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***Educational Reform
In Oman:
Policy Context and Teachers'
Attitudes***

By Tareq Al-Nuaimi

***University of Durham
Sociology and Social Policy
Department
2002***

A thesis submitted to the University of
Durham in fulfilment of the degree of
Doctor of philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the main problems that teachers encounter in their daily lives in the Omani schools. Despite teachers problems have been researched in many developing and developed nations, these problems have up until now never been researched in Omani schools.

The relevant research indicated that teachers are adversely affected by the economic and social conditions of a society, which in turn affect their roles and affects pupils' academic performance as well. This was indicated in the experience of some Asian and European nations. As a result, to solve and improve performance, developed and some developing nations made serious attempts to reform teacher's social and economic status. Also, they went further by reforming school environment (e.g, reducing class size) and enhancing the home school relationship as an important issue in reforming educational policies.

The ideas for this research were based on the World Bank and Ministry of Education reports that identified problems in the educational system in Oman.

To explore the main problems that affect teachers' performance, the researcher selected a large sample (5% of the total population of male teachers) of teachers (as the main sample in the study), the total population of the principals of educational areas, and purposive samples of parents, schools principals and school teachers.

The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to reveal the problems that were investigated. The questionnaires were handled to teachers and the principals of the educational areas. Semi-structured interviews were also used with teachers, parents and schools principals.

The outcomes of the field survey indicated that teachers have a good relationship with the schools' principals and with their colleagues as well. By contrast, the majority of teachers in the sample are dissatisfied with the salary, the annual salary increment and the opportunities of in-service training.

Teachers also indicated that large class size produces adverse effects on teaching practice and on the Omani pupils' academic performance. With regard to the Omani pupils' performance, teachers indicated that the aspects that are most affected by large class size are: amount of individual attention, the assessment and standard of work. Teachers considered the issue of class size as one of, or indeed the most important issue for them and for enhancing the academic performance of the Omani pupil's performance.

Teachers indicated that they are dissatisfied with Omani parents contact with school. They attributed the lack of home-contact with the school to many factors, e.g. illiteracy among parents, disregarding of the value of education for the future of their sons.

The principals of the educational areas emphasised the same issues that teachers raised in the questionnaire namely: weak home contact with the school, large class size and lack of in-service training.

The semi-structured interviews revealed that Omani parents are dissatisfied with the performance of the Omani teachers. Also, they indicated that the lack of the necessary facilities and curricula improvements, are serious problems that have adverse effects on teachers' and Omani pupils' performance.

Schools principals believe that the economic condition of Omani families and ignorance among Omani parents are serious social impediments that hamper them from contacting schools and to follow-up their child's academic progress. Alongside these home-school problems, the school principals indicated that the Omani pupils performance has been worsening and the Ministry of Education must introduce an effective policies that support and enhance teachers performance and improve the Omani parents awareness of the value of education.

The outcomes of the teachers' semi-structured interviews indicated that most of them are not optimistic about the future of education in Oman unless the Ministry of Education introduces qualitative improvements.

It was concluded that there was an urgent need for an appropriate balanced policy that takes into account the point that expanding the educational services must not be at the expense of the quality of education system in Oman. Also, I concluded that reforming teachers' status and teaching performance must be the starting point in any prospective improvements policy. Moreover, I concluded that improving the social awareness of the Omani parents of the importance of education must be an essential input in improving the performance of the Omani pupil performance and to bridge the gulf between the home and the school.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the spirit of my father. I also, dedicate this work to my love and the person who lives in my hart my mother, whose help and prayer to Allah eased all the difficulties and obstacles. To my wife and my children Almutaz, Fatma and Lubna who tolerated with me the difficulties and problems. To Sayyed and Mohamed Qutub and Abdulkader Auda, whose ideas and struggle to construct a new society that respects human rights, are the lights that always, lead me in this life.

To all members of my family.

Declaration

This thesis results are entirely from my own works and has not been previously offered in candidature for any other degree or diploma.

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Contents

List of Tables.

List of Figures

Chapter one: Thesis Introduction.
1-12

Chapter two: A profile of Oman.
13-41

Chapter three: Sociological Approaches to Education.
42-78

Chapter Four: literature Review.
79-125

Chapter Five: Methodological Discussion.
126-149

Chapter Six: An Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative
Data.
150-237

Chapter Seven: A Discussion of the Main findings
238-259

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and Recommendations.
260-288

References
289-301

Appendix (A)
Questionnaires and Semi structured interviews questions
302-318

Appendix (B)
Ministry of Education letters to PEA to give the Researcher a
Permission to Conduct the Study
Some Selections of different Economic reports on Oman
World Bank report on Education in Oman
319-341

List of Tables

- Table. 2.1 Distribution of the Sultanate population by region
- Table: 2.2 Distribution of Omani population by age and sex.
- Table: 2.3 Distribution Of Omani and non-Omani population by age and sex.
- Table: 2.4 Number of governmental schools (pupils and teachers.)
- Table: 2.5 Number of private schools (pupils and teachers)
- Table: 2.6 Number of Omani civil servants employed in ministries
- Table : 2.7 Omani Civil Servants Employed in Ministries and Government Organizations by Educational Level
- Table: 6. 1 Years of Teaching.
- Table: 6.2 Age distributions.
- Table: 6. 3 Marital statues.
- Table: 6 .4 Number of children.
- Table: 6. 5 Educational level.
- Table: 6.6 Number of teachers surveyed in Muscat and Al Batina (S/N) regions.
- Table: 6. 7 Monthly income.
- Table: 6. 8 Nationality.
- Table: 6.9 Number of pupils in the school.
- Table: 6 10 Number of pupils in the class.
- Table: 6. 11 My job makes good use of my skills and abilities.
- Table: 6. 12 I feel it is important to improve my teaching skills.
- Table: 6. 13 I have sufficient time to do my job as it should be done.
- Table: 6. 14 I feel under uncomfortable pressure because of my workload.
- Table: 6. 15 My job performance is decreased as a result of stress in my job.
- Table: 6. 16 My principal is fully aware of the amount of time I spend at work.
- Table: 6. 17 My principal recognizes and acknowledge when I have done my job well.
- Table: 6. 18 I usually believe what my principal tells me.
- Table: 6. 19 I given a real opportunity to improve my skills in this school.
- Table: 6. 20 The staff in my school have a clear sense of direction about aims and objectives.
- Table: 6.21 Working relations with colleagues.

Table: 6.22 The ratio of teachers to pupils in the school.

Table: 6.23 Monthly salary.

Table: 6.24 The annual salary increment.

Table: 6.25 Curriculum innovations.

Table: 6.26 Opportunities of In-service training.

Table: 6.27 Lesson preparation and planning.

Table: 6.28 Marking.

Table: 6.29 Recording pupil attainment.

Table: 6.30 Dealing with parents.

Table: 6.31 Administration works.

Table: 6.32 School policies and planning.

Table: 6.33 Meetings.

Table: 6.34 Teaching.

Table: 6.35: Q The number of pupils in the classes has increased over the last few years. Has this been the case with the class you teach in?

Table: 6.36 Q Do you believe that class size has an affect on the quality of teaching and learning?

Table: 6.37 Emotional well-being.

Table: 6.38 Motivation.

Table: 6.39 Standard of work.

Table: 6.40 Relationship with teachers.

Table: 6.41 relationship with pupils.

Table: 6.42 Amount of individual teacher attention.

Table: 6.43 Assessment of their work.

Table: 6.44 Preparation.

Table: 6.45 Time for assessment of pupils' work.

Table: 6.46 Time with individual pupil.

Table: 6.47 Classroom control and Discipline.

Table: 6.48 Pupils social and emotional needs.

Table: 6.49 Teacher's workload.

Table: 6.50 Teachers' emotional state.

Table: 6.51: Smaller class size.

Table: 6.52:Q How satisfied are you with the frequency of contact you have with your pupils parents?

Table: 6.53:Q. Do you ever feel reluctant to talk to pupils' parents?

Q: How many parents do you think:

Table: 6.54 Neglect to see their sons' homework done?

Table: 6.55 Set standards that are too high for their sons to achieve?

Table 6.56 Fail to show respect for teachers?.

Table. 6.57 do not check up on their sons after school?

Table. 6.58 Fail to discipline their sons?

Q: Do you think that the following is: a major, a minor, or not a cause of pupils having difficulties at school:

Table: 6.59 sons being left on their own after school.

Table: 6.60 The exam system.

Table: 6.61 Curriculum

Table: 6.62 Teachers not adapting to pupils needs.

Table: 6.63 Parents' not following their sons' progress at school.

Table: 6.64 lack of facilities at pupils home

Table: 6.65: Q Do the classroom you teach in have adequate ventilation?

Table: 6.66: The availability of air conditioners.

Table: 6.67 The conditions of air conditioners.

Q: The availability of school facilities.

Table: 6.68 Sports facilities.

Table: 6.69. School garden.

Table: 6.70 Staff/teacher room.

Table: 6.71 School Library.

Table: 6.72 Teachers' responses on the availability of books in the school library.

Table:6.73. The condition of the school building.

Table:6.74 Classroom Facilities.

Table.6.75 Conditions of Toilets.

Table.6.76 Teachers' room.

List of Figures

Figure (1) Teachers demands of Omani parents to enhance Omani pupil performance.

Figure (2) Teachers' perceptions for the factors that will help them in their work.

Figure (3) The perceptions of Principals of education areas on teachers' main difficulties.

Chapter One

Thesis Introduction

Introduction

Oman as a developing country has introduced mass education for its people in order to equip them with the necessary means to serve socio-economic development needs. The oil boom in the 1970s gave the government the opportunity to extend education to satisfy the demands of the general public as a tool for social and economic mobility.

The Statement of the Problem

One view of education is that it is a cornerstone of economic and social development. It improves the productive capacity of societies and their political, economic, and scientific institutions. It also helps reduce poverty by mitigating its effects on population, health and nutrition and by increasing the value and efficiency of labour. As economies worldwide are transformed by technological advances and new methods of production that depend on a well-trained and intellectually flexible labour force, education becomes more significant.

The government in Oman is aware of the importance and effect of education. The general aims of education were identified in the 1970s. Some of these aims are as follows:

- Education is the means for providing the individual with basic knowledge and developing his mental faculties to enable him to derive benefit from them in life. And as developing and cultivating mental faculties in man depends basically on acquiring linguistic skills, education, therefore, aims at teaching the individual the basic means of communicating with others, which is the language: reading, writing, comprehension and expression.
- Education is considered a human and economic investment and contributes directly in development projects and raising the level of economic production. And to achieve this, education aims, among other things, at providing the manpower required in various fields for implementing the development projects in the country and providing facilities for specialization and higher education according to development needs.

(The Philosophy of Education in the Sultanate of Oman,
Ministry of Education, 1978, pp. 27-29)



In order to achieve these goals, the planners worked on building schools, hiring teachers, and using the media to convince parents of the importance of education for their children's future and to enable them to fit usefully and harmoniously into society.

However, the educational system in Oman has faced numerous difficulties that obstruct it from achieving the aims that it was expected to fulfill. Obviously, rapid expansion and enrolment do not ensure adequate output. This significant aspect, unfortunately, was neglected.

Indeed, there is a huge gap between the objectives of education and the current conditions of schools as stated by the Ministry of Development report. Beeby (1979, p.274) writes about education in Third World countries that "the most obvious conflict in the deciding of educational objectives appeared to be between the expansion of schools and improving the quality of the work done in them".

The Rationale for the Study

Oman is a developing country seeking to achieve socio-political and economic development after a long period of deprivation. Oman as a member of the Gulf States had special historical circumstances that accelerated the need for social and economic change.

Conditions in Oman prior to the 1970s were very difficult. This resulted in social and political decay owing to the domestic policies that were adopted by the political leadership. As an extremist politician, Said Bin Taimur (1900-1970) implemented a rigid and aggressive internal policy that impoverished the Omani people and forced many of them to emigrate from Oman to neighbouring countries in order to find social and economic stability. Said Bin Taimur's main concern was the development of the military forces, the suppression of tribal independence and individual innovations. One observer wrote:

He quickly became a recluse from the modern world and the articles of consumerism. He forbade music and eyeglasses for example. He repressed education and the introduction of the modern health care. Even foreign travel was highly restricted.

A substantial, yet unknown, proportion of the Omani populace elected to flee rather than remain in medieval isolation. By the mid 20th century, Oman had

deteriorated from an outward-looking regional merchant power to one of the most under-developed countries of the world.

(Miller, 1988, p.7)

Such a draconian policy generated a negative reaction from the people, who dreamed of progress and development comparable to some prosperous countries of the Gulf, e.g. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. As a result, the domestic situation became unstable. External intervention in Oman, tribal conflict and radical movements were the major forces that fragmented Oman's national unity.

When Sultan Qaboos took power in 1970, he was aware of the various threats that faced his country. He worked hard toward gaining political stability as a prerequisite for socio-economic development. Education was at the top of his agenda as an instrument to transform Omani society from its traditional condition to a modern one. Moreover, Sultan Qaboos knew that education was the only way to eradicate illiteracy and poverty by providing the Omani people with the necessary knowledge and skills.

It is important to pay attention to the development of national human resources so that they may carry out that full role in the national economy. In this respect, there should be expansion in education and training and improvement in nutrition and public health.

The purpose of the programme engaged in economic and production activity should not be limited to meeting the needs of the administrative body of the state.

(His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, 1970)

Therefore, the educational budget was increased during the period 1979-81 from OR 39 to 73 million and then to 97 million during the period 1981-82 (Ridha, 1990, p. 117).

However, besides these justifications proposed by political discourse concerning education and its role in preparing national human resources, there are yet other objectives that have not been articulated. Salama et al (1988) explain the state's objectives of providing education for the mass in the Arab world, which is also true of Oman:

As the political institutions in the Arab world are a symbolic necessity to the existence of the state, the services institutions are mechanisms to gain the public satisfaction about the state. As a result, educational institutions are given special concern by the state. National movements during the struggle for independence made the resistance against illiteracy one of its most prime slogans. After independence, the national state adopted the obligatory educational policy, building new schools and universities. Such policy was

implemented due to the ambitions of the public to have access to social and economic mobility and to affirm the state ideology through education.

pp.181-182

As a result of the political leadership's efforts to make educational opportunities available and encompass all Omani people, the number of schools and teachers increased dramatically. Whereas, in 1969-1970 there were only three schools, now (2002) there are 967. Moreover, the increase in the number of teachers demonstrated spectacular progress, amounting to 22,693 teachers (Ministry of Education, 1997 statistics p.4).

The expansion of educational services in the Arab world to meet the social demands of the public led to the emergence of serious problems that stand in the way of the improvement of education. Abdul Daeem (1983) identifies various problems that face the educational system in the Arab World as:

1. The increasing pupil numbers (as a result of the high fertility in the Arab World) is tremendous whilst teacher provision lags behind the growth in pupil numbers, which yields high student-teacher ratio and decline in the student's cognitive attainment.
2. The continuous growth of pupil numbers is faced with another obstacle; the unavailability of sufficient school buildings. Moreover, schools in the Arab World are not equipped with facilities that are necessary for educational progress.

Abdul Daeem asserts that:

Education in the Arab world is remiss both quantitatively and qualitatively, which makes the future for the Arab world gloomy. Educational development is not only measured by its quantitative dimensions (teacher numbers, student numbers and school numbers) rather, qualitative consideration (teacher status, the availability of instructional materials, low teacher-student ratio) are crucial factors that influence positively the educational outcomes.

(Abdul Daeem, 1983 p.14)

As mentioned earlier, the political leadership in Oman believes that education is a vital instrument that will transform Omani society from its under-developed condition to a modern one. However, while there have been frequent

efforts to make education available for all Omanis, the quality of the education system has been neglected which makes the problems that face education in Oman typical of those throughout the Arab world. Such a conclusion was not arrived at in a vacuum. Omani officials were informed of the shortcomings of the educational system.

In 1991 the World Bank wrote a report on the development of human resources in Oman. The report determined a complex of the shortcomings of the Omani educational system. Here are some items of the report:

1. "MOEY¹ proposes the addition of 117 libraries in preparatory and secondary schools to strengthen the curricula. No mention of libraries for primary schools is found in the plan. Libraries are an integral part of the educational system. As learning resource centers, libraries should be equipped to augment the curricula and provide students with hands on experience, through the use of the multi-media computer and other facilities. The mission is that adequate funds be allocated to establish libraries at primary schools. This is necessary to compensate for the inadequate preparation of new students resulting both from an absence of pre-school training and from high illiteracy rates among parents.
2. The condition of educational facilities in existing schools is alarming. In addition to the complete absence of the libraries at primary level, the plan states that 17% of preparatory and secondary schools do not have libraries. Thirteen percent of all schools are not equipped with laboratories, while 15% do not have workshops and 24% lack facilities for home economics facilities. Upgrading is part of the qualitative improvements required to enhance the education system in Oman. The mission recommends that a plan to complete basic educational facilities be given a priority in implementation in order to improve the quality of education.
3. Little attention is given to the training or retraining of educators, an element which must figure prominently in attempts to improve efficiency and quality of the education system.
4. Educational wastage (repeaters, and dropouts) results whenever policies and practices negatively affect the availability and quality of teachers, curricula, methodology and educational facilities. Economic factors, labour, market conditions, family structures and traditions, and health and nutrition standards are among the factors that affect students' ability to continue their studies and their resulting development to educational wastage. It is necessary to institute measures for creating environments conducive to learning and for inducing increased parental and community involvement in children's education.
5. The educational system of the Sultanate exhibits a high repetition ratio especially at the primary and preparatory levels where 10 to 21% of male students and 8 to 14% of female students repeat one or more years during the primary cycle. At the preparatory level 9 to 23% of males and 6 to 11% of females are repeaters. Dropping out of schools is a problem at the preparatory and secondary levels.

¹ Ministry of Education and Youth.

6. Repeaters and dropouts create socio-economic problems for the Sultanate's policies, thus undermining efforts toward improving the skill level and training the workforce. Repetitions slow down the process of Omanization, while dropping out hinders its development".

World Bank Report, Annex B (1991)

Al Rawahi (1996) reached the same conclusions when he found that the weakness in the standard of education, especially in primary schools, is a logical consequence of the absence of qualified teachers, since qualified expatriate teachers prefer to work in other Gulf State countries where they are paid higher salaries.

He also found that there are many who leave school early, as education in Oman is not compulsory. This means that there will be many who are deprived of the qualifications needed for the labour market. Some of his recommendations to improve education in Oman are:

1. To improve the current education in primary schools, by providing the necessary equipment and teaching facilities to help the student to build up understanding, skills and to prepare them for the next level of school. The current attainment of primary schools is deteriorating due to the unavailability of such teaching facilities.
2. To increase the number of classes for each level, especially in primary schools where the number of students reaches 45 students in each class. Too many students in one class is a cause of low quality of education. Lowering the teacher-student ratio will help the students, as the chance of learning will increase.

(Al Rawahi, 1996 p.99)

Such shortcomings that characterise the Omani educational system have led to negative consequences that threaten the efficiency of human capital in Oman.

In 1997 a report was prepared by the Ministry of Development, which concentrated on improving the quality of education to enhance human capital. In this report various challenges were defined.

1. The low level of productivity of the labour force. The reluctance of Omanis to join certain professions and occupations has led to the reduction of their capacity to face future challenges, affected their integration with the world economy and at the same time has hindered the substitution of expatriate labour.
2. The weakness and inadequacy of basic education to cope with the rapidly-changing scientific and technological development."

(Five Year Plan 1996-2000, p.191)

The present research will attempt to determine the main reasons for these problems. It is essential for the future of the next generation and the future of Oman that we should investigate these problems and find the appropriate solutions to establish a base for any future educational reform, necessary to remedy the problems that face education in Oman

Moreover, few studies concerning educational obstacles in Omani schools have been undertaken in Oman. Only two studies have been conducted in recent years (Al-Salmi, 1994; Al-Manthri, 1995). Such scarcity of research in Oman persuaded the researcher to conduct the current study.

The foregoing argument is conducive to conducting a study about the education system in Oman. Logically, this study will not encompass every aspect of the educational system, but it will concentrate on the main figure:, the teacher in the Omani school, as he is empowered by the state and society to prepare the youth for their adult roles.

Significance of the Study

1. Oman is a developing country that has constructed developmental plans to achieve economic and social progress. Human capital has to have a prominent position in such plans, therefore, highlighting the main faults of the educational institution (schools) in general and the obstacles to teacher performance in particular will enable the social policy makers to eliminate the disadvantages that stand in the way of improving the human capital.
2. Schools play a decisive role in preparing the youth and inculcating common values, But in the absence of certain conditions that are necessary for educational achievement, schools turn into places that generate illiteracy and alienation. Thus, Tim Hays says "Modern public education is the most dangerous force in a child's life, religiously, sexually, economically, patriotically and physically" (cited in Apple, 1996, p.47)

The economic and social planners in Oman have been improving and rehabilitating the economic structure in order to attract foreign investment as the primary goals in the current developmental plan (1996-2000).

It is generally accepted that the availability of skilled people is a necessary condition for any foreign investor. Nevertheless, there is a divergence between such economic objectives and the facts mentioned earlier concerning poor education levels. By providing the social policy makers with the necessary information as to what hinders the education system, they will be able to shape vital education policies to meet Oman's economic ambitions and gradually to minimize foreign labour, which has become an obstacle to Omanization. Inkeles and Smith (1974) identify the modern man by a set of attitudes, which may be summarized as follows:

1. A readiness for new experiences and openness to innovation;
2. An interest in things other than those of immediate relevance;
3. A more democratic attitude toward the opinions of others;
4. An orientation to the future rather than the past;
5. A readiness to plan one's own life;
6. A belief that we can dominate our environment and achieve our goals;
7. An acceptance that the world is calculable and therefore controllable;
8. An awareness of the dignity of others, for example women and children;
9. A faith in the achievement of science and technology; albeit a somewhat simple faith;
10. A belief in distributive justice.

Such modern attitudes can be attained through different means, e.g. media, urbanization and industrialization. However, education remains the strongest tool especially in Third World countries. But how can modernization goals be achieved, while education does not function efficiently? Educational reform is necessary. This study seeks to designate the appropriate aspects of reform.

The researcher selected teachers as the major informants in the research. Teachers are fundamental since it is their knowledge, teaching skills and their behaviour, together with other important variables, which eventually determine

classroom learning. Teachers are also the most important input into the system. Therefore, they were selected as the sample because they are the most eligible component in identifying and distinguishing where the problems of education lie, rather than those who are sitting in “ivory towers” producing plans that may or may not suit the classroom situation. Teachers in the present research will talk about their problems, which I believe are the problems of education in Oman.

Objectives of the Study

The present research will stress certain issues that are fundamental for improving the quality of education: teachers’ difficulties, class size, the home-school relationship and the adequacy of school buildings. As a result, the objectives of this research are:

1. To identify teachers’ professional difficulties;
2. To highlight the effect of class size on teachers and pupils;
3. To examine teachers’ views on home-school relationship;
4. To hear teachers’ views on the adequacy of school buildings;
5. To examine teachers’ prospects on education in Oman;
6. To explore the views of education area principals regarding the most important difficulties encountered by teachers in Omani schools;
7. To examine parents’ levels of satisfaction with respect to the quality of education that is offered for their children.

Research Methodology

The research was based on a fieldwork study carried out on four samples: teachers as the main object of the study, educational provinces’ principals, parents and school principals. Principals of education areas (PEAs) were asked to identify the most critical obstacles faced by teachers. Their answers are vital because their experiences in the field of education and their continual contributions to drawing up educational policies make them familiar with education issues in general and teachers in particular. Their answers would serve to further and consolidate the objectives of the study and its suggestions and recommendations. Parents and school principals were also interviewed. The former were asked about their

satisfaction or dissatisfaction with regards to the education that is available for their children in schools. If they were dissatisfied I sought to determine the reasons and the appropriate ways to improve the situation in order to comply with their desires and requirements.

School principals were asked about students' academic performance and whether it is improving or deteriorating and why. The aim of interviewing is to get a clear picture of the real difficulties that schools in Oman currently face.

Five hundred and eighty teachers – irrespective of school type, Omanis or non-Omanis, experienced or beginners and the subject they teach – were surveyed.

Bogden and Biklen (1992) recommended the combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods. Two techniques were used for data collection for the survey: 1) the questionnaire; and 2) the semi-structured interview, which was used with parents, school principals and with some teachers.

I used the semi-structured interview with teachers because the questions touch on areas of critical issues, which have to be handled with some delicacy. Such questions would be almost impossible to answer truthfully and accurately if they were included in the questionnaire. The semi-structured interview was definitely a complementary instrument that reduced the disadvantages of quantitative method.

Three types of samples were used in the present study: random sample, stratified sample and purposive sample.

The Scope of the Study

1. The study was not limited to Omani teachers as the major sample; it also included the principals of educational areas and Omani parents. The teachers' sample included Omani and non-Omani teachers. Non-Omani teachers were included in the sample because they constitute 48% of the total number of teachers in Omani public boys' schools. Moreover, those teachers have greater experience than Omani teachers since they come from Arab countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Jordan) that have

more advanced educational development. Their responses will be invaluable to the development of the recommendations of this study.

2. The research was carried out in Muscat and Al-Batina regions, which are the largest cities in Oman. It was difficult for me to extend the survey to other regions in the Sultanate because of the cost of time and effort.

The Organisation of the Study

The thesis consists of eight chapters including the Introduction. The chapters will be as follows:

Chapter One: “Introduction”; this chapter considers the problem that the present research is investigating and the reasons that prompted the researcher to choose the topic being studied, then a brief outline of the research.

Chapter Two: “A profile of Oman” introduces the reader to Omani society, its climate, geographical regions, the economic and social transformation that the society has undergone in the last three decades and the current economic situation. It will also review the development of the educational system in Oman and its accomplishment.

Chapter Three “sociological perspectives in the sociology of education” examines the theories that are relevant to the study. The chapter will discuss functional theory, modernization theories and fragile state and education theory. This chapter will enrich the study since it will discuss the importance of education for the progress of societies.

Chapter Four “A review of literature”; this chapter provides a discussion on the literature dealing with education reform in developed and developing countries. The aim of this chapter is to study these countries’ experiences in the field of education reform and most importantly, the areas that reform focused on. This chapter is divided into three sections. First, it discusses teachers’ professional problems and what initiatives were taken to solve these problems in order to lessen any possible negative affects upon the pupils. Second, the chapter indicates how small class sizes are helpful in enhancing pupils’ academic performance, and how they increase teachers’ abilities to improve and diversify

teaching methods which reflects positively upon the pupils. The last section will deal with the benefits of strong home-school relations.

Chapter Five “Methodological discussion”; this chapter discusses the methodology used in conducting the fieldwork, sample types, techniques used for collecting data, and other procedures that were used in the fieldwork.

Chapter Six “An analysis of the data”; this chapter analyses the data that were obtained from teachers’ questionnaires, the educational areas principals’ responses and the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews that were used with teachers, schools principals and Omani parents.

Chapter Seven “Discussion of the main fieldwork outcomes” in this chapter, I shall give a sociological reading of the fieldwork data.

Chapter Eight “Conclusion and recommendations” presents the main findings of this research and the recommendations that can contribute in improving not only teachers’ professional conditions but also the educational system in Oman.

Chapter Two

A Profile of Oman

Introduction

All developing societies attempt to develop their economic performance in order to break free from their economically underdeveloped situation. When a developing country seeks to strengthen its economy, it tries to attain various targets. On the one hand it wishes to absorb high population growth - a main feature of Third World countries' - and to enhance living standards. On the other hand it wishes to develop human capital as an alternative to natural resources, which may be scarce. In this matter most Third World countries recall the Japanese Model, where human capital was the backbone to its socio-economic accomplishments.

In this chapter, several features of Oman will be presented. However, particular emphasis will be given to the economy and demographic structure since both components influence the educational system.

Geography

The Sultanate of Oman occupies the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula and is located between latitudes 16°40' and 26°20' north and longitudes 51°50' and 59°40' east. The coastline extends 1,700 km from the Strait of Hormuz in the north, to the borders of the Republic of Yemen and overlooks three seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

The Sultanate borders Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the west; the Republic of Yemen in the south; the Strait of Hormuz in the north, and the Arabian Sea in the east.

The total land area is 309,500 sq. kms, making it the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula.

Topography

The Sultanate of Oman has a variety of topographical features consisting of plains, rivers and mountains. The most important area is the coastal plain, which

represents about 3% of the total land area. The mountain ranges occupy about 15%. The Hajar range runs from Musandam in the north to Ras Al-Hadd, the extreme limit of the Arabian Peninsula. In the south, the Dhofar mountain range attracts the monsoon, which brings unique weather conditions and creates a special environment in Dhofar. The remaining area, which occupies 82% of the country, is mainly sand and gravel desert and includes part of the Empty Quarter.

Climate

The climate differs from one area to another. It is hot and humid in the coastal areas in summer, while it is hot and dry in the Interior with the exception of the higher mountains, which enjoy a moderate climate throughout the year. Rainfall is generally light and irregular; although heavy rains and thunderstorms can cause severe flooding. In the south the Dhofar region has a moderate climate and the pattern of rainfall is more predictable with heavy monsoon rains occurring regularly between May and September.

The Cities of Oman

Muscat

The Capital area now extends from the town of Seeb in the north to the fishing port of Quriyat in the south. With its commercial centres, industrial areas, Government offices, foreign embassies and hotels, the Governorate of Muscat is the most densely populated and developed part of Oman.

Al-Batinah

Al-Batinah is the area between the sea and the mountains, running some 270 km from the border with the UAE to Muscat. Traditionally it was a fishing and farming region, but it is now becoming more commercial and industrialized, in line with the policy of diversification of the economy, with projects embracing a wide variety of enterprises, located in designated industrial areas. It is one of the most heavily populated areas of Oman. Behind al-Batinah stretch the Western Hajar mountains running parallel to the coast with the highest peaks reaching over 3000m. The principal town is Al-Rustaq, which was once the capital of Oman.

Al-Jauf

The Al-Jauf central plateau that stretches from the foot of the Jebel Al-Akhdar south to the desert is the heartland of Oman and contains the historic towns of Nizwa, Bahla, Manah, Adam and Izki.

Sumail Gap

The Wadid Sumail forms a natural break between the Eastern and Western Hajar mountain ranges and thus forms the main artery of communication from the coast to the interior. The oil and gas pipelines run through the Gap, in which there are many small settlements as well as the major centres at Sumail, Bidbid and Fanjah.

Al-Dhahira

Al-Dhahirah, meaning the 'back' as opposed to the Batinah or 'belly' of the mountain is a semi-desert plain sloping down from the Western Hajar towards the Empty Quarter. In the north it meets the UAE at the border town of Al-Buraimi. The other main towns are Ibri, Dhank and Yanqul.

Al-Sharqiya

Al-Sharqiya is an area of sandy plains and *wadis* lying on the inland side of the Eastern Hajar mountain range. The main centres of population are Ibra and Sur. To the south lies the Wahiba sand sea and, along the coast, small fishing communities and the island of Masirah.

Al-Wusta

The central region is a gravel desert with escarpments running down to the coast, where the main occupation is fishing. Inland lie Oman's oil and gas and mineral deposits. This region also contains the Arabian Oryx sanctuary. The main settlements are at Haima and al-Duqm. The island of Mahawt is also in this region.

Southern Region (Governate of Dhofar)

The Southern region occupies about one third of the total area of Oman. The main town is Salalah which lies on the fertile coastal plain and the principal occupations of the inhabitants are fishing and agriculture. Raysut, to the west of Salalah, is Oman's second port and is also the location for a new industrial area. The Qara mountain range with its unique climate provides valuable pasture for cattle, camels and goats. Offshore, the Halaniyat Islands support a small fishing community.

Musandam

Separated from Oman by part of the United Arab Emirates, Musandam is a spectacular feature with mountains rising up to 1,800 metres and falling precipitately to the sea. Once forming an almost impenetrable barrier it is now linked with the rest of Oman by a modern road network. The main centres are Khasab and Bukha and the major commercial activity is fishing. (Ministry of Information, 1999, pp.25-29)

Sociological Analysis of the Demographic Structure of Omani Society

Before the 1990s, no general population census had been conducted in Oman. This created various difficulties for policy makers, e.g. in allocating development investments in a just and comprehensive way. Therefore in 1993 a general census for population and housing was carried out. Sultan Qaboos explained the importance of the general census as "to reinforce the development efforts, the general census of population and general housing – in the next year, if God wills – will contribute to providing the data and information that is vital for and has positive influence on socio-economic development spheres." (Contemporary Omani Society: 1993-94,p,12)

1. Geographical Distribution Of Population

Table 2.1
Population Density Percentage Distribution of the Sultanate's
Population by Region

Governorate/Region	% of Total Population
Muscat	27.2
Al-Batinah	28.0
Musandam	1.4
A'Dhahirah	9.0
A'Dhakhaliyah	11.4
A'Sharqiyah	12.8
Al Wusta	0.8
Dhofar	9.4
Total	100.0

Source: General Census of Population and General Housing, 1993,p: 33

Table 2.1 shows that the population of Al-Batinah region constitutes about 28% of the total population. The reason for this is that Al-Batinah is agricultural land: the availability of water and the fertility of the soil are crucial factors attracting people to settle here. The region with the second highest population density is Muscat, the capital city of Oman. Muscat is host not only to the governmental ministerial complex, the main airports, universities and other service institutions, but most of the development projects are also concentrated in this region. However, the government has made attempts to distribute governmental investments more widely in order to reduce migration to the capital and to create more employment opportunities for Omani youth. Although Al-Wusta region is very large in terms of area, it has the lowest population percentage, amounting to less than 1% of the population.

Age Distribution of the Population

Table 2.2
Percentage Distribution of Omani Population (by Age Group and Sex)

Total	Female	Male	Age Group
51.6%	51.6%	51.6%	0-14
45.4%	45.4%	45.4%	15-64
3.0%	3.0%	2.9%	65+
100.0%	100.0%	99.9%	Total

Source: General Census of Population and General Housing, 1993, P: 37.

Table 2.2 shows that the percentage of Omani population who are less than 15 years old has reached 52% of the total population. In contrast, 3% of the people are 65 years of age or above. The rest, who are between 15 and 64 years of age, constitute more than 45%. Children in Oman reach the highest peak as a result of a high birth rate, and a lower death rate, which are typical of the demographic features in Third World countries. Todaro (1989) asserts:

There has been a narrowing of the gap in mortality rates between developed and less developed countries. The primary reason is undoubtedly the rapid improvement in health conditions throughout the Third World. Modern vaccination campaigns against malaria, smallpox, yellow fever and cholera, as well as the proliferation of public health facilities, clean water supplies, improved nutrition and public education have all worked together over the past 25 years to lower death rates by as much as 50% in parts of Asia and Latin America, and by over 30% in much of Africa and the Middle East.

(p. 195)

There are also some social factors that affect birth rate in the developing world. Aloch (1986) argues that there are two main reasons for the birth rate increase in the Arab world (which is part of the LDC): first, the prohibition of abortion. Second, lack of use of contraceptives.

Table 2. 3
Percentage Distribution of Population (Omani/non-Omani
by Age Group and Sex

Total	Male	Female	Age Group
%	%	%	%
41.0	35.7	48.3	0-14
56.7	62.3	49.0	15-64
2.3	2.0	2.7	65+
100.0	100.0	100.0	Total

Source: General Census of Population and General Housing, p: 40

According to Whelan (1987 p, 139) “a major constraint on Oman’s development strategy is the lack of skilled native manpower”. This social and economic factor caused the private and governmental sector to rely on foreign labour to assist in the government’s development strategy. Moreover, the political and social instability prior to the 1970s forced many Omanis to emigrate to other states, which was another factor that exerted pressure on the governmental and private sectors to depend on expatriate labour. During the 1970s and 1980s and up to the middle of the 1990, many foreign workers came to the Sultanate.

The high level of immigration, comprised largely of working age males, has affected the general age composition of the population. In particular, it has increased the ratio of adult males (62.3%) at the expense of male children (35.7%) as shown in Table 2.3.

Population Dependency

The population dependency ratio in the Sultanate is 120. This ratio is more than twice that of the industrial countries, where the average is 50. It also exceeds the average for the world, which is 65, and that of developing countries, which is 70. (General Census of Population and General Housing, pp 23-24)

This dependency ratio is a real problem to Omani society. Todaro (1989) explains some consequences of this social problem:

Children under the age of 15 constitute almost half the total population of third world countries... In countries with such an age structure, the youth dependency ratio - that is the proportion of youth (below 15 years) to economically active adults (age 15-64) - is very high. Thus the workforce in developing countries must support almost twice as many children as they do in the wealthier countries. (P,196)

The government of the Sultanate of Oman is aware of the social and economic ramifications of its demographic structure. As a result, they are working on various possible ways of generating more employment opportunities for the Omani youth. There are two main policies that the government has implemented which will hopefully help the Omani youth to find jobs in the market: first, the restriction of foreign labour and flow of expatriates to the Omani market and by issuing very strict regulations that reduce labour importation particularly from Asian countries. Second, encouraging the private sector to employ Omani people instead of other nationalities.

Oman's Economy: Achievements and Obstacles

1. The Economy of Oman Before the 1970s

Prior to the 1970s, the economy of Oman had limited production capacity. Typical of traditional societies, Omanis depended on farming and fishing as their sole means of survival. According to Allen (1987, p.14) "Agriculture is by far the most important economic activity in the country, accounting for the livelihood of 85% of the people. "As a result, dates and fish were the only products that Oman used to export due to the limited resources. Omanis were unable to improve their capabilities due to their impoverished setting, political instability and high illiteracy rate. Allen describes the lives of Omanis thus:

Fishing supplemented agriculture along the coast, and 5% of the population lived a nomadic lifestyle. Some traditional manufacturing has also been conducted with poultry, weaving, metalwork, ship-building and several other handicrafts being important activities.

(Allen, 1987, p. 14)

2. The Economy of Oman From the 1970s

Political stability is one of the most remarkable successes of Sultan Qaboos. After his military and political efforts to eradicate the radical and tribal movements, a new era in Omani society began. To develop and improve the economy, five basic principles were formulated to lead the socio-economic development process:

1. Oil resources are a property of all Omani generations, and not of the present one alone.

2. The diversification of resources of national income is the guarantee for Oman's economic future.
3. The private sector is the backbone of a national economy, which is devoid of monopoly.
4. The goal of social development is to bring up Omani citizens capable of undertaking economic and productive activities.
5. Investments should be distributed in a way that leads to the elimination of variations in living standards throughout the Sultanate.

(Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1989, pp. 24-25)

As Sultan Qaboos was successful in creating political stability as an essential factor, the oil boom in 1975 gave a push to the economic and social development, otherwise the country would have remained in economic recession and underdeveloped.

In the following pages, economic achievements will be displayed through sectoral achievements. The emphasis will be on oil, industry and infrastructure.

Oil

"The motor of Omani socio-economic development has been since 1967, is now, and will remain oil" (Skete 1993, p. 100). Oil was produced in small quantities, amounting to 283 thousand barrels per day during the first five-year plan. The oil boom during the 1970s was responsible for the high GDP growth that Oman achieved during the first five-year plan (23.4%). This period witnessed a rise in oil reserves from 1,487 million barrels in 1976 to 2,489 million in 1980, as a result of concentrated investments and efforts directed at oil exploration.

As is typical of the oil producers in the Arab World, oil is the main source for foreign currency. For Oman as a developing country, oil is the most essential part of its economy. But, because Oman has small oil reserves, comparable to other Gulf States, it doesn't feel confident about its future without sufficient oil reserves. Therefore, the government increased the financial investments in order to explore more oil reserves in many parts of the Sultanate. Such policies yielded an increase in oil reserves to 4 billion barrels during the second five-year plan (1981-1985) (Ministry of Development 1996-2000, p. 17). It is hard to imagine how the development process could go further without oil. Whelan (1987) described the importance of oil to Oman thus:

Oman's petroleum resources are the predominant factor in its development strategy, although the single, resource nature of economy is also its biggest weakness... without the windfall of additional oil resources becoming available the Sultanate might have suffered the sharp recession which gripped some neighboring Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) States; after oil revenue ran out in 1981. Oman has not been untouched by the weak price of oil and there are fears that development may go into sharp reverse.

(Pp. 136-137)

Oil production in Oman varies in accordance with a number of factors. For instance, the instability of oil prices in the international market would mean that Oman would decrease its oil production in order to foster the oil prices and vice versa.

Myint (1980) argues that the underdeveloped countries should be wary of trying to increase their specialization in primary exports because this would increase their vulnerability to short-term fluctuations in the international market's demand for these products, which appear to be more unstable than that for these products. He also indicates that it was feared this short-term instability would make it difficult not only to maintain a stable, unchanged level of consumption and living standards of the underdeveloped world people, but also to maintain a stable level of investment for their long-term socio-economic development.

Todaro (1989) argument supports Myint's hypothesis. He indicates that the economic and social forces, both internally and externally are responsible for producing five common characteristics of developing countries:

1. Low relative levels and, in many countries, slow growth rates of national income.
2. Low levels and, in many countries, stagnating rates of real income per capita growth.
3. Highly skewed patterns of income distribution with the top 20% of the population receiving five to ten times as much income as the bottom 40%.
4. As a result of 1 and 3 above, great masses of Third World population suffer from absolute poverty.
5. In education, low levels of literacy, significant school dropout rates, and inadequate and irrelevant educational curricula and facilities.

The extent to which the Omani economic system is typical of the developing world and to what extent Myint and Todaro's arguments can be applicable to the Omani situation will be discussed later.

Industry

Most Third World countries rely heavily on developing their industrial sector as an important means to strengthening their economic structure and avoiding any reliance on a single source of income. Oman is no exception. There is a need to establish a well-developed industrial sector that will help to reduce Oman's significant dependency on oil and diversify its economy. Like other developing countries, the Sultanate has adopted various policies to support and encourage industry. During the first Five-Year Plan (1976-1980) many small and medium-sized factories were set up. They sold their products to the local market. Therefore, the industrial sector contributed to GDP growth from 0.3 in 1975 to 1.3 in 1979.

The second Five-Year Plan (1981-85) witnessed practical steps to encourage the industrial sector. In this context, Royal Decree 70/81 was issued with regard to financial support for the private sector in the area of agriculture and fisheries, and providing the required incentives to confirm its role in development, such as exemption from income tax, customs duties on raw materials and equipment and the establishment of basic infrastructure for industrial development (Fourth Development Plan, 1991-1995, p.17).

Forms of Financial Support Received by Omani Industry

During the fourth Five-Year Plan (1991-1995) the Royal Decree 91/99 was issued to give a grant of 30% of the total cost of projects located in Muscat (the capital). The grant can be increased to 50% of the project, if the project is to be established outside of the Muscat area (Contemporary Omani Society, 1993-94 p7.)

Moreover, during the fourth Five-Year Plan (1991-1995), in order to facilitate national and foreign investments, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry planned to establish, six industrial areas that would be distributed in different geographical areas of the Sultanate, namely:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Riysut Industrial Area | (Dhofar) |
| 2. Sohar Industrial Area | (Al-Batinah) |
| 3. Nizwa Industrial Area | (Al-Dakelia) |

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 4. Sur Industrial Area | (Al-Sharqiya) |
| 5. Al-Buraimy Industrial Area | (Al-Dhariha) |
| 6. Musndam Industrial Area | (Musndain) |

By the end of the fourth Five-Year Plan GDP growth of the industrial sector was RO275, 12% of average rate of growth (Development Council 1991-95, p.39).

The state perceives the industrial sector not only as a supportive element in its attempt to diversify its economy, but also, as an essential component to absorb Omani labour and to reduce the unemployment rate which is estimated at 10% (The Economic Intelligence Unit, 1998, p.15). However, Omani officials issued labour regulations to make gradual replacements of the expatriate workforce by Omani people (Omanisation targets).

<u>Omanisation targets by sector (% of the workforce)</u>	<u>Target</u>
Transport, Storage, Communication	60%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	45%
Industry	35%
Restaurant, Hotels	30%
Wholesale & Trade	20%
Contracting	15%

(Source: Press Reports in the Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd, 1998, p.15)

Heavy industries became the main goals of the Sultanate. Last year, India and Oman agreed to establish a petrochemical industry at "Sur" governate, at a cost of \$1.5 billion. Also it is expected that the Republic of China will set up a smelting project at Al-Batinah area at a cost of \$7 billion. (Press Reports in the Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd, p.22)

The Sultanate found it is necessary to attract foreign investment to support the diversification policy and saw it as a great opportunity for Oman to benefit from the transfer of modern technology. In general the goals of industry can be summarized as follows:

1. Industrialisation will support the Sultanate's policy to help it to diversify its economic structure, and to reduce its dependency on oil.
2. The distribution of industrial investments to cover, as far as possible, all of the regions in the Sultanate and to avoid industrial development in certain regions at the expense of others.
3. The establishment of the basic infrastructure required for the development process in general and for industrial development in particular.

Infrastructure & Administrative Machinery

As part of creating a modern state the leadership placed great emphasis on the development of the infrastructure. It was impossible to enhance the quality of life of Omanis without the establishment of the services needed by the public. Clements (1980) describes conditions in Oman thus:

Apart from the obvious economic benefits that oil brought to Oman, the most significant benefit has been in the field of social progress, particularly in the area of quality of life and health. In these areas little progress can be said to have been made prior to 1970 and the Sultanate was badly provided for in terms of public services, resources for the poor and medical facilities. These deficiencies had been obvious to most observers and indeed, there were certain areas that the Sultan (Qaboos) had declared on his accession must be remedied.

(p.19)

The administrative machinery was established during the first Five-Year Plan as a vehicle necessary to hasten the development programs that would significantly contribute to improve the lives of Omani citizens. Moreover, the sequence of plans led to the development of the administrative machinery. By the end of 1998 a complex of 23 ministry and two consultative councils constituted the administrative structure of the state.

Health

Prior to 1970 modern medicine was almost unknown. The tribal society was responsible for traditional medicine that was offered to its tribe members.

Cauterisation was the most popular cure in the traditional Omani society. Apart from that, people traditionally used what was called “popular medicine” that is a mixture of plants, leaves, salt and eggs.

About health in Oman prior to the 1970s, Clements (1980) wrote:

It might be imagined that Oman was a basically healthy land as there was no overcrowding, adequate supplies of food including fresh fruit and vegetables, no breeding grounds for disease such as swamps. In addition, life was lived mainly in the outdoors, although hardy, a living could be made from the sea and the land. Despite this the health of large sections of the population was extremely poor, especially in the interior where diseases such as trachoma, glaucoma and other eye diseases were rife. Throughout the Sultanate malnutrition and vitamin deficiency were prevalent as were diseases resulting from poor hygiene, and, malaria was endemic.

(p,81)

Such unhealthy conditions were a barrier to social progress. The alteration of such conditions would pave the way to improving the quality of life of the Omani people. Therefore, improving the health projects was one of the political leadership's desires to enable people to participate effectively in socio-economic development. The progress that the health sector achieved can be illustrated by the expenditure figures, which in 1970 stood at 534,282 and 4,432,892 in 1972 then to 15,900,000 by 1978 (Clements, 1980 p.82).

The third Five-Year Plan (1986-1990) witnessed a rise in the total expenditure on the health sector that stood at RO 26,670 and then rose to RO 83,182 by the end of the fourth Five-Year Plan (1991-1995) (Development Council, p.44). Such expenditures produced a network of medical services, which guarantees that each governorate in the Sultanate has access to free medical care. Now there are 46 hospitals, 86 health centres without beds, 24 health centres with beds, 65 preventative health units, 3,598 beds and 1,382 doctors.

The improvement of health care in the Sultanate led to the eradication of certain deadly diseases that had been prevalent among Omanis, and to a sharp reduction in infant mortality (Declaration of the State Minister for Development Affairs before Shura Council, 1995, p.8).

Electricity

The electrical sector is one of the main factors that have contributed to the promotion of the development process in Oman. The officials in Oman are aware

of this essential aspect in their social and economic progress. As a result they have made enormous efforts to provide electricity services, therefore, funds for this sector rose from RO 81,231 during the third five-year plan (1986-90) to RO 94,973 in the fourth five-year plan (1991-95) and then to RO 150,000,000 during the fifth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000). The government's fiscal difficulties pushed it to involve the foreign and national private sector in the provision of electricity services throughout the joint projects. That was modified in "Munah" electrical station in Nizwa, which was financed and constructed by the Omani Private Sector at a total cost of \$200 million. It is also expected that an electrical station will be constructed in Dhofar in the southern part of Oman at a total cost of \$1 billion. The project will be financed by the government and the private sector.

Obstacles Facing Oman's Economy

Two factors have particularly influenced the development process in Oman:

1. The poverty that Omanis lived in prior to the 1970s, which was one of the main reasons for hastening the development process to enhance the quality of Omanis' lives and also to prove to them the openness of the new regime.
2. The discovery of oil that was and still is the main generator of the development process in Oman.

These two factors have created a severe crisis for Oman's economy as well as creating certain advantages. However, the devaluation of the Omani Riyal in 1986 was the most harmful action in the modern Omani economy. (This action was taken due to the collapse of oil prices and then the decrease of the state income). This economic action, which resulted in a long recession, forced Omani officials to review the economic challenges and designate an appropriate way to overcome them. Therefore, in 1989 a report was prepared by the Development Council that documented the following challenges:

1. The Dominance of Oil as the main Source of Income

The report mentioned that oil is still the main provider for national income, and therefore for any improvement in the lives of Omanis.

They have continued to represent about 83% of total revenues in 1990, against 85% in 1985 and 92% in 1980. The volume of these revenues is greatly affected by external factors beyond the control of the national economy, and an increase in their influence on the revenue structure means they affect the volume of public expenditure, and therefore development achieved in other sectors, particularly the services.

(Fifth Five-Year Development Plan, 1996-2000, 1997, p.28)

2. Dependence on Foreign Labour

The increase in foreign labour in the Sultanate has created various difficulties for Omani labour since the private sector became dependent on foreign labour and was unwilling to employ Omanis. In addition, due to the decline in state revenues, governmental institutions were unable to take on more Omanis. As a result:

With an increase in the number of graduates and the inability of the governmental sector to absorb new workers, it has become necessary to find mechanisms to deal with the deficiencies of the labour market from the point of view of its composition (national/expatriate), and the occupational and sectoral distribution of the labour force within an integral manpower planning framework that would reconcile the graduates of various educational and training institutions with the needs of the labour market.

(Fifth Five-Year Development Plan, 1996-2000, 1997, pp.29-30)

3. The Imbalance between Revenues and Expenditure

The decline in oil prices created a gap between revenues and expenditure that forced the government to finance the deficit through withdrawal from the SGRF or by borrowing from abroad. Therefore:

It is important in this context to maintain the level of public expenditure within appropriate limits permitted by the increase in government revenues from its various sources without resorting to large withdrawals of reserves, or dependence on excessive borrowing.

(Fifth Five-Year Development Plan, 1996-2000, 1997 p.31)

The report that highlighted these difficulties was written in 1989 to be used as a guideline for the coming plans. Here an important question can be raised: regarding the extent to which the fourth Five-Year Plan will be successful in avoiding and overcoming the obstacles that face Oman's economy. The report about the fifth Five-Year Plan defined the main challenges faced by Oman's economy as:

1. The increasing deficit in the general budget; decline in financial reserves; levels of public debt that must not be exceeded; and the institution of a mechanism for achieving equilibrium in public finance.
2. The dependence of the national economy on a single, depletable resource (oil) that is affected mainly by external economic and political factors.
3. The expected gradual decline in oil reserves over the coming 25 years.
4. The poor production efficiency in government systems, and the inefficient utilisation of available resources.
5. The low levels of private savings and investment rates, and increasing consumption tendencies.
6. The existing disequilibrium in the labour market, including the low level of national labour participation and expansion in the employment of expatriate labour.

(Fifth Five-Year Development Plan, 1996-2000, 1997, pp.165-166)

Education System

After he came to power in the 1970s, Sultan Qaboos directed his efforts toward two essential objectives: stabilizing the political situation and building up a modern educational system in order to achieve various political, social and economic targets. His most important task, however, was to settle the conflict among Omani tribes and to provide the Omani people with the necessary skills and knowledge required by the labour market. Sultan Qaboos' strong interest in educating the Omani people was embodied in his statement "We will teach our children even under the shade of the trees"

The education system in Oman has passed through several phases whose main characteristics are as follows:

Rapid Expansion 1970-75

The first part of the 1970s witnessed rapid educational growth. The number of schools rose from three primary schools in 1970 to 183 schools. Accordingly, the number of pupils grew from 900 to over 49,600.

During this period, the Ministry of Education established illiteracy eradication programs to make the chiefs of tribes literate and to give them the chance to participate in the development process. Also, the state in Oman is aware that the chiefs of the Omani tribes have a great influence upon their followers. Therefore, educating those people in particular and the illiterate in general would be a help to socio-economic development.

First Development Plan 1976-1980

The export of oil and the growth of the state's administrative system necessitated the expansion of the education system. In this period, the enrollment of pupils doubled to over 100,000. Classrooms also doubled to 3194 and the number of schools doubled to 389. Also, by the end of this plan the number of universities graduates reached 939. Among the major accomplishment of this plan were:

1. The establishment of the Teacher Training Institute and the Nizwa Agricultural Institute.
2. The introduction of business courses in the secondary cycle.
3. The development of new programs to combat illiteracy and educate the handicapped.

The Second Development Plan 1981-1985

The main objectives of this plan were to expand primary schools to absorb the accelerated enrollment experienced in this stage of the development, and to enhance the quality of intermediate schools by providing them with libraries and other necessary facilities. During this plan, and as a part of the Ministry Of Education's policies to improve the quality of education, the Ministry, upgraded the teacher training institutes to junior colleges and restricted admission to secondary graduates only.

In the early years of the education system, Oman adopted the same curricula as the Gulf States. In this period, the Ministry started began the Omanisation of the arts and religious curricula and establish an association between the curricula contents and market needs. In order to improve the quality of education, the second development plan introduced a series of measures to:

1. Improve the selection of new teachers and provide additional training for existing teachers
2. Introduce incentives to attract more Omanis to the teaching profession, and
3. Improve existing schools and build new educational facilities.

Third Development Plan 1986-1990

The main objective of this plan was to link education with the successive developmental plans of the Sultanate. During the mid-1980s, the economy of Oman entered a long period of recession due to the decline of oil prices and the devaluation of the Omani Riyal which led to the delaying of many educational projects. However, enrolment exceeded 360,000 pupils in 800 schools, colleges and institutes staffed by more than 15,000 teachers. This plan also helped to achieve the following objectives:

1. Expanding the number of educational facilities to cope with a high density student population;
2. Renovating or replacing existing facilities in secondary schools;
3. Increasing teacher training community colleges;
4. Increasing faculty housing.

Fourth Development Plan 1991-1995

This plan continued the expansion of the education system and at the same time emphasized on improving the quality of the education services. As far as possible it sought to avoid the negative effects that the previous plan had experienced and to maintain the balance between the quantity and the quality of education services. Also, the Ministry of Education continued to encourage the Omani people to enter the teaching profession. Therefore, the number of the Omani teachers rose from 5351 in 1991/92 to more than 12,000 in 1995/96.

Fifth Development Plan 1995-2000

This plan came after several economic and social challenges encountered by Oman. Consequently, it was designed to focus on:

1. Improving the quality of educational services rather than expanding them.
2. Expenditure on education and economic return.
3. Reducing the cost of educational services.
4. Introducing new facilities to help the Omani pupil to cope with the new demands of the labour market. (Statistical Year Book, 1996/97, pp 2-5)

Table No.2.4

<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Number of teachers</i>
Primary (F/M) 338	300,707	11,173
Preparatory(F/M) 470	125,399	6,767
Secondary(F/M) 159	76,568	4,753
Commercial S. 1	329	23
Industrial. S 1	112	22
Total. 971	503,529	22,810

Source: Ministry of Education, statistical yearbook 1996-97, p. 5

Types of Education in Oman

Public Education

Public education in Oman consists of three levels of 6 years of primary, 3 years preparatory and 3 years of secondary. To meet its various developmental needs, the Sultanate established a number of educational institutes as follows:

1. Vocational institutes
2. Industrial secondary institutes
3. Commercial secondary institutes
4. Technical colleges
5. Teachers colleges
6. Nursing institute
7. Banking institute
8. Sultan Qaboos university.

Private Education in Oman

The Ministry of Education has encouraged the private sector to establish educational institutes. Most of the private schools are concentrated in the capital city and have good school buildings, low class sizes, good teaching facilities and strong home- school relationships. Table No. 2.5 indicates gives an explanations about private schools in Oman.

Table No 2.5

<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>Number of teachers</i>
Kindergarten		
5	6,452	339
Primary		
91	11,248	752
Preparatory		
5	920	135
Secondary		
5	459	152
Total		
106	19,079	1,283

Source: Ministry of Education, A booklet on educational statistics, 1996-97, p.2

Most of these schools as we can see are primary schools. This is mainly because enrolment at this level is much higher than at other levels, which requires expanding the number of the preparatory schools. It is secondly due to social and economic factors; the number of pupils decreases as they transfer from the preparatory to the upper levels (intermediate and secondary). Therefore, the private sector usually finds it inefficient to invest in these levels. Thirdly, because of high tuition fees, enrollment in private intermediate and secondary schools is confined to higher income families.

Pupils' promotion from one grade to another and from one stage to the next depends on passing the examination of the two semesters of the school year.

Teacher Training

Colleges of education and Sultan Qaboos University are the only institutions that offer teachers training programs. These institutions provide four years of pre-service preparation, which grant their graduates a Bachelor's degree in Education. The huge geographical area of the Sultanate (considered to be the third largest in the Arabian peninsula) caused the Ministry of Education to establish nine colleges distributed in the main cities of Oman. The aim of this policy was to save pupils' time and effort and to save on traveling costs. Omani teachers who study in these colleges find it very difficult to travel from one city to another, bearing in mind that most of those going into teaching come from low and middle income families. Another reason for the state establishing more training colleges was to achieve higher Omanisation targets and to reduce the numbers of expatriate teachers. (World Bank report, 1991)

Graduates of Sultan Qaboos Education College have made a number of criticisms of the training programs after leaving the college. Having joined the teaching profession they were able to identify the shortcomings of the pre-service training programs as follows:

1. Over-emphasis on theoretical aspects rather than on application.
2. An increase in education and psychology courses at the expense of major course credit hours.
3. Insufficient practical teaching hours
4. They indicated that there must be a link between the content of education courses and teaching practice.

(Eisan, 1995, pp228-236)

Principles of the Philosophy of Education in the Sultanate

With regard to these principles, the Ministry of Education designed a policy that took into consideration the needs of the Omani people and the needs of the socio-economic developmental plans. Here is a summary of these principles:

1. The full growth of the Omani individual is one of the desired aims of society and education adopts it as a guiding principle and seeks to achieve it as an aim.
2. Education endeavors to free the faculties of the individual and groups from the social and economic constraints resulting from ignorance and backwardness and to develop a spirit of cooperation and public service among Omani citizens.
3. The need to modernize the Omani society made education a basic means to enable the individual to acquire the necessary technical skills and intellectual attitudes to cope with national and global social and economic changes.
4. The Sultanate seeks to increase national production and to enhance the living standards of the Omani people. To achieve these objectives education should prepare Omani citizens to acquire the required technical capabilities and professional skills so as to enable them to bear responsibility for developing their country and achieving economic progress for the people of Oman.
5. The integration and unification of various Omani groups in a coherent national unity is considered as one of the most important guiding principles of education.
6. Education also pays special attention to the Omani woman to enable her to take her proper place in the community and to enable her to design a modern social life in accordance with the social traditions of Omani society.

(The Philosophy of Education in the Sultanate of Oman, 1978, pp23-25)

Education and Social Change in Oman

Due to the scarcity of social studies on Oman, the researcher will rely on his general observations of Omani society and the available secondary resources. To assess the influence of education on the process of social change in Oman and on the values of the Omani people this section will place emphasis on three areas that we would expect to have been influenced by education in Oman:

1. The policy of Omanisation
2. The role of Omani women.
3. The structure of the Omani tribe.

Education and Employment Policy

When Sultan Qaboos took control of the government, Oman was lacking in almost everything: roads, school, health, communication, financial services, water resources, housing and there were high expectations for change. The undermined social and economic infrastructure, the growing demands of the public for social services, had hastened the need for the establishment and expansion of

governmental ministries to manage the issues of social development. Over the last 30 years, the governmental policies have succeeded in fostering economic growth and transforming the country's socio-economic conditions. Political stability (after the 1970s) and the rational use of oil revenues were instrumental in achieving high growth and structural changes

Successive developmental policies have enabled the governmental Ministries to employ Omani labour and increased employment opportunities in the State's administrative machinery have brought about material gains for the Omani people and contributed markedly to the growth of the middle class.

Table No. 2.6

<i>Number of Omani civil servants employed in ministries</i>	
Petroleum and Gas	184
Health	8,188
Communication	773
Transport	1,559
Interior	1,905
Social affairs, vocational and training	2,233
Justice	709
Religious affairs	1,219
National affairs and culture	417
Education	23,362
Higher education	500
Commerce and industry	617
Electricity and water	1,829
Agricultural and fisheries	2,270
Housing	907
Regional municipalities and environments	5,419
Foreign affairs	601

Source: Statistical year book, 2000, pp 91-96

Table No. 2.7

<i>Omani Civil Servants Employed in Ministries and Government Organizations by Educational Level</i>	
Illiterate	7,920
Can read and write	5,970
Primary	3,953
Preparatory	4,876
Secondary	9,491
Diploma	15,842
University	11,012
Post-graduate diploma	313
Masters Degree	354
PhD	43

Source: Statistical Year Book, 2000, p.103

In summary we can outline the influence of education on social change in Oman:

- Education has provided the governmental institutions with the necessary labour.
- Education has contributed to enhancing the standard of living of large segments Omani people by providing them with the credentials required to join the government and private sector.
- The emergence of a technocratic class, which became an indispensable element in drawing up socio-economic policies.
- The preference of the Omani youth to choose an educated husband/wife.
- The increased social acceptance of Omani woman's education and employment.
- Enthusiasm of the youth for education as a means for social and economic upward mobility that were exacerbated by successive development plans, which, according to Saha (1982), are found in many developing countries.

According to him:

The findings reported here are consistent with the argument of those who contend that the higher levels of educational and occupational expectations in less developed countries are related to the development process itself. In other words, there is something about lower levels of development, which account for the relatively higher career orientations of school students. The discussion here again takes up this question in greater depth and probes further into possible explanations for this "rising expectation". Why do students in less developed countries aspire to higher goals than their counterparts in advanced industrial societies? The answer to this question is undoubtedly complex and it is unlikely that a one-factor explanation can prove fully adequate.

(Saha, p.258)

The Omani youth pressing for higher education manifested itself in the new policies of higher education ministry. In the last two years, the ministry has adopted and supported the establishment of new private universities and colleges. It became obvious to the ministry that the Omani youth are insisting on pursuing their higher education even outside Oman. Restricting admissions to Sultan Qaboos universality plus the unavailability of access to other universities have increased public anger and dissatisfaction. The new system of social values that demands more education, has pushed the government to encourage the private sector, by different means, to lead the establishment and provision of higher education policies. Undoubtedly, that education has had a significant influence and created positive attitudes to education.

Education and Omani Women

The provision of education for girls has long been a feature of the new leadership in Oman. Undoubtedly, education has opened up possibilities for Omani women by making them more apt to take up the employment opportunities which exist in the labour market. Omani parents were unable to resist the temptation of a higher income and the need to improve their social conditions. As a result, educated Omani parents and husbands became accustomed to women holding responsible jobs more quickly than might have been expected and Omani women were quick to realise that careers were possible and acceptable.

Historically, women in the labour market have played a very limited role even in agriculture areas, in contrast with conditions in other developing countries where women participate effectively. However, the participation of women in the

workforce increased from about 6% in the early 1970s to 7% in the early 1980s rising to 8% in the 1990s and reaching the present figure of 27% by 1999 (World Bank, 1991, p 15).

The new developments and the migration from rural areas to urban ones have changed the structure of the Omani family. The nuclear family became a wide-spread social form in which Omani women became an effective participant in the family's decisions. These changes would not have taken place without political input and the spread of mass schooling. The family in Oman remains the focus of social life, influenced primarily by Islamic and tribal values and consolidated by the education curricula.

Education and Changes in the Tribe Role and Structure.

Prior to the 1970s, the Omani tribe was the main provider of security, education, economic activities and social needs for its members. According to some sociological writing on the Omani society, the spread of mass schooling has left the structure of the Omani tribe untouched (AbdulNabi,1994). It could be argued that the modernization process has weakened the roles of the tribe for different reasons. First, the state in Oman monopolises the social and economic services. Even the new economic transformation which emphasises the role of the private sector in economic life means that the tribe has become a fragile competitor against the state and has brought about a gradual decline in the Omani tribal situation. Second, the exposure of tribal members to the educational institution and the mass media have enabled them to acquire what Daniel Learner calls the "mobile personality" which is characterized by its rationality, innovation and openness to new experiences. Third, the expansion of urbanization in Oman, has widened the scope of tribe members so that the welfare of their families, adequate social services and access to upward mobility have become their main concerns. Consequently, the Omani tribe became unable to meet and respond to all these social changes and demands

Here we will attempt to differentiate between the tribal role and tribal values, which are a valuable part of Omani culture. Clement (1982) recorded that desire of Omanis is to "ensure that their cultural heritage is preserved and not cast away as

a sacrifice to progress” and that traditional skills are to be taught and encouraged. He recommends that “the future of Oman will be far more secure and stable if the education system builds on the past and preserves in its future administration, businessmen and professions the sense and understanding of its history. (p.118)

Summary and Conclusion

Oman has achieved various accomplishments over the past two decades. The state found it necessary to improve the quality of the lives of Omanis after a long time of poverty and political segmentation.

As social and economic advantages were created, a number of difficulties arose as obstacles to the process of further development. The socio-economic planners were aware of these difficulties; therefore the report that was prepared at the end of the 1980s identified the main challenges facing Oman’s economy in particular and the society in general. Then, in the middle of the 1990s, the challenges were re-emphasised as severe threats to the future of Oman. A careful reading of these reports (1989,1995) shows that development plans failed to incorporate some of the socio-economic strategies. For example, “The goal of social development is to bring up an Omani citizen capable of undertaking economic and productive activities.” This principle is one of the main objectives of the socio-economic strategies, while the report that was prepared in the mid-1990s indicates the problems facing social development as:

1. Poor productivity of poor human resources.
2. The incapability of the national labour force to cope with rapid technological developments.

Thus the establishment of the infrastructure had not helped much in reaching the goals that were targeted a long time ago.

Clement highlighted this aspect:

A great deal still remains to be done, especially in ensuring that efficient, effective infrastructure is established and that it is capable of securing the future of the Sultanate when oil revenues are no longer significant. It is for this reason that it is so vital for the present income from oil to be spent wisely, not only to create a prosperous present, but to safeguard a future for the generation still to be born. The Omani government cannot afford the luxury of expensive mistakes and prestigious projects without mortgaging the future and this fact is recognized. However, the assessment of the success of the New Oman lies in the attitude of its citizens, and there can be no doubt

that this is favourable though the momentum must be maintained as one must be wary of the popularity bought by short term economic improvement.
(p.29)

Oman now faces three future challenges, which will put it at the crossroads: the expected depletion of oil (The Economist Intelligence Unit report 1998 expects that oil resources will last about 16 years); the high birth rate; and the poor productivity of human resources.

Education must be able to produce efficient human capital that will participate successfully in the development process. To achieve this goal, it is time for Oman to enhance the quality of education rather than simply building schools and providing teachers. Preparing the schools for the next century is a social and economic need, otherwise Oman will become a major loser, and the Omani people will remain underdeveloped.

Curle (1962) says:

Countries are underdeveloped because most of their people are underdeveloped, having had no opportunity of expanding their potential capacities in the service of society. The main reason for this lack of opportunity lies within the social structure and can only be remedied when there are enough people with a new attitude toward society. Education in its various forms is the chief vehicle for changing attitudes. I therefore hold that the emphasis should not so much be on using people to build the resources, but on using the resources to produce the people.

(p.300)

Chapter Three

Sociological Approaches to Education

Introduction

Education was and still is one of the major instruments that can help developing countries to emancipate their citizens from illiteracy and underdevelopment to become eligible in nation building. Not surprisingly, after the colonization period, most independent countries engaged in developing and reconstructing their educational infrastructure by allocating a high proportion of their annual budget to this valuable sector. This political trend mirrors the beliefs of the political leadership of the developing world in education as a means to achieve the socio-economic demands of the newborn society, and the magnitude of human resources in the development process.

It is important to emphasise that after independence, the domestic policies for rebuilding the society was deeply influenced by the state's ideological orientations. Some of these countries preferred to integrate in a socialist way and some of them chose the capitalist system as a means to promote socio-economic development. This distinction is very important because the entire strategy and content of education is designed and tailored not to be independent from the state's ideology and its long-term objectives. I will illustrate this point.

Historically, British imperialism had provided international and political contexts, which facilitated the emergence and creation of the Gulf States and other Arab countries. Because of this historical and political affiliation with the West, particularly England and America, the Gulf States adopted the capitalist system as the base for formulating national economic and social policies and stimulating economic growth. Meanwhile, these countries excluded and fought against the ideologies that did not suit the cultural and social bases of their societies.

Despite modest efforts to change and modernize their socio-economic systems the Gulf States' societies remained traditional. The oil boom in the

1970s entered the Gulf States into a new stage in their development as a result of the financial surplus that was generated from the oil revenues and this enabled these countries to spend generously on developing their socio-economic infrastructure by using new and advanced technology and with the help of professionals and expatriates. The impact of these new developments has brought about new needs, which had no priority and no preference in the traditional society. Education in the Arab Gulf states has been considered by the policy makers, to play a role consistent with the needs and goals of progress and development (Rasheed, 1984) and as an agent for instilling appropriate motives and aspirations for economic and rational behaviour as a complementary factor to the success of the economic and social plans. The economic development in these countries within the capitalist system had determined that human capital and modernization theories constituted the most appropriate frames for educational policies that aimed at building a qualified and effective populace.

Although education in the Gulf states, as developing societies, mirrors that of developed countries: e.g. universal primary education with competitive and meritocratic access to secondary and higher-level institutions, the Gulf States also worked on adapting their educational system to their own cultural and social contexts and in keeping with their economic development.

It is important to clarify these points in order to understand the scope of the present chapter. There are two main objectives of this chapter. The first is to highlight the relationship between education and the society and how education can be considered as an agent of change and in turn be influenced by the society's needs. This will be done by examining a number of theories that dominate the sociology of education, particularly the new liberal perspective (human capital and modernization theory), signalling theory and the human rights approach to education and to show the issues that arise from them in relation to the Omani education system. However, I have excluded the radical perspective because it has no value at all in tackling the development of education in Oman or its current needs, conditions, and problems. I have focused on the afore-mentioned theories because the Gulf States adopted them and embodied the themes in their philosophies of education and as guidelines

for their educational policies. Second, comparative study of theories of sociology of education will broaden our visions in terms of how to profit from these theories in drawing the conclusions of the present study and the analysis of the empirical data within the framework of these theories.

In this chapter I shall discuss the functional approach, liberal perspective and signalling theory. At the end of each theory, I shall attempt to reveal the influence of the development of social and economic contexts on the educational system. Signalling theory is displayed and presented at the end of the chapter because it indicates that the core of educational problems stem from the economic difficulties of the Third World countries and the incapability of the politicians to fulfil their primary promises of a modern educational system as a gate to modern life.

The Functionalist Approach

Three main concepts dominate the functional thought: system, structure and function. The social system is “The totality of organization which emerges to satisfy the needs carried in the central value system of a society. And structure is similarly defined by these values.” (Meighan, 1981,p.207)

The functional perspective analyses the educational system in the light of the above concepts, therefore, Durkheim, as “the father of sociology” rejects the broad and general definitions of education such as that of Kant and Mills¹. Based on his sociological analysis of the ancient and modern societies, he

¹ James Mill defined education as “The objective of education is to make the individual an instrument of happiness for himself and for his fellows”. Durkheim thinks that this definition does not establish a scientific end for education rather it represents a subjective perception. Therefore, this formula “ leaves the end of education undermined”. According to Durkheim, such definition assumes that there is an ideal, perfect education, which could be applied to all societies. Durkheim refutes these definitions because he believes that there is no one universal model of education that can be applied to all societies that have different historical, cultural and social experiences that affect the contents and goals of education. For more details about Durkheim criticism for this definition look at Durkheim: Education and Sociology.

found that in contemporary societies, education has certain functions to perform:

1. To develop in the child a certain number of physical and mental states that the society to which he belongs considers should be possessed by all of its members.
2. To develop in the child a number of physical and mental states that the particular social group (caste, class, family) similarly considers ought to be possessed by those who compose it.

(Durkheim, 1972, p. 203)

Durkheim argues that education is necessary for every individual. He contends:

Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that the collective life demands.

Having discussed the main objectives of education in modern societies, Durkheim indicates that education must be under the control of the state. He argues, that western societies, like other societies in the world, have a number of principles in common, which are: a respect for reason, science, ideas and sentiments. The role of the state should be to:

Outline these essential principles, to have them taught in its schools, to see to it that nowhere are children left ignorant of them, that everywhere they should be spoken of with the respect which is due to them.

Durkheim, 1956. p.80

But who should take this responsibility of inculcating in the child the above set of values? According to Durkheim, it is the responsibility of the teacher. The state has to “remind” the teacher of the principles that must be fixed firmly in the minds and memories of the children to prepare them for the social setting in which they will live and with which they will interact. To perform their role effectively, the teacher has to have the authority to do that. (Durkheim asserts that this authority is neither violent nor repressive). He argues that authority needs two important conditions in order to be present in the teacher: will and feeling. With regard to the former, authority implies confidence, which means that a teacher must be an example for the child because he cannot trust or have confidence in a hesitant or shifty teacher. The teacher, according to

Durkheim, has to have feelings of authority, which can be manifest “only if he possess it effectively.” (Durkheim,1956. p.88)

Then Durkheim asks from where does the teacher obtain the authority? He believes that a teacher can obtain it neither from the power he has nor from reward and punishment, but from faith in his task.

Child, Teacher and School Discipline

Durkheim believes that morality as a system requires three elements: “the spirit of discipline”, “attachment to social group” and “self determination or autonomy”. Preparing the child for the roles that he is expected to fulfil entails recognising the child’s familial social context, particularly his sentiments and emotions, which will be altered in school. In the school as a social institution, another set of ideas and attitudes will be inculcated in him.

Despite the fact that the family prepares the child for the moral life and for regularity, this preparation is not enough and has limited efficiency. Durkheim explains the reasons for this. He argues that the structure of the family entails flexibility in the relationship between parents and child. This relationship is not subject to any impersonal and official regulations, which give them a freedom in dealing with each other. Moreover, according to Durkheim,

The abstract idea of duty is less important here than sympathy ... all the members of this small society are too near one another and as a result of this proximity, they have too much feelings of their reciprocal needs.

(Durkheim,1956, p.147)

On the other hand, in school a child has to perform a host of duties and obligations that accommodate him to the life of adults. As Durkheim shows, in school he has to show respect to others, do his homework on time, etc. These practices and duties will nourish the child’s respect of discipline and inculcate its spirit. Meanwhile, it is very helpful in emancipating him from the family’s leniency. Durkheim stresses that the student and the teacher come to class not on the basis of personal feelings, rather for abstract reasons, to carry out a social function by the teacher and improve the immature mental condition of the student. It is therefore difficult to break down the rule of discipline of class or the school. Such respect for rules will produce good results:

It is by respecting the school rules that the child learns to respect rules in general, that he develops the habit of self control and restraint simply because he should control and restrain himself. It is a first initiation into the austerity of duty. Serious life has now begun.

(Durkheim,1956, p.149)

Nevertheless, Durkheim proclaims that any diminution of school discipline and this situation is discredited in public opinion and among teachers. This means that the public morality "is touched at one of its vital resources"(Durkheim,1956, p.152)

If the rules are to be applied successfully and to be respected by students, a student cannot be forced to become accustomed to it mechanically. The only way to obtain respect for the rule is to let the student feel the moral authority in the rule.

In doing so, Durkheim claims that the teacher is an efficacious instrument in that when he has certain personal qualities, like being decisive and having will and power. Therefore a teacher has to:

Really feels in him the authority he must communicate and for which he must convey some feelings. It constitutes a force that he can manifest only if he possesses it effectively.

(Durkheim,1956,p.154)

Durkheim assumes that the discipline of the school is contingent on a teacher's ability to show respect for authority. Accordingly, when a student respects the rules, it is because he accepts the behaviour of his teacher who shows respect for the rules, "but if the teacher allows violation, without intervening, such tolerance will seem to offer proof that he no longer believes in the same conviction" (Durkheim,1956.p, 166).

Punishment is an essential element of a school system. But what is the function of punishment? What type of punishment is needed, corporal or reproach punishment? Before answering these questions, it has to be remembered that Durkheim considered history as a means by which to gain deeper experience of educational knowledge. He considered historical societies as primitive, each having their own characteristics that distinguished them from modern society. One of their main features was the use of corporal punishment to treat and influence rougher natures. Such rough treatment for individuals

declined as mankind improved his political and moral conscience. Durkheim therefore insists that reproach is the essential function of punishment.

Punishment is a notion, a language, through which either the general social conscience or that of the schoolteacher expresses the feeling inspired by the disapproved behaviour.

(Durkheim, 1956, 176)

He believes that in the family context, the bad effects (through punishment) that the child receives, when he commits a mistake, can be softened through gentle and kindly treatment from his parents. But in school, where the penalties are impersonal, there is nothing that can soften these penalties as happens in the familial context; as a result, this kind of punishment could produce deviant behaviour. As a result, Durkheim calls for prohibition of physical corporal punishment from schools.

Finally, it is the teacher who holds the responsibility for the full application of reproach punishment. By that, he must not show any sign of sympathy with any sort of offence.

Now we turn to Talcott Parsons' themes as one of the most influential functionalists to dominate sociological thought in the twentieth century. His proposals about education and its function are clear in his article "School class as social system." Before we go into further detail about Parsons' theory of education, it is important to remark on parts of his general theory on social action, namely socialisation and the functional prerequisites.

For Parsons, the socialisation process happens through four mechanisms of learning, which are: inhabitation, substitution, imitation and identification. Parsons asserts that these mechanisms of socialisation, which operate as a learning process, are an integral part of the process of interaction in complementary roles. This means that the agent of socialising is expected to play exchangeable roles in the socialising process.

Parsons focuses on the mechanisms of imitation and identification as the main mechanisms of the socialising process that usually occur between the mother and the child. Imitation refers to the process by which some items of culture are taken over from social objective on the interaction process. On the other hand, identification refers to internalising the values of the model. This process refers to the interaction between what Parsons calls the ego and the

alter, when both interact in a reciprocal role relationship and will share value patterns.

These mechanisms have socialising effects, which are:

The socialising effect will be conceived as the integration of ego into a role complementary to that of alter(s) in such a way that the common values are internalised in ego(s) personality and their respective behaviour come to constitute a complementary role expectation.

(Parsons, 1952, p. 211)

The alter may influence the ego's behaviour in a way that fits his own expectation of how he should behave. Furthermore, rewards and punishment will be used to attain such desired behaviours by the ego. Parsons argues that beside the influences that the alter exercises over the ego, he will hold up a model that will be imitated by the ego. The alter will adopt, for example, the teacher model "We may speak of socialising by instruction as the implementation of the mechanism of imitation."

Concerning the mechanism of identification, Parsons argues that in order for identification to take place, the ego must develop a profound relationship with the alter. Based on this relationship, the ego will acquire the love of the alter, his approval and his esteem, which Parsons calls the value of acquisitions.

The Functional Prerequisites of the Social System

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of school functions, it is important to realise the functional prerequisites (which developed by Parsons) of the social system in general, which can be used and applied in school functions as social systems. Rocher summarises the functional prerequisites which are:

1. **Adaptation:** this process consists of taking social and economic resources needed by the system from the environment, in exchange for products originating within the system itself and arranging and transforming these resources to serve the needs of the system.
2. **Goal attainment:** all actions that serve to define the goals of the system, to mobilise and manage resources and efforts to attain goals and gratification.
3. **Integration:** this refers to establishing control to inhibit deviant tendencies to maintain co-ordination between parts and to avoid serious disturbances.

4. Latency or pattern maintenance: this refers to the point of contact between systems of action and the symbolic and cultural universe. The latter has a special bearing on systems of action in that it supplies them with symbols, ideas, models of expression and judgements necessary for the creation of motivation and its direction toward action.

(Rocher, 1974, pp. 41, 42)

These general outlines can be connected to Parsons' theory about school as a social system. Schools need material resources and moral, beside other resources, in order to perform their functions effectively as we shall see later.

With reference to the mechanism's learning process (identification and imitation), this can build up specific relations of sentiments and emotions that are necessary for the familial milieu. On the other hand, the school's function is to emancipate the child from emotional attachment to his family (identification and imitation).

For individuals, the old familial identification is broken up and a new identification is gradually built up, providing the first order structure of the child's identity apart from his originally ascribed identity as son or daughter. He both transcends his familial identification in favour of a more independent one and comes to occupy a differentiated status within the new system.

(Parsons in Anderson, Floud & Halsey, 1964, p. 446)

Following Durkheim's line, Parsons analyses the school as an agency to serve the capitalist society's needs through socialisation of the pupils. School socialisation, according to Parsons' theory, is different to that in the familial context. In school the aim is to develop and improve individuals' commitment and capacities that are prerequisites for their future role. He adds that both commitment and capacities have dual objectives:

1. On the level of commitment, a person has to have a commitment to the implementation of society's values and a commitment to the performance of a specific type of role within the structure of society.
2. Capacities can be divided into two components: the first is competence to enable the individual to perform the tasks

involved in the individual's role, and the second is the role responsibility to match people's different expectations.

Parsons' functional prerequisites are strongly related to school functions. Adaptation and socialisation both lead to one end: the arranging of things (as individuals) to serve other systems' needs (people needs, material environment) as the following diagram indicates.

Functional prerequisites	School function
<p>Adaptation: taking the necessary diverse resources and arranging and transforming these resources to serve the needs of the system</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School is an agency through which individuals' personalities are trained to be motivationally and technically adequate to the system. 2. School is an agency for manpower allocation.
<p>Integration: inhibiting deviant tendencies, to maintain co-ordination between parts.</p> <p>Goal attainment: allocations which serve to define the goals of the system.</p>	<p>The development of individuals' commitment and capacities, which are essential prerequisites for their future roles. A mechanic as well as a doctor needs to have not only the basic skills of his trade, but also the ability to behave responsibly towards those people with whom he is brought into contact at work.</p>

It is clear that there is a strong relationship between the functional prerequisites and school function. A general comment will be drawn at the end of this chapter.

Afterword

The functional perspective contains important assumptions about man and society and the role of education in satisfying the needs of the complex societies. Moreover, this perspective shows that: first, the society's institutions are functionally interrelated. Second, it indicates the essential and indispensable role of education in the maintenance and development of the social fabric. Third, and most importantly, educational dysfunction cannot be identified or redressed away from the social setting and economic system which espouse education with the inputs that it needs. This conclusion leads us to a very essential element in designing an effective educational reform policy, particularly in the case of Oman.

The success of educational policies is contingent on considering the social condition of the society (poverty, illiteracy) and those who receive the educational service or those who are expecting to obtain the fruits of education e.g. parents and the community. For example, Sarah Brown (1991) wrote that in Nicaragua, the growing economic difficulties families experienced increased the perennial problem of irregular school attendance among rural children. She noted that in the countryside of Nicaragua, the situation is quite difficult because when there is a lot of agricultural work, children have to help their parents. This results in attendance and punctuality problems. These experiences show us that providing education for citizens and enhancing its quality and its outcomes cannot occur without addressing the social and economic contexts in which education operates.

Human Capital Development Policy: a Step Toward the Institutionalization of Education in Nation Building

The relationship between education, development and economic growth has become accepted by a number of academics and policy makers in the developing and developed nations. Unlike many sociology of education theories, human capital theory was based upon the work of economists such as Shultz (1961), Becker (1964), Denison (1962) Harbison and Myers (1964,1965).

Human capital theory is based on an important assumption that if the major goal of a given society is rapid economic growth, then programmes of

human resources development must be developed in order to provide people with knowledge, skills and the incentives required by a productive economy. In other words, the development of human capital is a crucial agent for economic growth. Also, human resources development is a necessary condition to achieve the political, cultural and social objectives of a society.

The technical task of education was expressed explicitly in Schultz's address to the American Economic Association. Schultz's view is that the process of acquiring skills and knowledge through education is not to be regarded as a form of consumption, but rather as a form of productive investment. He indicates that, "by investing in themselves, people can enlarge the range of choice available to them. It is the one way free men can enhance their welfare" (Schultz, in Karabel and Halsey, 1977, p. 314).

Schultz goes further to argue that labour becomes capital, not only from the diffusion of ownership but also from the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which is the result of investment in man. Schultz claims that the main cultural and social criteria that differentiates between the developed and developing countries lies in improving the physical and mental capabilities of the citizens. Therefore, investment in the western man "accounts for the productive superiority of the technically advanced countries". (Ibid, 314) From this perspective, education must be the first stage toward socio-economic development. This perspective ignores the value of other organizations and factors that can bring about change and progress.

Schultz stands at odds with other western writers on the real causes for development and underdevelopment. For example, Blomstrom and Hettne (1965) noted that the earliest modern theory of development was purely economic and based upon simple modes of growth in which capital formation was a key factor.

Schultz rejects the argument that capital can introduce any real social and economic transformation particularly for developing nations. He sees that the chronic underdevelopment of Third World countries cannot be remedied by additional capital. He argues, that these countries misuse and mismanage the capital that is available to them and in most cases waste the capital on useless

and unprofitable projects. So how can Third World countries solve their underdevelopment problems?

Schultz claims that the solution resides in educating the people as a top form of investment because it is “not possible to have the fruits of modern agriculture and the abundance of modern industry without making large investments in human beings” (Schultz, in Karabel and Halsey, 1977, p.322).

If we accept Schultz’s thrust that investment in human capital would lead the less developed countries to overcome the problem of underdevelopment, it means that education would improve the training in skills for the development of industries, and also modern social services, increasing the readiness to learn new techniques required for innovation and change and required by modern organizations. It seems that Schultz’s vision converges with that of Weber (1983). Weber observed that modern organization requires a number of skills and personal characteristics, which he defined as responsibility, rationality, achievement, orientation, specialization, discipline, and professionalism. Weber contends that bringing about a significant economic and socio-economic transformation is contingent on the extent to which a public bureaucracy manifests these attributes. It goes without saying that a formal and well-developed education is the principal institutional mechanism for promoting human skills and knowledge.

Harbison and Myers (1964) confirm Schultz’s theory on the causal link between the quality of human capital and social and economic progress. They argue that the effectiveness of the elite, as the builders of the economy, depends not on their own development, but rather on the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the population which they lead.

Thus, they believe that human resources development is a more realistic and reliable indicator of modernisation and development than any other measure. By developing human resources, the developing nations would be able to absorb capital effectively.

One of the main aspects of their argument (which the developmental experience of the developing countries proved to be accurate) is that the development of a society’s social and economic institutions are a necessary condition for full utilization of human capital and for the success of

developmental programmes because “a country may have well-developed human resources, and its growth may be retarded by failure to develop the organizations and institutions which characterise a progressive society” (Harbison and Myers, 1964, p14).

A careful review of human capital theory, as it was developed by Schultz, indicates that the theory did not show how human capital can lead to economic growth and why human capital is a much more effective instrument in changing the conditions of the developing societies. These deficiencies would be treated in a number of empirical studies that correlate between education and development and have which shaped and influenced the course of educational policies in the last three decades.

Becker, G (1964) found a positive relationship between the level of education and earnings in the United States. In their book *Education, Manpower and Economic Growth*, Harbison and Myers grouped countries into four levels labeled: underdeveloped, partially developed, semi-advanced and advanced. The main objective of this book was to analyse human resources development in both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions and then to show the relationship between human resources development and economic growth. The conclusion of this study found a significant statistical relationship between levels of human resources development on the one hand and levels of Gross National Product (GNP) on the other for the 75 countries grouped according to the former criteria.

Harbison and Myers confirmed their findings by another study on developing nations and the causal relationship between human resources development and economic growth. The principal findings that emerged from the study were that “Investment in education certainly contributes to economic growth” and “educational reform is just as strategic as are increases in educational investment for promoting economic and social development” (Harbison and Myers, 1965, p. xxi).

Todaro (1989) found that there is a link between education and economic growth in which he gives further support for the human capital theory. He demonstrated, that education, in the Third World countries, contributed to economic growth by:

1. Creating a more productive labour force and endowing it with increased knowledge and skills.
2. Providing widespread employment and income-earning opportunities for teachers, school construction workers, textbook and paper printers;
3. Creating a class of educated leaders to fill vacancies and positions in the governmental sector.
4. Providing the kind of training and education that would promote literacy, basic skills and modern attitudes.

Despite these positive empirical findings of the correlation between human development and economic growth, human capital theory was criticized on several grounds. The theory ignores the composition of international relations and its influence on the underdeveloped nations. Also, the assumption of the theory, which contends that the path to social and economic development lies in improving individual characteristics, ignores or pays scant attention to the structural factors that are responsible for promoting social and economic development.

Hoselitz (1965) offers another criticism of the theory. Based on his analysis of historical and current experiences of western societies, he notes that the countries in which returns to investment in human capital had been found possessed five sets of common characteristics. First, they had highly developed economies with negligible or tiny subsistence sectors and highly important exchange sectors. Secondly, they had highly diversified occupational structures with considerable degrees of specialisation and hence a substantial need for elaborate training programmes. Thirdly, they had relatively full employment and efficient labour markets. Fourthly, they had highly developed communication systems dependent upon assumed universal literacy. Fifthly, they displayed a high degree of social and occupational mobility yet with sufficient stability to ensure a correlation between the training the individual receives and the career he might pursue. Hoselitz, ascertains that these economic conditions applied only to a limited extent in many developing countries.

These criticisms do not disguise the importance of human capital theory for the socio-economic developments in developing nations, particularly in the Gulf regions. The lack of skilled manpower led these countries to rely on the importation of foreign labour to offset the lack in human capital. Now, with the growth in the number of job seekers, the Gulf States have adopted an intensive strategy of human capital development in which education is considered to be the cornerstone.

I believe that the human capital theorists recall the experience of Europe in which the role of education was highly decisive in developing the citizens' potential and determining each European nation's rate of growth and power. Based on the analysis of the historical and social experience of Europe, Ramirez and Boli (1987) observed that political, economic and cultural development in Europe led to a model of the legitimate national society that became highly institutionalised in the European and later world cultural frame. The European model made the construction of a mass educational system a major, indispensable component of every modern state's activity.

Despite the cultural differences among nations, Ramirez and Boli argue that the European model of a national society, in which education is essential to individual and national progress, has evolved into a world model, strongly influencing the behaviour of states and societies. They illustrate their argument by indicating the following findings regarding the ways in which the European model has influenced educational development in the developed and new independent states:

1. By creating educational ministries and compulsory educational laws that symbolize a more rapid union of states and schools.
2. By increasing the proportion of funds devoted to education and taking a greater role in financing mass education, and regulating school admission and examination structure.
3. Because of the state's support of education, primary schools in virtually all countries have rapidly expanded since the end of the World War II.
4. National and individual developments have emerged as the most legitimate objectives of mass schooling.
5. The use of educational reform as an important solution to challenges and an element of national revitalization strategies. The less developed countries have been enthusiastic in embracing education as a key component of their nation-building projects and as part of their efforts to attain political legitimacy.

(Ramirez & Boli, 1987. p.14)

Afterword

This perspective helps us to understand why states in the developing world have emphasised the role of education in national development. First, in the developing world, national commitment to education is certainly influenced by the World model and supported by international organizations such as the UN and the World Bank. Second, the state has to provide formal access to mass schooling for all its citizens and schooling must be rationalized around and oriented to the national development and individual growth. Third, political stability is dependent on providing mass schooling to the population. Fourth, the production of committed and loyal citizens and productive workers is expected to have a high priority in political discourse and in national policies and the national state is responsible for channelling human capital. Fifth, enhancing economic performance requires adequate educational policies and well-prepared, educated human capital. Sixth, this requires that educational expansion and reform should be a response to internal or external challenges

In Oman, human capital theory provided a basic justification for increased expenditure on education. At the beginning of the 1970s, Sultan Qaboos faced overriding problems: lack of natural resources, illiterate people, political instability and widespread migration of the Omanis to neighbouring countries. Therefore, the political leadership believed that rapid expansion of education opportunities (in order to utilize the Omani people effectively in the national economy) held the basic key to national development. From the Omani political leadership perspective, more education would lead to rapid development, more political stability and more prosperity for the Omani people (who had suffered for decades from abject poverty and domestic wars that destroyed the national unity) by providing them with new avenues for social and economic mobility. Economic growth, which presumably could be achieved through a developed educational system, would help to reduce the gap between Oman as a new independent country and the rich Gulf countries. The value of education to the economic future of Oman is very clear in the political discourse of Sultan Qaboos:

There is no doubt that the economic aspect of every nation is the artery of its life, the source of its strength and the pillar of its policy and stability. We, therefore,

concentrate our attention on finding ways and means and initiating projects to develop the economy of our country and provide opportunities for employment and a good standard of living for every Omani citizen”

(His Majesty Sultan Qaboos 1970 in *The philosophy of Education of The Sultanate of Oman*, 1978)

Education was one of the main instruments, if not the main instrument, necessary for social and economic transformation.

Education, culture and awareness are the foundation stones in our development. Our duty is to build schools, educate the citizens and open the windows of civilization for our country”

(His Majesty Sultan Qaboos 1970 in *The philosophy of Education of the Sultanate of Oman* 1978)

These statements indicate clearly that national unity and national development leads to a strong economy. Education is a major means to achieving these goals. This view caused the state to engage in authorizing, funding and managing mass schooling as part of its efforts to construct a unified national unity in which the Omani people were expected to find their national identification and the strength of the state in Oman would be enhanced by universal participation of citizens in the state socio-economic projects.

Education and Modernization.

Whereas, human capital theorists indicated the value of education for improving people’s productivity, and contributing to economic growth, sociologists spoke about modernizing people attitudes, values and beliefs as a precondition for socio-economic development. Without possessing a set of modern values, the people of the developing nations, would not be able to enhance their social conditions and bring about the desired changes in people’s lives.

David McClelland (1961) attributed the greater progress that some societies had achieved than others to the system of culture and type of personalities that prevail in those societies. According to his argument, people in western societies are characterized by what he called the “need for achievement”. By contrast, people of the underdeveloped societies do not hold any proportion of these traits and therefore they are underdeveloped.

The correlation between certain psychological traits and development was emphasised by Inkeles and Smith. From a sociological perspective, they noted the need for less advanced societies to hold modern values that could help them to improve their improvised social and economic setting. They argue that:

Mounting evidence suggests that it is impossible for a state to move into the twentieth century if its people continue to live in an earlier era. A modern nation needs participating citizens, men and women who take an active interest in public affairs and who exercise their rights and perform their duties as members of a community larger than that of kinship network and the immediate geographical locality. Modern *institutions* need individuals who can keep to fixed schedules observe abstract rules, make judgments on the basis of objective evidence, and follow authorities legitimated not by traditional or religious sanctions but by technical competence. The complex production tasks of the industrial order, which are the basis of modern social system, also make their demands. Workers must be able to accept both an elaborate division of labour and the need to coordinate their activities with a large number of others in the work force.

(Inkeles & Smith, 1974, pp.3-4)

Theory of modernization holds the idea that certain institutions and experiences have the capacity to bring about change and influence the population in ways that bring about modernization. As a result the theory assumes that the more experiences a man is exposed to, the greater the degree of his modernity will be, which can be manifested in his attitudes and values. Inkeles and Smith identified a basic set of independent variables which can be expected to influence a man's attitudes which are: father's education, own education, occupational type, mass media contact, standard of living, urbanness of adult residence, ethnicity- religion and a variant on what they called life-cycle stage.

To test the hypothesis which they constructed about modern man, Inkeles and Smith selected six developing countries that spread over three continents namely: Argentina, Chile, East Pakistan, India, Israel, and Nigeria.

Two of the main conclusions of this study were that among the independent variables that contribute to modernity, education was a prime factor in determining the level of a man's modernity. (Inkeles & Smith, 1974 p. 134) and "*We feel our results make it clear that as developing nations acquire more modern institutions, more widely diffused, to that degree their populations*

will come to include more and more men marked by the characteristics we have termed modern.” (Inkeles & Smith,1974 , p.298).

But how does education influence the attitudes of pupils and develop new dispositions in them? Inkeles and Smith found that school modernizes through a number of processes, which include: reward and punishment, modelling, exemplification and generalization. They identify these mechanisms of learning as:

1. Generalization: the school helps the pupil to master one or more specific skills. By having mastered these skills the pupil comes to believe in his ability to acquire new skills. This way of learning encourages and supports self-confidence and develops a sense of efficacy.
2. Exemplification: the writers refer to the process whereby the individual incorporates into himself not a personal model but an impersonal rule or general practice characteristic of the social organization:
3. Modelling: this refers to the child's incorporation into his own role the ways of behaving and feelings of those who have power and authority in the school. Within the school the teacher is the model that the pupil usually observes.
4. Reward and punishment: these are some of the mechanisms through which the school inculcates attitudes of modernity.

(Inkeles & Smith,1974 Pp141-42)

The way modern man behaves with his children is different from that of traditional man. In the traditional society, man is concerned mainly with agriculture to support his family. The absence of modern institutions makes the traditional man oriented toward fixed daily activities. The young in such societies are prepared for definite purposes: to help their parents in farming in order to continue the customary way of life, and there is no need for schooling in a formal sense to develop literacy or encourage new ideas and practice. In the traditional society, the stress is on conformity to accepted customs and not on individual competitiveness (which is a virtue of modern society.)

The introduction of modern sectors, with industry and foreign technology and urban expansion, tends to change the requisites of daily life, individuals' goals and the pattern of socialization for family's members. According to Inkeles and Smith, modern man urges and encourages his young people to adopt new attitudes and values, which will prepare him for effective participation in modern institutions. In this way modern man acts to support the society's institutions,

facilitates the success of the modernization process and removes social obstacles²

Inkeles and Smith ascertain that modern attitudes are the most essential “pre-condition” for the success of developmental programmes in the developing world and modernising a nation. They argue that developing nations can imitate the socio-economic institutions and procedures that originate in more developed countries, but can these copied experiences and transplanted institutions lead to real economic progress and bear fruit in the new social setting? The writers dispute this. They claim that the experience of the developing countries indicates the failure of such transplantation because it is meaningless to transplant such institutions without the support of an underlying cultural pattern and the availability of individuals with special personal qualities who can ensure the successful functioning of these institutions. Finally, the writers stress that:

We are of the opinion that neither rapid economic growth nor effective government can develop, or, if introduced, will be long sustained without the widespread diffusion in the rank and file of the population of these qualities we identified modern man...diffusion through the population of the qualities of the modern man is not incidental to the process of social development, it is the essence of national development itself.

(Inkeles & Smith, 1974, pp.315-316)

² This is an important aspect for the present study. As we will see in the fieldwork chapter, the attitudes of the ignorant Omani people influence negatively their co-operation with teachers.

The assumption of the modernization theory prompted a number of studies around the world. Despite numerous studies into the relationship between education and modernization, I will limit the scope to two studies that support the above contention. In his book, *The Passing of the Traditional Society: Modernizing The Middle East*, Lerner (1958) found that modernity characteristics depend on what he called “psychic empathy” in which he defined it as “to see oneself in the other fellow’s situation” (p.50). Psychic empathy helps in “the infusion of the rationalist and positivist spirit” and is an “indispensable skill for people moving out of a traditional setting” (p.45).

Although Lerner’s study was concerned primarily with the influence of the mass media on people’s attitudes in some Middle Eastern countries, it argues about the significance of education in producing modern man and how levels of education affect the consuming of mass media, particularly radio and movies. For example, in Egypt, Lerner found that professionals and white-collar workers listen to the radio more than blue-collar workers and farmers. (Lerner, 1958 p.232). Also, a survey of Syrian respondents found that the presence of psychic empathy was related to a number of variables, particularly age, sex, socio-economic status and education. With respect to education, 39 percent of those Syrians who had completed secondary education scored high on empathy compared to 5 percent of the respondents who were illiterate. On the other hand, 74 percent of the illiterate respondents were non-empathetic compared to 19 percent of those with secondary education. (Lerner, 1958, pp 436-437).

Lerner’s findings indicate the way in which education is important to the lives of people and how it can contribute to enhancing their awareness of the social and economic settings. Lerner’s theory provides some explanations of the widespread emigrations of people from the Middle East toward the West. It is the desires of the deprived people to satisfy their economic objectives after losing confidence in their national governments’ ability to provide them with their socio-economic needs or to improve their living standards.

Kahl’s (1968) research supports the outcomes of the above studies. In his study on modernity attitudes in Brazil and Mexico, he found that there is a strong relationship between education and modernity - 0.55 and 0.57

respectively. (For more critique of human capital and modernization theories see chapter eight)

Several criticisms have been made of this theory for its view that social change can be created by a single factor. The experience of the oil-producing countries in the Middle East indicates that these countries underwent a social and economic transformation without possessing modern values. Oil, as the main component in its economy, was and still is the central generator of their wealth particularly after the dramatic price rises of 1973-1974 and a number of these studies documented the massive influence of oil on the process of social change in some developing societies (Al-Nakeeb, 1990; Richard and Waterbury 1996; Al-Rumaihi 1995).

Gusfield in his study of Indian society found that traditional values are not always opposite to or contradictory of moderns ones and "the view that tradition and innovation are necessarily in conflict has begun to seem overly abstract and unreal" (1967, p 352). As a result, he concluded that there are seven major fallacies regarding the distinction between traditional and modern societies: (1) that traditional societies are necessarily static societies, (2) that traditional culture is made up of a consistent body of values and beliefs, (3) that a society based on tradition has a homogenous social structure, (4) that in changing societies the traditional is necessarily replaced by the modern, (5) that the traditional and the modern are always in conflict, (6) that the traditional and the modern are mutually exclusive, and (7) that the process of modernization always weakens the traditional.

Afterword

As I indicated earlier, the government of Oman embarked upon a new policy of transforming the very nature of the polity and adopted reforms that would change not only the outward appearance but ideally the mentality and behaviour of the people as well. In this effort, education was to play the most important vital role, but the existing educational system was in a pathetic state: physical facilities and human resources were totally inadequate, the overwhelming majority of the people were illiterate and the structure inherited from the precedent ruler was inefficient for nation building and development.

Accordingly, from the beginning the political leadership adopted a conscious and enthusiastic policy of reshaping and rebuilding of the entire educational system, expanding systematically and harnessing it to the new political and social structure. They moved almost at once to create an educational system, which could lead to the modernization of Omani society. It is important to remind ourselves that Oman launched her educational efforts from a very low starting point. The old rulers of Oman did essentially nothing to educate the Omani people.

How were these ambitions translated on the ground? The quantitative growth and the qualitative improvements indicate clearly the beliefs of the political leadership in the value of education for the progress and reconstruction of Omani society:

- Prior to the 1970s all educational institutions in Oman were limited to three primary schools for boys with a total enrolment of 900 pupil as well as a few Koranic schools.
- By 1980, enrollment had doubled to over 96,000; classrooms had more than doubled to 3,194 and the number of schools had also doubled to 382.
- By the end of the fourth Five Year Plan (1991-95) the number of schools shot up to 490,482 students of both sexes taught by 22,504 male and female teachers.

(World Bank, 1991, no page Number)

The government of Oman had realised that development process needs a responsive, flexible and innovative educational system to meet evolutionary social and economic demands. Therefore, the government found that educational expansion must be coupled with a set of modernization policies for the system in order to enhance its effectiveness.

The government diversified the educational system in terms of quality and quantity. The main efforts to improve the quality have focused on:

- The construction of new schools, particularly at primary and preparatory levels to absorb the increased number of pupils and reduce the density in the classrooms.
- Improving the efficiency of educational facilities through a number of measures: replacing unsuitable buildings; completion of educational infrastructure;
- Introducing measures to improve teachers' performance, raise their productivity and encourage young people to join teacher corps.
- Implementing projects that aim at modernizing the educational process, e.g. establishing a centre for educational research promoting the use of computers in the Ministry of Education and the regional department and introducing computer studies in select secondary schools on a pilot basis; and

- Accelerating Omanization through expanding teachers' preparation facilities and attracting Omani youth especially females, to educational careers
(World Bank, 1991, no page Number).

It is important to note that modernizing the educational system goes hand in hand with the modernization of the national economy. The past and present collection of Oman's concerns connected with social change and the economy lead the government to work earnestly on modernizing and developing the socio-political and socio-economic institutions. These concerns are: First, the gradual decline of oil reserves (the predominant factor in the development strategy), which will minimize the significance and the role of oil in the state's economy, particularly when we know that oil provides in excess of 75 percent of government revenues. Second, every year there are 40,000 Omani youths coming out of secondary schools, plus university graduates and those from the technical schools. This means that the government should respond to this challenge by generating more employment opportunities both in the public and private sector to secure and maintain political stability. In addition to that, the demographic structure of Oman in which 52 per cent of the population is under the age of fifteen years constitutes a future challenge to the state in Oman. These numbers and economic facts forced the policy makers to think about improving the performance and productivity of the national economy in which a profound and well-developed educational system is one of the means to achieve this aim

Education as a Human Right

According to Chabbott and Ramirez, global changes emphasizing progress and justice produced a rationalizing discourse about development. The United Nations defines education as follows (Article 25, Para 1): "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well being of himself (sic) and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services..." Chabbott and Ramirez, 2000, p. 175)

It can be noted from the definition that the aim of development is not the growth or development of the economy, but the development of people's capabilities. The UN definition is further supported by another UN resolution in 1974 declaring that the objectives of the New International Economic Order

were to correct inequalities and maintain peace and justice for present and future generations.

How were these objectives translated and incorporated into education? In 1990 more than 150 nations accepted the declaration of education based on the following principles:

1. Education is a fundamental right.
2. Education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation;
3. Education is an indispensable key to, though not a sufficient condition for, personal and social improvements.

(Cited in Chabbott and Ramirez, 2000, p.170)

The writers argue that two major factors helped build the momentum toward the emergence of education as a basic human need. First, economic growth in the 1970s increased improvised conditions in many countries rather than decreased them. Second, poor manpower planning in the 1950s resulted in a failure to handle the educational crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. This highlighted the importance of human resources development (putting universal formal primary and secondary schools and quality of classroom teaching and curriculum at the forefront of educational priorities). The United Nation definition of development in terms of individual welfare rather than in terms of national economic growth prompted the use of universal access to primary education as a key measure of both individual welfare and national development.

In summary, education is not seen as an instrument for particular objectives of development, rather it considers the development of citizens to be its paramount objective.

Afterword

Education as a human right, which entails introducing major fundamental changes to the quality of education, particularly at primary level, has become an essential priority for the Ministry of Education in Oman. The Ministry has launched a comprehensive plan for the development of education. The plan targets the development of basic education to compare with international standards. In this new plan, the period a pupil spends in basic education has

been raised to 10 years (previously 9 years). Curricula, especially in science, arithmetic, Islamic studies, Arabic language, social and environmental studies and English language have been revised and redeveloped. New studies like information technology; the development of occupational skills, English language and computer science will be introduced for the first three years in primary education. Acknowledging the importance of the English language as a medium of instruction in higher education, as from the beginning of the new academic year (1998-99) English language started right at the beginning of the first year in all elementary schools. (Al-Markzi, pp 1-2)

To what extent are these new improvements capable of equipping the Omani pupil with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate more fully in society? I think it is still too early to give a clear-cut answer regarding the effectiveness of these new educational reforms.

Signalling Theory

Signalling theory is an attempt to explore the motives that encourage the elite to spread mass schooling in the Third World and the extent to which the State in these countries influences the function of the school in and how that impacts on the teacher and the student and eventually impairs the teacher's role and obligations.

Bruce Fuller emphasizes the nature of the state in the Third World calling it the fragile state. Most Third World countries lived under colonization powers in the last century. After their independence, all of them engaged in socio-economic development to enhance their living standards and build up the modern state. To create and further its legitimacy, the state has used Western symbols to indicate to its people that progress toward a "more modern society" is being made. According to Fuller, "mass schooling" is a central strategy in "signalling modern institutional change". Education is crucial because:

Mass schooling represents the modern form of socialization, allegedly enhancing western ideals of rationality, meritocratic opportunity and equality...in addition, the fragile state must mobilize ideological commitments and signals which convince parents and local elite that mass schooling is a legitimate form of socialization, providing youth access to, and higher status within, the wage economy and modern society

(Fuller, 1991, p14)

But:

By relying on signals of mass opportunity and meritocratic rules of getting ahead, the state can display Western ideals without directly attacking pre-modern economic interests and social organization. Of course, once the state signals the coming of modernity, popular demand grows for prompt delivery on its political-economic promises. And fragile states lack sufficient materials resources, organizational infrastructure, and technical know-how to deliver concrete improvements in economic and social well-being.

(Fuller, 1991, . p.xvii)

From the above quotations, Fuller indicates that the fragile state has two basic features:

1. The fragility of the state is clear from its need to establish “interdependencies with other institutions” e.g. elite groups and local communities. Fuller believes that these relationships with those institutions are very important for two fundamental reasons. First to enhance and bolster its political and social legitimacy. Second, to help the state to “draw in” economic resources and social capital. This requires that the fragile state move “downward” in a sense that it builds the necessary institutions that signals its modernity, particularly mass education. This policy requires expenditure of materials and symbolic resources.
2. In its endeavours to fulfil popular expectations, the fragile state is confronted with contradictions, technical difficulties and material constraints.

Legitimacy is a crucial goal for the fragile state, without it, the political and economic stability is threatened. Therefore, most Third World countries are engaged in institutional promotion where the educational system occupies a central position. Fuller argues that educational expansion (bearing in mind the weak experience and the scarcity of materials) influences and shapes the role of the teacher inside the classroom. Fuller defines four areas of State educational expansion that has an impact on the teacher’s role:

1. The fragile state continues rapidly to expand mass education, portraying new schools as the arrival of mass opportunity and modern progress. But material resources and technical know-how are so scarce that educational quality erodes relentlessly.... The state’s fiscal capacity is stretched both by forceful popular demands to broaden opportunity and by rising dependence upon Western resources and institution forms.

2. Mass opportunity is signalled, but actual growth in the modern wage sector is very slow. Thus the educational system above primary school remains highly selectivea national examination scheme attempts to represent a fair process for selection and mobility, but does little to help schools boost children's achievement or lessen class inequality.
3. Status, pay, and working conditions for teachers erode as demands to expand enrolments outpace the state's fiscal capacity. The teaching occupation- the original job in the wage – sector after independence for literate Africans becomes undesirable relative to private –sector employment.
4. The fragile state –traditionally strong in authority and weak in actual penetration of social spheres-tries to order secular socialization and look modern by routinizing the bureaucratic management of local school. Mechanical standardization of school management, pedagogical practices, and curricula, signal crisper state control and the reduction of organizational uncertainty.

(Fuller, 1991, pp 66-67)

For Fuller, the fragile state creates, via school expansion, mass conditions within the local school and classroom. He found that while the state assigns high social status to the teacher's role, the difficulties that a teacher faces in the classroom make him set up bureaucratic social rules in order to be able to control an overloaded classroom which would have a negative effect on his role and will eventually distort the image the public has of the teacher. Fuller adds that the teacher in the Third World classroom spends most of his time planning the lesson, talking to classes and watching over students working on routine class work. Such a way of controlling is essential for a teacher to ascertain his authority in mass schooling. Thus, whether these methods enhance the cognitive attainment of the pupils or not, according to Fuller, becomes "a question that is rarely asked".

The bureaucratic social rules that are set out by the teacher are not "handed down" to him by the state elite. The mass conditions in the classroom necessitate that a teacher adopts these methods to manage those conditions that are set for the school by the state. He supports his arguments by displaying the findings of a study, which he conducted on schoolteachers in Malawi in Africa as a Third World state. He found that teachers spent 45 percent of their classroom time lecturing and interacting with the entire class including presentation of materials, reading aloud from textbooks and asking for choral recitations (a classroom of sixty to seventy students) other teachers spent 30 percent of class time supervising students who were working silently on exercises. Moreover, the teacher –according to Fuller's findings – writes a

problem on the board and then asks the students to solve it in their exercise book. Then the teacher went through the students (sixty to seventy) within twenty minutes. Commenting on this situation Fuller says:

So education ministries preach the ideal of developing the individual child, romantic educational philosophy is taught in teacher training college, and governments create massive examination systems to carefully define each child's status. Yet mass conditions created by the state - led by political actors obsessed with using the school as a symbol of mass opportunity - discourage seeing each child as individual, each child is simply a part of the batch of fifty to ninety children setting before the teacher.

(Fuller, 1991, p.109)

The consequences according to Fuller are:

Teachers hold conflicting and mixed beliefs about socialization, a contradiction rooted in the ideologies of the modern state. Even if a teacher wants to attend to the individual curiosities of a student or encourage cooperative action by pupils, it is very difficult. Faced with so many pupils, scarce instructional resources, and a centrally prescribed curriculum - conditions set by the modern state - the teacher simply (and rationally) seeks to control and energize these crowded, restless children the state's preoccupation with the symbols of mass opportunity lead to concrete classroom conditions that necessitate mass bureaucratic ways of organizing kids and routinized presentation of facts.

(Fuller, 1991, p, 121)

The signalling theory indicates that while the fragile state expands mass schooling, the state's resources usually do not keep pace with the growth in population and enrolment rate because of economic stagnation. The deep chasm between the public's ambitions and the state's scarce resources, lead the fragile state to greater dependency on the western loans and resources in order to further school expansion.

There is a missing link in the fragile theory. It makes no reference to actual reasons behind the weak economy of the fragile state. The neo-Marxist critique of development provides us with affluent explanations for the dilemma of underdevelopment in Third World countries. Frank (1966) developed a series of hypotheses that account for underdevelopment in the Third World countries, which can be summarised as follows:

1. The development of capitalism itself generated underdevelopment in the satellites.
2. The satellites experience their greatest economic development and especially their most classically capitalist industrial development if and when their ties to the metropolis are weakest.

3. The most underdeveloped countries are those with the closest ties with the metropolitan.

Frank's hypothesis³ on the relationship between the metropolitans and the satellites deserves much more attention in the study of economic development and cultural change. In short, the assumptions of the linear theories that a single factor can bring about a social change and lead to a real economic and political independence, simplifies what Byrne (1998) terms the "complexity of the real" in the developing societies.

From this perspective, education is unable to serve development objectives because the articulation between the metropolitan and the peripheral are geared toward more exploitation of the peripheral countries and depriving these countries of the necessary capital to spend on and invest in the national socio-economic projects e.g. educational and health services, industrial establishments, social security, etc. The shortage of capital led many underdeveloped countries toward:

- o Fiscal crisis and cutbacks in the state's budget;
- o Damage to the quality of their social services.

Because the reality is complex in developing societies, it is very difficult to understand it through a sole theory. It would appear that any attempt to offer a convincing interpretation of the relationship between education and development, must be based on understanding and taking into account the

³ Despite the attractive and powerful argument of the classical dependency perspective, there are a number of new dependency studies that have modified some of the basic assumptions of the classical perspective. The new perspective stresses on the internal and socio-political variables and their critical impact on the socio-economic development process. Also, these studies reveal the co-existence of two contradictory process: dependency and development. In brief, the new perspective stresses on that dependency is the product of a combination of internal and external forces. For more information about the new dependency perspective look at: Cardoso and Faletto 1979, O'Donnell 1978, Evans 1983 and Gold 1986, in Alvin So. "Social Change and Development" 1990. pp- 135-165.

dialectic overlapping and interactions among the social systems of a developing society.

Afterword

There are some valuable lessons that can be learned from the signalling theory. First, it soon became clear that the early aspirations (that were drawn up by the politicians at the beginning of the independence era) to provide schools for all children were far beyond the reach of the Third World countries due to budget constraints. Second, the underdeveloped economy, which depends on exporting natural minerals or agricultural products, could not support educational expansion, which usually results in a failure of school performance both in terms of quality and quantity. Third, in terms of quality, problems relating to schools tend to produce unskilled workers and school leavers, giving rise to severe unemployment and a threat to the stability of the society. Such conditions cause drawbacks to the development process and constitute a serious barrier to any further improvements in the quality of lives. Fourth, the fiscal difficulties of the fragile state, do not allow it to increase investment in the education sector and in turn, the schools' capacity does not keep pace with the augmented student enrolments. Thus, overcrowded classrooms not only weaken the teacher's ability to communicate knowledge to all pupils, but also affect his role.

The economic condition of Oman supports Fuller's argument. The collapse of oil prices in the middle of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1980s and 1990s had profoundly affected the economy of Oman. The fiscal constraints forced the government to cut down a huge proportion of the civil ministries' budgets to create a balance between oil revenues and expenditure. This policy had a negative effect on the quality of education. One of the main negative consequences of this policy was the massive increase in class sizes (Ministry of Education 1990) and the inability of the Ministry of education to provide in-service training for teachers in Omani schools (which is one of the fundamental elements of any successful educational strategy) and led to a decline in the quality of schools outcomes I indicated in the first chapter.

Conclusion

The school in many underdeveloped countries is a reflection of the surrounding underdevelopment, from which arises its deficiency, its quantitative and qualitative poverty. But little by little, and there lies the really serious risk, the school in these underdeveloped countries becomes, in turn, a factor of underdevelopment.

(Joseph Kizerbo, former Minister of Education, Burkina Faso).

Virtually every serious commentator agrees that major reform within Third World education is long overdue.

(Richard Jolly, Deputy Director General, UNICEF).

This chapter has examined some of the dominant theories in the sociology of education. It would be misleading to rely on a single theory to understand the role of education in contemporary society. The foregoing presentation of theories aimed at forming some ideas that will enable the thesis to formulate an adequate educational policy, taking into account the social and economic factors that influence the educational system, because “the world becomes more complex, and at the same time comes under the influence of global social and economic tendencies, the comparative study of education’s role in these processes becomes increasingly important for both understanding and policymaking” (Saha, 2001, p.178).

The themes of human capital theory and modernization theory were largely responsible for the complete confidence by policy makers in education as a means of social transformation, economic development and of consolidating the national unity that Oman has undertaken in the last three decades. Therefore, in a short time, Oman witnessed a rapid rate of progress in increasing the number of teachers and the number of enrolments. Also, the Ministry of Education introduced a series of modernization policies in order to enable the education system to be compatible with the basic and changing needs of Omani society.

Despite generous spending on education and political support for it, education faced a number of challenges and difficulties, which I explained in the second chapter. The fragile state theory interprets the main reasons for educational failure in Third World countries. Educational difficulties according to the hypothesis of fragile state theory stem from the gulf between the eroded

fiscal ability of the state and educational expansion, which results in more intensive bureaucracy procedures and more pressures on teachers. This way of controlling schools weakens the quality of education and undermines skills and confidence, which are necessary for development.

It is important, in order to clarify the argument of this chapter, to indicate the real reasons behind the fiscal problems. The answer is twofold. First, there is the problem of inequalities and the imbalanced relationship between the industrialized world and the South. Despite the relative progress that some countries in the South have made in recent decades, they are still subjected to external pressures, brought about by the policies of the advanced world, the global economic system and the policies of IMF to which education is very vulnerable. Second, the internal conditions of the developing countries hamper educational progress. For example, Looney (1994) has noted that the main threat to education expansion would appear to lie in the excessive military development of the Sultanate. Nevertheless, policy makers in Oman have recognized the impact of these external and internal influences on the effectiveness and internal quality of education. Therefore, packages of improvements were initiated in order to prepare the Omani people for changes, particularly at the economic level. But bearing in mind that: educational reform requires a high financial cost which will probably have to be met by the state, we need to determine the extent to which the Ministry of Education is able to meet those costs.

Although the expansion of the education system to serve social and economic progress has created a host of deficiencies for its internal efficiency, education has generated a new attitude among large segments of Omanies in which the level and the quality of education, achievement and wealth have become dominant social criteria.

Education, among other variables, particularly the state employment policy, has produced a number of changes in Omani society, e.g. the creation of a new middle class, the changing roles of women, and the condition of the Omani tribe. All of these changes increase the social pressure and demand for educational opportunities and raise several questions about the ability of

education to advance the socio-economic development objectives in the coming years or to meet the increased social demand.

The above discussion helps us to draw some conclusions about the education system in Oman:

1. The state in Oman has expanded education in order to boost economic growth and employment and improve national unity. The last three decades have proved that the state has made successful quantitative growth:
2. A series of improvements were introduced to balance quantity and quality. These qualitative improvements are indispensable factors in producing well-prepared, involved citizens;
3. On the other hand the fiscal ability of the state constrains the expansion of educational opportunities in improving the quality needed in the current development stage.
4. The social base adds new pressures upon the educational system and increases the problems faced by those who engage in teaching the Omani pupil

The following set of questions will help to examine these points in details:

- To what extent are schools in Oman prepared to manage the increase in the number of the Omani pupils?
- How can we explain the increased number of private schools in Oman? Does this reflect Omani parents' concerns about the quality of governmental schools or the state's encouragement for the private sector to reduce pressure on governmental services?
- Do teachers in Oman receive the preparation necessary qualify them for the new social and economic challenges or not?
- Are schools in Oman well enough prepared to equip Omani pupils with skills and knowledge for their future roles?
- Do schools in Oman help to produce equality or do they reproduce inequality, thereby perpetuating class differences?

This theoretical chapter has indicated clearly the value of education to the progress of nations. In practice, to what extent education can affect human capital? What are the policies that the developed or the developing countries seek to improve the quality of the educational system and what are the areas of reforms that usually receive most of attention and concerns by the educational policy makers? These questions will be answered in the following chapter, which will review some of the educational reform policies.

Chapter Four

Review of Literature

Introduction

It is widely recognised that education is an effective means of development. Without a rigorous education system people remain sluggish and inactive. This fact has made people enthusiastic for education in order to access social and economic mobility. Political leaderships in developing and developed countries alike place education as a top priority for helping their people achieve the means to improve their lives. In this chapter I am going to discuss three important issues that affect teachers' performance: teacher's professional problems, the affects of the class size on the teacher and the pupils and finally the positive effects of a strong home-school relationship.

Background to Teachers' Problems

Coombs (1982) in a structural analysis defines several issues that have instituted challenges to the educational system and which will preoccupy strategies in virtually all counties in the next twenty years:

The Growth in Need for Learning

The need for learning has expanded both as a result of an increase in world population since the second world war, and also in response to technological, economic and political changes. Coombs thinks that the world population increase will take place mainly in the developing world, which in turn will increase the educational burden. To illustrate his arguments, he provides UNESCO statistics on expected school enrolments. The increase in total enrolments in the African region from 1980 to 2000 was predicted to be 107 million. For the same period in Latin America and South Asia, the increase in enrolment was forecast at 74 million and 176 million respectively. Europe, North America and USSR were forecast to witness the lowest increase in enrolments at 13 million during those years.

The Financial Squeeze

A growing financial squeeze is another critical force, which exerted pressure on education systems. It was caused by “the world wide recession and accelerated inflation in the 1970s; it had been in the making well before the recession” (p.148)

Coombs believed that the expansion of the educational system was to be paralleled with the growth of the GNP (Gross National Budget). However, with the augmented demands of various social and economic sectors, education will be unable to obtain any further increments or the “lion’s share” of the state budget.

The other side of the financial squeeze - according to Coombs - comes from the attempt to reduce costs, since expenditure per student tends to rise as a result of the labour intensive character of education and the lack of innovations in productivity. Anticipated educational innovations, according to Coombs’ forecast, will aim at making more efficient use of scarce resources that will be available for education.

Coombs (1982) anticipated that:

The upward pressures on costs are likely to intensify during the 1980s. As the growth of enrolments slows down, powerful built-in cost escalators come into play, particularly those tied to the hierarchical teacher salary structures that provide for automatic increase based on years of service and for large salary differentials tied to higher teacher qualifications. As fewer young recruits are hired at the bottom and the existing teaching staff ages, instructional costs per student will move upward. In addition, with fewer students to share various overhead costs - such as administrative salaries, repairs and maintenance supplies and utilities – these will increase per student..... nothing short of radical educational surgery can halt these inexorable cost increases, while at the same time coming to grips with the serious problems of educational quality.”

p.150

What Coombs predicted came true. Most of the world’s educational systems have suffered from various crises, which have, in turn, affected teachers. Teachers are crucial to the future of education, and therefore require support, encouragement and respect.

Nevertheless, schools' problems are not created by economic or the demographic factors only, social conditions significantly exacerbate their problems.

Jurgen Habermas believes that the crisis in the developed world doesn't lie in the economic spheres. He asserts that:

Crisis tendencies pregnant with the future are no longer located immediately in the economic sphere but in the sociocultural sphere: they don't directly concern the reproduction of material conditions of life but the reproduction of reliable structures of inter subjectivity.

(Quoted in Svi Shapiro, 1984, p. 26)

What Habermas calls the socio-cultural sphere as a producer for the crisis is not confined to the developed world but this concept can also be used to understand the problems facing schools in the developing world. The studies I am going to highlight, support the theories of Coombs and Habermas. The following argument will try to prove that teachers' problems are caused by social and economic circumstances.

Teachers' Professional Problems

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) in their study concerning job satisfaction in schools in England found that the main difficulties they experience as teachers are:

Poor career structure.

Inadequate salary.

Inadequate disciplinary policy of school

- Noisy pupils

Individual students misbehaving

- Difficult classes
- Trying to maintain standards
- Heavy workload

Ashton and Webb (1986) found that American teachers experienced a range of difficulties. The researchers conceptualised these difficulties and anxieties

in what they termed “status panic”. They separated the components of teachers’ status panic into three items:

Great Expectations and Limited Opportunities

Ashton and Webb believe that American teachers who enter the teaching profession are usually from blue-collar families. They join the profession to have access to vertical mobility (to the white-collar world). But their choice is crushed by the economic and social impact. Ashton and Webb define the decline of salaries and the lack of advancement opportunities as the main difficulties that face teachers.

Moreover, low salaries affect social status since there is a reciprocal relationship between income and social status. The researchers also found that many teachers were considering leaving teaching as a result of the low salaries.

Declining Status

According to Ashton and Webb’s findings, the status of teachers is being eroded due to the loss of public faith in education. Also, teachers complain of public ignorance about their efforts and the physical conditions that they experience at school. Weak co-operation between home and school results in low student performance, which causes teachers to be criticised by the media and parents.

Lack of Recognition

Apart from the decline of their salaries and social status, teachers’ accomplishments often go unnoticed either by school administration, parents or the media. Ashton and Webb found that there are many teachers who experience “burnout” because of the lack of gratitude and appreciation. Others consider leaving the teaching profession for the same reason.

Ashton and Webb highlight some problems that are endemic to the teaching profession which have an impact on teachers' sense of efficacy. These problems are:

Uncertainty

According to Ashton and Webb, teachers experience uncertainty because of the absence of a clear, determined and precise set of professional goals and teaching techniques. As well as giving teachers the opportunity to choose teaching strategies and a feeling of relative autonomy, the lack of certainty exposes teachers to critics and self-doubt. For example, some teachers – according to Ashton and Webb expressed their concerns as follows:

Sometimes I worry about whether I am getting the point across. Maybe I should have presented the materials another way. Are the kids listening? Do they care about this material as much as I do?

Or:

I don't know that what I am teaching will make any difference. It doesn't do my student a whole lot of good. It makes me sad to see some of my students leave, I think: "oh, boy, what's going to happen to you?" I feel they need some basics. But I wish I had something else to offer them

(Ashton & Webb, 1986, p.43)

Teacher Isolation

One of the problems facing teachers is the weak relationship between themselves, which can lead to lack of co-operation among colleagues. Ashton and Webb found that teacher isolation has some advantages:

If teacher isolation has its drawbacks, it also has its functions. On the psychological level, insularity functions to protect the professional image of individual teachers by placing a buffer between them at work. Isolation lessens the possibility that conflicts will develop among the faculty.

(Ashton & Webb, 1986 p.47)

Powerlessness

Ashton and Webb found that teachers are unable to influence matters outside the classroom, such as school policy, state regulations and school decisions. Such decisions could create more difficulties for teachers and destroy their

effectiveness. Moreover, teachers suffer from poor treatment by the school administration.

These findings by Ashton and Webb were emphasised by Gallup and Elam (1989) in their findings about teachers' sources of stress. These sources are:

- Lack of parental interest
- Lack of financial support
- Lack of student interest
- Lack of discipline
- Lack of public support
- Use of drugs
- One-parent household
- Lack respect for teachers
- Large schools/overcrowding
- Problems with administration
- Low teacher salaries

(pp.41-54)

If the above were sources for teachers' stress and difficulties, Chubb and Moe (1990) would consider a complex of variables not only as a source of teachers' satisfaction but also as causes of students' achievements. These causes are:

- Family background
- School size
- Economic resources

Regarding economic resources the writers say:

It makes sense to think that school ought to operate more successfully the more resources they have to work with. School that offer higher salaries and smaller classes - both of which require more financial resources - should attract more talented teachers who in turn should do a better job of teaching. Similarly, schools with superior facilities, equipment, and supplies – for example, bright clean building and classrooms, state of the art laboratories and computers, current and instructional materials – should be more successful than schools that are physically antiquated or dilapidated.

(Chubb and Moe, 1990, p, 232)

In a survey of 1,878 teachers in 1,016 primary schools in England and Wales that was conducted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (1998), the teachers expressed their views about different aspects as impediments they face. The difficulties are as follows:

Working Times

- 86% of full time primary teachers feel they have insufficient time to do their job as it should be done.
- 70% of full time primary teachers think that the amount of time they spend doing their job in term-time is unreasonable.
- 62% of full time primary teachers feel under uncomfortable pressure for more than half the time because of their workload.
- 44% of full time primary teachers think that their job performance is decreased for more than half the time as a result of stress in their job.

(ATL Survey, 1998 p. 4)

Negative views on the four, attitudinal issues (sufficiency, reasonability, pressure and stress) are each associated with higher average time spent working evenings and weekends (12.7 to 13.3 hours each week). Similarly a negative view on “overall job satisfaction” is associated with higher average time spent working in evening and at the weekend (13.4 hours each week). Correspondingly, positive views on these five issues are each associated with lower average time spent working evenings and weekends (10.2 to 11.6 hours each week).

Benchmark Comparison

The survey compared teachers’ views with those of employees in other organisations. The responses were as follow:

- Only 20% of primary teachers are satisfied with the amount of work they are expected to do. This result is lower than all other organisation surveyed.
- Only 45% of primary teachers, when considering everything about their present job, are satisfied with it. This result is lower than all other organisations surveyed.
- Only 51% of primary teachers agree that their head teacher recognises and acknowledges when they have done their job well. This result is low (23rd of 28) among organisations surveyed.
- Only 56% of primary teacher’s feel that their head teacher is doing a good job overall. This result is lower than all other organisations surveyed

(ATL Survey, 1998, p.4)

Teachers’ Priorities

The survey identifies the main activities to which teachers devote most of their time at the expense of other activities. The top five activities are:

- Administration and clerical work
- School policies and planning
- Meetings

- Recording pupil attainment
- Writing reports and dealing with parents.

However, as well as identifying the activities that take too much of their time, the teachers also suggest changes that would help them in their work. The top choices are:

- Smaller class size
- More non contact time
- More support staff in the classroom.
- Fewer demands on their time outside the school day. (ATL Survey.1998 p,5)

We can see, therefore, that teachers' difficulties are crucial and could be detrimental to the quality of education. Educational reform is required in order to eliminate these difficulties and to create a setting conducive to learning and teaching. For example, a report published in 1983 by the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth urged for enhancing recruitment, training and compensation of teachers.

Another report issued in 1983, *Educating Americans for the 21st century*, called for better compensation for teachers especially in the field of mathematics, science and technology. The pay for these teachers should be comparable to professionals in other sectors.

A place called school is another publication calling for reform of the educational system in the United States. The report, written by John Goodlad in 1984, calls for improvement in different areas and aspects. Goodlad thinks it is important to establish curricular balance in the student's program of studies. His recommendation is to alter the weighting of the student's program to be 18% literature and language, up to 18% in mathematics and science, up to 15% social studies, society and vocation and 15% physical education. The aim of this variation is to leave room for each student to upgrade his talent according to his interests.

Goodlad also emphasised the need for careful preparation in selecting school principals. He believes that the selection procedure for appointing a school principal takes place too quickly. Instead, Goodlad proposes two constructive procedures:

- a) There should be continuous efforts in searching for candidates with leadership potential so that random and unplanned selection can be avoided.
- b) Candidates could be given a grant for two years' paid study leave taken at a major university.

Goodlad, justifies the precise and careful selection of school principals in terms of the need to go beyond the conventional ways of administering and conducting a school. We can appreciate how plausible Goodlad's ideas are when we consider that school principals constitute – in many instances – a source of tension and frustration.

Goodlad (1984) also calls for more incentives for teachers, since low salaries are a major deterrent from entering the teaching profession. He believes that:

Teachers entering teaching could be interpreted to mean that professional and idealistic values and challenging work are sufficient incentives. This interpretation would be incorrect, I believe. Of course we want teachers who want to teach, just as we want professionals in all fields who are attracted to the work. But this insufficient incentive to assure a continuing supply of able people. Anticipated income will always be important.

(p.314)

In 1989, the Carnegie corporation published a report, *Turning points: preparing American youth for the 21st century* in which a reduction in the size of schools was recommended. The report also considered that teachers should be given greater authority to make decisions, and greater responsibility to enhance and improve educational outcomes. Giving the teachers the ability to make decisions means that they will use their intimate knowledge of students to design instructional programmes. Another advantage seen by the report is that teacher autonomy to make decisions will widen the horizons of students by pushing them to think about decision-making. In turn, students themselves can participate in making decisions that affect their education.

In Asia the status of teachers constitutes a major issue in any attempt to reform the educational system. Japanese educational reforms arising from the initiative of the Central Council on Education (CCE) - an advisory council set up to advise the Minister of Education in 1952 - centred on certain areas of reform. The period between 1967-1971 would witness the deliberation of the CCE initiative that concentrated on these sets of reforms:

- Kindergarten/nursery school unification
- Higher-education system reform
- University administrative reform
- Probationary training year reform
- Increasing teachers' salaries by 30% to 40% and reforming the structure of the salary scale.
- Licensing reform to create a new grade of master teachers.

(Schoppa, 1991, p.207)

Schoppa mentions that some of these reforms were partially implemented and some of them were implemented to a large extent. These were:

- Aid to private universities
- Aid to private schools
- Expansion of kindergartens
- Expansion of education for the handicapped
- Teacher salary rise
- Formal recognition of assistant principals
- Establishment of graduate teacher-training universities.

(Schoppa, 1991

p.207)

The second initiative reform was begun by Nakasona who became Prime Minister in 1982. Nakasona felt the need to address the national education problem. Therefore he refined the aspects of educational reform into seven points:

- Reform of the 6-3-3-4 school system.
- An improvement in the system of high school entrance examinations
- Improvement of the university entrance examination system.
- Incorporation of work-experience activities and overnight camps into the education system.
- An increased emphasis on moral and physical education.
- Continued promotion of the internalisation of education.
- An improvement in the quality of teachers. (Schoppa, 1991,p, 215)

The improvement in the quality of teachers occurred in the teacher-training year. The aim of this training program is “to assure that teachers come out of the training having acquired the personal qualities and abilities appropriate for teaching” (Schoppa, 1991, p. 245)

Howarth, (1991) compared Britain’s educational reform with that of Japan. From the sample of young people drawn from Japan, England and Wales, results of this international study of ability in science and mathematics showed that the Japanese came out top in the mathematics and science results, Howarth then compared the salaries of teachers and found no great difference between the countries. He concluded that there was no relationship between teachers’ salaries and pupil attainment. In other words teachers’ salaries whether low or high doesn’t lead to high pupil attainment.

Presumably, it is a mistake to assume that high salaries would lead to higher student attainments. It is arguable whether better salaries would increase teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession and would attract talented people to teaching.

To illustrate this point, Wise (1993) in his article *Three scenarios for the future of the teaching profession in the United States*, makes some premises about the teaching profession: He posits that:

- The shortage of qualified teachers is growing, such that the supply will be insufficient to meet the demand. The problem can be solved by taking serious steps to attract more people.
- Teachers’ academic ability will continue to decline unless serious changes are made to attract bright students to the teaching profession.
- Public confidence in the quality of teachers will depend on the perceived quality of teacher training programs and on the standards for entry to the profession.
- Educated parents are an important force in determining the financial support for public education and that could happen through voting.

- Professional teaching is getting more difficult and that is the result of standardised curricula and testing programs, bureaucratic reporting requirements, and systems of evaluating teachers.

Wise sets out the following three scenarios for the future of teaching in the U.S.:

- The business-as-usual scenario
- The tiered scenario
- The professional scenario

With regard to the business-as usual scenario, Wise perceives the shortage of teachers as a negative matter that will affect the quality of teachers. As the policy makers encounter this problem, on the one hand, and the demand for teaching increases on the other hand, entry requirements to the teaching profession will be lowered with a potentially negative effect on the quality of teachers.

In the two-tiered scenario Wise thinks the education system can copy the experience of the U.S. army in which a permanent and well-paid cadre of professional officers inducted and supervised contingents of drafted recruits. The U.S. education system could imitate the U.S. army experience. As the shortage of the teachers worsens, a permanent of cadre of senior teachers, administrators, and supervisors could induct and train temporary teachers. Wise doesn't predict success for this scenario.

Wise believes the professional scenario to be the most suitable for the U.S. education system and for a nation aspiring for superiority. He thinks that it is important to reform the induction and training of teachers. These reforms would work as standards that restrain the entry to the teaching profession. Wise designates social and educational benefits that can be brought about when good standards are established. On the social level, it would revive mass confidence in the quality of teachers entering the teaching profession.

On the educational level:

Teachers would no longer have to teach prescribed curricula, using stylized methods, to prepare their students tests. Instead, they would feel compelled

to teach with intellectual honesty and practical foresight. They would teach students to read for knowledge and enjoyment, not simply to acquire testable reading skills. They would teach student to think mathematically, not simply seek the right answers. They would teach students to write fluently and effectively, not simply to fill in the blanks.

(Wise, 1993 p. 205)

According to Wise, the successful implementation of the professional scenario depends on the desire of the policymakers to improve teachers' salaries and working conditions on the one hand and the establishing of entry standards to the teaching profession on the other.

Wise's forecast that a shortage of qualified teachers in the U.S. would develop was accurate. UNESCO in its recent report "*Teachers and teaching in a changing world 1998*" mentions that states vary in the standard requirements for the teaching profession. While some states require high standards, others require low standards. Therefore, more than 12% of new recruits enter the classroom without any formal training at all, and another 14% arrive without fully meeting state standards.

Teachers' employment and working conditions in the developing world are comparable those of their counterparts in some of the developed world (but with some differences). These conditions are: Low salaries, poor working conditions, weak training and preparation. Moreover, poor economic performance and, frequently, political instability, serve to deepen the teacher crisis in the developing world.

In 1983 a survey was conducted in the Arab world (Egypt, Lebanon and Libya were exempted from the survey) to determine factors that disincline young people from entering the teaching profession. The sample was chosen from intermediate and secondary school pupils, colleges of education and elementary, intermediate and secondary school teachers. The main factors found to influence their decisions to shun the teaching profession were:

- Low salaries that characterise the teaching profession compared to other professions.

- Difficulties experienced by members of the teaching profession compared to other professions
- Bureaucratic burden.
- Class size and students' disruptive behaviours.

Jenkinson and Chapman (1990) studied the factors that determined job satisfaction among Jamaican public and private elementary school teachers. They found that job satisfaction of Jamaican school teachers in public elementary schools, was related to their perceptions of school prestige, parental encouragement, working conditions and peer relations. With regard to job satisfaction among private elementary school teachers, it was related to: leadership style, organisational structure, teacher-parent relationship, working conditions and peer relations. So, working conditions and peer relations were found to be common factors that influenced teachers' job satisfaction whether at public or private schools. The factors that lead to job dissatisfaction among teachers could reduce teacher commitment and could in turn harm the educational process.

Tarvin and Faraj (1990) analysed the experiences of the developing countries in South and Southeast Asia in improving the quality of their schoolteachers. These countries found that, as well as factors such as low enrolment, parental indifference, or the physical conditions of the school producing weak outcomes, the ability of teachers to communicate knowledge to students could also produce a negative effect. The writers cite some information about the quality of these countries' teachers. A Chinese educational report mentions that out of the eight million teachers a large number of them are poor quality teachers who require retraining. Pakistan is another example where it is suggested that poor quality teaching is the main cause for a reduced enrolment rate and high absenteeism. The writers assume three factors to be the cause of the poor quality of teachers:

The Rapid Expansion Rate of the Educational System.

Most of the developing nations in Asia witnessed a high rate of student enrolments. In South Korea from 1945 to 1976, student enrolments increased by 394 %, at the middle level by 2,156% and at high school level by 1,045%. In the Philippines, student enrolments jumped from 6.3 millions in 1965 to 8.9 million in 1985. Consequently, according to the writers, the demand for teachers increased, while there was a shortage of qualified teachers. These countries were under educational pressure (high enrolment + shortage of teachers) to hire teachers even with low qualifications. In China, for example, housewives or former student have been able to enter the teaching profession.

Inadequacy of Pre-Service Training

The writers assume that the second factor affecting the educational system in these countries is the inadequacy of the pre-service training programs that produce unqualified teachers. In South Korea, educational reports mention that the inefficiency of training programs has negatively affected the development of the education system. In Malaysia and Thailand the need for trained teachers led these countries to depend on one or two-year pre-service programs which made them incompetent in the subject they teach since the curriculum is not covered properly.

Teachers' Lack of Commitment

Education systems in these regions experienced difficulty in attracting good, well-qualified university graduates into the teaching profession. Pakistan is an example. In South Korea many schools teachers left the profession. To resolve these educational crises the developing nations in South and Southeast Asia took practical steps that were embodied in the following actions:

The Establishment of Educational Authorities

India, for example, established the National Council of Educational Research and Training in order to design and implement programs for teacher education. In the Philippines, in-service programs to enhance the competence of teachers were prepared by the Bureau of Elementary Education and the Bureau of Secondary Education.

The Improvement of Pre-Service Programs

China for example, has expanded her university and college training system. Pakistan has reviewed and improved the curriculum of her teacher training programs.

Actions to Strengthen Teacher Commitment

The writers explain how the countries in the region have sought comprehensive solutions to problems regarding teachers. In addition to actions taken to improve the quality of teachers, further steps have been implemented to encourage teacher commitment. In Sri Lanka, pension schemes have been adopted and expanded. South Korea and Pakistan grant their teachers scholarships to study abroad. In Malaysia reduced class sizes have enabled teachers to perform their task efficiently.

The accomplishments of these countries reveal clearly how they plan well for future generations and how they aspire to superiority and progress by advancing educational reform as a prerequisite for economic and social development.

Thus, the World Bank Report "*Priorities and strategies*" (1996) confirms the experiences of those countries. Despite the fact that this confirmation is not cited directly, the aspects which that report counts as necessary for effective learning coincide with the areas of reform that those countries adopted. The report defines five types of input as follows:

- The student's capacity and motivation to learn
- The subject to be learned

- A teacher who knows and can teach the subject
- Time for learning
- The requisite tools for teaching and learning.

With regard to teacher knowledge the report states that:

Teachers' subject knowledge, an intended outcome of pre-service training, is strongly and consistently related to student performance. Teachers with a better knowledge of subject material and greater written and verbal language proficiency have better-performance students.

(World Bank Report, 1996, p.82)

The report mentions that in-service training programs are a useful way to ensure teacher improvement in subject knowledge and pedagogical practices. Gannicot and Throsby (1992) examined the reasons behind the weaknesses of the students in some of the South Pacific regions. They cite the example that academic performance in primary schools in the Solomon Islands is weak. Students in this region were required to have a minimum score of 12 out of 15 to gain admission to national secondary school. The results were disappointing: only 17% scored 12 and above.

Vanuatu is another island in the South Pacific which suffers from poor quality of students. Although, the island achieved universal primary education, according to as the writer, and there is a national need to expand the upper secondary to meet the national labour demand, educational results are poor. Therefore, investments should be made to try to improve qualitative rather than quantitative expansion.

In Tonga, a survey was conducted to test cognitive development of the students. The survey found that 20-40 % of school students were incapable of coping with the content and speed of the present curriculum. The survey concluded that the students had learning difficulties.

Gannicott and Throsby then outlined the elements that strained educational quality in the South Pacific:

The Quality of Teachers

The writers mention that teachers in the South Pacific Islands have received little or no teacher training. A large proportion of secondary school teachers have no more education than their students. The writers say:

When the teacher's grasp of materials is little better than that of the pupil he or she is teaching, the result is a rigid style of rote memorisation, with little fostering of an analytical approach to learning. Low standards of basic education and professional training mean that the school system becomes caught up in a vicious circle of poor quality.

(Gannicott & Throsby, 1992, p. 232)

The Provision of Textbooks and Materials

A deficiency of books and instructional materials is also considered responsible for the poor quality of students. In Fiji the lack of teaching resources and books has created a condition that has contributed to high rates of students failure in the upper secondary school and tertiary levels.

Instruction in the Mother Tongue

The writers believe that the use of a foreign language for instruction is a key factor that has damaged the quality of students. In the Solomon Islands English is used as the official language for instruction from the beginning of the primary school. In Vanuatu, English and French are the languages of instructions.

The problem is not with using English as a language for instruction but - according to the writers - that teachers are unable to use the foreign language sufficiently well for instruction, the consequence of which is poor quality of students.

Educational Management

Few teachers in these regions receive field support. In Fiji, for instance, most of the schools are visited less than once a year by the district education staff. Worse, visits that do take place last less than an hour. The learning

difficulties found are at least partly attributable to weak educational management.

Curriculum Reform

The writers assert that many of the islands have made real investments in curriculum reform in order to improve the quality of education. Nevertheless, there are no tangible results to show that student performance has improved. Some of the islands in the South Pacific such as Fiji and Western Samoa considered the possibility of vocationalising the curriculum. However Fiji decided to retain an emphasis on the traditional curriculum subjects because:

What is particularly interesting is that Tonga chose to retain a general curriculum not because of any failure to recognise the limited possibilities for wages for most school – leavers, but because it is the traditional curriculum, emphasising basic skills, which is thought more likely to equip students with the skills necessary to develop through their initiative, ways and means of learning a livelihood other than those offered by the government or large enterprises.

(Gannicott & Throsby, 1992, p 235)

In the previous pages teachers have indicated that smaller class size is one of the main requests they have in order to facilitate their work. But why and how can smaller class size help the teachers and pupils positively? The following pages will answer this question.

The Issue of Class Size

Class size has been an important issue for many policy makers, parents and teachers. This issue has been important because they believe that small class size can help in improving pupils' academic performance and reduce teachers' professional problems. Much of the educational research supports these beliefs.

Approaches to the Study of the Class Size

Class size studies can be categorised under three types, as follows:

Ecological Approach

This approach emphasises the study of class size from a historical or geopolitical perspective. An example of that is the study by Tomlinson which

found that numbers of students in the United States decreased during the period 1960-1984 from 30 to 24 in elementary grades and from 27 to 22 in secondary schools.

Other studies that attempted to identify the influence of class size used ecological comparison among nations. For example, the Second International Study of Achievement in Mathematics, found “great variation in the average size of mathematics classes in 13 year olds between 18 countries, from 19 to 20 Students in Belgium, Sweden, and Luxemburg, to 41 to 44 in Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Swaziland” (Postlethwaite and Husen, 1994, p771). The results were as follows; Belgium, Japan, and Hong Kong were among the top half of the countries in mean maths achievement. Meanwhile, Sweden, Luxembourg, and Swaziland were in the lower half.

The comparison between nations of the effects of class size on students' academic achievement usually disguises the influence of other variables and factors that are essential to educational process e.g. educational expenditure, educational goals, teacher preparation practice, and student characteristics which may contribute to the students' attainment. (Postlethwaite and Husen, 1994)

Cost-Related Approach

This approach examines the cost and the outcomes of reducing class size and whether it would be of benefit to pursue such educational reform or not.

Hanushek as a famous opponent to class size reduction policy reviewed 147 studies to determine whether there is any relationship between inputs such as teacher preparation, experience and class size on the one hand and students' achievements on the other hand. Hanushek concluded that there is no clear and positive relationship between school expenditure and student achievement. Therefore, he concluded that “reducing class size does not appear to be an economically efficient strategy for increasing school performance” (Ibid, p772)

The cost-related approach looks at the class size policy from a financial point of view only. As a result, this approach ignores other advantages that can be gained from reducing class size.

Classroom-Focus Research.

This approach focuses on experimental and non-experimental studies that show the positive effects of small class size on students' performance and teachers' workload.

The Definition of Class Size

Class size can be defined as: the total number of pupils allocated to a teacher for all or some of the teaching timetable. The average class size is the total number of children in school divided by the number of classes. (NAHT: 1996:p10)

Class size and Students' Achievement

The effect of class size in improving students' achievements has become a controversial issue. Many researchers still believe there to be little advantage in having small classes (Salvin, 1989; Robinson, 1990; Hanushek, 1999). On the other hand, many studies indicate advantages of small class for students and teachers.

A number of studies have established a strong relationship between small class sizes and students' attainment. The summarisation of Glass & Smith (1978) of 80 studies that linked class size with academic achievements of the students revealed that:

Reduced class size can be expected to produce increased academic achievement and;

The major benefits from reducing class size are obtained as the size is reduced below 20 pupils. (Finn, 1998,p 3)

The influence of class size still concerns the public, therefore, many longitudinal studies were conducted to identify whether there are any significant outcomes when class size is reduced.

Indiana's Prime Time study

In 1984, the state of Indiana funded an initiative to reduce class sizes in grades 1 to 3 down to an average of 18 pupils. This number was increased to 24 pupils when there was an assistant in the classroom. The study was conducted on 3 levels over 3 years. The levels were grade 1, 2 and 3. The conclusions of this study were as follows:

- Positive outcomes were found for small classes in terms of such factors as time on task, individualised instruction, behaviour, and teacher satisfaction;
- The results for academic achievement were mixed - sometimes, small classes were found to perform better and sometimes, in other cases large classes were better. (Finn, 1998, p,6)

Tennessee's Project Star

This study was conducted in 79 elementary schools in the state of Tennessee and covered the period from 1985 to 1989. The study divided the classes into three categories: "small" with an enrolment of 13 to 17 students; "regular" with an enrolment range of 22 to 26 students and "large" with a full time teaching assistant and the same range of students as regular classes. The results of this experiment are as follows:

- Differences among the three class types were statistically highly significant for all sets of achievement measures and for every measure individually. In every case, the significance was attributable to the superior performance of children in small classes and not to the classes with full-time teacher aides.

With only minor exceptions, there was no significant correlation with school location or sex of the pupil. A significant small-class advantage was found in inner city, urban, suburban, and rural schools alike and the advantages of small classes applied to both males and females.

- In each year of the study, some of the benefits of small classes were found to be greater for minority students than for non-minorities, or greater for students attending inner-city schools.
- No differences were found among class types on the motivational scales. (Finn, 1998, p, 8, and see Finn & Achilles 1990)

Nevada Class-Size Reduction Program

In 1989, the Nevada Legislature enacted the class-size reduction (CSR) Act. The measure was designed to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in public schools in the earliest grades and in classrooms where the core curriculum is taught. The results of this program were issued as reports on different years but they can be summarised as follows:

- Principals, teachers and parents were very positive in their attitudes toward class-size reduction, and the dynamics created within the classroom contributed to an improved learning environment;
- There was a tendency for greater gains in mathematics to be associated with larger second grade classrooms, and greater gains in reading associated with smaller second grade classrooms.

There are several factors overwhelmingly more important in predicting pupil achievement scores: special education status. ESL status, ethnicity, free lunch eligibility, and class configuration (in descending order). Each accounted for more variance in scores than did class size.

- Most respondents feel that having a smaller class means that each child will receive the individual attention needed to fully understand the skills that are being taught. (Pepper, 1997. Pp 5-12)

The National Association of Head Teachers funded a project to study the literature related to class size and the quality of teaching and learning. The survey included the studies on class size either in the U.S. or England. Some

of the main conclusions of the survey on the benefits of reducing class size on students' achievements are:

- Small classes can result in increased learning gains in the early years of schooling as measured by standardised literacy and numeracy tests; These effects are most marked with pupils in the very early years (KSI);
- Studies examining student attitudes, self-concept and motivation have found the most positive effects in small classes in the primary years;
- Small classes can have a beneficial effect on the academic achievement of children from low-income families and those learning English as a second language.
- The benefits to be gained from reducing class size is unlikely to be marked unless teachers change their styles of teaching to exploit the opportunities of smaller groups;
- Planned reductions in class size should be accompanied by a review of teaching methods, classroom management and in-service training in order to capitalise on the opportunity to enhance student learning;
- Large classes and the consequent overcrowding of classrooms are associated with lower student achievement measured by reading proficiency and mathematics test.

(NAHT Survey, 1996, p.66)

The satisfactory outcomes of class size reduction inspired the politicians mainly in some developing world to undertake several initiatives to reduce class size in order to enhance students' attainment. For instance, Wilson, the governor of California, proposed putting nearly \$500 million into reducing 1st and 2nd grade class sizes to 20 students. He justified his class size reduction policy as follows: "we now have the revenue we need to make investments to ensure students in California get the kind of education that will prepare them for the 21st century" (Education week, 1996, p13). The American school board journal (1997) adds other reasons for reducing class size in California:

Many schools trying (in California) to comply are scrambling to come up with the extra space and teachers they need to create smaller class sizes. In some cases, schools are surrendering playgrounds to portable classrooms or relegating school libraries to nooks in auditorium. The quality of teachers has suffered, too, some say. To trim class sizes last year, for example, the Oakland Unified School District had to hire about 100 new teachers - many of them inexperienced and many teaching on emergency credentials.

(p.9)

Riley (1999) exhibits the current condition of teaching profession in the U.S. in which it will be necessary to hire 2.2 million teachers in the next 10 years. In the meantime more than one million veteran teachers are expected to retire. He adds "We already face a shortage of high quality teachers,

particularly in specific fields of expertise such as math, science, special education and bilingual education” (Riley, 1999, p.6).

As a result, Riley believes in preparing well-qualified teachers in order to upgrade education standards. A major component of achieving high standards is lowering class size which became a reality through President Clinton's plan to reduce class sizes by recruiting 100,000 new high-quality teachers, as Riley stated in his article.

It could be argued that politicians usually adopt class size reduction initiatives to promote their parties' interests and to reach their political objectives, but this doesn't flow from a vacuum. The issue of class size is a crucial educational issue for a public who are ambitious to ensure that their children acquire the necessary skills and knowledge that will prepare them for their future lives. Moreover, large classes are sources for disruptive student behaviour that causes tension and pressure for teachers.

However, class size the reduction policy still encounters fierce attacks and criticism by those who view it as a policy to increase students' achievements. Eric Hanushek is known in the class size literature as the strongest opponent to the reduction policy. In a recent article, (1999) Hanushek denies any convincing advantages, and valuable benefits of reducing class size. He cites much evidence to prove that small class policy is incompetent and inefficient. First, the idea exists that small classes could help teachers to give more attention to students, whereas, the facts don't show any significant benefit in this respect. Second, Hanushek argues that class size has been falling in the last quarter of a century, but that the average student (in the U.S.) hasn't improved noticeably. Finally, he claims that small class size studies show both positive and negative effects of class size. Then, Hanushek poses this question: “Are the gains in student performance that one might expect worth the costs? Here the answer is an unambiguous: NO”.

Hanushek's alternative for the class size reduction program lies in attracting competent and capable teachers, which in his opinion, proves to be more practical and efficacious.

It is hard to agree with Hanushek's argument, despite his accurate standpoint that hiring capable teachers will improve students' academic performance. But this solution would solve only one problem facing schools - students' attainment. However, effective teaching needs another variable to ensure its success. Consequently, class size constitutes one of the main factors not only to enhance students' attainment but also for teacher satisfaction, improved learning behaviour and reducing time spent on classroom management. (Finn, 1999, p 45)

Therefore, the NAHT project concluded that the research on class size has focused on:

- The effects of reducing class size rather than the impact of increasing them;
- The influence of class size on pupils in the early years of primary schooling (KS1) as opposed to those at the upper primary and secondary school stages (KS2-4).
- The learning gains of pupils as measured by their scores on standardised tests - particularly in mathematics and reading.

(1996, p.65)

But certain aspects and issues have been neglected. The NAHT project identifies these issues as:

The long-term effects of class size on non-cognitive learning outcomes such as pupil attitudes, behaviour, motivation and self-esteem;

- The wider effects of class size on the professional work and quality of life of head teachers and teachers;
- The impact of rising class sizes on the management and effectiveness of schools and their capacity to sustain continuous improvement at a time of rising expectations and rapid educational outcomes.

(NAHT, 1996, p. 65)

These issues were ignored, not only by the research, but also by the opponents of class-size reduction. Instead of concentrating on the positive affects of small class size on teachers' satisfaction and classroom management, Hanushek, from a narrow, short-term view, only considered the financial cost of reducing class size which eventually led him to reject such a policy. Whereas, the advantages of class size reduction policy are enormous.

Salvin's works (1990, 1994) adopt a similar perspective in which he claims that employing qualified teachers, in-service training and continuing

support for teachers to ensure that they take advantage of smaller numbers of students, are an alternative strategy to class size reduction. Would this proposal solve the crisis in schools? If the other advantages of class size can be ignored, it is possible to say that Hanushek's and Salvin's theories are accurate and practical. But it is important to bear in mind that large classes are one of the main sources of teachers' dissatisfaction, student's disruptive behaviour and damage to schools facilities. In comparison, the benefits of small class for teachers and students, which are identified in the literature, can confound the arguments of the contestants and this is what will be indicated in the following pages.

The Effect of Class Size on the Lives of Teachers and Students

Johnston (1989) conducted interviews with teachers of the project STAR to identify their perceptions of teaching and learning differences in small classes as compared to regular classes. The outcomes of this study are as follows:

Class Size and Classroom Time

Teachers feel that classes with fewer students give them more time. According to the study, teachers explained that they had been able to cover the curriculum content faster than when they were in a regular sized class. Other advantages were as follows:

Some reported that with fewer children, or with a full-time aide, instruction took less time because pupils were more on-task and could get help when needed. Others attributed the faster instructional pace to their increased ability to monitor pupil learning and behaviour, describing how management and supervision was easier with fewer children or with a full time aide. Many teachers reported having a better sense of what was going on in the classroom, of what children were or were not doing.

(Johnston, 1989, p.111)

Individualising Instruction

The study shows that small classes benefit the student and simplify the task of the teachers. In small classes, less time was required to monitor students' learning more closely, and to evaluate their progress than in a regular class. In

addition, teachers felt efficiency and effectiveness in their classrooms. Because small classes helped teachers to evaluate students' progress, they "reported using fewer written tests because they had more detailed and immediately accessible knowledge of each child's progress based on daily work and individual interactions with each child". (Johnston, 1989, : 112)

Teachers in small classes found that:

- They were able to reteach the difficult contents;
- Students had the chance to ask questions when they had problems;
- Teachers had more opportunities to respond to students needs more quickly;
- Students didn't need to wait long to receive help from their teachers with their learning problems.
- Small classes helped teachers to diversify their instructions to meet different students' abilities.

Life in a Small Class

Small classes create an environment conducive to learning. The extra space available as a result of there being fewer students could be used by teachers for useful activities for the children, e.g. for children to work on the floor for art projects, games, pleasure reading and to allow children to work in pairs. One very important issue to be addressed by the study; was that teachers didn't find it necessary to impose firm control on children.

Teachers in small classes developed good relationships with children and with their families. Fewer children in the class gave teachers enough time to hear about students' interests, their lives and concerns. Children themselves enjoy finding out about their teachers' lives.

Teachers also perceived that they shared themselves with the class and thus children knew more about the teachers as an individual with a history, interests, and life outside of school. Teachers reported "an increased sense of satisfaction from feeling more like a member of the class" (Johnston, 1989, . p.116). This would appear to be the ideal role of the teacher.

Disruptive behaviour as one of the major problems that school suffers from, is reduced in a small class. Teachers observed that with fewer students and desks, the physical space became an essential factor in reducing students talking and disturbing each other. Moreover:

Several teachers explained that they had more time to work with each individual child, noting that children learned that they would all get attention from the teacher. As one teacher explained: the kids knew that they didn't have to act up to get my attention. Other teachers reported that they were able to pay more individual attention to children who had behaviour problems...increased communication with parents was one aspect of this individual attention, both to inform parents about positive as well as problem behaviour"

(Johnston, 1989,. p.118)

Bennett (1994) conducted a survey to identify the perceptions of teachers, head teachers, governors and parents of the effect of large classes. The survey covered 325 primary schools in England and Wales. The main findings of this research are:

- The great majority of teachers, parents and chairs of governors believe classes are too large, and that class size is a very important, if not the most, important educational issue.
- There is clear consensus among head teachers, teachers, chairs of governors and parents that increasing class size adversely affects teaching and learning.
- With regard to children there is concern about the effects of increasing class sizes on children. The aspects that were of most concern were: the amount of individual attention received, assessment, standards of work, behaviour and safety.
- Also, head teachers, teachers, chairs of governors and parents were concerned about the adverse effects on teaching. They were most concerned about time available for individual children, teachers' workload and emotional state, assessment time and space available to them.
- Teachers indicated the changes they would make if they had smaller classes.

(pp. 31-32)

Mitchell's study (1995) supports Bennett's findings. Mitchell investigated the methods employed by schools to manage large classes (35 students) and the effects of large classes on students' achievements and teachers' workloads in the county of Durham. The study shows that head teachers allocated experienced teachers and those with good management skills to large classes. What is notable in this study is that some schools received assistance

from parents and members of the community. Crowded classrooms pressed the need for more space. Schools dealt with these problems by:

- Using their largest classrooms
- Using adjoining rooms and corridors
- Using shared areas such as overspill areas.

(Mitchell, 1995, p 6)

The head teachers indicated that the educational standard of students was not significantly affected because of large class sizes. However, this good result was due to the enormous efforts that teachers made to help students succeed and to minimise the adverse consequences of the large classes. Nevertheless teachers paid the price for that. They found that large classes caused severe pressure and increased their teaching burden. Mitchell cited teachers' difficulties as follows:

- Planning, particularly where this involved working with colleagues or planning for two or more age groups
- Preparing classrooms and resources
- Maintaining pupil records
- Marking
- Team meetings to consider organisational issues and share information on individual pupils and groups
- Fulfilling other professional duties and responsibilities above and beyond their class responsibilities.

(Mitchell, 1995, p.10)

Teachers also felt less effective in certain areas, which required priority.

These aspects were:

- Counselling children and dealing with their social and emotional needs.
- Supporting and raising standards with pupils of average ability in their class
- Supporting the social side of school life.
- Meeting individual pupils' needs and in particular drawing out their creative abilities.

(Mitchell, 1995, p.11)

Jamison et al (1998) conducted a study in England and Wales that included 1,500 schools, to identify the influence of class size at key stage 1. The study included the views of teachers and head teachers. Because of the importance of the study, it useful to elaborate it's outcomes.

Both teachers and their head teachers were asked to determine whether class size has increased or not since 1994/95. There was consensus among

the informants that student numbers have risen since that year. The respondents explored socio-economic factors that may have contributed to the increased student numbers, e.g. new families moving into the school's catchment area, its popularity and any financial constraints.

Teachers' perceptions of the ideal class size are incorporated. They believe that the ideal class size for single and mixed age group classes with an assistant would be in the ranges of 21-25 and 26-30 students. However, for classes without assistants, the preferred number would be 20 or less (Jamison et al, 1998: p.27)

The study indicated that teachers taught large classes (36 pupils) and small classes (30 pupils and fewer). What is interesting is that their experiences vary according to class size, where they had a preference for smaller classes. Teachers found that large classes hamper the planning of programmes because:

- Briefing the class and any support staff takes longer.
- Groups within the class tend to be larger which might affect the amount of practical work they are expected to do;
- More adult supervision may be required for some activities;
- Coverage of topics needs more time;
- Large classes often reduce the physical space which might be a limiting factor

(Jamison et al, 1998, p. 29)

In comparison, teachers can benefit from small classes in relation to preparing the programmes because:

- The pace may be faster and more activities can be included in a given time;
- More practical work may be undertaken.

(Jamison et al, 1998: p.47)

Teaching and learning is also affected by class size. The study found that large classes tended to limit the experience that students can gain in practical activities such as those in science, technology and art. Beside that, teachers felt that more materials had to be prepared for students thereby increasing their teaching burden. Close monitoring for practical activities became more difficult. Teachers' statements show to what extent class size (38 students) prevents the teacher from maximising his efforts. The research

explains how teachers suffer when undertaking a science activity with a large class:

I would like to have done this a group at a time but it would have taken too long. All 38 pupils recorded what we had done in their own words - it was not possible to keep a check on all of them or assist all individuals who required help during this exercise.

(Jamison et al, 1998: p.50)

Teachers - as the research indicates - seemed more satisfied with teaching and learning in small classes. They noticed that pupils could do practical activities in less time than in a large class. Small classes also created an interactive atmosphere by giving pupils the opportunity to discuss their practical works with each other. Teachers cited rational explanations for this progress. Small classes gave teachers the chance to support and encourage each pupil: this couldn't be done in large class.

In general the research shows that the benefits of small class are as follows:

- The ethos of the class is improved; the atmosphere is more relaxed, yet conducive to work. Pupils are more likely to participate in discussion and remain on task; which is very important for the pupils' attainment
- Teachers find enough time to explore areas of interest in discussion. Moreover, in small classes, teachers recognise and encourage good behaviour;
- Pupils and teachers enjoy teaching and learning a lot more;
- These positive experiences seem to be associated with greater pupil confidence and better progress.

Jamison et al, ascertain that teachers exploited small numbers of pupils to:

- Make more frequent use of a greater range of teaching methods and in doing so to make their teaching more interactive;
- Attend to the learning needs of individuals pupils – not just the less able and those who were experiencing difficulties but those in the middle band of the class and also the most able;
- Use the teaching space imaginatively;
- Assess pupils' progress using a greater range of methods in more varied contexts and provide more individual feedback to them.

(Jamison et al, 1998:, p.65)

As the argument has revealed, small class size is a major issue in the educational efforts to create a conducive educational environment, but in order to enable pupil's academic improvements, the reform policies considered the home-school relationship. Sinder (1995) confirms that, since the early 1960s, educators have operated on the premise that improved home-school relations are integral to school improvement and reform efforts. Below we will consider how the home school relationship influences the pupil's performance in school.

Home School Relationship

We have already mentioned that a good home-school relationship is not only very important to the pupil, but also as an educational requisite to creating a stable school environment.

Theoretical Background to Home-School Relationship

A number of theories have been developed in order to further the relationship between home and school and to understand the familial characteristics that positively affect pupils' performance in school.

Ryan and Adams Model

Ryan and Adams (1995) proposed a model seeking to explain the ways in which the family can influence the child's performance and success at school. The model encompasses all the family characteristics that influence the academic life of the child. It includes (Figure 4.1) several levels that interact with a view to consolidating the relationship between home and school.

Level 0: Child Outcomes

The researchers identify school outcomes through this level in the child's academic achievement and social behaviour.

Level 1: Child's Personal Characteristics

This level includes certain characteristics such as self-esteem, sociability, assertiveness, confidence, and enthusiasm. Ryan and Adams assert that these personal characteristics are the outcomes of the home not the school. Therefore, any conflict between parents could affect the child's performance at school.

Level 2: School- Focused Parent-Child Interaction

The process at this level includes actions that are taken by the parents to motivate their child in order to perform successfully at school. These actions include: helping the child with homework, encouragement, support...etc

Level 3: General Parent –Child Interaction

Ryan and Adams argue that the variables at this level are those that characterise parent-child interaction. These variables include different parental behaviour such as authoritative, parental control and expression of warmth.

Level 4: General Family Relations

The variables at this level include the social condition of the family; the family cohesiveness, conflict, organisation, family sociability and marital relationship.

Level 5: Personal Characteristics of Parents

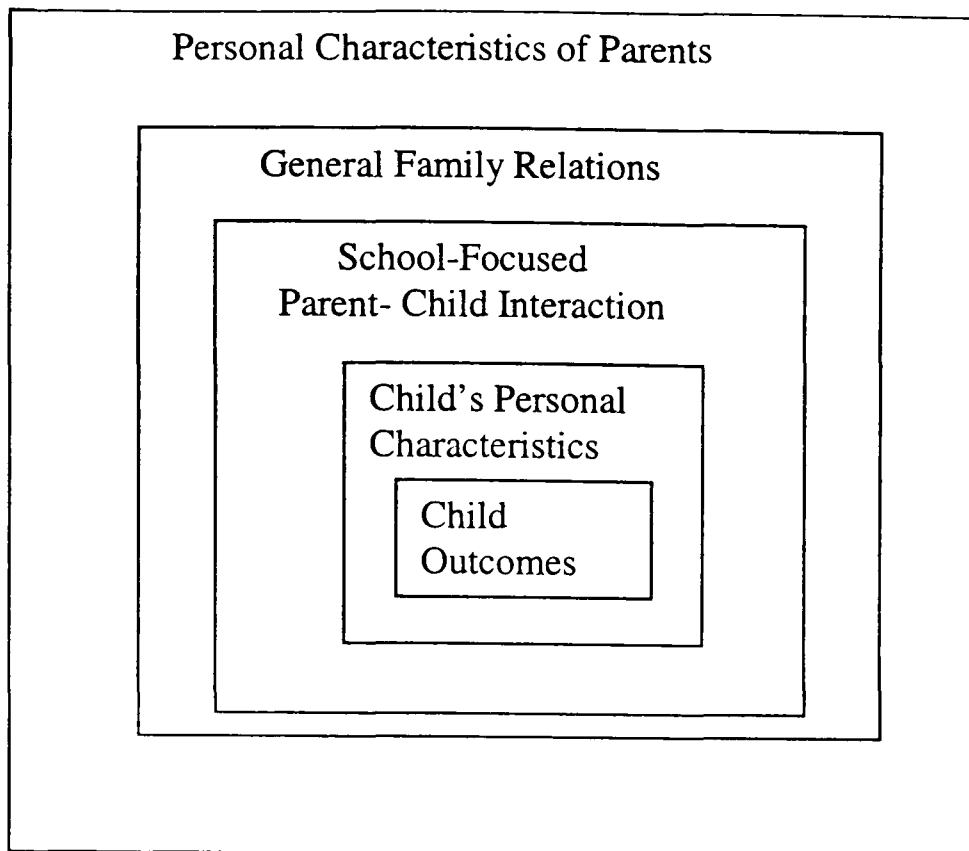
These characteristics include personality characteristics of the parents: introversion, expressiveness, dominance and other characteristics such as depression, anxiety, etc.

Level 6: Exogenous Social/Cultural and Biological Variables

These variables include two types. First, the social and cultural variables which include such factors as neighbourhood, marital status, family structure, and ethnicity. Second, the biological variables including sex of parents, sex of the child, and general disabilities (Ryan and Adams: 1995, pp. 8-12)

Figure 4.1

Exogenous Social/ Cultural and Biological Variables



Source: Ryan, B. and Adams, G. (1995) "The Family-School Relationships Model" p.8 in Ryan, et al (eds): *The Family-School Connection*.

Jones's Model

Whereas Ryan and Adam attempt to provide a more general perspective on the familial variables and dynamics that influence student achievement at school, Jones (1995) concentrates on parent-child interaction as the main predictor for the child's achievements (figure 4.2). Within this process, Jones hypothesizes four levels: valuing, monitoring, helping, and doing. He explains these levels:

At the first level, parents convey to children the value of education in general and the value of specific aspects of education. In addition, parents monitor children's behaviour and performance. Valuing and monitoring are assumed to affect students' motivation and engagement in the process of learning and schooling. Helping interaction are focused on the acquisition of basic skills in mathematics, reading, or other subjects....a fourth level-doing- in which parents are overly involved in their children's school work.

p.77

Jones goes further to argue that the socio-economic variables of the family or the formal education of the parents is not a prerequisite that is necessarily important to determine parent's contribution to the child's school achievement.

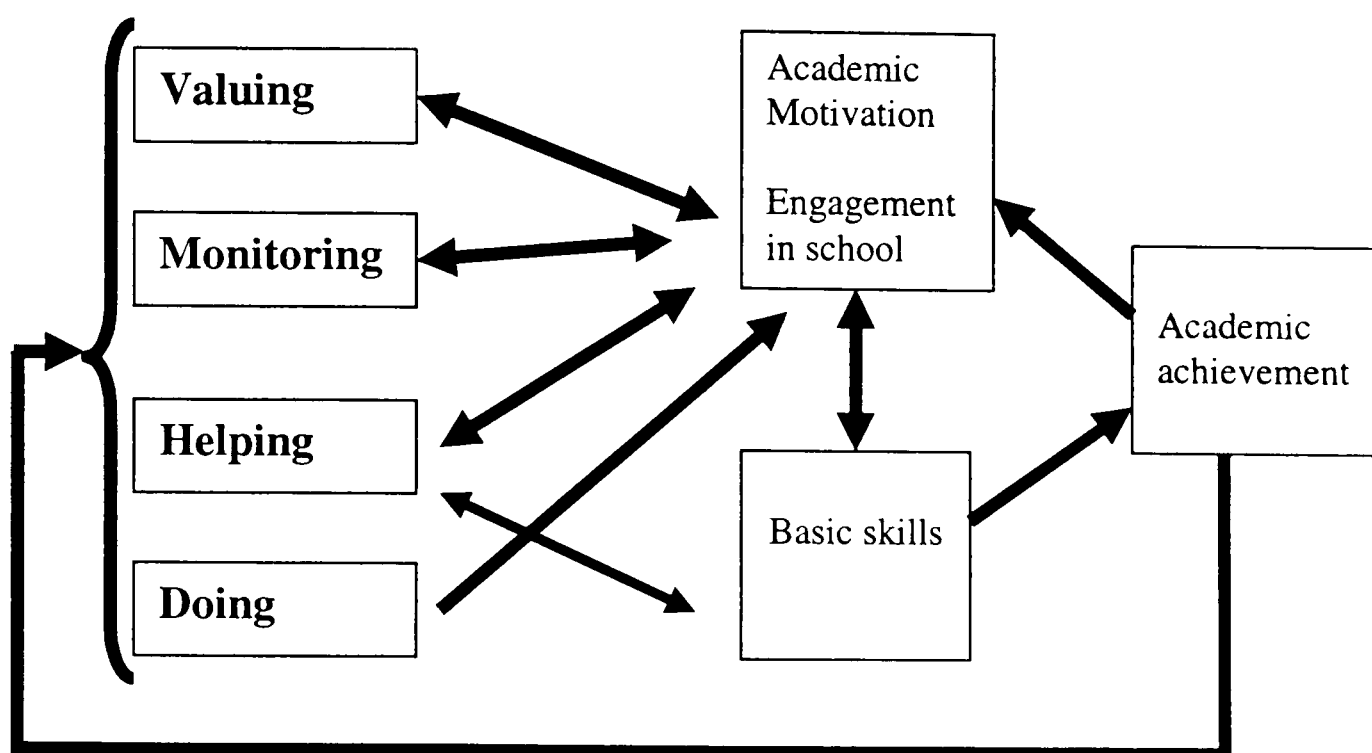


Figure:4.2 Source: Jones, D.(1995) "The Parent-Child Interaction and School Achievement" p.75, in Ryan, et al(eds): *The Family-School Connection*.

Coleman's Theory

Coleman (1998) argues that a student's commitment to schooling is influenced enormously by his parents. They are in turn influenced by school practices. Here, Coleman assumes that responsibilities are shared between home and school as an institution that holds the major responsibility for socialising the child. He believes that the primary objective of the school is not to serve the interest of the economy or the government, but rather it's main objective is to shape the student's commitment to education and learning. When his commitment is shaped, the society and parents can expect good result in the child's life. Coleman assumes four beliefs that govern the relationship between home and school:

1. "Student commitment to schooling (or engagement in learning) is primarily shaped by parents through the "curriculum of the home"; but this parent involvement is an alterable variable which can be influenced by school and teacher practices.
2. Schools should be judged by assessing how well they serve the interests of individual students and their families. Student commitment to schooling is a useful measure of this schooling outcome.
3. The most important external influence upon the classroom, that of the family, is at least potentially alterable, and hence must be incorporated in models of school effectiveness and improvement.
4. Triad collaboration at classroom level that promotes student bonding is the secret at the heart of school effectiveness. Better schools are necessarily both more responsive and more integrated. Leadership is vital to responsive and integrated school environment, in which all voices count.

(Coleman, 1998, p.18)

Coleman emphasises three aspects of parental practices that influence the commitment: parents can form in their child and enhance his/her academic ambitions and feelings toward success, to act as mediator by helping the child to cope with the school setting and as intervener to prepare the child to meet school requirements.

Coleman claims that child commitment is the outcome of child-parent interaction on one side and parent-teacher interaction on the other. Here we can see that Coleman's framework is identical to symbolic interactionism theory. The main theme of this theory, as developed by Mead (1934), is that values, beliefs, personality and self-concept are formulated via social interaction. In addition, the theory assumes that people learn how others anticipate their behaviour, so it is necessary that behaviour be adjusted to fulfil the others' expectations. Therefore, when parents fail to establish a good relationship with the school, they become unable to recognise the school's expectations toward their children. As a result, parents will not adjust their children's behaviour and increase their commitment for learning and education.

It is worth noting that Coleman's model doesn't institute separate responsibilities between home and school, rather, the duties for the child's learning are shared and collective. This perspective is paradoxical with the contemporary functional perspective - as developed by Parsons - in which he assumes that the function of the school, according to this view, is to socialise

the child on norms that are different from what he receives at home. Epstein (1987) wrote:

School and family relationships have been different at different times in history. It is not surprising, then, to see a restructuring of theories from inter-separation in the 1930s-1950s to co-operation between schools and families in the 1970s-1980s in order to accommodate the social change affecting these organisations. But we do not have a model of family-school relations that will account for the variations and process of change that will continue to influence the interactions of families and schools.

(p.123)

Finally it is important to assert that the foregoing home-school relationship models eliminate the association between the socio-economic status of parents and student attainment. This association is a major component in the studies that associated between parents' encouragement and follow-up of their children education and socio-economic variables as can be found in the studies of Douglas (1967), Halesy (1975), Bourdieu (1973) and Bowles (1971).

Studies on Home-School Relationship

Educational research demonstrates that promoting parental interest and concern in their child's education is strongly desirable to the educationist. Once the parents establish this concern, the fruits are beneficial to the educational process.

In her study, *Home environment and the school*, Elizabeth Frazer (1959) attempts to identify the factors that contribute to a student's performance. Various factors are included in her study: parent's occupation, attitudes toward education, income, etc. Frazer found that parental attitudes towards education are one of the most important variables that contribute to a student's performance. Nevertheless, these home environment variables are correlated to student performance more than intelligence tests (IQ). The findings of Frazer are confirmed by Wiseman (1964). In his report, Wiseman et al attempt to determine the relationship between educational attainment and social variables. They carried out an extensive survey in 1951 and 1957 in Manchester. It included fourteen and fifteen year olds. Tests covered three areas: reading

comprehension, mechanical arithmetic and intelligence. The report also includes a survey that was conducted by Warburton in forty-eight schools in Salford. The latter tried to find out the relationship between intelligence and school environment. The outcome of the three surveys shows that scholastic achievement is associated with family and home. Moreover, the report shows that peer group, neighbours and progressive methods of education affect students' academic attainment. Wiseman ascertains that parental attitudes are:

More important, because of their primacy, than those of either children or teachers. If the parents believe in education, if they support the school in its efforts, if their aim is broadly similar to that of teachers, then the child already has an enormous advantage over other pupils who come from less conforming homes

(Wiseman: 1964,p.179)

Based on a survey of 3,000 children and their parents, Plowden's report affirms the necessity of continual contact between teachers and parent to promote and foster the child's academic performance. The report states that:

Teachers must be constantly aware that ideas, values and relationship within the school may conflict with those of the home.... There will have to be constant communication between parents and the schools if the aims of the schools are to be fully understood.

(DES, 1967, Vol.1, para. 136).

Plowden's conclusion is supported by his follow-up survey "*The Plowden children four years later*". The aim of the study is "to obtain some quantitative estimates of the extent to which home background and early schooling influence later achievement" (Peaker, 1971, p.1). A sample of three cohorts numbering 3092 boys and girls constituted the object of the survey. Each group was taken from different school stages. The first group of 1023 children was in the last year of the junior stage. The second group of 1061 was in the first year of the junior stage. The third group of 1053 was in the last year of the infant stage. The first survey was conducted in 1964. In 1968, the same groups were surveyed again after they had moved up. The first group was in the fourth year of secondary school, whereas the second group was in the first year and the third group was in the last year of primary school. The three

groups were tested in 1964 and 1968. The students scored better on the test in 1968. The improvements in their test score were attributed to certain parental circumstances namely literacy of home and the occupation of father. Green's study "*Parents and Teachers: Partners or Rivals*" illustrates the findings of Peaker's study. Based on case studies that covered the period from 1961 to 1963, he found that the improvement in home-school contact was a fundamental variable that inclined the students to enhance their academic attainment. Also, he found that contact with schools changed hostile parents to co-operative ones. Equally important, is that disruptive students' behaviour and negative characteristics had settled down as a result of the strengthening of the home-school relationship.

Plowden's report suggested a minimum programme for establishing closer links between home and school. Therefore, ten years later (in 1979), a survey was conducted to examine whether there was any progress of parental involvement in primary schools in England and Wales. The perceptions of head-teachers, parents and teachers were the main source for the data. The survey shows that satisfactory progress in the home-school relationship had been made:

- One third of schools had PTAs
- A quarter had "Friends of School" organisations.
- Parents evening were organised in 95 percent of primary schools with an attendance level of three-quarters of parents.
- More home visits were made by head-teachers or teachers.

(Cyster et al, 1979, p.147)

The survey found there to be a positive correlation between home-school contact and certain factors. These are divided into two categories: external and internal factors.

The external factors are:

1. Social class of parents.
2. Ethnic origins of pupils
3. Working mothers
4. Pupil turnover
5. Changes in the size of school roll
6. Connection with a church

(Cyster et al, 1979 p.58)

The internal factors are:

1. School architecture
2. Curriculum organisation
3. School size
4. Pupil-teacher ratio
5. Level of in-school behaviour problems
6. Staff turnover
7. Period of head incumbency

(Cyster et al, 1979, p. 66)

A plethora of evidence proves that the sharing of responsibilities between home and school is an essential and indispensable educational variable that should form part of a school's reform process. School improvements are not the responsibility of the government alone, rather, they are the duty of society in general.

The reason for this is that many students live in a deprived and impoverished social and economic setting, in which such structural constraints severely affect the academic performance of those students and they could fall victim as a result of that.

Research shows that involving parents in children's education can offset the impoverished setting. Hampton et al (1998) conducted a 4-year study that attempted to involve parents in their children's education in order to enhance the student's attainment. They called their project FAST (Families Are Students and Teachers). The study was carried out in East Cleveland public schools in Ohio State. Demographically 99% of the population of East Cleveland is dominated by Afro-Americans and 69% of the students' families are single parents. Socially, 49% of the students are members of families that live below the poverty line. Therefore:

Many students come from homes affected by urban problems such as drug abuse, neglect, alcoholism, and domestic violence. This severely economically depressed community has been described in school district self-studies as an exaggerated microcosm of urban American's worst problems. In this environment, the traditional definitions of family, parents, home, and school have been altered and the relationship among parents, the school, and children often do not induce educational or development achievement among students.

(Hampton et al, 1998, p.413)

Because of these social circumstances and their educational consequences, the FAST project was initiated. However, establishing and fostering home school relations is not an easy task. As a result, the FAST project set up a three-year program that aimed to eliminate all the obstacles that hamper students' attainment. The program included various components that were designed to ensure fruitful and rich home-school relationships. The components of the program were:

- Teachers and parents were given the opportunity to have continuous contact for the three years of the FAST project period;
- The establishment of monthly parent workshops. These aimed at helping parents to ease difficulties that could obstruct the child's education and to establish a calm and comfortable familial setting;
- To ensure that the child remains with the same teacher through the three years in order to deepen familiarity between teacher and student on one side and teacher and parent on the other, in order to "permit parents to collaborate with the teacher on methods of promoting achievement and interest in school.

(Hampton et al, 1998, p.415)

During the workshops, teachers made remarkable efforts to convince parents that the child's educational progress requires the parents to devote as much time as possible to them.

As a result "the progress of Project FAST students in reading, Language arts, and mathematics is significantly above that of the other students in the same school and of students in the district at large". (Hampton et al, 1998,, p.423)

Continuous efforts to improve the educational system would give high priority and important consideration to home-school contact. "*Excellence in schools*" is the title of the report that was presented to Parliament in England (1997). The report includes certain educational factors that are expected to perform significant roles in raising the standards of the English students and to prepare them for the challenges of the next century. A strong home-school relationship is among the factors that will lead to an efficient educational system and positive accomplishment. The report states that:

Parents are a child's first and enduring teachers, they play a crucial role in helping their children learn. Family learning is a powerful tool for reaching some of the most disadvantaged in our society. It has the potential to reinforce the role of the family and change attitudes to education, helping build strong local communities and widening participation in learning. We

want to encourage more effective involvement of family learning in early years and primary education.

(Department for Education and Employment: 1997, p. 53)

A year after the report, school-home contact studies confirmed the advantages that could be achieved when parents commence effective communication and good parental roles in their children's education. The community Education Development Centre (CEDC) carried out a study (The Successful Schools Project) that aimed to identify suitable methods of involving parents in adolescents' education. The study was conducted in England and Wales and included 10 secondary schools. Parental co-operation with schools resulted in:

- A rise in students' self-confidence and self-esteem
- Practical co-operation between parents and teachers
- Improvements in students' behaviour and attendance
- Recognition within schools of the importance of family involvement
- The inclusion of parents who may have been categorised as hard to reach
- Improved communication between school and home
- An increase in professional confidence among teachers in working with parents and families.

(Street, 1998, p.359)

The teacher's voice is crucial in any attempt to reform schools. In 1968, the report of "*Young school leavers*" was issued. The report's major goal was to show the views of students on the adequacy of their academic preparation, teachers' knowledge of what is relevant to pupils and parents' perceptions of schools' roles in their children's academic preparation. The report came after the government revealed plans to raise school leaving age to 16. Such goals should neither be random accomplishments nor arbitrary efforts. Therefore the justification for the enquiry was:

The raising of the age could mean little more than the extension of a struggle between pupils who feel that school has little to offer to them and teachers who feel that they meet little other than boredom and resistance. Schools are, by contrast, likely to be most successful with those pupils who are supported by their parents and whose interest, motivation and sense of relevance are captured by the work they do. To attempt to achieve this can better be undertaken if the schools have more information about the attitudes of those involved.

(Government Social Survey, 1968, pp.iii)

The survey looked at the extent to which parents communicated with teachers and also the extent to which parents participated in their children's socialisation. It found that the majority of teachers agreed that the parents of the 15 year olds lacked interest in their child's education. Moreover, teachers felt the need to have information on students' background that would facilitate their work. Among the reasons that prevented parents from visiting schools, according to teachers' answers, is that responsibility for the education of the child was overwhelmingly delegated to the school and this led to 52% of the parents of 15 year old leavers having no discussion with teachers concerning their children. As a result, the survey would put the home-school relation as an essential aspect of improvement.

These findings are consistent with those of the American home-school relation survey which reveals teachers' perspectives on parental contact with the school. The main findings of the survey are as follows:

- Teachers attribute students' academic difficulties to being left alone after school. This causes more stress than poverty and single parent families.
- Many parents agree with the criticism they receive from teachers, of being lax in monitoring their children's academic progress.
- 51% of American teachers believe that parents are unsuccessful in disciplining their children.
- Nearly the same percentage (53%) of teachers believe that parents fail to fulfil their roles to encourage their children and motivate them for learning.
- Parents and teachers share an identical perception that there is a need for parental involvement at home and school.
- Teachers report that it is not easy or that they are reluctant to contact the parents
- Single parents, or two parents working full time seem to be strong factors in reducing an effective and adequate home-school relationship.
- A weak home-school relationship is an important cause for teachers' job dissatisfaction.

(Metropolitan Life Survey, 1987, pp.13-21)

Lareau (1989) reached a similar conclusion. She found in a survey of 20 schools in Northern California, that ineffective relationships with parents influence teachers' job satisfaction. An unstable home setting, according to teachers, produced severe problems in students' educational progress and caused them stress. Therefore, they strongly support parental participation with their children at home as a priority and to support efforts that will promote student attainment.

Summary

It has become clear that teachers' professional problems, both in developed and developing countries can affect educational outcomes. A shortage in the supply of teachers in the U.S. is due to the decline in teachers' status and salary, which makes other professions more tempting to good university graduates. In South and South East Asia, huge numbers enrolling have led to a deterioration of the qualifications of teachers, which has in turn hampered the development of the educational systems. The poor qualifications of teachers in the South Pacific yield a low quality of students.

These experiences offer a vital lesson that negligence in the training of teachers, and decline in teacher status, can, in turn, affect the national labour force and the process of economic development. Therefore, South and South East Asian countries have worked hard to reform their education systems. Their starting point has been the enhancement of teacher training and status, in order to avoid fracturing the development process. Good lessons can be learned from these countries

This chapter also revealed that small class size proves to be of great benefit both to teachers and learners. Academic attainment of students tends to be increased and enhanced in small classes, as was shown in the Tennessee and Nevada projects. However, Hanushek and Salvin's continual criticism of the advantages of small classes seems to be naïve and irrational. The research on class size undoubtedly confirms and consolidates that teachers perform better in small classes and pupils become more confident and ambitious. Hanushek's main concern that makes him an opponent to the class size policy is the expensive cost of such a program. However this is unconvincing. Pupils' attainment and the superiority of the nation must have priority over other concerns and issues. It was the effectiveness of the education system that contributed to for the strong Japanese economy and the ability of the former Soviet Union to launch Sputnik into space. As was displayed in this section, teachers hold positive view of small class size. Their

teaching is more effective and most importantly, a favourable learning environment is created by small classes.

Home-school contact is not a matter that can be neglected when endeavouring to improve an educational system in general and student attainment in particular. The literature reveals that parental contact with the school can bring about improvements to a student's academic achievement and his personality. Once the family fails to fulfil its role in helping the child to cope with the school's requirements the child will encounter a number of difficulties at the school. Therefore educational policies that aspire to improve the student's academic performance must attempt to enhance home-school relationships as one of the best solutions to reducing a student's educational difficulties, social problems or alienation.

The chapter indicates that teachers are not involved in a conspiracy as the Marxists tried to portray¹, but their role is influenced by the economic and social conditions of the society. These conditions significantly mirror the positions of teachers and determine their success or their failure.

¹ Kevin Harris (1982) as a Marxist writer believes that schools perform a political function through different processes with one ultimate end: the preparation of the students for the market's needs. He defines politics as "a matter of power and dominance and subordination. Under capitalism, the major political struggle takes place between capitalists and workers and is a struggle for power, eventually state power" p75. Therefore, teachers, according to him, act in relations not to classroom activities, but to political dominance over pupils. He argues that while the teacher tries to control the classroom, he tends to enter into a political struggle for domination with the students. Clearly, Harris's argument is influenced by ideological factors rather than firm facts about school conditions.

Chapter Five

Research Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I shall present and discuss the procedures of the fieldwork, give an account of the chosen methodology and a description of the research instruments used in the collection of data, the area studied and the difficulties that I encountered during the fieldwork.

The Areas Studied

The research was carried out in the Muscat and Al-Batina regions, which are the largest provinces in Oman. The aim was to survey the opinions of teachers on the main difficulties they experience in Omani schools. Because this is the first study on the serious obstacles that hamper the effectiveness of and improvements to the educational system in Oman, it was necessary to choose large cities and a large sample of teachers in order to generalize the outcomes of the present study.

Because the research covered large areas of Oman, it took a great deal of time, effort and money. The researcher handed the questionnaires to the school principals who distributed them to the teachers. There were a number of reasons why the questionnaires were not given directly to the teachers: First, most of the teachers, particularly non-Omani teachers don't have mailboxes to send the questionnaire to. Second, if they do have mailboxes, it would be very difficult to get the mailbox numbers and the names of the teachers. Even though the schools' principals followed up the questionnaires, many teachers were reluctant to fill them in. Therefore, it is not surprising that I waited two weeks for each school to get back the questionnaires.

Muscat Governorate consists of four main towns: the old town of Muscat; Muttrah;; Bawshar; Seeb; and Quriyet, which was incorporated into the capital in 1990. Al-Batina region on the other hand consists of six main towns: Sohar,

Ar-Rustaq, Shinas, Liwa, Saham, Alkaburah, As-suwayq, Nakhal, Wadi Al-Maawil, Al-Awabi, Al-Musanaah, and Barka.

In the Muscat area the data was collected in Seeb and Bausher. This is because, as I have already mentioned, Muscat is one of the largest cities in Oman. The problem is that the other *Wilayats* are far from the town in which I live, many of them between a one and two hour drive. In order to generalise the outcome of this study, I selected Seeb and Bawshar as of the main towns of Muscat Governorate. Al-Batina region, seven *Wilayats* were chosen as study areas: Sohar, Ar-Rustaq, Saham, Al-Khaburah, As-Suwauq, Al-Musanaah and Barka. A host of criteria determined the selection of these areas. First they are well-known to the researcher, so it was easy for me to visit the schools and to collect the questionnaires. Second, these areas constitute the main ones in Al-Batina region. Third, in some of these *Wilayats*, some of my friends are school principals, and they were very cooperative in data collection.

The Research Instruments

In the fieldwork the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods for collecting the data. The questionnaire was given to teachers and the principals of the educational areas. On the other hand, the qualitative research consisted of a series of interviews with parents, schoolteachers and school principals. Several things have to be taken into consideration by a researcher when combining the two approaches. First, it helps to clarify the quantitative methods:

In particular it can help to clarify the formulation of the researcher problem and the most appropriate ways in which problems or aspects of problems may be theorised and studied.

(Brannen, 1992, p, 32)

As well as the qualitative method being an important methodological procedure, the social environment was a crucial factor in deciding to use it as it would have been impossible to shed light on the essence of the educational problems in Oman without using semi structured interviews with parents, school principals and teachers. This is because in Oman it is very difficult (if not prohibited) for the Omani people to discuss any aspects of social policy publicly. Both Omanis and expatriates believe that any criticism of the Ministry's policies

could affect their careers. Therefore, many teachers were reluctant to answer the question “What do you think of the future of education in Oman?” Some of the teachers talked to me frankly only after I promised them that their answers were for research purposes only. Some parents also said these words ‘I am not afraid of anything and I will tell you frankly the faults of education in Oman’ revealing exactly how difficult it was for the respondents to articulate freely their own opinions. But for me it was essential to listen and to tackle the real problems that hamper the progress of a developing nation and the opportunities of individuals who seek a brighter future. The semi-structured interviews were very successful.

Quantitative Research: the Questionnaire:

Wiersma (1986) defines the questionnaire as:

A list of questions or statements to which the individuals are asked to respond in writing; the response may range from a check mark to an extensive written statements.

(p.179)

Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) argue that there are three major survey research methods used to elicit information from respondents: the mail questionnaire, the personal interview, and the telephone survey.

Kemmes and Mc Taggart (1988) identify three types of questionnaire:

- Mailed questionnaires in which a prepared list of questions is mailed to the respondents for answering and return.
- Group-administered questionnaires, in which a group from the sample concerned is gathered in a particular place at a particular time to fill in the questionnaire which is distributed to all respondents.
- Personal contact questionnaires, where the researcher personally contacts the respondents and asks them to fill in the questionnaire in their own time.

The third method was the most suitable one for me and would be the most appropriate for the teachers. As I have already mentioned, the school principals and secretaries played an important role in distributing the questionnaires to the school teachers because bringing a group of teachers together to fill out the questionnaire 'is

often difficult and meeting members individually may be excessively costly and time consuming' (Van Daleen, 1979, p153). In fact, I had several concerns regarding the questionnaire:

- Teachers might not fill in the questionnaires;
- Teachers might not answer the questions honestly because the questions touch some critical and sensitive issues (also the Ministry of Education doesn't want to raise some issues, particularly the issue of salaries and annual increment) the former, being one of the major problems that I encountered during the fieldwork.

Wiersma (1986) identifies some potential disadvantages of questionnaires as follows:

- There is excessive no response.
- Items are poorly constructed or organized.
- Respondents are not truthful in their responses.
- Questions deal only with trivial information.
- Data from different questions is not difficult to manufacture.

(p.186)

As I indicated in the previous pages, some teachers, particularly at elementary level, were reluctant to complete the questionnaires. This is because teaching takes up most of the teachers' time, so they don't have sufficient time to fill in the questionnaires and if they do have one or two free hours in some teaching days, they would use this time either to correct pupils' work or to prepare lessons. Moreover, many teachers believe that the questionnaires as a survey tool would not help to solve or even address the problems they experience every day. Dealing with more than one hundred pupils every day is not an easy task. Also, during my fieldwork I heard from some teachers and employees who work in the Ministry of Education say that the Ministry is about to retire hundreds of schoolteachers. This is not because they have reached retirement age, but as a part of its policy to improve the education system in Oman. Omani teachers feel that this is a kind of oppression and this has contributed to a general feeling of dissatisfaction among them.

With respect to the Principals of the Educational Areas (PEA), I used mail survey. This has many advantages. It doesn't require trained interviewers and provides less scope for error caused by bias. It also permits wide

geographic contact at a minimal cost (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992, p. 216). I used mail survey because the PEA is widely dispersed throughout Oman and also because of the high cost of transportation. The PEAs were very helpful and co-operative and all the questionnaires (that I sent to them) were completed and returned to me.

The Questionnaire: the English Version

The teachers' questionnaire was framed so as to determine and measure the main difficulties that teachers experience in their daily life at schools. The questions were divided into nine sections and designed to provide basic information about: 1) the respondents; 2) their skills and other issues; 3) administrative issues; 4) job satisfaction; 5) teachers' priorities; 6) the effects of class size; 7) the strength of home-school relationship; 8) school building; 9) teachers' perceptions of how their conditions could be improved.

The format of the questions is close ended. Some require a yes or no answer and then ask the respondents to indicate the reasons for their answers or give them the chance to write about issues that might not be included in the questions but which the teachers feel to be important. Because teachers were asked to make judgments on sets of ordered categories, the rating scale was used in formatting the questionnaire.

The PEAs questionnaires on the other hand included two questions: 1) a list of the difficulties that are faced by teachers; 2) appropriate policies to overcome those problems. The format of the questionnaire is one multiple choice and one open ended question (see the Appendix A).

On the macro level Salvin (1984) provided some useful and practical guidelines for constructing a questionnaire:

- The questions should be clear and simple.
- The researcher should avoid questions that are too long.
- Ask only important questions that the respondents can answer.
- Follow a natural logic and order with the questions.
- In multiple-choice questions, the researcher should try to ensure that all possibilities are covered.

On the micro level Wiersma (1986) thinks that the researcher should consider several principles when constructing questionnaire items:

- Questionnaire items should not be at all offensive or embarrassing to the respondent.
- All items should fit the informational background of the respondent.
- The researcher should avoid as much as possible any items that raise suspicions or lead the respondent to a preferred answer.

All these considerations were taken into account to eliminate any possible ambiguity in the questions and to make the questions easy for the teachers to answer. The researcher made an extensive survey of researches similar to the subject of the present one. After determining which of these researches were closer to mine, I adapted their questionnaires. To make the questions more suitable to the Omani schools' environment I eliminated any needless questions and developed some of the original ones.

Also, before I started my Ph.D. course I interviewed many teachers and listened to their complaints. Also, my readings on the educational reforms in different countries of the world made me aware of and gave first hand understanding of the main problems of education in Oman. This experience was very helpful in deciding which of the items and questions should be included and which should be removed.

The Questionnaire: the Arabic version.

The questionnaire was translated by the researcher into Arabic using the Arabic version of Word for Windows 2000. After being reviewed by the researcher, the translation was then checked by two persons: Dr Ali Al-Tigani of the archaeology Department at Sultan Qaboos University and a professional translator who works at an English learning institute in Oman.

Gaining Access

After the questionnaire was translated, the next step before commencing the fieldwork was to obtain permission from the Ministry of Education. School principals and the PEA were very cooperative after reading the letter that was sent to them by the Ministry. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) wrote that:

Getting permission to conduct the study involves more than getting an official blessing. It involves laying the groundwork for the good rapport with those with whom you will be spending time, so they will accept you and what you are doing. Helping them to feel that they had a hand in allowing you in will help your research.

(pp81-82)

Despite the Ministry sending a letter to the schools in the Muscat and Al-Batina regions explaining the purpose of my research, I preferred to take the original copy of the letter with me. I intentionally did that because I suspected that some schools for some reason or other would not receive the fax that was sent out. This would mean that the principals would not cooperate with me, which would be a waste of time and effort particularly bearing in mind that some areas in Al-Batina Region involve a four-hour round trip by car from the area where I live. As I had expected, some of the schools' principals welcomed me when I got to school and were expecting me, others were unaware of the research and had not received the letter from the Ministry. I was then able to show them my letter giving me permission to carry out the research. Irrespective of what Bogdan and Biklen said about the advantages of obtaining permission to commence fieldwork, in my country school principals would not be prepared to allow me to conduct the fieldwork without an official approval from the Ministry of Education in case of repercussions from the Ministry. The issuing of permission for researchers by the Ministry is a general regulation and Ministry employees adhere strictly to these regulations.

Conducting interviews was exempt from this regulation. I conducted the interviews with teachers, school principals and parents and there was no need to obtain permission from the Ministry. Two of the teachers were my colloquies and In turn they introduced me to their friends and explained to them the purpose of the research and that I needed their honesty in answering the

question because the interviews needed their opinions on certain issues regarding the present condition of education in Oman. The same story was repeated with parents. Some of them were also my colloquies at the university (the place where I work as a lecturer) and they helped me a lot by introducing me to other parents. With regard to school principals I met them at the school during the fieldwork. The selected sample for the interviews articulated their opinions frankly and they were not hesitant in expressing their dissatisfaction or pointing out many of the schools' faults and disadvantages. This way of choosing the informants is known as snowball techniques, which consists of continuous stages. In the first stage a few persons having the requisite characteristic are identified and interviewed. Then, these persons are used as informants to identify others who qualify for inclusion in the sample. The second stage, involve interviewing these persons who in turn lead to more persons (who have the characteristics that are needed by the researcher) who can be interviewed in the third stage and so on (Bailey, 1987)

The Covering Letter

As I have already stated, the questionnaires were distributed to teachers by school principals or in a few cases by the school secretary. Therefore, it was not me who explained to the informants the purpose of the research. Also the school principals did not fully understand what the questionnaire was about. For this reason it was essential to enclose a covering letter. This is a useful mechanism for introducing individuals to a questionnaire and motivates them to respond (Wiersma, 1986). To overcome any anticipated resistance or prejudice the respondents may have against the survey, Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) believe that a covering letter should include the following:

- The name of the sponsoring organization or the persons conducting the study;
- An explanation of the purpose of the study.
- A promise to the respondents that the information they provide in the questionnaire will be treated with complete confidentiality.

All these considerations were taken into account when I wrote the covering letter. In it I indicated the purpose of the research, the country that I study in and the name of the University. Also, I stressed that the respondent's name must not be written on the questionnaire to ensure the confidentiality of the information provided.

With regard to the PEAs I did the same thing. The covering letter that I included with the questionnaire was not enough to convince them about the survey. I also enclosed a letter from the Ministry of Education together with their letter to the IPA explaining to them about the research and myself and asking for their cooperation to accomplish the survey.

Piloting the Questionnaire

It is recommended that a researcher pilot the questionnaire with a few members of the target population. The aim of pre-testing the questionnaire is to identify the clarity or the ambiguities of the instrument items. Gay (1987) believes that pre-testing the questionnaire:

Yields data concerning instrument deficiencies as well as suggestions for improvements. Having two or three available people complete the questionnaire first will result in the identification of the major problems. The subsequently revised instrument and the cover letter should then be sent to a small sample from your intended population or a highly similar population. Pre-test subjects should be encouraged to make comments and suggestions concerning directions, recording procedures and specific items.

(p.199)

In fact, the researcher started the fieldwork in elementary schools. Twenty-five questionnaires were distributed to teachers from the targeted population. When I arrived at the principal's office I met some teachers and explained to them the purpose of the study and the content of the instrument. I gave the questionnaire to the school principal, who welcomed me and indicated his willingness to provide any kind of help. He told me that the questionnaires would be ready in ten days due to the teachers' engagement in extensive teaching hours. Ten days later, when I returned to the school, the questionnaires were ready. I met some teachers who had completed the questionnaires and asked them about the instrument questions and items. They indicated their satisfaction, most importantly with the content of the

questionnaire, which they indicated presented the main problems of Omani education.

Piloting the questionnaire also enabled me to drop those questions which I found teachers were unable to answer. After this feedback from the teachers, I started to distribute the questionnaires to schools according to the methodology plan. During the fieldwork I heard good comments about the questionnaire from many teachers in many schools. Some of them also wrote positive remarks at the end of the questionnaire.

Follow-up Activity

One of the major difficulties that I found in the fieldwork was the follow-up for the teachers' and PEAs questionnaires. All the principals told me to wait two weeks to get the questionnaires back irrespective of the area studied. It was easy for me to contact the schools by telephone in the Muscat area to ask if the questionnaires were ready or not. However, it was extremely difficult to do so with Al-Batina region because the survey covered the main areas in this region which are all very far from the town where I live. Despite this I personally made several trips to the areas where I had distributed the questionnaires to take them back from the school principals.

Wiersma suggests two approaches to a follow-up: 1) to send a letter to individuals who have not responded or 2) to send a blanket follow-up to everyone. Wiersma prefers the former approach because he believes it to be less expensive. However, in my case neither approach is suitable because the Omani people are not acquainted with these ways. Moreover, the questionnaires were not sent directly to the teachers, so it would not be appropriate to send them a reminder. Therefore the most suitable approach was to use the telephone for follow-up despite this being expensive in terms of time and cost. The same approach was adopted with the PEA questionnaires because they work in widely-dispersed geographical areas except for the one in Muscat.

This brings us to the response rate. Although, I explained to the schools' principals the magnitude of the study for me as a researcher and for educational policy in Oman, I found low - and sometimes unsatisfactory - levels

of cooperation from some principals, particularly at elementary and preparatory levels, due to heavy teaching schedules. On the other hand I found most of the secondary schools involved to be very helpful. Therefore, from 990 questionnaires, the return was 585. I then excluded those that were not filled out adequately, so the pure number was 532 questionnaires. On the other side, there was 100% return rate for the PEAs questionnaires and 100% return rate for the interviews. In fact there is disagreement among methodology books regarding the standard return rate. While some think that 70% is an acceptable return rate, others believe that:

The question of what constitutes an acceptable response rate cannot easily be answered because there is no agreed standard for a minimum response rate.

(Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992, p.221)

They note that:

Surveys done under contract to the federal government are expected to yield a response rate higher than 75 percent. But whereas academic survey organization are usually able to achieve that level, the response rates for surveys conducted by more obscure organizations are considerably lower.

(Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992, p.221)

So, a low response rate is an expected methodological aspect. However, several factors should be taken into consideration in order to understand why some researches have a low rate:

- Does a researcher have sufficient time and resources?
- Does a researcher conduct the fieldwork alone or with assistants?
- Also, we have to ask about the social setting where the fieldwork is conducted, does the person or the organization being surveyed show willingness to assist the researcher or not?

As I saw in the fieldwork, technique plays substantive role in increasing the response rate, some of which I lacked owing to limited resources and time.

The Size of the Samples and Sampling Techniques.

The purpose of sampling is to “collect information from some people in the group in such a way that their responses and characteristics reflect those of the group from which they are drawn” (De Vaus 1994: p.60). For the purpose of this research the sampling technique was designed with the help of my

colleague, Sayyed Abu Ali, a statistician and a Ph.D. student in the Maths department at Durham University. After I explained to him the objectives of my study, we decided that stratified sampling would be the best and most convenient process to achieve the objectives of the present study with regard to teachers' views on the difficulties they find at work. The next step was to look at the educational statistics yearbook (1997-98) to determine the number of schools in the Muscat and Al-Batina regions. Then we decided to take 15% as a sample size of the schools in both regions. The number of schools in both regions is a very important factor in determining the number we would select. It was as follows:

Al-Batina Region (South) 51; Al- Batina Region (Central) 72 (total 123)

Muscat 63.

Total number of schools in both regions = 186

To get a proportion of 15% of the total number in both regions we did the following:

$186 \times 15 / 100 = 28$ schools in both regions

To find the number of the schools that would be surveyed in each region we did the following:

$123 / 186 \times 28 = 18$ schools in Al-Batina region.

$63 / 186 \times 28 = 10$ schools in Muscat region.

Then we divided the 28 schools in Al-Batina Region to the following

Elementary - 6 schools (2 in the South 4 in the north).

Intermediate - 6 schools (2 in the South 4 in the North).

Secondary -6 schools (2 in the South 4 in the North).

With regard to Muscat, the number of the schools that were taken as a sample was 10 schools: 4 elementary, 3 intermediate and 3 secondary.

In fact to get the number of the schools that would be chosen as a sample for the present research the following formula was used:

$$\frac{N_1}{N} S_1$$

Where:

N_1 = refers to the number of the schools in Al-Batina and Muscat Regions respectively.

N = is the sum of the schools in both regions,

S_1 = is the sum of the schools that would be surveyed in both regions.

After the strata were presented in the sample, the sample units were selected from each stratum at random. Also, all the teachers were given the questionnaires by the schools' principals randomly so that every one had the probability of selection. Here I want to draw attention to a very important matter related to the research methodology and objectives. The researcher found that the stratified sample of teachers was disproportionate due to the reasons indicated previously. However, this does not constitute any stratum bias because the main objectives were to identify the main problems from which teachers in Omani schools suffer, irrespective of the level at which they teach. For example, large classes are not a problem confined to elementary level, rather they are also a persistent problem in the intermediate and secondary levels and eventually affect the Omani pupil's performance. Moreover, the weak home-school relationship, which affects the academic progress of the Omani pupil, is another problem that the Ministry of Education and school principals are trying to solve (and exist at educational levels) in order to create a conducive learning environment either in the school or at home and to reduce behavioural troubles. So it is a mistake to think that these problems stop at the borders of a specific educational level or are the product of the schools themselves. Accordingly, the disproportionate sample strata are not a methodological bias because the aim of the present research is to identify those difficulties that are common to all educational levels in Oman. In other words, stratified sampling is not an end in itself, rather it is a means to explore the current educational conditions in Oman.

The PEA were a very limited number (10), therefore the whole population were selected to explore their views on the issues of the research. Because the number was very small, this enabled me to send questionnaires to all of them.

Qualitative Method

Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) define the interview as:

A face to face interpersonal role situation in which an interviewer asks respondents questions designed to elicit answers pertinent to the research hypotheses. The questions, their wording, and their sequence define the structure of the interview.

(p. 224)

One of the major reasons for using the semi-structured interview was to get some necessary information that it was impossible to obtain from the questionnaire. As I explained earlier, there are some issues which are not allowed to be discussed publicly in Oman. Teachers in Oman whether Omani or non-Omani are aware of these organizational aspects and most of them avoided pointing out or criticizing the weaknesses of the educational policies and practices. Because I was eager to discover those issues that currently affect and hamper the improvements of education in Oman, using the semi-structured interview was a methodological necessity to consolidate the quantitative method and allowed me to cover those aspects that were not included in questionnaire to get a wider and truer picture of the deep problems that jeopardize the quality of education. Highlighting these problems would constitute a concrete base for any prospective educational reform policy. The semi-structured interview would also enable me to listen directly in a friendly atmosphere to what teachers were unable to say on paper

School principals and parents were asked about different issues: the academic condition of the Omani pupils and how to improve it, parents' views on education in Oman. The main aim behind the interviews with parents and school principals was to listen to schools' problems from other perspectives, and in the end I found that they were talking not only about Omani pupils, but also about the difficulties faced by teachers in Oman. Plamer confirms that:

The conversation of human beings are an important part of the data of social research, as, as well as an important part of research technique.

(Plamer, quoted in Burgess, R. 1990, p.107)

Webb and Webb in their *Methods of social study* conclude that:

For the greater part of his information the investigator must find his own witness, induce them to talk, and embody the gist of this oral testimony on his sheets of notes. This is the method of the interview, or a conversation with a purpose, a unique instrument of the social investigator.

(Webb & Webb, quoted in Burgess, R. 1990, p.107)

Selection Techniques of Cases for Study.

Michael Patton describes the procedures that case study researchers use to select their cases as purposeful sampling (Quoted in Joyce P. Gall, 1999, p.294). The aim of purposeful sampling is to 'select individuals for case study who are likely to be "information-rich" with respect to the researcher purposes' (Quoted in Joyce P. Gall, 1999, p.294). Patton describes seven purposeful sampling strategies, which can be used to select the cases for the study. To indicate which of these strategies were more convenient to the present research, I will display these strategies.

Sampling strategies Cases selected

Strategies to select cases representing a key characteristic.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. | Extreme/deviant case | Cases that exhibit the characteristic to an extreme high or low extent. |
| 2. | Intensity | Cases that exhibit the characteristic to a high or low, but not extreme, extent. |
| 3. | Typical case | Cases that exhibit the characteristic to an average or typical extent. |
| 4. | Maximum variation | Multiple cases that exhibit the entire range of variation in the characteristic. |
| 5. | Stratified. | Multiple cases that exhibit the characteristic at predefined points of variation. |
| 6. | Homogenous | Multiple cases that represent the characteristic to a similar extent. |
| 7. | Purposeful random | Multiple cases selected at random from an accessible population. |

Source: Joyce P. Gall, M.D. Gall and Walter R. Borg. Applying Educational Research. 1999, p.295.

For the purpose of this study I used the purposeful random and homogenous strategies, which I found to be very practical, useful and saved time. For example, I tried to talk to parents with regard to their sons' education. Parents with low educational levels, or those who were not concerned about

their children's education found it very difficult to answer my questions and articulate their views. As a result I decided to change the strategy and to focus on parents who showed a real interest in their children's education. These will form the building blocks for my sampling strategy and was not an easy task. Generally speaking, the interviewees had common characteristics with regard to their children's education. Mason (1998) confirms that:

For each sampling decision therefore, you should ask whether this person, or these people, or this or these documents, or this or these instances or experience, can potentially tell you what you want to know. Finding a successful answer to the question of what you should sample contributes to the ultimate production of analytical validity by ensuring that you are looking in the right places when you about the process of data generation.

(p.90)

The number of units to be sampled in the qualitative research seems to have been largely ignored in the methodology texts. Should the number be small or large? Is the sample that a researcher is going to select is a representative of the wider population or not? These questions were hard to answer. However, Mason, gives an answer to these questions. She argues on sampling aspects that face some researchers who use qualitative instruments:

If you are using a theoretical or purposive sampling strategy, then whether or not the sample is big enough to be statistically representative of a total population is not your major concern. However, you will wish to include particular units or a range of units, from which you can generate data, which will help you to develop your theory, and that range may end up being quite large.

(Mason, 1998, pp.95-96)

She continues:

Qualitative samples are usually small for practical reasons to do with costs, especially in terms of time and money, of generating and analysing qualitative data, but in my view there is no inherent reason why a qualitative sample must be small.

(Mason, 1998, p. 96)

In this research, the sample consisted of 10 teachers, 10 parents and 5 school principals, which I think is convenient for the purpose of the research.

Data Analysis for the Semi-Structured Interviews

For analysing case study research, several approaches can be used which RantaTesch (1990) classified into three types: Interpretational, structural and reflective analysis.

Interpretational analysis involves a systematic set of procedures which code and classify qualitative data to ensure that the important constructs, themes, and patterns emerge.

With structural analysis, on the other hand, the patterns that are identified need not be inferred from the data. Instead, they are inherent features of the discourse, text, or events that the researcher is studying.

In reflective analysis, the researcher tries mainly to rely on his intuition and personal judgment to analyse the data that has been collected. This kind of approach does not need to use an explicit category system or a prescribed set of procedures. With reflective analysis "the researcher often weaves case study data into a story". (Joyce Gall et al, 1999, p.302)

After reviewing these approaches, and with the help of my supervisor, I found the reflective analysis to be most suitable for the analysis of the data which I collected in the fieldwork.

Data-Recording Procedures

Taking notes during or after the interview was the technique that I used to record the data. With parents, at the beginning I took the notes during the interview, then I observed that some parents became less fluent in articulating their ideas and were looking at the notes to see what I had recorded. I felt that this might make them less responsive for the forthcoming questions, less accurate and less truthful. Therefore, I decided to record the notes with some parents after the interview to guarantee that they would express their ideas and complain in a comfortable and secure setting. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argues about the feelings of some respondents that they:

Will not care if the interview is recorded. Others will ask what you intend to do with the tapes. They want assurance that private information they share with you will not be revealed to others at their expense. In addition, some people think that once their words are recorded on tape, the tapes could come haunt them (or get them in trouble if, for example, they revealed something illegal they did.

(p. 100)

With schoolteachers and principals I followed the same way that I used with parents. Generally speaking, taking the notes during or after the interview was contingent on the relationship that I had with the respondents. Where the respondents knew me and I had a close relationship with them, taking notes during the interview was the technique I employed to record the data and vice versa to avoid any embarrassment for the subject or for me. Wiersma (1986) ascertains this fact:

The interview should be structured to obtain the necessary information efficiently in a friendly but businesslike atmosphere. If possible, there should be some accuracy checks on the responses.

(p.181)

Biklen lays down some guidelines for the interviewer in the field:

- To avoid questions that can be answered by yes or no.
- To ask questions that urge descriptive answers.
- To avoid interrupting the interviewee. Interruption can change the direction of the conversation.
- To listen carefully to what the subject says.

Also, beside these considerations I tried to formulate questions that could lead me to listen and discover the core of the problems. Therefore, with the teachers I asked the following three questions:

- Teachers' difficulties.
- Their anticipations for the future of education in Oman.
- How to improve the educational system

With regard to parents and school principals I tried to avoid any technical questions that could prove difficult for them to answer. For instance, I didn't ask Omani parents how to develop maths or science curricula, or how to upgrade teachers' skills. These questions could not be answered by parents, therefore I avoided them. Instead, I asked the answerable questions in order to obtain vital information that would accurately portray the state of education in Omani schools.

Generalizability is one advantage of the quantitative methods; accordingly, many researchers are eager to employ the necessary techniques

that ensure that they can generalize the research outcomes. However, qualitative methods are first of all not concerned with generalizability, rather they are:

More interested in deriving universal statements of general social process than statements of commonality between similar settings such as classrooms. Here, the assumption that human behaviour is not random or idiosyncratic. Therefore, they concern themselves not with the question whether their findings are generalizable, but rather with the question of which other settings and subjects they are generalizable.

(Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 45)

Second, the findings are not impaired by lack of generalizability. In my case I found that the semi structured interview was a very effective and useful tool to highlight many aspects where social and economic climate deeply affect the work of teachers and schools. I can ascertain that the qualitative method was an indispensable tool with which to look at the various aspects of the problem. For example, I found that teachers complained about the lack of in-service training, which is considered an essential component of educational reform policies in all countries - as we saw in the literature review chapter - irrespective of its economic and social progress. This is also a major finding that concurs with the World Bank report on the shortcomings of education in Oman. The value of the semi structured interview in my research was due to the privacy that the teachers had during the interviews, their feelings that the responses would not be reviewed by anyone, their trust in the researcher, and the type of question which I formulated to be direct to the point.

Joyce Gall *et al* believe that researchers who conduct case studies differ in their views about whether case study methods and outcomes should be judged according to the validity, reliability and generalizability criteria, which are used to support and enhance the objectivity of the quantitative methods. Instead, they think that case studies are carried out according to interpretivist epistemology that refute the notion of the external validity that can be discovered through what is called objective methods. Despite the fact that some authors reject the measurements that are used in quantitative research, there are others who believe that the same concepts can be used in qualitative studies, but by replacing different meanings. I will use two definitions for the validity in the qualitative methods, then I will see the extent to which it can be

used to judge the validity of the semi structured interview which was the main tool in the fieldwork.

Mason, thinks that judgements of validity are in effect, “judgements about whether you are measuring or explaining what you claim to be measuring or explaining.” (Mason, 1998 p.146)

James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher (1997) consider the validity as: “the degree to which interpretations and concepts have *mutual meanings* between the participants and the researcher, the researcher and participants agree on the descriptions and or composition of the events, especially the meanings of these events.” p.404

Both of these measures support the validity of the qualitative tool for this research. The semi-structured interview was successful in revealing many aspects of the educational dilemmas in Oman, i.e. the concerns of Omani parents regarding the current condition of education and probable effects on the economic and social mobility of their sons.

Also, there was mutual agreement on the meanings of the events between the researcher and the participants. There was agreement that enhancing teaching skills by more in-service training and better salary policy is an effective approach to improving schools’ results. There was an agreement that the curriculum needs wide revisions and modifications in order to increase its efficiency and appropriateness for Omani students. The researcher believes that there is a mutual meaning with the participant not only as a researcher, but also as a father who has many concerns regarding his children’s education. Max Weber confirms this approach when the researcher put himself in the place of the participant. (Verstehen)

To what extent are the findings of the qualitative methods applicable? Applicability refers to the study’s findings, which can be applied to the individuals or situations in the practitioner’s settings (Joyce Gall et al). This depends mainly on the sampling strategy used by the researcher. The findings can be applicable if:

The researcher used a multiple-case design, they usually conduct a cross – case analysis to help readers determine whether there was generalizability of findings among the cases that they studied. The presence of cross-case generalizability is strong evidence that the findings are applicable to other situations and individuals that those studied by the researcher

(James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher, 1997, p.308)

The researcher, used various cases as sampling strategy for this research, so we can confirm that the outcomes are applicable to other settings and individuals.

Preparing the Data for Computer Analysis

The completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 9. The software package is popular and used extensively by researchers since it provides them with a wide range of processes that include tabulation, multivariate analysis and various statistical tools.

Once the data had been collected, I prepared it for coding in order to enter it into the computer for analysis. Because I lack experience in this field, coding the data was done with the help of my colleague Ahmed Al-Emadi, a PhD student at the school of Education in Durham University. We prepared the data for coding in three steps: codes or numbers were allocated to the answers to each question, computer columns were allocated to each question (and were addressed according to type); and finally the codes were checked for errors. My colleague suggested the unification of numerical codes, so that the lower the number, the more intense the response. For the purpose of analysing the researcher used frequency and percentage distributions. The researcher believes that descriptive statistics help to give sociological readings of the data that was collected in the fieldwork.

Issues Emerging from the Fieldwork

In conducting the fieldwork I encountered a number of difficulties, which must be understood in the context of Third World countries, in particular, subjects that touch on areas of government responsibilities and policies. These issues must be handled with delicacy.

In the foregoing argument I explained that teachers were very careful to avoid any criticism of Ministry of Education policies because this might be a black point on their C.V. In order to determine whether these are concerns only of the teachers, or whether they extend to senior officials in the Ministry I agreed with my supervisor to conduct an interview with the deputy of the

Ministry of Education to explore their views on teachers' issues and difficulties. I talked to her secretary to ask for an appointment then I waited a few days. The secretary asked for several things: the questionnaire, the type of study and the interview questions. After waiting several more days for an appointment with her, the secretary told me that the deputy had left for France to attend a Unesco conference and we would not be able to get an appointment to see her.

The secretary asking for the questionnaire, or saying that the deputy was busy with important meetings during the working day was, in my perception, an excuse created by her to avoid the interview. One possible reason for this could be that the interview questions touched on sensitive issues about which she didn't want to talk or she felt the answers for these questions to be in the hands of those who have power in the State. Therefore, it was better for her not to expose herself to any kind of prospective blame.

Also, obtaining official documents and information that I needed to support the argument of the data analysis chapter was another difficulty which I faced during the fieldwork. The Ministry of Education is very conservative with regards to documents. Restricting access to official documents is not confined to the Ministry of Education, but all the Ministries in the country follow the same policy. The main reason given for such restriction is that Oman is still a relatively new state and Ministry documents and statistics must not be for the use of anyone other than the Ministry or the state officials.

Another social barrier of which I am aware because I faced it in my MA course is meeting with Omani women. It was very difficult for me to survey female teachers because I know that meeting or talking to ladies is not an easy task for a host of reasons. The Omani social tradition does not allow men to talk to women freely. Also, ladies in Oman, particularly married ones, are busy most of the time with the affairs of the home. Therefore, they would not find enough time to complete the questionnaire. Al-Suaigi from United Arab Emirates (UAE) which is a neighbouring country to Oman, found the same situation during his fieldwork. In his words:

Another difficulty, which I faced, involved my meetings with women. In UAE it is not possible for a man to remain alone with an women, and consequently in my meetings with women there always had to be a third person present, who more often than not was a senior official. A possible disadvantage that

could result from this arrangement is that they may have responded differently in the presence of a third person than they would have done on their own.

(1999, p.116)

These social obstacles may be encountered by other researchers. It is important to understand that the Gulf States still have some tribal values, which make free contact between men and women very difficult.

Conclusion.

In this chapter we discussed the methodology and procedures used to obtain the research data. We showed the procedures used in designing the research study, types of sample and sampling techniques, types of study instruments that were used to collect data. Also, we indicated the ways that were used in analysing the qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, this research revealed that the social milieu and the set of society's values affect the conduct of the social research. This point must be taken into account because researchers usually find social issues, when conducting fieldwork in some Third World countries, that are completely absent from the methodology textbooks.

In this research I combined the qualitative and quantitative methods to study the problems of teachers in Omani schools. Bryman (2001) indicates that researchers combine both methods because such a strategy would seem to allow the various strengths to be capitalized upon and the weaknesses to be offset somewhat. I would agree with this. In this research combining these two methods enabled me to identify those complicated factors that contributed to the increase of educational backwardness in Oman and to get a clear picture of different aspects of the problems. Second, because of its tendency toward educational reform, the present research found that it is necessary to employ a variety of strategies, to cover as many as possible of those issues that hamper teachers' performance in Omani schools and the possible ways to eliminate them to help teachers to contribute toward the development of better society. By considering these issues in any prospective educational policy, it (the policy) could be built on a sound basis. The experiences of educational reforms indicate that reforming the educational system require a careful and

comprehensive study of the cultural, social and economic systems since they all influence the educational system

Therefore, whereas the quantitative tool was designed to identify the inner factors that constrain teachers' performance, the qualitative method was used to reveal the broad economic and social factors that burden teachers with severe difficulties and constraints.

This way of using a multi strategy is known as triangulation, which entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. (Bryman, 2001, p274)

Bryman cites a number of studies that have used the triangulation approach but each obtained inconsistent results. Unlike these studies, the outcomes of both methods in the present study were consistent to a large extent. For example, teachers and the principals of educational areas stressed the lack of home-school relationship as a problem that increases teachers' problems. Also, parents, teachers and the principals of educational areas revealed the need for in-service training programs as a major component in teachers' professional development. The consistency between the quantitative and qualitative data supported the reliability and the validity of the study tools. Thus we can say that the outcomes of the study are generalizable (which was my concern from the beginning and influenced my selection of study tools and areas of study) and constitute a good start for any prospective educational reform policy. One of the advantages of using the triangulation strategy is that it indicated that the problems facing teachers and the issues surrounding their dissatisfaction are rooted in and the product of the economic system and the course of social change.

Chapter Six

Data Analysis

Introduction

...Over the 1980s, a series of national reports described widespread concerns about inadequate levels of students learning in elementary and secondary education. The motivation for these reports can be summarized as follows: improvements in student knowledge and competencies must be achieved if today's youth are to qualify for good jobs, if firms are to compete in an increasingly international market place, and if the nation's economic and military security is to be preserved. The reports acknowledged the need to increase the resources devoted to education and to improve the quality of schooling in general, and of teachers in particular. Unfortunately, the calls for educational reform have emerged at a time when there is a growing imbalance between the demand for well-trained and motivated teachers and the resources-financial and human-available to increase the supply.

(Wagner, 1993: 75, new pressures in U.S elementary and secondary education)

Besides being a critical development in its own right, education is an important form of human capital that improves productivity, health, and nutrition and slows population growth and helps in improving economic performance as a major problem that faces most of the developing world.

The developing world, since their independence, has launched huge efforts and devoted a high proportion of their budget for developing and modernizing the educational system and for building new schools. The politicians identified education as: the engine for human development, economic growth and a prerequisite for industrialization and successful developmental programs.

However, the expansion of education seems to be a costly enterprise for developing countries which spend between 15 and 35 percent of their national budgets on education, and yet their educational systems are often inadequate. (Oliveria & Farrell, 1993).

Lookheed & Verspoor (1993) highlight some education problems in the developing world. They argue that developing countries guarantee that children of primary age, usually between the ages of 6 and 11 will be provided with education. But the poorest countries have not been able to meet this objective because of high birth rate and fiscal difficulties. The writers indicate that despite

a high proportion of students enrolling in the primary stage, few of them complete it. Moreover, in developing and less developed nations, very few skills are learned in schools. Therefore, "since these skills are taught almost entirely within the context of schools in developing countries, it is possible to conclude that schools in developing countries are ineffective" (p.1).

The ineffectiveness of developing nations' schools usually produces undesirable consequences, which became serious challenges for the economics of these countries and for their domestic stability. Lockheed and Verspoor identified these undesirable consequences as:

- Too few primary school completers.
- Undereducated primary school completers.
- An uneducated adult labour force.
- Few scientists and engineers.

Doubtless, the education problems in Oman and the schools outcome deficiencies are identical or very similar to those found in many developing nations (some of which are explained in the first chapter).

The quality of education services has been a major problem that has concerned educational policy makers since the inception of education services at the turn of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies. In 1974 the World Bank evaluated education in Oman. It described education as of poor quality and with little relevance to national needs. The World Bank's technical team recommended substantial improvements including the development of a whole new curriculum and teaching materials, a teacher training program so that unqualified and expatriate teachers could be replaced, and training programs to provide personnel that can participate in nation-building and fit in with the economy needs. (Allen and Rigsbee, 2000).

The Ministry of Education realized that the real challenge is to change these conditions of learning from those that inhibit achievement to those that accelerate and enhance Omani pupil achievement. As a result the of these persistent problems and in accordance with frequent recommendations by the World Bank, the Minister of education stated that:

The development of the education services comprehensively means that priority should be given to the process of upgrading the standard of these

services to the extent and shape that would lead to the fulfillment of the set aims and expected goals of education as an accruing investment. The targeted development aims at taking care of and developing the educational basics which direct the student to learn in order to know, work and live as an active individual for oneself and his community.

Thus:

The planning for developing education was characterised by far-sightedness, and care given to it was comprehensively considering all components of the educational process, starting from the teaching plan which the Ministry is trying to extend in order to allow more time for experimental teaching and learning. The school building was also cared for, so that it would be spacious enough to meet the requirements of effective education. The initial training of teaching staff, their follow-up, inspection and continuity of their in-service training to cope with the recent innovation and trends of the day were also catered for while planning. The various educational media like the students' textbooks, laboratories and educational materials that motivate the student's senses were all considered. The structural system and administrative staff were given a great deal of consideration so that the whole system would serve and provide the sustainable educational needed.

(Address by the Minister of Education to Majlis Al-Shura, 1997, pp 5-7)

I would argue that these plans are hopes rather than realities and theoretical rather than practical solutions to solve the problems of the quality of education services. Accordingly, the current educational policy has sought out potential improvements at the margins of the education system rather than its core.

One reason why these solutions are theoretical rather than practical is that they lack certain material and social inputs that are necessary to promote the Omani pupil's academic performance. First, there is the problem of underfunding, a financial problem common to most of the developing world. Hurst and Rust (1990) confirm that "efforts to improve the quality and efficiency of education around the world are often seriously undermined by the pay, status and self esteem, and the conditions of service of teachers". Second, introducing a real educational reform requires strong commitment and support from the society's leaders, parents and students and constructive coordination among government institutions. Without mass mobilization, educational reform policies will remain dormant and ineffective.

This part of the thesis will reveal, as much as possible the shortcomings of the Omani educational system. I shall also consider crucial factors related to

Omani teachers' working environment and the input necessary for educational improvements. This research will not only highlight the problems of education but will also indicate the disparities between the Minister of education's proposal for developing the education system and the actual situation in Omani schools. Finally I will indicate how the findings of the present research are similar to those of a recent World Bank report (2000) on the various challenges that face the education system in Oman.

This chapter and the subsequent one will look at the objectives of the study and provide the answers to a set of questions.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify teachers professional difficulties.
2. To establish the effect of large classes on teachers and pupils.
3. To reflect teachers' feelings regarding home-school relationships.
4. To obtain teachers' views on the adequacy of school buildings.
5. To look at the teachers' thoughts the future of education in Oman.
6. To explore the principals of educational area views on the most important difficulties that encounter teachers in Omani schools.
7. To examine parents' levels of satisfaction regarding the quality of education that is offered for their children.

Also, a set of questions will be answered to indicate the problems of education in Oman. These questions are:

1. To what extent are schools in Oman prepared for the increase in numbers of Omani pupils?
2. How can we explain the increased number of private schools in Oman? Does it reflect Omani parents' concerns about the quality of state schools or the state's encouragement of the private sector to reduce the pressure on the governmental services?
3. Do teachers in Oman receive the necessary training to enable them to meet the new social and economic challenges?
4. Are schools in Oman well enough prepared to equip Omani pupils with the necessary skills and knowledge for their future roles?

5. Do schools in Oman help to promote equality or do they reproduce inequality, thus perpetuating class differences?

The first part of this chapter focuses on three aspects of the data: skills and management issues and job satisfactions. In this section I have attempted not only to show the factors that affect teaching performance e.g. in-service training and workload, but also those that affect current and prospective teachers, i.e. teachers' salaries. The second section looks at the impact of large class size on teachers and pupils. It is important to clarify a major problem that may raise some confusion. Some of the opponents of class reduction policy, either in the developing world or the developed one, argue that small classes are not an essential factor for enhancing pupil performance. Unlike in the U.S., for example, where the data indicates that the average class size has fallen steadily in the last twenty years, from twenty-four to nineteen students at the elementary level and from twenty to fifteen students at the secondary level, class size in Omani schools is increasing dramatically. Here it is unlikely to find less than forty to fifty pupils in a class at elementary level and 35 to 45 pupils at secondary level, which creates disciplines and learning problems for the teacher and pupil alike. This is a major distinction that must be taken into account when trying to understand teachers' difficulties and the appropriate methods available to lessen them or the problems of Omani pupils' performance.

The next section considers the topic of home-school relations. In this section I examine teachers' views on certain aspects of parents relations with the schools or with their children. Lack of parental contact with the school, due to certain social factors, (which will be indicated later in this section) have produced difficulties for the pupil and the teacher.

Also, I look at teachers' views on the adequacy of school buildings and the availability of certain facilities. An adequate school building is an important condition for teaching and learning as I shall indicate later.

In the third part I highlight the answers given by principals of educational areas on the main difficulties that encounter teachers and their suggestions to improve their working conditions. Finally, there is an analysis of interviews with teachers, parents and school principals.

Presenting the findings- Part I

Basic information

Table 6.1
Years of teaching

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5	136	25.6	25.6	25.6
6-10	181	34.0	34.0	59.6
11-15	87	16.4	16.4	75.9
16-20	79	14.8	14.8	90.8
21-25	32	6.0	6.0	96.8
26-30	10	1.9	1.9	98.7
31-35	4	.8	.8	99.4
36 and more	3	.6	.6	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

34.0% of the teachers surveyed have 6-10 years experience in the teaching profession; this is followed by those with (1-5) years teaching experience. These two groups make up 59.6% of the sample. Competitiveness is the main criteria for the selection of non-Omani teachers as a general policy of the Ministry of Education. For those hoping to work in Oman as teachers, number of years of teaching experience is one of the most important criteria in a non-Omani teacher's C.V. The Ministry of Education believes that well-qualified teachers are a crucial factor in improving the school's outcomes. However, The Ministry of Education adopted the Omanisation process, where non-Omani teachers are replaced by Omani ones. The aim of this policy is to absorb graduates from colleges and universities in order to reduce dependency on expatriates and to minimize the unemployment rate among Omani youth. This became the main concern for the policy makers in Oman.

**Table 6.2
Age Distribution**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-29	192	36.1	36.1	36.1
30-39	189	35.5	35.5	71.6
40-49	137	25.8	25.8	97.4
50-59	12	2.3	2.3	99.6
60 and more	2	.4	.4	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

The majority of teachers (71.6%) as indicated by table 6.2 are under 40 years old. It became usual to find the youth joining the teaching profession. In countries where enrolments have expanded rapidly in recent years it is expected that teacher force will be younger than in countries where this is not the case

**Table 6.3
Marital Status**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Married	421	79.1	79.1	79.1
Divorced	3	.6	.6	79.7
Bachelor	90	16.9	16.9	96.6
Engaged	18	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.3 reflects a fundamental social phenomenon in the Arab world: Marriage. A high proportion of the sample (79.1%) is married. This should be understood in the religious context, where the youth are urged by the two basic sources of Islam (The Holy Koran and The Prophetic Instructions and Commands) to get married and to avoid any prohibited sexual activity

Table 6.4
Number of children

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
None	153	28.8	28.8	28.8
1-2	174	32.7	32.7	61.5
3-4	147	27.6	27.6	89.1
4-5	29	5.5	5.5	94.5
5 and more	29	5.5	5.5	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

We can see from table 6.4 that 32.7% of teachers have either 2 children or less. This is typical of the structure of the modern family in the Arab world. Arab people do not favour many children for specific reasons. Firstly, raising children can become costly, thus straining financial circumstances. Secondly, the spread of family planning programs, in order to control the rapid population growth in most of the Arab world. Thirdly, and most importantly, the Arab world is passing through an intensive urbanization process, which directly affects the birth rate, and thus influences, the structure of the family. This has led to the fact that nuclear family are now considered to be one of the main characteristics of most urbanized Arab cities.

Table 6.5
Education level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Intermediate	8	1.5	1.5	1.5
Secondary	9	1.7	1.7	3.2
Diploma	136	25.6	25.6	28.8
BA	357	67.1	67.1	95.9
MA	22	4.1	4.1	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

The Ministry of Education in Oman requires those who wish to work as teachers to have a Bachelors degree irrespective of nationality (Omani or non-

Omani) particularly, if they wish to teach at secondary or intermediate levels. This explains why a high proportion of the sample (67.1%) holds a Bachelors degree. However, we find that 25.6% of the sample holds a diploma degree (originally two years study in college after secondary level and later extended to four years). A small proportion of the sample (3.2%) hold qualifications of a lower level. These could be the people who entered the teaching profession towards the end of the Seventies and the beginning of the Eighties, when there was a pressing need for teachers to work in state schools, regardless of their qualifications.

Table 6.6
Number of Teachers Surveyed in
Al-Batina and Muscat Regions.

AL-BATINA and MUSCAT	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0				
Primary	109	20.5	20.5	20.5
Intermediate	224	42.1	42.1	62.6
Secondary	199	37.4	37.4	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.6 shows that 20.5% of the sample are primary school teachers, while 42.1% are intermediate and 37.4% are secondary school teachers.

Table 6.7
Monthly Income

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
200-250	20	3.8	3.8	3.8
250-300	92	17.3	17.3	21.1
300-350	78	14.7	14.7	35.7
350-400	69	13.0	13.0	48.7
400-450	77	14.5	14.5	63.2
450-500	81	15.2	15.2	78.4
500-550	107	20.1	20.1	98.5
550-600	1	.2	.2	98.7
More than 600	7	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.7 shows that 20.1% of teachers' salaries are between 500-550 OR. Without doubt, it is only the Omani teachers who receive this amount. 17.3% of the sample receive a monthly salary of between 250-300 OR. This is the standard salary paid to non-Omani teachers. Some of them receive a salary higher than 300 OR, however the figure rarely exceeds 400 OR. The salary structure for non-Omani teachers varies depending upon the country of origin and the conditions imposed by that country for its citizens working in Oman.

Table 6.8
Nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Omani	228	42.9	42.9	42.9
Non Omani	304	57.1	57.1	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Non-Omani teachers constitute a high proportion of the sample at 57.1%, while Omani teachers make up 42.9%. Oman, like all Gulf countries hires non-Omani teachers due to a shortage of Omani teachers. Graduates of higher education in Oman are still unable to satisfy the demand of the exponential

growth of the number of schools that are built annually. The result is that it is inevitable for the government to seek to employ teachers from other nationalities in order to bridge this gap.

Table 6.9
Number of Students in the School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
900 or less	149	28.0	28.0	28.0
901-1200	136	25.6	25.6	53.6
1201-1500	247	46.4	46.4	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Teachers were asked to provide the number of students in the school in which they teach. As we can see, 46.4% gave pupil numbers of between 1200–1500 pupils, while, 25.6% said that the school they teach in had 900 pupils and above. Finally, 28.0% of the sample stated that the number of pupils in their school was 900 or less.

Table 6.10
Number of pupils in Class

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
30-40	383	72.0	72.0	72.0
41-51	136	25.6	25.6	97.6
52 and more	13	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

According to table 6.10 a high proportion of the sample (72.0%) said that the number of pupils in their school's classes was between 30-40. However, 25.6% gave the number of students per class as between 41-45%.

Teachers are the most important resource in education programs. To ensure the best possible quality in the teacher work force, the policies implemented by government ministries must take into account the interplay of certain critical variables that influence teachers' careers. These variables include

preemployment training, recruitment, remuneration, and personnel development.

(Amnon Golan, director of the Economic Development Institute, Washington)

Skills, Working Time, and other Issues

In this section I will introduce certain issues that are closely associated with teachers' performance in school. Highlighting the advantages and disadvantages that teachers experience in their work, will allow us to determinate areas of strength and weakness.

In this section teachers were presented with 5 statements in relation to the following:

- Teaching skills: (each using an "agree/disagree" 5-point scale) Tables No 11-12.
- The sufficiency of working times: (using an "agree/disagree" 5-point scale) Table No13.
- Pressure and stress: (each using an "all of the time/never" 5-point scale) Tables No 14-15.

Table No 6.11
My job makes good use of my skills and abilities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	18	3.4	3.4	3.4
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	20	3.8	3.8	7.1
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	34	6.4	6.4	13.5
<i>Tend to agree</i>	166	31.2	31.2	44.7
<i>Agree</i>	294	55.3	55.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

We can observe from this table that a very high proportion (55.3%) agree that their job makes good use of their skills, while (31.2%) tend to agree. In general those who disagree or tend to disagree constitutes small proportion (7.2%)

Table 6.12
I feel it is important to improve my teaching skills

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	35	6.6	6.6	6.6
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	28	5.3	5.3	11.8
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	32	6.0	6.0	17.9
<i>Tend to agree</i>	142	26.7	26.7	44.5
<i>Agree</i>	295	55.5	55.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

While table 6.11 shows that teachers are satisfied with their performance, we can see in table 6.12 that most of them feel the need to improve their skills (82.2%). We would expect to find such a high proportion of agreement among teachers on a critical issue such as the need to improve teaching skills. The School of Education at Sultan Qaboos University held a workshop for its teaching graduates. The main purpose was to listen to the graduates' opinions on the pre-service training program they received; and to contribute to identifying shortcomings and ways of possible improvement, for their preparation in the School of Education. Such workshops were invaluable in designing better preparation programs for future candidates. The participants were from different disciplines, namely: Science, Maths, English and Arabic Language. All the participants agreed that their acquisition of teaching skills, they received through the preparation program at the School of Education, was only average. (Eisan, 1995, p. 234)

During the workshop inspectors were asked to evaluate the competency of the School of Education graduates. All of the inspectors (29 in total), scored the competency of the Omani teachers as below average. (Ibid, p.235)

However, non-Omani teachers experienced similar shortcomings in their academic preparation. Shawqi and Saeed (1995) cite the results of a survey on the training programs in various Schools of Education, in the Arab world. The results are:

- o The deficiency that is inherent in the preparation programs makes these programs incapable of providing teachers with self-learning skills. This drawback reduces the teacher's ability to update and augment the knowledge and skills previously acquired.

- Theoretical curricula are dominant in these preparation programs, while practice teaching is limited. This creates a weakness in teacher preparation, as a result of the preponderance of one aspect over another.

(p. 28)

Without doubt, improving these conditions depends on intensification of in-service training. However, in most developing nations:

The dilemma for in-service teacher education in these situations is that time and resources are often insufficient to prepare a large number of teachers. The solution has then been to provide a series of materials to be read as guides or instructive for teachers to follow.

(Tatto, 1997, p. 223)

With respect to Omani teachers, the need for retraining through in-service programs is not a new issue. In fact it was a central issue in the recommendations put forward to the Ministry of Education; in order to enhance the performance of the education system. The World Bank (1991) indicated with regard to teachers' training in Oman "from the first chapter of the present research":

- Little attention is given to the training or re-training of educators, an element which must figure prominently in attempts to improve efficiency and quality of educational system
- Educational wastage (repeaters, and dropouts) results whenever policies and practices negatively affect the availability and quality of teachers, curricula, methodology and educational facilities.

It is hard to predict how the Ministry of Education will be able to retrain a huge number of teachers since it is associated with a host of determinants. Tatto summarises some of these determinants:

Educating large numbers of teachers in innovative ways to support disadvantaged students, will depend on the priority this goal is assigned at economic and political levels and the degree to which the dominant culture in given societies supports the ideals of justice and equality for all. Purpose of education and the teachers' role will be shaped by these ideas and will in turn shape teaching and learning in classrooms. The result will be a radical transformation in modern schools.

(Tatto, 1997, p. 225)

Table 6.13**(I have sufficient time to do my job as it should be done)**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	51	9.6	9.6	9.6
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	53	10.0	10.0	19.5
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	43	8.1	8.1	27.6
<i>Tend to agree</i>	175	32.9	32.9	60.5
<i>Agree</i>	210	39.5	39.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.13 shows that 72.4% agree that they have sufficient time, while 19.6% disagree with the statement and 8.1% are neutral.

Table No 6.14**(I feel under uncomfortable pressure because of my workload)**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>All or almost all of the time</i>	88	16.5	16.5	16.5
<i>Most of the time</i>	169	31.8	31.8	48.3
<i>About half of the time</i>	121	22.7	22.7	71.1
<i>Less than half of the time</i>	80	15.0	15.0	86.1
<i>Rarely or never</i>	74	13.9	13.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Almost half of those teachers questioned (48.3%) say that they are under uncomfortable pressure because of the workload all or almost all of the time. Whereas, (22.7%) experience pressure about half of the time, and (15.0%) less than half of the time.

Table 6.15
(My job performance is decreased as a result of stress in my job)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>All or almost all of the time</i>	65	12.2	12.2	12.2
<i>Most of the Time</i>	90	16.9	16.9	29.1
<i>About half of the time</i>	68	12.8	12.8	41.9
<i>Less than half of the time</i>	76	14.3	14.3	56.2
<i>Rarely or never</i>	233	43.8	43.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

29.1% believe that their performance is adversely affected by stress. 12.8% agree that this happens about half of the time. On the other hand 43.8% consider that their performance is normal and don't experience any difficulty. In general teachers' performance suffers because of stress but this varies from teacher to teacher.

Summary

Teachers have indicated that they need to improve their teaching skills. This is the most significant aspect of their responses. This can be interpreted in the light of significant up-dated subject knowledge and teaching methods of pupil learning in particular and the efficiency of education in general. We also saw, in this section, that the majority of teachers feel that they are under uncomfortable pressure. Apparently, this is the result of teaching burden and other organizational factors.

Management Issues.

In this section teachers were given five statements to record their responses on a five-point scale "agree/ disagree". The statements focused on:

- Principal- teacher relationship: tables No 16, 17, 18.
- The adequacy of school in improving teachers' skills: table No19.
- Teachers' recognition of aims and objectives: table No.20

Table 6.16
My principal is fully aware of the amount of time I spend at work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	18	3.4	3.4	3.4
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	29	5.5	5.5	8.8
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	38	7.1	7.1	16.0
<i>Tend to agree</i>	151	28.4	28.4	44.4
<i>Agree</i>	296	55.6	55.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

84.0% agree that their school's principal is aware of the amount of time a teacher spends at work. Those who are undecided make up 7.1% and 8.9% disagree with the statement.

Table 6.17
My principal recognizes and acknowledges when I have done my job well

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	24	4.5	4.5	4.5
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	30	5.6	5.6	10.2
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	58	10.9	10.9	21.1
<i>Tend to agree</i>	136	25.6	25.6	46.6
<i>Agree</i>	284	53.4	53.4	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

79.0% agree that the principal is aware when a teacher performs his job well, while 10.9% neither agree nor disagree. 10.1% disagree with the statement.

Table 6.18
I usually believe what my principal tells me

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	32	6.0	6.0	6.0
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	29	5.5	5.5	11.5
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	80	15.0	15.0	26.5
<i>Tend to agree</i>	218	41.0	41.0	67.5
<i>Agree</i>	173	32.5	32.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Again we can see from this table 6.18 that 73.5% of the sample believe what their principal tells them. 15% neither agree nor disagree with the statement. Those who disagree were 11.5%.

Table 6.19
I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in this school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	52	9.8	9.8	9.8
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	42	7.9	7.9	17.7
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	73	13.7	13.7	31.4
<i>Tend to agree</i>	189	35.5	35.5	66.9
<i>Agree</i>	176	33.1	33.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.19 shows that 68.6% of the sample agree/ tend to agree that they are given opportunity to improve his skills in his school. The undecided teachers comprise 13.7%. Disagree teachers were 17.7%.

Table 6.20
The staff in my school have a clear sense of direction about aims and objectives

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Disagree</i>	36	6.8	6.8	6.8
<i>Tend to disagree</i>	37	7.0	7.0	13.7
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	94	17.7	17.7	31.4
<i>Tend to agree</i>	191	35.9	35.9	67.3
<i>Agree</i>	174	32.7	32.7	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.20 shows that 68.6% agree or tend to agree with the statement while 13.8% disagree or tend to disagree with it. The table also tells us that the undecided teachers number 17.7%.

Summary

In this section teachers revealed their satisfactions and the good relationship that they have with the school's principal. In fact the policy of the Ministry of Education focuses on selecting the most appropriate persons for the position of principal. Most school principals were former teachers and had a great deal of experience in the teaching profession before being promoted to school principal. Their previous experience had made them aware of teachers' difficulties, problems and their responsibilities. School principals' awareness of the work load placed on teachers makes them sympathetic toward teachers and better able to help them overcome their difficulties.

Job Satisfaction

The importance placed on teachers' job satisfaction arises from two important reasons. First, a satisfied teacher is more committed to teaching than a dissatisfied one which contributes to better teaching. Second, good working conditions are an important element in attracting talented people to the teaching profession. Third, it is unlikely that dissatisfied teachers will be particularly effective over a sustained period of time. Fourth, the research shows that bad

working conditions are responsible for high teacher turnover. Therefore, the present research includes a section on teachers' job satisfaction as an important element in drawing up an effective educational strategy.

In this section teachers were asked how satisfied they are by rating various aspects which they consider important in their professional lives. The 5-point "satisfied/ dissatisfied" scale was used.

Table No 6.21
Your working relationship with your colleagues

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	9	1.7	1.7	1.7
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	20	3.8	3.8	5.5
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	28	5.3	5.3	10.7
<i>Satisfied</i>	213	40.0	40.0	50.8
<i>Very Satisfied</i>	262	49.2	49.2	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.21 reflects the good relationships that dominate the working environment. 89.2% of those questioned are satisfied with their relationship with their colleagues, while those who are neutral make up 5.3%. The dissatisfied or the very dissatisfied constitute 5.5%, which is negligible. These results reflect the nature of the bureaucracy, in which people perform defined and prescribed activities that are functionally related to the general goals and objectives of the institution (the school) and in which sources of conflict between the staff are minimal. Merton gives a sociological explanation for this:

The bureaucrat's official life is planned for him in terms of a graded career, through the organizational devices of promotion by seniority, pensions and incremental salaries.

As a result they have a:

Sense of common destiny for all those who work together. They share the same interests, especially since there is relatively little competition in so far as promotion is in terms of seniority. In-group aggression is thus minimized and this arrangement is therefore conceived to be positively functional for the bureaucracy.

(Merton, 1957, p. 53)

Table 6.22
The ratio of teachers to pupils in your school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	65	12.2	12.2	12.2
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	165	31.0	31.0	43.2
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	107	20.1	20.1	63.3
<i>Satisfied</i>	156	29.3	29.3	92.7
<i>Very satisfied</i>	39	7.3	7.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

This table (6.22) indicates that those who are dissatisfied of the total population are 43.2% while those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied numbered 20.1%. The percentage of those who were satisfied or very satisfied is slightly lower (36.6%) compared to the dissatisfied group.

Table No 6.23
Monthly Salary

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	180	33.8	33.8	33.8
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	153	28.8	28.8	62.6
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	111	20.9	20.9	83.5
<i>Satisfied</i>	60	11.3	11.3	94.7
<i>Very satisfied</i>	28	5.3	5.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

According to table 6.23, 62.6% are very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with their monthly salary. However, those who preferred to be neutral make up 20.9%. Compared to the dissatisfied group, those who were satisfied comprise 16.6%. This shows major differences between the two groups.

Table No 6.24

The annual salary increment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	146	27.4	27.4	27.4
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	186	35.0	35.0	62.4
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	104	19.5	19.5	82.0
<i>Satisfied</i>	71	13.3	13.3	95.3
<i>Very satisfied</i>	25	4.7	4.7	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Teachers are dissatisfied with their monthly salary, as the table above reveals; likewise they are dissatisfied with the annual salary increment as table 6.24 shows (62.4%). Whereas 19.5% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 18.0% are satisfied with their annual salary increment. This problem can be understood, in the light of the erratic economic performance, which the economy of Oman suffers from, due to the instability of international oil markets. This instability has brought about a decrease in state income and, in turn, affected public expenditure. Without doubt, public services - as has been seen in Third World countries - are targeted in expenditure reduction (education has not escaped any financial reduction policy).

Oman has witnessed two economic shocks. The first was in 1986 and the second was in 1993. Both resulted in serious economic and social problems. In 1986, the Omani Riyal was devalued, in relation to foreign currencies, while, in 1993, Oman started implementing the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to deal with the persistent problems that had plagued the Omani economy. The purpose of these policies was to:

- o Reduce expenditure for social services;
- o Reduce subsidies for basic foodstuffs;
- o Reduce public sector deficits and thus reduce inefficiency and waste in the state apparatus;
- o Reduce public sector employee numbers as a direct result of the previous policy;
- o Restrain wages and public sector employment.

In an attempt to enhance its economic performance, Oman applied these principles rigidly, with the exception of the reduction of subsidies for basic foodstuffs. However the procedures that were taken by the government resulted in massive effects on per capita income. The average annual growth rate of GNP per capita declined from 9% in 1980 to (-3%), in 1993-97. (Unicef,1999, p. 116).

Dissatisfaction is not restricted to teachers in Omani schools, but extends to those who work in the public or private sector or the middle and lower classes in general. Oman's situation is similar to that of other developing countries.

A study covering 107 developing countries, of which forty-one were categorized as among the 'least developed countries', found the following disturbing trends since 1980:

- Gross Domestic product (GDP) per capita, has fallen 54% in the least developed countries and 64% in the other developing countries.
- Public expenditure, per capita, has fallen in 58% of the least developed countries and 67% of the other developing countries.
- Private consumption, per capita, has decreased in 81% of the least developed countries and 64 % of the other developing countries.
- Debt service (the amount of money paid in interest and other charges on loans) has increased to claim a greater share of export earnings in 87% of the least countries and in 84% of other developing countries.

(Brown, S. 1998, pp.13-14)

Brown, S describes the consequences of the economic stagnation and a complete adherence to IMF policies as follows:

- Reduced spending on public services causes a decline in the quality or quantity of services. Health, education, housing transport and water supplies suffer.
- Cutbacks in public sector employment often affect the urban middle classes as well as poorer groups. They have the most dramatic impact in countries where the public sector provides a large proportion of jobs in the formal sector particularly for those with post-primary education.

(Brown,S.1998 p, 21)

Table No 6.25
Curriculum innovation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	113	21.2	21.2	21.2
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	149	28.0	28.0	49.2
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	120	22.6	22.6	71.8
<i>Satisfied</i>	110	20.7	20.7	92.5
<i>Very satisfied</i>	40	7.5	7.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.25 indicates that 49.2% are dissatisfied with curriculum innovation. Those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied total 22.6%. On the other hand, 28.8% express their satisfaction with curriculum innovation.

Table 6.26
Opportunities for in-service training

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	142	26.7	26.7	26.7
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	170	32.0	32.0	58.6
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	133	25.0	25.0	83.6
<i>Satisfied</i>	67	12.6	12.6	96.2
<i>Very satisfied</i>	20	3.8	3.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.26 demonstrates that 58.7% are very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with opportunities of in-service training. While, 25.0% did give their opinion but were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 16.2% showed their satisfaction with in-service training opportunities. We can see from this table that there is a clear distinction between those who showed their satisfaction and those who were dissatisfied.

Without referring to the great importance of in-service training to the efficiency of the educational system, there are several factors that may limit in-service opportunities.

In her article '*Limits and constraints to effective teacher education*' Tatto, mentions various factors that affect teacher education. Most important among them are:

- Economic priorities and constraints.
- Values and priorities of the dominant culture.
- Purpose of education.

(Tatto, 1997, pp. 221-222)

One central issue that was absent from Tatto's argument (particularly with regard to the developing world) and relevant, not only to economic progress, social development, and political stability; but also, to educational effectiveness and planning, was rapid population growth.

With regard to Oman, the Ministry of Education has a strong inclination to improve teachers' performance, through in-service training. However, in-service training programs are costly. At the same time, the budget of the Ministry is divided between staff salaries (teachers and administrators) and constructing new schools or enhancing the existing ones to absorb the exploding enrolment rate. Therefore, very little of the budget is left to spend on equipment or other educational needs.

Bearing in mind the instability of oil prices, and the impact of the IMF adjustment program, as I pointed out earlier, the Ministry of Education's budget experienced slow growth during the Eighties and Nineties. According to the World Development indicator - issued by the World Bank - public expenditure on education increased from 2.1% of GNP in 1980 to 4.5% in 1997. (World Development Indicator, 2000, p. 71)

The growth that occurred during the Eighties and Nineties (and still persists today) went, for the most part, to teachers' salaries and those who work in the Ministry. The remainder of the budget is concerned with building new schools or enhancing the existing ones. This channelling of funds was to meet the massive social demand for education. This is the essence of educational growth in Oman. This brings about the question of what is left for staff development?

To illustrate this picture, an analysis of the budget of the Ministry of Education confirms our view. The budgets of 1991, 1992 and 1993 show that

the recurrent expenditures in these years constituted 89%, 86% and 82% respectively. The remainders of the budgets were utilized for construction purposes. The latest Unesco report confirms these findings. In Oman, the report states that teachers' emoluments¹ constituted 84.8% of the educational budget (Unesco report, 1998, p. 162)

Oman is no exception. Any country that depends on one resource as the main income, or subjects its policies to foreign institutions usually tends to produce unstable domestic policies that affect peoples' lives and weaken the society's institutions.

Reimers (1991) examined the impact of economic stabilization and adjustment on education in Latin America. He found, that the adjustment program caused the educational expenditure growth to slow down. In addition to this, the adjustment programs left few opportunities to improve the quality of education. In Costa Rica and Venezuela, the effect of adjustment gave a high proportion of the education budget to teachers' salaries - 98.4% in Costa Rica and 99.3% in Venezuela.

The reduction of the education budget made the author draw bleak conclusions. He says:

My results indicate that adjustment led to declines in education in terms of financial allocations with the consequent declines in the performance of the system: rates of growth of the number of teachers and schools. There are signs of declines in quality...in this context the best one can predict for the future is a continuation of the decline, especially as deterioration generates a negative momentum.

(Reimers, 1991, p 351)

If the government in Oman wants success for its Omanisation² process, it should allocate more financial resources to education, "inadequate human resources, is the result of poor education" (Lockheed *et al*, 1991, p. 16)

Where it is difficult to compare the quality of education of the developed world with the developing world, because of the strong economy of the former, as well as their generous expenditure on education, one can draw lessons from

¹ Teachers' emoluments are the percentages of total current expenditure. Expenditure on emoluments of teaching administrative staff and other personnel expressed as percentage of total public current expenditure on education. (Unesco report 1998)

² Omanisation refers to a process where Omanis replace expatriates. Efforts to reduce numbers of the expatriates, are attributed to political, economical and security purposes. However, the entire Gulf States implement a rigid nationalization of labour force policy.

other developing countries, showing how teacher training is a fundamental component in their educational policies, to ensure qualified school outcomes.

The World Bank, in a report (1993) on education in the Caribbean Regions, found that the lack of certain educational input hindered the desired educational outcomes:

- Lack of necessary cognitive and psychomotor skills in first year pupils.
- Problems associated with both overcrowded schools and small schools.
- The poor physical condition of many classrooms.
- Untrained teachers and inadequately trained teachers in mathematics, language and science.
- Low teacher morale and high attrition rates.
- Reductions in real levels of per pupil expenditure over the 1980s resulting in adequate school finances for supplies, materials, utilities and maintenance.

(p.76)

Bangladesh's low spending on education (2% of the GNP, compared to other low income countries, which spend 3.2% of the GNP on education), resulted in low literacy rate. In Bangladesh, the World Bank report indicates that among those who enter primary school, only 40% finish it, while 7% complete secondary level (Khandker, 1996, p, 27).

To counter these trends, the World Bank suggested certain reform interventions in order to improve children' academic achievement:

- Better trained and educated teachers, which would affect significantly students' attainment by reducing their failure and dropout rate.
- Recruiting more female teachers.
- Improving toilet facilities in schools.
- Educating mothers to level up children participation in school.

(1991, p, 28)

Another example comes this time from India. The country, which has a huge population, made extensive efforts to offer universal primary education for its people with a balanced equation: quantity and quality. But these aspirations point to three challenges; expanding access, raising learning achievement, and reducing gaps in education outcomes across states and among groups. What actions and policies will be taken to cope with the anticipated challenges? India's solution can be summarized by four points

- Increasing the finance for primary education.
- Improving the preparation, motivation, and deployment of teachers.
- Improving the quality of textbooks and efficiency of their production.

Lockheed et al (1991) justify World Bank assertion on In-service Programs:

In-service teacher education, particularly on-going programs that monitor and evaluate teachers regularly, shows much promise for improving teaching in developing countries and has received support from the international donor community. Between fiscal years 1963 and 1984, 22 percent of World Bank-assisted education projects involved in-service training for primary school teachers.

(p. 69)

Priorities

Which school activities take up much of the teacher's time and which receive less attention? Respondents were given a list of items, with a 3-point scale in response to each item

Table 6.27
Lesson preparation and planning

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	129	24.2	24.2	24.2
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	351	66.0	66.0	90.2
<i>Too little time</i>	52	9.8	9.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.28
Marking

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	167	31.4	31.4	31.4
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	298	56.0	56.0	87.4
<i>Too little time</i>	67	12.6	12.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.29
Recording pupil attainment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	149	28.0	28.0	28.0
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	229	43.0	43.0	71.1
<i>Too little time</i>	154	28.9	28.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table No 6.30
Dealing with parents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	49	9.2	9.2	9.2
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	198	37.2	37.2	46.4
<i>Too little time</i>	285	53.6	53.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table No 6.31
Administration works

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	209	39.3	39.3	39.3
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	186	35.0	35.0	74.2
<i>Too little time</i>	137	25.8	25.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

**Table No 6.32
School policies and planning**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	55	10.3	10.3	10.3
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	267	50.2	50.2	60.5
<i>Too little time</i>	210	39.5	39.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

**Table No 6.33
Meetings**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	37	7.0	7.0	7.0
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	208	39.1	39.1	46.1
<i>Too little time</i>	287	53.9	53.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

**Table No 6.34
Teaching**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Too much time</i>	330	62.0	62.0	62.0
<i>About the right amount of time</i>	187	35.2	35.2	97.2
<i>Too little time</i>	15	2.8	2.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

The aim of this section was to find which activities take up too much of the teachers' time and which get about the right amount or too little time. The tables reveal that the activities teachers perceive as taking up too much time are:

- Teaching (62%).
- Administrative work (39.3%).

Other activities either take little time or about the right amount of time.

Summary

In the previous pages we have looked at the problems facing education in Oman. The Ministry of Education has the desire to improve teachers' status, promote subject knowledge and teaching methods. Yet the social and financial pressures constitute a barrier to any further qualitative improvements. International reports have found that a lack of certain educational inputs affects the quality of human capital. Oman has to look at these issues carefully to develop the performance of Omani schools.

Presenting the Findings- Part II

Class Size

Class size has been an important issue in many educational policies aimed at enhancing pupils' performance. In this section I will analysis the effect of large class size on teachers and pupils.

Table 6.35
The number of pupils in classes has increased over the last few years. Has this been the case with the class in which you teach?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	428	80.5	80.5	80.5
<i>No</i>	104	19.5	19.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.35 shows that the majority of teachers agree that there has been an increase in pupils number (80.5%). While the majority agree with the statement, only a small proportion (19.5%) said that there has been no increase in students' numbers.

However, I asked those who agree with the statement to refer to the factors -as they perceive them - that led to an increase in pupils' number.

Teachers distinguished heterogeneous reasons, which can be classified into three categories: demographic, resources and organizational factors.

First: The resources factor:

- Shortage of building new secondary schools to absorb the increased number of students. This has led to more students being admitted to the school in which I teach.
- Failure to provide vocational secondary schools.
- Shortage of building new intermediate schools to absorb the fast-growing students numbers.
- Shortage in recruiting new teachers.
- Insufficient classrooms.

Second: organizational factor:

- Increase in number of repeaters
- Poor educational planning.
- Ignorance among pupils of the importance of education for their future, which resulted in more failure.

Third: demographic factor

- Rapid population growth.
- Economic stagnation, which make it very difficult for the state in Oman to provide schools with sufficient numbers of teachers.
- Parents' desire to educate their boys to enhance the family's economic and social status
- Lack of application of family planning among parents³.
- Migration from rural areas to urban ones particularly to Muscat for economic motives.

These various factors explain and reflect the characteristics of Omani society as typical of developing societies in Third World countries. With respect

³ The aim of this program is to help in reducing fertility rate among Omani families by providing parents with contraceptive. These programs are widely spread in most of the developing countries as inspired by (IMF).

to the resource factor, we can see that Coombs prediction (which I cited in the literature chapter) is clearly accurate.

Having discussed the growth of GNP and its positive influence on education, Coombs (1982) argues that:

This trend was very helpful to educational expansion at the time but it obviously couldn't continue indefinitely without crippling all other important public services. The day of reckoning finally arrived for most countries during the 1970s when education's percentage share of the pie was forced to stop growing and in some cases actually declined. In the minority of countries where this has not yet happened, it is virtually certain to happen in the 1980s. In short, the halcyon days of generous and relatively easily obtained annual increment to education budget are over. Henceforth, the annual "Battle of the budget" will be much rougher, with stiffening competition from other sectors (not least of all in many countries, the military). What happens to educational budget increment from here on in various countries will depend heavily on two things: how fast their economy grows, and what national priority is given to education.

(pp.148-149)

When we look at the demographic factor, teachers cited many reasons for the increase in class sizes. However, rapid population growth is the most dynamic and influential one. Socio-economic development in Oman accelerated the increase in population number, giving it one of the highest population growth rates. According to the World Bank indicators (2000), Oman averages annual population growth rate is 4.1% (p, 39), which is considered one of the highest in the world.

The age composition in Oman reveals that the average annual growth of those who are aged 14 and less is 4% (World Bank Indicators, p. 43). Therefore, it will be a key factor in drawing the social policy and future needs. The report states that:

The population growth rate is a key demographic characteristics of a country, but the composition of the population by age can have more important consequences. The age structure determines not only the allocation of resources to education, health and social security, but also birth and death rate.

(World Bank indicators, 2000, pp. 33-34)

Oman is not the exception. Its demographic characteristics match many developing countries. Unesco (1995) report states that:

According to recent projections the world's primary age population will increase from 652 million in 1990 to 760 million in the year 2000. Rapid population growth in some developing regions accounts primarily for this expected additional 100 million people. The number of school children in this age group is projected to rise from 129 million in 1990 to 144 million in 2000 unless major efforts are made to increase schooling capacity. (P.2)

Table 6.36

Do you believe that class size has an effect on the quality of teaching and learning?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	521	97.9	97.9	97.9
No	11	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.36 shows that 97.9% agree that class size has an affect on the quality of teaching and learning, while 2.1 % said that class size doesn't affect teaching and learning.

Teachers' perceptions of increasing class size effects on pupils

In common with the questionnaire structure, teachers were asked to rate whether increasing class size would have a beneficial or adverse affect on pupils' characteristics and behaviour. Teachers' answers give clear indications on the effect of class size:

Table 6.37
Emotional well-being

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Adverse	259	48.7	48.7	48.7
No effect	81	15.2	15.2	63.9
Beneficial	86	16.2	16.2	80.1
Not sure	106	19.9	19.9	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

48.7% said that increase in class size had an adverse effect on pupils' emotional well-being, whereas 15.2% said that it had no effect. 16.2% agreed that increase in class size can be beneficial and those who were not sure made up 19.9 %.

**Table 6.38
Motivation**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Adverse</i>	342	64.3	64.3	64.3
<i>No effect</i>	85	16.0	16.0	80.3
<i>Beneficial</i>	72	13.5	13.5	93.8
<i>Not sure</i>	33	6.2	6.2	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.38 shows that 64.3% of the sample believe that increase in class size has an adverse affect on pupils' motivation While 16.0% think that class size has no effect, 13.5% said there is a beneficial aspect to larger sizes. Finally, 6.2% were not sure.

**Table 6.39
Standard of work**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Adverse</i>	363	68.2	68.2	68.2
<i>No effect</i>	80	15.0	15.0	83.3
<i>Beneficial</i>	49	9.2	9.2	92.5
<i>Not sure</i>	40	7.5	7.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.39 indicates that the majority of the sample agrees that an increase in class size produce an adverse consequences on pupils' standard of work, while 15.0% see no effect due to increase in class size.

Table 6.40
Relationship with teacher

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Adverse</i>	308	57.9	57.9	57.9
<i>No effect</i>	110	20.7	20.7	78.6
<i>Beneficial</i>	71	13.3	13.3	91.9
<i>Not sure</i>	43	8.1	8.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

57% of teachers think the teacher-pupil relationship is affected by increase in class size, while 20.7% disagree with the statement.

Table 6.41
Relationship with pupils

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Adverse</i>	273	51.3	51.3	51.3
<i>No effect</i>	116	21.8	21.8	73.1
<i>Beneficial</i>	83	15.6	15.6	88.7
<i>Not sure</i>	60	11.3	11.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.41 also reveals that the majority of teachers believe that increase in class size leads to an adverse result in their relationship with pupils (51.3%). 21.8% said that there is no effect and 15.8% claim that there is a beneficial side.

Table 6.42
Amount of individual teacher attention

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Adverse</i>	376	70.7	70.7	70.7
<i>No effect</i>	91	17.1	17.1	87.8
<i>Beneficial</i>	41	7.7	7.7	95.5
<i>Not sure</i>	24	4.5	4.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

The amount of individual teacher attention is a critical factor in successful learning. Therefore a large percentage of respondents indicate that the current increase in class size generates adverse outcomes on time teachers' can give to pupils (70.7%).

Table 6.43
Assessment of work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Adverse</i>	373	70.1	70.1	70.1
<i>No effect</i>	90	16.9	16.9	87.0
<i>Beneficial</i>	47	8.8	8.8	95.9
<i>Not sure</i>	22	4.1	4.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

70.7% of teachers believe that class size affects the assessment of pupils' work.

The effects of increasing class size on teachers' performance

As there are effects of class size on pupils, increase in class size also influences teachers. Teachers were asked to rate a set of classroom practices on the extent to which they think they would be affected by increase in current class size.

Table 6.44
Classroom practice (preparation)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	57	10.7	10.7	10.7
<i>Some effect</i>	80	15.0	15.0	25.8
<i>Little effect</i>	265	49.8	49.8	75.6
<i>Not sure</i>	130	24.4	24.4	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.45
Time for assessment of student's work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	299	56.2	56.2	56.2
<i>Some effect</i>	167	31.4	31.4	87.6
<i>Little effect</i>	54	10.2	10.2	97.7
<i>Not sure</i>	12	2.3	2.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.46
Time with individual pupils

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	357	67.1	67.1	67.1
<i>Some effect</i>	129	24.2	24.2	91.4
<i>Little effect</i>	37	7.0	7.0	98.3
<i>Not sure</i>	9	1.7	1.7	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.47
Classroom control and Discipline

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	194	36.5	36.5	36.5
<i>Some effect</i>	171	32.1	32.1	68.6
<i>Little effect</i>	144	27.1	27.1	95.7
<i>Not sure</i>	23	4.3	4.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.48
Pupils' social and emotional needs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	174	32.7	32.7	32.7
<i>Some effect</i>	236	44.4	44.4	77.1
<i>Little effect</i>	91	17.1	17.1	94.2
<i>Not sure</i>	31	5.8	5.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.49
Teacher's workload

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	312	58.6	58.6	58.6
<i>Some effect</i>	156	29.3	29.3	88.0
<i>Little effect</i>	52	9.8	9.8	97.7
<i>Not sure</i>	12	2.3	2.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.50
Teacher's emotional state

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Large effect</i>	238	44.7	44.7	44.7
<i>Some effect</i>	191	35.9	35.9	80.6
<i>Little effect</i>	80	15.0	15.0	95.7
<i>Not sure</i>	23	4.3	4.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

The above tables reveal that the classroom practices most affected by increased class size are:

- Time for individual pupils (67.1%)
- Time for assessment of students work (56.2%)
- Teachers' workload (58.6%)
- Teachers' emotional state (44.7%)

If the class were significantly smaller would you change any of your classroom practices?

Table 6.51
Smaller class size

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	487	91.5	91.5	91.5
<i>No</i>	45	8.5	8.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Teachers were asked whether they would change their classroom practice, if the class they taught in were smaller. A high proportion (91.5%) agreed that they would change their classroom practices if the classes were smaller. The following answers give us some indication as to how they would do so:

- A classroom of 25 pupils would enable the teacher to assess pupils' grasp of the curriculum.
- The teacher would be able to follow up pupils' problems.
- It would be much easier for the teacher to control the classroom and reduce disruptive behavior.
- Small class size would contribute to enhancing pupils' academic performance.
- The teacher would give more individual attention to pupils.
- The teacher would be more comfortable.
- The teacher would have more time to monitor pupils learning and evaluate their learning progress.
- The teacher would be able to reteach the content when pupils don't understand it.
- The teacher would be able to give more times to marking pupils' homework.
- Pupils would have more chance to ask questions and participate in class activities.
- A good relationship would be developed between teacher and pupil.

- The teacher would be better able to discuss any academic problems with the pupil.

These are the most repeated answers in the questionnaires. They give clear indication that the foregoing teaching practices are absent from daily classroom life in Omani schools.

Class size and Omani pupils' learning

Teachers were asked whether they thought class size to be an important factor in enhancing Omani pupil learning. To answer this question, teachers were given four options to choose from, to indicate whether or not they believe this issue to be important to pupils' learning.

Statement	Number of respondents who agree (%)
Class size is the most important issue for enhancing Omani pupils' learning.	19.9%
Class size is one of the most important issues for enhancing Omani pupils' learning.	60.4%
Class size is an important issue, but not the most important for enhancing Omani pupils' learning.	18.0%
Class size is not an important issue for enhancing Omani pupils' learning.	1.7%

As we can see, 83% said that class size is either the most important or one of the most important issues for enhancing Omani pupils learning

Class size as an important issue for teachers in Omani schools.

There are many difficulties that teachers encounter in the Omani school system, e.g. disruptive behaviour, workload etc. In order to determine to what extent class size issue is important to them teachers were given four options from which to select one.

Statement	Number of respondents who agree (%)
Class size is the most important issue for me	18.6%
Class size is one of the most important issues for me	54.4%
Class size is an important issue, but not the most important one	24.6%
Class size is not an important issue for me	3.0%

73% said that class size is either the most important (18.6%) or one of the most important (54.6%) issues for them.

Summary

In this section I have tried to show the effect of class size on teachers and pupils. Analysis of the data indicated the following:

1. Teachers agree that there is an increase in class size in Omani schools. This increase is attributable to social and economic factors.
2. Most of the teachers believe that the current increase in class size affects the quality of teaching and learning.
3. The increase in current class size has an adverse effect on Omani pupils' learning. The greatest effect is on: amount of individual teacher attention, assessment of their work, standard of work and motivation.
4. With regard to teachers, the current increase in class size affects teaching practices. Those most affected are: time available for individual pupils, time for assessment of their work and teacher workload.
5. Most teachers agree that they would change teaching practices if the classroom were smaller.
6. Teachers in Omani school believe that class size is an important issue for improving Omani pupil performance. However, the issue of class size is one of the most important for them.

Home- school relationship

Having discussed the impact of class size on teachers and pupils, in this section I explore teachers' opinions on parents' relationships with schools and its effect on the pupil. First I examine teachers' satisfaction regarding parents' contact with the school.

Table 6.52
How satisfied are you with the frequency of contact you have with your students' parents?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	210	39.5	39.5	39.5
<i>Somewhat dissatisfied</i>	162	30.5	30.5	69.9
<i>Not sure</i>	9	1.7	1.7	71.6
<i>Somewhat satisfied</i>	130	24.4	24.4	96.1
<i>Very satisfied</i>	21	3.9	3.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.52 shows that a high proportion of the sample is dissatisfied with the frequency of contact with pupils' parents (69.9%). On the other hand, those who were satisfied constitute 28.3%. The table shows a high level of dissatisfaction regarding an issue that is vital for improving the Omani pupils' learning and reducing teachers' professional problems.

In order to determine the reasons for parents' reluctance to contact the school to follow the progress of their children I asked the teachers - in an open question - to consider the reasons for their dissatisfaction with parental contact. The following are some of the most common reasons given by teachers:

- Ignorance among parents towards their children's education.
- Illiteracy among parents, which makes them unaware of the importance of education.
- Familial problems.
- Lack of time for parents to contact the school. Parents' work commitments inhibit them from contacting the school.

Illiteracy is perhaps the most complicated problem that faces parents and hampers any further improvement in their relationship with the school. Oman, like most of the Arab regions, has made significance efforts to reduce illiteracy rates among its citizens. However the reduction rate is far from satisfactory indicating that a lot more must be done to reach a very low illiteracy rate. A World Development Report (2000, p. 316) shows that the illiteracy rate in Oman for those aged 15 year and above is 31%. Juaoni (1987) explains the reasons for illiteracy phenomena in the Arab world as follows:

- The lack of application of compulsory primary education
- Lack of rational economic and educational planning.
- Because it was not a national objective, the illiteracy eradication programs were not given a high priority and the deserved consideration. Eradicating the people of the Arab world from illiteracy is prerequisite to successful socio-economic development.

Al-Nasser (1990) adds another reason:

Despite progress in the promotion of literacy education, there are still 66.1 million illiterates aged 15 years and over in the Arab States in 1990, which represents an increase of 7.5 million since 1975. The efforts to eradicate illiteracy do not seem to catch up with the increase in the population. The number of functionally illiterate adults continues to grow and this has become a major social problem.

(p. 474)

Home-school relationship theories show that parents' interaction with the child and their characteristics positively influences their learning at school. Thus, illiteracy among Omani parents is a negative factor that hinders the child's success at school. Parents' illiteracy, weakens their awareness of the value of education and makes them unable to help the child to cope with school requirements.

Teachers' opinions on who should take the first step

Teachers were asked to determine who should take the first step in order to improve parents' contact with the school. Their answers were as follows:

1.	Teachers	9.0%
2.	Parents	30.6%
3.	Both	59.4%
4.	Not sure	1.0%

The data shows that the majority of teachers (59.4%) believe it to be the responsibility of both sides to encourage parental contact with the school. However, 30.6 % think that it is the Omani parents who should take the first step.

Teachers were then asked whether they have ever felt uneasy or reluctant about approaching a parent to talk with them about their child.

Table 6.53
Do you ever feel reluctant to talk to pupils' parents?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	76	14.3	14.3	14.3
<i>Not sure</i>	22	4.1	4.1	18.4
<i>No</i>	434	81.6	81.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table No 6.53 shows that 81.6% have never felt reluctant to talk to pupils' parents

Teachers' views on key aspects of pupil's home life

To determine to what extent Omani parents are involved in their sons' education reveal teachers were asked to rank a number of parental duties with regard to their children's education, using a "most parents/ hardly any" 5 point scale).

Table 6.54
How many parents do you think fail to ensure that their son's homework is done?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Most parents</i>	148	27.8	27.8	27.8
<i>Many parents</i>	236	44.4	44.4	72.2
<i>Not sure</i>	12	2.3	2.3	74.4
<i>Some parents</i>	85	16.0	16.0	90.4
<i>Hardly any parents</i>	51	9.6	9.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.55
How many parents do you think set standards that are too high for their sons to achieve?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Most parents</i>	20	3.8	3.8	3.8
<i>Many parents</i>	56	10.5	10.5	14.3
<i>Not sure</i>	62	11.7	11.7	25.9
<i>Some parents</i>	154	28.9	28.9	54.9
<i>Hardly any parents</i>	240	45.1	45.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.56
How many parents do you think fail to show respect for teachers?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Most parents</i>	39	7.3	7.3	7.3
<i>Many parents</i>	49	9.2	9.2	16.5
<i>Not Sure</i>	101	19.0	19.0	35.5
<i>Some parents</i>	126	23.7	23.7	59.2
<i>Hardly any parents</i>	217	40.8	40.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.57
How many parents do you think: do not check-up on their sons after school?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Most parents</i>	195	36.7	36.7	36.7
<i>Many parents</i>	242	45.5	45.5	82.1
<i>Not sure</i>	13	2.4	2.4	84.6
<i>Some parents</i>	60	11.3	11.3	95.9
<i>Hardly any parents</i>	22	4.1	4.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.58
How many parents do you think fail to discipline their sons?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Most parents</i>	105	19.7	19.7	19.7
<i>Many parents</i>	178	33.5	33.5	53.2
<i>Not sure</i>	32	6.0	6.0	59.2
<i>Some parents</i>	175	32.9	32.9	92.1
<i>Hardly any parents</i>	42	7.9	7.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

When we analyze the tables we see that:

- 53.2% think that many or most parents fail to discipline their children.
- 72% of teachers believe that many or most parents neglect to ensure that their children's homework is done.
- 82% of teachers say that many or most parents don't check up on their sons after school.
- 74% of teachers indicated that some parents or hardly any set too high a standard for their sons to meet.
- 64.5% of teachers say that some parents or hardly any fail to show respect for teachers

Teachers' Views of Major Causes of Pupils' Difficulties at School

Teachers were asked to rank six possible causes of pupils having difficulties in the school. The type of causes covered a range of economic factors, both home based and school based.(each using a "major cause/ not sure" 4-point scale).

Table 6.59

Do you think that children being left on their own after school is a major, a minor or not a cause of students having difficulties in school?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Major cause</i>	485	91.2	91.2	91.2
<i>Minor cause</i>	33	6.2	6.2	97.4
<i>Not a cause</i>	7	1.3	1.3	98.7
<i>Not sure</i>	7	1.3	1.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table No 6.60

Do you think that the exam system is a major cause, a minor cause or not a cause of students having difficulties?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Major cause</i>	80	15.0	15.0	15.0
<i>Minor cause</i>	203	38.2	38.2	53.2
<i>Not a cause</i>	231	43.4	43.4	96.6
<i>Not sure</i>	18	3.4	3.4	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.61

Do you think the curriculum is a major cause, a minor cause or not a cause of students having difficulties?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Major cause</i>	133	25.0	25.0	25.0
<i>Minor cause</i>	200	37.6	37.6	62.6
<i>Not a cause</i>	172	32.3	32.3	94.9
<i>Not sure</i>	27	5.1	5.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.62
Do you think that teachers not adapting to pupils' needs is a major cause, a minor cause or not a cause of students having difficulties in school?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Major cause</i>	133	25.0	25.0	25.0
<i>Minor cause</i>	219	41.2	41.2	66.2
<i>Not a cause</i>	124	23.3	23.3	89.5
<i>Not sure</i>	56	10.5	10.5	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.63
Do you think that parents' not following up their sons' learning progress is a major, a minor or not a cause of students having difficulties in school?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Major cause</i>	388	72.9	72.9	72.9
<i>Minor cause</i>	99	18.6	18.6	91.5
<i>Not a cause</i>	28	5.3	5.3	96.8
<i>Not sure</i>	17	3.2	3.2	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.64
Do you think that lack of facilities at home is a major cause, a minor cause or not a cause of students having difficulties in school?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Major cause</i>	125	23.5	23.5	23.5
<i>Minor cause</i>	223	41.9	41.9	65.4
<i>Not a cause</i>	145	27.3	27.3	92.7
<i>Not sure</i>	39	7.3	7.3	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Teachers' answers show the major causes for pupils' difficulties to be as follows:

- o 91.1% of teachers believe that pupils being left on their own after school is a factor that accounts for pupils having difficulties in school.
- o 72.9 said that parents who don't follow their children's progress are another major cause for their difficulties at school.

What do Teachers Want From Omani Parents?

The foregoing answers show that teachers are dissatisfied with parents' interaction with their children or they are dissatisfied with their contact with the school. Therefore, in the questionnaire, teachers were asked to identify from a rank of choices the seven most effective behaviors that they sought from parents to foster and improve their sons' performance at school. Teachers believe that when parents fulfill these duties school drop-outs and repeaters - which cause financial and employment troubles for the Omani government - will be reduced.

The graph⁴ shows the most important factors chosen by the teachers to be:

1. Monitoring homework.
2. Having high expectation for education.
3. Nurturing the child (son).
4. Spending quality time with the child (son).
5. Initiating contact with the teacher.
6. Attending parents' councils.
7. Taking the child (son) to the library.

Parental support is an indispensable factor for school effectiveness and constitutes one of the main inputs. '*How schools improve*' is a study at 31 different sites in three developing countries: Bangladesh, Colombia and Ethiopia. The main purpose of the study was to describe and analyze the

⁴ Because of technical reasons I was unable to include the definitions of the statements in the graph 6.1. Here are the definitions from 1-15: Nurture the child, spend time with the child, read to child, take the child to library, having high expectations for education, monitor homework, send back forms with signature, attend school events, be supportive if the teacher call, follow through on teachers requests, know what the teacher expects, initiate contact with teacher, show support for the teacher, share the responsibility for the child progress, visits the classroom.

factors that contributed to the success of educational reform efforts in these countries at the national and local level.

The report documented a number of variables that contributed to reform implementation:

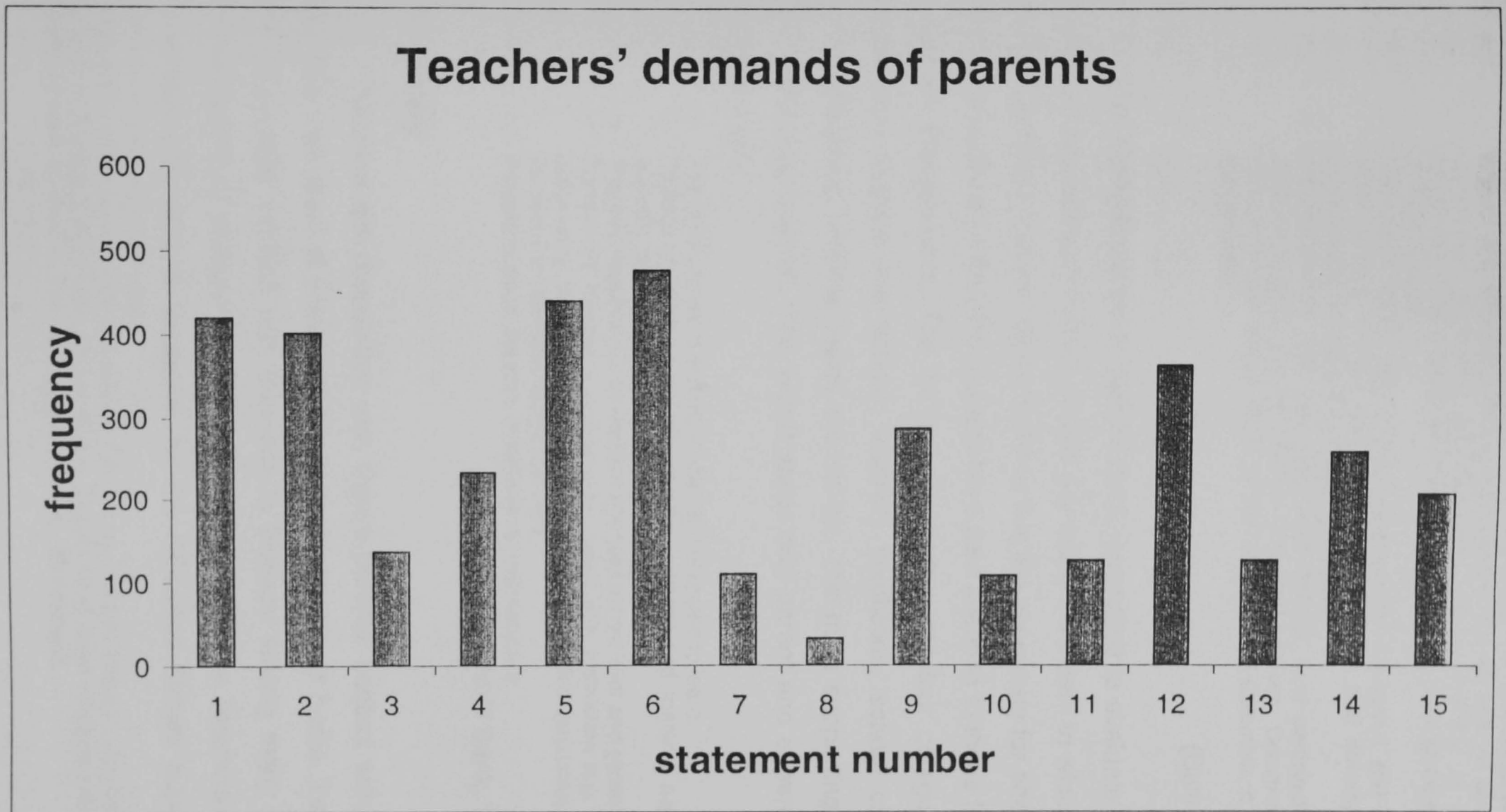


Figure 6.1

- Reform depends on a permanent and locally available in-service teacher training system and effective system of supervision and support. All three systems have a combination of training and supervision locally available as regular part of the schoolwork. The training and supervision system is seen as having high a impact in all three countries.
- Successful reform efforts encourage teacher motivation and commitment. More empowerment through delegation, combined with staff development and support produces higher commitment among teachers.
- Commitment is built and maintained through local participation (e.g. parents), external agency support and demonstrated success. Community participation is seen as a high impact factor in both Ethiopia and Colombia. It is a weak factor in Bangladesh.

(Dalin et al, 1994,p.4)

The World Bank study *School Count* attempted to evaluate the World Bank projects in sub Saharan Africa⁵. It also examined the extent to which these projects take into account schools' characteristics that are necessary for effective education. The study concluded that the projects have paid attention to those factors related to education effectiveness. The factors are divided into four categories: supporting inputs from outside the school, enabling conditions, school climate, and the teaching/learning process inside the school. The main supporting input is parent and community support. The report states that parent and community support is effective when:

- The child comes to school healthy and prepared to learn.
- Parents and the community provide financial and material support for the school's operation.
- There is frequent communication between school staff and parents.
- Community members and parents assist with instruction e.g. parents and community frequently serves as tutors, information resources and/ or an audience for students' academic work.
- Parents support the idea of homework and monitor it.

(World Bank, 1996,p. 67)

Summary

Teachers are dissatisfied with Omani parents' contact with the school and also with their level of involvement with their children at home. Teachers ascribed lack of parents' contact with teachers to illiteracy among many parents or their ignorance of their children's learning at school. Therefore, teachers believe that lack of contact with parents accounts for the difficulties Omani pupils encounter at

⁵ Sub Saharan Africa countries are: Cameron, C.A.R ,Guinea, Ethiopia, Somalia , Uganda, Burundi , Comoros , Madagascar, Rwanda, Zaire, Ghana , Guinea-Bissau , Nigeria ,Chad ,Niger , Burkina Faso , Cape Verde, Mauritania, Mali, the Gambia, Botswana , lesotho, Malawi , Mozambique.

school. Monitoring their homework and having some expectations for education came as the top expectations teachers' had of parents.

The outcomes of this part agree with the literature from developed or developing countries on the importance of a strong home-school relationship to influence the pupil's performance at school.

The School Building.

One of the major intentions of the research is to get teachers' views on the adequacy of the school building, since the quality of school buildings has a strong impact upon teaching conditions. There were several questions regarding the availability of libraries, school facilities and equipment. The research on education in developing nations usually associates the availability of certain inputs with educational quality.

Table 6.65

Does the classroom you teach in have adequate ventilation?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	345	64.8	64.8	64.8
<i>No</i>	187	35.2	35.2	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

The first question teachers were asked was about classroom conditions. Table 6.65 reveals that 64.8% said their classrooms had adequate ventilation, while 35.2% said that the classrooms they taught in didn't have adequate ventilation.

Teachers' Views on the Condition of the School Building

Teachers were asked to give their opinions on the condition of the school building. From choice of five responses, teachers were requested to select only one:

When asked about the condition of the school building 33% said that it was in good condition. 33% felt it was in need of minor repairs, 19.7% felt that most or all

classrooms needed major repairs, 3% said the toilets needed major repairs and cleaning and 11.3% thought that the school needed complete rebuilding.

The data indicates that 66% of the sample felt that the school building is in good condition, while 19.7 said that most or all classrooms need major repairs. The good conditions of school buildings reflect Ministry of Education efforts to keep the school environment healthy and clean.

The Availability of Air Conditioner

Oman is a country characterized by a hot climate throughout the year except in some areas in the south. The average temperature from November to March varies between 18 and 26 degree Celsius. The temperature reaches a peak during the months that follow April. During these months the temperature is between 45 and 52 degree Celsius, therefore air conditioning is essential. Schools should be provided with certain facilities and equipment in order to function properly. One educationist's view is that:

Since each child grows up intellectually, emotionally and physically at a different rate, his teachers need to know and take account of his "developmental age" in all three aspects. The child's physique, personality, and capacity to learn develop as a result of continued interaction between his environment and genetic inheritance. Unlike the genetic factors, the environmental factors are, or ought to be, largely within our control

(Department of education and science, 1972, p .26).

The following tables show the extent to which Omani schools are provided with air conditioners.

Table 6.66
Does the classroom in which you teach have an air conditioning?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	236	44.4	44.4	44.4
<i>No</i>	296	55.6	55.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.66 shows that 55.6% of teachers said that air conditioners are not available, while 44.4 said that air conditioners are available in the classrooms they teach in.

Table 6.67
If yes, is it in good condition?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	73	13.7	13.7	69.4
<i>No</i>	163	30.6	30.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.67 indicates that 30.6% said that the air conditioners are not in good condition. On the other hand 13.7% said that the air conditioners in their classrooms are in good condition.

Lack of air conditioners in classrooms increases the problems of teachers and pupils for the following reasons:

1. Crowded classrooms.
2. The school building is exposed to sunlight during the day, and if we bear in mind that the temperature in Oman is very high, it is clear that the classrooms become very hot and the heat affects teaching and learning practices.
3. Non-Omani teachers make up a large proportion of teachers in Oman. Most of them come from countries that are characterized by low temperatures during the year. Hot classes due to the lack of necessary equipment; make those teachers intolerant and lead to less effective teaching practice.

School Facilities

Teachers were asked about the availability of certain school facilities which are very important for both teacher and pupil, such as: sports facilities, school garden and staff room.

**Table 6.68
Sports facilities**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	411	77.3	77.3	77.3
<i>No</i>	121	22.7	22.7	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.69
School garden**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	166	31.2	31.2	31.2
<i>No</i>	366	68.8	68.8	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.70
Staff room**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Yes</i>	333	62.6	62.6	62.6
<i>No</i>	199	37.4	37.4	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

The above tables show the following:

- 77.3% said that their school had sports facilities while 22.7% said theirs did not
- 68.8% said that their school had a garden but 31.2% said theirs did not
- 62.6% indicated that their school had a staff room, said theirs did not

School Library

“A library without books” Some teachers wrote this comment when I asked them about the availability of a school library. It is a vital aspect of the school environment because it contributes to the development of the pupil’s cognitive skills

and in turn enhances their academic performance. The following tables show teachers responses.

Table 6.71
Is there a school library?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	321	60.3	60.3	60.3
No	211	39.7	39.7	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.72
If yes, are there sufficient good books in the library?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	155	29.1	29.1	68.8
No	166	31.2	31.2	100.0
Total	532	100.0	100.0	

According to table 6.71 60.3% said the school they teach in has a library. However 39.7% said that the school didn't have a library. Teachers were then asked if the school library has sufficient good books. Table 6.72 shows that 31.2% said the school library didn't have good and sufficient books. Lack of school libraries in Omani schools were one of the shortcomings cited by the World Bank Report⁶.

A school library can bring about effective schooling. Many studies confirmed that point. In his article *"What School Factors Raise Achievement in the Third World"* Fuller reviewed 60 studies conducted in Third World countries that "report on the school's aggregate influence on academic achievement versus the influence of family background" and "assess the relative influence of alternative school inputs

⁶ World Bank Report, Technical Co-operation unit, country department 111, Oman: Development of Human Resources at Crossroad, 1991

and organizational practice, pointing to more efficient strategies for raising pupil achievement' (Fuller, 1987, p. 255)

Fuller identified 27 factors that influence pupil's achievement. He concluded that the most influential ones are:

- o Teacher quality (years of tertiary & teacher training)
- o In-service teacher training
- o Library size and activity.

(Fuller, 1987, p. 258)

Fuller⁷ et al reconfirmed his findings in a later research where he found that the presence of a school library is the most consistent and effective factor related to better pupil performance in low-and middle-income countries. (Fuller & Clarke, 1994, p. 65).

The presence of a library in the school is a significant indicator for low or high schooling quality. In 1994 Unesco and Unicef undertook a pilot study on the conditions of primary schools in the least developed countries. One of the main objectives of the study was to provide a set of indicators on the conditions of primary schools in these countries.⁸ The study concluded that, with exception of some countries, "Nearly all children were in schools without a library." (Andreas et al, 1995. p. 131).

Teachers' Views on the Adequacy of School Buildings

Teachers were asked to rate changes in certain features of the schools. The rating scale used was:

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Much worse | 3. About the same | 5. Much better |
| 2. Worse | 4. Better | |

⁷ Bruce Fuller is well known for his researches on reforming education in the Third World countries. Reviewing the World Bank Reports show that most of World Bank frameworks and recommendations to improve the education in these countries are derived from Fuller's works.

⁸ Unesco and Unicef staff undertook the indicators on school quality. The indicators were included on: conditions of school building, school amenities, classroom equipment, classroom supplies, total enrolment, class size, crowdedness, amount of grade repetition instructional hours per day and year, number of teaching staff, teachers qualification, teachers absence, teachers housing, degree of stability of teaching staff, number of toilets and their condition.

Table 6.73
The condition of the school building

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Much worse</i>	39	7.3	7.3	7.3
<i>Worse</i>	60	11.3	11.3	18.6
<i>About the same</i>	203	38.2	38.2	56.8
<i>Better</i>	156	29.3	29.3	86.1
<i>Much better</i>	74	13.9	13.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.74
Classroom facilities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Much worse</i>	38	7.1	7.1	7.1
<i>Worse</i>	83	15.6	15.6	22.7
<i>About the same</i>	221	41.5	41.5	64.3
<i>Better</i>	163	30.6	30.6	94.9
<i>Much better</i>	27	5.1	5.1	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.75
Conditions of toilets

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Much worse</i>	57	10.7	10.7	10.7
<i>Worse</i>	85	16.0	16.0	26.7
<i>About the same</i>	177	33.3	33.3	60.0
<i>Better</i>	163	30.6	30.6	90.6
<i>Much better</i>	50	9.4	9.4	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.76
Staff room

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Much worse</i>	35	6.6	6.6	6.6
<i>Worse</i>	74	13.9	13.9	20.5
<i>About the same</i>	239	44.9	44.9	65.4
<i>Better</i>	127	23.9	23.9	89.3
<i>Much better</i>	57	10.7	10.7	100.0
<i>Total</i>	532	100.0	100.0	

The above tables reveal that most respondents tend to agree that school buildings are about the same and better or much better. This is due to maintenance works and the clean week competition organized by the Ministry of Education to choose the cleanest school.

Summary

In this section I have tried to show the condition of school buildings. The teachers' answers show that school buildings are in good condition. However, teachers said the school buildings lacked the most important equipment to protect them from the heat of the sun: air conditioners. Moreover, most schools are without good libraries.

This research came about ten years after the World Bank's report on improving education in Oman. Despite the fact that providing schools - particularly at primary level - with libraries was one of the report's central recommendations, we can see here that schools in Oman still lack this vital input for pupils' academic progress.

Teachers' perceptions of factors that would ease their difficulties

I asked teachers to rate a set of factors they thought would help to ease their difficulties a lot or a little. They ranked them all as "would help a lot", but assigned different value to each factor.

Figure No 6.2⁹ shows teachers' perceptions of these factors in descending order:

- o More support for teachers 82.5%
- o Reducing teachers' burden 80.5%
- o Fixing air conditioners 76.7%
- o Increasing salary 74.5%
- o Enhancing annual salary increment. 68.8%
- o Pursuing higher education 66.4%
- o Pursuing Masters degree. 61.3%
- o Smaller class size. 50.2%

Teachers believe that in the current situation, they are in need of moral rather than materialistic encouragement. Their chosen responses for the statements "more support for teachers and reducing the teachers' burden" is a strong indication of that. It is understandable that teachers might think that increased salary would help them a lot because of their aspirations for vertical mobility, but it is not so obvious why they gave smaller class size the lowest rate among these factors.

There are many possible interpretations for this. Teachers may think that the state's economic difficulties are a serious hindrance to initiating class size reduction policy. As a result, they ranked it lower than the other factors that they thought would help them a lot, preferring more practical, hands-on solutions for their problems in accordance with the saying "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". Second, teachers may think that more support for them would help to enhance teacher's social status and by reduce the teaching burden

⁹ The definition of the graph No.6.2 statements are as following: smaller class size, more non contact time, more support for teachers, reducing teaching burden, increase salary, to pursue higher education, to pursue master degree, to enhance the annual salary increment, to fix air conditioner in the classroom

Teachers preceptions for the factors that will help them

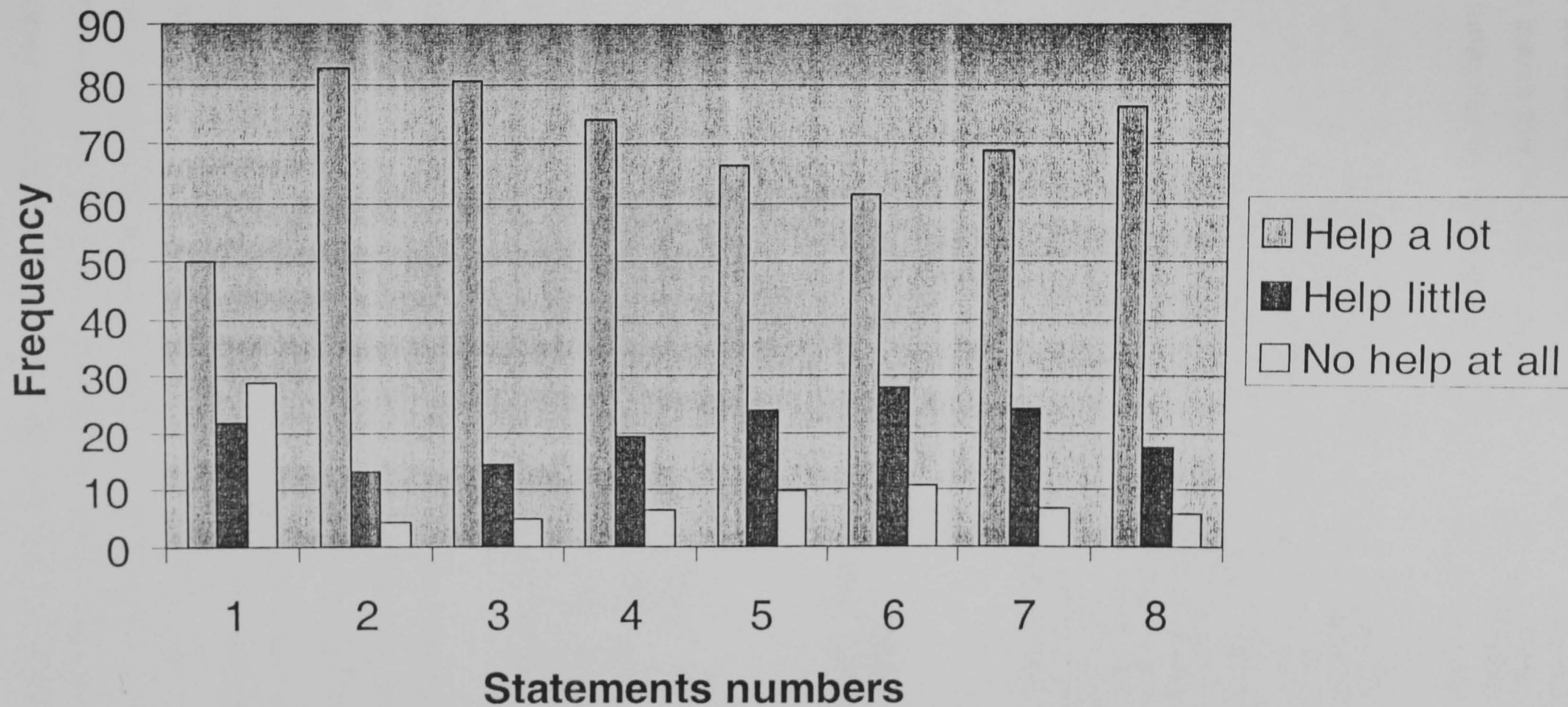


Figure 6.2

They would be able to manage the problem of large classes. Finding the solutions for those issues that teachers indicated as extremely helpful factors are depends on two fundamental components which are explained in the Unesco report:

As regards educational expenditure: since teachers' salaries and allowance in most countries typically account for two-thirds or more of such expenditure, the scope for improvement in teachers' incomes depends in part on the priority accorded to education in the overall allocation of national resources. Even so, an increasing priority for education will not necessarily benefit teachers, particularly if the additional resources are mainly used for expansion of the education system on the basis of existing conditions. This appears to have been the experience in many countries over the past decade. In the more developed regions, and in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Africa, the estimated share of education in GNP is larger than it was a decade or fifteen years ago. Only in the Arab states and Eastern Asia/Oceania regions, and in the countries in transition – especially the latter – is the share estimated to be stationary or lower".

(Unesco, 1998, p. 38)

Presenting the findings: Part III

The Views of the Principals of Educational Areas, School principals, Omani parents and teachers on some Educational Aspects

Introduction

This part of the chapter is complementary to the previous one. It is divided into two sections. In the first section I will display Principals of educational areas (PEA) views on the main teachers' difficulties. The second section will present the views of parents, teachers and school principals on various educational issues that are of main concern for them

PEAs in Oman have been working in the Ministry of Education for a long time. Most of them worked as teachers or as employees, engaged in educational matters or in designing educational policies. Their experience made them eligible to be principals of educational areas. Therefore I decided to examine their opinions on the central problems that teachers face in their daily work. Their answers would not only help to ascertain these problems, but also to confirm the outcome of teachers' questionnaires. In other words, to compare teachers' answers regarding class size, home-school relationship and their dissatisfaction regarding the most crucial problems with principals' perceptions of the main difficulties faced by teachers.

Theoretical Background

Bronfenbrenner (1976) introduced the concept of ecological analysis as a framework for the educational researcher to study the dynamics of the environmental process that promotes development. Ecological analysis consists of four assumptions:

1. Behaviour is the function of subjective perception of the individual.
2. Behaviour is the function of interaction between the individual and the environment.
3. Behaviour is not only affected by two individuals in a face-to-face setting, but also indirectly by many others who are present in that situation.
4. In the social setting behaviour is reciprocal between individuals.

Bronfenbrenner, provides an explanations of the ecological structure of educational environment components:

1. The micro system consists of the teacher's immediate setting, typically the classroom.
2. The mesosystem comprises the interrelations among teachers' major settings.
3. The exosystem refers to the formal and informal social structures that influence the teacher's immediate setting, including the socioeconomic level of the community, the nature of the school district, the mass media, the state and national legislative agencies.
4. The macrosystem consists of cultural beliefs, ideas and ideology that affect the teacher's behaviour and thoughts.
5. Based on this framework I designed a questionnaire that included a number of variables that constitute the main difficulties and pressures on teachers. (For more details on these variables see appendix A).

PEAs were asked to identify the most important professional difficulties of teachers. The question offered the informants a list of items. The approach taken here is to calculate the responses on each item.

- | | |
|--|--------|
| ○ Parents' co-operation with teachers and school | 100.0% |
| ○ Opportunities for continued professional development | 88.9% |
| ○ Class size (Number of students in class) | 77.8% |
| ○ School administration | 66.7% |
| ○ Teaching resources/facilities/equipment | 66.7% |
| ○ Financial incentives | 66.7% |

The principals proposed a range of remedies for teachers' problems. The following were the most frequent responses:

- Providing more in-service training programs.
- Offering advancement opportunities to teachers based on the outstanding performance not on the years of service.
- Improving the relationship between parents and teachers
- Providing schools with the necessary staff and personal.
- Giving higher salaries because teachers confront more difficulties than others who work at Civil Ministries in Oman.
- Reducing the teaching load

One principal expressed the following views:

The government should allocate a high proportion of the annual budget to the education sector to build new schools that have laboratories, libraries and air conditioners that are necessary for comfortable learning environment. Moreover, it is important to increase school numbers to reduce class size. There should be more in-service training programs for teachers to help them practice effective teaching. Also, the Ministry should increase the Omani teachers' salaries. Non-Omani teachers should get good and sufficient salaries to ensure that we get the best quality.¹⁰ Schools in Oman should be provided with computers as a necessary tool to cope with globalization age.

¹⁰ The principals want to make this point: the ministry of education depends on many non Omani teachers from Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia...etc. most of the non Omani teachers with higher qualifications prefer to work in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or United Arab Emirates because they receive higher pay than Oman.

Summary

Social and economic conditions in Oman seem to have a huge impact upon teachers. The former resulted in weak home contact with the teachers, while the latter, produced the problem of large classes, dissatisfaction and lack of the necessary input e.g. in-service training. The outcomes of this research indicate that there is compatibility between teachers' and principals' views on the main impediments. The principals suggested a variety of policies and practices (that agree with the structure of the ecological frame work) that would create a better learning and teaching environment:

- Reducing class size to increase teacher-pupil interaction and foster pupil's achievement (the micro system).
- Improving home-school relationships (the macrosystem).
- Offering better salaries to enhance teachers' social and psychological conditions (the exosystem).
- Reducing teaching load (the mesosystem).

Teachers', School Principals' and Parents' Views of Certain Aspects of Education

Introduction.

The number of private schools has increased rapidly over the past five years. The ministry has encouraged the trend by simplifying licensing procedures for applicants who satisfy the conditions attached by the Ministry. Therefore:

"The private sector has made good progress in opening private school. The school year 1995/96 there were 81 private school with 831 streams housing 16,061 male and female students whose total number makes 3.25 percent of the country's school population."

(Omani Minister of Education, Al-Markazi, 1998, p.2)

There are two possible reasons why the Ministry encourages the private sector to open private schools: First, parents wish to see their children obtaining better education in private schools. Small classrooms, better facilities and equipment characterize most of the private schools in Oman. Second, the Ministry of Education encourages private schools in order to reduce the strain placed on the

government schools which was causing severe learning problems. However, not all Omani parents can afford to enroll their children in private schools.

The interviews I conducted with parents explored their serious concerns about the problems facing schools and their influence on the children's education.

Parents were asked if they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their children's education. Most of the parents expressed dissatisfaction. Likewise, the interviews indicated consensus among parents about the need to promote a positive learning environment in the schools.

The Inadequacy of Many Teachers' Qualifications

The lack of qualified teachers surfaced repeatedly in parents' answers. They believe that prospective remedial policies for schools' problems lie in a precise and strict policy for recruiting qualified teachers. A parent made this point:

In our schools you can find some teachers who lack good qualifications and experience. Moreover, they lack good ethical behaviors, which can be reflected on pupil's personality.

Parents highlighted a critical point regarding Omani teachers: weak teaching performance. According to the parents, lack of necessary knowledge and skills for teaching, is the main reason for their weak performance.

One parent complained about teachers:

The problem lies in the Omani teacher. His qualification is low, evidence of that is that the Omani teacher finds it difficult sometimes to answer pupils' questions. This is a big problem that should be treated.

Curriculum.

Parents stressed the need to improve curriculum content. They said of curriculum problems:

Unfortunately you find that when a pupil graduates from the secondary grade, only a few months after his graduation, the Omani pupil has forgotten most of what he studied at school. The problem is amplified when he is unable to find a job or a chair at the university, the pupil becomes like an illiterate person. The reasons are that the curriculum in Omani schools stresses memorization skills, but not creative thinking. Another thing is that the curriculum is overloaded and doesn't cope with the economic changes."

The same parent holds a high position in the Civil Ministry. His long experience has enabled him to deal with and understand the problems of secondary

and university graduates. He cites another symptom of the decay of education in Oman:

Many Omani pupils graduated with A (excellent) or B (very good) marks. When they were admitted at the university here in Oman they faced unlimited academic problems. Why? Because there are enormous problems in the secondary school either in the curriculum or teachers qualifications.

Another parent saw the problem of curricula as follows:

It is difficult and it is higher than the preparatory pupil's capabilities, which causes continuous failure for many of them. In addition science textbooks in the secondary level contains many errors. My daughter spent many hours trying to solve a physics problem but she was unable, eventually she found that the problem itself was not written and printed properly.

A parent who is head of the parents' council says:

Last year the daily Omani newspapers discussed the problem of the huge failure at the first year of the intermediate level. As a result the Ministry of Education established a committee to study the reasons for pupils' failure at this stage. I believe that there are major problems with the curricula

Lack of Equipment and Facilities

Lack of essential equipment and facilities in the schools are one of the major problems that contribute to parents' dissatisfactions. Schools suffer from the shortage of labs, air conditioners, etc. One parent asked

How can a 7 or 8-year-old child learn and grasp the lesson in overcrowded and very hot classrooms? It is really very difficult situation for the child and for the teacher"

Another parents says:

Schools should be provided with essential equipment for effective learning. For example, schools are not equipped with computers and libraries. Many parents in Oman can't buy books or computers for their children because of their low income. Therefore, a good, well-equipped school would enhance the pupil's learning and offset a poor home environment¹¹.

A parent who works at the university as a lecturer said:

I graduated from secondary school at the end of the Seventies. From that period until now you can't see any significant improvements. The quality of education in Oman neither lives up to parents' ambitions nor progresses in the direction that would enhance pupils' achievement.

¹¹ The findings of the present research are confirmed by the Ministry of Education policy. It had started providing the primary schools with computers as part of new policy to enhance the quality of education in Oman.

Parents' Perceptions for Improving Education's Efficiency in Oman

Parents gave a variety of suggestions to improve schools in Oman. The interviewees indicated that improving schools required serious fundamental efforts. As a starting point, according to one parent said:

The government should appoint to the education system the most eligible and well-qualified people who are able to produce successful educational policies, avoid any arbitrary actions that could jeopardize schools' results and promote efficiency in Omani education. Otherwise the educational system will face continuous challenges.

The above quotation clearly shows that state policy is moulded by what Richards and Waterbury (1996) calls the social actors. The problem in many developing countries is that social actors influence the social policy and in many cases produce a policy that may not fit with the nation's objectives. Not surprisingly most of these countries suffer from continuous social problems and economic recession. So, when parents call for a reform to education through precise selection for competitive people who can design an effective educational policy, it is because of their belief that any confused or aimless policies could undermine human capital as the most important and valuable component in the development process.

Another father who studied in England and was influenced by its educational policy believes that:

The government should give the education sector top priority over other sectors and should allocate a high percentage of its expenditure to education. Moreover, more resources should be provided to the other social services like housing and health".

The international reports that I presented in the previous chapter included teachers' in-service training in their recommended policies as one of the major determinants for improving educational output. The parents agreed that enhancing teaching practice would be a major factor in improving the Omani pupil's performance. Therefore:

Teachers should be provided with in-service training in order to promote their teaching practices. Also, I think there should be a precise policy for recruiting teachers that must select the most qualified teachers. Here I would like to mention an important aspect that schools of education should reform the admissions policy by accepting secondary graduates with high scores. Also, teachers are frustrated because of the lack of advancement opportunities. Accordingly, a financial incentive should be established to reward the more active and productive teachers.

These difficulties show that efforts to improve education have fallen behind what is required to achieve a good quality of education. As I revealed in the quantitative analysis, educational expansion consumes a huge proportion of the budget and leaves little for improving quality. These unintended faults by the state constitute the primary concerns for many Omani parents and account for the increase in new private schools in Oman. We need to look at: what the poor in Oman can do for the future of their children. Education, with its current deficiencies, would affect their acquisition of essential skills and in turn minimize their opportunities in the labour market. Thus, education would “reproduce” the poverty of many Omani families.

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Main Difficulties¹²

Here we will look at those problems teachers encounter but didn’t have the opportunity to mention in the questionnaire.

Pupils’ morale

Teachers indicated that students’ reluctance and disinclination to learn effectively is the severest problem they face in their daily work. They associate this reluctance to government policy. According to the teachers, the restriction of access to higher education, Sultan Qaboos University and Technical Colleges, causes pupils to despair of finding channels to improve their families’ standards of living. Studying at the university has always been the stepping-stone to better lives in the minds of Omanis.

According to one teacher:

Omani pupils’ reluctance to learn is the hardest problem I face in my work. Careless and reluctant pupils usually don’t participate in classroom activities, don’t respect the teacher and tend to create problems in the classroom.”

The same teacher explains the reasons for Omani pupils behaving in this way as being “Because the pupils lack hope and are uncertain about their future”

Another teacher complains:

¹² In the methodology chapter I explained the reasons for conducting interviews with teachers.

It has become hard for me to control the class. I am here to teach them but if they don't want that, because they don't expect that they will be able to reach their aims to be at the university, what is the benefit of my efforts and my teaching".

Another commercial secondary school teacher says:

Usually at the end of term, pupils behave very dangerously with school equipment. A few days ago they broke the school's doors, stole some of the school belongings and threw a stone at one of the teachers. Thanks God it didn't hit him"

The teacher thinks that the social class of the pupils affects their behaviour.

He continues:

It is the behaviour of the lower class pupils. They think they have no future in Oman, their parents are powerless to improve the family's standard of living, as a result they try to vent their spitefulness by committing these ugly deeds.

Omanis like most people in the world, believe that education is an important instrument for upward mobility. Meyer's article "*the Social Construction of Motives for Educational Expansion*" stresses that:

In contemporary societies educational attainment is directly valued and is the main factor leading to advantage along all other key dimensions of individual stratification. Essentially every incentive that modern systems have to offer is put at the service of educational participation. In going to school and staying longer, people tend to gain greatly in occupational status, income, political rights to fuller participation and to seek office, preferred material partners, enhanced access to organizational participation, cultural capacity to act in preferred ways, informal social advantages, and the esteem of almost all who matter. For each of these goods, education is not simply one helpful resource; it usually is the primary factor
(Meyer, 1987, p.227)

Teachers also, revealed the impact of the economy upon pupils' motivations. Pupils, according to teachers' interviews, usually express to teachers that education in Oman is useless in helping them to get a job.

According to one teacher

Pupils have the desire to learn, but unemployment among Omani youth, which has been a serious social problem; produces lack of ambition among Omani pupils for learning because they think that they will face the same problems as the preceding graduates.

Not surprisingly, people in the Arab world, as in many parts of the world, believe in education as a vehicle to a better life. Meyer explains the reciprocal relationship between education and status

Surveys of modern individuals show they not only recognize many advantages of education but also believe that these advantages ought to hold: that is, education should lead to status advantages. Along with this, they generally support

education as having more diffuse and personal advantages as well. Such popular doctrines make it more legitimate for individuals to pursue education.

(Meyer, 1987, p.228)

Other Difficulties and Problems

Besides the problems presented, teachers suffer from other difficulties. For example, one Sudanese teacher thinks that the main difficulties are that:

Teachers are not consulted and don't participate in designing the curriculum and teaching methods. Also, schools' regulations are not implemented very well, which produces a conflict between the teacher and the pupil.

The teacher here indicates that some of the regulations have to be implemented in order to reinforce the school order. Despite the teacher not revealing exactly what he meant by these regulations some other teachers talked about similar problems. Some teachers stated that schools had several methods of punishing pupils, by those pupils that show disrespect for the teacher. However, some schools rarely used this regulation, which resulted in more bad behaviour by pupils.

One Sudanese teacher indicated some of what he considered to be the most serious problems. From his long experience in Omani schools, he believed that the difficulties that affect teachers' performance are:

- o The weakness in the Omani pupil's academic level.
- o Teachers' workload.

A science teacher who teaches in a remote area in the southern part of Oman, believes that the problem lies in the fact that:

.... a number of Omani pupils show unwillingness to learn. Therefore, they tend to create disturbance for the pupils and teachers. Also, as a science teacher, the lack of laboratory and the necessary equipment in this school increase the teaching burden

This statement by the Sudanese teacher reminds us of the World Bank and Al-Rawahi conclusions on the shortcomings of education in Oman.

The movement of pupils' from one class to another and from one grade to another is dependent on passing examinations. The Ministry of Education instructs the teachers to design easy questions to help pupils pass the examinations without any difficulties. Passing examinations becomes something that is taken for granted by the pupils. Teachers believe that this policy could undermine pupils' competency and academic orientations.

In the words of one teacher:

Omani pupils' ignorance, irresponsibility and carelessness are some of the main problems that I encounter in the Omani school. I believe that the system of examinations is the source for these behavioral troubles I just cited. This system helps lazy and careless pupils to pass the exams without serious effort. The pupil knows that passing the exams is guaranteed. As a result, there is no need at all to prove any seriousness.

This teacher's statement indicates how the Ministry's policy became harmful in one way or another for the Omani pupil. The same teacher anticipated that:

If the prevailing conditions continue as they are, I don't expect bright future for education in Oman. In order to avoid such a future, the Ministry of Education is required to take steps to improve the quality education.

Salary Differences Between Omani and Non-Omani Teachers

While the survey indicated that 65% of teachers are dissatisfied with their wages, the semi-structured interviews show that non-Omani teachers are more affected by this issue than Omani teachers. To illustrate this I will provide some background to this problem:

Given the working conditions in the poorer countries, it is hardly surprising that many teachers seek employment in the oil states. Egyptian schoolteachers can make at least *ten times* their domestic salaries in Saudi Arabia; small wonder that more than 50,000 of them are working abroad, while thousands seek to leave. Indeed one of the difficulties with maintaining, much less advancing, the educational system of countries such as Sudan and Yemen has been the departure of the small number of trained teachers to the Gulf States.

(Richards and Waterbury, 1996 p. 121)

The main idea that we can get from this text is that teachers immigrate for economic and social purposes to the Gulf States as a hiring factor to Arab labour. Non-Omani teachers believe that wages differences between them and Omani teachers are extremely drastic. A Jordanian English teacher says:

I have a master degree; this means that my salary should be higher and better than those with a bachelor's degree. But what is happening is completely the opposite. I receive half the salary that the Omani receives, don't you think that this situation will affect my performance?

He adds:

Many non-Omani teachers prefer to work in Kuwait or the United Arab Emirates. Their pay is far better than what we get here in Oman. One of my friends has been working in the United Arab Emirates for twenty years and doesn't want to leave because he is satisfied. Good salaries for non-Omani teachers are an important condition to attract talented and qualified teachers to work in Oman. "

Here we can perceive a similarity between the Jordanian teacher's complaints and the view of one of the educational areas' principals on the importance of making teachers' salaries equal.

I believe that the state of Oman recognizes this problem and its influence on the quality of teachers entering the teaching profession. After the economic problems in 1993 caused by the decline in oil prices, the Ministry of Development prepared a report on the different aspects of the economy that required essential reforms. The report ascertains that without creating substantial improvements in the education system to enhance its internal efficiency, the State will not be able to build up a strong and productive economy that can resist any external shocks. Therefore, the report identified a number of themes that are required to introduce the desired outcomes. One of these themes is: "improving teachers' conditions. Thus the Ministry of Education will be able to attract the best, well-qualified teachers. (Ministry of Development, *Vision for Oman's Economy*, Oman 2020 1995, p, 11)

In fact, nothing was introduced to achieve the goal that was stated in the report. In reality what is occurring is paradoxical to that policy, as we will see in the next paragraphs.

The Future of Education in Oman

Teachers are not optimistic about the future of education in Oman. They believe that there are major factors that interact with each other and cause serious problems for the internal efficiency of education. These factors are:

- Exam system
- Curriculum
- A reluctance toward schooling among Omani pupils
- Overcrowded classrooms
- Lack of in-service training

I will examine some of these problems in detail. One secondary mathematics teacher said:

The math curriculum content at the preparatory grade is irrelevant to intermediate grade. Likewise, the math curriculum content at the intermediate grade is irrelevant to secondary grade. I think curriculum contents require major improvement. Otherwise pupils' performance will experience further decline and their essential skills acquisitions will become very difficult to achieve.

Curriculum problems seem to be common in the Developing World. According to Lockheed et al:

Unfortunately, the curricula presented in textbooks, particularly the scope and sequence of the material are often poorly designed. Instructional design is important because inappropriately-targeted curricula (which are too difficult or too easy) frustrate students and increase failure.

(Lockheed et al, 1993, p.46)

They add:

In their study of the scope and sequence of textbooks for the first grades one, three and five in fifteen countries, Cope, Denning, and Ribeiro (1989) found that the material in the mathematics and reading textbooks for the first grade was appropriate, but the difficulty level increased greatly by the third grade. In the fifth grade the mathematics texts were too difficult while the reading texts were too easy.

(Lockheed et al, 1993, p.46)

Beside these problems, some teachers showed their concerns about the Ministry of Education policy with regard to the nationalization of the teaching profession. One teacher explains the faults of this policy:

The Ministry now displaces many non-Omani teachers and doesn't renew their contracts in order to employ Omani teachers as a part of the nationalization policy. This is the right of your country to adopt any policy that it thinks will benefit the citizens, but believe me this policy is at the expense of pupils and education in this country. This is because the Ministry employs Omani schools of education graduates irrespective of their bachelor degree grade. You can find many Omani teachers who graduated with a D and despite that they join the teaching profession. This happens now and will continue to happen in the coming few years. How can a teacher with low qualifications communicate effective teaching?"

Accordingly, teachers do hold out much optimism for the future of education in Oman. Another Islamic studies teacher made a similar point:

You asked about the future of education in Oman. This is a difficult question. Actually, good efforts are being made to improve the quality of education, such as equipping schools with computers and audio-visual facilities. But the problem lies with the Omani pupil. He is depressed because it has become extremely difficult for him to pursue his higher education or to find a job. In addition, many non-

Omani teachers with good qualifications were resigned by the Ministry of Education and were replaced by poorly-qualified Omani teachers. I think these factors harm the education in this country”

Here I want to raise an important methodological issue. Whereas curriculum and system of examination didn't figure significantly in teachers' responses in the questionnaire as major causes for pupils' difficulties at school, in the interview teachers considered the system of examinations and curriculum to be major causes for education ineffectiveness. I don't believe this constitutes contradiction. The reason is that in the questionnaire, teachers tried to avoid any criticism of the aspects that are related to Ministry policy. In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher explained to teachers the importance of highlighting and addressing the factors that continually hamper the enhancement of pupils' academic attainment and, in the long run, harm the education system. As a result, I believe that the informal setting (the teacher's house, the coffee shop. etc) played a critical role in creating a comfortable atmosphere in which to gain more data on the condition of education in Oman.

What are the educational inputs necessary to create a better learning environment?

Teachers identified a number of factors that would help them enhance pupils' learning, minimize potential threat to the future of education In Oman, and construct an educationally effective climate:

- Teachers believe that the current government's higher education policy makers should recognize the aspirations of many Omani families to see their children attend university, not only for status purposes, but for economic growth. Therefore, The government should adopt a more flexible policy¹³ for pupils' admission at the university. In other words, the government should increase the number of pupils admitted to the university. Teachers believe that such a policy would foster pupils' achievement and enthusiasm and reduce their anxiety for their future. Restricting access to higher education - according to teachers' views - is one

¹³ To encourage the private sector to establish higher education institutions (university or a college), the government of Oman had initiated a new supportive policy by giving the new universities or colleges financial loans that amount to 5 million pounds. This new governmental policy confirms the findings of present research.

of the major causes of problems in the classroom that teachers encounter in their work. One teacher said:

Pupils want to learn because they have the desire to improve their living standard, but the Omani pupil finds that the channels to achieve his dreams are excessively restricted either by organizational requirements or economic difficulties, which subvert his enthusiasm for learning and excellence”

- Teachers showed a consensus that successful and satisfactory educational reforms are contingent on creating fundamental changes and improvements in curriculum content. The current curriculum suffers from lack of sequence, is boring, inappropriate and fails to reinforce problem-solving skills.

- In order to perform effective teaching, teachers stress the need for in-service training programs. One teacher said:

I think that in order to advance the education system in Oman, the Ministry of Education in Oman must design a new admissions policy for the colleges of education in Oman that stresses the following:

- a) Enhancement of teachers’ competence by reforming teachers’ preparation programs.
- b) Restriction of admissions to the colleges of education to secondary graduates with the strongest academic background. Teachers believe that such a policy will help significantly to avoid producing teachers with inadequate skills.
- c) Strengthening the Omani people’s awareness of the importance of education and fostering good home-school relationships.

While teachers indicated a package of reforms, they repeated the need to reform teachers’ salaries:

To improve the education system in Oman there must be serious attempts to enhance teachers’ status. This entails the Ministry taking serious steps to promote our financial conditions

Teachers stress that teaching as an important profession is undermined by social change in Omani society. Ministry regulations sometimes help this trend indirectly and therefore there should be better, more effective regulations that prevent disruptive pupils from slighting teachers:

Last week a pupil abused me. All the pupils in the classroom heard him. I took the pupil to the school principal to complain about his behaviour expecting the pupil to be punished but he was returned to his classroom without punishment Do you not think the teacher will be less respected by that pupil?

One Sudanese teacher suggests a host of solutions. In his words:

The best way to reduce teachers' problems is: First by creating good, serious system of examinations. Second, teachers and schools' administrations must be given a greater freedom to help them to take the necessary actions to improve pupils' academic performance. Third, the Ministry must recruit honest and effectual teachers. Fourth, better home-school relationships should be fostered. Fifth, salaries must be brought into line with our counterparts who work at the Civil Ministries to show that teachers' efforts are appreciated.

School Principals' Views on Schools' Problems:

School principals were asked to comment on whether the nature of parental contact with schools affects Omani pupils' academic performance. Principals' answers show the following:

Home-school contact

Principals that I interviewed indicated that lack of awareness, illiteracy among parents and low income are serious constraints hampering effective home-school contact. Besides illiteracy, which I have already discussed with reference to its influence on home-school relationship, here we can note that school principals have added the low income of many Omani families as another factor that hinders parental contact with the school to discuss the progress of their sons. But here we will look at how low incomes affect parents' contact with school

A secondary school principal explained this scenario

Many parents are asked to donate money to the school to buy facilities and materials or to be used for maintenance works. Because parents are unable to pay and to avoid embarrassing themselves, they prefer to refrain from any kind of cooperation or contact with school. Parents drudging to enhance the family income make them don't pay much attention to their sons' education.

He illustrated that:

The low economic condition of Omani families constricts effective contact with the school. A parent came to school only when his son was dismissed from the school. I asked the parent why didn't you contact the school to find out about your son performance? He replied: "every day I go fishing then I take the fish to market to sell them. If I don't do that it will be very hard for my family to get the money that will help us to manage our lives. Therefore I don't find enough time to contact the school."

Another secondary school principal gave a different reason:

Unfortunately ignorance and illiteracy are the major social impediments that obscure home-school contact. Last month I sent 1000 invitations to Omani parents to attend the parents' council to discuss pupils' issues. Do you believe that only 20 parents attended the council?

Omani Pupils' Performance

School principals consider that social change and higher education policy restricting admissions to the university (particularly the latter) has created a discouraging atmosphere among students. One secondary principal said:

I was trying to advise a pupil who had been creating trouble and displaying disruptive behaviour to care about his lessons, prepare himself for the exams and be a good, disciplined pupil. The pupil replied to me, "there is no hope in the future, no chance for higher education and no chance for a job, so why I should study why I should be here at the school?"

Another secondary school principal gave a similar response:

I think that the University admission policy has discouraged the Omani pupil and created a skeptical and pessimistic view about his future. This is reflected in his learning performance at school. Besides the problem of weak home-school contact, restricting admission to the university or to jobs has aggravated schools' problems, e.g. dropouts, disruptive behaviour and the decline of pupils' learning performance.

An intermediate school principal at Sohar city (in the Al-Batina North region) indicated that:

I believe that the Omani performance has worsened over the last four years. This is evident from the significant increase in pupil failures at the end of the academic year. In addition, even those pupils who pass from one class to another suffer from a decline in academic attainment and lack in Arabic and English language proficiency. There are many reasons for this problem, but unwillingness and lack enthusiasm for learning among Omani pupils are the most important"

These problems should be understood in the light of the Oman's state policy. Al-Nakeeb (1990) argues that the role of the state in the Arab World is decisive and critical in the lives of the people. The state monopolizes the resources, therefore improving the social and economic infrastructure is entirely in the hands of the state. Also it (the state) employs large numbers in the public sector. Al-Nakeeb (1990) went further to find that the effective monopoly of the sources of power and wealth which the ruling elite practices, impedes mobility in society which will lead, with the passage of time, to increasing friction between the social classes and ranks.

Furthermore, the spread of education on a wide scale in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula countries, the rise in the standard of living, and the increase in income levels have led, according to Al-Nakeeb, to a rise in expectations among members of the middle and lower classes. Thus the desire to improve one's employment situation or to guarantee a higher level of income, and especially the right to climb the social ladder, comes to be regarded as an acquired right. Al- Nakeeb goes on to point out that members of the middle and lower classes, face a reality which does not recognize this right, since they confront obstacles to socio-economic mobility which prevent the realization of their expectation and ambitions.

With regard to Oman, the state reliance on oil as the main income and it's new economic transformation with emphasis on private sector involvement as a partner with the state in improving the economy base has led to what Byrne (1998) calls "the closure of economic opportunity". This tendency has affected pupils' ambitions as was indicated by teachers and school principals and in turn affects the stability of the classroom and teaching and in the long run raises serious questions about the future of education in Oman.

School principals suggest different proposals that combine social and educational factors to enhance Omani pupil performance. Some of these proposals are:

- Improving the curriculum.
- Providing schools with computers and Internet connection.
- Good teacher preparation."

An intermediate school principal adds:

- Modernizing teaching practice by eliminating the rote learning that dominates all learning levels (leaving little chance for pupils to participate in classrooms activities). Instead, teaching practice should help the pupil to think creatively.
- Reforming the exam system to reflect properly pupils' academic attainment.
- Using the media to develop parent and pupil awareness of the value of education for the child's future
- Providing incentives for outstanding pupils to encourage them to put more effort into their studies.

School principals agree that Omani pupils' performance has worsened over the last four years due to many social and economic problems. As a result they agree that enhancing their performance requires the following:

- Parents should continuously follow up their child's progress
- Pupils should have faith in the future
- Teachers' development should be enhanced by providing different training schemes
- Higher educational opportunities should be improved by admitting more secondary school graduates into higher education institutions particularly Sultan Qaboos University.

Conclusion

Oman, as a developing country, placed great faith for improving living conditions on the expansion of education and allocated a major share of its budget to this vital sector. The empirical work has revealed some of the pivotal problems of the educational system in Oman, and has highlighted the wide gulf between the Minister of the Education's 'idealistic' proposal and the reality in the Omani school. So, as long as education involves both human aspirations and practical realities, the question that needs to be raised is: does education in Oman provide for these ends or not? Let me summarize some of the main findings which will help to answer this question. The interviews with teachers, parents and schools principals showed parents' and teachers' dissatisfaction with the current conditions of schools in Oman. Parents argue that not only the problems of the curricula but also the quality of Omani teachers' qualifications have become a persistent educational problem that prevented them from communicating good and effective teaching. School principals agree that the Omani pupil's performance is deteriorating and this could cause severe problems for education in Oman. However, there are many factors that hamper learning and teachers' abilities to do their best, such as: lack of in-service training, unsatisfactory salary and the problem of large classes. Therefore, the reform policy should be comprehensive and should focus on all aspects that contribute to enhancing the quality of education in Oman. Also, the qualitative analyses have shown that teachers, parents and schools' principals have raised the same issues as the World Bank in its 1991 report.

The findings of the empirical work of this thesis are similar, to a large extent, to a new world Bank report (2000) which designated new challenges that the Omani

officials must work hard to overcome if they are to enhance internal efficiency and realize the objectives of education that were formulated at the beginning of the education course in the early 1970s:

1. The two key challenges currently facing the education sector are: improving the quality of general education, and expanding opportunities in higher education. Another key issue is the external efficiency of the education system. The Ministry of Education has recently initiated a reform to develop the basic education system. The educational goals of the reform include: developing capabilities for continuous self learning; preparing citizens capable to adapt to the future; inculcating and developing values and culture of work, production, and achieving quality; and keeping up with the scientific and technological advances and developing critical thinking.

But what are the real challenges? The report indicates:

Authorities are facing a major challenge in securing the resources to implement the reform fully and to take care of growth in the sector. Eliminating double shift schools, expanding current facilities to make room for new programs. Reorientations and upgrading the qualifications of Omani teachers, demand for more teachers for the increased number of teaching periods, more and better educational resources -all illustrate the additional financial and technical demands placed on the system.

Therefore:

Reordering priorities in the allocation of funds is appropriate when such objectives are to be realized under the umbrella of preparing productive and competitive citizens for the 21st century.

2. The level of education spending has steadily increased regardless of fiscal and economic conditions. Ministry of Education (MoE) recurrent spending continues to rise over time, while development and capital spending is static. Recurrent spending on higher education continues to increase significantly. Most education sector spending is recurrent, at over 90 percent of the total.

3. A large proportion of MoE expenditures are for wages, salaries and other personnel costs at 88 percent of total recurrent expenditures. This leaves relatively little room for pedagogical inputs.

The impact of the fiscal problem is exactly what was indicated in the quantitative part. On page 174 of this chapter I wrote:

“The growth that occurred during the Eighties and Nineties (and still persists today) went for the most part to teachers’ salaries and those who work in the Ministry. The remainder of the budget is concerned with building new schools or enhancing the existing ones. This channeling of funds was to meet the massive social demand for education. This is the essence of the educational growth in Oman. The question that we can raise is: what is left for staff development?”

To illustrate this picture, an analysis of the budget of the Ministry of Education confirms our view. The budgets of 1991, 1992 and 1993 show that the recurrent expenditures in these years constituted 89%, 86% and 82% respectively. The remainder of the budget was utilized for construction purposes. The latest report confirms these findings. With regard to the Ministry of education in Oman, the report states, that teachers’ emoluments constituted 84% of the educational budget.” Is there any difference between the findings?

The substance of these data – that of the World Bank and my personal comment is that the government made enormous efforts to absorb the increased number of new enrolments. However, in the long term it reduced the quality of the national human capital that is the vehicle of the socio-economic development.

The World Bank report brings us to a matter of most crucial importance, that is the relationship between economic status of the Omani families and access to higher education institutions. The report states:

4. Analysis of household survey information suggests that public spending at post-secondary educational institutions benefits wealthier groups more proportionately and these graduates have the highest private return. The same household survey information reveals that wealthier families are already spending some of their own resources on schooling and schooling-related items.

As a result:

5. On average, a year of schooling increases labor market earnings by more than 12 percent. In contrast, in other countries the returns to a year of schooling are about 10 percent. Returns to schooling are especially high for college education and university study. These high rates of return reflect the attractive wages paid to

educate Omanis, who are largely employed in the public sector. This demonstrates that there is scarcity of human capital in Oman

The facts revealed by the report, give a negative indication concerning the impact of this governmental policy upon the motivations of the Omani pupil. The semi-structured interviews with teachers showed that they have experienced difficulties with regard to classroom discipline or are frustrated by that a large number of Omani pupils feel they are excluded or they are on their way to being excluded from society. The restrictive higher education admissions policy and the economic atmosphere are some of the main reasons for these problems that emerged in the recent few years.

Not surprisingly, many Omani pupils release some of their frustrations in a variety of ways. Some of them, particularly those from low-income families, try to hurt the teachers or show disrespect for them. Others try to express their anger or their oppressed feelings in a more “polite” way, such as repeating the last year of secondary school in order to get higher scores that he thinks could help him secure a seat in the university.

Unlike Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates, the two countries in the Gulf region that have many universities (and absorb large numbers of secondary graduates), Oman’s higher education policy favours a very limited number of higher education institutions. This blind policy has generated negative impacts upon the morale of middle and low-income classes who strive for higher degrees that could secure for them a satisfactory income. Therefore, the report suggests a solution for these problems:

Concerns about access to higher education should be addressed through the introduction of a student loan scheme that protects students unable to find employment after graduation.

Let me here draw attention to the words concern and protect used by the report. I will compare these words to some findings, which I already presented in the qualitative part and which I believe mirror a growing phenomenon in Omani schools.

One teacher says:

Omani pupils reluctance to learn is the hardest problem I face in my work. Careless and reluctant pupils usually don’t participate in classroom activities, doesn’t respect the teacher and tend to create problems in the classroom.”

But why does the Omani pupil behave in this way? The same teacher says it is because “the pupils lack hope and are uncertain about their future.”

One teacher complains:

It has become hard for me to control the classroom. I am here to teach them but if they don't want that, because they don't expect that they will be able to reach their hopes to go to the university, what is the benefit of my efforts and my teaching”.

While the report made some references to the social consequences of the government policy with regard to keeping a tight hold on access to higher education, the empirical work shows clearly how this policy has produced an adverse effect on pupil motivation, their relationship with the teacher and their trust in education as a means for economic advancement.

I don't want to be pessimistic, but the present research indicates that the Ministry of Education has not introduced tangible improvements that could strengthen the internal efficiency of the system and the gulf between hopes and realities is increasing not decreasing. Assuming that the government has the will to improve the quality of education to ensure equity and well-prepared labour, there must be a clear plan to do so. Educational reform requires neither arbitrary action nor individual ambition rather it entails rational planning, social support, political commitment and coordination among the ministries to lay down the requisites for successful educational reform. Without these dimensions, the school in Oman will not be able to socialize the children properly, transmitting, perpetuating and developing the appropriate attitudes and ideas.

The Ministry of Education must not be misled by the quantitative achievements owing to educational expansion. If we look at World Bank reports of 1991, 2000 (and the present research) we can see that these reports constantly focused on improving the quality of education as the most critical challenge facing Oman as a developing country. As a result, it is possible to deduct that the school in Oman is at a crossroads and the Ministry is required to do a lot to respond to these challenges. Otherwise it could produce many negative social and economic effects that are not in the Omani people's favour. The Ministry was successful in promoting access to education. However promoting access must be accompanied with

improvements in quality, which is an issue that is almost ignored in the educational policies. In the next chapter I shall indicate some of the consequences of the current problems that were revealed in this chapter.

Chapter Seven

Discussion of the Main Fieldwork Findings

Introduction

In the previous chapter my main concern was to present and give economic and social analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. In this chapter my goal is to show the implications of the main findings for teachers and eventually for education in Oman. Understanding the current and prospective implications of teachers' working conditions in Oman is a major step toward drawing up any educational reform policy. This section of the chapter will focus on three major findings: teachers' dissatisfaction, the effects of class size and home-school contact.

Teachers' Work Dissatisfaction

To what extent are teachers in Omani schools satisfied or dissatisfied with their work situation? Several measurements were included in the questionnaire, aimed at revealing their views regarding their professional lives. Generally speaking, teachers indicated that they are dissatisfied with their work as teachers. Among the various factors that contributed to this, salary and lack of in-service training came out at the top of those factors that make up teachers' dissatisfaction. It has been shown that fluctuations in oil prices, in addition to other economic forces, affect the state's economic and social policy, which in turn affects the lives of teachers as members of the middle class. Halpern (1963) believes that due to socio-economic development, the middle class is growing rapidly in the Middle East. Here are suggestions as to what might be the main reasons for teachers' dissatisfaction.

Teachers in Oman, as part of the middle class, are motivated to improve their living standards. Their low salaries put heavy constraints on them. First, as indicated in the primary information in the questionnaire, the teachers are fathers of up to four children. Such social conditions pushes parents to find different ways to enhance the family's income. Second, the demographic transformation that Oman has undergone has changed the family pattern toward the nuclear family, which has become the pervasive pattern in the

urbanized cities of Oman. As a result, parents opt more for independent accommodation. The major problem that faces the Omani people is that the state is no longer the provider of financial loans to build houses as in the past three decades. Moreover, private banks in Oman provide high-interest loans. This issue constitutes hardships for large segments of the Omani people including teachers. If a teacher decides to get a loan, this means that little of his salary will be left to provide for his family's needs. Non-Omani teachers, on the other hand, have to pay very high rent for their accommodation, particularly those who live in the capital. In turn this consumes a high proportion of their salary. Third, and most importantly, the inflation rate in Oman reduces the buying power of the Omani Riyal, which makes life very difficult for Omani people and teachers can't escape this fact. Thus, the relative economic status of teachers has been declining with no tangible improvements worth mentioning. Fourth, teachers indicated that teaching takes up more time than other activities in the school. A heavy teaching burden creates firm convictions among teachers that they have the right to get more incentives because of the difficult task that they perform every day. Bearing in mind the shortage of school personnel, this means that teachers engage in more administrative tasks, which make the teacher's working week more stressful.

The huge quantitative expansion that the education system has witnessed was at the expense of quality. Because of the urgent need to build new schools to meet the demands of a rapidly-growing population, it was impossible to increase teachers' salaries. These findings support the fragile state theory assumption that as education expands, less capital becomes available to improve teachers' salaries. This creates a conflict between the leadership's ambition to expand education to provide for substantial sections of the population and the economic ability of the state which hampers these ambitions. Consequently, teachers in Oman - as in many developing countries - have to engage in different kinds of work to supplement insufficient income. Lockheed, et al (1991) found that teachers' absenteeism in some developing countries was affected by several factors:

- Salaries that are so low teachers must hold other jobs to supplement their income.
- Poor working conditions.
- Scarce opportunities for professional advancement.

- o Deficient local supervision, authority, and administrative procedures.

(p.102)

In Oman, strict regulations prevent teachers from being absent from work. However, there are other ways in which teachers (Omanis and non-Omanis) can supplement their income. Many teachers seek more lucrative employment elsewhere. But the quality of degree that they hold qualifies them to work only in the field of education (all teachers in Oman have graduated from education college) therefore, it is very difficult for them to find appropriate jobs in other sectors. The other possibility is to work in private schools. Again, teachers do not aspire to work in these schools because of the very low salaries. In addition, the private schools don't offer job security as the governmental schools do. However there are other plausible possibilities for a teacher to enhance his/her income from additional sources other than their teaching salaries. Omani teachers often establish small businesses (grocery shops, barber shops, etc.), which they tend to after school hours. With respect to non-Omani teachers, tutoring is the only suitable way for them to supplement their income (despite tutoring being officially banned). Teachers who engage in tutoring raise suspicions regarding their behaviour and treatment of the pupil in the classroom. From their point of view, non-Omani teachers believe they are behaving properly and fairly. On the one hand they believe they are helping the academically weak pupil to improve his performance and overcome his difficulties. On the other hand they are finding other sources of supporting their meager salaries. But others may accuse them of paying less attention to those pupils whose parents can't afford coaching fees. Moreover, teachers who prefer not to engage in tutoring (because they view such behaviour as against the honesty of the teaching profession) often describe those who do as opportunist, unfaithful and violating the rules of the teaching profession.

In the short term this will mean there will be few high quality teachers who are strongly committed to the teaching profession. In the long term, teaching posts in Oman will be occupied by those who have no other option but to work as schoolteachers. This category is not interested in the profession; on the contrary they are not motivated and seek any job to avoid unemployment. Moreover, these conditions will make teachers lose what Durkheim considers

“teacher faith in his task”. Non-Omani teachers are not given equal salaries as we saw in the teachers’ interviews. This has created tension between Omanis and non-Omanis. Therefore, some of the educational area principals mentioned that the salary scale should be equal for Omanis and non-Omanis. In the long term, the better-qualified non-Omani teachers will seek work in other Gulf States because of higher rates of pay. This means, that the education system in Oman will lose the best teachers. It should not be forgotten that most Sultan Qaboos University graduates who join the teaching profession experience insufficient and weak academic preparation. This will have a negative effect on the future of education in Oman.

This brings us back to the argument about teachers’ dissatisfaction with the opportunities for in-service training. One of the most important outcomes indicated by the interviews with parents indicated that they are dissatisfied with the teaching performance of many Omani teachers. World Bank Reports (1991, 2000) and the educational area principals’ survey emphasized this issue. Effective teaching is determined by the individual teacher’s knowledge of the subject matter, mastery of pedagogical skills, personal characteristics like having power and will (Durkheim, 1956). Madani (1989) an Arab scholar in the field of sociology of education believes that effective schools are dependent on: 1) well-trained and well-qualified teachers, (2) pupils’ attitudes (3) pupils’ commitment to learning and finally (4) the content of the curriculum.

Lets us bear in mind several facts, which I wrote about in the previous chapter regarding in-service teacher training:

- A high proportion of the Ministry of Education budget goes toward teachers’ salaries and the rest to constructing new schools to accommodate the increase in enrollment numbers
- Very little is allocated for teachers’ in-service training
- The Ministry of Education in Oman implements Omanization whereby non-Omanis are replaced by Omani teachers;
- The academic preparation of schools of education graduates is inadequate and weak.

These facts signify several things: First, that the academic knowledge of the Omani teacher is expected to fall in the coming years because of lack of in-

service training and inadequate opportunities offered by the Ministry for Higher Education to up-date teachers' skills. Second, the Ministry of Education continues to hire graduates of Sultan Qaboos University, irrespective of their professional standards, in order to reduce unemployment among Omani youth. The conclusion that can be drawn from the forgoing argument is that, unfortunately, it is at the expense of the quality of education in Oman in general and the Omani pupil's performance, achievement and his chances in the labour market in particular. This is simply because the educational "inputs" experience various difficulties during their academic preparation which means they lack the knowledge necessary to be effective teachers and this problem will continue to grow. Failure to recruit and provide schools with highly qualified teachers has resulted in a greater dropout and repetition rate, waste of money, inefficient manpower and the loss of public confidence in Omani schoolteachers. A poor quality of teachers is sure to produce low quality school results and weaken the ability of education to perpetuate and reinforce the homogeneity that life in society demands. (Durkheim, 1956)

It could be argued that the issue of teachers' professional development will remain absent from the educational policy makers' agenda. Rapid population growth and the slight increase in fiscal allocations to the education sector leave no room for the educational policy makers to think about these critical issues that are key factors for adequate school results.

Socially, schools with many educational deficiencies have forced wealthy parents to enroll their children in private schools in order to ensure that they obtain a good quality of education and to avoid a bleak future. One of the consequences is that government schools are becoming a place for pupils whose parents lack fees for private schools. This also means that schools, in the near future, will reflect class composition in Oman. This situation appears to contradict the education philosophy in Oman proposed in the following:

Increasing national production and raising the standard of living of individuals by developing human capabilities and skills and exploiting natural resources are among the basic national aims of Omani society.

Education should prepare citizens to acquire the required technical capabilities and professional skills so as to enable them to bear the responsibility for developing their country and achieving economic progress for the people of Oman.

(The philosophy of education in the Sultanate of Oman. 1979, p.15)

These “structural bacteria” (Ridha, 1997) in the education body, deprive the lower classes of the opportunity to develop their social and economic positions, whereas, according to educationist observers “education policy should be taken as a set of social procedures that benefit the majority of a society’s members and eventually lead to social mobility” (Ridha, 1997, p. 105). As a result, we are going to witness a gradual divergence between educational policy and educational philosophy (which assumes that education should benefit and develop the potential of Omani citizens).

The need to upgrade teachers economically and academically is more urgent today than in the past. The economic atmosphere plus the economic transformation policies, that the Sultanate implements to support its economic performance, (the transformation from public sector domination to private sector) have created a difficult employment situation, thereby frustrating pupils’ ambitions about the future. Parents also indicated in the interviews that they were unhappy with the general condition of schools in Oman, simply because they view education as the most important avenue for social and economic mobility. Graduates from the government schools are less able to compete in the labour market than their counterparts who studied in private schools because of the limited skills they obtained in their schools. This is because the private sector demands a high level of skills. Therefore most of the government school graduates will have more opportunities in manual work. I am not criticising manual work, but the income from such work is insufficient to manage the increased expenses of everyday life in Oman. Improving and reforming educational input would contribute toward reducing parents’ and teachers’ dissatisfaction, enhancing public confidence in education and reviving the hopes that schools will generate adequate human capital, not mirror the class structure in Omani society.

If we look at the historical experiences of some of the developed countries, we can find that promoting teachers’ knowledge and teaching practices constituted the heart of their educational development. Although its educational development covered various issues teachers’ status remained the most important component in the French educational experience in the 19th century. It found that poor educational results could threaten its political and

economic existence against Britain. Therefore, France sent Victor Cousin, an educationist scholar, to Prussia to determine the main factors that contributed to the superiority of its educational system. Cousin found that the main reason for Prussia's educational success lay in the good preparation of teachers. This would be a good lesson for Oman to learn.

Class Size

In his speech before the Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council), the Minister of Development, argued that Oman attained remarkable economic and social achievements through its successive development plans (Ministry of Development Report, 1995, p. 15). According to the Minister's speech, 95% is the enrolment ratio for primary level, which is "one of the greatest achievements of the Sultanate in the field of education compared to the achievements of the Middle East and South African countries." (Ministry of Development Report, 1995, p. 9)

Does this number indicate that Omani pupils obtain the necessary knowledge and skills in the classroom? If providing more opportunities for a wider sector of the Omani people to enrol their children in schools is seen as an important part of development, then undoubtedly, the education policy that the Sultanate has pursued since the 1970s is successful. Also, if the essential goal of education is to reduce illiteracy, then the number reflects magnificent accomplishments by the educational policy in the Sultanate. But if, however, the aim of education is to strike a balance between continuous quantitative expansion and qualitative improvements, then the policy has achieved a very limited success.

It is possible to agree with the Minister that Oman has attained a high enrolment rate, but 95% disguises the concomitant effects of rapid quantitative expansion. Abduldaem (1979 pp.32-42) summarized some of the effects of educational expansion in the Arab world (which are also true for Oman):

1. There is unbalance between the increasing pupil numbers and teacher numbers. In other words, teacher numbers lag behind the massive increase in pupil numbers. This has resulted in an increase

of pupil-teacher ratio, large classes and a decline in educational attainment.

2. The growth in pupil numbers is not met with sufficient school buildings to absorb these numbers. Consequently, school buildings are used for two or three shifts.
3. As education expands to meet social demand, repeater and dropout numbers represent a serious problem and constitute major wastages that minimize the role and effectiveness of education.

We looked at whether the current state of education in Oman is typical or different from the general characteristics of education in the Arab world, which have been cited. Teachers' answers indicate that social and financial factors interact with each other to produce educational problems, typical in the Arab World. Regarding the increase in class sizes teachers attributed this to the following reasons:

- Rapid population growth
- Failure to recruit sufficient teachers
- Insufficient number of school buildings
- Increase in number of repeaters

With all these defects in education, which affect the performance of schools in Oman, does the Minister's figure of 95% suggest that pupils in Oman receive a good quality of education? These deficiencies reveal that supply-side intervention by the state in Oman (through building, hiring and deploying enough schools) doesn't keep up with the renewal needs of schools in Oman. So the outcomes of these forces are as follow:

- The development budget is being increased to build more schools, but the budget for salaries and other teachers' supports may suffer and vice versa.
- High teacher-pupil ratio calls for new teaching skills, such as the ability to work with large groups, deal with pupils with poor performance, etc.

- A larger, more heavily subscribed education system affects the teacher's life and engages him in greater responsibility with more supervision and administrative responsibilities.
- While pressures are increasing teachers are told to teach the syllabus, to teach to the test, to produce more successful graduates.

We have to wonder how teachers can effectively respond to all these burdens while they often lack the training, status and the necessary facilities to do so. How can a teacher pay attention to the needs of 40 pupils in a classroom?

The result is that class size in Omani schools has become a major constraint that continuously hampers the improvement of Omani pupils' performance. Teachers' answers indicate that they believe class size to be one of the most important if not the most important issue for them. Also, they indicated that class size, is one of the most important or the most important factors affecting the academic performance of the Omani pupil.

The importance of class size for teachers can be understood in the light of the workloads assigned to them. In Oman, teachers usually teach between two to four classes every day. These workloads double job responsibilities and make them unable and less committed to fulfil the expected roles, not because they are unwilling to do so, but because the working conditions impose a heavy burden upon them. Most of the time the Omani pupil falls victim to educational policies that fail to take into account the changing economic and social environment and its inevitable effects on education. Again the philosophy of education stresses that:

The development of the individual, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and morally is the desired aim of every society, which derives its strength from that of its members. Thus the full growth of the individual which is the basic aim of education is also one of the desired aims of the society and education adopts it as a guiding principle and seeks to achieve it as an aim, a means, and an end.

(The philosophy of Education in the Sultanate of Oman pp. 23-24).

How can a teacher find enough time to instruct 38 pupils or more morally, emotionally, etc. in a 35 minute period? This means that each pupil

receives less than one minute. (We are assuming here that there are ideal conditions in the classroom, but the facts indicate that teachers spend some of the class period organizing and disciplining the pupils). We have to ask therefore whether one minute is enough to develop the individual's social and/or educational capabilities? Parsons argues that the school's goal is to develop and improve the individuals' commitment and capacities that are prerequisites for their future roles. These crowded conditions impair the improvement of individuals' commitment and make the teacher less able to inculcate the appropriate and rational attitudes that modern socio-economic institutes require. Moreover, the philosophy of education was formulated in relation to the developmental needs of the Sultanate. These conditions in the schools will gradually undermine the ability of teachers to attain the objective of the philosophy of education.

97.9% of teachers' responses revealed that increase in class size affects the quality of teaching and learning. However, teachers indicated that pupils' emotional well-being, standards of work, motivation, amount of individual teacher attention and assessment of pupils' work are all affected by the current increase in class size.

So we can see that the gap is widening between the ideal (the philosophy of education) and the daily practice in the classroom. Teachers in Omani schools are not given the opportunity to perform their role properly, and in turn they are unable to give their pupils sufficient attention. Also, within the frame of 35 minutes how can a teacher be expected to assess his pupils' work?

Pupils' homework and assignments should be corrected and graded by the teacher as part of the pupil's academic evaluation, but how can the teacher find enough time to grade no less than 200 (on average) assignments? More pupils in the class make the job more difficult, more complicated and minimize teacher's effectiveness.

Accordingly, the content and form of knowledge is questioned because a teacher in an Omani classroom rarely finds sufficient time to ask pupils about academic matters or elicit the student's own views. Limited time and large numbers of pupils leave little opportunity for the teacher to diversify his teaching methods and to ensure that the pupil grasps the lesson. Apparently, lecturing to

the pupils is the only way available for the teacher. However, lecturing is not the only way to enhance pupils' learning. Teachers' answers highlighted this issue. When I asked teachers what they would do if they had smaller classes, most of them indicated that they would employ better teaching strategies that would substantially benefit pupils' learning. An example of the way in which they would be able to assess pupils' grasp of the curriculum would be to follow up on the less able pupils, .etc (which I suggested in the previous chapter). This means that Omani pupils are being deprived of the following:

- Time to participate in classroom activities.
- The opportunity to ask questions.
- A teacher's feedback on their progress.

Inkeles and Smith (1974) suggest that the school should help pupils to master one or more specific skills, which would help him to believe in his ability to acquire new skills. This way of learning, which they term "generalization", as a mechanism for modernizing pupils' attitudes, encourages and supports self-confidence and develops a sense of efficacy. Large classes in Omani schools inhibit teachers from communicating this vital mechanism for a pupil's professional future.

The interviews with teachers indicated that curricula presented in the textbooks lack coherence, scope and sequence, among other deficiencies. Therefore, they assert the need for substantive curricula reform efforts to improve the learning ability of Omani pupils. The curricula problems seem to be an overriding issue in many educational systems of developing countries. But when those problems combine with the difficulties that are being produced by overcrowded classrooms, it is clear that education in Oman needs serious remedies.

Moreover, the social background of many Omani pupils, exacerbates the effects of increase in class size. According to the statistical yearbook, in 1990-2000, 14 % of the population in Oman live on the poverty line. Poverty affects whether children enroll in school, whether they stay in school and how much they learn. Socio-education research (Madin.1983, World Bank, 1993) indicates that children from poor households are educationally weak compared to those

from wealthier households. So the poor pupils encounter various challenges that don't end with the home environment. Large class size constitutes one of the major problems that reduces their ability to learn and to build on their potential which means that the incidence of dropping out and failure is escalating.

In the Al-Batina region, where I conducted the interviews with secondary and intermediate school principals, they complained about parents' lack of contact with the school. This means that Omani parents delegate to the school their children's preparation for the future. However government input is insufficient and school facilities in turn are not adequate to teach the pupil appropriately and effectively. It becomes difficult then to imagine what kind of future awaits the Omani pupil. In the Al-Batina region, the number of private schools is no more than 23, compared to Muscat (the capital of Oman), which has more than 53 schools (Al-Markazi, 1998, p4). The number of private schools in the Al-Batina region gives a good indication of the economic ability of Omani families. The burning issue here is what can be done to improve the academic performance of the Omani pupil as long as large classes produce a negative impact on their learning, bearing in mind the low economic status of many families who live in the region? I believe that education in Oman is witnessing a new form of reproduction of the Third World. Bourdieu, the French sociologist, assumes that schools support the ruling class. Meanwhile, the children of these classes have a stronger chance of educational success in school than other classes. In Oman, schools reproduce educational underdevelopment when a child moves from one class to another and from the lower grade to the higher one, with limited knowledge that has been imparted to them in the classroom and they are not ready for the higher grade. This means that his chances of being admitted to the university or his competency in the market (or economic and social mobility) are weaker than those who have received a better education. As a result, Omani pupils recognize what this means for their future. According to the interviews with school principals, many pupils repeat a year, particularly the last year of secondary school, in order to get higher marks that could enable them to secure a place in the university. However, to repeat the year will not benefit them. Instead it will increase class

size, and teachers will be unable to monitor pupil learning, evaluate their progress, or find sufficient time for feedback and reteaching difficult topics. Not surprisingly, some pupils, according to teachers' interviews, try to harm their teachers as a manifestation of their anger toward the current economic and educational conditions. Educated parents I interviewed are aware of these aspects which don't predict a bright future. Therefore, they press for introducing profound, comprehensive educational improvements because they believe (as members of the middle class) that education is the most useful way to increase their sons' opportunities in the labour market.

Hanushek (1991) is one of those who persistently believe that class size is a worthless policy for enhancing pupils' achievements. But is it possible to agree with his suggestion that reducing class size would not benefit the pupil and teacher in Oman? I will clarify this issue. US and UK class size studies were carried out in different social and educational settings. The American and British schools were well-equipped, staffed with qualified teachers and had good facilities in the classroom and, importantly, they had teachers' assistants. Good home-school relationships were encouraged. However, most of these elements are non-existent in Omani schools, which increases teachers' burdens and weakens pupils' academic achievement. As a result, Hanushek's view lacks credibility and experience of the educational problems in the developing world. We can see then that preparing any educational policy entails taking into account the educational peculiarity of a society.

Also, class size studies are aimed at identifying the effects of small class size for early primary grade pupils as this is the most important stage in the pupil's academic life. In Oman there are 40 pupils and above per class. If pupils do not get a proper education from the beginning they will not be productive and motivated at the next educational level or grade as is happening now. If we assume that a weak pupil can pass from one class to another, his chances to read and write are very slim. In other words, you can find illiterate pupils. There are so many cases like this. So, the Minister of Development, proud of its 95% enrollment in primary schools, signals a political dimension of the quantitative accomplishment of socio-economic development, rather than reflecting the reality of daily life in Omani schools. Fuller (1991) confirms the relationship

between politics and education and its impact upon pupils in Third World schools:

Teachers spend class time arranging lessons, talking at the pupil masses, and watching over students working on routine seatwork. Whether these teaching practices effectively impart literacy or higher order cognitive skills is a question rarely asked. These actions are symbolically rich in maintaining order and expressing the teachers' authority within a modern, mass organization - the classroom. The teacher is acting out the behaviors and rules that are expected, and is following legitimate images of what is supposed to occur in the classroom. Here teachers and pupils' actions both demonstrate active membership in the classroom in the school institution, independent of any material or cognitive effects. The state sets mass conditions that allow easy symbolic expression of membership-a prerequisite for realizing opportunity – while begging the question of whether much is actually being learned.

(Fuller, 1991, p. 108)

The adverse effects of class size should be studied and understood in the light of socio-economic context. Large numbers in Omani class could compel the Ministry to resort to some solutions that are against the quality of education and the academic preparation of the Omani pupil. The fertility rate in Oman is the highest in the world. This means, that schools are going to witness high growth in enrollment numbers in the coming years which implies that the government shouldn't only construct new schools every year, but must also increase the number of schools to keep pace with newcomers. The evidence – according to teachers' answers and official statistics - indicates that the number of schools is falling behind the “explosion” in pupil numbers. So, what are the options available to the Ministry of Education in Oman? In fact, there are two possible solutions, which are in part being implemented already. The first is to open new classrooms and hire new teachers. This is a conventional policy, which the ministry follows, but it is still insufficient to fully absorb the new pupils. The second is to facilitate pupils' movement through different grades and levels by introducing very easy exams and flexibility in grading them¹. The aims of these procedures are: 1) to ensure that a high proportion pass the exams; 2) to reduce repetition rate; 3) to find enough places for future pupils.

¹ Based on the interviews with teachers and their complains of the negative effects of the examinations system.

The startling aspect of this policy is that it neglects the long-term consequences on pupils and teacher. Oman is about to export human capital². The current education situation in the classroom provides the Omani pupil with low (if not the lowest) knowledge and skills. School graduates, who seek jobs despite the employment difficulties, are supported by strong government regulations to help them gain employment in the private and public sectors. But this is not going to be the case when they seek jobs outside Oman. It is the quality of their credentials that will determine their eligibility to compete with other nationalities in the labour market.

The educational problems that are produced by high density of class size, together with other pressures, lead us to think critically about the role of education in developing and forming human capital. How, with all these shortcomings, can the Omanisation policy achieve its goals? How can education contribute to narrowing the gap between the social classes if the internal mechanisms of schools are ineffective in producing well-educated human capital? How can we enhance educational efficiency to reduce school dropouts and leavers, particularly after the primary grade? Obviously, large class size impacts on pupils' learning, particularly those with low cognitive abilities, because it makes teachers unable to communicate curriculum contents to the whole class and at the same time prevents the pupil from asking questions to improve his potential. This could lead to an increase in dropouts and school leavers. Finding the solutions for these problems depends on the view of the policy makers of how they want Omani society to be in the future and whether educational equity is a theoretical slogan or a real issue (and indispensable element for educational development) that the policy makers look forward to achieving.

The Dilemma of Omani Parent-School Relationships

Interviews with teachers and school principals, have revealed the following:

² The government of Oman had signed work agreement with a neighbouring country. One of the main objectives of this agreement is to give Omani labour a priority in employment over other Asian nationalities.

1. Deterioration in the academic level of the Omani student.
2. Behavioural problems at school and in the classrooms.

These are the main problems of the Omani pupils. On the other hand, teachers have their professional problems that influence their performance at school. The question remains, will teachers be able to successfully deal with their problems or with their pupils' problems?

Pupils' educational and discipline problems may be improved through collaboration between parents and school. However, in reality things are different, as most Omani parents do not show the least interest in following their children's academic progress at school. This was clearly evident by the fact that most teachers were not happy with the level of collaboration with parents. Teachers hold parents responsible for failure to follow the academic development of their children. They ascribe this to structural reasons within Omani society. Teachers are in need of a strong, effective link with Omani parents, for the following:

1. To assist teachers in understanding the difficulties faced by the pupils.
2. To increase the Omani student's level of motivation, willingness and enthusiasm for learning. This will also positively influence the pupils' behaviour in school and command respect for the teachers.
3. To help parents become cognizant of their children's achievement at school, consequently parents will be aware of the type and extent of assistance they should offer to their children.
4. To help to reduce the pressure felt by teachers at school.
5. To enhance parents' awareness of the problems and issues of education in Oman, consequently enhancing awareness of the reform tools appropriate to the Omani environment. As the parents' points of view are very important to the development of education, this approach is being recognized and followed by some developed countries such as Britain and Japan.

6. One economic benefit would be a reduction in the number of school failures, which is considered one of the main issues facing the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

Unfortunately, lack of home-school contact hinders achieving these aspects that are essential components of human capital development.

Lack of interest by Omani parents in getting involved was quite obvious, as a high percentage of teachers held the view that parents are spending less and less time helping their children with their homework, and caring for them.

Teachers and school principals feel that parents turning away from helping their children with their homework, and the lack of interest in their affairs mirror, not only the social problems within the Omani family but also the faults of socio-economic development in Oman.

Teachers and school principals' opinions show that, poverty, low income and illiteracy among parents have led to low morale that cannot be expected to create enthusiasm in a pupil education. This situation can be attributed to the following:

1. The father's engagement in providing for the family needs consumes a great deal of his time, consequently he is not able to find the time to get involved in helping his children with their homework, or at least urging them to observe their studies and pay attention thereto.
2. If economical aspects, such as the high cost of living and inflation, and how they influence the low income Omani family are taken into consideration, we will notice that all these factors contribute to the psychological pressure and frustration felt by Omani fathers, which in turn leads to lack of interest towards their children's education.

Hagen discussed the issue of the familial environment and its influence upon the children. He highlights the contrast between traditional and modern societies positing that each of these societies is a product of a different type of personality. Hagen argues that people with a low status, or groups that are forced to accept a lower status, become disenchanted with the established order. Their accumulated resentment is then transferred to their children. As a

result, frustration and rage continue to be accumulated from one generation to another. The retreatist person, he says, is not free of rage. As a result:

As retreatism deepens in successive generations, it creates circumstances of home life and social environment that are conducive to the development of innovational personality. The historical sequences seem to be authoritarianism, withdrawal of status respect, retreatism, and creativity. This seems to have been the sequence of events over a period of some generations in Japan, Colombia, England (where the retreatism was probably less intense), and Russia.

(Hagen, 1962, p.217)

I feel that Hagen's argument regarding the social factors that lead to social and economic transformation of the traditional society, may not explain the consequences of Omani parents' carelessness about their sons' behaviour and their attitudes toward education. This means that a deep understanding of the subject's social change and social problems is a necessary methodological tool for appropriate and effective solutions. The limited number of educational institutions in Oman and the difficulty to find work makes Omani pupils feel very low which in turn undermines their attempts to improve their potential. Losing hope in the surrounding environment exposes the Omani pupil to a sequence of social risks. Therefore, the likelihood that these situations could lead to development, as Hagen argues, is very slim.

As I have previously explained, the results of Omani parents' ignorance towards their children's/sons education were substantial. According to teachers, parents are not setting a good example for their children to follow, not withstanding other problems faced by Omani families which affect the Omani pupil.

Teachers have gone further, as they believe that the main reason for the academic problems faced at school by pupils is the family and not the school. However they also believe that some of the responsibility should be borne by the school.

Regardless of whether home or school has largely contributed to the pupil's problems, the outcome is the same. The student is the only victim of such negligence. Ironically, even if services at school are enhanced, the gap in the link between parents and schools will not lead to a great improvement in the performance of the Omani pupil, as long as parents do not care about their

sons' education. On the other hand, if we assume that the parent-school relationship has improved then the school's problems (teacher quality, curriculum, and facilities etc.) will only result in a slight improvement in the level of the Omani pupil.

When we say the Omani pupil becomes a victim of these circumstances this means that their chances of attending higher education are at their lowest level, consequently, if the pupil is attending elementary school, then their chances of going on to the intermediate school are slim. Similarly, if the pupil is attending the intermediate school, then their chances of going on to secondary school are also very weak, and so on. Evidence of this is that of five pupils in the elementary level, only one pupil has a chance to access the intermediate level and of four students in the intermediate level, only one pupil has access to the secondary school³ ...

What do teachers want from parents? Teachers' answers have focused on the importance of parents helping their children with their homework. Teachers' insistence on this issue reflects the crisis existing in Omani schools.

We also notice that teachers want parents to teach their children to value education. The important question is, if the parents themselves are illiterate, poor and running business activities that do not require high academic qualifications (fisheries, greengrocers), and themselves are not aware of the value of education, how can they be expected to urge their children to study harder? This does not imply that child negligence is restricted to parents of low academic qualifications. Unfortunately this phenomenon is apparent amongst all types of Omani parents, even those holding high academic qualifications. This claim is supported by the fact that school principals were complained about parents' failure to attend school committee meetings in order to discuss their children's school issues. Teachers also focused on the issue that parents must look after their children. No doubt this is very important to the pupil's academic achievement. As mutual cooperation between home and the pupil plays a major role in defining their present and future behaviour, above all it plays a role in planting the seeds for the right or acceptable behaviour towards others. Moreover, in their behaviour towards others pupils copy their experience with

their families. Therefore, preparing parents and, making them ready to shoulder their responsibilities on that front, is very important for the future of Oman.

However, there are a number of facts that should be remembered:

1. Youngsters between 0 - 14 years represent a large portion of the Omani population structure (51.6%). (General Census of Housing and Population, p.39)

2. The Omani family is undergoing many changes. These changes include the transition from the extended family to the nuclear family, the entry of Omani women into the paid labour force, family breakdown, economic changes and their negative impact on the Omani family cohesion and on children.

This is where the government can help by reshaping parents' attitudes and helping needy families to cover their daily subsistence, protect them against breakdown and maintain a good level of relations between the parents and children. In this way they can provide a good upbringing for the children. One might say that such intervention requires human and financial resources, which the government of Oman cannot afford. This is not true, as the investment in human resources will lead to the development of various aspects of the Omani pupil. This should not be confined to school, and must be enforced through the Omani family as the major social institution responsible for the child's socialization.

The economic circumstances, and the state of the "death of the awareness" which have become a hallmark of the Omani family, is a result and a natural outcome of development, which has faced many difficulties and crises. Therefore, no one can solve the families' problems and incite them to value education, except the government. This can be achieved by studying and investigating the social and economic obstacles that inhibit effective contact between parents and teachers. Amongst these obstacles are: poverty, illiteracy and indifference.

Some social problems in the developing nations seem to impact on the quality of education. Fagerlind and Saha indicate that Indonesia during the 1960s and 1970s had some common features with other less developed

³ Of course, there are many social and economic factors that impact school dropout in Oman. Weak-

countries regarding educational condition, i.e. low educational attainment, rapid social demand for education, etc. the writers showed that the geographical conditions of Indonesia (the country comprises 3000 islands) made communication very difficult for the Indonesian people. Moreover, Indonesia is characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity (250). After dependence, Indonesia began improving its educational system. However, the fragile Indonesian economy made it very difficult to allocate more funds for education. The oil boom during the 1970s gave the government the perfect opportunity to spend generously on education, which was witnessing a continuous deterioration. Fagerlind and Saha ask:

What impact did this increase have on an educational system, which had been previously chronically starved of funds? A purely economic determinist model would suggest that overnight the educational system would develop both in quality and quantity. In fact this did not occur. This reason, of course, is that economy is only one of three important dimensions in the dialectic process relating to education. As indicated our model, other dimension continued to impose serious constraints.

(Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, p.202)

What are the 'serious constraints' that limit the improvements of Indonesia's education?

They refer here to the social dimension. "Panca-sila-minded man" is one of the goals stated in the philosophy of Indonesian education. It was expected that through this goal, education would produce a person who would have "a high degree of dedication to the future of Indonesia", knowledge and skills that correspond to development needs" (ibid, p.203). Fagerlind and Saha concluded that the social dimension was an obstacle that minimizes the achievement of education. The social dimension lies in the "fragmentation and pluralism of Indonesian society, which as we have already described, is part of the dialectic process which is in conflict with the goals of education. The result is an education system quite different from that intended, which cannot be effectively bought with money alone". (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, p.205)

This educational experience tells us that designing an educational policy requires taking into consideration not only the current variables and constraints, but also the prospective ones. In other words, treating educational problems

home-school relationship is among these factors.

must be based on a complementary view so that the economic, social and demographic factors become considered as important determinants for the success or failure of education.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion and Recommendations: A Call for a Comprehensive Change in Teachers' Conditions

Unless something is done to overcome the demoralization of teachers, it is unlikely that any reforms will improve significantly the quality of education in the United States. There are no teacher-proof reforms. Ultimately, the success of all improvement efforts depends on the quality and determination of the classroom teachers.

Patricia Ashton and Rodman Webb (1986).

In Ghana 70 percent of adults are illiterate; in Nepal the figure is around 80 percent. How one expects that these illiterate parents will be active in the management of their children's school.

Perhaps only two conclusions can be drawn from these three examples. The first is that the political dimensions are crucial in any attempt to provide effective education for the disadvantaged. The second general conclusion is that once the political will is mobilized, there must be a radical reform, for radical reform what is needed.

Nicholas Bennet (1993) about educational reform in some Asian countries.

Introduction

Despite the quantitative achievements of the last three decades, education in Oman still suffers from certain deficiencies and encounters serious challenges. These deficiencies and challenges have had an adverse effect on teachers' roles in Omani schools, Omani pupils' performance and their fortunes in the labour market. The recommendations of this study are intended to act as guidelines for any prospective educational reform policies in the Sultanate.

Before stating the recommendations of this study it is important to present a discussion of the main issues of the fieldwork and to summarize the theoretical and empirical findings. Indicating the findings of the theoretical chapters is essential in order to: justify the radical reform policies that this study is going to recommend in order to raise the quality and the standard of education and to get it out of its current impasse. Irrespective of government propaganda on the quantitative achievements of the education system, the study has indicated that the education needs urgent attention in order to halt

problems it is experiencing. Second, presenting the findings of the theoretical chapters, particularly the economic social demographic features of Omani society, will reveal that if these features are not improved by means of a strong, efficient education system, social security, political stability and national unity could be adversely affected. Third, benefiting from the literature review studies, which indicate the various policies in the developed and developing world that have attempted to improve educational efficiency and school results will enable us to participate effectively, actively and responsibly in the socio-economic projects. This section from the last chapter in the thesis will summarize what these studies concluded regarding the educational reform strategies and what the current educational situation is in Oman and how to profit from their experiences and lessons in drawing up the elements of educational reform policy in Oman.

The sociological Theory and Reality in the Third World: Oman as an Example.

In the theoretical chapter I have selected some theories and studies, which represent the different sociological approaches to the study of education in the developing nations. Here I want to discuss the main findings of the fieldwork in the light of the sociological theory. It is important to emphasise here that this discussion doesn't criticize the theories, but rather offers a modification of them to make them more relevant to a Third World setting. The focus will be on the modernization theory, which drove the educational policies of most of the developing nations.

A number of social, historical and economic facts combined to provide the bases for the modernization and institutional theories: first: it is argued that the economic failure and stagnation of many underdeveloped nations is attributed to the absence of mass education. Second, these theories assume that the ability of western societies to develop and build their education institutions at all levels is responsible for the 'take off' of the developed world.

As a result, if the developing or underdeveloped nations, want to achieve the same level of economic development, they have to imitate the experiences

of the west in which education played an effective and significant role in that historical period.

Modernization theory has two aspects: one that has its origins in economic discipline. This aspect of the modernization theory stresses that educating the people of the Third World by investing in education at primary, secondary and higher education levels constitutes an effective means to economic development.

The studies of Becker, Harbison and Myers on the influence of education on economic development in developed or underdeveloped countries supported the assumptions of the human capital theory.

In the images of the third world governments, human capital theory offers a lot of promises for these governments. By investing in human capital, the developed nations can break free from socio-economic underdevelopment. Given their limited resources, but at the same time recognising the vital role of education, many developing nations adopted the themes of human capital theory and incorporated them in their educational policies as the “magic solution” that could help these nations to overcome all their economic difficulties.

Inkeles and Smith's theory falls within the modernization paradigm. Based on empirical investigation in many developing countries, they concluded that the process of modernization could take place through the experience of institutions such as schools and factories (the writers emphasized the significance of the former in inculcating modern attitudes on the later).

Based on their findings, they confirm that modern attitudes (or western values) provide the social and psychological orientations that are required for economic development and to bring about the desired social changes.

Like Parsons and other functionalists, Inkeles and Smith found that the school, as the most important institution in the modernization process, provides certain mechanisms that can bring about changes in the society's values from traditional to modern ones. From this perspective, development such as modernization is seen as an evolutionary process relying on changes in values of a particular developing society. Also, becoming modern entails resocialisation of the traditional people with western values that proved (based

on the experience of the west) to be a pre-condition for effective and successful development.

I agree with Ramises (1984) that theories of development formulated a set of ideas that are alien to the social and economic contexts of most Third World countries. Also, western writers consider the ideas of the theories as a set of objective laws that can interpret the causes of underdevelopment and the sources of progress and development. Finally, following the same social and economic paths of the west are the sole solutions offered for the overriding social and economic problems that abound in underdeveloped societies.

Harrison (1989) confirms that:

It should be noted that evolutionism, diffusionism, and structural functionalism all contributed to the theoretical 'mix' that constituted early modernization theory, and that was based especially on the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons and his related concepts of the pattern variables, both of which had been developed in general sociological analysis and neither of which were designed for particular application to the Third World.

(p. 31)

He continues:

Because of this theoretical orientation, and the fact that the whole of the analysis tended to be actual societies, it is clear that the influence of factors outside these societies was given little prominence. Colonialism, and all this implies, may not have been ignored, but it is hardly the case that the relationships with the West or with Eastern bloc loomed large in the analysis. By the same token, the view of the Third World societies as relatively self-contained systems meant that the causes of under-development were seen, in general, to rest within their own structures, and were attributed to their own deficiencies. It then followed that, if they were to develop, the main focus of remedial attention would have to be adjusted to bring about a greater 'fit' with industrialization and modernity.

(Harrison, 1989, p. 32)

This magnificent text summarises appositely the problems of the modernization theory. First, there is a deliberate ignorance of the complicated, historical, social and economic conditions of the Third World which overlap to produce underdevelopment. Second, some of the main shortcomings of these theories are that they assume that a single factor could lead the third world to prosperity and growth. Third and most important, modernization theories created a misconception of the ultimate objectives of development which were reduced to economic growth as the key to changing the systems of traditional societies. In

this way it makes no reference to other humanitarian or social objectives or to the real causes that aggravate the problems of underdevelopment in Third World societies.

The history of Europe tells us that many factors led to the great progress made by these nations. Education, colonialism, political development and military power played decisive roles in the economic progress of the west and account for the superiority of the West. From this we see that there are a number of factors, not just one.

After their independence, the less developed countries inherited subversive social and economic systems which posed numerous problems for these societies.

Buchanan describes the conditions of post independence:

The long, and continuing, exploitation of the colonial and semi colonial territories led to what have been aptly described as "the ultimate in poverty and degradation". It produced a world (a world containing two-thirds of humanity) whose existence was that of, at best, half men, living poorly and living briefly, living in the twilling world of the illiterate, living in the brutalising certainty that half of their children would perish of hunger or preventable disease before adolescence.

(Buchanan, K. in Mountjoy, 1971, pp.30-31)

Expanding education was seen as the most vital contributor to economic development and to improving the living conditions of these societies. But educational expansion was far beyond the financial capabilities of the Third World budgets. Moreover, providing free schooling for all children has increased literacy rates and this is a highly positive social return from educational expansion. On the other side it has undermined the quality of education in most developing nations. This is exactly the case in Oman.

The empirical findings of this present research indicate clearly that large classes, lack of in-service training programs and failure to improve teachers' income, elements which are crucial to the efficiency and quality of education progress are some results of the huge expansion which was influenced by human capital theory. This is not only the case in Oman, but it is a persistent problem that prevails in many developing nations. Unesco report (1998) consolidates this aspect of my argument. The report states that

Trends and developments in earlier decades, both within and outside education, contributed to the upsurge of concern for educational quality at the beginning of the present decade. In the less developed regions of the world the dramatic expansion of educational enrolments in the 1960s and 1970s severely strained the qualitative foundations of many, if not most, education systems. Pressures on teachers' demand-supply balances were noted.....but there were also pressures on educational administration, on the physical infrastructure of education and the availability of instructional materials. The difficulties faced by many countries in tackling these problems were compounded by the economic circumstances and budgetary constraints of the 1980s. Growing numbers of school leavers and higher education graduates entered adulthood ill prepared for the difficult future that awaited them. (p.49)

I agree with Harrison. The application of a theory that was taken assuredly by the policy makers in the Third World, led to undesired and poor educational results.

Fuller's theory is an attempt to portray the consequences of unbalanced educational expansion policies in the Third World in the post-independence period and the political and economic motives that drove these policies. The problem with human capital, notwithstanding its valuable ideas, was that it presented misconception of the main objective of development and the role of education in this process.

Therefore, Al-Kawwari (1981) refutes the narrow conceptions about development where it was associated in the western sociology of development literature with economic growth. Al-Kawwari believes there must be a link between development and economic growth as the paramount objective of the developmental programs. From his point of view, development must be directed at creating qualitative social, economic and political structural transformations that can lead to an increase in the individual's productivity and real improvements to the society's potentials. Based on this definition, he indicates various components and objectives of socio-economic development:

1. Development is a social process that entails participation of the society's citizens and groups;
2. Development is a rational process, in a sense, that it is not an arbitrary socio-economic plan; rather, a real and effective development requiring long-term strategies and defined objectives.
3. Development programs must be designed to create structural transformations. These aspects, according to Al-Kawwari, are what differentiate socio-economic development from economic growth.

4. Also, an increase in individual average income must be one of the chief objectives of socio-economic development.
5. Moreover, socio-economic development must gradually and constructively build up the technical, economical and the political capabilities of the society.
6. Finally, mobilizing human capital constitutes one of the most essential mechanisms in reaching the objectives of development plans.

It can be noted that Al-Kawwari proposes a broader, more comprehensive and more convenient concept of development in the Third World. He adds that the socio-economic components cannot be achieved without crystallizing a social awareness of the causes of underdevelopment and the appropriate ways of reform.

Al-Kawwari's theme is closer to the social reality in the Third World than human capital theory itself which confined the role of education to achieving economic growth without paying attention or giving any further considerations to the social and economic setting and the decisive role it can play in the prospering or failing of socio-economic development programs. The shortcomings of the theory made it amenable to many contradictions when it was put in practice. My research provides a good example. As was indicated, teachers are dissatisfied with Omani parents' contact with the school. Lack of contact reflects not only the absence of social and educational awareness among most Omani parents, but it also gives a good indication that without citizens' participation and sharing of responsibility with the school, its influence over children socialization will not yield the intended effects, let alone solve other educational and economic problems (pupils' discipline problems, school dropout, etc.).

The challenges facing human resources development in Oman have been discussed in the first chapter of the thesis, but here I want to cite a good example of the need for social awareness (as a missing link from the human capital theory) as a "pre-condition" for the progress, not only of education but also for effectuating the developmental programs.

When I was a pupil in public school, I, together with other Omani pupils faced a stiff competition from other Arab pupils (Egyptians, Jordanians, Sudanese, Tunisians) whose parents were working in the Sultanate as expatriates. The noticeable thing was that most of them were hard workers and outstripped the Omani pupils. The conscientiousness and motivation of non-Omani parents and their awareness of the importance of schooling for social and economic mobility and as an access to organizational participation meant that their parents continuously encouraged their sons and helped them in school assignments. As a result, teachers in Omani schools didn't encounter any discipline problems from this distinguished category of pupils. Moreover, their good educational attainment in surpassing others pleased the teachers and relieved them from many teaching burdens.

Theories on the home-school relationship, Ryan and Adam (1995), John (1995) and Coleman (1998) (which were discussed in chapter four) have focused on the roles that parents can play in moulding the motives of their sons and in pushing them toward good educational attainment.

The forgoing argument indicates the inaccuracy of the human capital theory in establishing a linear relationship between education and economic growth. This vision oversimplifies the factors that can rescue the Third World from pervasive and chronic underdevelopment. Also, it misconceives the priorities of development and underestimates environmental constraints. Also, this vision opposes the sociological perspective, which suggests that no part of society can be understood in isolation from the society as a whole.

Dropping traditional values and acquiring modern attitudes, as a requisite of the modern and transformational societies, is the main research focus in Inkeles and Smith's modernization theory. Some modern attitudes, undoubtedly, are crucial for the progress of socio-economic development in every part of the world. But why does the theory assume that the Third World cannot be liberated from poverty and illiteracy unless these societies displace traditional values?

There are a number of studies that have criticised this perspective (Bendix 1967, Gusfield 1967, Eisenstadt 1974.) However, in this argument I want to take the intermediate position and discuss it in the light of the present research.

Oman, as a developing society, has been undergoing qualitative social and economic changes that are programmed to improve the living standards of the Omani people. The political leadership is aware of the severe changes that might be created in the lives of the Omanies as a result of modernization policies. Consequently, they have shown good will in keeping up a co-existence between traditional and modern values without sacrificing the former in favour of the latter. Within this frame, the state of Oman emphasises on implementing rational and balanced educational, social, economical and political policies that avoid unplanned and unbalanced social transformations that could harm the society or make it vulnerable to any social and political shocks. As a result, the general philosophy of education states that:

The people of Oman have an ancient civilization, culture and art, which they have derived from the Islamic civilization and culture shared by other Arab and Moslem peoples. Therefore, the revival of the Arab and Islamic heritage in the fields of science, literature, philosophy and arts and its development necessitate the discovery and nurture of talents in young Omanies in all fields in order to protect and maintain the purity of the Omani culture and to enrich it by suitable and educational activities.

(The philosophy of education in the Sultanate of Oman. 1979, p. 29)

In comparison with the above educational discourse, the modernization theory asserts on a different objective:

Critics of the modernization school also attack the functionalist assumption of incompatibility between tradition and modernity...

The critics ask: are traditional values always obstacles to modernization? Do we need to eliminate traditional values in order to promote modernization? As some critics point out, traditional values may be very helpful in promoting modernization. For example, in the modernization of Japan, the value of "loyalty to the emperor" was easily transformed to "loyalty to firm", which helped to enhance workers productivity and to cut down turnover rate.

(So, 1990, p.56)

We are reminded that Durkheim indicates that each society has a set of principles and values that has to be inculcated in the minds of the youth. Teachers have a central role in this process. According to Durkheim's argument, the state has to remind the teacher of the society's principles which have to be fixed in the memories of the children in order to prepare them for the

social setting in which they will live and in which they will interact. Obviously, this is the correct function of the school. Schools in every nation of the world are created to promote the interest of their social systems and to preserve the society's morals, but not to produce conflicting social values.

In Oman teachers' beliefs are part of the wider culture to which they belong and in which they respect and adhere themselves to its commandments. If teachers were asked to indoctrinate the modern attitudes as an alternative to the Omani society's values they would face enormous challenges and resistance from Omani pupils and their families.

I will give an example to support this aspect of the argument. After the collapse of Ottoman Empire in 1924, Ataturk introduced a host of constitutional and social changes into the Turkish society. In order to bring about westernisation, in 1928 Ataturk adopted the Latin alphabet as what he saw as an essential step if modernization were to be achieved and to free Turkey from the Ottoman culture. This step was met with strong resistance and opposition from traditional elements, many intellectuals and prominent administrative officials opposed the Latinization policy. (Szyliowicz, 1973)

To implement Ataturk's ideology, the state restructured and reorganized the existing educational system. Because the reforms efforts were arbitrary, ignored the social and historical reality of the society and was inharmonious with the basic culture of the society, the educational progress was very limited. One of the reasons was:

Steeped in tradition, the majority of teachers were totally unprepared and lacked the necessary background to apply these new principles....although some special necessary courses were held for teachers and a number of publications were issued, these efforts were far too limited in scope to affect traditional approach and philosophies.

(Szyliowicz, 1973, p.207)

Another major reason was:

The lack of financial resources and the high degree of traditionalism that pervaded the society, especially in the rural areas, must be considered. Reluctance to change and to promote innovation, however, was not limited to rural areas. Persons with conservative ideas were entrenched at all levels even within the Ministry of Education. Its orientation is most vividly evidenced by its strong opposition to such reforms as coeducation, the adoption of Latin alphabet, and the reorganization of rural education.

Szyliowicz, 1973, p.210)

Modern history indicates that the societies most successful in achieving high levels of socio-economic progress were those that were able to preserve their own values with planned and rational selection of western values, e.g. the Asian societies.

Because modernization theory tends to formulate its argument at a high level of abstraction, there was an ignorance of the developmental priorities of Third World societies. After dependence, the less developed societies were in massive need of food, stability and freedom as bases for development and as the main priorities of the people. This methodological problem led the theorists to suggest that western values were the best starting point for solving the problems from which the underdeveloped societies suffered.

The present research has revealed that: first, despite continuous efforts by the state in Oman to improve the educational system, there are a number of social and economic problems that have to be improved and overcome in order to produce a participative people. Second, this research suggests that reforming and improving the social conditions of the Omani people would constitute a major element in improving the role of schools in, for example, reducing illiteracy among parents and supporting poor families which, the interviews indicate, are serious factors that limit parent-teacher relations. Therefore, one of the primary aims of the visions for Oman's economy in the next quarter of a century is:

Enhancing the standard of living of the Omani people; reduction of the inequality among regions and among income levels of various groups; and ensuring that the fruits of development are shared by all citizens.

The Fifth Five-year Development Plan (1996-2000), 1997, p. 164

Schools need both financial and social support from the society. .Can these goals be achieved by the cultural variables alone as the modernization theory assumes?

Some of the modern attitudes are useful for the socio-economic development programs because no society in the globalisation era can progress without benefiting from the experience of the western civilization. But in order to reach this objective, teachers in Oman, like any developing society, must be well prepared to do this job perfectly. Likewise, the state and the

society are required to eliminate all the social and economic barriers that constrict or weaken teachers' performance.

One of the indigenous results of the research is that those theories which are less inclined toward ideological orientations are more capable of interpreting and accentuating the factors that influence and contribute to the educational dilemmas of the Third World societies. However, there are some factors which are still undervalued in improving the performance of schools. Fragile state theory is one of the best means in the field of sociology of education of providing a socio-political understanding of schools' problems in Third World countries. The main shortcoming of the theory is that it attributes the decline in schools' performance in the developing world to pure economic factors and in turn neglects the influence of social factors. The environmental constraints and limited success of the educational reforms in Turkey and Indonesia provide clear examples of the importance of the social dimensions in education.

The social and economic problems of Third World countries are too complicated to be solved by economic or sociological theories. Therefore, in order to overcome these methodological defects of the sociological theory, I agree with Byrne (1998) that thinking of society in terms of a dissipative and evolutionary system of complex conceptual structure is a good way of resolving the problems of sociological theory. I might add, that thinking of the complex factors that educational reform requires is a healthy and appropriate way of widening the horizons and the scopes and considering the various components that make up a successful educational reforms policies and this chapter will indicate that.

To sum up, no one can ignore the role of education in modern societies, but it is a methodological necessity to explain some of the missing elements from these theories in order to suggest appropriate recommendations that would suit the Omani society.

The Findings of the Theoretical and Empirical Chapters:

First: The Findings of the Theoretical Chapters:

1. Prior to the 1970s, Oman was the poorest country in the Gulf region. This is a fact upon which all historians who have written about Oman agree. The abject poverty from which the Omanis suffered, the need to stabilize the shaky political conditions and the scarcity of natural resources, inspired the government to adopt human capital investment as an official dogma in Omani policies to: 1) serve its socio-economic needs by equipping the citizens with the necessary skills and knowledge 2) develop and improve the performance of Oman's economy 3) achieve social unity 4) inculcate the appropriate attitudes and values for promoting socio-economic development.
2. Within 30 years, the government of Oman has brought about quantitative and qualitative changes in the lives of the Omani people. The economy of Oman experienced many problems due to the fluctuations in oil prices, which led to tightening the education budget. This problem occurred in the last few decades and will continue to occur as long as oil is Oman's main income and the government fails to develop other economic alternatives that can replace the income from oil.
3. Oman has been witnessing one of the highest (if not the highest) birth rates in the world. This constitutes current and future educational challenges for the nation. Rapid population growth means that the budget of the Ministry of Education has had to keep pace with the augmented, expanded and growing social demand for education.
4. Illiteracy among many Omanis is a persistent problem that affects the social and economic lives of Omanis.
5. Despite the insistence of the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education, it has remained a major problem that impacts upon school graduates and their ability to join the labour market.
6. The experiences of many developing and developed countries indicate that improving teachers' pre-service and in-service training

programs were included as an essential (if not the most essential in some countries) component of educational reform strategies.

7. Poor teacher preparation and lack of policies to promote their teaching knowledge and skills results in a deterioration of pupils' attainment. Such conclusions were clear in the countries that failed to provide schools with the required educational input.
8. Increase in class size is associated with a number of factors. Rapid population growth has proved to be the main factor.
9. Educational research indicates that small class size can contribute effectively to enhancing a pupil's academic performance and lessen the teacher's professional difficulties. Therefore, the positive results of the educational research regarding small class size have encouraged the educational policy makers in many developed countries to adopt a class size reduction policy.
10. Research evidence confirms the benefits of home-school contact. The research shows that various types of parental contact with teachers have positive results, including measurable gains in pupils' academic performance. Consequently, reform policies continually try to devise strategies that will get parents into their sons' school. The motivations behind these efforts are to improve pupils' achievement.
11. Parents' attitudes toward their children's education, the economic situation and the place are important factors that determine and influence parents' co-operation with the school.

Second: The Findings of the Empirical Work

The following is a comparison of the above findings with the results of the empirical work.

1. A large proportion of teachers expressed a need to improve their teachings skills.
2. Teachers revealed their dissatisfaction with the in-service training opportunities. The researcher has shown, through a comparison with other studies and by using secondary data, that the Ministry of Education allocates a high proportion of its financial resources

for teachers' salaries and constructions purposes. This expenditure factor prevents the Ministry from being able to add additional capital for in-service training programs

3. Likewise, teachers indicated their dissatisfaction with their salaries or the annual increment in their salary. The economic turbulences that affected the economy of Oman due to the decline in oil prices, beside other variables, led the government to freeze any anticipated increment in teachers' salaries. The problem of low salaries seems to be more harmful to overseas teachers because they have to pay for accommodation, water, electricity and telephone bills as well as their families' daily needs. These situations usually lead many teachers to look for other sources for income to supplement their needs.
4. Teaching load and administration work takes up most of teachers' time. As a result, 48.3% of teachers in the sample said they are under uncomfortable pressure because of workload.
5. Most teachers believe that class size has an effect on the quality of teaching and learning.
6. Teachers revealed that there has been an increase in class size. The research has identified, through teachers' answers, organizational and demographical factors behind the increase in class size.
7. Teachers indicated that large class size has an adverse effect on Omani pupils' motivation, their standard of work, the amount of individual teachers' attention they receive and assessment of their work.
8. Also, teachers believe that time for the assessment of pupils' work, teachers' time with individual pupils, teachers' workload and teachers' emotional state are affected by the increase in class size.
9. Teachers indicated that they would change their teaching practices if they had smaller classes, in a way that would help to improve the academic performance of their pupils. Teachers'

answers reveal how their teaching practices are hindered by current class sizes.

10. Not surprisingly, the teachers agreed that class size is one of the most important issues for enhancing the academic performance of Omani pupils and one of the most important issues for them.
11. Teachers' answers show that a high proportion are dissatisfied with the level of contact between home and school.
12. Illiteracy and ignorance among parents and the economic conditions of Omani families are the major social problems that hamper strong and effective home-school co-operation.
13. Unfortunately, teachers believe that a high proportion of Omani parents don't check up on their children after school time, neglect to see that their homework is done, fail to discipline their sons and hardly any set high standards for their sons to meet.
14. Consequently, teachers shoulder the parents' responsibility for the educational difficulties that their sons encounter at school.
15. Teachers want Omani parents to perform a number of tasks with regard to their children's education which, if fulfilled, would have a positive affect on the academic performance of the Omani pupil and improve his behaviour, to monitor homework, to have high expectations for their education, to nurture their sons, to spend quality time with them and initiate contact with the teacher.
16. Schools, particularly at the elementary and intermediate levels, lack air conditioners.
17. Elementary schools also lack good libraries.
18. The principals of educational areas' answers reinforce the findings relating to the teachers' professional problems and difficulties. They indicate that lack of: home-school contact, professional development, class size, financial incentives and lack of in-service training opportunities are the professional difficulties that teachers encounter the most.
19. Almost all Omani parents in the sample expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the inadequacy of educational input.

They focused on the need to promote Omani teachers' teaching skills, providing schools with the necessary learning facilities, refining and improving the curricula.

20. The economic and social modernization of the Sultanate was successful in bringing about new attitudes and requirements in its citizens, yet the current economic and social systems are unable to live up to the renewed and augmented needs of a large segment of the Omani people. Take, for example, the need for higher education. Establishing more higher education institutions and improving economic performance are the persistent demands and concerns of the Omani people who strive to improve their material conditions. Therefore, many Omanis are seeking employment opportunities and higher education outside the nation.
21. These complicated situations are well recognized by the government, which is working hard to encourage the private sector to establish more higher education institutions. The present research found that lack of access to higher education and jobs had an adverse effect on pupils' morale and motivation. Pupils attempt to release their depressed feelings by creating discipline and educational problems, e.g. repeating the academic year, harming teachers, disrupting the classroom order and so on.
22. School principals said that there has been a decline in the academic standards of Omani pupils. For the foreseeable future then, strategies for raising learning achievement will need to focus on the quality of teachers by providing in-service training programs and developing home-school contact as some of the most essential elements in the strategy.

Looking at the findings will bring out a number of political, economic and social factors that could influence the progress of the education system in Oman. Although Oman has successfully extended education to large segments

of the Omani people, the education system is still in great need of educational and financial inputs and social and community support alike.

Education, like many social systems, influences the social and economic composition and in turn is influenced by the major changes and developments in these systems. Parsons (1974), as was indicated in the third chapter, has referred to adoption as a process which takes social and economic resources needed by the system from the environment. Education, is one of the most important social systems in the society, thus it requires a high (if not the highest) proportion of the financial resources.

When Sultan Qaboos took power in the 1970s, he recognized the needs of his people, therefore he and his cabinet adopted a human capital development strategy to build the state and the society.

There are some social and economic circumstances today that are similar to those which existed prior to the 1970s. Many Omanis seek employment opportunities, higher education and a prosperous life in neighbouring countries. Moreover, there is increased unemployment among secondary graduates. These conditions and feelings that prevail among many Omanis are not to Oman's advantage.

The state must adapt and give further concern and priority to education as it did at the beginning of the Sixties. After thirty years of socio-economic development in which the government was able to increase oil production and to invest in other natural resources, which improved the financial position of the government, the social and economic problems still proliferate. Schultz (1962) argues that the chronic underdevelopment of Third World countries cannot be remedied by additional capital. Also, Harbison and Myers (1964,1965) reinforce Schultz argument that by developing human resources the developing nations would be able to absorb capital effectively. Therefore, successful human capital strategy is a precondition for the development projects.

This research can conclude that improving the quality of education is vital to the future of Oman for the following social and economic reasons:

- To help sustain economic development and improve its performance.
- To enable the Omanis to cope with the new and austere economic transformations.

- From the human rights perspective, to provide Omani youth with good quality education with a view to ameliorate their alienation (which is shown by increased unemployment) as well as fostering a positive self-image and loyalty to the nation.
- Strengthening the educational systems is expected to be a key to developing self-reliance and commitment to nation building.

In the case of Oman, there are two major forces that affect the quality and development of education: population growth and the performance of the national economy.

The main conclusion of the present research is that there is a gulf between the growing needs of schools and the resources available to meet those needs. Also, the above findings of the fieldwork indicate that the qualitative developments of education in Oman lag behind the educational reforms in many developed and some developing countries. While the economic transformation and population growth accelerates the need to introduce substantial qualitative changes, the Ministry of Education is engaged in constructing new school buildings to keep up with the frequent increase in pupil numbers.

To understand the problem I shall introduce this equation:

$$\mathbf{N + F = BQQD.}$$

Where **N** refers to: education needs to meet social demand as a result of population growth.

Where **F** refers to: the adequacy of the available financial resources.

BQQD refers to: a balance between the qualitative and quantitative development.

The equation enables us to understand why some countries were luckier than others in producing meaningful and constructive changes to improve schools' effectiveness. The developed countries have increased their financial allocations to the education sector (because of demographic, economic and social factors), which has enabled these countries to strengthen the internal

efficiency of education and to balance quantity and quality. On the other hand, some developing countries have failed to provide schools with the necessary input which has led to a deterioration in the performance of education.

As a result, quantitative growth that was at the expense of quality, the decline in pupils' performance and the increase in number of schools leavers are some examples of the educational wastage in these countries.

According to the equation $N + F = BQQD$, so when, $N - F = QD$:

$$N - F = QD$$

Where N refers to: The needs of education to meet the growing socio-economic changes and developments.

Where F refers to: adequate financial resources.

QD refers to the quantitative growth without parallel qualitative improvements.

The availability of adequate resources is only one part of the solution for the development of human capital in Oman. The complementary part lies in parental and community support for education, which is considered an invaluable component to the progress and quality of human capital. In his book, *The Great Disruption, the Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order*, Francis Fukuyama (2000) indicates how social capital¹ of the American family is so important to human capital:

One of the most important consequences of the decline in social capital in families is a decrease in the human capital of subsequent generations....

Much of the disastrous decline in the test scores that occurred in the United States over the period of the Great Disruption can be laid at the door of families that were disrupted, distracted, improvised, or in the other ways less able to pass on skills and knowledge. Conversely, the strong performance of many Asian American children reflects the relatively more intact family structure and family-based cultural traditions of this community.

(Fukuyama, 2000, p.115)

Let me remind the reader of an important fact about the trends of economic development in Oman and its relation to human capital. Economic development in Oman is going through critical changes, which focus on a more effective and participatory role of the private sector in socio-economic projects.

¹ Fukuyama defines social capital as: "a set of informal values or norms shared among members of the group that permits cooperation among them" p.16

These transitions require that Omani parents should be more active and accountable for their children's education. They must inform them of the new changes in social and economic spheres. It is also important to remind the pupils that the government sector is no longer the generator of employment opportunities. In Oman, the government has introduced a series of regulations that: 1) encourage the employment of national labour in the private sector and 2) dampen the flow of expatriates into the Omani market. (The study will recommend what can be done to enable Omani parents to become more aware and responsible toward their children's education.)

The significant aspect of the new economic trends is that the individual's potential and his possession of skills and knowledge, rather than social and tribal criteria, will eventually determine his position (and social class and the economic status of his family).

Comparative lessons

Why Educational Policies Can Fail (1998). This is the title of a paper commissioned by the World Bank to study educational policies in East African countries, on issues ranging from combining education with production at the primary level to the financing of higher education. The paper concludes that policy outcomes fall far short of matching expectations, mainly because:

1. Their implementation is insufficient, or non-existent.
2. They are vaguely stated and the financing implications are not always worked out.

Oman has to avoid the problems which the East African countries faced. Educational reform was and still is an important solution to the difficulties that challenge powerful, aspired and energetic nations. The Soviet launching of Sputnik stimulated a wave of educational reform in the U.S. Also, educational reform policies have been used by some developed countries in response to military and industrial challenges (Ramirez and Boli, 1987).

The Ministry of Education in Oman is facing a real challenge in improving the quality of education. The challenges range from securing the financial resources to revolutionizing the apathetic feelings of many Omani parents.

World Bank report (2000) indicates the vast efforts needed to deal successfully with the obstacles:

Most education personnel including all levels of supervisors, principals and teachers have been taught in the “traditional system” and have had years of experience (for which they get extra compensation) of outmoded practices which the reform aim at changing radically

(World Bank Report, 2000, p. 2. Emphasis as in the original)

Based on the outcome of the fieldwork and the theoretical chapters, the study recommends the following series of policies:

First: Teachers' Incentives

The Ministry of Education must provide teachers in Omani schools with in-service training programs. Improving the quality of education depends on the quality of teachers. Also, one of the solutions that the Ministry can implement to upgrade the quality of teaching is to provide Omani teachers with scholarships to pursue their higher education. This policy was used in some Asian countries.

It is important here to remember the Ministry of Development report on the damage that inflicted Omani school graduates and their inability to integrate in the labour market, as well as the social cost of such educational wastage (which was not mentioned in the report). Based on that, it is hard to expect the desired educational outcomes without providing the educational system with qualified teachers.

This means that the Ministry must also think about enhancing teachers' salaries. Non-Omani teachers, as the survey and semi-structured interviews indicated, complained about their salaries compared to those of the Omani teachers and they feel that their salaries fall short of their families' needs. So, recruiting the most qualified non-Omani teachers depends mainly on reforming teachers' salaries. Of course I don't confine the recommendations here to non-Omanis, but also to Omanis. Certainly this would help to improve teachers' performance and their social status.

Enhancing teachers' salaries means that the education system will attract the most talented, ambitious and active teachers. Encouraging policies could include special recognition for them and more authority in decision-making at school level.

One problem that affects teachers' promotion is that their salary structure is tied to the uniform scale of civil services. This administrative obstacle must be removed because it affects the Ministry of Education's autonomy and in turn its decisions for improving teachers' salaries. The Ministry of Education is aware of the problem caused by lack of incentives.

This package of incentives must be accompanied by a reform of admission policies of the colleges of education in the Sultanate. The Ministry of Education should prevent colleges of education from accepting secondary graduates with poor grades. The Ministry believes that such a policy will help to achieve Omanisation objectives. In fact such a policy could be harmful to teachers' and pupils' education. Good education should have top priority over any employment objectives. Admission to the colleges must be restricted to the strongest secondary graduates so that the teaching profession can ensure that it gets the best quality graduates. This policy is implemented in the colleges of medicine and engineering at Sultan Qaboos University and other universities in the Arab World. So, the colleges of education can imitate the same policy to ensure good quality of teaching and to enhance the public trust in education.

Class Size

The adverse effects of large classes on pupils and teachers are one of the major outcomes of the study. As a result, the study recommends that the Ministry should take the necessary actions to reduce class sizes at secondary, intermediate and elementary levels. 40 pupils and above at the intermediate levels make interaction between the pupil and the teacher very difficult and prevent the pupils from absorbing and understanding the lessons. At the same time, it causes pressure for teachers and increases their teaching burden.

This study recommends that pupil numbers should not exceed 25 at preparatory and intermediate levels and 28 at secondary level to enable the teacher to:

1. Communicate good teaching.
2. Follow-up the academic progress of his pupils.
3. Have sufficient time for correcting pupils' homework, which mirrors their progress and grasp of the lessons.

To reduce the number of pupils per class the Ministry of Education must hire new teachers and build new classrooms to absorb the greater number of enrolments.

Home-School Contact

Poor home-school contact is among the most critical problems of which teachers complain. The present research has indicated that the social and economic factors that cause weak home-school contact reside in the social structure of Omani society. Based on that, the study recommends the following:

1. To improve Omani parent's awareness and attitudes of the value of a good home-school relationship the Ministry can use the media to encourage Omani parents to visit schools and listen to teachers about their children/sons. The use of mass media has been a successful instrument in helping the government of Oman to overcome a number of social and economic difficulties. Therefore, the Ministry of Education must cooperate with the Ministry of Information to design educational programs that contribute to developing Omani citizens' awareness and attitudes toward the benefits of strong home-school relationships. The contents of these programs can be designed by experts from different disciplines e.g. sociology, psychology, economics, etc to ensure its successful and positive influence upon Omani parents
2. The poor economic conditions of many Omani families were one of the major obstacles that prevent parents from contacting teachers. This resulted in more tension for the teachers. The Ministry can encourage parental contact with the school by offering financial rewards to parents who follow their sons' academic progress and show strong commitment to their children/sons' education. The financial reward must be based on two criteria:

- This commitment can be manifested positively in the child/son's behaviour in the school;
- It should also be manifested in his academic progress.

Why does the study recommend these solutions? Remedying such social problems is not an easy task. The effects of poverty or illiteracy on home-school relations must be eased by strong, effective policies that remove barriers and encourage Omani parents to become more involved in their sons' education. Otherwise, pupils' academic and behavioural problems (particularly those pupils from families that experience difficult economic circumstances) will remain unsolved in the Omani school. The financial rewards will create a culture of parental commitment to their sons' education and will encourage other families to do the same thing.

Strong home-school relations must be considered as one of the main principles of the philosophy of education in the Sultanate. Educating the children must not be the responsibility of the school alone. The Omani family must take some of the responsibility. In doing so, the above item must be considered by the Ministry of Education.

Curriculum Reform

As we saw in the questionnaire and the interviews, parents and teachers raised critical questions about the curriculum. Therefore, the study recommends the following:

- The curriculum at all stages must be revised to make it more responsive to the life and needs of the children in particular and the socio- economic transformation in general.
- School curricula should be designed in a way that encourages practical, manual learning and analytical thinking rather than rote learning and memorization as systems of learning that prevail among pupils in Omani schools.

Examination System

An examination system that measures the capabilities of the pupils must be the main objective. The current system is not designed to evaluate the pupils' understanding of the content of the curriculum, but to give them a better chance to pass the exams. This policy has affected educational standards.

The educational administrators must shoulder the responsibility for implementing an accurate method of evaluation that measures pupils' attainment and their understanding of the curricula content. The present system fails to distinguish whether the pupil who passes the examination has acquired any sense and understanding of the meaning and values of the syllabus or whether he has simply memorised the subjects by heart. My observations lead me to say that the pupil depends on subject memorisation because the system encourages this way of learning. Also, my observations suggest that the Omani pupil usually forgets most, if not all, the facts and information that he learned a short time after the examinations.

Reforming the examination system will assist teachers to overcome the difficulties that are produced by the present system.

School Facilities

Schools in Oman must be equipped with the necessary facilities that will contribute to promoting the Omani pupil's academic performance particularly computers and libraries.

Schools' classrooms must be provided with air conditioners to help teachers and pupils to interact actively.

The Role of the Government

Despite the budget of education having increased over the last year, the government of Oman has to allocate more funds to the qualitative changes and improvements that need to be introduced. A high proportion of the education budget goes to teachers' salaries and the rest to construction and maintenance purposes to meet the increased demands for education. This is good, but it is insufficient to deal with the new social and economic challenges and the public's demands for qualitative improvements.

The Ministry of National Economy and Energy Resources must realize that the success of its economic plans depends, among other variables, on competitive human capital. The experience of the Eighties in which the decline in oil prices forced the government to reduce the budgets of the Ministries of Civil Services and the Ministry of Education, led to a gradual erosion of the quality of education. This experience must be clear in the eyes and minds of the economic policy maker in order to avoid a repetition of the same negative influences. To do that, the Ministry of National Economy and Energy Resources must allocate sufficient financial resources for the education system to produce the desired school results.

The Ministry of National Economy and Energy Resources should help the Ministry of Education to build independent financial investments to feed the growing educational needs in order to keep this vital sector away from any fluctuations in the oil prices.

The government should urge the rich people in Oman to donate to improving education in Oman. This experience occurs in the USA and some European countries. Donations from the rich for reforming education would be highly appreciated by the public and would help to improve education in Oman. Moreover, it would help to bridge the gap between poor pupils' needs and the rich. These donations could take various forms, e.g. grants for educational institutions to improve the curricula, provide the schools with air conditioners, support poor families, provide teachers with scholarships etc.

The government must encourage and support structural changes. The national plans to improve education are so complex that they will not be able to succeed without a comprehensive reform at all levels and institutions of the education system and without reviewing the value of some administrative ministries. In other words, some of the ministries are without any value to the socio-economic development. Reducing the budget of these ministries and adding them to capital and recurrent expenditure of the Ministry of Education can benefit the education system.

Finally I know how difficult and costly these reform policies are, but it is important to remind the policy makers that they are indispensable for the future of Oman and for future generations. I know that these reforms require huge

efforts and resources, but this is the only way to produce educated people who can benefit themselves and benefit the society. There is no doubt that the current situation of schools in Oman not only inhibits the schools from performing their roles, but also creates difficulties by producing various problems in schools. This was clear in the Ministry of Development report. It is important to realise that Oman will remain dependent on foreign labour, as long as the schools are deprived of the necessary resources to improve their roles. This constitutes a political threat to the society in the short and long term. It is also important to remember that the economy of Oman is losing \$1.5 billion annually as a result of foreign labour money transmittance. It is also important to remind the policy makers in Oman that the natural resources will not last forever. There is a gradual decline in the oil reserves and nobody knows how the situation can be tolerated without oil. Therefore, the benefits of oil must be exploited for the sake of Oman's future.

Certainly putting these policies into practice will be of great benefit to the future of Oman.

A recommendation with regard to the sociology of Education

Despite the enormous benefits of sociology of education theories in understanding the role of education in modern societies, these theories still lack a plethora of elements that can contribute to a better understanding of how education improves social conditions in the developing world. For example, human capital ideas assume that an education system can lead to economic development. This is partially true. But the theory neglects any reference to the role of the political system in supporting economic development.

Another example, the modernization theory, assumes that the main function of the education system is to instill modern attitudes, which, according to the theory, are in conflict with traditional values. This is completely unreliable and unacceptable. Modern societies in the developing world need modern attitudes to efficiently manage the socio-economic institutions but this doesn't mean traditional values and norms have to be abandoned. Japanese society represents a good example with its ability to reconcile between traditional

values (which supported the economic development of Japan) and modern attitudes.

Therefore, the study recommends sociology of education for Third World countries that study the function of education or the current problems from which these systems suffer in the light of the historical, economical, social, regional and international contexts. Fragile state theory is a step in the right direction.

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Department of Sociology and Social Policy.

University of Durham.

Durham.

United Kingdom.

Dear teacher.

I would be grateful if you could fill in the accompanying questionnaire. This forms part of the study which I am undertaking as part of my Ph.D degree at the University of Durham in the UK. The study concerns the difficulties and the problems that you face and the solutions that you suggest to improve your work conditions.

All the information you provide in this questionnaire will be treated with complete confidentiality, and you will not be asked to write your name. Consequently, nobody will be able to identify anyone who responds to the questionnaire. The focus is on the outcomes that the questionnaire produces. Your answers will be very helpful in identifying the difficulties and the problems and the appropriate ways to reduce them.

The researcher.

Tareq Al-Nuaimi.

Teachers' Questionnaire.

Please tick in the appropriator place, only one for each question unless it states that you can tick more than one.

A. Basic Information

1. Years of Teaching (tick one)

- 1 – 5 ()
- 6 - 10 ()
- 11-15 ()
- 16- 20 ()
- 21 - 25 ()
- 26- 30 ()
- 31- 35 ()
- 36 – and more ()

2. Age:

- Age 20 – 29 ()
- Age 30 – 39 ()
- Age 40 – 49 ()
- Age 50 – 59 ()
- Age 60 and over ()

3. Marital Statues

- Married. ()
- Divorced ()
- Bachelor ()
- Engaged ()

4. Number of children.

- Non. ()
- 1 2. ()
- 3 4 ()
- 5 6 ()
- 5 and more ()

5. Educational level.

- Intermediate ()
- Secondary ()
- Diploma ()
- Bachelor ()
- Master ()

6. Region.

- Al-Batina/ South ()
- Al-Batina/ North ()
- Muscat ()

7. School type

Primary ().
Intermediate ().
Secondary ().

8. Income.

200 250 ().
250 300 ().
300 350 ().
350 400 ().
450 500 ().
550 600 ().
600 and more ().

9. Nationality

Omani ().
Non-Omani. ().

10. Number of pupils in your school

900 and less ().
9001 1200 ().
1201 1500 ().

11. Number of pupils in the class you normally teach

30-40 ().
41-51 ().
52 and more ().

B. Skills, work time and other issues

Please circle a number where: 5= Agree, 4 = Tend to agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = Tend to disagree, 1 = disagree

12. My job makes good use of my skills and abilities. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I feel it is important to improve my teaching skills. 1 2 3 4 5

14. I have sufficient time to do my job as it should be done. 1 2 3 4 5

Please circle a number where: 1 = All or almost all of the time, 2 = Most of the time, 3 = About half of the time, 4 = Less than half of the time, 5 = Rarely or never

15. I feel under uncomfortable pressure

because of my workload. 1 2 3 4 5

16. My job performance is decreased as a result

of stress in my job. 1 2 3 4 5

C. Management Issues

Please circle a number where: 5 = agree, 4 =Tend to agree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 2 = Tend to disagree, 1 = disagree

17. My principal is fully aware of the amount of time I spend at work. 1 2 3 4 5
18. My principal recognizes and acknowledge when I have done my job well. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I usually believe what my principal tells me 1 2 3 4 5
20. I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in this school. 1 2 3 4 5
22. The staff in my school has a clear sense of direction about aims and objectives. 1 2 3 4 5

D. Job Satisfaction.

Please circle a number where 5 = Very satisfied, 4 =satisfied, 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 1 = very dissatisfied.

23. How are you satisfied with the following aspects of your job?
- a) Your working relationship with your colleagues 1 2 3 4 5
- b) The ratio of teachers to pupils in your school 1 2 3 4 5
- c) The monthly salary 1 2 3 4 5
- d) The annual salary increment 1 2 3 4 5
- e) Curriculum innovations 1 2 3 4 5
- f) The opportunities of in-service training 1 2 3 4 5

E. Your Priorities

Please circle a number where: 1 = Too much time, 2 = about the right amount of time, 3 = Too little time.

24. Which of the following activities are taking too much time and which are getting too little?

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| a) Lesson preparation and planning. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| b) Recording pupil attainment. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| c) Dealing with parents. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| d) School policies and planning. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| e) Teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| f) Meetings. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| g) Administration works. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| h) Marking. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

F. Class Size

25. The average class size in schools has increased over the last few years. Has this been the case with the classes you teach in?

Yes No

26. If yes what do you think are the main reasons for this increase?

.....
.....
.....

27. Do you believe that class size has an effect on the quality of teaching and learning?

Yes No (Please circle only one)

28. With regard to pupil, what effect do you think that increasing current class sizes would have on the following?
 (Please circle ONE number on each line)

	<i>Beneficial</i>	<i>no effect</i>	<i>adverse</i>	<i>not sure</i>
a) Emotional well-being.	3	2	1	4
b) Motivation.	3	2	1	4
c) Standard of work.	3	2	1	4
d) Relationship with teachers	3	2	1	4
e) Relationship with pupils	3	2	1	4
f) Amount of individual teacher attention.	3	2	1	4
g) Assessment of their works.	3	2	1	4

29. With regard to CLASSROOM TEACHING, which of the following classroom practice are likely to be affected by increase in current class sizes, and in what way?

	<i>large Effect</i>	<i>Some effect</i>	<i>Little or no effect</i>	<i>or not sure</i>
a) Planning and preparation	1	2	3	4
b) Time for assessment of pupil's Work.	1	2	3	4
c) Time with individual pupil.	1	2	3	4
d) Classroom control and discipline	1	2	3	4
e) Pupil social and emotional needs.	1	2	3	4
f) Teacher's workload.	1	2	3	4
g) Teacher's emotional state	1	2	3	4

Please list any other aspect that might be affected.

.....

.....

.....

30. If your classroom were significantly smaller, would you change any of your classroom practices?

Yes No (Please circle.)

If yes, what would you change?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

31. Finally, there are many pressures on the quality of teaching and learning , e.g. curriculum overload, teachers' workload, etc. How important is the issue of class size in relation to these other pressures?

(Please circle ONE number only.)

- Class size is the most important issue for me 0
- Class size is one of the most important issues 1
- Class size is an important issue, but not of the most important 2
- Class size is not a very important issue for me 3

32. Do you think that class size is an important factor to improve and enhance Omani pupil academic performance?

(Please circle ONE number only)

- Class size is the most important issue for enhancing Omani pupils' learning. 0
- Class size is one of the most important issues for enhancing Omani pupils' learning. 1
- Class size is an important issue but not the most important for enhancing Omani pupils' learning. 2
- Class size is not an important issue most important for enhancing Omani pupils' learning. 3

Please use this space for any other comments you wish to make about any aspects of class size.

G. Home-school relationship

33. How satisfied you are with the frequency of contact you have with your students' parents:

- a) Very satisfied. 5 ()
- b) Some what satisfied. 4 ()
- c) Some what dissatisfied. 2 ()
- d) Very dissatisfied. 1 ()
- e) Not sure. 3 ()

34. In trying to increase the parents' contact with the school, do you think that the teacher can take the first step, or can only parents take the first step?

- a) Teacher can. 1
- b) Only parents can. 2
- c) Both. 3
- d) Not sure. 4

35. Have you ever felt uneasy or reluctant about approaching a parent to take with them about their child/son?

- a) Yes 1
- b) No..... 2
- c) Not sure..... 3

36. How many parents do you think (Please read each item and circle one number in each line) most, many, some, or hardly any?

	<i>Most Parents</i>	<i>Many Parents</i>	<i>Some Parents</i>	<i>Hardly Any Parents</i>	<i>Not sure</i>
a) Don't check up on their sons' after school .	1	2	3	4	5
c) Fail to discipline their sons.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Set standards that are too high for their sons to achieve.	1	2	3	4	5

- e) Fail to show respect for teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
- f) Fail to ensure that their sons' home work is done. 1 2 3 4 5

37. Do you think that the following (Please read each item and circle one number in each line) are a major cause, a minor cause, or not a cause of students having difficulties in school

	<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Not a</i>	<i>Not</i>	
	<i>cause</i>	<i>cause</i>	<i>cause</i>	<i>cause</i>	<i>sure</i>
a) Children being left on their own after school.	1	2	3	4	5
b) The exam system.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
d) Teachers not adapting to pupils needs	1	2	3	4	5
e) Lack of facilities at pupils' home	1	2	3	4	5
f) Parents not following up their sons learning progress	1	2	3	4	5

38. There are many ways in which the Omani father can enhance the academic performance of his sons, here are some of them, please choose only seven that are most important.

- a) Nurture the son.
- b) Spend time with the son.
- c) Read to the son.
- d) Take the son to library.
- e) Having high expectations for education.
- f) Monitor homework.
- g) Send back forms with signature.
- h) Attend school events.
- i) Be supportive if the teachers call.
- j) Follow through on teacher's requests.
- k) Know what the teacher expects.
- l) Initiate contact with teacher.
- m) Show support for the teacher.
- n) Share responsibility for son's progress.

o) Visit the classroom.

H. School building.

39. Do the classroom you teach in have adequate ventilation?

Yes No

40. What is the condition of the school building? Tick only one:

- In good condition ()
- Some classrooms need minor repairs ()
- Most or all classrooms need minor repairs ()
- Some classrooms need major repairs. ()
- Toilets need major repairs and cleaning. ()
- School need complete rebuilding ()

41. Do the classrooms you teach in have air conditions?

Yes No

42. If yes, are they in good conditions?

Yes No

43. Which of the following does the school currently have?

	Yes	No
a) School garden	()	()
b) Sports area/ play ground	()	()
c) Adequate teacher room/ staff room	()	()

44. Is there a school library?

Yes No

45. Are there in the library good and sufficient books?

Yes No

46. This question asks about building and facilities. In this case, the question is if you see them as much worse or better than four years ago.
for each item please circle one of the numbers

	<i>Much / Worse</i>	<i>Worse/ About The Same</i>	<i>About The Same</i>	<i>Better</i>	<i>Much Better</i>
a) Condition of school building	1	2	3	4	5
b) Classroom facilities	1	2	3	4	5
c) Conditions of toilets	1	2	3	4	5
d) Teachers' room	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle a number where 1= No help at all, 2= help a little, 3= help a lot.

a) Smaller class size	1	2	3.
b) Reducing teaching burden.	1	2	3
c) Increase salary	1	2	3
d) To pursue higher education.	1	2	3
e) To pursue master degree.	1	2	3
f) To enhance the annual salary increment.	1	2	3
g) To fix air conditioner in the classroom	1	2	3
h) More support for teacher	1	2	3

Department of Sociology and Social Policy.

University of Durham.

Durham.

United Kingdom

Dear Principal

This questionnaire is part of my Ph.D at the Durham University. The main objective of my research is to identify the most important difficulties that encounter teacher in the Omani school.

You have chosen because of your experience in the field of education which will very helpful in indicating these difficulties and the appropriate policies to limit them.

All the information you provide in this questionnaire will be treated with complete confidentially, and you will not be asked to write your name. Consequently, nobody will be able to identify anyone who responds to the questionnaire. The focus is one the outcomes that the questionnaire produces. Your answers will be very helpful in identifying the difficulties and the problems and the appropriate ways to reduce them.

Principals of Educational Areas Questionnaire.

1. The following statements describe some of the difficulties that face teachers in their work. Please choose seven of these items that you think are most important.

- a) Adequate subject knowledge. ()
- b) Teacher-Inspector relationship. ()
- c) Opportunities for continued professional development. ()
- d) Individual difference between students in the classroom ().
- e) Parents' co-operation with teachers and school. ()
- f) Pupils' standard of achievement/performance. ()
- g) Class size (number of pupils in the class) ()
- h) Pupil-pupil relationship. ()
- i) Discipline in school/classroom. ()
- j) School administration. ()
- k) School building. ()
- l) Teaching/resources/facilities/equipment. ()
- m) Non financial incentives ()
- n) Financial incentives. ()
- o) Others-----

2. From your perspective, what are the appropriate ways to improve teachers' conditions? Please use space below.

The Semi structured interviews questions.

First: Teachers.

1) As a teacher, can you state the main the main difficulties that you face at work?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What do you think of the future of education in Oman?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

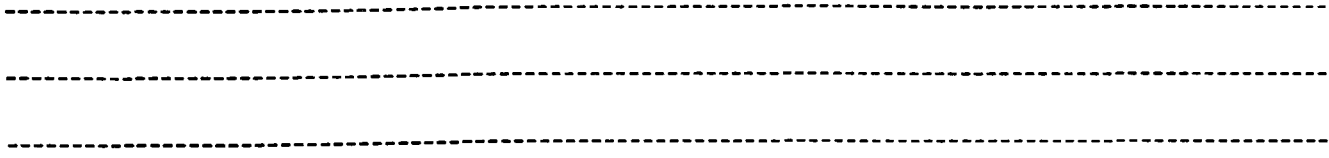
3) From your point of view, what are the strategies needed to limit teachers' problems?

Third: schools' principals.

1) How do you find parents contact with the school is it weak or strong and why?

2) How do you evaluate the academic performance of the Omani pupil is it better or worse than the last four years?

3) What are the educational policies needed to improve the academic performance of the Omani pupil?



Sultan Qaboos University

COLLEGE OF ARTS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



جامعة السلطان قابوس

كلية الآداب

Ref :

Date : / / 14 Hira
/ / 19

الرقم : ج س ق ك / ٧ / ١٠٨١
التاريخ : / / ١٤
التوافق : ١٩٠٧ / ١٤ / ١٣ م

المحترم
الفاضل / مدير عام التخطيط والمعنومات التربوية
وزارة التربية والتعليم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته .. وبعد ،،،

نرجو التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الفاضل / طارق بن صقر
ابن سلطان النعيمي المدرس المساعد بقسم الاجتماع بكلية الآداب ،
حيث يقوم المذكور بدراسة ميدانية كجزء من دراسته للدكتوراه
وسيقوم خلال هذه الدراسة بتوزيع استبانات للمعلمين والمدراء
الاداريين في المناطق التعليمية بالوزارة .

شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم الدائم معنا ،،،

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير ،،،

فاطمة بنت حمدان الحميدان
المدير الإداري



P.O. Box: 42 Al-Khod
Postal Code: 123
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
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صندوق البريد: ٤٢ الخوض
الرمز البريدي: ١٢٣
مسقط - سلطنة عُمان
فاكس: ٥١٣٢١٢ : هاتف: ٥١٥٦٦٩

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الفاضلة / د. سناء مديرة المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير
أحيطكم علما أنني سأقوم بتطبيق استبيان لمعلمي المدارس الابتدائية والإعدادية
والثانوية بمنطقة مسقط ومحافظة الباطنة . ويتناول الاستبيان أهم قضايا المعلمين
ومشكلاتهم . ويعد الاستبيان جزء من أطروحة الدكتوراة المقدمة الى جامعة درم
بالمملكة المتحدة . كما أربغ كذلك في استطلاع آراء مدراء المناطق التعليمية من
خلال إستبيان أعد لهذا الغرض للاستفادة من آرائهم وخبراتهم في صياغة نتائج
الدراسة وتوصياتها . لذا أرجو منكم الموافقة على توزيع هذه الإستبيانات وإتخاذ
الإجراءات اللازمة .

الباحث / طارق صقر سلطان النعيمي
جامعة درم . بريطانيا .

طارق صقر
٢٠١٢/١٢/١٠

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

المحترمة

للفاضلة/ الدكتورة سناء

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته...

بالإشارة لطلبكم تحديد تخصصات المعلمين أود إفادتكم أن المسح يشمل كافة المعلمين بغض النظر عن تخصصاتهم هذا وقد تم اختيار منطقة مسقط ومحافظة الباطنة كمناطق التي سيجرى فيها البحث. أمر آخر فان عدد المعلمين سيصل إلى ٥٠٠ معلم كعينة مستهدفة في البحث وسيبقى أمر تغطية هذا العدد متروك لظروف الباحث وإمكانيته.

ملاحظة

الدكتورة سناء بعثت إليك برسالتين أحدهما لمدراء المناطق التعليمية والآخر للمعلمين.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سعادة الدكتوراة/ فوزية الفارسي
وكيلة وزارة التربية والتعليم
لشؤون التربية والتعليم

الملاء عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته... أما بعد

فأنا أقوم حالياً بتحضير درجة الدكتوراة بجامعة درم Durham. ويدور موضوع الدكتوراه حول أوضاع المعلمين وجزء من منهجيتة الرسالة ، يتطلب إجراء حوار معكم للحديث حول بعض قضايا المعلمين. لذا نرجوا منكم التيسير لنا، حيث أن المنهجية تتطلب أن يكون الحوار مباشراً، وليس عن طريق أي أسلوب آخر. نسأل الله أن يوفقنا لما فيه خير التعليم والتربية في عمان.

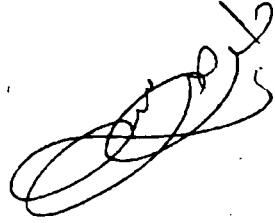
وشكرا لكم،،

الباحث/

طارق بن صقر بن سلطان النعيمي

جامعة درم

قسم علم الاجتماع والسياسة الاجتماعية



الرقم: ص ٢٩٢
التاريخ: ١٤٣١ هـ الموافق: ٢٠١٠/١٢/٢٠ م



سَلْطَنَةُ عُومَانِ
وَزَارَةُ التَّرْبِيَةِ وَالتَّعْلِيمِ
المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير

الفاضل / مدير إدارة التربية والتعليم محافظة مسندم المحترم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته... وبعد...

أود إفادتكم بان الفاضل طارق بن صقر بن سلطان النعيمي يرغب باستطلاع آراء مدراء عموم المناطق التعليمية من خلال استبانته تم إعدادها لهذا الغرض للاستفادة من آرائهم وخبراتهم .

يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحث في تطبيق دراسته .

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير،،،

د. منى بنت سعيد البلوشي
مدير المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الرقم : ٢٣٦ / ٧٩
التاريخ : ١٠ / ١١ / ١٤٢٠ هـ
الموافق : ١٦ / ٢ / ٢٠٠٠ م



سَلْطَنَةُ عُومَانِ
وَزَارَةُ التَّرْبِيَةِ وَالْعُلْمِ
المديرية العامة للتربية والتعليم بمسقط
دايرة الاشراف التربوي

الإفاضل / مديره ومديرات المدارس المتفرغون

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،، وبعد :

نود إفادتكم بأن الفاضل / طارق بن صقر بن سلطان النعيمي يقوم بإعداد جزء من أطروحة الدكتوراه المقدمة إلى جامعة درم ببريطانيا حول (أهم قضايا المعلمين ومشكلاتهم) . وعليه فإنه يرغب في توزيع استبانة معدة لهذا الغرض وتوزيعها على معلمي المدارس بمختلف المراحل . لذا يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة المذكور ومساعدته قدر الإمكان .

هذا وتفضلوا بقبول وافر الاحترام ،،،

عليش بن محمد بن عليش الحميري
مدير دائرة الاشراف التربوي


الدموم

سلطنة عمان

وزارة التربية والتعليم

المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير



الرقم ... ص.م.ف. ٥٩٢
التاريخ: ١١/١١/٢٠٠٠ م

المحترم الفاضل / مدير عام المديرية العامة للتربية والتعليم لمنطقة الداخلية

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،، وبعد ...

أود إفادتكم بان الفاضل طارق بن صقر بن سلطان النعيمي يرغب باستطلاع آراء مدراء عموم المناطق التعليمية من خلال استبانته تم إعدادها لهذا الغرض للاستفادة من آرائهم وخبراتهم . د اعممين (الباض ص ب)

يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحث في تطبيق دراسته .

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير ،،،

بعضهم

- مدير ادارة الوض

- ~ ~ ~

- مدير قسم التربية الخاصة

- ~ ~ ~

- ~ ~ ~

- ~ ~ ~

- ~ ~ ~

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د. سناء بنت سبيل البلوشي
مدير المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير



الرسالة

سليم بن محمد

سليمان بن محمد
وزارة التربية والتعليم
المهتمة الفنى للدراسات والتطوير

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الفاضل / مدير عام المديرية العامة للتربية والتعليم لمنطقة الازاخرم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،، وبعد ...

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يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحث في تطبيق دراسته .

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير،،،

الفاضل

مدير الادارة الجهوية

مدير التعليم

مديرية التربية والتعليم

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د. سلطان بنت سبيل البلوشي
مدير المكتب الفنى للدراسات والتطوير



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المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير

المحترم / مدير عام المديرية العامة للتربية والتعليم لمنطقة الداخلية

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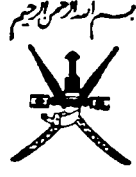
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الْمُعْتَمَدَةِ لِلدِّرَاسَاتِ وَالتَّطْوِيرِ

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سلطنة عُمان
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مكتب
التربية والتعليم
بمسقط
١٤/١٠/١٩٩٠م

international levels, the broad focus of the vision for Human Resource Development is as follows:

'To develop human resources and the capabilities of the Omani people to generate and manage technological changes efficiently, in addition to facing the continuously changing local and international conditions, in a way that ensures maintaining the Omani traditions and customs'.

5.3 Challenges Facing Human Resources Development:

The significant improvement during the past two decades in the indicators relating to human resources development, has led to the Sultanate occupying a distinguished position among the developing countries. In some indicators, the Sultanate has exceeded several countries with a high human development record. However, there are still some challenges facing human resources development and the achievement of the envisaged future. These challenges, which have been discussed in the reports and evaluation studies, are summarized below:

1. The low level of productivity of labour resources. The reluctance of Omanis to join certain professions and occupations has led to reduction of their capacity to face future challenges, affected their integration with the world economy, and at the same time has hindered the substitution of expatriate labour.
2. The weakness and inadequacy of basic education to cope with the rapidly changing scientific and technological development.
3. The provision of a mechanism for creating suitable employment opportunities for about a quarter million Omanis, who are expected to join the labour market within the next century.
4. The existence of variations in employment conditions between private and public sectors (in terms of working hours, official holidays and pensions). These have led to a reluctance of Omanis to join private sector.
5. The challenges resulting from the need for reducing the size of the expatriate labour force (estimated in December, 1993 to be around 370,000 in the private sectors working in different jobs and activities), especially those engaged in professions with low value added, and whose productivity is less than their real economic cost.
6. The increasing demands for basic services, such as health, education, housing, water and sewerage systems, resulting from the fact that the rate of population growth exceeds the growth rate of national income and government revenues.

5.4 Human Resources Development Strategy (1996-2020) and Dimensions:

The most important dimensions of the human resources development strategy which will form the basis for the achievement visualised for this sector and the Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020, are as follows:

- a. **First Dimension:** To achieve a balance between population and economic growth by reducing the current population growth rate to less than 3% by 2020, through reasoning and enlightenment.
- b. **Second Dimension:** Provision of health services and reduction of the rate of mortality and infectious diseases by the following:
 1. Provision of basic health services to the entire population of the Sultanate through a system characterised by cost effectiveness and efficiency. It is planned to promote general safety awareness and protection from diseases.
 2. Provision of preventive health and emergency services.
 3. Reducing the death and infection rates to levels equivalent to those of the advanced countries.
- c. **Third Dimension:** Dissemination, encouragement, and patronage of knowledge and the development of education by:
 1. Creating a climate that encourages the spread and promotion of knowledge and eradication of illiteracy.
 2. According priority to the spreading of basic education, upgrading, and the provision of access to education for all people, so as to ensure equal opportunities for all people. This will be done in an efficient and cost effective manner.
- d. **Fourth Dimension:** Establishing a post-secondary and technical educational system based on the provision of the main specialisations required by the national economy, together with the provision of the necessary facilities for carrying out applied research in the social and economic fields.
- e. **Fifth Dimension:** Providing a system for technical education and vocational training that is capable of preparing labour to adapt to the needs of various specialisations and skills in the labour market, and the achievement of a per capita income that conforms with performance and productivity.

Economic development and better job prospects in cities have gradually attracted young Omanis to urban areas. The population is now concentrated in the capital area, which extends from Muscat to Seeb and along the northern Batinah coast. Other important population centres include the Dhofari city of Salalah and the northern towns of Sohar, Nizwa and Sur.

The bulk of the Omani population is Muslim. The ruling family and a substantial proportion of ordinary citizens adhere to Ibahism, a breakaway sect of Shia Islam. Most of the rest of the population is Sunni, although there are some Shia, mainly in the capital area. Unlike other Gulf countries, however, there is no requirement that an Omani national be Muslim, and there is one prominent Omani trading family which is of Indian Hindu descent. Owing to Oman's trading history, the country is a mixture of races. Slavery existed in living memory and, while free, some former slaves still live as retainers to the families they previously served.

Education

The education system in Oman, which consists of primary, preparatory and secondary levels, has grown substantially over the past three decades. In 1970 there were three schools in the country; by 1998, there were 970 government schools and 118 private schools. Enrolment levels have expanded accordingly, with the total number of students exceeding half a million in the 1998/99 school year. Opportunities for girls, in particular, have increased. In 1975/76 girls made up just 27% of the student population, but by 1998/99 they accounted for about one-half of enrolment. At Oman's only university female students make up about two-thirds of the student body.

Pressure has been building in recent years for the sultanate to expand opportunities for students beyond the secondary level. The country has one university, Sultan Qaboos University, where about 6,000 students are enrolled. Foreign universities have also been allowed to set up branches in the sultanate to provide the first part of university education. Students then have the option of going overseas to complete their degree. There are also six teacher-training colleges and seven private colleges, which offer courses in areas such as computer skills and business administration. However, with an estimated 30,000 school leavers each year, many Omanis complain that the number of places available is not sufficient. Under this pressure, the government has agreed to license private universities in Oman and in July 2000 approved plans for one in Sohar.

Aside from addressing demand for additional post-secondary places, the main challenge for the government over the next few years will be changing the focus of the education provided. At lower levels the Ministry of Education has announced that it intends to ensure that teachers focus on encouraging analysis and logical thinking rather than rote learning. At higher levels the government must provide more skills-oriented programmes to prepare Omanis for the job market. The government is also embarking on the provision of short courses designed to support its Omanisation policy. In 1998 it provided a training course for petrol-station attendants in order to ensure that there was a

June 7, 2000

Sultanate of Oman/World Bank
Cost Effectiveness Study for the Education Sector

Aide-Memoire

1. A World Bank mission consisting of Messrs. Radwan Shaban (Mission Leader), Guy Beatson (Public Sector Management Specialist), Norman LaRocque (Private Education Specialist), Harry Parrinos (Senior Education Economist), and George Zarour (Senior Educator) visited the Sultanate of Oman from May 27- June 7, 2000, at the invitation of the Government of Oman to undertake the Cost Effectiveness Study for the Education Sector. The mission met with their Excellencies the President of Sultan Qaboos University and Advisor to H.M. on Economic Planning, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health, and their Excellencies the Undersecretaries of the Ministries of National Economy for Development Affairs, Finance, Higher Education, Health, and the Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The mission met with counterpart teams at the Ministries of National Economy, Education, Higher Education, Finance and at Sultan Qaboos University. The mission also met with officials from the Tender Board, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bank Muscat, and UNICEF. The mission also visited several public and private schools and colleges. The mission is grateful to all members of the counterpart teams and officials met for their cooperation and hospitality.

Overview of the Education Sector

2. Educational progress has been quite impressive in Oman over the past three decades. The two key challenges currently facing the education sector are: improving the quality of general education, and expanding opportunities in higher education. Another key issue is the external efficiency of the education system. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has recently initiated a reform to develop the Basic Education system. The educational goals of the reform include: developing capabilities for continuous self-learning; preparing citizens capable to adapt with the future, inculcating and developing values and culture of work, production, and achieving quality; and keeping up with scientific and technological advances and developing critical thinking. Authorities are facing a major challenge in securing the resources to implement the reform fully and to take care of growth in the sector. Eliminating double shift schools, expanding current facilities to make room for new programs, reorientation and upgrading the qualifications of Omani teachers, demand for more teachers for the increased number of teaching periods, more and better educational resources – all illustrate the additional financial and technical demands placed on the system. Reordering priorities in the allocation of funds is appropriate when such objectives are to be realized under the umbrella of preparing productive and competitive citizens for the 21st century. However, it is essential to put in place mechanisms to ensure that implementation is successful and the goals are being

realized. There should be room for interventions and changing course when there are indications of discrepancies or failure.

3. Most education personnel, including all levels of supervisors, principals and teachers have been taught in the "traditional system" and have had years of experience (for which they get extra compensation) in outmoded practices which the reform aims at changing radically. It is not easy for them to change overnight and become genuine reformers to lead and implement the new programs. This is a challenge that mandates extensive retraining, radical change in approaches, continuous assistance to school personnel particularly during the transitional stage, and provision and appropriate utilization of materials. The relatively small number of schools that have started the new reform are the pioneers and may have been selected carefully and staffed by enthusiastic principals and teachers. Indications of success may become diluted when the experience is expanded and generalized to reach less committed staff. Thus, it is essential that evaluation and monitoring of the implementation be performed by expert groups external to the system, from within the country or outside. The extra cost will be a very small fraction of the cost of the reform and it is worth it.
4. A major challenge facing the higher educational system is the mushrooming number of secondary school graduates who are facing difficulties in finding a place in higher education. Of the 22,178 secondary school graduates who passed the General Secondary Certificate in 1999, there were 3,926 admitted to SQU and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) institutions; 2,123 were admitted to industrial technical colleges and institutes of health science; and less than 200 were sent on scholarships, or enrolled in other local institutes. The total number of absorbed candidates is about 6,200 leaving close to 16,000 without access to local higher education institutions. In addition to 2-year or 3-year private colleges, the government has licensed 3 private universities so far. There is an excess demand for higher education in Oman as evidenced by the increasing number of Omanis going abroad for university education at their own expense.

Analysis of Expenditure Patterns

5. Oman provides free education in public institutions at all levels. In addition to fully covering tuition, the Government finances the transportation of most students to elementary, preparatory and secondary schools. At the college and university levels, the government provides students with living allowances, transportation, food and cash allowances.
6. In 1998, the Government spent RO 283.5 million on education (not including Human Resources Development Fund). Spending on education has increased over time, from RO 180.1 million in 1991. Education spending made up 13 percent of total government expenditures in 1998, up from 10 percent in 1991. The education sector spending stood at 5.2% of GDP, which is about average for the GCC countries, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait spending relatively more while the other three GCC countries spending relatively less than Oman. The level of education spending has

steadily increased regardless of fiscal and economic conditions. Ministry of Education (MoE) recurrent spending continues to rise over time, while development and capital spending is static. Recurrent spending on higher education continues to increase significantly. Most education sector spending is recurrent, at over 90 percent of total. Among the two main ministries and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), 73 percent of spending goes to the MoE, 9 percent to MoHE, and 18 percent to SQU.

7. A large proportion of MoE expenditures are for wages, salaries and other personnel costs, at 88 percent of total recurrent expenditures. This leaves relatively little room for pedagogical inputs. In addition, about 7 percent of recurrent expenditures are used to transport most students to and from school. At the higher education level, considerable resources are used to pay for living costs and other allowances for students at SQU and the teacher colleges. At the college level, these allowances make up more than one-third of the unit cost for boarding students.
8. Analysis of household survey information suggests that public spending at post-secondary educational institutions benefits wealthier groups more proportionately – and these graduates have the highest private returns. The same household survey information reveals that wealthier families are already spending some of their own resources on schooling and schooling-related items. This possibly indicates a realization among wealthier segments about the private returns associated with schooling attainment.
9. On average, a year of schooling increases labor market earnings by more than 12 percent. In contrast, in other countries the returns to a year of schooling are about 10 percent. Returns to schooling are especially high for college education and university study. These high rates of return reflect the attractive wages paid to educated Omanis, who are largely employed in the public sector. This demonstrates that there is scarcity of human capital in Oman. It also signals that there is scope for cost-recovery at the higher education levels.

Encouraging Private Investment in the Education Sector

10. The private education sector in Oman operates at all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education. Its role is recognized in both the Basic Law and in the Fifth Five-Year Plan. There is a developing private school sector currently enrolling just over 4 percent of Omani students. The higher education private sector is a more recent phenomenon in Oman. Currently, there are 9 private colleges serving around 2,000 students, and a number of private training institutes. Three private universities have recently been approved to operate. The private education sector enrolling Omani students has experienced high growth rates, 11% in the number of schools and 23% in students enrollment between the two academic years of 1996-97 and 1998-99. Despite this growth, it faces a number of challenges, including variations in the quality of provision, the lack of affordability of private education, and limited access to capital for institutions and students.

11. The Ministry of Education has oversight of the private school sector. Private schools appear to be heavily regulated – entry by new providers is closely managed, private school fee levels must be approved and the curriculum for most schools is centrally driven. Private schools are eligible for some assistance, but do not receive operating subsidies. One option is to move to a more light-handed approach to regulation, within a framework of strengthened competition among schools and well-informed parents. Funding systems could be made more responsive to student demand and could be focused on students, rather than institutions. Innovative approaches to funding could be piloted, including decentralized school management, introducing targeted scholarships (so that a proportion of students could attend private schools) and contracting out school management. Another possible change would be to separate the Ministry of Education's regulatory functions from its other roles. This could be done by shifting some regulatory functions to an independent school review agency. The mission will detail such policy options in the report.

12. Oversight of the higher education sector appears fragmented, with responsibility for the different parts of the sector spread across a variety of institutions. In general, there is less regulation of private colleges than of private schools, and what regulation exists seems more light-handed. Although entry of new private colleges and their fee levels are controlled, responsibility for quality assurance (QA) and curriculum rests primarily with the institutions. Funding of higher education is inequitable, with students at public institutions receiving considerably more assistance than their private sector counterparts. The mission believes that efficiency gains could be realized if policy makers were to consolidate oversight of the higher education sector. The mission will detail such policy options in the report.

Cost Recovery and Resource Mobilization

13. A number of changes could be made to increase both the efficiency and equity of spending, and to generate new resources to address the access and quality challenges. These include reducing allowances for most students at public institutions and introducing nominal charges (e.g., for textbooks, tuition fees), and replacing the current multiple funding systems with an integrated higher education scholarship scheme that would apply to both public and recognized private institutions. One concern with cost recovery is that some segments of society may not afford attending school. This, however, can be mitigated through targeting measures, such as scholarships and grants for low-income students. Concerns about access to higher education could be addressed through the introduction of a student loan scheme that protects students unable to find employment after graduation. These initiatives will be set out in detail in the report.

Moving towards Performance Budgeting and Management

14. The education sector operates within a relatively clearly defined institutional framework. There are, however, several areas where the mission believes that there are opportunities to clarify roles and responsibilities (potentially in the higher

education sector). Some potential exists for quality and efficiency gains from establishing new governance structures, in schools, for example. The report will examine this and other governance issues in detail.

15. Within that framework, a comprehensive process governs education sector planning and budgeting. However, the mission's review of the planning process has highlighted the scope to introduce performance-based budgeting through improved and tighter specification of the outcomes the Government wishes to achieve in the education sector, as well as the policy actions (e.g. education sector services, regulatory interventions, transfers, and investments) to deliver those outcomes. This may assist in making clearer linkages between the outcomes, agreed policy actions, and resource allocation within the education sector. Improved specification may also create possibilities to improve the monitoring of education sector services, and the use of resources. The report will explore the potential for further development of financial and other information systems to support education sector cost effectiveness. The report will investigate the scope for strengthening financial accountability through consolidation of the ministry's and human resource development budgets for each education sector organization (by current, capital and development expenditure items).
16. Significant progress has been made in increasing the financial management flexibility of education sector organizations. However, this has not been matched by similar administrative and personnel management developments. The size of the education sector (as measured by the number of employees and the amount of the investment made by the Government), the significant pressure to educate an increasingly large number of students, and the demands for improved education service quality – make financial and administrative flexibility almost imperative. The report will analyze how institutional changes could be made to generate greater efficiency and better quality education services through increased financial and administrative flexibility, consistent with international experience.

Implementation/Action Plan

17. The mission will develop a set of recommendations and an implementation action plan.

Next Steps

18. A draft report will be submitted to the Government by the first week of September, 2000. While this Aide Memoire reflects key findings of the mission, the report will also address other issues outlined in the terms of reference of this study. A smaller mission will visit Oman within a month of the submission of the draft report to make a presentation on the study's recommendations and obtain Government's comments on the draft report. A final report will be submitted to the Government by December 2000.