  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Omani culture & social values  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Islamic values & teachings   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Technical readiness  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Willingness & motivation of employees  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Readiness of organisations (infrastructure, organisational structure & work culture)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Political culture (power relations, de(centralisation), team work, accountability, responsibility, equity, gender roles, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



10. Do you think quality management systems and philosophies are compatible with the higher education system in Oman?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

- Probably not
- Very little
- Neutral
- Somewhat
- Yes, to a significant extent
- I don't know

11. Do you think quality management programmes adopted in the higher education system in Oman are successful?

\* Mark only one oval per row.

- Probably not
- Very little
- Neutral
- Somewhat
- Yes, to a significant extent
- I don't know

12. Do you have any further comments about the use of Western managerial philosophies and methods in Omani education system, especially higher education? You can add your answer in Arabic or English.

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Thank you for your cooperation.

## Appendix C Questionnaire (Arabic Version)

الأساليب (الإدارية) الغربية في نظام التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان

عزيزي المشارك

شكرا جزيلاً على تخصيص الوقت لهذا الاستبيان. أولاً يرجى قراءة قسمي الوصف الموجز واستمارة الموافقة المسبقة. إذا كنت ترغب في مواصلة الإجابة على الاستبيان، يرجى اختيار زر "موافق" في نهاية استمارة الموافقة المسبقة.

Required\*

وصف موجز للاستبيان

أود أن أطرح عليك بعض الأسئلة حول رأيك في إدارة نظام التعليم العام في سلطنة عمان، وبالأخص التعليم العالي. الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة حسب ما تعرفه وبناءً على ما تعتقده.

سيطلب منك الإجابة على قسمين:

القسم ١: التفاصيل الشخصية

القسم ٢: الاستبيان

ولن يأخذ ذلك منك أكثر من ١٠ دقائق.

علماً بأنه سيتم التعامل مع جميع البيانات المعطاة وفقاً لمبادئ حماية البيانات المحددة من قبل كلية التربية بجامعة يورك، حيث سيتم تخزين البيانات لمدة ٣-٥ سنوات وبشكل آمن على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور سرية، ولن يتمكن أحد من الوصول لهذه البيانات باستثناء الباحثة، وسنحترم خصوصيتك ولن يتم ذكرك بشكل شخصي في أي مؤتمرات أو مقالات قد تنتج عن هذه الدراسة. إذا كان لديك أي سؤال أو استفسار آخر عن الاستبيان، يرجى التواصل مع الباحثة بواسطة البريد الإلكتروني

saab502@york.ac.uk

أو مع رئيسة لجنة أخلاقيات البحث العلمي بكلية التربية بجامعة يورك: الدكتورة إيما مارسدن من خلال

emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk

استمارة موافقة المشارك

لقد قرأت الوصف الموجز للاستبيان، وقد سحنت لي الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة على الباحثة عبر الإيميل. وقبل أن أوصل المشاركة بالاستبيان فأني أعلم أن هذه الدراسة قد حصلت على موافقة اللجنة الأخلاقية وفقاً للإجراءات المعمول بها بجامعة يورك، وأعلم أيضاً أنه سيتم الإبقاء على البيانات بشكل مجهول في أرشيف لا يصل إليه إلا الباحثة حيث سيتم استخدام هذه البيانات فقط لأغراض البحث العلمي.

اختيار "أوافق" يشير إلى أنني:

قد قرأت المعلومات الواردة أعلاه

أوافق طوعاً على المشاركة

عمري ١٨ عاماً وما فوق

إذا كنت لا ترغب في المشاركة، يرجى النقر على زر "لا أوافق" أدناه والخروج من هذه الصفحة.

شكرا لتعاونك.

صباح البلوشي  
طالبة دكتوراة  
جامعة يورك

هل ترغب في الاستمرار؟ \*

- أوافق
- لا أوافق

القسم ١: المعلومات الشخصية

١. هل أنت؟\*

- عماني/ عمانية
- غير عماني/ غير عمانية

٢. هل أنت؟\*

- ذكر
- أنثى

٣. ما هو عمرك؟\*

- ٢٢-١٨
- ٣٠-٢٣
- ٤٠-٣١
- ٥٠-٤١
- ٦٠-٥١
- +٦١

٤. ما هو أعلى مستوى تعليمي حصلت عليه؟ \*

- الشهادة الثانوية أو شهادة الدبلوم العام
- دبلوم تقني أو مهني أو ما يعادله
- البكالوريوس
- الماجستير
- الدكتوراه
- آخر: \_\_\_\_\_

٥. من أين حصلت على شهادة البكالوريوس أو الدبلوم (الدرجة الجامعية الأولى)؟ أو أين تدرس الآن؟\*

- مؤسسة (كلية أو جامعة) حكومية في عمان
- مؤسسة (كلية أو جامعة) خاصة في عمان
- آخر: \_\_\_\_\_

٦. ماذا تعمل الآن؟\*

- طالب/ طالبة في جامعة أو كلية أو معهد
- معلم/ معلمة في مدرسة
- محاضر/ محاضرة في جامعة أو كلية أو معهد
- إداري/ إدارية في مدرسة
- إداري/ إدارية في جامعة أو كلية أو معهد
- آخر: \_\_\_\_\_

## القسم ٢: الاستبيان

١. هل تعتقد أن نظام التعليم العماني الحالي في المراحل التالية مناسب: أي هل يلبي احتياجات ومتطلبات المجتمع العماني؟\* الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | نعم، إلى حد كبير      | نعم، إلى حد ما        | محايد                 | بشكل قليل جدا         | لا، على الإطلاق       |                               |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم الأساسي حلقة ١ و ٢    |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم ما بعد الأساسي حلقة ٣ |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الحكومي        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الخاص          |

٢. هل تعتقد أن أنظمة التعليم العمانية في المراحل التالية تأخذ بعين الاعتبار القيم الإسلامية للمجتمع العماني؟\* الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | نعم، إلى حد كبير      | نعم، إلى حد ما        | محايد                 | بشكل قليل جدا         | لا، على الإطلاق       |                               |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم الأساسي حلقة ١ و ٢    |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم ما بعد الأساسي حلقة ٣ |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الحكومي        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الخاص          |

٣. هل تعتقد أن أنظمة التعليم العمانية التالية تأخذ بعين الاعتبار التقاليد الاجتماعية للمجتمع العماني؟\*الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | نعم، إلى حد كبير      | نعم، إلى حد ما        | محايد                 | بشكل قليل جدا         | لا، على الإطلاق       |                               |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم الأساسي حلقة ١ و ٢    |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم ما بعد الأساسي حلقة ٣ |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الحكومي        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الخاص          |

٤. هل تعتقد أن مؤسسات التعليم العالي الحكومية في عمان تعكس الآتي؟\*الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | نعم، إلى حد كبير      | نعم، إلى حد ما        | محايد                 | بشكل قليل جدا         | لا، على الإطلاق       |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | القيم والتقاليد الخاصة بك   |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | الأهداف والطموحات الخاصة بك |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | وجهات نظرك وآراؤك           |

٥. هل تعتقد أن مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة في عمان تعكس الآتي؟\*الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | نعم، إلى حد كبير      | نعم، إلى حد ما        | محايد                 | بشكل قليل جدا         | لا، على الإطلاق       |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | القيم والتقاليد الخاصة بك   |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | الأهداف والطموحات الخاصة بك |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | وجهات نظرك وآراؤك           |

٦. هل تعتقد أن المراحل التالية في نظام التعليم العماني الحالي تُدار بشكل فعّال؟\*الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | نعم، إلى حد كبير      | نعم، إلى حد ما        | محايد                 | بشكل قليل جدا         | لا، على الإطلاق       |   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم المدرسي – الأساسي وما بعد الأساسي |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الحكومي                    |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الخاص                      |

٧. من وجهة نظرك، أي من الأساليب أو الأنظمة التالية في نظام التعليم العماني تعتبر وسيلة غربية مستوردة؟ يمكنك اختيار أكثر من إجابة واحدة\*

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | نظام التعليم الأساسي حلقة ١ و ٢                         |
| <input type="radio"/> | نظام التعليم ما بعد الأساسي الصف ١١ و ١٢                |
| <input type="radio"/> | طرق وفلسفات التدريس في التعليم المدرسي                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | جوانب معينة من المناهج الدراسية في التعليم المدرسي      |
| <input type="radio"/> | نظام عدم ترسيب الطلاب (النجاح التلقائي)                 |
| <input type="radio"/> | نظام المعدلات في الجامعات والكليات                      |
| <input type="radio"/> | استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة التدريس في التعليم العالي |
| <input type="radio"/> | نوع المناهج الدراسية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي           |
| <input type="radio"/> | التعاقد مع أعضاء هيئة تدريس من دول غربية                |
| <input type="radio"/> | دفع رسوم للدراسة في مؤسسات التعليم العالي               |
| <input type="radio"/> | تطبيق نظم إدارة الجودة                                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | برامج الاعتماد الأكاديمي في التعليم العالي              |
| <input type="radio"/> | آخر: _____  |

٨. هل تعتقد أن استيراد أساليب إدارة غربية وتطبيقها في نظم التعليم العالي التالية تعتبر سياسة صحيحة لسلطنة عمان؟\* الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | قطعا سياسة صحيحة      | من المحتمل جدا أنها سياسة صحيحة | محايد                 | ربما                  | على الأغلب لا         |                        |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الحكومي |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التعليم العالي الخاص   |

٩. من وجهة نظرك، ما مدى أهمية العناصر الآتية في سياسة استيراد نماذج إدارة غربية وتطبيقها في نظام التعليم العالي العماني؟\* الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة من الخيارات الـ ٦ المعطاة لكل صف.

| لا أعرف               | مهم جدا               | مهم إلى حد ما         | محايد                 | قليل الأهمية          | غير مهم               |                                    |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | خطط التنمية الاقتصادية             |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | خطط تطوير التعليم                  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | الثقافة العمانية والقيم الاجتماعية |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | القيم والتعاليم الإسلامية          |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | الجاهزية (الاستعداد) التقني        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | وجود الرغبة والحافز لدى الموظفين   |

|                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |  |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | استعداد<br>وجاهزية<br>المؤسسات من<br>ناحية البنية  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | التحتية والهيكل<br>التنظيمي وثقافة<br>العمل  |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | الثقافة السياسية<br>مثلا علاقات<br>السلطة،<br>والمركزية أو<br>اللامركزية،<br>والعمل<br>الجماعي،<br>والمساءلة،<br>والمسؤولية<br>والإنصاف،<br>وأدوار<br>الجنسين .. الخ |

١٠. هل تعتقد أن فلسفة نظام إدارة الجودة متوافقة مع نظام التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان؟ \*

- على الأغلب لا
- بشكل قليل جدا
- محايد
- نعم، إلى حد ما
- نعم، إلى حد كبير
- لا أعرف

١١. هل تعتقد أن برامج إدارة الجودة المعتمدة في نظام التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان ناجحة؟ \*

- على الأغلب لا
- بشكل قليل جدا
- محايد
- نعم، إلى حد ما
- نعم، إلى حد كبير
- لا أعرف

١٢. هل لديك أي تعليقات أخرى فيما يتعلق باستخدام فلسفات ومفاهيم وطرق إدارة غربية في نظام التعليم العماني، وبخاصة في التعليم العالي؟

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شكرا لتعاونكم.

## Appendix D Respondents' Comments to the Questionnaire's Open-Ended Item

Do you have any further comments about the use of Western (managerial) philosophies and methods in Omani education system, especially higher education?

---

One size doesn't fit all. Managing educational institution has to consider all the factors including customs and attitudes of people. Adapting western systems might need much more time to be successfully implemented.

---

We should improve the higher education in Oman because lately it is going wrong  
The use of ranking system among colleges and universities should be applied, especially for private education colleges.

---

There is a new method in teaching reading and writing to C1 students called Jolly Phonics. It is amazing. It works very well. By the end of grade one year, children can read words

---

Oman educational system needs new and effective ideas but as it is mentioned above it needs good planning.

so not the way but how to apply it to specific society with specific culture and religion.

---

This is really interesting study (it would be much better to state the objectives in your introductory to this questionnaire). A lot of your questions need research in order to give you information. More clarifications were required for adopting Western management in Omani Universities (Do you mean adopting based on Omani context as it is currently applied? Or blindly applying the Western principles?)

---

They have to change the education system and way of teaching, especially the higher education since it is very low level

---

Higher education institutions should have more facilities to help student learn and more research work to bring the institutions on the first places on the list of the best ones in the world.

---

Not much; but a good guidance for students from grade 10 until entering university is something we hope they adopt from western countries.

---

التعلم من الكتب أفضل من الإنترنت

---

Yes if we will implement it we should follow it .and the community should be aware about it.

---

الحاجة لربط التعليم العالي بالاقتصاد القومي  
بحيث يكون للاقتصاد مشروع قومي يعمل التعليم العالي على خدمته وتوفير بيئة بحثية لتحقيقه

---

They are more advance than us in Oman. There is no harm to take the Western philosophy and adopt it accordingly.

---



---

well qualified people should be haired.  
curriculum should be changed to some degree.  
new courses and new disciplines

---

We should build our own....

---

. الاهتمام بأراء الطلاب في ما يخص تنمية المؤسسات التعليمية  
مستوى التعليم مجدي ومحاذات التطور والنمو العلمي العالمي المستمر بالسلطنة بمستوى جيد جداً. ونطمح  
بالمزيد لنمو الفكر العماني المتجدد

---

Help students develop the language and learn the language of others ... and  
development in providing some appropriate conditions for the student to help him p  
learning and excellence Bkhl best ...

---

لا توجد لدي تعليقات فقط نفضل احضار معلمين بريطانيين او امريكيين لكونهم حاملوا لغتهم الام ، اما الهنود  
والفلبينيين وغيرهم يشكلون بعض المشاكل للطلاب لأن لغتهم الانجليزية مكسره وينطقون الحروف غير  
النطق الصحيح أن وهم ينطقونها بن n صحيح مثال للهنود

---

Yes, in general Omani education system should have even a little management from  
western philosophies to be deployed more

---

ليس من العيب استخدام اساليب وطرق غربية ولكن هو اختيار الاسلوب المناسب وفي المرحلة الملائمة لذلك

---

Sabah:

Wish you all the best in your research. So great to see you doing well.

I just want to advise you that you are making big assumptions here about the  
Western influence on our educational policies. I wish you don't fall into that trap of  
mono-thinking and Western imperialism and its influence on our thinking and  
practice because that implies that we are powerless followers to the West and I  
personally hate to think of us that way. I think it is time for research to be  
empowering rather than disempowering us and lead others to believe we are blind  
followers to the west. We as a country and individuals need to be accountable for  
our decisions for ourselves and our country.

---

It is very important to get use of successful management experience . However,  
continuous evaluation, adaptation and follow up of the plans and application is  
needed to reach acceptable standards.

---

الفلسفة الغربية قد لا تصلح معنا في عمان

---

نحتاج لفلسفة تناسب طلابنا في التدريس واعداد المناهج

---

It should be applied by it's people that can understand Omani culture well and the  
western culture, so, they will benefit from each other.

---

I think that as Omanis we should enrich the students with up to date new methods  
that do not affect our valuable needs moreover we need to cope with modern  
technology all around us and encourage our students to be more aware of the  
importance in tracing the new technical aspects in their study

---

I think we need experts from the western countries and there should be high  
standards in choosing those people not any foreigner is good

---

Our education system should be empowered by our values, culture and religion. It  
should represent our identity at all levels.

---

---

What I have observed through my years of experience is that it is very difficult to fulfil all the aspects of education and to satisfy all the parties in the educational system

---

We have to use in Oman whatever policies proven that they are successful.

We have to make use of other people development as long as they don't contradict our environment.

---

ابن العلاوت

---

To use whatever related to our religions and customs and not to copy paste every thing.

---

Use the mother tongue staff with applying the Omani and Islamic values

---

In the first place, real leadership, accountability of work and financial support play a major role in adopting such managerial methods. Additionally, blind adoption that scarifies the national talents, context and innovations for foreign philosophies should not be considered. An example is the length of the school day; where hot and wet weather in Oman does not help young learners or teachers to work effectively, unlike western weather. Another thing, the western philosophies do not say that teaching in higher education MUST be in a foreign language, which is not compatible with the system in Oman where the compulsory use of English in higher education prevents undergraduate students from achieving their potential goals.

---

إلا بد أن تنبثق من فلسفة الدولة ومن المبادئ الإسلامية. وان تراعي العادات والتقاليد

يجب ان يتم اختيار تخصصات توافق سوق العمل بدلا من تضييع وقت الطلاب بدراسة تخصصات تنتهي بهم بالجلوس لمدة طويلة بلا عمل

توفير جودة عالية من المحاضرين في المؤسسات التعليمية وتكثيف التركيز على الطالب وتشجيعه لدينا في كثيره لم تستغل وعقول مفكرة للأسف لم تسفل عمان مواهب

هناك انظمة المنحنى التي في وجهة نظري ارى انها فلسفه عشوائية قد لا تعطي الطالب حقه ، كما انه نظام تسجيل المواد وبالأخص في الجامعات الحكومية بدا نظام تقليدي وغير مجدي حيث من الممكن وضع الجداول دراسيه الفصلية كل على حده بحيث يمكن للطلاب السير ع هذا المنهج

توفير فرص العمل للخريجين

بالنسبة للتعليم المدرسي فإن المشكلة الحقيقية تكمن في التخطيط طويل الأمد أي الاستراتيجية وكذلك في منطقية التخطيط الاجرائي وتقييم مراحل التنفيذ دوريا بهدف التقويم المرحلي الجاد وإنتقاء وتأهيل الكوادر الفنية في مختلف الجهات

بالنسبة للتعليم العالي فإن المشكلة تكمن في التركيز على الجوانب النظرية أكثر من العملية و المهارات التي تعتبر محصلة التعليم بشكل عام. بالإضافة الى آليات التقويم لدينا، ومستوى الكوادر التدريسية

ينقصنا وجود رؤية ثابتة وواضحة (((على أساسها))) يتم تقييم مؤسسات التعليم العالي

الفلسفة لا بد من أن تنبع من المجتمع نفسه ولكن يمكن استخدام إدارة غربية في نظام التعليم العماني بما يتناسب مع فلسفة المجتمع

في حال الرغبة في تطبيق مناهج او فلسفات غربية لابد ان تكون متوافقه مع طبيعته العمانيه من ناحية الدين والقيم والاخلاق ، وان لا تؤخذ التجارب الاخرى كامله لانها قد لا تتوافق مع طبيعة المنطقة بشكل كامل استخدام مناهج غير مناسبة للتخصصات

تطوير فكرة الادارة الغربية بما يتناسب مع ثقافة وقيم دين الاسلامي

استقطاب كوادر ذات علمية وفكرية وذات شخصية قوية تستطيع تقديم الانتقاد البناء وبدون محاباة او مجاملات. شريطة الا تتضارب مع الدين والقيم العمانية

---

---

وجود لجنة محايدة تقيم مستوى مخرجات التعليم من كل الجوانب ومقارنتها مع المخرجات الغربية

وجود نتائج مستوى التعليم ومدى التزامها مع قيم والاخلاق في منهجها الدراسي ودورها للحفاظ على منهجية الثابتة للقيم والأخلاق

---

الاتباع العشوائي للأنظمة الجديدة بدون تحليل ومعرفة مدى صلاحيتها وجودتها لهذا المجتمع

لا ييسمن ولا يغني من جوع

---

التعليم العالي بحاجة الى نظم ادارية قوية تتوافق مع انظمة الجودة العالمية وتطبق مبادئ الحوكمة والمساءلة بشكل صارم... صلاح المجتمع وقوته تنبع من قوة أنظمة التعليم فيه

عدم التركيز على التطوير والتحديث

---

يجب ان تعتمد خطط المناهج على أسس ومبادئ من المجتمع العُماني وليس من مجتمعات اخرى كما يجب ان تدرس الاحتياجات في التعليم العالي قبل قبول الطلبة حتى لا تنتشر البطالة ويظل الخريجون دون عمل

---

الاهتمام بشكل اكبر بالتخطيط لادارة التعليم العالي بطريقة تتناسب مع مخرجات التعليم

---

فقط يجب استخدام الانظمة الغربية في نواحي مفقوده لدينا ويتم دراستها وتجربتها على عينه ثم البدء في تطبيقها

الابتعاد عن استيراد تقاليد وعادات غريبه غير متلاءمه مع ثقافتنا وديننا

وضع اهداف محدده لما نريده من الاجيال القادمه ثم البدء في وضع الخطط

---

اخذ المفيد الذي يتناسب مع عاداتنا وعدم جلب الفكرة كاملة بدون تنقيح

---

تغيرت أساليب وطرق التدريس في التعليم العالي بدرجة كبيره فلا اعتقد ان معلم اسلاميه او رياضيات او

عربي يجب عليه دراسه مناهج باللغة الانجليزية لانه لن يستفيد منها بالمستقبل

---

ناخذ المفيد منهم لكن بما يتناسب مع ديننا وعاداتنا وتقاليدنا

---

? نعم هناك الكثير من الجامعات لاتدرس التخصصات العليا باللغة العربية لماذا

---

إذن أين تطبيق الدين واللغة العربية في معاهدنا وجامعاتنا

---

## **Appendix E Supervisor's Letter to Invite Participants to Assist Researcher Conduct Interviews**

Department of Education  
University of York  
York  
YO10 5DD  
UK  
Tel: 01904 323460  
Fax: 01904 323433

13 February 2015

To Whom It May Concern

Ms. Sabah Al Balushi is a research student at the Department of Education, University of York. Her project involves the investigation of the usability and sustainability of Western managerial methods in the Omani Higher Education context. In-depth interviews with decision makers and senior management in different Omani government organisations and higher education institutions would be the most effective way to obtain data for the study. This research is supervised by Dr John Issitt, from the Department of Education, University of York.

Further description of the study and procedure are outlined in the consent form, attached to this letter.

This letter has been given to the student upon her request to support her project. We appreciate your cooperation with Sabah and we thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,  
Dr John Issitt

Department of Education  
University of York

## Appendix F Interview Informed Consent Form (English Version)

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Study:** The Usability and Sustainability of Western (Managerial) Methods in the Omani Higher Education Context

**Researcher:** Sabah Al Balushi

#### Brief Description of the Study

Dear participant

I appreciate you giving me the time to do this interview.

This study investigates the different factors that influence the decision-making process and management choices of Western managerial methods in the Omani higher education context. You are requested to answer some questions during a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the above researcher. The interview will take around one hour and it will be audio-recorded. The recording will be transcribed. If you wish, you will have an opportunity to comment on the written record once it has been produced.

The data from this study will be handled according to data protection guidelines outlined by the Department of Education, University of York.

Data will be securely stored for 3-5 years on a password-protected computer, and only the above researcher will have access to these data. You will not be personally identified in any presentations or publications that may come from this study.

If you have any further questions about the study, or would like to be debriefed after the study is completed, please write to [saab502@york.ac.uk](mailto:saab502@york.ac.uk), or/ and the chair of the Ethics Committee at the Department of Education, University of York, Dr Emma Marsdon at [emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk](mailto:emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk)

### INFORMED CONSENT

I have read the description of the study, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I am happy to take part in the study.

I understand that I may decline to answer any questions.

I understand that I may, at any time, request the recording to stop, and for that recording, or part thereof, to be withdrawn from the study.

I understand that I may withdraw my agreement to participate for up to seven days after completion of the interview, and that at that point any information I do not want to be used will be destroyed.

I consent to the recording and written transcript to be kept in an archive accessible to the above researcher, and to be used for research. I consent that anonymised parts of the recording can be shown at conference presentations and in publications.

I understand that this study has received ethics approval following the procedures of the Department of Education, **University of York**.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ Proposed Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G Interview Informed Consent Form (Arabic Version)

### الموافقة على إجراء مقابلة لدراسة دكتوراه

عنوان الرسالة: مدى قابلية واستدامة الأساليب والطرق (الإدارية) الغربية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان  
الباحثة: صباح البلوشي

### وصف موجز للدراسة

عزيزي المشارك

أقدر لك منحي الوقت لإجراء هذه المقابلة والتي تأتي كجزء أساسي من دراسة دكتوراه تبحث وتحلل العوامل المختلفة التي تؤثر على عملية إدارة مؤسسات التعليم العالي وخيارات صنع القرار فيما يتعلق بأساليب الإدارة الغربية في سياق التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان.

ستقوم بالإجابة على بعض الأسئلة خلال مقابلة تجريبها معك وجها لوجه الباحثة المذكورة أعلاه. سوف تستغرق المقابلة حوالي الساعة، وسوف تكون مسجلة وسيتم بعد ذلك تدوين وكتابة تسجيل المقابلة. سيكون لديك الفرصة للتعليق على السجل المكتوب في حال رغبتك بذلك.

علما بأنه سيتم التعامل مع جميع البيانات المعطاة وفقا لمبادئ حماية البيانات المحددة من قبل قسم التربية بجامعة يورك، حيث سيتم تخزين البيانات بشكل آمن لمدة 3-5 سنوات على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور سرية، ولن يتمكن أحد من الوصول لهذه البيانات باستثناء الباحثة المذكورة أعلاه، وستحترم خصوصيتك ولن يتم ذكرك بشكل شخصي في أي مؤتمرات أو مقالات قد تنتج عن هذه الدراسة. إذا كان لديك أي سؤال أو استفسار آخر عن الدراسة، أو إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على ملخص بعد الانتهاء من الدراسة، يرجى التواصل مع الباحثة الرئيسية على [saab502@york.ac.uk](mailto:saab502@york.ac.uk) أو مع رئيسة اللجنة التي تعنى بأخلاقيات البحث العلمي بقسم التربية بجامعة يورك الدكتورة إيما مارسدن على [emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk](mailto:emma.marsdon@york.ac.uk).

### موافقة المشارك:

لقد قرأت الوصف الموجز للدراسة، وقد أتيتحت لي الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة. وعليه فأني أوافق على المشاركة في إجراء مقابلة معي، حيث أنني أعلم أنه بإمكانني رفض الرد على أي سؤال والطلب من الباحثة وقف التسجيل في أي وقت، وحذف التسجيل أو جزء منه وسحبه من الدراسة.

وأعلم أيضا أنه بمقدوري سحب موافقتي على المشاركة لمدة تصل إلى سبعة أيام بعد الانتهاء من إجراء المقابلة، حيث أنه في تلك المرحلة سيتم التخلص من أي معلومات لا أريد استخدامها.

وبناء على ما تقدم ذكره فأني أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة وعمل نسخة مكتوبة منها تحفظ في أرشيف لا يصل إليه أحد عدا الباحثة المذكورة أعلاه، كما وأوافق على أن تستخدم البيانات لأغراض البحث العلمي فقط، بمعنى آخر أن تستخدم البيانات أو جزء منها بشكل مجهول في مؤتمرات ومقالات قد تنتج عن هذه الدراسة والتي قد تمت الموافقة عليها من قبل لجنة أخلاقيات البحث بقسم التربية بجامعة يورك.

الاسم: \_\_\_\_\_ التوقيع: \_\_\_\_\_  
المسمى الوظيفي: \_\_\_\_\_ التاريخ: \_\_\_\_\_  
التاريخ والوقت المناسبان لإجراء المقابلة: (في شهر سبتمبر) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H Interview Guide (English)

### The Use of Western (Managerial) Methods & Concepts in the Omani Higher Education Context

#### Opening

*Establishing rapport:* Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview.

*Purpose:* As stated in the consent form, this study investigates the sustainability of implementing Western managerial methods in the Omani higher education context.

*Timeline & procedure:* This interview will be semi-structured and should take around one hour. It will be recorded.

*Language:* Do you prefer to do the interview in Arabic or English?

Ok. So, before we begin, do you have any queries?

#### Introductory scenario:

We all know that Oman's education, particularly higher education is very young. When it first started, many things, such as curricula, teachers, philosophies and methods of teaching were imported from other Arab and Gulf states. More recently, however, this has been shifted towards borrowing from foreign, Western, developed countries. Looking at HE now, importing foreign programmes has been a successful strategy to help with the rapid development and expansion of this vital sector in Oman. This strategy has not been limited to educational disciplines and fields, but also included the importing of a wide set of quality management programmes. I am particularly interested in the **usability** and **sustainability** of imported Western (quality management) concepts and methods in Omani HE, so to understand the scope and limitations of the applicability of Western management philosophies in relation to our Omani culture. In other words, how do Western managerial concepts fit or/and clash with our culture and values. It would be very interesting to hear your opinion on the matter.

**Body:** Prompts by Topic/Category

| Topic/<br>Category  | Essential Qs  | Extra Qs  | Probing Qs  | Throw-away<br>Qs  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>General information</b>                                |   |   |   | Could you tell me a bit about yourself, your qualifications, your position in the institution and your main job responsibilities, especially in relation to management and decision/policymaking? |
| <b>Rationale of policy:</b>                               | What is the rationale behind the policy of importing (managerial) philosophies & methods from | Why borrow or import Western managerial concepts, philosophies and methods in | e.g. academic accreditation; quality management programmes that originated in |   |
| <b>Vision, causes, reasons, advantages, disadvantages</b> |   |   |   |   |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  | Western countries into Omani HE?   | Omani higher education?  | Western countries? e.g. affiliation with foreign Western universities.   |
| <b>Process</b>                           | How are concepts, methods, philosophies and strategies imported from the West into Omani (higher) education? E.g. into your institution? | Who makes such a decision?   |  |
| <b>Part 1: Planning (e.g. selection)</b> | How does a decision to import a concept or method take place?  | Is there (sufficient) collaboration and consultation between the different stakeholders, i.e. the HE sector (different ministries) and between those and society before such decisions are executed? |  |
|  |  | Are there certain Western countries where policymakers prefer to import concepts and methods?  |  |
| <b>Process</b>                           | After a decision has been made to import a certain Western management philosophy or method, what would the next step involve?            | What about application?  | Let's take some examples of important values that are the basis of Western culture, e.g. Western culture does not recognise gender relations and roles in work operations; all are equal. Also, transparency and popular participation. All of these are the basis of democratic values, and are a major |
| <b>Part 2: Accommodation</b>             | Did/Would it involve any cultural or structural changes?   | How does the development of systems modelled on Western models take place?   |  |
|  |  | Is there a specific formula in place for using Western (management) concepts in Omani higher education so that they are 'sustainable'? i.e. they deliver what  |  |



|                                   |  |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|
|                                   |  | they promise and to the required or desired result?   | requirement for any kind of western management.  |
|                                   |  | How do HE policymakers accommodate such programmes and models without compromising the conceptual structure/ integrity/ base of the original Western model on the one hand, and not threaten the social and cultural fabric of society? | How do Omani higher education policymakers go about such an important aspect of Western vs Omani/ eastern culture? How, if so, are these Western models customised or tailored to fit the local context? |
| <b>Process Part 3: Evaluation</b> | Thinking about some of the Western managerial methods or philosophies adopted into Omani higher education, what has worked and what has not? How is the process of importing evaluated? Have any of the imported concepts/ methods been assessed? How? By who? | How is the extent of the sustainability of Western managerial concepts in Omani HE evaluated in the long run?   | Can you name some successful or failed experiences?  |
| <b>Conflicts, inconsistencies</b> | Reflecting on the policy of importing, what were/ are/ could be the conflicts or inconsistencies between Western (managerial) concepts and Omani context, i.e. cultural, social, political,  | In your opinion, what are some potential areas of agreement & disagreement?<br><br>How compatible were/ are the two value systems, i.e. Western vs. Omani values?   | <b>Suggested scenario to probe further:</b><br>The policy of importing a wide range of programmes from different foreign (mainly developed Western) countries seems to be more of a                      |

economic,  
religious?

Based on our  
Omani  
experience, does  
importing  
(managerial)  
philosophies  
from the West  
present (has it  
presented) any  
foundational  
clashes?

short-cut (fast  
process) to build  
a framework of a  
system modelled  
upon others that  
were originally  
designed for  
different  
contexts that  
recognise  
specific sets of  
values. As these  
systems are not  
following the  
same framework,  
conflicts may  
occur. These  
Western systems  
are not universal  
and are in most  
cases very  
context-based.  
So what happens  
here? First, how  
would/do you  
accommodate  
different  
imported  
systems?  
Second, how  
would/do you  
'customise' them  
to or integrate  
them into the  
local context, i.e.  
'Omanise' them?  
What are the  
elements  
considered?  
Economic  
factors?  
Cultural?  
Islamic?

---

**Future of  
Omani HE**

How do you see  
the future of  
Omani HE, e.g. in  
terms of issues  
like open-access  
knowledge,  
equity, student  
unions, freedom  
of expression,  
individualism,  
intellectual

Are Western  
models the best  
trajectory for  
Oman's (and the  
region's) future?  
Aren't there  
other ways than  
importing  
Western  
experiences?

ownership,  
participation of all  
in the decision-  
making,  
transparency,  
gender roles, etc.  
as all of these are  
part and parcel of  
Western models  
of quality  
management?  
Where do they  
(you) want to go  
from here?  
Will the policies/  
plans harness  
Western  
principles or  
Islamic and  
Omani values? Is  
the plan to mix  
the two?

### **Closing**

*Maintaining rapport:* I appreciate the time you have given me, and all the information. Is there anything else you would like to add that you think might be helpful to the study? Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

*Confidentiality:* Once again, I would like to assure you that all the information that has been recorded will be treated as confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

*Follow-up/ action to be taken:* Would it be all right to contact you if there is anything, e.g. clarification of a certain matter? What would be the best way to contact you? phone, email?

You can contact me if you wish to have a look at the transcribed interview (within a specified period of time as indicated in consent form), or if you would like to get a brief summary of the results.

Thank you for your time.

## Appendix I Interview Guide (Arabic)

### استخدام المفاهيم والنماذج (الإدارية) الغربية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان

#### الإفتتاحية

شكرا جزيلا على موافقتك لإجراء هذه المقابلة. كما ورد في استمارة الموافقة، هذا الدراسة تبحث مدى استدامة المفاهيم والأساليب الغربية بخاصة الإدارية منها في سياق التعليم العالي العماني. سنتبع المقابلة طريقة شبه منظمة، ويتوقع أن تستغرق حوالي ساعة واحدة وسيتم تسجيل الحوار. هل تفضل أن تكون المقابلة باللغة العربية أو الإنجليزية؟ قبل أن نبدأ، هل لديك أي استفسار؟

#### السيناريو التمهيدي:

كلنا يعلم أن التعليم في سلطنة عمان، والتعليم العالي بشكل خاص حديث جدا. عندما بدأ التعليم لأول مرة، تم استيراد أشياء كثيرة، مثل المناهج والمعلمين والفلسفات وطرق التدريس من الدول العربية والخليجية الأخرى. ولكن في الآونة الأخيرة، تحول توجه المسؤولين للدول الغربية، أي الدول الأجنبية المتقدمة. وبالنظر لنظام التعليم العالي الآن، يتوضح لنا أن سياسة استيراد البرامج الأجنبية تعتبر استراتيجية ناجحة ساهمت في التطور السريع والتوسع في هذا القطاع الحيوي في عمان. لكن هذه السياسة لم تقتصر على التخصصات والدرجات العلمية، ولكن شملت أيضا استيراد مجموعة واسعة من النماذج الإدارية مثل إدارة الجودة. لدي اهتمام خاص بمسألة استخدام المفاهيم والطرق الإدارية الغربية (نظام الجودة) المستوردة في قطاع التعليم العالي العماني، وذلك لفهم مدى استدامتها أي قابلية نجاح وحدود سياسة تطبيق فلسفات الإدارة الغربية في عمان. وبعبارة أخرى، كيف تتناسب أو تتعارض المفاهيم الإدارية الغربية مع الثقافة والقيم العمانية. وسيكون من المثير للاهتمام جدا أن أستمع إلى رأيك في هذه المسألة.

| الموضوع                      | الأسئلة الرئيسية  | الأسئلة الإضافية  | الأسئلة الاستكشافية  | أسئلة عامة   |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| معلومات عامة                 |   |   |  | هل يمكن أن تخبرني قليلا عن نفسك، المؤهلات العلمية ووضعك في المؤسسة ومسؤوليات العمل الرئيسية، خاصة فيما يتعلق بالإدارة وصنع القرار؟ |
| الأساس المنطقي للسياسة:      | ما هي أسباب ودوافع سياسة استيراد الفلسفات والأساليب الإدارية وغيرها من الدول الغربية؟     | لماذا يتم استيراد المفاهيم والفلسفات والأساليب الإدارية الغربية وتطبيقها في التعليم العالي العماني؟ | على سبيل المثال الاعتماد الأكاديمي وبرامج إدارة الجودة التي منشؤها في الدول الغربية؟ |  |
| الرؤية الأسباب المزاي العيوب |   | ما هي مزايا وعيوب سياسة استيراد أساليب إدارية غربية وتطبيقها في التعليم العالي العماني؟             | على سبيل المثال أيضا، نظام الارتباط مع الجامعات الغربية.                             |  |
| العملية الجزء 1: التخطيط     | كيف يتم استيراد المفاهيم الإدارية والأساليب والفلسفات والاستراتيجيات من الغرب إلى التعليم | من يقوم بصنع القرار؟ هل هناك تعاون وتشاور (كاف) بين مختلف أصحاب                                     |  |  |

| معايير ومنهجية الانتقاء)   | (العالي) العماني؟ على سبيل المثال في مؤسستك؟  | المصلحة، أي بقطاع التعليم العالي بمختلف الوزارات المسئولة عنه وبين هذه من جهة والمجتمع من جهة أخرى قبل أن يتم تنفيذ مثل هذه القرارات؟  |
|--|---|--|
| العملية<br>الجزء 2: -ال  | كيف يتم اتخاذ القرار باستيراد مفهوم أو طريقة غربية ما؟<br>من يشترك في صنع مثل هذا القرار؟   | هل هناك دول غربية معينة يفضل صانعو السياسات في التعليم العالي العماني استيراد المفاهيم والأساليب الإدارية منها؟<br>ما نوع (ماهية) التخطيط والتدريب المرتبط بعملية صنع أو اتخاذ القرار باستيراد مفهوم أو طريقة (إدارية) غربية؟<br>ما الذي تتضمنه عملية استيراد المفاهيم والأساليب (الإدارية) من الغرب إلى قطاع التعليم (العالي) في عمان؟  |
| العملية<br>الجزء ٢:<br>الاستيعاب، التكيف، الموازنة   | بعد أن يتم اتخاذ قرار استيراد فلسفة أو نموذج غربي، ما الخطوة التالية؟<br>هل ينطوي الأمر على أي تغييرات ثقافية أو هيكلية؟  | ماذا عن التطبيق؟<br>كيف يجري تطوير ومواءمة النظم المستوردة؟<br>هل هناك صيغة معينة مرسومة لاستخدام المفاهيم (الإدارية) الغربية المستوردة في التعليم العالي العماني بحيث تكون نتائجها "مستدامة"؟ أي أنها تنجز ما تعد به وتقدم النتيجة المطلوبة أو المرجوة؟<br>كيف يقوم واضعي السياسات في التعليم العالي باستيعاب مثل هذه البرامج والنماذج دون المساس بالهيكل أو القاعدة أو نزاهة المفاهيم التي يبنى عليها النموذج الغربي الأصلي؟ هذا من جهة، ومن جهة ثانية بدون المساس بالنسيج الاجتماعي والثقافي للمجتمع العماني؟ |
| معلومات خلفية: في 2001 صدر مرسوم ملكي رقم 2001/74 والذي تم بموجبه إنشاء مجلس الاعتماد العماني (وهو ما يسمى الآن OAAA). وما فهم من هذا المرسوم أنه إشارة واضحة عن أهمية جودة التعليم العالي. هذا أدى - على ما يبدو - إلى تأسيس نظام وطني لإدارة الجودة للتعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان، وذلك بمساعدة من خبير استشاري دولي. هل لديك أي تعليق حول هذا الموضوع؟ | دعنا نأخذ بعض القيم الهامة التي هي أساس الثقافة الغربية، على سبيل المثال، الثقافة الغربية لا تعترف بتحديد العلاقات والأدوار بين الجنسين في عمليات العمل؛ فالجميع سواسية. أيضا الشفافية والمشاركة الشعبية. كل هذه هي أساس قيم الديمقراطية، وهي شرط رئيسي لأي نوع من الإدارة الغربية. كيف يتعامل واضعي السياسات في التعليم العالي مع هذا الجانب المهم من الإدارة الغربية مقابل الثقافة العمانية الشرقية؟ كيف يتم تخصيص وتصميم أو إذا جاز استخدام لفظ "تعمين" هذه النماذج الغربية لتناسب مع السياق المحلي؟ |  |

**العملية  
الجزء ٣:  
التقييم**

بالفكر في بعض الطرق  
أو الفلسفات الإدارية  
الغربية المعتمدة في التعليم  
العالي العماني، ما الذي  
نجح وما الذي لم ينجح؟  
كيف يتم عملية تقييم  
المفاهيم والطرق  
المستوردة؟ وأي منها يتم  
تقييمه؟ هل (ي) تم تقييم  
الجميع بلا استثناء؟ كيف؟  
من قبل من؟

كيف يتم تقييم مدى استدامة  
المفاهيم الإدارية الغربية في  
العماني العالي على المدى  
البعيد؟

هل يمكنك أن تسمي بعض  
التجارب المستوردة التي  
نجحت أو فشلت؟

**نقاط الاختلاف  
والتضارب**

بالفكر في سياسة  
الاستيراد هذه، أين كانت أو  
أين يمكن أن تكمن أوجه  
الاختلاف أو التناقض بين  
أسس المفاهيم (الإدارية)  
الغربية والسياق العماني،  
بمعنى آخر أوجه الاختلاف  
الثقافية والاجتماعية  
والسياسية والاقتصادية  
والدينية؟

في رأيك، ما هي بعض  
المجالات المحتملة للاتفاق  
والاختلاف؟

بمعنى آخر، ما مدى توافق  
وإختلاف القيم بين الثقافتين،  
أي القيم العمانية مقابل  
الغربية؟

بناء على خبرتنا في عمان،  
هل تشكل سياسة استيراد  
الفلسفات (الإدارية) من  
الغرب أي تعارض أو  
صراعات تأسيسية؟

**السيناريو المقترح لسبر  
الفكرة:**

يبدو أن سياسة استيراد  
مجموعة واسعة من  
البرامج من مختلف البلدان  
الأجنبية (بشكل عام من  
الدول الغربية المتقدمة)  
هي سياسة لاختصار  
الوقت وتوفير الجهد أي  
أنها عملية سريعة لبناء  
إطار لنظام على غرار  
نظم أخرى كانت مصممة  
أصلاً لتناسب سياقات  
مختلفة تعترف بمجموعة  
محددة من القيم. وحيث أن  
هذه الأنظمة لا تتبع نفس  
الإطار، فمن المتوقع  
حدوث تعارضات. فهذه  
الأنظمة الغربية ليست  
عالمية أي أنها محددة  
السياق، فماذا يحدث عند  
استيراد بعض هذه الأفكار  
والفلسفات؟ أولاً، كيف يتم  
استيعاب هذه الأنظمة  
المستوردة المختلفة في  
السياق العماني؟ ثانياً،  
كيف يتم تخصيصها من  
أجل دمجها في السياق  
المحلي، أي بمعنى آخر  
تعميم الأنظمة الغربية. ما  
هي العناصر التي يتم  
أخذها في عين الاعتبار  
خلال هذه العملية؟ هل  
هناك عوامل اقتصادية أو  
اجتماعية أو إسلامية يتم  
مراعاتها؟

**مستقبل التعليم  
العالي في  
عمان**

كيف تنظرون إلى مستقبل  
قطاع التعليم العالي  
العماني، على سبيل المثال  
من حيث قضايا مهمة مثل  
الوصول المفتوح للمعرفة  
للجميع والإنصاف  
والاتحادات الطلابية،

هل استيراد النماذج والتجارب  
الغربية هي المسار الأفضل  
لمستقبل عمان (ولباقي دول  
المنطقة)؟  
ألا توجد مسارات أخرى؟

وحرية التعبير، والفردية،  
والملكية الفكرية، ومشاركة  
الجميع في صنع القرار،  
والشفافية، وأدوار الجنسين،  
وما إلى ذلك من القيم التي  
هي جزء لا يتجزأ من  
نماذج إدارة الجودة  
الغربية؟

أين يريد صانعو القرار  
الذهاب بهذا القطاع؟

هل ستسخر سياسات  
وخطط التعليم العالي  
المبادئ الغربية أو القيم  
الإسلامية العمانية؟ هل  
هناك خطة لخلط الاثنين؟

خاتمة

شكرا جزيلاً على الوقت الذي أعطيتني إياه، وجميع المعلومات. هل هناك أي شيء آخر تعتقد أنه قد يكون مفيداً للدراسة تود إضافته؟ هل لديك أي أسئلة تود طرحها؟  
مرة أخرى، أود أن أؤكد لك أن جميع المعلومات التي تم تسجيلها سيتم التعامل معها على أنها سرية ولن تستخدم إلا لأغراض البحث.

هل بإمكانني الاتصال بك إذا كان هناك أي شيء، على سبيل المثال. توضيح مسألة معينة؟ وما هي أفضل طريقة للتواصل؟  
بالطبع يمكنك الاتصال بي إذا كنت ترغب في إلقاء نظرة على المقابلة المكتوبة (في غضون فترة زمنية محددة كما هو مبين في استمارة الموافقة)، أو إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على ملخص موجز للنتائج.

شكرا لك على وقتك.

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