

**Assisting Educational Change in Oman through Developing School
Leaders: the Principals Leadership Training Project**

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Dedication:

To my beloved mother, whose prayers are behind God's blessings for me.

To my beloved wife, my companion in the journey of my successes. No words can complement the support that she has given me.

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My grateful thanks and appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Michael Wilson for his support and guidance throughout my PhD journey. His care and interest in my work has encouraged me to learn academically, and has assisted me to improve my skills. My thanks also to the School of Education's staff who assisted me in any way needed. My appreciation for the University of Leeds' members who contributed to my training.

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Abstract

This study is based on researching a national project as a case study: the Principals Leadership Training (PLT), which was initially introduced in 2007 by an international consultancy from the United States, and then scaled up nationally by the Ministry. Throughout the PLT project, over 1,200 school leaders were trained through a cascade model of training delivery from 2008 to 2013. The training programme included two phases: the first on transformational leadership and the second on instructional leadership, with an aim to build the capacity of school leaders to lead change at their schools.

The focus of this study is to research the preparation of school leaders from an international, comparative and cross-cultural perspective through the use of the PLT as a vertical case study. Consequently, the study aims to answer four key questions - the first being 'What motivated the decision to initiate the PLT project, and why did participants want to join?' The second question is, 'How and to what extent has the PLT project impacted on the leadership development of school principals?' The third question asks 'What cross-cultural insights into school leadership training can be gained from the PLT?' The fourth question to be answered is 'What are the implications for leadership development theory, policy and practice from a cross-cultural perspective?'

A vertical case study methodology was used in this study with the purpose of comparing vertically, transversally and horizontally the international, national and local levels. Data were collected from the programme's participants through five focus groups in each of the three regions selected through purposive sampling, followed by individual interviews with 15 experienced and 15 less experienced school principals from the focus group participants through maximum variation sampling. In addition, interviews were conducted with the providers of training at local level (local trainers), national level (master trainers and policy makers) and international level (PLT designers).

The findings have shown changes in how the policy and plan of the PLT were implemented at regional level due to the cascade model of delivery. Also, the findings have shown a misalignment of policy and practice between the levels of national, local authority and schools. Additionally, the data have shown that the theoretical models used in the PLT were not appropriate for the context from a cross-cultural and comparative perspective as they were based on ontological considerations that are irrelevant to the current context of Oman.

As a result, the study drew implications for theory, policy and practice. The implications for theory were by claiming the need to adapt the current theoretical frameworks of transformational and instructional leadership to the context of Oman, by considering the level of decentralisation and to the reality of the practice. For the implications policy and practice, by proposing a model for policy and practice for Oman through adaptation to provide more potential to apply the instructional and transformational models. In addition, the study has proposed a model to improve the practice of the progression of school leaders in a way that is linked to a national scheme of professional development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Focus of the Research

The focus of this study is on the preparation of school leaders in Oman as a way of assisting educational change at school level, as the issues of educational change and the impact of large scale educational reforms have gained the interest of researcher (Harris (2011); Fullan, 2009; Wedell, 2009). Additionally, other researchers, for example Hallinger (2003), theorise links between the educational leadership models of transformational and instructional leadership and educational change. However, the introduction of educational change needs effective planning and management (Wedell, 2009; Coleman (2000), an issue which is addressed in this study at both local level and national level.

This study investigates a large-scale initiative for developing school leaders in Oman: the Principal Leadership Training (PLT) project. The project was introduced in 2007 as a response to an assessment of needs to assist educational change at school level carried out in 2006 by an international consultancy. The key goal of the PLT was to build the capacity of school principals in order to enable them to properly implement the changes introduced by the central Ministry of Education (MoE) on one hand, and by enabling them to face the challenges arising at school level on the other hand.

Studying PLT has an international dimension because of the involvement of three international actors in the initiation of the project. The USA's Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in collaboration with the MoE, provided the coordination and funding for the initial stages of the project (before the national replication). MEPI contracted two consultancies from the USA that have experience in international development education. As a result, the international consultancy designed the PLT programme in English with the provision of Arabic translation. The programme was delivered in Oman by experts in international and cross-cultural educational leadership from the US to a sample of 22 secondary schools principals.

In 2007, the Ministry decided to nationally scale-up the training on the PLT programme through its human and financial resources. Therefore, it planned to replicate the training through a cascade model in order to cover the eleven regions of Oman. The training in the regions was delivered through local trainers who were trained during the earlier cohorts of the project. The local training teams were supervised by a team of master trainers at Ministry level. Also, the programme was phased into two stages, two weeks each, the first on transformational leadership and the second on instructional leadership.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the PLT as a national initiative case study. It explores the relationship between theory, policy and context at local level and at the schools. Consequently, there are four key research questions for this study:

What motivated the decision to initiate the PLT, and why did the participants want to join the PLT?

The aim of this question is to investigate the rationale for the PLT initiative from the perspective of the Ministry within its policy and actions to reform education in Oman. It will also investigate the intended goal of the PLT from the perspective of the international consultancy who developed the PLT programme. Additionally, to compare at local level, it will investigate why the participants wanted to join, as well as how they joined.

2. How and to what extent has the PLT project impacted on the leadership development of school principals in Oman?

This research question will explore how, and the extent to which, the training provided has:

- (a) addressed the perceived professional needs of school principals;
- (b) influenced the mind-set of school principals in relation to their perceived leadership role;
- (c) directly or indirectly impacted on the leadership behaviour of principals in bringing about institutional change and improvement;
- (d) principals' evaluation of content and processes of the programme in relation to any reported impact.

3. What cross-cultural insights into school leadership training can be gained from the PLT project?

As the PLT project relies on a combination of Western leadership models/experts and Omani expertise, this research question will explore the implications of a cross-cultural delivery of training and development. It raises important issues relating to education transfer and policy borrowing in leadership training. Also, issues of shared meaning and translation of concepts will be researched together with any potential inhibitors, and how and to what extent Western leadership models and systems can be adapted to a different Omani educational context.

4. What are the implications for leadership development theory, policy and practice from a cross-cultural perspective?

This research question will focus initially on a critique of Western models on the strength of the empirical evidence drawn from a non-Western cultural context. On this basis, it will develop new theoretical insights and models of leadership development, along with their implications for research-informed educational policy and practice, both in Oman and beyond to other non-Western countries, thus closing the knowledge gap in our understanding of leadership development in non-Western contexts.

This study is significant for various reasons. It has the potential to inform future researchers, practitioners, policy makers and international consultancies on the area of preparation and development of school leaders. This is particularly important when considering the scarcity of published research on this topic in the context of Oman. This is the first study to examine the PLT project, which is considered as the most major large-scaled project to train principals. Additionally, for the case of the PLT, it was initiated in collaboration with international consultancies. The characteristics of combining global actors with both national and local actors give it a uniqueness for investigation as a real life phenomenon in a natural context.

As the Ministry of Education, Oman has recently inaugurated an academy to train teachers and principals, this study will provide a feedback on its most recent project in training principals. Then newly established academy will aim to provide programmes of a high quality for principals. This study provides a cross-cultural perspective relevant to Oman on using current knowledge to develop school leaders, an issue which is scarce in literature.

1.2 Researcher's Motive and Position

My interest in educational leadership began when I undertook an MA in International Educational Management at the University of Leeds in 2006. Additionally, my training at UNESCO in 2007 sparked my interest in comparative and international education. Those experiences led me to conduct this study in this particular way. Fortunately, when I returned back to my role at the Central Ministry of Education, the PLT project was in its planning phase between the Ministry and the international consultancy. Consequently, I was appointed to the project as a liaison-trainer to work with the experts from the USA. This was a great opportunity for me to work collaboratively with the experts who were specialised in international and comparative educational leadership. As a result, I acquired an ambition to complete a PhD in the same area, and to use the PLT as a case study in order to link my new learning to my experience, and consequently for my future career at the Ministry as this area is of a particular importance for the Ministry.

My interest in this field of educational leadership has increased after undertaking an internship at the National College of Teaching and Leadership in June 2013. I worked with the college's international unit which was responsible for designing and delivering educational leadership programmes for international customers. As part of the internship, I spent a day at the Department of Education, which was a great hands-on opportunity to learn about the education system in the UK. This experience of the internship sparked my interest in international and comparative education leadership. I became enthusiastic about sharing the knowledge and experience I had acquired in the UK with my home country. Therefore, I feel that this thesis is the start of such a journey.

During my PhD journey, I have had many excellent experiences. I have developed my skills in all areas through joining the training workshops at the university. I feel that I have gained a great advantage from doing my BA, MA and PhD here at Leeds. Each stage really prepared me for the next stage. The most exiting experience was my internship in June 2013 at the National College of Teaching and Leadership. Through this opportunity, I had a hands-on experience on how the National College provides leadership programmes. My work with its international team raised my interest in researching international and comparative educational leadership.

With regard to my position, before starting my PhD I was an educational expert at the Office of Educational Reform and Research at the Central Ministry. For the PLT, I worked with the experts from the USA as a training liaison in 2007. I assisted with translation during the sessions, and also with cross-cultural and contextual clarifications. At the national scale-up phase, I was appointed as a master trainer in the project, supervising training in the regions. Being an insider researcher has assisted with me with conducting the reach through the field study with a thorough understanding of the context.

1.3 Philosophical Issues and the Methodology

This research is epistemologically interpretative and ontologically constructivist. ‘In this world view, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed toward certain objects or things’ (Creswell (2012:20). Through this constructivist paradigm, ontology is described as ‘relativistic: reality is socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature’ and epistemology as ‘knowledge consists of mental constructions about which there is relative consensus’ (Klenke, 2008: 20). The ontological parameters relate to actors across all levels, within the education system in Oman, where people’s consciousness of reality is constructed through Arabic language and their minds are shaped by culture and organisational practices.

The researcher is part of the perception of reality in this research. However, being an insider within a constructivist paradigm provides the opportunity to understand the context, as an ontological issue, in order to assess the relationship between the universal epistemology

(theory) and practice at local levels. However, being an insider researcher raises issues on axiology. Klenke (2008:17) writes that ‘axiology refers to the role of values and ethics in the research. The traditional scientific approach seeks research that is value free and unbiased. However, all research is value laden and biased’. Therefore, my knowledge on the context and its values adds to the understanding on how to access data sources, either from the documents or the participants.

On the basis of the constructivist paradigm of the study a qualitative design was decided as a way to seek answers for the research questions. As the PLT consisted of multi-levels of actors in various settings, a vertical case study approach was used in this study in order to find out through ‘vertical comparison’ between each of the levels of the PLT. Additionally, in order to investigate the changes over time and place, a ‘transversal’ comparison was used. The ‘horizontal comparison’ is used to compare at local level (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009). Further details are in Chapter 4.

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

MEPI: The US Department of State Middle East Partnership Initiative established in 2002 with a goal to promote reforms in the Middle Eastern region with regard to political changes, economy, education and empowerment of women.

Creative Associates International: An international development service provider based in the US, who also works internationally.

Seward Incorporated: A provider of international development education services with extensive international experience. They received a contract from Creative Associates International to design and deliver the PLT.

Ministry of Education: The Ministry responsible for education within the central government in Oman. They administer the education system within the eleven regions.

Directorate General of Education (DG): The official title for the local education authority in Oman.

PLT: the Principals Leadership Training Project

Basic Education Cycle One: The first phase in the education system in Oman (Grades 1-4), students start at the age of six. Students are of mixed gender but the members of staff are exclusively female.

Basic Education Cycle Two: The second phase of education in Oman (Grades 5-10). The schools are of the same gender and are staffed according to the gender of the students.

Secondary School: The third phase of school education in Oman (Grades 11-12). The schools are of the same gender and they are staffed according to the gender of the students.

Administrative supervisor: Located at the local education authority (DG) and responsible for monitoring the administrative part of the principals' work.

Instructional supervisor: Located at the local education authority and responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of teachers in schools. They are supervisors for every subject in the curriculum.

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

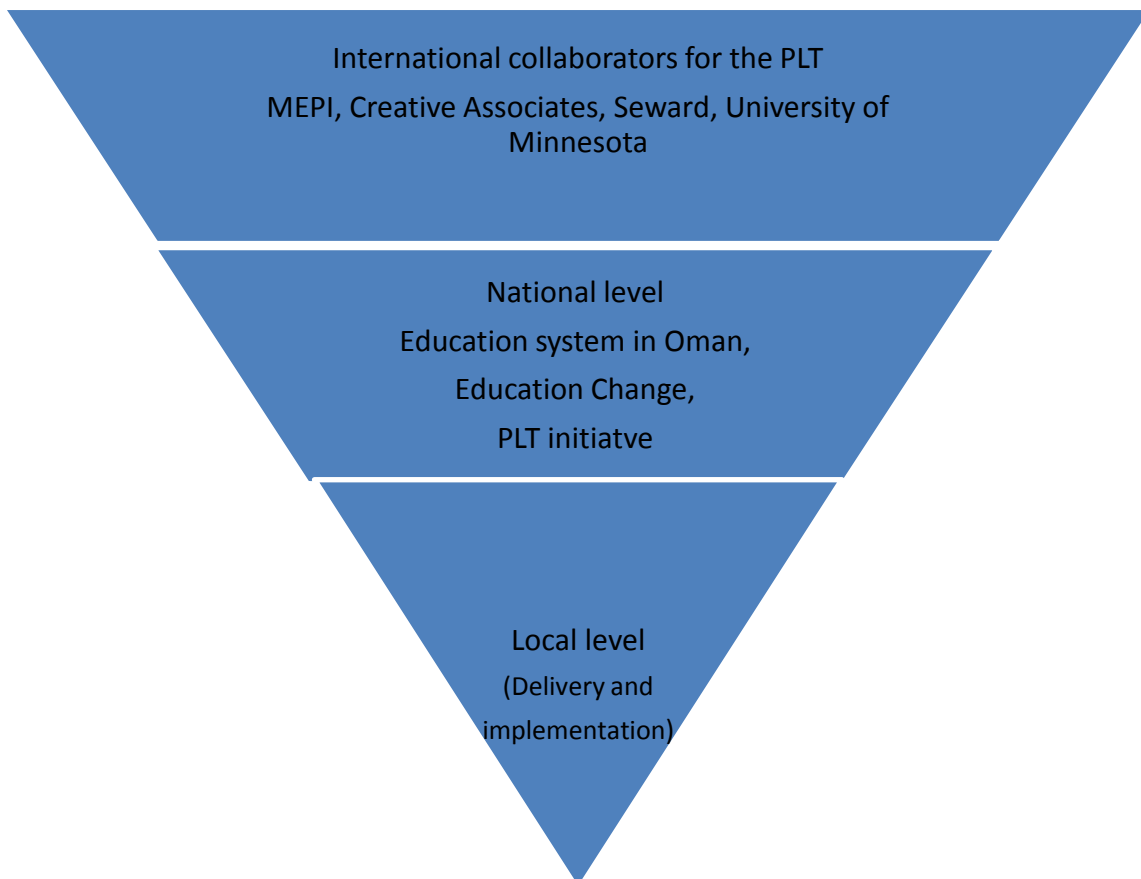
This study consists of nine chapters, including this introduction. The second chapter describes the context of the PLT within the three boundaries of international, national and local levels. The third chapter is the literature review. The fourth chapter outlines the methodology of the research. The fifth chapter presents the findings from the focus groups. The sixth chapter presents the data from the individual interviews. The seventh chapter presents the data from the interviews with training providers at international, national and local level. The eighth chapter discusses the findings of the research. The ninth chapter concludes the research and draws implications for theory, policy and practice.

Chapter 2 The Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Omani educational context, drawing on a number of secondary academic publications, as well as primary documentary government sources, in order to provide an insight into the Ministry of Education's priorities for school reform, school leadership development, and international collaboration in assisting the process of effective policy implementation and the management of change. The contextual analysis is also informed by a review of relevant publications relating specifically to the underlying policy, course content and evaluation of the Principals Leadership Training (PLT) Programme. The adopted triplex framework of contextual analysis draws on the model of (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2014) in emphasising the need to make comparisons 'vertically', at international, national and local levels, while also acknowledging the need to make 'horizontal' comparisons between both regions and research participants.

Figure A The multi-levels of the context of the study



2.2 International Collaboration for the PLT Initiative

International development education organisations and consultancies have an increased role of intervention in reforming education systems, particularly in the less developed countries, including Oman. The significant move to international collaboration to reform education in Oman began in 1995 when a national vision ‘Oman2020’ was initiated as a strategy for achieving economic competitiveness (MOE, 2004). With this strategy driven by economic and human capital rationales, education reform in Oman has witnessed various initiatives that were based with international collaboration with consultancy providers particularly, from English speaking developed countries. The Ministry of Education in Oman sought the assistance of these consultancy providers for two key interrelated purposes: first, evaluation of the whole education systems or particular reforms; second, introducing new initiatives and reforms, usually on the basis of previous evaluations.

For example, one of the major collaborative initiatives to assist a large-scale education change at school level was the B.A.-Oman project for training English language teachers with the University of Leeds(Wedell, 2009) .In explaining the goal of this initiative in the professional development of teachers, Wedell (2009:9) quotes Fullan’s concept of ‘re-culturing’, which he defines as ‘a process of adjusting many of their established professional behaviours, and eventually also beliefs about their roles and responsibilities as teachers’. Similarly, the goal of the PLT was to achieve such a similar target for school principals as the Ministry sought changes at school level, as its new policy was to redefine the role of principals and to extend decentralisation (MoE, 2004). The Ministry’s stated rationale for introducing new initiatives through the expertise of the international consultancy providers is to *‘learn from best international practices in reforming education systems’* (MoE, 2004: 22).

There were four international entities involved in the initiation of the PLT project. Each one of these had a particular role in the PLT according to their area of interest and specialisation. These were the United States’ Secretary of State’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), Creative Associates International, Seward Incorporated, and the College of Education and Human Development of the University of Minnesota, USA. Each of these entities had particular roles according to their objectives and expertise.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) was created in 2002 by the Department of State of the United States of America. Sharp (2005:1) explains the MEPI: ‘a program designed, in the words of Secretary Powell, to be a ‘continuation, and deepening of our longstanding commitment to working with all peoples of the Middle East to improve their daily lives and to help them face the future with hope’. Sharp adds that the MEPI has three main categories: economic, political and educational. For the education category, Sharp (2005:2) explains ‘MEPI also is designed to ‘bridge the knowledge gap’ in the Middle East by providing more access to higher education for young people and raising the quality of education in local schools’. The PLT programme’s document (Seward, 2008) notes the MEPI representative in Oman’s contribution to the first stage of the programme.

The MEPI’s key role towards the PLT programme was funding and supervision. The field work was delivered through a contract with an international consultancy: Creative Associates International. Creative Associates International is a US-based consultancy that provides development services in various countries around the world (Creative (2005). The document (Creative, 2005:1) shows that the relationship between the Ministry and MEPI started in 2004 through establishing a joint Omani-US team to assess the needs to reform secondary education in Oman. In 2005, Creative in collaboration with MEPI prepared a report on the assessment study of secondary education in Oman.

The consultancy, Creative, usually assigns subcontractors to deliver programmes. For the PLT, Creative assigned the task of delivering the programme to another US-based consultancy: Seward Incorporated. According to Seward’s website (Seward, 2008), it defines itself: ‘Seward Incorporated is an international education and training company based in Minneapolis, that has provided services and custom solutions to the international education development market since 1990’. The role of Seward in PLT was to arrange content design with experts from the College of Education at the University of Minnesota, and to deliver training for principals in Oman.

The College of Education at the University of Minnesota was involved in the programme through the participation of some of its staff in the PLT programme's design and delivery. According to Seward (2008) the participating experts from the College were experts in international, comparative and cross-cultural educational leadership. Seward (2008) explains that the team of experts executed a visit to assess the needs of training before designing the programme's content.

Each of the four previously mentioned international bodies had particular roles with regard to the programme. The involvement of MEPI was a supervisory role, whereas for Creative was logistical. Seward (2008, p.4) states: 'Seward was responsible for most or all aspects of project planning and preparation as well as actual implementation of project activities'. This shows that the international consultancy of Seward was responsible of all aspects of programme design and delivery in Oman in the first phase, before the national scaling-up from January to June 2007. This also shows that the Ministry's staff were not involved in the design of the content.

To answer the first research question regarding the rationale for initiating the PLT programme, the Ministry of Education in Oman began negotiations with the MEPI's representatives in order to identify areas of potential assistance and technical collaboration. A decision was then made to carry out a study to assess the needs of the education system in Oman, (Creative, 2005, p.1) states:

Building on the productive November 2004 visit to the Sultanate, US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the MoE stated their intention to identify experts to work in partnership as a joint Omani-US Assessment team (JAT) to carry out the assessment. Creative assembled a team of three experienced educators with extensive Middle East experience to carry out this task.

One of the key recommendations of the study was to train the school principals to build their capacity. In 2006, the Ministry arranged with the aforementioned consultancies the design and delivery of a training programme.

2.3 National Level

Oman is a Middle Eastern country shaped by its long history and culture. The history of Oman can be dated back at least 5,000 years, establishing Oman as an ancient civilization. Historical documents refer to several names of Oman, namely: Magan (copper mines), Mazoun (plentiful water) and then Oman (MoI, 2002). The geographic location of Oman has played a significant role in the ethnographic culture and practices of its people. As Rippenburg (1998) writes:

Oman's historical development is more closely associated with overseas trade when compared to its Arab neighbours, principally with East Africa. This was largely due to the geography of its interior, which isolated it from other countries on the Arab peninsular. (Rippenburg, 1998, p. 3)

The diversity of Oman's geography has created variation within its regions, in the type of people's lives and local cultures. Common (2011:216) argues 'despite some superficial similarities, the important contextual factors that make Oman unique in the Middle East are as much a product of geography and history as of culture and economic change'. Such contextual factors are varied within Oman as its geography is so diverse. This geographical and demographical diversity influences the way the Ministry of Education provides and manages educational provision, as the Ministry aims to provide equal opportunities of access to education (MoE, 2004). Consequently, such variation in the school's societal culture and context influences the practice of educational leadership.

With regard to the administration of provinces in Oman, it is divided into eleven governorates as the map below shows. In each governorate, there is a local education authority that is officially entitled the Directorate General of Education, DG., and each of these directorates reports to the central Ministry. The administration of education is tri-level: the central Ministry, the local education authority (DG of Education), and schools. These local authorities are responsible for resourcing schools and supervising both teaching and administration. The education policies, curriculum, salaries and finances are administered by the Ministry. For the PLT programme, the role of regional DGs was to manage the project at local level in terms of the selection of participants, arranging training facilities and coordinating with the project's management at the central Ministry.

Figure 2: Oman's map (www.worldatlas.com)



Being a state in the Middle East, Oman shares the Middle Eastern Arabic Islamic culture. ‘Oman shares many of the cultural characteristics of its Arab neighbours, along with rapid economic development’ (Common, 2011: 216). Additionally, Oman is classified as part of the Arab Middle Eastern domain in leading studies on leadership such as the Goble study (House et al., 2004, cited in Common, 2011). As with other neighbouring Arab countries, the political system is a monarchy, an important issue in understanding and interpreting organisational leadership within the context of Oman according to Common (2011).

The main source of national income for Oman is oil. Therefore, considering oil as an unsustainable resource, the government of Oman is remarkably investing on developing human resources to cope with the post-oil-era (Ministry of Information, 2014). Additionally, the government has adopted a diversification of resources policies through focussing on tourism, information technology and international investment (ibid). As a result of these economic policies, education and training have become a corner stone in the government perspective of development as the Vision for Oman's economy (Oman2020) considers education as a path way for sustainable development (Ministry, of Education, 2004). This point leads to the discussion of the formation of the education system in Oman and its reform in the following sections.

2.3.1 The school education system in Oman

The official resources date the formal education system in Oman back to 1970 after the reign of the current ruler Sultan Qaboos who established the contemporary renaissance of Oman (MoE, 2004). The school education system in Oman has expanded from three schools and 900 students in early 1970 to 1040 schools and 517,053 students in 2012 (MoE, 2012). However, during the forty five years history of education in Oman, Rassekh (2004) categorises it into three main stages of transformation with regard to policy and practice. The first is the quantitative development of education (1970-1980) which focussed on providing access to education regardless the limits of resources. The second stage started in 1980 with the introduction of new improvements in curriculum and teaching. The third stage began in 1995 after the government endorsed a future vision (Oman 2020) to transform the economy of Oman.

The previously outlined development of education was managed by the central Ministry of Education. The Ministry formulates its policies in accordance to the Government's plans and directives. The second level in the management of education in Oman is the local authorities in the eleven governorates. The third level is the schools who implement the policies and directives of the Ministry coming through the local education authorities.

The school education system in Oman is categorised into three levels of schooling. The first is the first cycle of basic education which lasts for four years and contains grades one-four. This stage of education is unique in its co-education of male and female students. However, the staff are exclusively female, including the principal, and the schools have their own designated buildings. The second stage is the second cycle of basic education that lasts for six years. At this second stage, schools are separated according to the gender including the teachers and the principals. The third stage of education is the secondary education which consists of grades eleven and twelve. The schools are also separated at this stage according to gender including the staff. The nature of this context of separate gender schools are based on the national culture and practice. By this description of the formation of education system in Oman and how it is organised the following section will shed light on the education reform in Oman and how it influenced the preparation and development of school leaders.

2.3.2 Education change and school leadership in Oman

Education in Oman enjoys a high political commitment by the Omani government. According to Oman's Basic Law of State: 'the goal of education is to achieve a balance between preserving national identity, and achieving a high level of modernisation', (MOE, 2003:13), and 'education is a cornerstone for the progress of society which the state fosters and endeavours to spread and make accessible to all' (MOE, 2004:9). Education change in Oman is aligned with the objectives of the State and what the Ministry's publications and documents call 'comprehensive national development plans' (MoE, 2004: 13). Such education change that is rooted in national identity, with a desire for international competitiveness, creates the initiation of new programmes and initiatives influenced by the national philosophy and policy of education from one side, and international practices and policies from the other side.

Additionally, the MoE (2004, p.8) draws links between the economic drive to establish a knowledge-based-economy and education reform. The national vision for reforming the economy (Oman, 2020) has emphasised on the role of education in economic development, MoE (2004). Oman's commitment to education is usually quoted to give an example of political commitment for education reform amongst developing countries (Chapman et al., 2012). In reforming education, the Ministry transfers policy from what it considers as high

performing education systems, and it searches for ‘best education practices’ either through hiring consultants, usually from English-speaking countries, or through sending its national experts for educational visits abroad to learn new practices (MoE, 2009, p.25). This interest expanded after the Ministry joined international comparative assessments studies such as TIMMS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS ((Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), and became more interested in the global competitiveness of its education systems.

The Ministry of Education, MoE, (2005) lists eight goals for education reform in Oman. One of these is ‘upgrade the role, knowledge, skills, and practices of school administrators and inspectors’. Another document on the reform of Basic Education in Oman (MoE, 2007) states: ‘school administration is a key component in reforming education in Oman’. The policy documents usually show a systematic and comprehensive framework for education reform for school education. For example, the MoE (2005) uses an ‘input-process-outcomes framework’ to explain how the Ministry addresses the quality of education: within the processes category, ‘strong leadership’ is listed. This shows how the Ministry is shifting its perception on schools’ principals and their roles within the education reform in Oman.

The Ministry of Education introduced the School Performance Improvement Project (SPIE) in 2002/2003 with the aim of ‘establishing national standards and introducing a comprehensive system of school self-evaluation, complemented by external evaluation’ (MoE, 2005, p.63). This initiative was developed by an expert from the English Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education), with modifications to fit the policy and context of education in Oman (Plummer, 2005). The project’s documents explain that it adopted a cascade model in training principals and inspection teams on the procedures of school evaluation and improvement plans. MoE (2010:63) states that:

The Ministry of Education is encouraging a change in school culture. The aim for schools is to work towards the continuous improvement of the whole school. The Ministry wants schools to be self-critical, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and taking responsibility for their own development.

However, besides the above intended policy, the study of the international consultancy Creative, in 2004, revealed that the principals of Oman’s schools lacked leadership and

management training. As a result, Creative (2005:14) suggests two key policies to improve the capacity of school leadership in Oman. The first is ‘to develop a comprehensive decentralisation programme’, and the second is to ‘initiate a national programme for training school principals and deputy principals on new management techniques’.

The advice of the consultancy was to implement these two actions in parallel. However, consultancy’s documents do not provide any detailed advice for the Ministry on how to increase the decentralisation at regional level or school level. The study made a clear recommendation of achieving a balance between building the capacity of principals and increasing decentralisation by the Ministry at school level.

Similarly, after introducing the programme by the consultancy in 2007, it stated similar recommendations. The proposed changes at school level require adequate support from the Ministry. Seward (2008, p.23) states: ‘Central MoE officials had a lack of understanding of the importance of and need for building proper institutional support for the proposed school leadership reforms’. Consequently, Seward (2008, p.32) recommended: ‘Policymakers and superiors need to be capable of effectively supporting the proposed changes’.

The other issue recommended by the consultancy is dialogue with stakeholders. Seward (2008, p.40) explains: ‘the most successful reform programs rely on full support, cooperation, and involvement of central MoE officials. Whereas Ministries of Education often publically support reform programs in principle, experience has shown that verbal support alone is not sufficient. Successful implementation and integration of education reforms requires robust policy dialogue among all affected stakeholders’. Again the consultancy did not provide any details on the issue of policy dialogue or how to improve the current status of policy and practice.

Similarly to the consultancy’s recommendations, the most recent study to assess the efficiency of the education system in Oman, MoE-World Bank study (2011, p.220) recommends to ‘develop educators’ leadership and management skills with systematic

training at central, local and school levels, possibly as a postgraduate course. Additionally, the Ministry should extend school-based management to all schools; broaden decentralisation of responsibility to governorates and regions'. The recommendation is not limited to school level but also covers regional level where the regional education departments play a significant role in guiding the practice at school level in Oman.

The World Bank's (2011) study on reforming education in Oman, explains a new perspective by the Ministry towards the role of the principals in assisting education change in Oman. There is a growing consideration at the Ministry's level on the role of school principals.

Among the most important and challenging transitions are the MoE's early efforts to decentralise various aspects of educational administration. By building the leadership capacity of school-level leaders, MoE officials hope to strengthen their ability to serve as the focal point through which MoE reforms can be implemented. In other words, MoE officials are beginning to realise that effective educational reform will require fully competent school-level leadership to guide and direct the wide variety of expected educational changes. World Bank (2011)

However, the World Bank study on reforming education in Oman does not give any further guidelines on the issue of leadership development or training programmes for principals. The issue of training is becoming a more important issue, particularly after the establishment of a training academy for educators in 2014.

2.3.3 The Principals Leadership Programme (PLT)

The key rationale for initiating the PLT project was to make a change at school level. The international provider of training, Seward Incorporated, explains its involvement in the project due to a request from the Middle East Partnership Initiative and its regional contractor: Creative Associates International (Seward, 2008). During a project scoping trip to prepare for project activities, the Seward project team worked with national and regional Ministry of Education officials, local Creative staff, and a variety of Omani principals and school leadership personnel to further define the focus and scope of the project Seward (2008, p.5).

The design of the content of the programme was intended for secondary school principals. This action is relevant to the previously discussed quote from the Oman's Education Assessment Report on the recommendation to 'initiate a national program for training high school principals and deputy principals' (Creative, p.14). Consequently, the training consultancy from the USA, Seward, designed the programme to fit their expectations with regard to trainees. The Seward's document on the project, Seward (2008), explains:

It was initially decided that Seward would focus on training and preparing secondary school principals and possibly a few of their supervisors. As a result, Seward developed materials and training activities to increase the leadership capacity of a select group of Oman's secondary school principals and MoE supervisory staff.

For the initial stage of the project (before the national scale-up), the findings show that the consultancy developed content consisted of 26 modules in the English language, and the original content was translated into Arabic by a translator based in the USA. The Ministry was not involved in the translation of the original Arabic version of the content.

2.3.3.1 The content of the programme and leadership theory

The content of the PLT programme was identified, according to the project's document, on the basis of studying training needs. Creative (2005:11) describes:

The three principals and their deputies were unanimous in requesting more training to deal with the challenges they faced. They were explicit in requesting that training. They desired interpersonal communications skills, leadership skills, community and conflict resolution skills, since discipline was becoming a major concern in the large schools.

From the Ministry's perspective, Seward (2008:9) explains that the Ministry of Education (MoE) suggested twenty training needs for its principals. To quote examples of these needs: taking care of gifted students and underachievers, performing effective school planning, managing change, and building leadership skills. Seward comments that it prioritised and organised the list of topics in order to build the content structure necessary for the six weeks of training. The assessment team then interviewed MoE personnel to establish a priority ranking of topics and gain agreement on which of these topics would be featured in the six weeks of the PLT project (ibid, p.9).

The programme's content developer contends that the content was designed in such a way that assists modification and reproduction. The aim of this step is to make the materials fit the contextual and cultural factors, as Seward (2008) explains:

By employing a simpler and more straightforward design, the Seward project team intended to produce something that would be easy for MoE personnel to reproduce and/or modify.

It is anticipated the MoE will want to adapt the original materials in ways that meet their ongoing national and regional priorities or based on important contextual and cultural factors.' Seward (2008, p. 39)

The training materials were in the form of hand-outs containing PowerPoint presentations as well as the activities. All materials were in CD format containing the original material in English and the translation in Arabic.

One of the initial topics in the training was the distinction between 'leadership' and 'management'. This was introduced through definitions of both concepts, followed by asking participants to reflect on their actual practice and classify their daily activities to each of the categories. As mentioned previously in the last section, the Arabic term for 'management' is also used to translate the term 'principalship'; and the Arabic term for 'manager' also means 'principal'. Likewise, the Arabic translation for the term 'leadership' is also used as a translation for the term 'commandership'. These linguistic-equivalence-issues will be discussed later.

One of the topics focussed on 'transformational change' and 'transformational leadership'; this type of leadership was discussed in the literature review. There were a couple of themes relating to this topic such as 'changing culture', 'building teams', 'time management', 'strategic thinking and planning', and 'school reform'. The Arabic term for change is 'Tagyeer' التغيير; this Arabic-term is also used to mean 'replacement'. For the term 'transformational leadership', it is translated as 'القيادة التحويلية'. This Arabic-term gives similar connotations to the term 'change', as they mean 'replacement' or 'alternations'. This may show that the direct transfer of theoretical frameworks in the development of school principals in Oman has a possibility of being context irrelevant. Seward (2008, P.41)

describes how the consultancy-trainers were challenged by participants' reactions when they introduced the topic of initiating change by principals.

One of the theoretical frameworks for leadership is instructional leadership. There were also other topics relevant to developing instructional leadership, such as: student-centred learning, instructional design and delivery, instructional strategies, assessment, and staff development. Each topic was introduced with definitions, examples, and suggestions. The usual practice in Oman's schools is to place the responsibility of instructional issues on senior teachers who are responsible for other teachers in the schools. These senior teachers are supervised by a subject supervisor. The curriculum supervisory in Oman is unique to Oman and was adopted in Oman in the 1970s, when the system was run by Arab expatriates, mainly from Egypt.

The other type of leadership introduced in the training was strategic leadership and strategic thinking. The literature review has discussed the relationship between this model and context and the model of transformational leadership. The Ministerial documents on school planning show that schools are required to develop an annual plan which is in a structured form for all schools in Oman, MoE (2011). Also, the Globe study, discussed in literature, contends that the Middle East is not future oriented. On the contrary, the programme content trains principals in strategic thinking and strategic planning. The Ministerial documents do not use the term '*strategic*', neither in the policy documents nor in the school planning guides. The strategic thinking topic involves activities on developing school's visions and missions. The consultancy documents do not explain how such a model can be utilised within the current level of centralisation in the school-education system in Oman. There is an urge to discover how this model fits within Oman's context, and what modifications are required at macro level (Ministry), Meso level (education local offices) and micro level (schools).

2.3.3.2 Process of delivery

For the PLT programme, Seward (2008:10) describes that it is used in its training seminars, active learning experiences (such as the fish bowl technique), role play, and simulations. Also, the consultancy document Seward (2008, p.42) states:

They planned to deliver the main training content, relevant handouts and supplemental references, and applied exercises and activities using active learning techniques and according to current adult learning pedagogy. Emphasis would be placed on Omani-relevant application exercises and activities with regular formative and summative evaluations.

Such a high professional standard of delivery from the experts at the pre scaling-up stage shows how important training the local trainers is in order to assure a similar proficiency of training skills.

After the successful delivery of the initial phase of the programme, the Ministry was motivated to nationally scale-up the project to train all school principals. Seward (2008, p.39) explains: ‘Previous discussions with central MoE officials indicate they will likely opt for a replication plan phasing-in training over a multi-year period. Participants would likely receive two weeks of training annually on a pre-determined portion of the 26 modules’. The scale up of the programme made the necessary changes in terms of duration and selection of topics. The Ministry decided on a selection of twenty topics for two cycles of duration, each two weeks. The topics of the first cycle are on transformational leadership, and the topics of the second cycle are on instructional leadership.

2.3.3.3 Language and translation

Language and translation is an important issue in the content design and training delivery of the PLT programme. Seward (2008, p. 21) explains: ‘most of the materials were initially developed in English and were then sent out for translation into Arabic as part of the production process’. The document reported that participants complained of vagueness in some of the Arabic translation. For this reason, they asked to have the training materials both in Arabic and in English, as most of them had a good level of English. It was explained in the document that the majority of the initial-phase participants were selected based on their good English proficiency. However, the training replication plan does not provide any data about the Ministry’s plan to solve this challenge. The challenge of the use of Arabic terms for leadership and management will probably be more serious as the majority of principals do not have a sufficient level of English to understand the content.

There is also another issue which is related to the linguistic differences between English and Arabic. Seward (2008, p. 12) states:

The Seward project team and translators also faced some challenges in trying to decide how to translate English acronyms (e.g. SMART goals, SWOC analysis). It adds that ‘lastly, due to the nature of translation from one language to the text, there is simply no way to easily and satisfactorily deal with acronyms. Seward’s research and consultations revealed that Omanis rarely use acronyms.

To solve this linguistic obstacle, Seward explained the use of three techniques: introducing the English acronym with an overall explanation; working with the Arabic translators to translate each of the constituent terms and come up with an acceptable Arabic term; and asking the master trainers from the MoE to come up with a one-word Arabic term that conveyed the meaning of the overall construct, which was then used in conjunction with the English acronym.

The other important issue with regard to meaning equivalence of leadership terminology is how the terms are perceived in Arabic in Oman, in the spoken and written discourse. For example, the key term used in the training is ‘leadership’, which is translated into Arabic as ‘qiyadah قيادة.’ There are various theoretical frameworks used with this concept: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, situational leadership. The other frequent term used was ‘change’ which was translated into Arabic as ‘Tagyeyar التغيير’. The modified content used in the scaling-up phase was Arabic only, as the majority of participants did not know English. As discussed in the literature review, various sources highlight the issue of meaning equivalence; however, there are no examples or details on the use of Arabic terminology in Arabic.

To give further examples, one of the earliest topics was the distinction between ‘leadership and management’; and the distinction between ‘a leader’ and ‘a manager’. The translation of ‘leadership’ to Arabic was ‘qiyadah-قيادة’ and the translation of ‘management’ is idara; the term ‘idara’ also means ‘principalship’ or ‘headship’. As discussed in the literature review,

the use of this term, in Arabic, is sensitive. Change is usually from the Ministry and is usually referred to by Ministry's term, 'development', where the term reform is usually not translated to its standard Arabic translation 'taqyear', but to 'tatweer' which means 'improvement'.

These were examples of how the use of Arabic terms in leadership training in Oman may create concepts that are contextually understood differently from the English original term. English is the language of theory in the field, and the language used to disseminate this study. On the other hand, Arabic was the language of training and will be the language of the in-field data collection. This means that in this study there is meaning transfer in constructing reality and researching the phenomena of developing school leaders in Oman.

2.4 Local Level: Scale-up of the Programme and Implementation

After introducing the initial phase of the project in 2007, the Ministry had to take the responsibility over the technical and financial issues in order to scale-up the project by its national personnel and experience, without any further assistance from the consultancy. The following quote from the document explains the consultancy's vision after its mission is accomplished:

Following up on this main phase of the project, Seward prepared and delivered fourth and fifth workshops to build the MoE's capacity to conduct its own replication planning and implementation for the current Principal Leadership Training and any forthcoming projects' Seward (2008, p.6)

The consultancy's expectations were that the Ministry can adapt the programme's content to fit the needs of the targeted trainees. However, there was no indication in the documents on how the Ministry can adapt the materials, and no indication for future technical assistance to assist with the content as the following two quotes describe:

These training materials can be adapted according to regional variations, level of schooling (i.e., primary, secondary, or tertiary education), or specific, intended educational purposes. Seward (2008, p.13)

In addition, it is anticipated the MOE will want to adapt the original materials in ways that meet their ongoing national and regional priorities or based on important contextual and cultural factors. Seward (2008, p. 13)

However, there is no explanation of any future plans to assist the Ministry to technically deliver the content of the programme, or how to assist the capacity of its personnel in developing the programme.

As the PLT programme was one of the key initiatives to assist education change in Oman's schools, there was a policy-versus-practice concern over the implementation of the project. The content of the programme urges principals to implement practices of change and transformation that require more power and authorisation, and also requires support from the local education authorities. This issue was very clearly highlighted in the consultancy document on the project:

Policy makers and superiors need to be capable of effectively supporting the proposed changes, not supporting it by word alone. This means training cohesive teams representing various levels and regions of the education system simultaneously or in a coordinated fashion. Seward (2008, p.33)

The scale-up decision was legally assisted with a Ministerial decree (No.330/2007) which identifies the objectives of the national scale-up phase of the project. The first is 'laying the foundation for decentralisation in school management through building capacity of school principals'. The second is 'improving the quality of education in schools through developing principals' skills that enable them to continuously improve the performance of their schools'. The third is 'conciliation between the policies of the Ministry regarding expansion in decentralisation from one side; and ensuring the quality of implementation and practice on the other'. The fourth is 'building qualified training teams in school management'.

As the decree content shows, the Ministry links its policies with its decision to nationally scale up the PLT project. These policies are related to gradually expand measures of decentralisation and school based management, to improve the quality of schooling, and to assure informed implementation of its policies at school level. This may show how the

Ministry is considering the issue of policy implantation particularly, as discussed frequently in this study, there are various newly introduced policies and initiatives that are introduced to schools from a top-down model (Ministry-schools). This important reality may highlight considerations on the content of a leadership programme intended for school principals in Oman, and how it is aligned to support and complement other initiatives.

A scaling-up plan was developed by the steering committee of the project at the Ministry. The plan lasted from 2008 until 2013, with two cycles of two-weeks of training. The decision was to prioritise the topics of the original programme and to classify it into two cycles: the first was on the topics relevant to transformational leadership, and the second on topics relevant to instructional leadership. The management of the project was organised into a central team at the Ministry of master trainers whose job is to supervise local trainers and assist training at district level. In each of the eleven districts in Oman, a local training team was identified from the participants of the early workshops of the programme delivered by the international consultancy. A budget from the Ministry's finance department was allocated with the scale-up plan to ensure the availability of resources until the end of the scale-up plan.

The aim of the scale-up plan was to train all principals of all types of schools, as well as all deputy principals. There are three types of school in Oman according to the grades of schooling: basic education cycle one schools (from first to the fourth grade), basic education cycle two (from fifth to tenths grades) and secondary schools (grades eleven and twelve). In the first cycle of basic education, all staff including, the principal, are female and the students are of mixed gender; whereas for the other two levels, schools are separated according to gender. The documents of the international consultancy and the Ministry do not provide details on the issue of educational leadership and gender.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the background of the case study-initiative (PLT project). This clear outlining of the PLT and the broader context of education change in Oman will assist in reviewing relevant knowledge on the topic and shape the research design.

The context was described at three levels that are relevant to the PLT programme: international, national, and local level. At international level, the international consultancies provided their services with an assumption that they can use their expertise to successfully assist the reform of the education system in Oman through leadership development. The consultancy provider used current knowledge from American academic institutions as content for the programme. The training provider argued that it used cross-cultural and comparative perspective in programme design and delivery on the basis of the data they have on the context.

At national level, the Ministry's documents describe policies that show interest in reforming the state of educational leadership at schools. Additionally, the Ministry's documents show commitment for decentralisation and school autonomy. The Ministry manages the education systems in the usual top-down way used at centralised systems through three the levels: the Ministry, the local education authorities in the districts, and schools. The scaling-up of PLT was through the cascade mode of replication.

At local level, the education authorities in the regions have a strong influence on what is happening in schools through the authority they have over Practice I schools. For the PLT, there was a local training team responsible for delivering training on the basis of the guidelines from the Ministry's central team. There are three types of schools according to the grades: cycle one, cycle two and secondary. In cycle one all staff and principals are female and students are from both genders. For cycle two and secondary schools, they are separate according to gender. The project scale-up plan was to train over 1200 principals and deputy principals over two cycles of training (two weeks each): the first on transformational leadership, and the second on instructional leadership.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The previous chapter has outlined the context of the Principals Leadership Training (PLT) project within its three vertical levels: international, national and local. It has described how the issues of education change and leadership development are linked with the international development education bodies, the national Ministry and the implementation level in regions and schools. This chapter will review the relevant literature of the previously outlined issues of change and leadership development. The aim of this review is to situate this study within the current published knowledge on the field.

A literature review is presented in this chapter for two reasons. The first is to respond to the need to ascertain what has already been researched and so to identify gaps in knowledge and the need for further research. The second is to draw on a wide range of theoretical and empirical literature, both Omani and general, to provide the basis for the cross cultural analysis needed due to the Western involvement and influences in the PLT initiative. The process of identifying relevant literature included searching for key words related to the theme of educational change and the theme of the preparation and development of school leaders through search engines. I also searched through the key words in journals that are related to the field of my study. Also, I conducted a book search on the university library portal using the key words in my research questions. After extensive reading, the next step was to select the sources most relevant to the study.

Most of the reviewed literature is from the UK and USA. This is an issue that is related to the nature of knowledge in the field of educational leadership and management as theory is based in a context (Bush, 2011), and that context lies largely outside Oman. The literature review aimed to provide a cross cultural and international analysis of relevant ideas in order to use current knowledge to inform the study in the context of Oman.

The literature published in the UK and North America is particularly important for researching the case of this research, i.e. the PLT project. The reason is that the PLT was introduced on the basis of the theory and practice in the United States with attempts to contextualise the content of the programme delivered to the Omani participants. Additionally, the Ministry of Education in Oman is relying on consultancy providers from the UK and North America in reforming its education system. Consequently, the presentation of relevant literature published on the field will provide a framework from the same epistemological foundations that PLT project was based on.

With regard to the organisation of the chapter, it begins with defining educational change, and will then review the literature on relevant issues of tri-level education change, policy borrowing and the role of school leaders in education change. Later, it will discuss the issue of leadership development in education and the theories of educational leadership, mainly transformational leadership and instructional leadership. What follows is a discussion of leadership and gender. Educational leadership will then be discussed from a comparative and international perspective. Following this, educational leadership development programmes will be discussed altogether, with relevant issues of content and processes of development.

3.1 Education Change

A number of terms are used with the meaning of change in education (Wedell, 2009). Wedell (ibid:1) explains that ‘formal changes at national, regional or institutional levels whose implementation has apparently been fully thought through and planned may be referred to in the literature as educational *innovations*’. He adds that the term *reform* is also used to describe large scale national changes. For the PLT project, the term used in the documents of international consultancies of the USA is *Change* (for example, in Seward, 2008:32), whereas in the Ministry’s publications in English the usual term is *reform* which the Ministry prefers to translate into Arabic as *Tatweer*, a term which is also equivalent to the English terms of ‘development’ and ‘improvement’. This is an example of how the terminology of educational change and educational leadership is influenced with both Arabic translation and the preferences of Arabic discourse in the context of Oman.

There are various reasons to initiate change in the education systems. Wedell (2009:15) lists four reasons. The first is ‘to enable the national education system to better prepare its learners for a changing national and international reality’. The second is ‘to make the education system more clearly accountable for the funding it receives’. The third is ‘to increase the equality of opportunity within society as a whole’. The fourth is ‘to use the announcement of educational changes for some kind of short-term political advantage’. I can add a fifth reason for Middle Eastern countries, which is the response to global forces from international organisations such as UNESCO or the World Bank, or the politically driven bodies such as the United States-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), as one of its goals is ‘to bridge the knowledge gap with better schools and more opportunities for higher education’ (Brynen, 2004). The PLT project, which was initially funded by MEPI, is an example of where national interest in reform meets with global interest.

To discuss the initiation of educational change, Wedell (2009:22-27) lists three factors to consider in educational change. The first is ‘starting where people are’ as the change should be derived from the reality of the context and from the people at the practice or implementation level. The second is ‘identifying and communicating the need for change’, through informing people at various levels in the education system with the reasons to initiate the change. The third is ‘making a long-term commitment’, as change requires commitment to funding and supporting the actual implementation in schools. Fullan et al. (2005:54) argue: ‘a missing ingredient in most failed cases is appreciation and use of what we call change knowledge: understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice’. This knowledge of change is important particularly for policy makers particularly in tri-level hierarchically managed education systems, such as in Oman.

3.1.1 Tri-level education change

As explained above, educational change is not limited to one level, but rather it is managed with various levels from policy making, ending with implementation. For the PLT project, the top level is shared between the central Ministry and the international consultancy as the change is collaboratively designed. Chapman et al. (1997:1) comment on central level initiatives for reform, ‘while many countries are expressing a renewed commitment to

improving the quality of their education system, the move from commitment to action has been harder than expected. The education systems of most countries are highly centralised and major decisions on how quality should be improved are often made many levels away from the classroom, where the real process of education occurs'. Additionally, they (ibid, 1997:294) add that 'the interests and knowledge of stakeholders at lower levels of the education system may differ meaningfully from those at the top'.

On the basis of the above explained reality, (Fullan, 2009) proposes a tri-level model of education change. From his Canadian context, Fullan classifies the three levels to the school level, the district level and the state level. Therefore, for the Omani context the tri-level will be the school level, the region level and the central Ministry level. In a context of change, Fullan (2009) emphasises the need for a systematic change within the three levels. Similarly, Wedell (2009:17) argues that 'the need for national policy makers to be aware of the 'whole' change context. Similarly, (Magno, 2013) suggests three units of analysis in each country context: policy makers, leadership trainers and school leaders. For the PLT, the international consultancy recommends the Ministry to adopt a 'systematic approach' when introducing changes at the region and school levels (Seward, 2008). This discussion leads to the role of school leaders within such a tri-level change.

The PLT initiative was delivered from the central Ministry level to the regional level through a cascade model scale-up. Wedell (2005:3) summarises a definition for the cascade model as, 'the cascade model is one strategy widely used to try to provide training for maximum numbers of teachers in a cost effective manner, especially where the numbers ultimately needing training are very large, and/or funding to provide training is limited'. The scale-up plan of the PLT aimed to nationally replicate the initiative to cover the eleven regions of Oman (Seward, 2008). Wedell (2005) stresses that in order for a cascade model to achieve its aims of proper implementation at the school level, relevant and contextually appropriate training is recommended'. I assume that such an issue will be demanding at the implementation level at the local level. By discussing the issue of tri-level change in education, the following section will outline the role of school leaders in the process of change in their schools.

3.1.2 The role of school leaders in educational change

School leaders have a key role in the process of educational change (Hargreaves and Fink, 2012). Bush (2011:642) states ‘during the 1980s, researchers (Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1986) used the terms ‘political’ and ‘micropolitics’ to interpret the behaviour of school leaders’. Bush justifies this trend to the failure of the bureaucratic model to explain school operations. Similarly, Starr (2011:656) writes that ‘principals unanimously view leading major change as one of the most difficult aspects of their job along with managing difficult people, with the two often being interlinked’. These quotes show the critical role of school leaders in the change process because they are the closest people to teachers and students. In my experience of ten years in teaching in my earlier career, I can estimate the role of principals in managing change at school level, and how they make changes succeed or fail in their schools.

However, this vital role of principals may not be well considered at national level in some contexts. (Chapman et al., 1997) on the basis of a review of educational change case studies, comments that the policies and programmes coming from the central Ministries are seen at school level as irrelevant to the real context’. Similarly, Starr (2011:656) explains that ‘governments respond to global forces to ensure national economic competitiveness, releasing some ‘dark’ micro repercussions for school leaders’. This is noticeable in the education reform in Oman as it is economically driven since the inauguration of the economic plan ‘Oman2020’ where development of human resources through education and training is a key pillar of that plan. But I also argue that the economic drive for education reform in Oman was an advantage as well, because it made financial resources available and it gave the education reform a unique political commitment.

The role of the principals is mostly significant at the implementation level. Wedell (2009) argues that their role is the most essential of all others involved during the stage of implementation, as they strive to re-culture the roles of the teachers as well as their own roles. Similarly, Fullan (1992:84) views the role of the principal as ‘leading changes in the school as an organisation’. Similarly, Harris and Lambert (2003:38) write that school leaders ‘can provide the much needed energy for change’. Additionally, (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999)

argue that school leaders play an essential role in the implementation of change through the capacity building of teachers and their schools.

3.1.3 Decentralisation in education systems

The issue of decentralisation is discussed here because it is linked with the issue of change and the issue of capacity building of principals. The PLT project was an initiative that was linked to both of these issues. (Bush, 2003) explains that schools operate within a legislative framework that is created nationally or at the province level. He adds that one of the features of this framework is the degree of decentralisation in the education system where centralised systems provide limited authority to schools, while decentralised systems provide more power to schools. Lauglo (1997:5, cited in Bush (2003:13)) explains that ‘bureaucratic centralism is pervasive in many developing countries’ and justifies this to both the former colonial rule and the focus on central planning by the post-colonial governments.

Decentralisation in education means a shift in the authority distribution away from the central ‘top’ agency in the hierarchy of authority...Different forms of decentralisation are diverse in their justifications and in what they imply for the distribution of authority. (Lauglo, 1997:3, cited in Bush, 2013:13)

Bush (2013:13) notices that ‘the school-based management trend in many countries is underpinned by both participative democracy and the market mechanism’. For developing countries, international organisations such as UNESCO are considering the issue of centralisation/decentralisation as one of the key areas for education reform in these countries (De Grauwe, 2011). Bush (2013:3) links the issue of centralisation/decentralisation in education systems with the relevancy of educational leadership models to the context. He explains ‘the recent emphasis on instructional leadership is based largely on research and practice on decentralised or partly decentralised contexts’. However, there is limited evidence provided from the developing countries. Therefore, there is a need to consider the transfer of the models to the context of Oman.

3.2 Policy Borrowing and Transfer

After the discussion of change and the role of the principal in a system with a certain degree of centralisation/decentralisation, an important issue to discuss in this section is the issue of

policy borrowing and transfer. Policy transfer and borrowing is a growing issue today as the education systems plan their reforms with knowledge from international providers or the experience of the other systems. Verger et al. (2012:3) write ‘Today, as we speak, similar education reforms and a common set of education policy jargon are being applied in many parts of the world, in locations that are incredibly diverse both culturally and in terms of economic development’. With regard to the sequence of borrowing, (Phillips and Ochs, 2003) identify four stages of policy borrowing in education: the first is cross national attraction. The second is making the decision. The third is implementation. The fourth is internationalisation to the context.

One of the reasons for policy borrowing according to Shields (2013:14) is that ‘the use of education to create economic growth was supported by a new body of economic theory defining the concept of human capital’. This interest has created an interest for research policy borrowing in education. Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow (2012:271): ‘borrowing/lending research is genuinely interested in understanding the disjunctures that occur between global education policy and local re-contextualisation’. Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014:34) write that ‘the notion of borrowing was gradually questioned as educational systems came to be regarded as interwoven in the fabric of their society’. I argue that the issue of leadership is more sensitive to borrowing than the teaching and learning issues because leadership is more concerned with people’s behaviours in contexts.

(Bush and Jackson, 2002) observed educational leadership programmes in North Carolina, Ontario and England and noticed common features within these programmes. This may show the borrowing in educational leadership programmes. For the PLT, the consultancy has used leadership models that are familiar in the USA to the Omani context (Seward, 2008). Another example of transfer in leadership development is the recently developed enterprise of the UK-National College for Teaching and Leadership to provide leadership programmes for clients around the world. I was briefed on these programmes during my internship at the National College in 2013, and most of the leadership input is similar to the programmes. The following section will discuss in more detail the issue of educational leadership development.

3.3 Educational Leadership Development

3.3.1 The concept of leadership

West-Burnham (1997) has made a number of claims regarding the conceptualising of leadership. First, he notes that the concept of leadership was formulated in British society in the 19th Century. Secondly, the concept was influenced by cultural practices and became associated with individuality, hierarchy and masculine language. Third, he argued that in order to make educational leadership practices equivalent in the 21st Century, the language of leadership should be developed and aligned to learning. Fourth, he commented that the usual language of leadership is based on vocabularies of management which will influence conceptualisations and behaviour. However, the West-Burnham claims are normative and not based on empirical evidence.

In reference to what was discussed in the previous section, Grace (1995) criticises the reductionist approach usually used in studying educational leadership which is based on management, without real consideration for the school context. In his recommendations, Grace comments that ‘to resist these reductionist tendencies in many societies, which may be called the commodification of school leadership, it is essential to place the study and analysis of school leadership in its socio-historical context and in the context of the moral and political economy of schooling. We need to have studies of school leadership which are historically located and brought into a relationship with wider political, cultural, economic and ideological movements in society (Grace, 1995, p.5). Bryman (1992) categorises leadership into four stages: trait (from early research up until the 1940s); style (late 1940s until the 1960s); contingency (late 1960s until the early 1980s); and contemporary leadership theories (since the 1980s – the main theories are charismatic and transformational leadership).

One controversial issue in leadership research is whether leadership can be taught and be learnt. Grint (2007) claims that leadership is not easy to learn. Grint, in an attempt to analyse leadership learning, explains leadership as a combination of three interrelated elements; knowledge, skills and wisdom. Grint explains that learning new knowledge and acquiring skills through practice needs to be complemented with the wisdom of acting correctly

according to situations. This high level of leadership competency, according to Grint, can only be gained through real life situations and experiences. Similarly, (West-Burnham, 2009:3)) argues that:

Leadership cannot be taught, it has to be learned. Equally, leaders are not born; they develop and grow subject to the same range of variables that determine every other area of human activity that is grounded in learning.

School is considered as a key component in educational change. Spillane and Louis, (2002:83) write that ‘the belief that the school is the key unit of change has become something of a mantra among scholars and practitioners over the past twenty years’. They clarify that relations between the process of school improvement and students’ learning is implicit or unclear. I think that there is no clear relation for two reasons. The first is because there are various factors influencing the attainment of students, and secondly because the impact between school leadership and learning attainments is long-term.

Educational leadership is usually discussed in contexts with a higher degree of decentralisation. Usually, authors in educational leadership differentiate between the concept of leadership and the concept of management by relating leadership to visionary and influenced roles, whereas management is referred to administrative and daily maintenance activities (Dimmock, 1999, Bush, 2008, Coleman, 2000). For example, in the context of the UK, Bush (2008) writes that the concept of leadership in education emerged at the time of Education Reform Act (ERA) in 1988. Dimmock (1999:442) gives a clear definition for the term ‘leadership’ and the related terms of ‘management’ and administration:

School leaders experience tensions between competing elements of leadership, management and administration. Irrespective of how these terms are defined, school leaders experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration).

Bush (2008) considers that leadership is a social influence process exerted by an individual or a group over other people in order to structure the relationship and activities in a group or an organisation. This discussion shows that leadership is complimentary to management and has

specific roles in educational administration. Leadership development programmes should show the relationship between various concepts and how to apply them in real practice.

In an attempt to analyse approaches to educational leadership based on review of published literature, Leithwood et al. (1999) identified twenty concepts in educational leadership. They classified them into six categories of models. The first is 'instructional' which deals with the role of leadership in influencing the educational practice of teachers. The second is 'transformational leadership' which focuses on change and engaging people in change. The third is 'moral leadership' which deals with ethics and values of leadership. The fourth is the 'participative leadership' which focuses on how decisions are made with the team. The fifth is 'managerial' which covers how to efficiently perform tasks and functions. The sixth is the 'contingent' which focuses on how to utilise various styles with various situations. Therefore, introducing these categories into the content of training Oman's principals will provide relevant knowledge. However, a critical issue that must be addressed is how to link these theoretical categories to real context practice of Omani schools.

Atton and Fidler (2003) believe that each theory and approach of leadership is important in the context of schools, and the activation of a theory depends on the context and situation that the principal faces. Therefore, they proposed a multi-level model that classified theories according to level of practice. For example, in a classroom teaching and learning situation, a school leader will use instructional leadership, whereas at organisational level, he will use transformational or transactional leadership. Based on this level, Bush and Glover (2003) suggested that schools' principals should develop an array of leadership styles in order to use them according to the requirements of situations and contexts. Based on these quotes, an important issue which is rarely addressed in literature is how to scale and balance the content of leaders' development programmes in order to give the right weight for each and every leadership theory.

With regard to types of educational leadership, usually nine types are identified (Bush, 2008, Bush and Glover, 2003). These types are managerial leadership, participative leadership, transformative leadership, interpersonal leadership, transactional leadership, postmodern

leadership, contingency leadership, moral leadership and instructional leadership. Bush explains that each type provides a certain perspective about leadership. Additionally, Bush argues that the focus on each type in leadership development programmes refers to the nature of leadership and management roles in educational systems.

After discussing the concept of leadership and its place in school principalship, it is important to explain how leadership is influenced by cultures. As this issue is related to leadership programmes, Hofstede (1980:25) defines culture as ‘the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one human group from another’. Hofstede developed a multi-dimensions model in order to understand national cultures which are: power distance; collectivism versus individualism; femininity versus masculinity; and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede and Bond (1984) added another dimension of national culture: long term orientation in life versus short-term orientation. To provide an understanding of cultures and their relations to leadership across the globe, House et al. (2002) discuss the GLOBE research programme. They explain that GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness) was a multi-phased multi-method research intended to study cultural values and practices through analysis of samples from all continents of the world. The factor of culture is probably an influential one in developing leadership programmes in the context of Oman.

The GLOBE study is frequently cited in leadership research (Westrick and Miske, 2009). One of the outcomes of the GLOBE research is a consensus on a definition for leadership: ‘the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of organisations of which they are members’. For culture, it was theoretically defined as ‘shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations’ (House et al. p.5). House et al. write that the GLOBE study studied nine cultural dimensions which are: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, societal collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation and human orientation. The GLOBE study findings are usually used by researchers to study leadership in non-Western contexts. Westrick and Miske (2009) write that they attempted to avoid bias in their study of leadership in Oman by referring to the GLOBE study findings rather than the abstract theories

of leadership developed in Western contexts. The argument here is how generalisable are the GLOBE study findings to Oman? This may require further research, especially for educational leadership.

Macpherson and Tofghian (2008:406) within their discussion of Middle Eastern culture on school leaders' preparation, write that:

In sum, the provisional evidence assembled in this chapter suggests that Middle Eastern countries intending to improve the preparation and development of school leaders would be well advised to learn from other countries and intellectual traditions with a great deal of caution. Program designers are advised to mediate the adoption and blending of Western models with the systematic scientific creation of indigenous and evidence-based practice and theory of educative leadership, and if conditions permit, develop a defensible political philosophy of educative leadership.

Consequently, the Western developed theories of leadership and the content of educational leadership programmes for Middle Eastern contexts should not be borrowed without mediation and contextual adaptation. Another important point in educational leadership development is the institutional culture and policies within an educational system. Bush (2008: 20) in his synthesis of leadership models writes that 'much depends on the nature of the leadership and management role in particular educational systems. If the principal's role is primarily about the implementation of policy determined outside the school, for example by national, provincial or local government, then leadership development should be primarily focused on developing 'managerial leadership'. This is the expectation in many developing countries and those in Eastern Europe'. This statement shows that leadership in schools is not only influenced by societal culture, but as well by policies and practices of educational policies. This may raise debatable issues in centralised educational systems like Oman.

3.3.2 Theories of educational leadership

(Hopkins, 1994) reviewed the development of the conceptualisation of leadership from trait theories to behavioural theories to situational approaches and then to the transformational style of leadership, and they commented on this development as a no-linear process. Additionally, Cheng (2002) describes two categorisations for the emergence of leadership

theories: traditional concepts including trait, behavioural and contingency theories and transformational perspectives. He considers the traditional concept of leadership a transactional as a leader transacts with followers to determine their performance. On the other hand, he notes that the transformative perspectives, which emerged since the 1970s, conceptualise a leader as proactive, and have the capability to transform the situation to create new culture and opportunities for followers.

Louis et al. (2009:178) describes the development of the theorising leadership:

Over the past several decades, the definition of leadership in our field has evolved from individual traits, to an organisational quality (Ogawa and Bossert, 1995), the descriptive version of distributed leadership- an idea so conceptually vast that it is difficult to separate what does and does not constitute leadership.

Earley and Weindling (2004) categorise the development of theorising leadership into six theoretical frameworks: trait theory, style theory, contingency theory, power/influence theory, personal trait theory, and learning-centred theory. Additionally, Leadership theories were criticised on their lack of linking with real practice. Sergiovanni (2001:1) comments that leadership theories are 'too rational and too scripted to fit the messy world in which school leaders must work'. Therefore he contends that 'there is no single strategy, style, list or formula fits all situations' (p.20).

Bush (2008) lists nine models of leadership. The first is managerial leadership which is concerned with the management of existing activities. The second is transformational leadership which views leadership as gaining the commitment of followers and building their capacities to enable them to achieve shared goals. The third is participative leadership which focuses on the participation of the participants in decision making. The fourth is interpersonal leadership which emphasises collaboration and interpersonal relationships. The fifth is transactional leadership which views leadership as an exchange of benefits between the leader and the led. The sixth model is postmodern leadership which focusses on democracy, diversity and participation within the whole group. The seventh is moral leadership which is concerned with deriving authority from shared values and morals. The eighth model is instructional leadership which focuses on the processes of teaching and

learning, and the influence of leaders on the learning of students. The ninth model is contingent leadership which emphasises on the adaptation in leadership practice according to the situation.

The relationship between theory and practice is controversial basically in contexts where leadership theory was developed. Bush (2013) discussed the dilemma on the relevance of theory to practice, and (2013:29) describes three characteristics of theory: first, they tend to be normative and reflect beliefs rather than descriptive; second, theory tends to be selective in describing people and educational settings; third, theories of educational leadership are usually consolidated by observation of practice in educational institutions. Consequently, we should be cautious in applying current theory and models in contexts that have differences from the context in which theories were developed as such theories are not universal unlike the natural sciences theories. Two main theoretical models were used in the PLT content: transformational leadership and instructional leadership, which will be discussed as follows.

3.3.2.1 Transformational and instructional leadership models

Bush (2014) writes that the transformational and instructional leadership models are the two most important models. Transformational leadership is concerned with the engagement, relationships and capability of the organisation's members in achieving shared higher level goals (Harris, 2005); (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999). There are various characteristics of this form of leadership, 'This form of leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of organisational members. Higher levels of personal commitment to organisational goals and greater capacities for accomplishing those goals are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity'. (Leithwood et al., 1999:9, cited in Bush, 2013:84)

Caldwell and Spinks (cited in Bush, 2011) argue that transformational leadership is essential for autonomous schools. It seems that the model is more linked with authority for principals. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) argue that the transformational leadership model is the most appropriate model for principals seeking change in their schools. Similarly, Hallinger (2003) argue that during the past two decades the two models that are linked to educational change are the transformational and instructional leadership. However, Hallinger links the

development of the two models to the changing context of schooling in North America, a fact that may raise questions on their relevancy to Oman's context.

To define instructional leadership, Bush and Glover define it as:

Instructional leadership focusses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with students. Leaders' influence is targeted at student learning via teachers. The emphasis is on the direction and impact of influence rather than the influence process itself. (Quoted in Bush, 2013, p.17)

Bush (2013) explains that 'the term 'instructional leadership' derives from North America and has been superseded in England and elsewhere by the notion of 'learning centred leadership'. Hallinger and Lee (2013:6) write 'Over the past two decades a growing body of international research suggests that instructional leadership from the principal is essential for the improvement of teaching and learning in schools'. I argue that this is an issue which is more related to decentralised systems where the instructional roles are entrusted to the principal. For example, Hallinger (2003) explains that the instructional leadership model has three main goals: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive school learning programme. This shows the extent of instructional authority provided for the principal in the decentralised education systems.

3.3.3 Educational leadership and gender

This issue of leadership development in education relates to the issue of gender, including in the context of Oman as female principals lead female only staff. Coleman (2000) argues that considering a gender perspective in leadership creates new possibilities to know more about the lives of men and women who have teaching, management and leadership roles in education. This is particularly an important issue in Oman as leadership and management practices are influenced with the culture, society and organisational culture.

Collard (2001) writes that feminist research has suggested that there are key differences in the leadership beliefs and practices of male and female leaders. However, the issue of gender is not adequately addressed in the research of leadership programmes, particularly in the Middle East where there is a scarcity of published knowledge on leadership development in education, including the issue of gender.

Within the field of educational leadership and management, Lumby (2014:28) writes that ‘Research repeatedly confirms that the experience of aspirant and current women school principals throughout the world is different and less advantageous than men’. This statement might be true for some countries but we cannot generalise for every single place in the world before researching its context. Additionally, Oplatka (2005), cited in Shapira et al. (2011:26) argues that ‘little is known about the lives and careers of female managers in developing countries. This shows how it is important to address the issue of gender in researching educational leadership development in the context of Oman. The following section will discuss the issue of leadership development programmes.

3.3.4 Leadership development programmes

There is a growing interest in the issue of leadership in education ‘because of the wide spread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes’ Bush, 2008:1). Some studies distinguish between knowing about leadership, and developing leadership practices. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009:5) argue that ‘knowing that these leadership practices matter is one thing, but developing them on a wide range is another’. Leadership development programmes aim to improve the professionalism of principals through building their capacities in alignment with their expected roles in schools. (Hoyle and John, 1995) describe three features of professionalism: knowledge, autonomy and responsibility.

Training programmes and other activities of mentoring and coaching are expected to improve principals within the three stages of professionalism. To define development in principal performance, Buckley and Caple (2009) define development as general improvement and growth of an individual’s competencies and skills through conscious and unconscious learning. Therefore, principal development is a systematic process and leadership development in any education system should be treated as organised learning, and not ad-hoc individual activities. Bush (2008) writes that there are two main factors in the effectiveness of school leadership development programmes: content, and process.

Bush and Jackson (2002) remark that the content of leadership development programmes had considerable similarities in different countries, and they hypothesised that there is an

international curriculum for school headship development. They identified five main elements in the content of training. The first is the leadership component which includes vision, mission and transformational leadership. The second element is learning and teaching, or 'instructional leadership'. The third component is the main tasks of administration such as human resources management. The fourth component is financial management. The fifth component is curriculum and managing external relations (Bush and Jackson, 2002). Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2008) conclude 'seven strong claims' about successful school leadership. Five of them are related to the content of leadership programmes:

- 1- Managing teaching and learning in schools.
- 2- Building vision and setting direction for schools.
- 3- Developing and motivating staff.
- 4- Redesigning the organisation.
- 5- Distributed leadership.

The delivery of training is an important factor in principal development programmes. (Hart and Pounder, 1999) differentiate between three approaches in educational leadership preparation and professional development programmes. The first is the traditional classroom instruction, which is usually practiced through books, journal articles or other published materials on practice, research and theory. The second is the case studies where a written description of a particular case is provided to serve as a source for knowledge in the practice of educational leadership. The third is problem-based learning and is practised through reflections on a project that provide opportunities for practice and reflections, through techniques such as role playing, written materials or archival data that stimulate responses of students or trainees in educational leadership. The selection of the aforementioned approaches may depend on the aims and procedure of training adopted by training provider.

Bush et al. (1999:196) argues that leadership development can be classified into four types: knowledge for understanding, knowledge for action, improvement of practice, and development of reflexive mode. I think that the importance of this classification is the

identification of the purpose of content clarifying a hierarchy on the use of knowledge. The question which arises here is how content in a certain educational system is identified in order to use it in leadership programmes in order to review and evaluate previous programmes. Bush (2008) reviewed practices of content development in the USA, Canada, Norway, Austria, Singapore and China, France, Taiwan and South Africa. Bush concluded that the content of training has some similarities and differences resulting from the context. Another analysis of topics was explained in Bush and Jackson (2002) who, after conducting observatory visits to world leading educational leadership development institutions, concluded that there is an international curriculum for developing school leaders. The concluding curriculum includes the following components: instructional leadership, law, finance, managing people and administration.

The other key factor in developing and evaluating school leaders' development programmes is what Bush (2008) describes as 'development processes', which deal with how principals should be developed. This issue is probably very important when we consider the models of skills and types of knowledge discussed previously, because the type of training content requires appropriate processes of delivery. Leadership training and development programmes and activities are based on theories that aim to understand adults learning. Black and Earnest (2009) explain the development of leadership capacities based on social learning theory. They pointed out that social learning theory explains adults learning in their interaction within a group where they observe model behaviours, reconsider their own behaviour, and attempt to imitate and acquire new behaviours.

Earnest and Black consider some implications of this theory for leadership training. They propose that activities in leadership training should provide opportunities for participants to interact and exhibit behaviour to improve their skills and competencies. In this view of competence development, (Gunter, 2006) used the Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which means the gap between a learner's current competency and a proximate potential performance that can be achieved through providing assistance. Gunter, based on the notion of ZPD, proposes that researchers in leadership development should focus on how learning is socially, culturally and historically mediated which implies researching tools and language of learning in the context. This fact raises considerations for

my research on the content and process of the PLT project, and to what extent these learning theories are invested.

Earnest and Black (2009) discuss another area in leadership which is adult learning theories or andragogy, as pioneered by Knowles. They write that according to the principles of andragogy, adults learn by experience and using a problem solving approach. They add that a successful training programme should clearly inform participants about why they professionally need the programme and how relevant topics are to their needs and interests. They explain that adult motivation in development programmes is based on relevance of the programme to their needs, the relevance of activities to their actual practice, and to how the programme contributes to their professional advancement. This is an important dimension for evaluating the process of leadership development especially because the usual purpose of such programmes is to equip participants with skills rather than just theoretical knowledge.

Murphy and Hallinger (1987) propose a set of characteristics for administrative training. These characteristics include providing an active role for participants, job related learning, self-directed learning, informal learning, providing regular feedback during training, providing needs-based training and creating an environment of trust. Pedder and MacBeath (2008) add another important point in the success of leaders which is the context, and how they react to context. Additionally, Kirkpatrick (2009) suggests factors to be considered in planning and implementing training programmes. These factors are: determining needs, setting objectives, identifying content, selection of participants, designing schedule, selection of facilities, selection of trainers, preparation of audio-visual materials, coordination of the programme and finally evaluation of the programme. These characteristics can be used as criteria to judge leadership development programmes. In their review of literature for Stanford's school leadership study, Davis et al. (2005:1-2) conclude four key findings:

- Successful school principals influence student achievement through two important pathways: the support and development of effective teachers, and the implementation of effective organisational process. These factors should be considered in the choice of knowledge and skills in leadership programmes' curriculum.

- The content of leadership programmes and methods of development are essential features in their success. The content and the methods should reflect the current research on school leadership and adult learning theory, and also be consistent with the requirements of an educational system (ex. State standards).
- There are multiple pathways in leadership preparation and development. Each type has its own approach and focus with regard to academic proficiency, or management skills. The evaluation of in-service programmes should consider the variations in training design, underlying learning theories, and specific learning objectives.
- The components of leadership programmes should be aligned with the finance strategies and leadership policy to assure coherence, productivity and sustainability.

Based on the previously mentioned findings, Davis et al.(2005) suggest more research in the aforementioned four areas: effective leadership skills, types of experience and training required, the programme's structure and design to develop them, as well as finance, policy, and practice to support these programmes. This explanation gives evidence to the key argument in this study, that leadership development should be understood and conceptualised within the uniqueness of a particular context. Moreover, the previously outlined outcomes assist in developing a theoretical and conceptual framework to study leadership development programmes from an international and comparative perspective.

Buckley and Caple (2009) suggest a systematic approach to training consisting of four main stages. The first is investigating training needs. The second is designing training. The third is delivery of training. The fourth is the evaluation of training. For evaluation, Buckley and Caple explain two types of evaluation: internal validation and external validation. By internal validation they mean measuring participants' performance to assess their achievement on the basis of objectives of training. The external validation is the assessment of whether the objectives of the training meet the professional needs of participants. Heck (2003) proposes an evaluation for the impact of principals training using two concepts - professional and organisational socialisation. Heck explains professional socialisation as formal preparation or training, whereas organisational socialisation is the process of becoming familiar with leadership practices. This implies that principals' development programmes should include

multi activities for professional socialisation as well as organisational socialisation. This issue relates to the issue of how leaders respond effectively to their own distinctive organisational cultures. Moreover, an important issue is how to adapt the leadership programme content to the real training needs of principals. For example, the variation of contexts within schools all over Oman, and how leadership coaches should respond to such needs and variations.

The effectiveness of educational leadership programmes depends on internal and external factors. The internal factors were discussed previously such as content, process, and the related issues within these factors. The external issues are related to the holistic context of leadership practice within an educational system (Fullan and Levin, 2009). Leithwood et al. (2009) identify ten lessons for developing and sustaining principal leadership based on 12 schools as case studies. They recommend policy makers, programme developers, researchers, and staff developers around the world to consider these lessons as guiding principles for developing schools' principals. These lessons are (Davis et al., 2005):

- Professional development programmes can have significant influence on how principals approach improvement in their schools.
- A good professional development experience for principals can result in adoption of continuous learning ethos and positive attitudes towards development.
- Training should be inclusive as other school's staff should be included in professional learning; this element relates to the effects of shared leadership on school improvement.
- Assisting principals in data-driven decision making through organising hands-on training to build capacity.
- The importance of practising the learnt leadership skills and behaviour in real school context; teachers' behaviour is influenced by their principal's behaviour.
- Helping schools to find, or training them how to find, discretionary money which will have positive impact on school improvement.
- Good leadership programmes should build a community of leaders where productive mentoring relationships are developed.
- The community of leaders should be a sustainable practice after the programmes to provide opportunities for principals to improve.

- Improving the position and job conditions of principals, and providing inspirational models for future principals.

The abovementioned criteria for good principals' development programmes are related to the contextual dimension in this study, which represent a key component in the study's conceptual framework. As discussed in this section, there are various factors that influence creating effective leadership development programmes. However, much of the available epistemology is based on Western and North-American contexts. This shows that we should be cautious in using such knowledge in order to evaluate and reflect on leadership practices in other contexts. The next section will attempt to discuss the available knowledge on evaluating leadership development programmes. To summarise, (Walker and Dimmock, 2006) provide a comprehensive review of international literature, identifying a number of key factors which maximise effective school leadership training:

- Linking learning to real school contexts and ensuring cultural sensitivity.
- Ensuring an ongoing focus on real time, real life issues as a basis for learning.
- A substantial involvement of trained and experienced principals as mentors, acting as critical friends through mentoring, sharing ideas, observing and questioning.
- Adequate training and role definition for experienced principals involved in the training programmes.
- Flexibility to meet diverse needs, in terms of course content, learning methods, the pacing of programmes and areas of focus.
- Multiple opportunities for sharing and reflecting.
- Recognition and respect for existing skills, values and knowledge, including prior experience.
- Cohort bonding and networking to promote ongoing collaboration, both sideways (with peers) and hierarchically with more and/or less experienced school leaders.
- Meaningful evaluation, both formative and summative, including opportunities for self-evaluation.

3.3.4.1 Evaluation of educational leadership programmes

After discussion of leadership development for school principals, this section will emphasise on the evaluation of leadership programmes. For the concept of a 'programme', Owen and Rogers (1999) define programme as a set of planned activities that are directed to achieve specific changes in a certain time and for a particular audience. Patton (2005:162) defines programme evaluation as 'the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programmes to make judgment about the programme, and/or inform decisions about future programming'. From training background, Kirkpatrick (2009:5) defines training evaluation as 'the systematic process of collecting and analysing information in order to describe and judge the merit or worth of the programme'. Therefore, the evaluation of principals' development programmes should not be limited to comment on a single case study, but rather, provide recommendations for improving policy and practice.

Evaluation is defined by Scriven (2003) as the process of determining value. This is a general definition and can be further explained in the context of education; Owen and Rogers (1999) classified areas of evaluations to - policies, programmes, organisations, products and individuals. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2005) explain that evaluation is an important factor in the delivery of effective training programmes. Similarly, Stufflebeam and Welch (1986) considers evaluation as an essential factor for improvement: 'we cannot make our programmes better unless we know where they are weak and strong and unless we become aware of better means' (p.140).

There are various classifications for evaluation. Owen and Rogers (1999) classifies five categories of evaluation: proactive, clarificative, interactive, monitoring and impact. Owen explains proactive evaluation as an evaluation that takes place before the programme in order to inform the design of the programme through the approach of needs analysis. The clarificative type of evaluation aims to clarify the internal structure and functioning of the programme through logical development of the programme or accreditation. The interactive evaluation provides information about particular activities or components of the programme. The monitoring form of evaluation is carried out when the programme is well established. This type of evaluation is done through approaches like component analysis or system

analysis. The impact evaluation is used to assess the impact of settled programmes to assess the level of attainment of specified objectives. The main approaches used within this type are objective-based evaluation; process outcomes studies and performance audit.

Kirkpatrick's model is one of the key models used in evaluating professional development programmes. Kirkpatrick (1994) suggests a model that involves a four-level framework that assesses particular areas. The four levels in order are - reaction, learning (knowledge, skills and attitudes), behaviour and results. Furthermore, Abernathy (1999) states that Kirkpatrick's model has the advantage of being flexible in evaluation studies. However, Phillips and Phillips (2001) claim that Kirkpatrick's model lacks evaluation of return on investment (ROI). Similarly, Guskey (2000) argues that the simplicity and practicality of Kirkpatrick's model made it a foundation for evaluation of training programmes. In addition the aforementioned models of evaluation, Gusky proposes a model for particular use in evaluating professional development in education. The proposed model includes five levels: participants' reactions, participants learning, organisation support and change, participants' use of knowledge and skills and finally, student learning outcomes.. The selection of level of evaluation will probably depend on the aims of the research. Moreover, it is clear from the table that each level of evaluation requires particular research questions and methods. This framework is the most appropriate for my research. It was developed particularly for educational settings as it is linked to educators and students. Moreover, the third level is concerned with organisational support. Other frameworks lack this essential component in the leadership development process. Lastly, this framework clarifies data collection and usage for each and every level. This framework was also incorporated within this literature review to infer how a good professional development programme for educators should appear. This framework is distinctive from other frameworks available in literature of human resource development and organisational development in its contextual consideration for education context.

3.3.5 Gaps in knowledge on developing school leaders in Oman

Many writers and researchers in the field of developing educational leadership indicate that this field is in a position for further research. For example, Orr and Barber (2009b:481) write that: 'the range of program and outcome measures used across the various studies suggests

that the field is still at an exploratory stage of measurement development'. Besides this dimension of a gap in knowledge, there is also another important dimension for knowledge production within my research which is the cross-cultural comparative dimension of educational leadership epistemology. Dimmock and Walker (2005:56) explain that 'the minimal comparative research currently being conducted in school leadership and administration tends to be Western-centric, superficial and stereo-typical in its approach to understanding school personnel in particular contexts or from a particular ethnic group'. The evaluation of educational leadership programmes should consider the context. Bush (2013:453) argues that for a proper evaluation of educational leadership development approaches and models, 'we should acknowledge the vital importance of culture and context in shaping education, leadership and leadership development in each country'. Similarly, Dimmock (2002) criticises the neglect of societal culture as an influence in research in educational leadership. Dimmock and Walker justify the international interest in comparative learning about educational leadership practices to the growing interest in international comparisons of student achievement.

Dimmock and Walker (2005) write that a comparative model in the study of educational leadership is based on four elements. The first being organisational structures, such as the physical and financial resources, staff, and decision-making structures. The second is the leadership, management and decision processes such as position, role and power of principal, leadership style, and staff appraisal. The third is the curriculum, and the fourth is teaching and learning factors. In their discussion of conceptualization of cross-cultural leadership, Dimmock and Walker list six main types of organisational culture that influence the process and practice of school leadership. My argument here is that such comparative frameworks of educational leadership show the need for knowledge production to understand the context of leadership within the education system of Oman.

The traditional type of principal development in Oman is higher education academic programmes. Al-Farsi (2007) writes that principal development programmes, including those university postgraduate degrees, are usually theory-focussed, and he commented that the training content may not be adequate to the contextual needs of principals in Oman.

The scarcity of knowledge on educational leadership in the Middle East is usually commented on in published materials. Grisay and Mahlck (1991) comment that most research on educational leadership is conducted in industrialised countries with very few studies available on developing countries. As noted previously, leadership practices are influenced with societal and institutional culture and they should be considered in order to avoid bias in leadership development provision, or in researching educational leadership.

With regard to the context of my research, Wiseman et al. (2009) commenting on the availability of knowledge about leadership in Oman, note that literature on leadership in Oman's context is scarce. This comment shows the international interest on educational leadership studies in the Middle East. This interest is generated by many reasons, for example, academic interest of researchers in comparative and international education, international educational organisations like UNESCO, and educational development institutions and expertise providers for the Middle East. For specific consideration of the PLT programme, Wiseman et al. (2009:43) comment that:

This study of the PLT in Oman shows the value of grounding country-specific training in international, multi-country comparative research rather than adapting training models developed in one country with a single, national research base to use in another country.

This comment by the two authors, who were also involved in the delivery and formative evaluation of the project, show that the context of Oman was considered in three stages: content, instructional design, and learning activities. This relates to the previously discussed dimensions in leadership development programmes: content and processes. However, Westrick and Miske did not explain how the content and processes contributed to the impact of the introductory phase of the programme. Such data is very important for initiating and developing further programmes in Oman, and also to know what type of leadership training is more appropriate for this region of the world. Bush (2008) distinguishes between leadership development in developing countries on the one hand, and in the developed countries on the other hand. Bush's main categorisation for the education systems of developing countries is the issue of finance and resources, as this creates challenges for leadership. I argue here that the context in the states of the Middle Eastern Gulf cannot be categorised by Bush's

distinction of developing and developed countries. Gulf States are a special case where resources are available, and mature educational systems try to update themselves by introducing various initiatives and reforms; such a trend places more importance on the necessity of developing schools' principals.

To outline the knowledge gaps, the first knowledge gap is how education change can be better managed in Oman and be properly linked with the development and preparation of school leaders. Secondly, what are the best ways to professionally develop school principals in the context of Oman, and what are the implications for policy and practice at various levels? The vast majority of relevant research reviewed in this section was developed as epistemology for the context of Western countries. The Principals Leadership Training project (PLT) is an important initiative by the Ministry of Education in Oman, and has the potential to provide evaluative data to improve the policy and practice of leadership development in Oman. The following section will describe a research design to bridge the aforementioned knowledge gap.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This chapter presents and discusses the issues with regard to the methodology of this study. The chapter begins with outlining the research aim and questions in Section (4.2). It then outlines the research paradigm in Section (4.3), and goes on to discuss the research design and strategy in Section (4.4). Next, the sampling is explained in Section (4.5). Following this, the data collection methods are outlined in Section (4.6). Later, the piloting of the tools is explained in Section (4.7). The next section (4.8), discusses the trustworthiness of the study. The ethical issues are then explained in Section (4.10). After that, cross cultural considerations are discussed in Section (4.11), and finally, the last section (4.12) summarises the chapter.

4.1 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate educational leadership development in the context of Oman, as there is a scarcity of research in this field in the Middle Eastern context. Newton et al. (2010:558) in their discussion of models and theory in educational administration, and researching real practice, argue that ‘the success and failure of models employed in educational settings assists in engaging with the existential reality of our contexts, and allows researchers and practitioners to co-construct theoretical understandings that have some explanatory power’. This need for research and filling gaps in knowledge may justify international interest in the study of education leadership development programmes. For example, Orr and Barber (2009a:491) argue that ‘faculty interest and commitment to learning more about best practices and the effects of preparation on leadership practices remain the primary drivers for advancing program evaluation research in our field’.

This research will investigate educational leadership development in the context of Oman using the case of the PLT project. The main purpose in this investigation is to discover the best ways to develop school leaders within the uniqueness of the Omani context. Thomas (2013:122) argues that ‘Evaluation research is probably the most kind of research done by professional researchers in education and the social sciences, being undertaken to assess how effective a programme of activity has been’.

Similarly, Hartas (2010:273) writes that one of the main aims of evaluation research is ‘to generate knowledge and articulate insights gained from the evaluation to support further knowledge production’. Within the educational leadership field, Orr and Barber (2009) argue that one of the key purposes of program evaluation in leadership preparation and development is knowledge generation. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1- What motivated the decision to initiate the PLT, and why did the participants want to join the PLT?

The aim of this question is to investigate the rationale for the PLT initiative from the Ministry’s perspective within its policy and actions to reform education in Oman. It will also investigate the intended goal of the PLT from the perspective of the international consultancy who developed the PLT programme. Additionally, to compare at local level, it will investigate why the participants wanted to join, as well as how they joined.

2. How and to what extent has the PLT project impacted on the leadership development of school principals in Oman?

This research question will explore how, and the extent to which, the training provided has:

- (a) addressed the perceived professional needs of school principals;
- (b) influenced the mind-set of school principals in relation to their perceived leadership role;
- (c) directly or indirectly impacted on the leadership behaviour of principals in bringing about institutional change and improvement;
- (d) principals’ evaluation of content and processes of the programme in relation to any reported impact.

3. What cross-cultural insights into school leadership training can be gained from the PLT project?

As the PLT project relies on a combination of Western leadership models/experts and Omani expertise, this research question will explore the implications of a cross-cultural delivery of training and development. It raises important issues relating to education transfer and policy borrowing in leadership training. Also, issues of shared meaning and translation of concepts will be researched altogether with any potential inhibitors, and how and to what extent Western leadership models and systems can be adapted to a different Omani educational context.

4. What are the implications for leadership development theory, policy and practice from a cross-cultural perspective?

This research question will focus initially on a critique of Western models on the strength of the empirical evidence drawn from a non-Western cultural context. On this basis, it will develop new theoretical insights and models of leadership development, along with their implications for research-informed educational policy and practice, both in Oman and beyond to other non-Western countries, thus closing the knowledge gap in our understanding of leadership development in non-Western contexts.

4.2 Research Paradigm

With regard to the use of theory in educational research, theory is used to understand social phenomena. Kettley (2010:145) writes that ‘In education studies, all theories promise to explain empirical phenomena by logically interrelating concepts as a generalized representation of the relationships that exist between people, schools and society. These efforts to enhance our understanding of schooling are often conjoined with practical recommendations for change derived from the theoretical representation, which seek to improve learning and promote equality’. Therefore, the use of theory in educational leadership to understand and improve practice in a context such as Oman is important to create knowledge and recommendations that are respected by researchers in the field and by policy makers. However, consideration of context is important in order to provide empirical recommendations, especially when we consider the societal and institutional cultures in Oman’s education system.

Researching educational leadership and management has witnessed developments in the epistemological stances. Heck and Hallinger (2005) in their analysis of the history of research in educational leadership noted that there were continual developments in epistemological stances. The variety of epistemological stances led to diversity in frameworks and methods which had the advantage of increasing the accumulation of knowledge but, on the other hand, created new challenges for the field, such as the increased limitations of confidence in research results and the limited reliability of the application of research knowledge to real practice (Heck and Hallinger, 2005). With regard to this study, there are three main considerations with regard to knowledge production. The first is enhancing understanding through researching leadership development. The second is ensuring impact through providing evidence based data for policy makers and practitioners. The third is ensuring that research takes into account the unique societal and organisational culture of Oman.

Gunter (2005) provides a conceptualisation of research in educational leadership based on five knowledge domains: conceptual, humanistic, critical, evaluative, and instrumental. My research fits in the humanistic domain as it draws on the perceptions of principals and their learning and experiences in the programme. It also fits into the evaluative and critical domains through outlining PLT participants' perceptions and providing a critique for current leadership theory.

This study is based on knowledge in educational leadership that was developed on epistemological and ontological stances relating to the educational context in the West. However, as Bogotch and Townsend (2008:7) explain, 'Education is contextual and temporal in theory and practice'. They argued that it is important for practitioners and researchers in leadership development to make leadership theories beneficial to real contexts of schools. This may raise questions of the appropriateness of conceptual and theoretical frameworks used to assess the context in Oman. Usually, the Ministry of Education in Oman depends on Western based organisations to provide expertise to reform its education system. Also, another issue is the ontological equivalence of the terms used in data collection tools when they are translated into Arabic, and when translating the collected data from Arabic to English. Being an insider researcher, my experience as a master trainer in the programme enabled me to understand the context. Furthermore, my experience in the translation and

interpretation of educational leadership discourse over the past few years assisted in transforming the content of the data from one language to another. Table (1) below summarizes my paradigm in this research, which is a combination of aspects of constructivism and interpretivism.

Table 1 Summary of the Research Paradigm

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Research Methods
Constructivism	<p>Reality is socially and locally constructed within the actors at various levels in Oman’s education system.</p> <p>There are particular variables to Oman’s context: policy, culture, management of its education system.</p> <p>School level is interconnected with the local, national, and global level.</p>	<p>Interpretivism</p> <p>Knowing about how leadership preparation is perceived and practised in the context of Oman</p> <p>Knowing through seeking answers from various actors at various level</p> <p>Knowing through comparison: vertical, transversal and horizontal</p>	<p>Vertical case study research: a national leadership development project: PLT</p>	<p>Document Analysis</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Individual interviews</p>

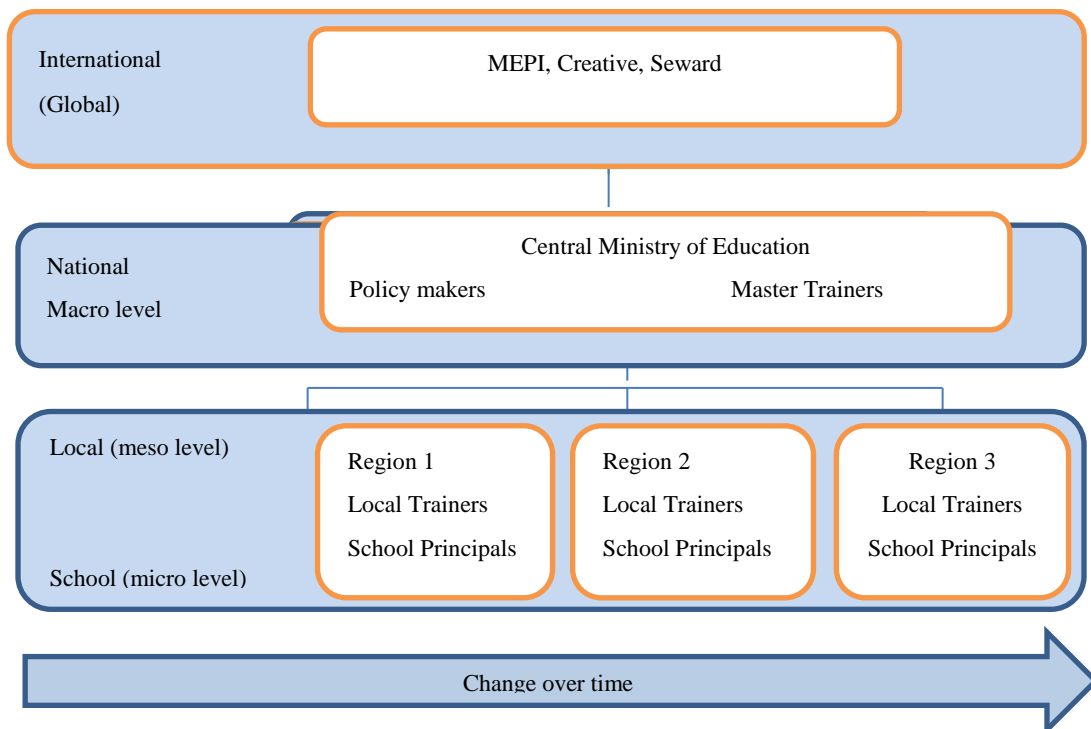
This research adopts a qualitative research approach due to the nature of the phenomena researched. A positivist quantitative approach i.e. a survey was not chosen because of two key reasons. The first is that statistical generalisation from large survey samples is not the aim of the research. In contrary, it seeks in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation which can only be gained from qualitative methods. The second reason is related to the culture and practice within the context of the study. This point is emphasised by Dimmock and Walker (2005:58) who argue that ‘we believe that there are promising avenues to be explored within the interpretivist paradigm through the use of narratives, case studies and interviews, and more generally through symbolic interactionist perspectives, emphasizing the perspectives and meanings attributed to school leaders’ actions in different cultures’.

Additionally, Bryman (2008:159) lists some criticisms for quantitative research as it fails to distinguish people from ‘the world of nature’: the measurement process possesses a sense of precision, reliance on instruments hinders connection between research and everyday life, and the analysis of relationships between variables creates a static view of social life that is independent of peoples’ lives.

4.3 Research Design

This study adopts a vertical case study methodology. The Vertical case study is a methodological approach in the field of comparative and international education developed by Vavrus et al. (2006). Vavrus et al. (2009: 11) define the vertical case study as: ‘a multicited, qualitative case study that traces the linkages among local, national and international forces and institutions that together shape and are shaped by education in a particular locale’. The Vertical case study has an epistemological rationale: ‘vertical case study is a particularly effective way to promote engagement with the knowledge borne by various groups of stakeholders in a policy reform initiative, a teacher education program, or a research project’. Similarly, for this study, epistemologically, there is a need for knowledge at various levels within the PLT, as shown in Figure (1) below.

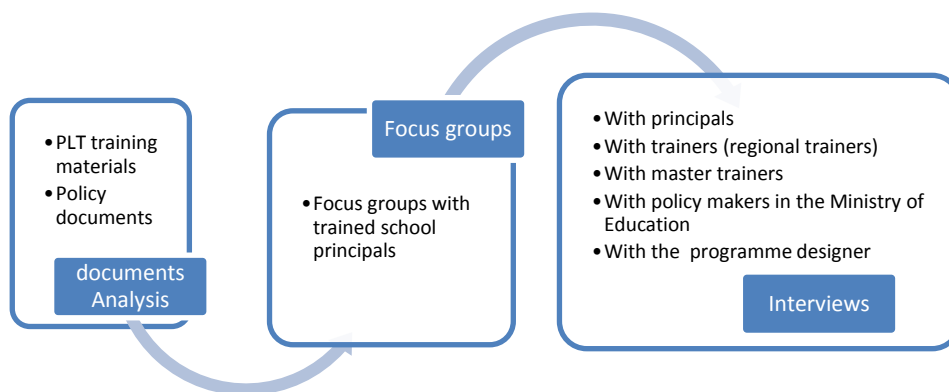
Figure 3: PLT as a vertical case study (adapted from Bartlett and Vavrus, 2014)



The vertical case study approach compares through three ways: vertical, horizontal and transversal (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2014). The vertical comparison is through comparing micro, meso and macro levels. The horizontal comparison is through comparing the implementation of policies in various locations. The transversal comparison ‘traces the creative appropriation of educational policies and practices across time and space’ (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2014:131). One of the key purposes of the vertical case study is to ‘reconceptualise the nature of locality in the face of globalisation’ (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2014:129). For this study, the implementation of the PLT at both regional and school levels will be compared with the theory used in the content of the programme.

The collection of the data is aligned with the approach of the study. Data is collected from the three vertical levels of the study: international, national and local. Data is collected at local level from three sites (regions), as well as through focus groups and individual interviews. The purpose is to provide data to compare horizontally between the locations and between participants. Figure (4) below shows the stages of data collection.

Figure 4: Stages of data collection



4.4 Sampling

This study has used purposive qualitative sampling to match its goals of seeking knowledge from the context as it is based on a constructivist paradigm. Patton (2005) argues that purposive sampling maximises variation with an aim to describe the key themes that cut across a large amount of variation. Three regions were selected at micro level for their representativeness of the geographic and demographic diversity of Oman: Muscat in the

North, Dhofar in the South, and Dahira in the West. Five focus groups were then selected in each region according to the level of schooling and gender within the context of schooling in Oman. Therefore, the five focus groups in each region were: Basic Education (cycle one) principals, Basic Education (cycle two) female principals, Basic Education (cycle two) male principals, Secondary School female principals, Secondary School male principals. The purpose of this section was to consider the contextual variation in order to provide data that compare horizontally at local level. The nomination and contacting of participants was organised by the local education authority in each region, according to my request.

The focus groups included participants at various levels of experiences in principalship. The following stage after the focus groups was individual interviews. Therefore, two participants from each focus group were selected: the least experienced and the most experienced. The purpose of this maximum variation is to identify the common patterns between each group (Creswell, 2007, 127).

At local level, the whole team of local trainers at each region was interviewed. The purpose was to investigate the variation in local trainers, which is later described in Chapter Seven. At the national level of the Central Ministry, all three master trainers were interviewed. In addition, the two policy makers who were involved with the PLT were interviewed as a purposive sampling. At international level, the PLT programme designer was interviewed.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

4.5.1 Document analysis

Klenke (2008:21) explains: *the social world cannot be described without investigating how people use language, symbols, and meaning to construct social practice*. Therefore, the documentary analysis served to provide an initial picture of ‘what is going on’, and will increase the trustworthiness of ontological perception. In other words, the description of the context and the PLT project will be gathered from official documents rather than relying on the researcher’s own perception and experience.

The second reason for using documentary analysis was to prepare for the on-site data collection phase with available data relating to the key components of the study's map of concepts: content of the programme; processes of leadership development; cross cultural issues; and policy and systematic reform issues. Pole and Lampard (2002) write that documents are 'a form of existing data'. They are usually used as an introductory phase in data collection because they 'form the basic and original materials for providing the researcher's raw evidence'. Fitzgerald (2012:297) in (Briggs et al., 2012) 'for researchers in the field of educational leadership, documentary research might be primarily used as data collection strategy for case study. It is unlikely that a researcher in this field would undertake documentary research in the same way as a historian'. As the PLT is a national case study, the available documents are intended to provide data on both the policy and practice of leadership development, and how it is related to educational change in Oman.

The third purpose of the document analysis is to use them to improve *internal validity* (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006), as well as a way of *methodological triangulation* with other data collection methods used in this research (Punch, 1998). The choice of various documents that describe the macro-level and micro-level will be used to gather data from multi-level perspectives, and to compare the data between various sources. However, these documents are very limited in describing the impact of training, particularly after the nationally scaling-up of the programme. They also cannot answer the research questions on their own, implying the need for the other data collection methods.

Content analysis was used to analyse the documents. Kleke (2008) uses the term 'content analysis' to describe the 'presence of certain concepts within texts'; whereas she defines texts as books, articles, newspapers and historical documents. For thematic coding, Klenke (2008:95) writes that there are two types of coding: manifest and latent. In manifest coding, the visible or apparent content of phenomena is elucidated. In latent coding, the researcher looks for the underlying aspects of the phenomena under investigation that represent a higher level of abstraction. Documents will provide data on the background of the training project, content, and its delivery methods. The project's documents are:

- a- Needs' assessment for School Education Reform in Oman: this is a study of needs' assessment for reform in Oman. It was conducted by Creative Associates (an American based international educational consultancy). One of the key recommendations of this study was to improve the leadership skills of school principals in Oman. The PLT initiative was based on this study.
- b- The programme guide: this document was published by Seward Incorporated (American based education consultancy) who designed and delivered the first phase of the programme in Oman. This document reports on the initial phase of the project, and describes the design, delivery and formative evaluation of the programme.
- c- The programme training materials: these materials include PowerPoint slides, activities, handouts, and videos. These materials are the content which have been used since the launch of the programme in 2007.

4.5.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are a type of group interview where participants discuss a topic provided by a researcher who guides the interaction according to the research aims (Yin, 2003). The key aim of using the focus groups is to collect data via the interaction of the participants (Cohen et al., 2004). A researcher through conducting a focus group can assist participants to 'suggest ideas, clarify potential options, react to ideas, recommend a course of action, make a decision, plan or evaluate' (Krueger and Casey, 2009).

Focus groups have various advantages. They are valuable in 'generating and evaluating data from different sub groups of the population' (Cohen et al, 2000:288). They also provide rich data from the school leaders at the local level. Further, they can be used as a way to triangulate data with other data collection methods (Robson, 2002). Additionally, Knodel (1995:8) added that an advantage of focus groups is 'they generate discussion among participants. Comments by one participant can stimulate others' thoughts about the topic and lead to verbal reactions by them'. This advantage was noticed throughout the focus groups that were conducted for this research. Some of the members of the focus groups spark the

discussion by raising a comment or a clarification which initiates the contribution of other participants.

However, as with any data collection method, there are some limitations and weaknesses. In focus groups, there are limitations with regard to the number of questions to be asked when considering the number of participants and the time provided (Cohen et al, 2000). Additionally, Robson (2002:285) highlights that participants ‘may not share their views, extreme views may predominate, and biases may be caused by the domination of the groups by one or two people’. Consequently, I have attempted to solve these limitations through providing guidelines at the formation stage in order to assure the appropriate flow of discussion and the fairness of opportunities to share ideas and points of views. Additionally, confidentiality is another issue with focus groups, as Robinson (1999) clarifies participants may not share certain issues within a larger group but they may be able to do in an individual interview. Therefore, I mediated the discussion in the focus groups in a way that will not go beyond the research questions within the five areas of discussion listed in appendix (F).

Additionally, participants in the focus groups from the same status, i.e. school principals and deputy principals. The purpose was to ensure that the interviewees would not feel constrained by the presence of more senior people and would therefore be more likely to express their views more openly. Such an openness is related to the validity of the data from the focus groups.

The focus groups were an exciting and interesting experience for me and for many of the participants. My past experience in training assisted me in performing the role of a moderator. As Krueger and Casey (2009) comment, the role of a moderator in focus groups is important in generating data from the participants. Based on the experience of the pilot focus groups, I used a framework for discussion and asked the participants to set norms for the discussion in order to give them confidence as well as to guide the discussion in accordance with the themes.

Many of the participants praised the use of focus groups. For example, one participant commented, ‘this this the proper way to get data about our experiences’, while another said, ‘we need to see and interact with the researchers, this is why I do not fill in questionnaires coming to my school from researchers’. I realised that the use of focus groups was socially and culturally more preferable as people in Oman prefer the face-to-face interaction. Additionally, the interaction within a group gave participants the confidence to comment and participate in the discussion.

There were five focus groups in each of the three regions: Muscat, Dahirah and Dhofar. The five groups were according to the three types of school and gender of the staff. They were conducted in the local training centre where the local education authority in each region organised the setting and invited the participants according to my request. The focus groups lasted from one hour to an hour and fifteen minutes.

4.5.3 Individual semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in this research for several purposes (details in appendices A-E). Interviews were used to collect in-depth data that might not be accessed via a questionnaire. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that interview tools for collecting data should be in multi-sensory ways such as verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. There is also another advantage for interviewing that makes it more suitable for this research, which Robson (1997) explains in that through interviews, researchers can follow-up interesting responses and investigate underlying motives. Similarly, Wellington (2015) writes that interviews can provide access to data that cannot be collected using other methods. This research focuses on reactions and points of view of school principals and as it is based on interpretive paradigm, interviews provided various personal interpretations and reactions related to the research questions. Interviews were conducted with programme participants, local trainers, and master trainers, as well as the foreign expert who was involved in the design of content of the PLT.

The cross-cultural nature of my study is reflected in methods. Wragg (2002) highlights that language is an important issue in settings where research participants speak a different mother tongue language. For example, he explains the issue of register in asking interview

questions and in getting answers. The issue of being an insider researcher will give this research more of an advantage, as I do not need a translator or any other means to understand the cultural contextual use of language.

The interviews were recorded to provide further opportunity for natural communication and for engagement with participants instead of pausing for note-taking (Chapman, 2005). Additionally, interviews extended the respondents' rate of response as they increased the possibility of providing required information through natural communication which assists clarification, and providing further clarification when required (Robson, 2002). The venues for interviews were arranged with the regional local education authorities in order to provide the suitable arrangements, and took place at local training centres in each region. The individual interviews with the programme participants, after the focus groups, lasted from 30 to 40 minutes, whereas they lasted from 40 to 50 minutes with the local trainers. The interviews with the master trainers lasted for about an hour, and the policy makers interviews lasted for about half an hour.

4.6 The Pilot Study

Research tools should be piloted on respondents who are similar to those participating in the main study. According to Merriam (2014), (Seidman, 2012) a pilot study enables the researcher to check that respondents understand the meaning of statements when doing qualitative interviewing. The previously mentioned purposes of piloting were considered particularly as the research tools language was in Arabic, while it was epistemologically based on literature review from sources produced in the English language.

Piloting interviews is an important stage to improve them (Wragg, 2002). Wragg suggests two points in piloting interviews. The first is to seek feedback and comment from experienced people in order to gain more objective feedback. The second is to test the completed schedule with one or two typical respondents. A focus group was piloted in Oman before the actual data collection. Seven participants, principals of various levels of schools, and of both genders, attended the focus groups. Also, pilot interviews were conducted for individual principals and local trainers.

There were various outcomes for the piloting of the tools. First, it was very important to provide an introduction to the participants on the aim of the study and its purpose, and to inform them that their participation will inform the research. The second was the importance of setting norms for the focus groups before the start of the discussion. By setting the norms, the researcher may not need to intervene during the discussion, for example, to stop someone. However, it is important that participants set the norms with guidance from the researcher in order to maintain their confidence. Also, after the piloting, I developed a framework for the focus groups and individual interview discussions based on the research questions. The aim was to guide the discussion journey through a map to assist transition from one topic to the other.

4.7 Analysis of Data

Data analysis should fit in the approach taken in the research (Thomas, 2009). Data analysis is also linked to the *analytical frame* in the study in *a holistic context* which continually requires the researcher's thinking (Thomas, 2011:170). Additionally, Thomas (2011) argues that interpretative researchers start with the view that situations cannot be fractured into variables. He believes that researchers should study meanings that people are constructing of the situations in which they find themselves, and to analyse these meanings in order to understand the social world. Such a way of analysing the data was adopted through the linkage of data from each of the levels of the study (international, national and local). Additionally, it was considered through recognising the variations at local level.

The first stage in the analysis of data was the transcription. The transcription of the focus groups data was completed through Nvivo software, while the rest of the data was prepared manually to a Word document. My purpose was to learn and practice both ways of qualitative analysis: with Nvivo, and without Nvivo. At the end, I noticed that analysis depends on the creativity of the research, and the software only facilitates certain issues in the job.

The following stage in the analysis was the reduction of data. In this stage, data were classified into themes and sub-themes. Transcripts were read many times in order to gain a mental picture of what was available and how to process it. I used the following resources as

guides on how to perform the qualitative coding: Miles et al. (2013), Saldaña (2012), Krueger (2009). For using the 'Nvivo' software in the analysis, the most useful guidebook was by Bazeley and Jackson (2013), as the writers explained in an up-to-date way how qualitative analysis can be conducted with what the Nvivo can provide. I developed an initial map of codes deductively on the basis of the research questions. Later, as this study is constructivist and values the context and its people, I inductively coded the data which were not initially in the research questions, for example, the issue of gender.

The third stage was comparing the data. The comparison was done according to the aforementioned aims of the vertical case study: to compare vertically, transversally and horizontally. Thomas (2013:171) states that interpretative inquirers analyse data based on the *constant comparative* method. He explains the use of the constant comparative method in data analysis by clarifying that data is categorised into themes and then mapped to show the interconnections between them. For example, the category 'leadership development' was subordinated with two other categories - 'content' and 'processes', in order to organise the data within the correct category.

Data analysis is for knowledge production research and should probably be linked to theory within the field of study. As discussed in the literature review, this study is based on theories and knowledge in the field of educational leadership developed in the West. Although there are cultural and contextual considerations in this study, it should relate and build on the existing knowledge and theories in order to make sense of the data analysis and interpretation for the academic audience within the educational leadership field. Thomas (2013) uses the term 'glue' metaphorically in order to show the importance of theory in interpretation and sense making of data, as well as for developing new theories and generalisations based on existing data. Thomas (2013:180) summarises theory building through interpretative data analysis through:

- Seeing links between ideas
- Noticing where patterns exist
- Abstracting ideas from your data and offering explanations
- Connecting your own findings with those of others

- Having insights
- Thinking critically about your own ideas and those of others

Consequently, this study attempted, through Chapters Eight and Nine, to discuss the findings in-line with the published knowledge in the field. Further, it attempted to provide implications for theory, policy, practice and research, ‘the four main building blocks in the field of educational leadership and management’ (Bush, 2010:266).

4.8 Trustworthiness and Generalizability Issues

Trustworthiness is an important dimension to consider in this research for reliable findings. The leadership initiative case study discussed in this research is expected to provide generalisable data on policy and practice of educational leadership development in the context of Oman. One of the tools to improve the trustworthiness of research, mainly from a positivist perspective, is triangulation. Janesick (2000, cited in Caelli et al. (2008) explains four types of triangulation: Data triangulation - the use of a variety of sources in a study; Investigator triangulation - the use of several different researchers or evaluators; Theory triangulation - the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data; Methodological triangulation - the use of multiple methods to study a single problem.

Thomas (2009) commented on triangulation as a tool for evidence in social sciences research: ‘having noted the importance of corroboration (or triangulation) though, it is important to say that you will never in social research get conclusive evidence of something being the case’. Thomas links the notion of evidence in social research with John Dewey’s concept of ‘reflective thought’, which means questioning the reasoning and evidence of opinions and statements. Research carried out from an interpretative paradigm is considered by some researchers to have value and completeness in itself, and does not need to be verified from other kinds of research (Thomas, 2009). I think that assurance of validity of education research will give it more value, especially if it aims to add to existing knowledge and to be used in policy making by national Ministries of Education.

In this study, triangulation will be achieved via two methods - methodological triangulation, and respondent triangulation. Methodological triangulation is considered through using two methods for data collection - interviews, and focus groups. Respondent triangulation is through collecting data from various people involved with the PLT. Such variation of tools will help to validate them and provide data from various levels and perspectives. Bergman (2010) writes that the systematic mixture of methods helps in validating the research instruments and scales.

Stake (2000) argues that the usual purpose of research in education and social sciences is to gather information for many uses without necessarily being restricted to generalizations. Schofield (2002) argues that the increasing use of qualitative studies in evaluation research has led to an increased awareness of the importance of structuring qualitative studies in a way that improves their implications for the understanding of other situations. Bassey (1999) makes an important notice on the issue of 'generalisable' assumptions. He argues that the usual aim of case study research conducted for empirical studies has a purpose of improving practice and informing policy making in a certain context rather than developing generalised published assumptions. Bassey adds that the advantages of 'singularity in case study research' are that sufficient data is collected for researchers to be able to deeply explore the case and put forward an interpretation. Furthermore, Bassey comments on the issue of scientific generalizations, arguing that generalizations are not appropriate in summarising social research findings because of the complexity of social events.

Generalization is sometimes categorized by writers in case study research to clarify the type of contribution a case study may make towards a theory. Rowley (2002) states that case study research can contribute to analytical generalisation but not to statistical generalisation. Rowley explains that the empirical results of a case study can be used to analytically generalise with reference to a previously established theory. Furthermore, Rowley adds that if more than one case shows the same results, the more cases with same results can further contribute to analytical generalization. Flyvbjerg (2004) states that the second misunderstanding about case study research is that it cannot contribute to scientific knowledge because case study research is not generalisable. Flyvberg explains that this claim was based on the scientific research paradigm which does not consider a single case for

developing natural laws. However, Flyvberg argues that it is possible to generalize from case study research in human fields according to the type of case and its context. To sum up, the level and extent of generalisation in case study research, in my point of view, should be considered from the very beginning when carrying out the research design. A researcher should identify the extent of generalisation with reference to the purpose of conducting research.

Therefore, the findings of this study claim to be generalizable with the context in which it was conducted. Also, the findings are relevant to the variables of policy, organisational culture and practices which were contemporary during the conduct of the research. This is an issue relevant to the constructivist nature of this research. If the variables were changes in the future, the findings of this study would not be applicable. For example, if the degree of centralisation in the education system in Oman and the way that schools are managed is changed in the future, then the current findings will not be applicable to the new context.

4.9 Ethical Issues

Thomas (2011) defines ethics, within case study research, as principles of conduct to identify what is wrong and what is right with the procedure a researcher uses to collect data from participants of the case study. Additionally, Bassey (2002) states that the ethical guidelines should be considered from the stage of devising research questions. This research will follow the ethical guidelines. The guidelines adopted in this research are the ethical guidelines of the University of Leeds (2011), and the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004). I received written approval from the university's Ethical Review Committee (No. AREA 10-178). The research recruited participants voluntarily with informed consent. The interviews were conducted only after participants understood and agreed to participate without any pressure. However, participants had the right to withdraw at any stage whenever they decide, without the need for justification.

Participants' identities were protected by maintaining anonymity in data collection and reporting where personal details of the participants were not stated in the presentation of the data. Numbers were used to identify respondents. Additionally, respondents were briefed

about the research when they were invited to join the process of data collection upon their agreement and confirmation to attend. Consent forms with details of the research were provided for every participant, in Arabic, to read and sign.

Additionally, conducting educational research may require institutional ethics in some contexts. Dimmock and Walker (2005) explain that conducting research projects in some cultures, even for doctoral theses, may require the permission of the authorities. This is practised by the Ministry of Education in Oman in order to facilitate the job for educational researchers. Therefore, I gained approval from the Ministry of Education in Oman to carry out this research.

4.10 Cross-Cultural and Translation Considerations

There are some cultural considerations with regard to researching school leader development. The first is a growing concern that Western theories and approaches are dominating at the expense of non-Western perspectives, the Middle Eastern perspective for example. Lumby et al. (2009) explains a lack of knowledge from an international dimension of research into the preparation and development of school leaders. This led to undermining the rich cultural heritage, alternative perspectives and insights from African, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern cultures, and the ‘uncritical adoption’ of Western approaches (Chen and Hatzakis, 2008) instead of their application through adaptation similar to that described by Roberston (1997, cited in Jungck and Kajornsin (2003)) as ‘glocalisation’. This shows the importance of considering such an issue in the methodology of researching educational leadership in the context of Oman.

Another issue in researching educational leadership in a non-Western context is *equivalence*. This is a matter of ensuring validity so ‘that questions mean and measure the same thing in different countries’(De Vaus (2008:260) .At data collection and analysis levels is the challenge of *ontological equivalence*, an equivalence of meaning and understanding in the use of language and definition of key concepts. The concept of leadership is itself contested (Lumby, et al., 2008). Bush (2007) adds that there is conceptual confusion in the study and practice of educational leadership due to the cultural variations in the concepts of leadership and management. Similarly, Wilson (2010) describes an ontological challenge in international and comparative research, for example, the term ‘leadership’ is perceived differently according to various cultures.

For the context of Oman, Plummer (2005) states, from her experience in working in Oman's education context, that the concept of leadership is sensitive. I argue here that the sensitivity is in the Arabic term for 'leadership', which is also mean 'commandership'. Therefore, validity can be undermined as a result of 'definitional sloppiness' (Hantrais, 2014) or 'culturally-bound misinterpretations or misunderstandings' (Grootings, 1986, cited in Hantrais (2008)). Therefore, being an insider researcher involved in the PLT project will assist in overcoming mostly all the previously mentioned challenges.

I have used my translation skills in all the translation processes of this research. I have utilised my experience in written and oral translation during my career before starting my PhD. Also, my experience with the PLT training and being a member of the Ministry of Education provided me the advantage of being aware of the contextual use of terms in Arabic and their connotation. Further, my academic experience with the literature of the field used in this study gave me the advantage of being aware of the meanings of the terms in English. Such an experience assisted me to appropriately translate the research instruments into Arabica and then to translate the data from Arabic to English. Additionally, for the translation verification, my strategy was to double-check the translation of the transcript and to compare it with the audio recordings in Arabic.

4.11 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology of this study. It explained the goals of the study and the research questions. After explaining the paradigm, it has explained the vertical case study qualitative design in order to provide answers for the research questions from various vertical levels and through various ways of comparisons. The methods for collecting relevant data were identified and also how the data were analysed. Relevant issues of ethical and cultural consideration were explained. The following chapter, Chapter Five, will present the data collected through the focus groups.

Chapter 5

Analysis of the Providers' Interviews

This chapter presents data within the sequence of the three vertical levels of the PLT provision: international, national and local. At international level, an interview with one of the experts who designed and delivered the PLT programme's content is analysed. At national level (the central Ministry), individual interviews with three master trainers and two policy makers are analysed to show their perceptions at national level. At local level, the individual interviews with the local trainers at the regions are analysed to show their perceptions. The aim of this vertical analysis is to investigate how the PLT is perceived at various levels as an initiative of education change through the preparation of the development of school leaders.

5.1 International Level

This section presents data at international level gathered through an interview with one of the PLT programme designers. These data will complement the data collected through the document analysis. It also provides a comparison of perspectives at international level in order to compare with both national level and local level. The data from the interview with the international expert will be presented within the following themes.

5.1.1 Initiating the PLT

The analysis of the PLT project shows that the purpose of initiating the PLT from the perspective of the international expert was to assist the Ministry's efforts in succeeding its education change. The expert explained that the data collected through an evaluative study for a sample of secondary schools in 2004, showed that principals need professional development in order to make them capable of handling challenges in their schools. The data of the evaluation showed that principals lack skills on how they can improve their schools and that they usually perform day-to-day managerial duties.

She explained that the initiation of the project started with negotiations between the Ministry of Education in Oman and the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) of the USA Department of State.

The MEPI assigned the contract with a US-based consultancy: Creative Associates International who has a world-wide experience in international development education. Creative assigned the task of delivering the programme to Seward Incorporated who worked with our College of Education at the University of Minnesota to design and deliver the programme.

The involvement of the four international bodies described in the above quote shows the extent of international involvement in the initiation and delivery of the PLT project. It also shows the contemporary trend in how the global knowledge of the international consultancy providers influences the local settings. It also may show that the issue of leadership in education in the Middle East is becoming an issue of political interest through the MEPI's involvement and funding of the project.

5.1.2 Design and delivery of the PLT

The international expert responsible for the design of the PLT programme explained that the design of the PLT content was based on a needs analysis. She explained further:

The training team spent two weeks on-site in Oman meeting with a representative group of principals and MOE representatives to discuss what Omani educators thought were the critical issues for Oman education and also what these educators thought were primary training needs for leadership of decentralized Oman secondary schools.

The programme was designed on the basis of the above described visit which lasted for two weeks. This short period, I argue, can provide data from a small sample only, when considering the eleven regions in Oman and their 1200 schools.

The expert explained the procedure of deciding the content of the programme. She explained that it is based on 'International research-based practices for leadership, assessment, curriculum and instruction would be integrated into each training module'. The expert also explained the intent to compromise between the international research on educational leadership and the context of Oman. She clarified further:

Activities were built into the content to help principals set measurable leadership objectives relevant to the culture of their school and also alignment to the priorities of the MOE for moving toward decentralization of the Omani education system.

In order to fit the need of the context of Oman, the expert explained that the selection of the trainers from the USA was based on their experience in international and cross-cultural leadership development. She explained further:

The trainers were selected for their expertise and experience in leadership of schools in international contexts, knowledge and experience in intercultural training, theory, knowledge of current teaching and learning best practices and knowledge of adult learning principles.

She added that one of the lead trainers was a faculty member in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the College of Education, University of Minnesota who taught theory and practice of school leadership in a doctorate program for international educators. This faculty member was formerly a practicing school administrator in a large urban school district. Another of the trainers was also a professor in teacher education, and formerly a deputy superintendent in an international school.

The expert also explained that the cross-cultural issues were considered throughout the delivery of the training. She stated that the training team integrated the feedback from principals and MOE officials into the leadership theory choice process. Feedback from the participants after each session also helped determine any changes made in the content and instructional approach. She added that the training team decided that it was very important to help the participants differentiate between leadership and management and to model as trainers a collaborative team approach to leadership.

The expert explained that the choice of the leadership framework considered the needs of the Omani context. She provided as an example the Deal & Peterson leadership framework, which was selected as a particularly important conceptual framework for Omani principals. She justified this choice of theoretical framework as it focused the participants on systemic analysis of their own school culture and incorporated a consideration of the rituals, ceremonies, symbols, stories, informal and formal leaders that were present and what changes

in the present culture might occur. The other theoretical framework was the transformational leadership. She justified the choice of this framework by stating that ‘to institute change, leaders need to gain knowledge and skill in the theory and practice of transformational leadership’. She added that the ‘instructional leadership’ model was introduced in the content to enable the principals to introduce changes to the processes of teaching and learning in their schools. She explained that these frameworks can assist to improve the practice at school level in Oman. This issue leads to the discussion of cross-cultural issues in educational leadership.

5.1.3 Cross-cultural issues

With regard to the cross-cultural considerations in the PLT programme, the expert described a number of factors that were considered:

The history of Oman’s education, including the current structure for leading and managing schools and the role of MOE and principals was reviewed. Hofstede’s leadership cluster dimensions for the Middle East were reviewed. Gender roles and implications for training were considered in terms of trainers and participants. Potential English language proficiency issues for optimal learning were also considered.

The research resource for the experts to estimate the cultural context of Oman was the Hofstede’s study which not only describes the culture in Oman, but rather more broadly of the Middle East.

One of the actions explained by the expert to introduce changes to the culture was the inclusion of the some of the Ministry’s staff in the workshops. She explained ‘it was decided to have the MOE officials work in their own group to offset the potential “power over” influence on discussions and the various of group activities’. The expert added that the purpose of having the officials in the training was to give a message of the intended change in the culture in order to share power between the Ministry and the schools. The participants from the Ministry became master trainers when the PLT was scaled up nationally.

The other issue with regard to the cross-cultural delivery of the PLT was the translation. The expert explained that the training materials were translated into Arabic. She added that an MOE official and one of the trainers who spoke Arabic and was familiar with the module

content served as interpreters as relevant. The PowerPoint content was displayed in both Arabic and English. However, the expert was unaware of the connotations of leadership terminology in Arabic. For example, she was surprised to learn that the Arabic term for 'leadership' may also mean 'commandership'. She noted that there is no published research on the issue of the use of Arabic terms in leadership development. All these issues of cross-cultural dimensions of leadership development raise the issue of how the development of school leaders can assist change at school level.

5.1.4 Supporting change

The expert explained that the purpose of the PLT was to introduce changes at school level through building the skills of the principals. She added that the PLT was designed to fit with the current reform of education in Oman. She explained further 'Oman MOE education reform objectives were reviewed by members of the Seward team and dialogue with MOE officials assigned to the team was built into the project'. The expert noted that the international training team goal was to align the PLT with the Ministry's policy to reform education in order to assist change at school level through the development of principals.

Therefore, the expert explained that the type of leaning intended for participants aimed to assist the change process. She noted that 'principals learned the strategies for developing a school vision, mission, and rubrics based outcome objectives relative to systemic continuous improvement of education in Oman nationally, regionally and locally', and added that 'the shift from centralized to decentralized leadership and management of Oman schools requires systemic change at all levels of the education system'. Therefore, she recommends that the MOE needs to empower even more principal capacity for leadership and management of schools if this is a national priority. For example, she noted that principals need to be empowered to select and hire their own staff and not merely part-time staff as was the case when the project was first implemented.

5.2 National Level

This section presents the data collected at national level: from PLT-master trainers and policy makers. This level represents the top level in the management of the PLT in particular, and the management of the educational change in general. This data answers the research

questions from the perspective of this national level, and will provide a comparison of perspectives with the other vertical levels of the PLT.

5.2.1 Master trainers

Master trainers at central Ministry level had two roles with regard to the PLT. The first is the role of managing the logistics of the project in coordination with the project's steering committee. The second role is technical through providing supervision to regions and assisting training at local level. The master trainers gained their experience through their participation in the three workshops on the content delivered by the international experts in 2007, and through training by the consultancy (Seward) on training skills and on replication strategies of educational initiatives.

5.2.1.1 Joining the PLT project

The three interviewed master trainers stated that they joined the programme because their department (School Performance Development Department, SPDD) was involved from the very beginning, in arranging for the PLT with the Ministry's Office for Research and Education Reform. One of them explained further:

Our department is responsible of all the issues with regard to school principals and deputy principals, including the professional development programmes. Our department is also responsible of the supervision of school principals. R.2

Another respondent explained his experience with joining the PLT:

In 2005, our department assisted an international consultancy (Creative) in conducting an assessment study of secondary schools in Oman. One of the outcomes of that study was the need to build the capacity of school principals in order to enable them to improve the performance of their schools. The PLT programme came in 2007 as a response to that recommendation. R.1

The master trainers clarified that the initial plan of the project was to train a selected group of 22 secondary schools' principals. A respondent explained further:

Those participants were selected from the eleven regions of Oman on the basis of two criteria: being a secondary school principal and having a good proficiency of English. This was the first experience for the Ministry to train principals by a consultancy from the USA. R.3

They noted that the decision to scale up the programme nationally came as a result of the indicators of the efficiency of the three workshops and the impact reported from the participants. A respondent explained: ‘After noticing the impact of the three workshops delivered by the American experts, the Ministry wanted to extend the benefits to the rest of the principals in the Sultanate’. R.2

These statements match the data from the project document produced by the consultancy (Seward). There was no decision for scale up at the beginning of the project. The decision came after the delivery of the three workshops.

5.2.1.2 The delivery of the PLT

The master trainers explained that the PLT is managed by a steering committee appointed with a ministerial decree, a respondent explained:

The replication decision was formally endorsed with a ministerial decree by the Minister. This official endorsement gave the PLT legal and institutional strength. It assisted us to develop a replication plan and to get approval of the budget by the finance department in the Ministry. R. 1

Another respondent added:

The initial step to scale up the project was to create local training teams at the regional level. The decision was to use the cascade mode of delivery which is the usual way for large scale initiatives at the Ministry. It is not applicable to bring 1200 principals from eleven regions to the Ministry’s training centre. R.2

A respondent clarified further:

Part of the Ministry’s plan to train locally was to build the capacity of regional DG in delivering professional development programmes. We were aware that local trainers were not professional at the beginning of the project, and we wanted to develop their skills for the future, not only for the PLT but also for future programmes. R.3

However, all of the master trainers acknowledged that the option of a cascade mode of delivery influenced negatively the quality of the delivery. They stated that they are aware that the quality of the local trainers is not like the quality of the international experts who introduced the PLT.

With regard to the selection of the content for the scaled up programme, they explained that they selected ten modules for the first phase of the project (2008-2011), and the modules of this phase were on 'transformational leadership'. A respondent explained further:

We decided to select the content of the first phase on transformational leadership. We had agreed that those modules will be more interesting and relevant as a start of the programme. They contain relevant issues to the usual practice of principals such as planning and managing time and meetings. R.2

The focus of the second phase (2011-2014) was on instructional leadership. The master trainers selected twelve modules from the original content for two weeks of training. A respondent clarified:

After we trained all principals on transformational leadership topics, we decided to initiate a second phase on instructional leadership topics. We have selected twelve modules from the original programme. Our aim was to deliver the most important topics in the PLT to all principals and deputy principals in Oman. R.1

With regard to the inclusion of all principals and deputy principals in Oman to attend the PLT, the master trainers explained that the purpose was to give them the opportunity to learn from the programme. One of them explained:

The content of the PLT differs from the other programmes being delivered at the central level or at the local level. The PLT is designed by international experts on the field of educational leadership and management. We want our principals to learn and benefit from this content even if they hold MA or any other specialised qualification. R. 2

Similarly, another master trainer added:

Our belief was that the less experienced principals will learn from the experienced during the discussions. The experienced will share their experiences with each other and with the less experienced. R.2

Additionally, for the gender issue, master trainers mentioned that there is an attainment gap between males and females, as females are outperforming males according to the TIMMS data. One of them explained further:

We aimed for a share of experiences between female principals and male principals. There is a gap between the performance of females and males. We wanted such share of experiences and influence particularly for changing the mind-sets of participants. R.1

However, they did not mention any particular strategies to achieve the above goal. They stated that it is an issue which was not considered at the early stage of the project when the international experts introduced the programme.

5.2.1.3 Transformational leadership and instructional leadership

The transformational leadership and instructional leadership models were the key models used in the PLT programme. The three interviewed master trainers thought that these models were chosen by the programme's writers on the basis of their experience in the USA. One of them explained further:

I think that the choice of the leadership theories was made by the American experts on the basis of their experience in school principalship in the USA. They use the theory on educational leadership in developing the content of leadership programmes. R.2

Another master trainer added that:

The knowledge used for the preparation of school principals is universal. I myself did an MA in School Administration and the knowledge of this field is produced mainly by writers from the west like most of educational theories. R.3

Similarly, master trainers clarified that the transformational leadership and instructional leadership models were developed in Western decentralised education systems. However, they noted that with the ongoing changes in the Omani education system they will be more relevant to the context of Oman. For example, one of them further clarified:

The education system in Oman is under change process with plans to provide more autonomy for the school principals. So, even if the current models are not so relevant to them at the moment, they will be relevant one day in the future. R.1

Additionally, two out of the three master trainers stated that the education system in Oman is witnessing changes at school level and both the transformational leadership and instructional leadership models are important to assure a proper implementation of the changes, one of them explained further:

We want our principals to be capable of handling education change at the level of their schools. Both of the models of transformational leadership and instructional leadership are important at this time of education change. R.3

However, the three master trainers acknowledged that the models were not well linked to the current practices with regard to both the management and instruction at schools. They explained that the American experts who wrote the content were not aware of the details of the context in schools. The three of them noted that the contextual limitations of the transformational leadership model were not addressed in the content. One of them explained further:

I think that the transformational leadership model was introduced in the content in a theoretical general way rather than adapting it to the real context of school. I think that is why the concept of 'transformational leader' was resisted by the participants in the regions. R.2

Similarly, for the instructional leadership, three of the trainers commented that the instructional leadership model was not adapted to the instructional practices at regional and school levels. They explained that instructional leadership in Omani schools is shared with the region, as teachers are supervised through visits by curriculum supervisors from the local education office. They stated that these details were not addressed in the content. Also, the curriculum in Oman is taught through textbooks provided by the Ministry and the teachers have limited choice over the content of instruction.

5.2.1.4 Tri-level change

The three master trainers explained that the PLT is not only a training programme but is also an initiative for change of practice. They stated that the PLT have a goal of changing the mind-sets of participants. One of them explained further:

The goal of the PLT was to introduce changes to the roles of principals to enable them to be proactive and assistants of change at their schools. The roles of the principals should change from the traditional managerial role. R.1

However, the three master trainers acknowledged that the three levels of introducing and managing change from the central Ministry to regions and then to schools creates challenges that were not expected at the beginning when the PLT project was planned. One of them explained further:

When we attend the training sessions in the regions, participants raise various concerns and perceptions over the PLT content with regard to the intended roles of a principal. Many principals argued that the Ministry's reforms and policies do not fit the real context at schools. R.3

In order to meet these challenges at regional level, the three master trainers explained that they took notes of the challenges reported by the participants and also their recommendations for improvement. However, the master trainers explained that they have no power over some of the challenges, such as concerning the authority of principals.

The three master trainers explained that the principals in Oman have opportunities to change their schools within the current centralised way of managing schools in Oman. However, they explained that principals need an efficient delivery of leadership training at local level. They stated that the performance of some local trainers in some regions was below their expectations, and with such local trainers it was not easy to change the mind-sets of the principals. They noted that this is a usual challenge with using the cascade model in scaling up initiatives and programmes as the quality of training at local level becomes less than the original delivery at the Ministry's level.

The other issue mentioned by the master trainers was that of supporting principals at local level by the Local Education Authorities (Directorates of Education). They explained that the PLT encourages principals to initiate changes at their schools; however, the amount of support provided at regional level was not appropriate, particularly for issues that need further mentoring and coaching. A master trainer explained further:

Some of the skills were introduced in the PLT, like writing a strategic plan, a vision and a mission for the school. This is particularly important for the newly appointed principals who need further assistance after they attend the programme. R.2

5.2.2 Policy makers

At national level, besides the master trainers, another party involved with the PLT was the policy makers at the central Ministry. Decisions with regard to the PLT project, and all other initiatives, are made at this level. Therefore, this subsection will analyse data collected from two policy makers who were involved with the initiation and scale up of the PLT project. They are also responsible for policies and decisions with regard to the decentralisation autonomy of schools.

5.2.2.1 Initiating the PLT

The policy makers explained that the PLT project was based on the recommendation of an assessment of needs study in 2005, which was carried out collaboratively by the Ministry and an international consultancy. They also noted that the training of principals became an issue of interest from the start of the major education reform in Oman in 1997. They clarified that the choice of an international consultancy to deliver the PLT training was to benefit from the international expertise in the field, and who had also delivered similar programmes for principals in other countries. One of the policy makers explained further:

The PLT is the first programme in the development of school principals to be designed and delivered by an international consultancy. The aim of the Ministry was to build the capacity of the principals in order to enable them to properly implement the changes introduced by the Ministry. R.1

Similarly, the other policy maker explained the Ministry's aim of international collaboration to initiate the PLT project:

The education systems in the West, particularly in the USA, have a rich experience in decentralisation and school autonomy. Therefore, we decided to collaborate with a consultancy from the USA to train our principals. We provided previously a training programme with the UK-National College for School leadership, but that was for a small group of principals. R.2

The policy makers' aim was to make a change at school level through the training of principals. They stated that the Ministry had provided all resources for the schools and 'the ball is in their court'. They explained that the better the principals are trained the more

capable they are to handle the changes. This issue leads to the following theme on education change.

5.2.2.2 Education change, decentralisation and leadership development

The policy makers stated that there had been many changes and initiatives since the major education change in 1997. The changes were mostly at school level, such as the changes in the curriculum, assessment and instruction. They explained that the aim of the basic education reform was to change traditional methods of teaching and assessment with modern methods.

We wanted our education system to be competitive with the other education systems in the world and can produce outputs that are relevant to the job market. We continually introduce changes to improve our education system.
R.1

Both policy makers explained the Ministry's commitment for education change. They stated that one of the key actions to assist education change is through providing professional development for educators. They gave as an example, the ten-year project with the University of Leeds to train English language teachers.

Our priority was to introduce changes at the school level, through introducing changes on the curriculum, learning resources and methods of teaching and learning. Therefore, we believe that these changes require proper professional development of the teachers. R.2

Both policy makers explained that they think that the provision of professional development from international providers is more trusted because of their experience. Additionally, the Ministry's aim is to compete internationally in the field of educational reform, and the international consultancies will assist its reforms.

For the issue of reforms in the area of centralisation/decentralisation, the policy makers explained that the administration of the state depends, as in most countries in the region, on a centralised hierarchal system. However, they explained that within the current system the state encourages initiatives for decentralisation in order to give regional local authorities

more authority. One of the policy makers sees centralisation as an advantage for the education system. He explained further:

The education system in Oman was established in 1970. Centralisation provided the opportunity for the Ministry to assure proper provision of resources and the proper management of the education system. R.1

Additionally, the policy makers explained that within the current system of managing the education system, the Ministry ‘manages’ but does not ‘control’. One of the policy makers explained further:

We do encourage innovation and creative initiatives of the schools and the regions. The Ministry’s policies and regulations are for the proper management of the education system, they are not to limit the creativity of teachers or principals. R.2

The policy makers noted that the aim of the PLT as an initiative to build the capacity of principals is to increase proactivity at school level. They explained that the Ministry is continually providing more autonomy for schools. They stated that the Ministry’s strategy is to develop the principals first before giving them any further authority or responsibility in order to create a ‘balance’. This discussion of introducing change at school level leads to the discussion of policy borrowing to the education system in Oman.

5.2.2.3 Policy borrowing and transfer

The policy makers explained that the education system was established with expertise from the Arab countries that preceded Oman, such as Egypt. They stated that the majority of the workforce in education was from Arab states, mainly Egypt, including school principals.

The formal education system in Oman was established in 1970 with the experience of teachers and principals from Arab countries particularly Egypt. They have transferred with them all the practices they used to with regard to teaching and management. R.1

They explained that the major transition in policy transfer was in 1997 when the Ministry introduced a major change (Basic Education system) on the basis of a consultancy from

Canada. As a result of this consultancy, many policies and practices were transferred to the reformed system.

The Basic Education reform introduced major changes with regard to the strategies of teaching and assessment. The aim of the reform was to replace the traditional methods of instruction with modern ones that are practised by the best performing education systems. R.1

The policy makers' confidence on the suitability of the newly transferred policies for Oman was based on their success in what they called 'best performing education systems'. They also explained that the basic education initiative was evaluated in 2004 by a Canadian consultancy in order to assess the success of the changes at practice level.

For the issue of the use of leadership theory for training principals in Oman, the policy makers explained that the education change in Oman at classroom and school level relies on current knowledge in education. They explained further that the contemporary educational system almost depends on the same principals with regard to teaching and learning. They both agreed that the principals in Oman also need to be trained on the current leadership theories. However, they noted that principals need to be capable of contextualising the leadership theories to their context. They explained that 'it is not applicable for the Ministry to change the way of the education system overnight to fit a particular theory'. Therefore, they recommended that the researchers from Oman, and particularly from the Ministry, adapt the 'international knowledge' to fit the context of the education system of Oman.

5.3 Local Level

This section shares the same local level with the previous two chapters (Chapters Five and Six) which presented data from the recipients of the PLT training). This group of local trainers work under the supervision of the master trainers at Ministry level with the cascade mode of the PLT delivery. This section will present the data from the local providers of training of the same sample of regions used previously for data collection from the PLT participants. Fifteen local trainers were interviewed individually, five from each of the three districts: Muscat, Dahirah and Dhofar. The data is presented according to the following six key themes.

5.3.1 The preparation of local trainers

The analysis of data showed three routes for joining the PLT as local trainers. The first were the 22 secondary school principals trained at the initial phase of the project by the international consultants in 2007 (Type A). The second were the regional supervisors who were trained by the consultancy in 2007 through a two-week workshop on both the content and the processes of delivery (Type B). The third were the principals (and sometimes supervisors) who were trained in their districts as early cohorts, and were then selected locally to be trainers (Type C). For further clarification, a local trainer from the first type commented on the way of joining the PLT programme as a local trainer:

I was a principal of a secondary school. I have attended three workshops at the central Ministry's training centre delivered by the international consultancy: Seward, then I have attended a training-of-trainer workshop. I have trained in the both phases of the programme. R.4

Some of the PLT local trainers were administrative supervisors (six). These supervisors worked locally inspecting schools' administration and providing guidance for principals. One of them stated of his experience:

I was prepared for the PLT through two weeks workshop delivered by the international consultancy in 2007 at the central Ministry's training centre. They trained us on the content and on training skills as well. That workshop was really condensed with the topics. R.7

Nine of the participating principals in the early cohorts of the project were selected to be local trainers. This selection was made by the district responsible department on managing the PLT locally (School Performance Development Section). The decision was made due to the shortage of trainers prepared centrally by the Ministry. For example, one of these trainers explained: 'I am a principal of a second cycle school. I joined the PLT in 2008 as a participant. Then, I was selected to join the training team at the region. I have participated in training many workshops.' R. 9

The above three stated responses represent three types of preparation of local trainers. These three types are the product of the implications of the context of the regions when the replication decision was officially made at the end of 2007. The consultancy (Seward, 2008) explained that they do not have a clear vision regarding the Ministry's long term vision regarding the scale-up in the early stages of the project. The following table shows the variation amongst regions in terms of the type of how the local trainers were prepared.

Table 2: Local trainers according to type of preparation

Region	Type A	Type B	Type C
Muscat	2	1	2
Dhofar	-	-	5
Dahira	1	2	2

There was an issue of sustainability of local trainers who were trained initially by the international consultancy. It was only in the Dahira region that all members of the initial training team remained (three), with an addition of another two, who were selected from the trained principals. In the Dhofar region, not all of the initially trained team remained, with two of them moving to another department in their region, and a further one joining a full-time MA. Therefore, in Dhofar a new team was established from the locally trained principals and supervisors. In Muscat, three of the initially trained principals and supervisors remained, and another two were added from the locally trained group. This variation in the selection and preparation may show how implementation through a cascade mode may be different and more challengeable than the international consultancy and national ministry predicted and planned for at the beginning of the project.

5.3.2 Local trainers evaluation of the PLT

These data assist two purposes: gaining evaluation data from the perspective of providers of training at local level, and to use this data to compare with the other levels in the eighth chapter of discussion. The presentation of data follows Gusky's (1999) five levels of evaluating professional development in education, the same framework used in evaluating the programme from the perspective of the participants. The five levels of evaluation are the

participants' reactions, participants' learning, organisational support and change, participants' use of new knowledge or skills, and students learning.

For the participants' reactions, there was regional variation in local trainers' evaluation of participants' reactions. In the Daira region, local trainers think that all participants were satisfied with both phases of training. In contrast, in the Dhofar and Muscat regions, the local trainers think that participants were satisfied with the first phase (transformational leadership topics) and that they were unsatisfied or less satisfied with the second phase (instructional leadership topics). They justified that the topics of the first phase were more important and relevant to the practice of management at schools. A respondent clarified further:

Trainees were more engaged and active at the first stage because there were lots of practical skills that are relevant to school management like planning, time management and management of meetings. Then, there was a long period gap between the first and the second phase. When participants returned for the second they found topics of less interest to them. R.5

The aforementioned gap between the workshops for the same participants varied from region to region, and from one group of trainees to another. The gap lasted from a year to two years for some cohorts. This is a much longer period than when the consultancy delivered the workshops with short gaps (in the months of January, March and April 2007).

For the participants' learning, local trainers stated that due to the variety of participants in terms of experience and prior knowledge, the impact on their learning varied. They explained that the less knowledgeable participants found that there was much to learn, particularly from the first phase of the programme. A trainer explained further: 'I think most of the skills to be learnt by the participants and are relevant to their work are at the first phase of the programme. The second phase was merely knowledge on teaching and learning issues' (R. 7).

Local trainers explained that they had appropriately used the formative assessment techniques for the first phase to assess participants' learning, but used them less during the second phase. They justified this change in assisting learning to the change of the emphasis of supervision and follow up by the master trainers.

For the third level of evaluation regarding organisational support and change, all local trainers explained that there is no formal plan for support and change. A local trainer clarified further:

There is no official plan for change by the Ministry to be implemented at regions. What is happening is that motivated participants implement some of what they have mastered on the programme, particularly from the first phase like writing a vision and a mission for their school. R.11

Another local trainer who also worked as an administrative supervisor commented:

Because I train at the programme, so whenever I visit a principal who was trained by us, I usually evaluate him or her putting in mind the skills we trained him/ her on. For example, when I review the school's plan, I assess if they have implemented what they have learnt at the PLT. However, there are no officially written instructions for us from the Ministry. R.12

Four out of the 15 local trainers think that this was due to the way the Ministry introduced the programme to build the capacity of principals without adopting in parallel a plan for change. Some others (five of fifteen) refer it to the clarity of communication between those at the Ministry and those at local level.

For the fourth level of participants' use of new knowledge or skills, the most reported application of learning was developing a school's vision and mission and displaying it at the school. A local trainer who also supervises principals' commented:

Now after the PLT programme, all schools have their own vision and mission statements. I think this an application of knowledge which creates motivation and inspiration at schools. It also shows the value of training that have an impact on schools (R.7).

However, five local trainers commented that schools have written visions and missions because it is a mandatory requirement nowadays. For example, one respondent explained:

It is an obligatory issue now that every school should have a vision and a mission. The principals have learnt from the PLT programme how to develop them. This example shows the importance when training matches what principals really need at their schools' (R.14).

The local trainers, including those who supervise principals at schools, explained that they did not document the participants' use of learning at the PLT. They justify that they were not trained or instructed from the region or the Ministry to produce such documentation.

For the fifth level of evaluation concerning students learning outcomes, the local trainers explained that there is no data regarding the performance of students before or after the programme. However, some trainers (four out of the fifteen) explained some examples of changes in the attitudes and behaviour of students when the principal adopted new strategies at schools as a result of their learning at the PLT. For example, a respondent explained:

One of the trained principals used to face challenges with students' behaviour and their commitment to learning. Then, the principal decided with his teachers to use a new communication strategy that he learned at the PLT of using a positive and encouraging verbal and body language with the students. After one month, most of the students became much committed and they behaved much better. R. 10

Twelve of the local trainers wished for professional development programmes for principals and teachers to be linked with their impact on students. They stated that the usual evaluation of training at regional level is an evaluation of participants' reactions at the end of each programme, without enough consideration of their impact on learning at schools.

5.3.3 Evaluation of their preparation

The local trainers' evaluations of their performance varied according to the way they were prepared as discussed in Section 7.1.1. The A-type trainers, who were trained by the American consultants on the content for six weeks with a further week on training skills, showed more understanding of the content of the programme, as they were privileged to have had first-hand experience with the PLT designers and trainers from seven weeks of training. However, they (total of three) raised two concerns over their preparation:

When we joined the PLT-three workshops in 2007, nobody told us that we will be trainers except when they invited us for a training of trainer workshop in July 2007. We would have prepared ourselves better if they informed us from the beginning of our roles in the project. R.1

We were trained in 2007; however, the scale-up started at the end of 2008, a year after our preparation. We lost lots of what we have learned. We had to go back to our notes taken during the training to recall the details of information. Particularly, the provided content contains only key themes and explanations. The important details were said verbally by the American experts. R.3

As the American experts left the country after the initial phase in 2007, they explained that their only resources for the content and process were the training materials that they had acquired and the knowledge that they had gained themselves. Therefore, there were individual differences between the local trainers in terms of their competency of content and processes.

The second type of local trainers (type B) were regional administrative supervisors (three) who had been trained by the American experts in June 2007, for a period of two weeks, on the content of transformational leadership and training skills. They explained two concerns:

Our training was very much condensed. In two weeks, they trained us both on the content of the first phase and on how to train as well. That was not a practical way to prepare a successful trainer. R.6

We were asked to train for the second phase of the programme on instructional leadership, but we were not prepared for it. They did not prepare us by the American experts as they did for the first phase. Our competency was based on our understanding of the training materials provided on the CD by the Ministry. R.8

Although this group play an influential role at regional level as they are trainers and supervisors at the same time, they explained that their preparation was not adequate as they felt that they needed to influence principals of varied years of experience. They stated that sometimes they are challenged with the competency of some principals during discussions at the workshops.

The third type of local trainers, type C (three supervisors and six principals), were trained locally in the earlier cohorts in their regions by local trainers and master trainers from the Ministry. These trainers commented that they were not prepared by experts but, rather, by their colleagues who were trained by the experts. For example, a respondent explained: ‘We were trained by local trainers who were either principals or supervisors and some of the content was not even clear to them. We should have been trained by the experts to be knowledgeable of the programme and to master the training skills’ (R.14). These trainers explained that there was a drop-out in training as they were trained by second-hand experience trainers. They stated that they were challenged when they started training, particularly when the trainees asked further questions regarding the content of the programme which they did not meet before.

5.3.4 Leadership theory and cross-cultural issues

For local trainers, one respondent of the type A trainers (trained by the international experts) said that educational leadership theoretical models are applicable to some extent if the principals understood them well. For example, one of them commented:

If theory proved to be successful in improving performance in schools in the USA, then I think we can use it to improve our practice. Education systems around the world use theories developed in Western countries. R.2

Similarly, another type-A trainer stated that:

When I started the programme in 2007, my expectation was that theory used in the PLT content is just something to ‘know about’ as knowledge on educational management. But through the explanation and reflection on practice I could realise that it is relevant in some way to practice. However, there are lots of limits in our context that require us to understand the theory within the limits of our context. R. 3

A-type trainers explained that their beliefs and attitudes towards the theories of transformational leadership and instructional leadership were shaped with the inspirational way of training delivered by international experts. For example, one of them explained:

The experts could convince us on the applicability of transformational leadership to our practice. They have inspired us with their way of training.

They have convinced us through examples that we have a choice in the application of theory and knowledge to our context. R. 1

Types B and C trainers explained that leadership theories are general and idealistic, while reality in schools and regions in Oman is specific. For example, one of them explained:

Theories in the PLT programme are translated from English. They have been developed by researchers in the West. The context of schools in Oman is different. For example, transformational leadership theory can be applied at independent or autonomous schools, like the schools in the West. It is not easy to convince school principals here to be transformational leaders. R.8

Besides the above mentioned trainers' attitudes towards theory, they explained that it was challenging introducing the concept of transformational leadership to participants. For example, a respondent explained:

The concept of transformational leader and transformational leadership is quite unfamiliar for the participants. The participants are familiar with terms like 'improvement' or 'development' which means improving the school according to the prescribed suggestions from the region or the Ministry, but the term 'transformation' has a connotation of 'major changes' or 'complete change' to the school. R. 5

Additionally, another respondent explained that the first module on transformational leadership was the 'comparison of cultures educational change between USA and Oman'. Participants would comment that the context in Oman is different at school level, and transformational leadership theory cannot be applied the same way. For example, a respondent commented:

When introducing the topic of comparing education change in USA and in Oman, participants usually argue that in the USA context, principals have more choice and authority. They usually comment that transformational leadership is more applicable to the USA context and it cannot be used the same way in Oman. R.7

Similarly, 12 of the 15 respondents commented that it was challenging trying to influence the mind-set of principals to change from 'managers' to 'leaders'. They explained that the term leader in Arabic has connotations of complete authority which makes it unrealistic to think of being 'a leader'. A respondent explained:

The term manager is translated to Arabic as 'mudir' which is also their official title. So when you ask them to transform from 'mudir' to 'qayed' (leader), they start to tell you their stories at school and regional level which contradicts the idea of being 'a leader' and the notion of 'transformational change'. R. 10

They explained that the concept of *idarra* (school management) has connotations of organising and managing day-to-day routines. Additionally, principals are assessed on the basis of expectations of supervisors. For example, one of the trainers who also supervises principals commented:

When we visit schools to evaluate principals we usually check the files and records and make sure that the principal have ready all the required records and that they are well-filled and updated. We comment on the basis of what we notice through the review of school's records. R.5

Similarly, for instructional leadership, local trainers indicated that the content did not make any explicit links between the transformational leadership and instructional leadership. A respondent explained further:

There was a long period gap between the first workshop on transformational leadership and the second workshop on instructional leadership, sometimes a year for some cohorts. Additionally, there is no explanation on how they are related either in concept or in practice. R. 9

Also, the local trainers explained that the curriculum and teaching strategies differed from each level of education (i.e., basic education cycle one (Grades 1-4), cycle two (Grades 5-10), secondary (Grades 11-12), and the PLT instructional leadership topics did not address the specific issues with learning and teaching at each level. A respondent explained further:

The topics on instructional leadership were general without examples or explanation of the real practice of teaching and learning in our schools. Also, some topics are relevant to the first cycle school like the topic of 'child centred learning'. There is an initiative of 'child centred learning' in the first cycle basic education schools. The PLT content is not reflecting the currently implemented instructional initiatives at schools. R.13

Additionally, five respondents commented that the instructional roles of a principal are not well specified. The curriculum textbooks are provided by the Ministry, and teachers are monitored by the subject supervisors at local level. A respondent explained further:

As the programme participants perceive themselves as responsible of management roles, it was not challenging convincing them to take instructional roles an act as instructional leaders. During training sessions, participants usually commented that we want to give them an extra burden and responsibilities beyond what they can handle. R.13

5.3.5 Gender and educational leadership development

The issue of gender in leadership preparation programmes was one of the themes discussed within the analysis of focus groups. This section will present data on the same issue from the perspective of local trainers. All respondents explained that female schools are similar to male schools in the way they are managed and the curriculum, but they differ in terms of the specific practices in the school, a respondent explained further:

All schools are similar in terms of curriculum and management; but they differ according to gender in terms of the way they act and perform and the way they deal with each other. As a supervisor, I can notice these differences when I supervise each type of school. R. 8

Similarly, five local trainers explained that during training sessions the attitudes and reaction of female participants are much better than the males, for example, a respondent clarified:

During training sessions females were more active, more punctual and keener to learn. On the other hand, males were more critical of the context at the region level and the Ministry level. That is why I think it was a good idea to train females and males together, this way females will influence the mind-sets of the males who resist change. R.7

Additionally, four of the fifteen local trainers explained that the way female principals influenced female teachers differed from the way male principals influenced male teachers.

A respondent explained further:

Female principals differ from males in the way they manage their staff and the way they deal with students. This is due to the impact of culture and nurturing of females. I think that management at female schools is easier (R.11).

Consequently, all respondents commented that the PLT and the other programmes for principals are general and do not address the gender issue, one of them explained: ‘The content of the PLT did not address anything with regard to gender although schools in Oman are classified according to gender. The challenges at each type of school differ’ (R.12). Therefore, some respondents suggested the issue of gender in the development of school principals at the region level through the type of supervision for female schools, and the Ministry level through considering gender in leadership development programmes.

5.3.6 Tri-level educational change

Thirteen of the respondents stated that before training principals and deputy principals on issues such as ‘transformational change’, there should be changes at both regional level and Ministry level on policy and practice. They commented that schools are recipients of reforms initiated by the various departments in the central Ministry and are supervised by the regional education authorities (DG of Education). Additionally, they commented that the authorities and responsibilities of principals should be aligned with the recommended roles in the PLT programme. A respondent explained further:

It is unrealistic for me as a local trainer to try to convince participants to be ‘transformational leaders’ in a centralised context. They usually argue they have no authority over staff and everything in the school is decided by the Ministry (R. 7).

Similarly, four of the fifteen respondents argued that the regional education authorities (DGs of Education) are also implementers. They added that change should start with policies and regulations at Ministry level. One of these respondents explained his experience in this regard with the PLT participants:

As local trainers, we face the criticisms from the participants on the Ministry’s policies and regulations, we were targets for their reactions towards the content of the PLT particularly with issues of strategic planning, strategic thinking and transformational leadership. R.11

Additionally, one of the respondents explained:

When local trainers introduce the new topics and recommend participants to apply them, they argue that the regional DG and the Ministry should start implementing them first before the schools do. For example, when we introduce the topic of ‘strategic planning’, they comment that there are no

strategic plans at regional level nor at Ministry level, why starting from the bottom of the pyramid. R. 12

Besides, thirteen of the respondents explained that after the training sessions the local trainers used to put down all recommendations of the participants for the Ministry. These recommendations were based on what they have trained on in the PLT. However, they explained that there was no action plan to consider the participants' recommendations. For example, a respondent clarified further:

At the beginning of the programme, master trainers told us to write down participants' recommendations for change at local level and at Ministry level. We have put down all their recommendations. But there is no response to participants' suggestions. Such an issue may consolidate the mind-set of some participants that they are just implementers and their voice is unheard'.
R.13

The respondents see the PLT as an initiative that requires changes at Ministry level and regional level before introducing changes at school level. This issue of tri-level educational change will be addressed at national level and at international level in the following sections.

5.3.7 Summary

This chapter presented the data from the providers of the training at local level, national level, and international level. At each level, there were variances of perspectives with regard to educational change and the development of school leaders. At international level, the international expert assumes that the context of schools in Oman can be understood through available models like Hofstede's framework. It shows that the international consultancies are confident of intervention in other educational systems through the available knowledge on comparative and cross-cultural educational leadership.

At national level, policy makers think that they can change practice through their 'top-down' actions and policies. They also believe that transferring policy from the 'model' education systems to their systems will definitely improve their education systems. They see the international consultancy as having the solutions to assist education change. More

interestingly, they assume that they have provided all the opportunities for principals and teachers.

At local level, there are far more complications than expected by those at the central Ministry's level. These variations were mainly caused by the cascade mode of the programme delivery. These challenges were not foreseen by the international consultancy or the policy makers. It seems that they assumed that the scale-up of the PLT would be typical in all regions which was not the case. These issues will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

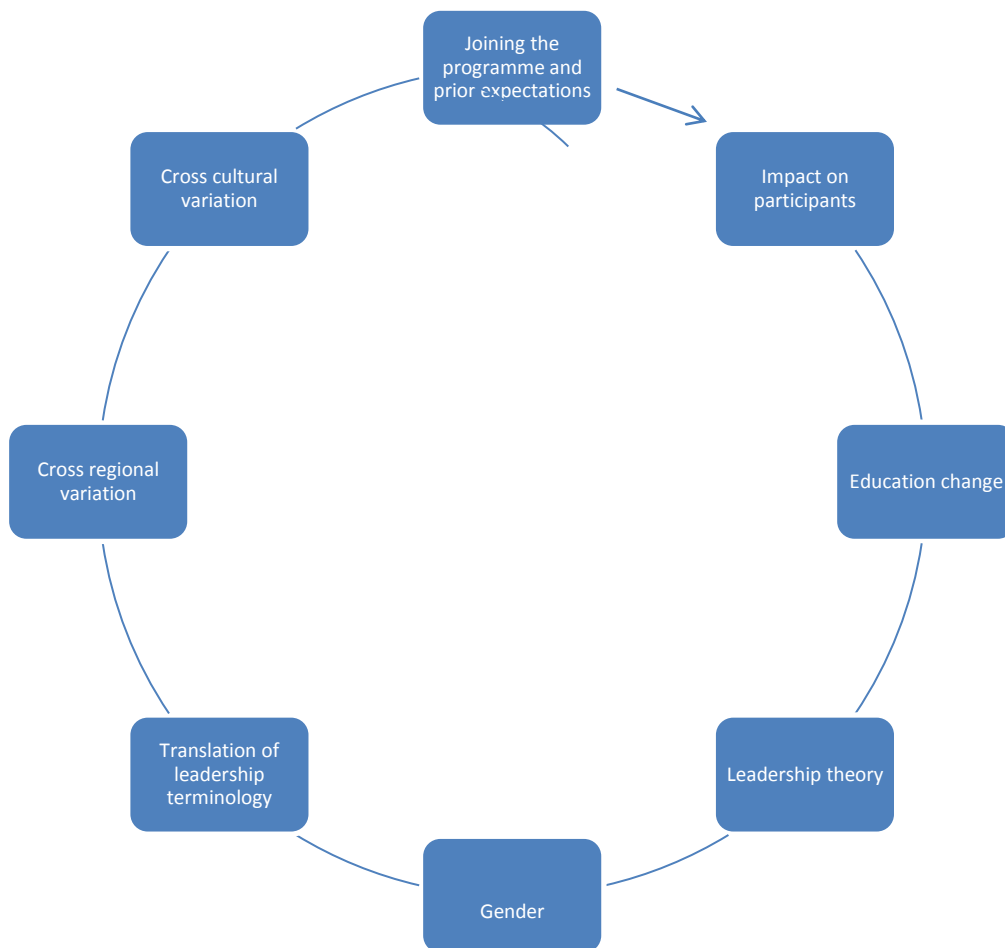
Analysis of the Focus Groups

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first section analyses the data according to a thematic framework. This thematic framework guides the analysis according to the key themes derived from the research questions, or are grounded in the data as this study is qualitative in nature and aims to investigate a phenomena in its natural settings that are not predictable. The following section will draw on implications and will discuss recommendations. The fourth section will summarise the chapter, and then introduce the following chapter.

6.1 Presentation of data

This section analyses the data gathered through the focus groups according to the key themes. As the Figure 1 shows, the analysis is presented according to the key themes which are a product of the coding process. Most of the coding themes were initially identified on the guidance of the research questions to provide an analytical framework based on the deductive method in order to ensure a focus on the research agenda. However, new themes and subthemes also emerged through a process of inductive analysis consistent with the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

Figure 5: Key Themes of Coding Focus Group Data



6.1.1 Joining the programme and prior expectations

This theme is relevant to answering part of the first research question regarding what had motivated participants to join the programme. The analysis of the documents in the previous section revealed the intention of both the international bodies involved in the programme and the Ministry of Education. Consequently, the focus groups' data focuses on what motivated the principals to join the programme. The participants' points of view will be compared with policy makers, in the seventh chapter, to find out the perception of each group towards the programme, and how similar or different they are.

All of the respondents in the five focus groups in each of the three regions stated that they joined the programme through a nomination from the regional education authority (Directorate General of Education, DG). The communication from the local office to the participants was usually through a written letter, in some cases by a telephone call to the school. The invitation to join the programme was usually within a short period of time before the start of the programme. The usual medium of contact to inform principals was via a written letter from the local DG to their schools as a respondent describes:

I received an invitation letter two weeks before the programme from the School Performance Development Section at the Directorate General of Education in the region. The letter contained the title of the programme and the duration.

Male cycle two school from Muscat region

For some other respondents (total of six), communication by telephone was the main method of contact, and this took place at short notice for cases when time did not allow for a paper letter. This was an informal way of contacting principals and it allowed a lesser amount of details on the programme. For example, a respondent explained how she was invited to join the programme:

The Schools' Administrative Supervisor called on the school's telephone some four days before the programme to inform me on my participation in the programme. When I asked for further details, the caller told me that I will know when I join the programme.

Female first cycle principal in Dhofar region

Participants explained that the previously described ways of communication and the amount of information provided had influenced their expectations and preparation for the programme.

All 15 focus group participants said that they were not expecting the PLT programme in particular, and as documents have shown, there is no formal requirement for training by the Ministry for principalship. A principal with eighteen years of experience said:

With my experience in principalship for eighteen years I was not expecting a programme of training in principalship, we should have had such programmes at the beginning of our career. Muscat Secondary female focus group

Another participant who was a novice assistant principal commented on his expectations:

I was expecting to be enrolled on training programmes generally, but I know that there is no must-to-do programmes for principalship. I was a teacher then directly I was appointed as an assistant principal.

Dofar second cycle Basic Education male principal focus group

The above data show similar findings to those in the document analysis in that there is no official obligation of formal training for principalship provided by the Ministry. The PLT programme, in particular, was not expected by the novice principals, nor the experienced; they knew about the PLT programme through the invitation-contact just before the programme.

The above discussion of how participants joined the PLT programme leads on to discuss their expectations before joining the PLT programme. There was a variation in responses as the nomination letter contained only the title of the programme without providing any further details. The programme title 'Principal Leadership Training' was translated into Arabic as (*parnamag tatweer maharat aledarah wal ishraf*) which when directly translated to English means: 'The Programme for developing management and supervision skills'. As a result, almost all responses of respondents showed their expectation that the programme will be on management and supervision skills. This shows how the connotations of the terminology of the leadership and management in the Arabic language have consequences on how respondents perceive them. For example, a respondent commented:

The invitation letter from the local education office mentioned only the title of the programme and its duration. There were no further details on the objectives and the specific content of the project.

Dahira female 1st cycle schools' principals F group

Some other participants stated that it would be more helpful for them if they had received more detail about the programme so that they could have prepared better for it. For example, a respondent commented:

We wished that we knew what we are going to learn so that we can prepare better for the programme.

Muscat male 2nd cycle schools' principals F group

Similarly, some other respondents added that they would have been more motivated and more confident to join the programme if they had known precisely what they were going to do in the programme.

Besides any prior expectations, some participants were even more concerned about what was expected from them as a result of attending the programme, when going back to schools and starting to implement what they had learnt. Some of them also wanted to know how the training was relevant to their career development. This issue was of a particular importance for them to find out before joining professional development programmes. For example, a principal explained:

We wished that it is clear for us knowing our future direction after the programme and how it will be linked to our career progression. We pay lots of time and effort in such training and we need to see the fruits of our efforts.

Dofar region male secondary schools' principals F group

This presents an interesting issue of how principals want to see the value of training before joining such programmes. It is an issue of motivation and commitment for the training. It also shows the procedures of communication between the levels of policy making (the Ministry) and the implementation levels of regional education authorities and the schools. Almost all the respondents declared that they received limited details on the programme and on what was expected from them, both during the programme and afterwards. This is one of the early findings regarding challenges at local level when the Ministry decided to scale-up the PLT programme. This issue did not equally exist when the international consultancy introduced the programme for a small sample of participants in 2007, and reported a high level of motivation and engagement (Seward, 2008).

6.1.2 Impact on participants

This theme is relevant to answering the second research question regarding the impact of the PLT from the perspective of the participants. With reference to Gusky's (2000) framework of evaluating professional development in education, the data for impact are analysed within a five category framework derived from the literature review on the evaluation of professional development in education. This framework will assist in providing a guideline for the analysis and align it to an established theoretical framework.

First, with regard to the first level of evaluation in Gusky's framework: (i.e., participants' reactions), the data collected showed two distinctive responses to the programme: one for the first phase of the programme, and the other for the second phase. As discussed in the context of the study so far, the first phase of the programme took place over a two week period, with a content of ten themes on transformational leadership skills; whereas the second phase was also a two week programme focussing on twelve themes of instructional leadership skills. All the respondents in the five focus groups in the three regions said that the first phase was generally useful and well delivered. However, for phase-two, three focus groups in Muscat (male, secondary, female secondary, male basic cycle two), and two focus groups in Dhofar (male secondary, male basic education cycle) felt that the first cycle had a much higher impact than the first. For the Dahira region, on the contrary, participants in all focus groups said that both phases were useful and beneficial. This variation between districts will be discussed in a forthcoming section.

Participants usually commented that the first phase of the programme had more of an impact because it was more relevant to their work. They perceived the second phase as being focussed on teaching and learning issues. For example, a principal stated:

The themes of the first phase were relevant to our practice in schools as they are on how to manage the school but the topics of the second were related to teaching like the topic of 'student-centred-learning'.

Muscat male principal of 2nd cycle schools F-group

Similar comments were also shared by the principals of secondary schools. Some participants gave examples from the content to show the extent of their interest in each cycle of the programme.

The topics in the first phase were on strategic planning and leadership skills, such topics are important. For the second phase, the topics were on teaching strategies and assessment which are not very related to our work as principals.

Dhofar region female secondary schools

In contrast, the principals from the first cycle of basic education schools usually commented that both cycles of the programme were useful for them.

The topics of both phases of the training programme were both useful for us. We have learned from the first cycle issues related to skills of planning and managing change in schools. In the second, we have learned how to improve teaching and learning.

Dahira region female first cycle basic education schools

This also shows variation in how participants reacted to the selection of content according to the level of the school (i.e. cycle one, cycle two, or secondary). They also commented that the second phase themes on instructional issues were relevant to a recently introduced initiative at their schools of child centred methodology. This may show the impact of introducing a typical content to all principals, regardless of their professional needs and the level of their schools.

There is also an important issue with regard to the delivery of the content. There was a variety of responses towards the content according to the region. For example, a respondent commented:

The programme content was translated from English. All groups are trained on the same content. Some of the content is sometimes unclear, when we ask for clarification, the local trainers do not show in-depth understanding of the content.

Muscat region female first cycle basic education principals F group

Participants explained that the quality of training, mainly in the Muscat and Dhofar regions, was inadequate in the second cycle of the programme. A respondent reported that some local trainers explicitly justified their performance because they have no choice over the content and how to deliver it:

The local trainers told us that they have the content from the Ministry and their role is just to deliver it. This was mainly in the second cycle of the programme.

Dofar region male secondary schools' principals F group

The issue of the quality of the local trainers' performance might be due to the selection of local trainers, which was mainly decided at local level. Thus, there is a need for further data from local trainers and from the master trainers in the Ministry on the issue of selection and development of local trainers. This is an issue relevant to pertaining how Omani principals can best be prepared and developed.

The data shows a relationship between the quality of delivery and participants reactions to the programme. For example, in the Dahira region, where the local training team was the same for both cycles and participants expressed their satisfaction with the quality of delivery, they also expressed their satisfaction about the programme in both of its phases. Whereas, in the other two regions where there were changes to the members of local training teams, participants showed dissatisfaction towards the second phase of the programme. This is an important issue to learn from on how to prepare national coaches in educational leadership. The documents did not provide adequate details on how the Ministry is going to prepare leadership trainers at local level. It seems, there was an expectation that education leadership can be developed with the provision of a well-designed content. There was not an adequate emphasis on the quality of delivery.

For the second level of evaluation (participants' learning), the data show diverse responses according to the phase of the programme and gender. Almost all of the participants in the three regions agreed that they have learned new skills and practices from the first phase of the programme. In all groups in all regions, respondents were not aware of the connection

between the skills presented in the first and second phase, an issue which was emphasised in the project's documents. A respondent explained:

Most of the skills we learned were in the first cycle of the programme, skills like planning and managing meetings. Most of the second cycle was theoretical issues on learning. The second phase of the programme which was a year after was with different topics and does not relate to the first.

Dhofar male second cycle basic education schools focus group

It seems that local trainers did not appropriately link between the themes of the first and second cycles of the programme. Transformational leadership was not well linked to instructional leadership, conducting such a link when demonstrating leadership theories probably requires a competent trainer in both knowledge and training skills. Additionally, as a result of the cascade mode of the scaling-up of the programme for a large number of participants, the duration gap between the two phases was a year or more. Such a long gap between the two phases may have caused the loss of connection between them. This contradicts the original aim of the design of the content proposed by the consultancy to build the capacity of principals of Oman.

For the third level of evaluation (organisational support and change), participants responses varied according to the phase of the programme and the region. Some respondents reported assistance from the regional supervisors after the first phase of the programme particularly in the Dahira region. For example, a principal stated:

After drafting the school's plan with a new vision and mission, the regional school supervisor assisted me with improving the vision and mission statements. This was a great thing to find support after the programme and find somebody to encourage you. Dahira 2nd cycle female principals' focus group

In contrast, respondents did not report any similar support after the second cycle of the programme. A principal explained:

Nobody from the DG followed us after the second cycle when we finished the whole programme. We were not sure what to implement after doing the second cycle.

Muscat 2nd cycle basic education principals' focus groups

It seems that there was no adequate linkage between the programme's goals of building the capacity of principals on the one hand, and organisational change on the other hand. The consultancy's study (Creative, 2005) recommended the Ministry to initiate a decentralisation plan to extend the autonomy of schools. In addition, the Ministerial documents regarding endorsement of the scale-up of PLT included goals of capacity building and autonomy. However, at the local district and school level, respondents stated that 'old practices' still remain in the region and they sometimes contradict with the recommended practices of the PLT.

Regarding the fourth level of evaluation (participants' use of new knowledge and skills), the respondents in the three regions reported that they had implemented changes in their schools as a result of what they learned from the training programme. However, all the examples mentioned by respondents were from the first cycle of the programme which focussed on leadership and management skills. As noted before, respondents commented on the second phase of the programme as being focussed on teaching and learning issues. The most frequently reported application in schools was strategic planning and developing a vision and mission for the school. For example, a respondent explained:

I have changed the previous way of planning which was just to fill a form. I have formed a team at my school to write a vision and mission for the school with a plan. This was very much appreciated by my staff.

Muscat female secondary schools' principals' F group

The other type of application of learning from the programme was meeting management. Respondents in all regions reported that they had changed or improved the way they manage meetings in their schools. They acknowledged the value of what they learnt in the programme, particularly on the modules of its first cycle. A respondent explained his experience:

I have applied the tips and suggestions learnt from the programme on managing meetings in my school.

Dhofar male 2nd cycle schools' principals F group

The other most frequent application is community and parent involvement in the school. In almost all of the focus groups there was at least one example. For example:

After the programme, I initiated on a new procedure for community involvement. It worked very well. I have invited parents for meetings and used the involvement strategies I have learned to influence them on involvement and participation in school.

Dahira male 2nd cycle schools' principals F group

Additionally, some respondents reported that they had implemented communication strategies. Participants explained how they had introduced changes in the way they communicate, either in written language or spoken language. A principal explained:

I am using the listening skills I have learned from the programme when dealing with my teachers. I have also improved my choice of words when talking to them in order to encourage them and to build good relationships with them.

Respondent A., Dahira female 1st cycle schools' principals F group

As explained above, almost all of the use of knowledge is for skills learnt in the first phase of the programme, focussed on management and leadership skills. This may show the effects of the previously outlined variation in the quality of delivery between the two phases of the programme. Additionally, this may be linked to how the respondents perceived their roles in schools as mainly a managerial role as teachers are being assessed by subject supervisors from the local authority in the District (D.G. of Education). This is an issue which is linked to principals' roles, an issue that requires additional data collection and will be presented in the following chapter on individual interviews with participants.

Regarding the fifth level of evaluation, which was the impact of the programme on students' learning, the purpose of the PLT programme was to assist educational change in Oman. However, as explained in the literature review, the evaluation of the impact of leadership

programmes on students' attainment is a complex issue in the research of educational leadership. Some of the respondents reported that the relationship between the principal and the teachers has improved. Some others said that the teachers' motivation for teaching has increased. All their utterances expressed changes in some aspects of school culture that are usually linked to good learning. There is no single known study in Oman, as far as I am aware, that evaluated the impact of an educational initiative with regard to students' learning.

Principals raised their concerns over the impact of the huge amount of initiatives and programmes implemented by the Ministry at school level on the performance of students. Most of the respondents said that schools become distracted with the high levels of duties and requirements that they receive from various departments of the Ministry and the regional education offices. The principals explained that some policies and practices do not assist schools in improving the learning of students in the classrooms. They suggested that the development programmes of teachers and principals should be aligned with proper policy and practice to assure an effective impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

6.1.3 Education change, policy borrowing and transfer

The analysed data, presented below, provides an informative insight into policy borrowing. It also provides a deeper explanation and exploration of the data collected from the documentary analysis. The data shows the complexity of policy implementation and contextual variation in managing reform-initiatives through the usual top-down cascade mode of programme delivery. The documentary analysis has shown the Ministry's ambitions to reform its education system through their knowledge of best practices of the top achieving educational systems. The data from the PLT may provide a perspective on how policy borrowing and transfer is taking place in the context of education systems in Oman.

In almost all focus groups, the respondents raised the issue that the Ministry has introduced many initiatives at school level within the last fifteen years. These initiatives are usually introduced in collaboration with international consultancies specialising in international development education - the PLT being one of them. Some respondents explained that schools are overwhelmed with the number of reform initiatives which have come from the

various departments of the Ministry, and consume much effort from principals and teachers.

To provide an example of a frequent comment usually discussed in the focus groups:

There are lots of initiatives and programmes implemented at our schools; they take lots of time from us and from our staff. We are not very sure if these initiatives supported students' learning or only added more workload to our schools.

Muscat region-male principals- cycle schools F group

Other respondents also complained about the number of tasks required from the principals by the local education authority (Directorate General of Education). They described that they are very much driven by the managerial requests and regulations from the local education authority. They believe that the Ministry should evaluate all the current reform initiatives before introducing more projects and initiatives. For example, a principal commented:

We are overwhelmed with the amount of work required from us for the Directorate General; I sometimes do not get time for a glass of water. They should evaluate current position of reform before introducing more initiatives.

Respondent E., Muscat region female cycle 2 schools

For some other respondents, they argued that the whole process of policy making at Ministry level should be reformed. They commented that some policies and programmes do not match with the real context at school level. Some principals stated that the big amount of initiatives has distracted the focus on learning and negatively impacted on students' attainment.

Policy making at the central Ministry should be reformed and aligned to the real context of schools. The level of students' attainment is deteriorating because of the implementation of the new teaching and assessment reforms.

Dhofar male secondary principals' schools F group

As all initiatives in schools are introduced by the Ministry, to local districts, to be implemented in schools, it was noticed in discussions that respondents justified what they think of as failures or challenges to policy making Ministry level, and to the way the local education authorities work and deal with initiatives.

Most of the focus groups (twelve out of the fifteen) raised the issue that some of the current practices at district level do not match with the content of the PLT programme. They stated that the programme recommends principals follow the ideal practices on management and leadership, whereas some practices at district level contradict with the principles of leadership introduced in the programme.

Some of the practices at the regional DG contradict with the principals of good educational leadership introduced in the PLT programme, for example, the managing of meetings. From my experience in attending the meetings at the DG., they are not managed as the way we were trained at the PLT programme.

Dofar region male secondary schools' principals F group

The key message in the first cycle of the programme is to change from 'a manager' to 'a leader'. The documents have shown that the American consultants faced challenges at the beginning of the initial programme in changing the mind sets of the principals. The data from the focus groups show that principals acknowledge the idea of 'a leader' in theory, but in a real context the principal usually takes on the role of 'implementer' of policies. A respondent explained:

The programme introduces the idea of becoming 'a leader' instead of 'a manager', this may be applicable in theory or in schools in the West or the independent schools in Qatar, but how can you become a leader if your role is to do what has been told.

Dhofar Secondary male schools focus group

This is an issue which shed light on how applicable to the context the content introduced in the PLT. Most of the respondents critiqued the idea of transforming themselves into leaders where they lack authority over their schools.

Additionally, introducing new changes to schools requires adequate support. As discussed in the previous chapter, the consultancy's document recommends providing adequate support for principals to assist them in the implementation of the new learning in the programme. The consultancy declared in its document that training alone is not enough; supporting principals

and schools is essential for the success of the intended changes. However, the respondents report that there was no post-training follow-up programme to assist principals. The lack of adequate support has influenced the implementation of changes, a principal explained:

Initiatives and reforms usually come from the Central Ministry to schools through the local education directorates and implemented at the school levels. Sometimes, schools do not get adequate support from the local directorate. This creates challenges for school principals. Sometimes, when we introduce new changes to our schools, we get opposed from some people at the local DG of Education. They tell us to get their permission first.

Dahira male secondary schools principals' F group

Therefore, respondents usually expressed the urge for a systematic education change. This need was typically highlighted by the experienced principals whom usually explained a mismatch between the levels of decision making at Ministry level, district level, and school level.

The respondents expressed an important issue in education change. They explained that it is essential for them to learn about the Ministry's policy behind initiatives like the PLT programme. Some of them said that the more they knew about the Ministry's intentions behind the initiatives, the better they could be involved with it. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the data shows that principals had no clear expectations before joining the programme. One principal explained:

For us as school principals, we do not know what the plan of the Ministry is neither the objectives behind all the initiatives in schools. The Ministry should evaluate the current policies before implementing any more in schools.

Muscat male 2nd cycle schools principals F group

As described in the context, there is a political dimension behind the policy transfer through the PLT programme. The MEPI patronage and funding of the introductory phase of the programme in 2007 was under its goal to 'democratise' the Middle East. The contracted consultancy providers used theory and knowledge from the USA. From the Ministry's perspective, the attraction behind the initiation of the PLT was its often declared policy to

learn from the ‘best international practices’, and based on its commitment to education reform, it decided to nationally scale the programme up. However, as the responses of the participants have shown, the adoption of the borrowed policies may not fit, or contradict with, the context and the culture particularly. There is also another issue with regard to the interplay between PLT and context which is the limited support provided to the principals after the programme.

6.1.4 Leadership theory and frameworks

This theme is relevant to answering the third and fourth research questions regarding the cross cultural perspective of educational leadership theory and practice. With reference to the education policy documents and the PLT programme’s documents analysed before, the Ministry is keen to improve education in Oman by learning from the best practices of other high performing education systems. The major education reform in Oman was introduced with the technical assistance of a Canadian consultancy. The idea behind the PLT, as discussed previously, was that learning knowledge and skills for school improvement can make a difference at school level.

For theory, respondents had various views on the relevancy of theory on educational leadership and management to practice. The newly appointed principals agreed that learning theory of educational management through academic or professional programmes is important for good practice. Most of the experienced principals think that practice in schools is different from theories. Some of them think that the learning of school management comes through on-site learning through doing and practising. For example, a principal with an MA in Educational Administration from the local university commented:

I have done a Masters in educational administration at the university; the degree provided me with academic knowledge. For the skills, I only learned them from real practice in schools.

Dahira 2nd cycle male focus group

Usually, the experienced respondents with a postgraduate qualification in educational administration share similar comments to the above. They think that university qualifications are for academic purposes, and are usually theoretical and do not represent real life practices.

Similarly, some respondents (22 respondents from 12 focus groups) explained a contradiction between the way theory was used in the PLT-programme's content and the real context of schools. Some of them commented that theories usually represent ideal situations while in real practice there are many contextual variations and challenges. The following sub-sections will provide more detail to explain the two key theoretical models of educational leadership.

6.1.4.1 Transformational leadership and instructional leadership models

According to the PLT-programme's documents, the theoretical models used in the content of the PLT programme were mainly transformational leadership and instructional leadership. The purpose of using such knowledge on leadership as described in the project's documents was to build the capacity of school principals in Oman with skills of improving the practice and performance of their schools. One of the analysed documents showed that the international experts attempted to align the aims of the project (PLT) with appropriate knowledge on educational leadership (SEWARD, 2007).

The literature review discussed the background of these two theoretical models and their relevancy to practice in their original contexts. Such theoretical frameworks require particular settings and conditions in order to be well implemented. As explained before, the PLT programme showed that it aims to develop school principals as 'transformational leaders' and as 'instructional leaders'. As outlined in this study's research questions, the key issue to fill the gap of knowledge is to know how appropriate the leadership models are for the unique context of Oman.

The data show inconsistencies between the way the two models were presented and real practices in schools. The authority and power of school leadership in Oman's schools are shared with various departments at the local education authorities and the Central Ministry.

The respondents said that their roles in schools are mostly managerial. They act according to the established norms of principalship which they gained from previous model-principals. Their practice is also influenced with the expectations of the supervisors and other administrators in the regional authority who conduct monitoring and evaluation visits to schools. Such an issue create a collective culture within each district on the basis of expectations of the schools' supervisors and the staff at the regional education authority.

Most of the practices in our schools regarding like the daily time table, curriculum textbooks, teaching and assessment and even my files and documents should be done along the expectations of the DG Of Education and the Ministry. We are accountable to them. The content of the PLT should have been aligned to the real practices in schools.

Muscat second cycle male schools focus group

Most of the participants (53 respondents from the 15 focus groups), think that the transformational leadership model is not exactly applicable with the way it was introduced in the PLT, and they suggested adapting it to the context. The respondents commented that their schools are not independent bodies in order to act as a transformational leader, but rather, branches or leaves for the big tree (the Ministry and the local authority). Almost all respondents said that the programme entitled them to write their own vision, mission, and a strategic plan in a context where almost all the policies and practices are described by the Ministry or the local authority. They added that the regional education authorities do not have a vision, a mission or a strategic plan. A respondent explained:

There is no vision or mission for the Ministry neither for the DG of Education. How do they ask us to develop our own vision and mission statements and plan strategically? , How leadership is introduced to the system from bottom up at the school level, they should start from the Ministry then to the region then to the schools.

Dofar secondary female school principals' focus groups

Additionally, some of the respondents explained that the local trainers did not have the capacity to adapt theories to local contexts. For example, a respondent explained:

I think that one of the challenges with the model of transformational leadership was that the local trainers could not explain it well and link it to practice in our schools. They depend only on demonstrating the given explanation and examples in the content.

Muscat first cycle schools' principals

Moreover, the respondents described various contradictions between the model and the context. They claimed that the model assumes that principals have total authority and power over staff and what happens in schools, which is not, in fact, completely accurate. One of the challenges that was shared by almost all of the focus groups was the principal's power and authority over the teachers, and the other school's staff who are employed and paid centrally by the Ministry. The respondents explained that they lack any coercive power or reward power over their staff. For such a reason, the respondents clarified that they use other types of power to influence mainly transactional and collegial types of leadership. This type of power was mainly significant in female focus groups. This practice in schools shows that it is influenced with personal relationship-oriented leadership rather than task-oriented leadership, principals usually practise transactional leadership. For example, a principal clarified:

We influence and lead teachers from a humanistic collegial way, otherwise, they will not obey. So in some instances, how to instruct the staff to perform, some staff refuse to be under the control.

Dofar secondary male principals' focus group

It was obvious that principals mainly in the male focus groups link their perception of how much power and authority they have with the notion of transformational leadership.

Some respondents explained that the context in schools has many limits that hinder the principal from becoming a transformational leader. In most of the focus groups, participants highlighted that the role of the principal is mainly managerial. A principal explained:

There are limitations in schools to be a transformative leader. The expected role of a principal is not to transform but to manage the school. May be the term 'improvement' is more realistic than 'transformation'.

Muscat 2nd cycle male principals' focus group

Some respondents link the concept of transformation to political leadership, thinking that it is related to people with charisma and power to transform.

This concept can be understood with political leadership, but not with school leadership because of limits. Our job in schools is to improve the school's performance, the Ministry can transform the whole system not ourselves.

Dahaira female 2nd cycle focus group

Additionally, another issue with the transformational leadership model and its applicability to Oman's context is the extent of future orientation. Schools' principals in Oman conduct their school planning on the basis of a prescribed annual planning form developed by the Ministry. The interviewed principals described that they do this planning as a managerial requirement as they will be inspected for the proper filling of the form by the local education office. Moreover, the respondents explained that principals are transferred from one school to another frequently without the consultation of the principal, which means that they do not stay for long periods of time in one particular school. Such a context limits the opportunities of transformational leadership in schools which usually depend on longer periods of time.

Similarly, the analysed data show that the introduction of the instructional leadership model was not appropriate to the context. As described before, the second phase of the programme focussed on developing instructional leadership. In respondents' responses to a question on what the relationship is between the first and the second phase of the programme, all respondents were unaware that the second phase (instructional leadership skills) complemented the first phase (transformational leadership skills). Some respondents commented on the second phase, 'it is not on school management and what we do on a daily basis, unlike the first phase'. The data show that respondents are centred on managerial leadership, as most of them expressed their roles in the usual management tasks. The respondents commented that the explanations and the examples provided were from USA-schools, for example:

The examples provided are from the American school system. The context of schools in the USA is different from Oman. I have been to some schools in the USA and I saw how the environment was different from our schools.

Muscat region 2nd cycle female principals' focus group

The respondents also mentioned other contradictions between the realities of their context and the essence of the instructional leadership model. One of them was the complexity of instructional leadership roles between the key players within the tri-level system in Oman: the Ministry, the local education office and the schools. Almost all the respondents claimed that they perceived their roles in schools as managerial roles. Other respondents explained that intervening from the local education office limited them to day-to-day managerial roles. Moreover, the teaching/learning issues are handled and inspected by the curriculum inspection section at the local office. For example, a principal commented on his perception of transformational and instructional leadership with regard to his context:

The focus of a principal is management roles because of the current pressure and practices from both the Ministry and the local education office.

Dahira region second cycle male focus group

Some respondents (34 from the 15 focus groups) clarified that the Ministry recently introduced further reforms with regard to instruction in schools, while the PLT content was not updated to respond to the new reforms. A respondent further clarified:

For example, the Ministry had introduced a new post in schools: a deputy principal for academic affairs; however, the local trainers are still using the same content on instructional leadership without consideration to these changes in schools.

Dhofar second cycle basic education school principals

Additionally, for some participants, the framework of the instructional leadership was not clear to them, and was not introduced with explanatory examples from their context. This was clearer in the responses of the secondary schools and the second cycle schools' principals. For example, a principal commented:

The relationship between instructional leadership and its relevancy and actual practice was not well explained.

Dofar region 2nd cycle male schools focus group

Some of them added that the concept was not clearly explained in the Arabic content of the programme.

There are some context specific issues that were not considered in the content of the programme. For example, the supervision of teachers and teachers' lessons is performed by staff at the local district education authority.

Now there is a senior teacher who takes over teachers, regional supervisors for curriculum take over responsibility on subjects.

Muscat region secondary schools' female principals focus group

Respondents explained a hierarchical scheme of supervision of teachers in their schools with a senior teacher for every subject. They commented that these details were not linked with the model of instructional leadership.

6.1.5 School leadership and gender

The data revealed a very interesting issue that was not initially considered in the research questions, the issue of gender and school leadership. It was neither considered in the analysed documents of the project or the policy documents. It has been said that the context of Oman is unique with regard to the role of women, because the position of the women in Oman generally is very much developed compared to many other countries in the region. Women in Oman enjoy all their rights with regard to education and jobs (Ministry of Information, 2012). For schools, the international assessment comparative study TIMSS showed that female students in Oman are outperforming male students (World Bank, 2011). The World Bank recommends conducting further study on this issue of the gap in performance between male and female schools (World Bank, 2011).

The explanation of the context of the study has shown a difference in the setting of schools in Oman with regard to gender from Western countries. In Oman, the first stage of basic education schools (Grades 1 – 4) is of mixed gender and staffed only by female teachers, and managed by a female administration. For the second stage (Grades 5 - 10) as well as for secondary schools (Grades 11 - 12), the students are of the same gender and are staffed only by the same gender of students. Therefore, principals in Oman practise school leadership with staff of the same gender. During the pilot focus groups, participants raised the issue of gender as an important issue with regard to leadership development, as some participants noted that it is not the same issue in real practice, although it was not considered in the content of the PLT.

For the issue of gender of participants during the PLT training, respondents in the three regions provided similar responses on their points of view regarding the training of both genders in the same workshops. They agreed that it was a good opportunity for them to be familiar with the context and practice in the other gender schools. Female respondents commented on the behaviour of male principals during training, in that they complained more about the context, and were more resistant to change than the female principals. A female respondent explained:

Male principals usually prefer to discuss challenges in their schools during the workshops. Sometimes, we got distracted from focussing on the content of the programme. Sometimes, the local trainers lose control over the discussion and cannot manage the time probably. I prefer to learn new things instead of complaining.

Dofar secondary female schools principals' focus groups

They added that the presence of female principals was influential to male principals to change their mind-sets about the opportunities of change and leadership in their schools. Some male principals acknowledged that female principals were more committed during training sessions than the male participants.

Female principals are usually more committed and more active than the males during the professional development programmes.

Dahira secondary schools male principals' focus groups

This combination of males and females seems to have created a positive environment for sharing ideas and learning from each other. However, training materials do not provide any guidelines on how to make use of these mixed respondents. Additionally, the local trainers were not prepared to handle the gender variations in training needs and preferences on leadership development.

However, some participants (34 from the 15 focus groups) think that joining male and female principals in the same sessions was better for learning leadership and management skills from the real practice of the other gender. One principal commented:

It was great to share ideas and benefit from them, and they can learn from us as well.

Dahira 2nd cycle basic education male schools' principals

However, some participants raised the issue that female leadership is different from male leadership, an issue which was not considered in the content of the programme according to the documents.

The nature of female schools is different from males, for example, communication is more in female schools especially for mothers who visit female schools are more than fathers visiting male schools. Muscat female secondary schools' principals focus group

Similarly, one principal explained that the way in which a female principal influences her staff is not precisely the same way as a male principal would. She argued:

For female leadership, I think influence through experience will have great impact on influencing over people.

Dahira female 1st cycle basic education schools' principal focus groups

The male principals think that the females tend to obey more than males. That is why they think female leadership is quite different and is easier.

The difference between a female principal and a male is that females are more obeying policies and regulations; women are more accurate than men and take care of the details. On the contrary, they are less flexible and less confident than men.

Dofar male secondary schools' focus group

Similarly, male principals think that the way female principals lead female teachers is not the same as the way the male principals deal with male teachers.

The way a female manages and leads a school differs from a male principal. This is because of the nature of female staff and female students. Girls are by nature well-disciplined and eager to learn more than the boys.

Muscat male 2nd cycle Basic Education schools focus group

Such a rich variation in responses regarding the issue of gender in leadership development highlighted by the respondents was not considered in the design of the PLT by the international consultancy. It was also not considered by the Ministry in the scale-up of the programme.

6.1.6 Leadership terminology in Arabic

The translation of educational leadership and management from English to Arabic is one of the issues relevant to this study, as this is an issue of epistemological and ontological considerations. The knowledge used in the programme was developed in the English language, while it was introduced to the participants in Arabic, where participants activated their schematic knowledge in Arabic and constructed meaning in Arabic. The documents have also shown that the American consultancy has translated and revised the content translation into Arabic by means of a translator in the USA. The Ministry of Education used the materials provided from the consultancy in the initial phase of programme delivery in 2007, and on the national scale-up of the programme.

As discussed in the literature review, the English terms for leadership had emerged over the years through research and practice interactive process - the terms used to have roots to the practice over years. This means the leadership terminology (in English) represent concepts

that are realistically practised and experienced in their indigenous Western context. As a result, it was essential to investigate the perceptions of the trained respondents in Oman, particularly after the end of the role of American consultants and as Omani trainers became responsible for training delivery.

As explained in the analysis of the programme's content, the translation was based on transferring the meaning to Arabic as there are no equivalent terms already in use in Arabic. For example, the term 'a school' is translated into Arabic, the equivalent term is *Madrasah* which has existed in the Arabic language for centuries. However, for terms such as 'transformational leadership', the translation procedure is not to find an already equivalent used term but rather to translate the meaning of the term 'transformational' and the term 'leadership'. As a result, the Arabic term is 'alqiyadah a'tahweeliyah'. One respondent commented:

This term is not usual in the Arabic discourse used by the Ministry and in schools. It seems it is a direct translation from the English.

Muscat second cycle basic education schools

However, this is an issue which may raise issues on academic accuracy in the transfer of knowledge in educational leadership: whether to translate the meaning directly to give the original connotation in English, or to translate it to adapt the discourse used in a particular context, such as in Oman. This remains an area of research of scarce sources.

The respondents in the three regions said that they recognised during the first days of the training that the training materials were translated, and not authentically written in Arabic. They discussed this with the local trainers whom confirmed this also. The respondents used this sense of translation to argue that the programme did not represent the local Omani contexts. Those who took the MA in Educational Administration using Arabic, commented that the programme neglected literature on leadership written by Arab scholars on management and leadership where they used Arabic terminology which is more familiar and frequent. For example, a respondent explains his experience with the translation of the terminology:

The terms were not clear from the first time. But, we could understand the terms used in the programme through explanation of the concepts and through discussion. We know that these terms are translated from English.

Dhofar region secondary male schools' principals F group

For some other respondents, the clarity of the terms depends on the respondents' prior familiarity with them. They recall their prior learning and understanding of the terms. For example, a respondent commented on the translation:

Sometimes the translation of the terms from English to Arabic is clear, like the term strategic planning; but for other terms like transactional leadership, they are not clear from the first instance.

Dahira region female 1st cycle basic education schools' principals F group

Some terms were considered as more clear like the Arabic equivalent for education, culture, theory, practice, evaluation, planning, and reform. They justified that such terms are usually frequent in the discourse used by Oman's Ministry of Education. However, for some other technical terms, such as the Arabic equivalent for strategic, transactional, transformational, change, instructional, etc., the respondents said their meaning was unclear from the first instance, but with explanation and providing examples from the context they could understand them.

Some terms are familiar; but other terms like transactional leadership, transformational leadership or strategic thinking are not very clear.

Dahira male 2nd cycle schools' principals F group

One of the issues in the translation of leadership terminology is contextual appropriateness. Translators usually tend to transfer the word from English to Arabic on the basis of the word root equivalence. For example, the word 'leadership' is transferred to Arabic on the basis of the verb 'lead' and its meaning. I was using such techniques myself during my experience in oral and written translation at the Ministry. However, when the term is translated into Arabic, people will understand it on the basis of its Arabic roots and connotation, particularly for those who do not speak English and are not aware of the original term in English. For example, the term 'leadership' is translated to as 'qiyadah', which is also the equivalent term of 'commandership'. It was outlined in the literature review that the term 'leadership' (in

Arabic) is sensitive in Oman. Some respondents clarified such understanding for the term, for example a respondent commented:

The term ‘qiyahah’ (leadership) usually connotes to absolute authority over followers, like leaders in the Army.

Dofar male secondary schools’ principals focus group

The Ministry’s documents do not use the usual Arabic translation for leadership ‘*qiyadah*’, but, instead, uses Arabic terms that are equivalent to ‘principalship’ or ‘headship’. The focus groups’ data show that respondents conceptualise the indigenous connotations of the Arabic term for leadership ‘*qiyadah*’ that represents charismatic top down leadership. One of the documents of the Ministry on the guidelines of research advises researchers to avoid using the term ‘*qiyada*’. Such an issue of translation creates challenges on how to convey the exact concept of the terms without mixing with the connotations of the indigenous terms, or that are not permitted within the discourse of institution.

Similarly, respondents also noted other terms. One such term was ‘change’, which translated into Arabic as ‘*tagyeer*’. This term in Arabic is usually used to mean ‘replacement’, and usually used to replace something bad or old with something good and new. Another similar term which respondents have raised was ‘*tahweeliya*’, which is the Arabic term for ‘transformational’, an adjective used with other nouns such as leadership and change. The respondents felt that they could grasp the meaning of the concept after explanation, but the Arabic term does not give clear meaning from the first instance.

6.1.7 Cross regional variation

The sample of respondents was chosen to reflect the diversity of the context of Oman. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, one of the aims of maximum variations from the choice of regions was to select them on the basis of geographical and demographical diversity. The project’s documents outline that the training of the delivery to regions is based on a cascade mode. However, the documents do not discuss any inter-region variation. The

Ministerial documents have shown that there is a practice of central planning for professional development at the Ministry.

One of the variations was in the impact of the project. Respondents' responses varied from one region to another to show that the impact was not the same although the content of the programme was the same. This is an interesting issue as the programme's documents did not indicate any such expectations. These variations will assist in learning about leadership development at local and school level, and about education change at micro level.

Data show that impact in the Dahira region was the highest among the three regions - almost all respondents of the focus groups in the Dahira region (18 respondents out of a total of 25) reported impacts either in knowledge, skills or attitudes. Furthermore, Dahira was unique for the respondents' satisfaction over the second cycle of the programme, unlike the other two regions where respondents usually commented that it was not beneficial for them. For example, a respondent from the Dahira region explained:

Both cycles of the programme were beneficial for me, I have learned from both of them. I really need such programmes in the future.

Dahira female 2nd cycle schools' principals focus group

In contrast, most respondents in the other two regions explained that they did not learn much from the second cycle of the programme (16 from Dhofar out of 25, and 18 in Muscat out of 25) . They commented that they did not see any link between the first cycle and the second cycle. Some of them stated that they only learned about knowledge, but there were no skills to learn unlike the first cycle of the programme. For example, one of the respondents stated:

I liked the topics of the first cycle, but the second cycle was boring, I did not learn much. I have done a university degree in educational management just a couple of weeks before joining the second cycle.

Muscat female 2nd cycle basic education schools' focus group

The above discussed variation between regions in the impact of the PLT programme refers mostly to the quality of delivery, according to the rationales provided by the respondents; the variation was mostly for their points of view over the second cycle of the programme. One of the major notices between the Dahira region and the other two regions was that in Dahira the local training team remained the same for both cycles, this team was trained from the beginning of the programme by the American experts and by the central team. Whereas, in the other two regions, respondents reported that new trainers from the region joined the local team. These new trainers were usually from the previously trained principals. One of the respondents commented:

Most of the trainers in the second cycle were from principals of the previous cohorts of the programme. I do not think that they are capable of providing good training.

Muscat female 2nd cycle basic education focus groups

Some of the respondents from the Muscat and Dhofar regions (18 respondents from the 10 focus groups in the two regions) differentiated between the first cycle of the programme and the second.

The performance of the team in the first cycle was much better than the second. In the second phase, new trainers joined and they were not professional in training and do not have adequate knowledge of the content.

Dofar 2nd cycle basic education schools

In contrast, in the Dahira region, respondents positively commented on the training team of both cycles of the programme. They commented that the training team remained with almost the same personnel and with the same quality of delivery. A respondent commented:

The training team here in the region was great in both of the cycles. They were skilled, we have learned a lot from them.

Dahira Male 2nd cycle basic education focus groups

The sustainability of the local training team who were trained at the central Ministry had a key impact on the quality of delivery. It is obvious that the quality of managing the programme at local level is influential in achieving its intended goals.

The aforementioned discussion of local trainers is linked to another issue of variation between regions which is the quality of delivery. In the Dahira region, respondents positively commented on the way the workshops were delivered either for the first cycle or the second cycle; respondents reported various approaches of training that were used during the workshops that represent the local trainers' capability. For example, one of the respondents explained:

I think, in my point of view, the success of the training in both of the workshops I attended was because of the way training was delivered. They used games, activities, and group work.

Dahira first cycle focus group

Another respondent added that, to show their skills:

Sometimes, when there are sections in the handouts which are unclear, local trainers can adapt it or change it with another one from their own design. Even, they used to give us further examples and clarification from their own knowledge.

Respondents in the Dahira region almost agreed on their satisfaction over the styles and approaches of training used in both workshops; whereas the respondents in the regions of Dhofar and Muscat explained that the way of training in the first cycle of the programme was much better than in the second cycle. They explained that in the second cycle most of the training was lecturing and reading from presentation slides. Some other respondents clarified that in some sessions they spent most of the time discussing challenges in their schools, and the local trainers usually could not control the discussion and became distracted from achieving the goals of the session. For example, a respondent explained:

The training in the first cycle was interesting. There was a master trainer from the Ministry who used to assist the local trainers. For the second cycle, training was merely lecturing and reading from the slides. I preferred if they gave us the slides and we went home instead of wasting our time.

Muscat female 2nd cycle Basic Education focus group

Another respondent similarly clarified:

I have learnt a lot from the first cycle of the programme because of the selection of topics and because of the procedure of the training. In the second cycle, some local trainers were not well prepared and they only read the PowerPoint slides and lecturing. They did not provide good answers when we asked questions about the training topics.

Dhofar male secondary principals' focus group

In almost all of the focus groups in Dhofar and Muscat, respondents reported similar comments on the processes of training delivery in the second cycle. It seems that the previously discussed was the key reason for their evaluation of the impact of the second cycle of the programme.

6.1.8 Cross-cultural variation

The issue of cross cultural, international and comparative educational leadership was one of the key issues revealed and discussed in the context and documentary analysis chapter. It was also discussed in the literature review as a key issue of interest by researchers in the field. Furthermore, as this study has some aspects of a vertical case study, it will vertically compare the issue of culture from a vertical perspective: international, national and local. This will assist with how we can epistemologically learn from the vertical comparison through understanding how theory is influenced by a particular context, and how we can use it to understand another context such as in Oman.

Almost all of the respondents in the three regions showed an awareness of differences in cultural aspects between the content of the PLT programme, and their national and local context. They perceived the issues related to culture in the programme through the provided examples and explanations in the translated content. Respondents reported contrasts between the cultural features in the content and the reality in schools' and local cultures. Almost, in all the focus groups, respondents explained that there are differences between the culture of schools, and of society in Oman and the culture in the West. For example, one respondent commented:

Our culture and context is not the same as in Western countries. They have their own unique culture and practices which can be different from ours. Dahirah region-Secondary male principals F-group

Some of the respondents (14 respondents from the 15 focus groups) gave examples of issues related to societal culture. For example, the programme on the time management module suggested saying 'no' to save leaders time, but they said it was not socially applicable to say 'no' to parents, especially any elderly people when they make unplanned visits to see the principal. A principal further explained:

It is not acceptable by parents to excuse not seeing them, even if their visit is not for an important issue. The local community is expecting a very warm welcome when they visit the principal in the school. A principal has limited control over his time; whereas, in the West it is acceptable to say 'no', and excuse not to meet if a principal is busy.

Muscat secondary schools' principals' focus group

Similarly, another respondent clarified the way the school and the local society interact:

The culture and context of Oman and our region is not like the context in the USA, the way the society here live and act influences the way a principal behave and act'

Dhofar region Basic Education cycle 1 female principals, F-group

Some other respondents also gave further examples of variations in societal culture that influences practice at schools. One of the examples was parental and community involvement, and the strategies of communication which are preferred and influential within each local community. Another example discussed in some focus groups was the time issue, and the psychology of time and how is it linked to culture. They explained that in local culture, time is present oriented or short-term future oriented. The other issue was the ethnographic complexities of local communities, such as the tribal system, as well as the system of social conduct practised locally.

The other type of cultural variation as explained by the respondents was the variation in the institutional culture. They explained that the education system in Oman is not the same as education systems in the West. Some of the respondents who have visited schools in the West through official visits arranged by the Ministry, stated differences to show such variations. One respondent explained:

The practice of schooling in Oman is not the same as in Western countries. I have visited some schools in UK and saw lots of differences. The education

systems in the West are differently organised and managed. Therefore, we cannot as principals use exactly the same strategies used by principals in the West.

Muscat region-2nd cycle females F-group

The respondents gave further examples, such as how school buildings are organised, classroom resources, timings of the day, and the school calendar.

Some other respondents went into more detail to variations in terms of philosophy of education, and its linkage to morals, values and religion-rooted disciplines. Participants explained that education and educational leadership should be linked to Islamic and national culture. Some of them opposed the idea of the globalisation of education on the basis of other contexts that are different from Oman. One of the respondents explained:

Morals and good values are the cornerstone of our society. We do not educate students for the job-market as in some other countries. The government has re-realised the importance of morals and values in education after the protests inspired by what called so far Arab Spring. Morals and values are essential for our education system.

Muscat female principal 2nd cycle (5-10 grades) schools F-group

Similarly, some other respondents explained that educational leadership introduced for Omani principals should be linked to the Islamic perspective of leadership. A respondent explained:

Our societal values that are derived from our religion should be considered in schooling and in leadership and management of schools. We can learn a lot about leadership from our Islamic history; that will be more relevant to our understanding of leadership.

Dahira region Female 2nd cycle schools principals

Some other respondents stated that leadership development should respond to the unique contextual challenges, and should be dynamic and responsive to the challenges at school, local and national levels. They explained that the real challenges facing principals at school level are not incorporated into the programme's content.

It is noticeable that the current generation is negatively changing from previous generations. There are lots of concerns on the behaviour of current generations. Schools should play a key role in building good future generations and should respond to the regional specific social changes.

Dofar Male secondary school principal

Such insights may provide guidelines for designing leadership development programmes and for the process of developing school leaders. Such an issue should be a comprehensive process and should be concerned with the various levels of practice.

6.2 Participants' recommendations

The participants in the focus groups suggested recommendations from their point of view as practitioners in schools. Some of them argued that they are more aware of the context in schools than anybody else because they are the closest to teachers, students and the learning settings. Some of their recommendations were regarding policy and practice whereas some other recommendations were on educational leadership programmes and the PLT programme.

Participants raised some recommendations on policy. They recommended reforming the current practice of school management in order to align it with the way of principalship. Some of them said that change usually comes from the top without considering the real practice at schools. They suggested becoming involved in the process of planning educational initiatives and reforms. One respondent explained:

A principal is an implementer of regulations and policies from the Ministry, he has no choice.

Dhofar 2nd cycle Basic education male principals

Therefore, most of the focus groups (13 out of the 15) recommended involving them in the process of policy planning. They stated that they are the ones who will implement policies and initiatives at school level. One principal explained:

We wanted to be involved in policy in schools, principals should be involved in the policy and reform of education.

Muscat 1st cycle Basic Education

Some others (14 respondents) clarified that being involved in policy making and planning initiatives will assist in their participation in leadership development. They explained that they will be more knowledgeable on the Ministry's policies and plans, such an issue will assist their leadership development.

For the issue of developing school principals, the respondents explained that there is no systematic procedure to train principals. Within the focus groups, there were principals who had postgraduate university qualifications in Educational Management, whilst some others had no training other than the PLT programme. One respondent commented on the current context:

The current training of principals is ad hoc. There should be a systematic procedure of leadership learning.

Dahira secondary schools male principals

Consequently, the interviewed participants recommended a national scheme for leadership development proposing the development of a system for career progression in school principalship that is linked with a scheme of leadership development programmes.

There should be a particular programme that is linked to each post in the leadership journey.

Muscat Basic education second cycle female

Respondents recommended establishing a variety of programmes with various levels of competencies that fit into various stages of principalship.

For the content of the programme, participants recommended forming a balance between theory and practice. The experienced participants especially recommended incorporating the content of a leadership programme with issues that are relevant to the practice in schools, focussing on skills rather than knowledge. One respondent explained:

There should be a combination of theory and practice in leadership programmes. The practice should be relevant to the real practices in our schools in order to make a linkage between the theory and what we do in schools.

Muscat secondary schools female principals

Similarly, other respondents (26 respondents) suggested including practical issues from schools in the training programmes. They explained that such a combination of theory and real practice will develop their skills in the workplace. One respondent, for example, explained:

The programme should include practical issues in schools in order to assist us to tackle the challenges in schools.

Dahira 2nd cycle male school principals

They argued that training programmes will be more beneficial if they prepare principals for real practice in schools.

With reference to the three levels of schooling (cycle one, cycle two, and secondary), the respondents of each focus group recommended providing educational leadership programmes according to the type of school. One respondent explained:

The content should be relevant to the level of school, the conditions of the first cycle schools are different from the conditions of the second cycle schools and the secondary schools. Therefore, the content of the programme should be relevant to the context and practice in schools.

Dhofar 2nd cycle female principals

The respondents explained that in each level of schooling the challenges of leadership are different to the other level. They mentioned various variations between the types of schools, such as age of students, students' behaviour, number of staff, etc.

For the theory of leadership, participants recommended adapting the theoretical models of leadership to the context of schools in Oman. They advised using theoretical models in the Arabic language that are relevant and applicable. They commented that, otherwise, theories will be considered as irrelevant to practice. They also recommended using examples of leaders from Islamic and Omani history instead of the translated example leaders and their quotes from other contexts. They claimed that such examples will be more convincing to participants if they were from leaders and events from Islamic history. To provide an example quote:

There are lots of brilliant examples from the history of Prophet Mohammed that are inspirational on leadership. These examples will be easily understood and more convincing for leadership concepts.

Dahira region 2nd cycle female principals

This recommendation was frequent in all focus groups in the three regions. Some participants noted that the use of examples from the Western context show that leadership is a Western issue and not relevant to their real practice.

More specifically, for the transformational leadership model, focus group participants recommended aligning the model to the limits of authority in Omani schools. Some of them suggested changing the currently used direct translation of the term ‘transformational’ to another term which equivalent to ‘improvement’. Others recommended using examples from Omani schools and of Omani principals to clearly link the model with practice. They felt that such an adapted model would be important for novice principals who want to see the linkage between knowledge and practice in schools. For example, a principal stated:

The transformational model should be adapted to the practice in schools in Oman. The examples given to explain the model should be from Omani schools.

Dahira secondary school female principals

Similarly, for the instructional leadership model, the principals recommended aligning the model with the instructional responsibilities of Omani principals. They also recommended

reforming the current duties of a principal to provide more opportunities to practise the skills of an instructional leader.

6.3 Summary

This chapter has reported the findings of the focus groups. This stage of data analysis followed the earlier findings from the analysis of documents on the context of education change in Oman, and on how the PLT programme was initiated. The focus groups' analysis has partly answered the research questions from the perspective of the programme participants who represent the implementation at local level. Findings have shown that implementation functioned in a way that had not been predicted by the policy makers (national level) nor by the American consultancy providers (international level). At the implementation level on a national scale, there were many variations and challenges that were not foreseen after introducing the programme by the international consultancy in 2007 when the programme was introduced for a small-scale group of 22 selected participants.

The analysis has shown that introducing changes at school level is more of a complicated issue than policy makers assume. It is also beyond the expectations of the international consultancy providers working in the field of international development education. However, it can be learned that capacity building at local and school level will remain the most effective solution for the future of education reform in Oman in general, and for developing school leadership in particular. The practise of leadership development should be aligned to context and real needs of principals and schools. The use of the theory of educational leadership, and the translation of knowledge in the field in Arabic, is recommended to make it fit the context for an influential use of content in educational leadership programmes.

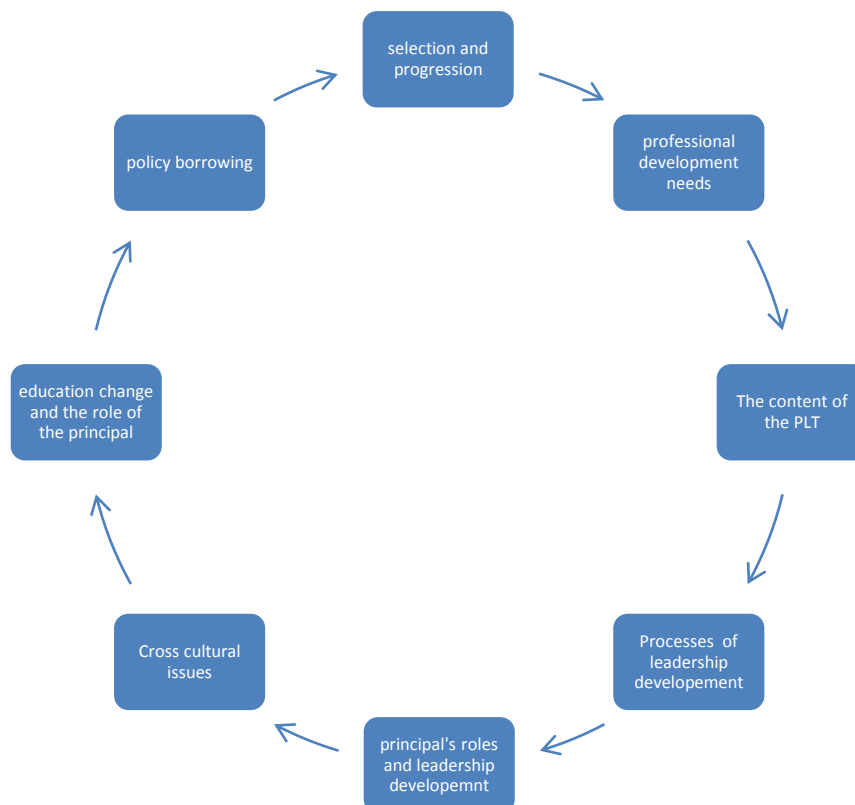
Regarding further data, the analysis shows the need for further data from two categories of participants: the most experienced principals, and the least experienced principals. This issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Analysis of Principals' Individual Interviews

This chapter presents the data gathered through the individual interviews. This stage was based on the previous stage of focus groups; it was explained in the analysis of focus groups that further data are required from two categories of participants of the focus groups: the most experienced (five years of experience and more) and the least experienced (less than five years). The focus group data show a variation in responses in the focus groups according to the experience of a participant and his past training history in school management. The data were analysed within the thematic framework outlined in fig.1 with implications for improvement suggested by the respondents within each thematic category. The coding themes were initially created on the basis of the research questions and on the categorisation of the data into themes.

Figure 6: Key themes of analysis of individual interviews with participants



7.1 Selection and Progression

The data of this theme are regarding the selection and progression of principals. These data will provide clarification on the procedures of selecting principals in Oman in order to provide a better understanding of leadership development and how educational leadership programmes should be designed. The selection of the experienced principals (15) was with fewer procedures than the selection of novice principals and deputy principals. An experienced principal explained:

I was the only national teacher in my school and the rest were expatriates. The people at the Directorate General of Education (local education authority) appointed me a principal at the same school. R.2

On the contrary, for the novice principals (15), the procedure of selection was more systematic, a newly appointed deputy principal explains:

I have applied for the post through filling a form and sending it to the DG of Education at the district. I was interviewed at the DG office here at the district. Then, I was interviewed at the Ministry level. R. 5

For the current selection procedures, some respondents argued that it does not assure a perfect selection of good principals, a principal explained:

You may be able to explore the personality of a candidate through an interview, but this does not assure the good selection because there are lots of other issues like attitudes, skills, a personality that you cannot become aware of by a short interview. An experienced principal, R.8

Ten of the less experienced and twelve of the experienced respondents believe that good selection procedures should have a component of assessing candidates' skills and attitudes in the work place. Further, they believed that a starting principal should be continually assessed before being officially appointed as a deputy principal or as a principal.

For progression, respondents think that the current practice of progression in principalship posts from a deputy to a principal is through the availability of a vacant post in the region,

and the availability of financial grades from the Ministry. For example, a respondent explained:

There is no consistent procedure for progressing from a deputy to a principal. Some people stay for a year or two at the post of a deputy then they are promoted to a principal, while some others stay for many years as a deputy. R. 10

In such a context, the progression in the principalship post is not linked with professional development programmes or academic certification, a principal who recently took part in an academic programme explains:

I was a deputy principal at a first cycle basic education school. Then, I joined a higher diploma programme at the university as a full time student. After the programme, I returned to the same post in at the same school. Nothing has changed to my career. R.11

Similarly, many respondents commented that the PLT programme is not well linked to progression in principalship. They noted that its participants are from various stages of principalship.

The newly appointed principals and deputy principals have explained that the Ministry has endorsed the PLT programme as a professional qualification required for officially issuing an appointment decree from the Ministry, a principal explained:

Doing the PLT programme is currently mandatory to get approval from the Ministry for official appointment by the Human Resource Department at the Ministry. The PLT have replaced the higher diploma programme at the university which was required for official appointment. R.13

On the other hand, some experienced principals (six out of fifteen) argued that they were officially appointed as principals and obliged to join the PLT programme. An experienced principal explained:

I have been a principal for many years. I have joined lots of professional development programmes here in the region and at the Ministry's training centre, why do I still need to join the PLT as it is now considered a pre-request for official

appointment. We should have had a different more advanced and more highly regarded programme. R.16

Respondents also discussed the issue that principals are not prepared for a particular level of schooling (i.e. level of school: basic cycle one, basic cycle two and secondary). A respondent explained:

Principals do not stay with the same type (level) of a school. The DG of Education sometimes moves principals from a secondary school to a basic education school or vice versa. The most recent policy is to remove the level of the school from the title and just to give a principal the title 'principal'. R.3

This recent policy described in the above quote may show that the Ministry assumes the capability of a principal to manage any type of a school regardless of its type of the three: basic cycle one, basic cycle two, and secondary. However, respondents have two different points of views regarding this policy. The first agrees with the Ministry's policy and they think that a good principal can work in any condition, for example, a respondent explained:

I think there is no need to identify the type of a school in the official title of a principal. I think when a good principal is transferred to any school, he can manage the school. R.16

However, this view was opposed by some other respondents (six) who think schools have differences according to their level which means variation in the age of students, behaviour, and the teaching and learning. A respondent explained further:

From my experience, each type of a school has different demands on a principal and requires skills relevant to the level of the school. When, they moved me from a second cycle school to a first cycle school, it took me months to adapt; I have faced new challenges because of the age of young students and the type of teaching and curriculum at this stage. R. 19

It was explained in the context that the programme's documents show that the original content was developed by the international consultancy for secondary school principals with a suggestion to adapt for the other levels. However, the Ministry replicated the same content for all the participants regardless of their type of school. Thus, this discussion of variation in

responsibilities and demands at each stage leads to the discussion of the professional developmental needs and their variations.

7.2 Professional Development Needs

The professional development needs described by the participants varied according to their experience and their previous academic qualifications. This variation in experience has influenced their attitudes towards the PLT programme. As was discussed in the context, the international consultancy has designed the PLT programme on the basis of two sources: a survey of needs from a small sample of secondary school principals in the Muscat region, and conducting an analysis of the needs for the current reform of education in Oman through interviewing some of the key policy makers at the Ministry. When the training provider (Seward) delivered the programme in 2007 for a small group of 22 secondary schools' principals, the international experts noted variation in professional needs and attitudes, although the group was small, and they had to adapt (Seward, 2008). Therefore, with the replication of the programme nationally, the variation in the professional needs of the participants is too diverse, as the following discussion of data shows.

For the less experienced principals (15), their professional needs are centred to transform them from teachers to principals:

I have served as a teacher for seven years, then I was appointed a year before joining the PLT programme. I wished if I had had training on management skills that can prepare me for the expected duties. R.17

Similarly, another less experienced principal added that the PLT, on the contrary, introduces skills which are more suitable for competent principals, as the principal explains:

The PLT programme includes topics which can be demanding for the starting deputy principals, topics like 'leading change in school' or 'the school culture', I think that a starter deputy principal needs first to understand regulations and build confidence skills. R.29

Another deputy principal argued that professional development of principals should be assessed according to individual needs rather than a programme that fits all. The principal explains:

My professional needs may differ from the needs of other principals and deputy principals. I think that the professional development of a deputy principal or a principal will be more beneficial if it is based on actual needs of every individual.
R. 19

The starting deputy principals and principals explained that they need a specialised professional development that builds their capacity as they are in their early years of principalship. A principal explained further:

My learning of principalship was through learning from working with the principal as I started as a deputy principal. I have learnt most of the practices by my personal effort. I wish if there was a clear system for learning skills of school management'.
R.29

For the experienced principals (15), they have explained that they did lots of professional development programmes. Some of the programmes were delivered locally and some are centrally at the Ministry's main training centre. A principal explained:

I have attended many programmes here at the local education training centre and at the Ministry's centre. However, most of these programmes were short workshops usually a day, two, or three days and they are not designed within a training plan that is based on needs analysis. R. 28

Additionally, the data show that most experienced principals usually have one of three types of academic qualifications in educational management: BAs, higher diplomas, and Masters degrees. The BA in Educational Management was a qualification designed by the local university for principals with a diploma qualification in teaching. The higher diplomas are for principals who have a university BA qualification. The MA in educational management is a two year full time programme provided by the local university. However, the experienced principals stated that they were not asked about their qualifications before joining the programme. A respondent explained:

Every principal was invited to join the programme without consideration to their qualification. I wished if the Ministry gave me the opportunity to continue my study and do an MA instead of the PLT. R.14

However, some experienced principals (four responses) felt that PLT was a good opportunity to refresh their knowledge on educational management. A principal further explained:

I think it was a great thing to learn from each other regardless of our experience. It would have been better if the programme was organised in a way that the less experience principals learn from the experienced. R.16

In addition, experienced principals suggested (seven responses) that they can participate in the provision of professional development programmes.

7.3 The Content of the PLT

There was also a variation in responses between the experienced and less experienced principals. The less experienced principals explained that the PLT programme provided them with a knowledge base on educational management. For example, a respondent stated:

The programme provided me the first opportunity to learn about management and leadership and the difference between both terms. I have read a book on leadership before, but I could not understand the difference precisely except at the PLT programme. R.17

Some others (five responses) justified their need for knowledge at this stage of their career in principalship, for example a respondent clarified:

At this stage, we practise management in our schools but without being aware of the principles of good management. Further, we have benefited from the content in improving our practices, for example how we can use various types of power to influence our staff. R.7

Similarly, four of the less experienced principals explained that learning the basic management skills was most useful for them in the programme content. A respondent explained:

The advantage of the programme's content in my point of view was learning about management skills that we really need at this stage of our career, skills like time management, team management and meeting management. We almost perform these skills on a daily basis. R.21

However, six of the less experienced principals noted that some topics in the programme were demanding for them in terms of understanding them and applying them in schools, a respondent explained:

Some of the topics were not easy to comprehend or to apply at school. For example, the topic of 'change' and the seven stages of introducing change at school. I think that it was not appropriate to learn about change management before learning the other basic skills of management. R.25

Eleven of the experienced principals feel that the content of the PLT is not new to them in terms of knowledge. For example, a respondent explained:

Almost all the topics are not new to me, for example the issue of the difference between management and leadership is an outdated issue in my point of view. There are more contemporary issues in leadership, topics like 'leadership in the 21st century'. R.22

Four of the experienced principals explained that the content is not new in terms of the titles of the topics, but there were further useful explanations within each topic, a respondent clarified:

Although the titles of the topics were not new to me, I have learnt new things from the explanations. For example, I have read before about strategic planning but I did not know about the procedure of doing it, so the PLT has added to my learning. R.14

Similarly, five of the experienced explained their preference of reflecting on practice in their schools when introducing the knowledge in the professional development programmes for principals, a respondent explained:

We have read and studied lots of issues on management and planning, it is good to be knowledgeable on these areas. However, we need to link the knowledge with our practice in schools. We need to discuss and evaluate our practices in schools in order to improve them. R.24

Despite the variations in responses between the experienced and the less experienced principals, they have some shared opinions about the content of the PLT programme. One of the shared remarks over the content was the translation of the content. They all noticed that the Arabic content was translated rather than originally being written in Arabic. For example, a respondent explained:

We have noticed from the first day of the training that the content is translated. It was clear from the choice of the words and phrases.

The least experienced principals (15) found some topics more demanding, for example, nine of the least experienced principals and deputy principals stated that the understanding of the Globe study was demanding for them. For example, a respondent clarified further:

Some topics in the content were difficult to understand, for example the topic of Globe study and its details. It was difficult to understand and I do not see how relevant it is to my work or how beneficial. R.5

This challenge for the less experienced principal was because the content was not graded according to the proficiency of participants. This issue leads to the discussion of the issue of processes of development used by the PLT trainers in the regions.

7.4 The Processes of Leadership Development

The data show a variation between the less experienced participants (15) and the experienced participants (15) with regard to their opinions on the processes of professional development. The less experienced participants think that the learning of the novice deputy principals and principals should be on-site in the school, a respondent explained:

I think that learning the skills of school management is through learning them at the school. I have learned lots of skills when I was a deputy principal through learning from the principal. I think that the Ministry should make this type of learning more organised and official prepare the new deputies. R.17

Similarly, another less experienced principal added:

I think for proper preparation of a deputy or an also for a principal, there should be a programme of learning through practice under the supervision of an experienced principal who proved to be a good model for the others.

Additionally, four of the less experienced principals recommended that each district should design a professional development scheme for every novice deputy principal according to needs analysis, a respondent explains further:

I think that the needs of every person differ from the other. In the PLT programme, they used the same training strategies for the same skills. In my point of view, the way of training should be according to the needs and preference of the trainee. R.15

Five of the less experienced participants added that they wished they could have accessed the materials of the PLT before the programme.

It would be a great idea if the materials were made available through the Ministry's portal on the internet. Such a thing will assist us to prepare for the programme in advance. This could have assisted us to cope with the experienced principals. R.7

7.5 The Roles of the Principals and Leadership Development

The issue of principals and deputy principals' roles is linked with leadership development, as the key goal of leadership development programmes is to prepare school leaders to fulfil their expected roles in schools. With this regard, the data showed further variation regarding respondents' roles more clearly than was initially noticed in the analysis of the focus groups. The first difference in respondents' roles is the difference between the roles of principals and the roles of deputy principals. For example, a respondent clarified further:

The role of a deputy principal is not the same as the roles of the principal, particularly now with the new changes of assigning two deputies: one for administrative and financial affairs and the other for educational affairs. Now, there are also other assistants at the school's administration. R. 8

Similarly, a respondent explained:

The roles of a principal and a deputy principal are different in many ways. The preparation programmes should be relevant to the roles. The deputy principals were trained on the PLT programme with the same training as for the principals. R.19

This inclusion was not acceptable from the point of view of experienced principals:

I think it is not appropriate to bring us as with long experience in school principalship to have training with the new deputy principals. They should have their own programmes that fit to their roles. R.4

There were some contextual changes after the initiation of the PLT with regard to staffing school administration. A respondent clarified:

The Ministry has recently introduced new positions at the school's administration, there should be a more organised and relevant professional development according to the expected roles. R. 21

As a result, many respondents recommended clearly defining the roles of the principal, the deputy and the assistants. For example, a respondent argued:

With the newly introduced changes to the number of people working at the school's administration, the roles of every person should be clearly identified. R.20

A principal explained his challenges with the identification of roles and how such an issue creates challenges to the practise of leadership at schools:

I have requested a task from one of the newly appointed assistants but he rejected justifying it is not his duty. He complained at the responsible section in the local DG of education and they supported him although there is no official job description for the assistants. Such an issue limits the authority of a principal over the staff. This is an issue which contradict with what we have been taught at the PLT programme. R. 12

Similarly, another respondent added:

The increased number of staff at the administration added more challenges instead reducing the load on the principal because roles are not specified from the Ministry. This is an issue that creates more challenges for the new principals. R. 21

With the lack of a formal job description for the principals and the deputy principals, the roles are implicitly acquired through context, and from previous practices of principalship that are consolidated as a culture within a school or region, a respondent explained:

When I started my career as a deputy there were no written descriptions for the job. I have recognised my roles through my observations of what is practised by the previous deputy. Then, I learnt through practice in the school and through dealing with people from the local DG of Education. R.10

The roles of a principal and a deputy are probably shaped with the expectations of the supervisors and other staff at the local DG of Education as the schools are in a position to follow the guidance from the top (the DG). An experienced principal explained:

The satisfaction of the people at the local DG of Education is important even if you are not convinced with their guidance. Sometimes I work after school time just to avoid a negative comment from a young visitor from the DG. R.24

Similarly, another respondent noted that the lack of a formal job description increases the burden on the school principals and makes evaluation ambiguous. An experienced principal explained further:

From my experience, when you are doing very well at managing your school, you may be appreciated by the visitors from the DG of Education; but, if they recognised a single negative point, they'll comment on it and it may be considered as a mirror for your performance. That is why school principals work hard to be on the safe side. R. 12

Some other respondents also discussed that there are no professional standards for principals in Oman. For example, a respondent argued:

There are no official standards for principals in Oman yet. I think with the lack of standards, the judgment will be on personal views. For example, sometimes an administrative supervisor comes and gives guidance which may contradict with other supervisors. R.16

With such absence of formal identification of roles of principals and deputy principals, some respondents questioned how the PLT programme was designed> For example a respondent commented:

As there are no formal job descriptions for principals and deputy principals, on what basis was the PLT programme designed?, How were the suggested roles of a

transformational leader and instructional leader decided and introduced in the content of the programme. R. 16

Similarly another respondent explaining the expected roles at the region level added:

In the PLT programme, the training aimed to change participants from managers to leaders, while at the region level the expectations of the roles remained the usual as before. R.13

Eight experienced and nine less experienced respondents remarked that the Ministry should reform the regional education authorities (DG.s of Education) before introducing changes to schools. For example, a respondent explained:

I think that the Ministry should train the regional DG of Education's personnel on good leadership and management before training the principals. Our roles are very much linked with how the regional DG of Education manages schools and their staff. Therefore, the roles of the regional DG should be reformed in accordance with the principles introduced in the PLT programme. R.10

Similarly, another respondent added:

You cannot introduce changes to the roles of principals through training only. There should be changes of practices at the regional DG level. Principals' roles should be clearly identified including specifying the amount of authority provided for them that enables them to practise leadership roles. R. 6

Six of the experienced respondents even suggest reforming the current policies at Ministry level to assist the roles of the principals at schools. For example a respondent explained:

If the Ministry wants to enable principals to take leadership roles at schools, the policies related to schools should be reformed, for example, the policies related to the principal's authority over teachers and staff. The reform of such policies will enable principals to perform according to the principles introduced in the PLT programme of being a transformational and instructional leader. R.22

The above quotes show that principals see their current roles mismatching with the desired roles in the PLT. Furthermore, they explained that their roles are very much shaped by the institutional culture at region level as the principals react according to the expectations of the education authority in each region.

7.6 Cross-Cultural Issues

One of the cultural issues described by the respondents which influenced the practice of leadership by principals in Oman is the society and local culture. Additionally, there were variations in responses between the experienced and the least experienced principals and deputy principals. A respondent explained this issue further:

From my experience as a school principal, the school is influenced with the local society. The local society and its culture influence the school through factors of the type of the students, the extent of supporting their kids and how cooperative with the school. R. 2

Seven of the least experienced principals and deputy principals reported that they find dealing with local society a challenging issue. For example, a respondent explained:

When I started my career the most demanding issue was to deal with the parents and local people. This is a very important skill as it determines the success of a principal at the local community. R.11

Another less experienced deputy principal (two years) stated his experience with the local society:

My big challenge was the involvement of parents in the school. I have tried various ways to involve parents to assist with the learning of their kids but I could not. How can I make the changes proposed at the PLT programme with my local challenges not addressed? R.5

Two experienced and six least experienced argued that the PLT programme's suggestions were based on the context of society in the West. For example, a respondent commented:

I think that the programme considers the community and family context as similar as the West. In the West, it is different; the family takes full responsibility of educating the child at home, whereas, here, the school takes all responsibility. R.13

Another respondent explained that there are various contextual challenges with regard to society and its influence on school leadership in Oman. For example, a respondent explained:

Usually, families have a large number of kids. Sometimes, parents are illiterate, they cannot help their kids. The life in the community is very social and parents do not have time to stay with their kids. R.9

Additionally, one of the cultural issues highlighted by participants was the clarity of metaphors used in the programme, for example, a respondent explained:

Some of the metaphors used in the programme are unusual for us. For example, when they discussed the team work, the metaphor used to clarify the concept was 'the monkey on your back'. It was not clear for me at the beginning. R.15

Similarly, another respondent explained:

One of the metaphors used in the topic of school culture was the 'unwanted culture sale' in showing how to change the school culture. The concept of culture sale was difficult to understand at the beginning. R.11

Two experienced and three least experienced justify the difficulty of participants to understand the metaphors and examples provided to the local trainers, for example a respondent explained:

I think the reason for the non-clarity of some of the examples and metaphors was due to the local trainers who were reading the translated-to-Arabic-content without being aware of the original content and original meanings in English. R.10

An experienced English speaking principal gave an example of how translation from English to Arabic influenced the original meaning, she explained:

There was a quote in the English content which reads: 'peak performers live at the edge of their competence and when they fail, they fail forward'; the phrase 'fail forward' is translated into Arabic as 'fall forward' and local trainers were demonstrating the action of falling forward to explain this quote from the Western culture. There are much clearer proverbs in Arabic, they could have used them. R. 20

Another experienced principal also explained a contextual variation with regard to practising leadership at schools in Oman:

In the leadership topic, there was a quote which reads: 'principals should spend 75% of their time in leadership and 25% in management, this equation can be

implemented at schools in the USA but I do not think that it is possible here in Oman. R. 20

Additionally, participants stated that they found some of the translations in the content demanding. It was more demanding for the least experienced principals than the experienced ones. For example, an experienced principal commented:

I have met many of the terms used in the PLT programme in my MA at university, terms like: management, leadership and school planning. However, there were some terms which were new for me like 'backward mapping'. R.14

In contrast, for the least experienced principals and deputy principals, most of the terms were new to them as the PLT was the first professional development programme to them on leadership, a two year experienced deputy principal explained:

Most of the terms were new to me. Some of them were easy to understand with explanations like the term 'school culture', some other terms were difficult to understand, such as the terms 'transformational leadership' and 'transformational change'.

It may be that some participants find the Arabic equivalent for the term 'transformational' demanding to understand because it is never used in the discourse of the Ministry. An experienced principal clarified:

The Ministry do not use the term 'transformational', the usual term is 'improvement', even the title of the PLT in Arabic is 'The improvement of Principals' skills', the PLT programme should have used instead terms that are more relevant to the context and to the usual discourse.

Respondents also noted that some topics may contradict with the real practice at schools. For example, in the topic of 'strategic planning' it was recommended to plan strategically for three to five years, which contradicts the current practice at schools. A principal explained:

At the programme, the training was to develop a plan for three years or more. The actual planning in schools required is for a year through filling an official planning form mandated by the Ministry.

There were differences in cross-cultural variations of meanings between the original terms of the content in English and their translations into Arabic. For example, the term 'leadership' which was translated in the content as 'qiyada', had a variation of connotations between the

less experienced and the most experienced principals. The less experienced principals think that it is linked to commandership and authority. For example a respondent clarified:

Leadership is a concept usually used in military; army officers have complete authority over the soldiers. A leader can punish or reward a soldier. In contrast, schools works under civil service law, a principal has no such power. R.11

Most of the less experienced principals (eleven) stated that the key role of a principal or a deputy principal is management. They were cautious about the use of the Arabic term for leadership, a respondent clarified further:

The official term for our practice is 'idara' (management). We do not use the term 'qiyadah' (leadership) either orally or written. It was only been used in the content of the PLT programme. After the programme we did not use the term any more. R.19

For the experienced principals, the term was familiar due to their previous professional development programmes and academic qualifications. For example, an experienced principal explained:

I have learned about leadership and management during my MA programme at the university. I have also attended various workshops on leadership and management. However, we do not use the term at the workplace either orally or written, even for the PLT title, it was 'management and supervision skills' not 'leadership'. R. 16

This respondent meant the title of the programme in Arabic which reads 'the programme for developing management and supervision skills' rather than the title of the project in English 'Principals Leadership Training'.

7.7 Educational Change

Educational change was one of the issues discussed by respondents in relation to their practice. The experienced principals were the most able to comment on this topic and give relevant examples from their experience. Most of the respondents (eleven less experienced and thirteen experienced) think that education change creates more responsibilities for them. For example, a respondent explained:

All the changes are coming from the Ministry end at the school, we will become responsible of implementation regardless if we like the changes or not. R. 9

Three less experienced and seven experienced gave examples of some of the changes and initiatives introduced by the Ministry and explained their impact on their schools. For example, a respondent explained:

When some departments at the Ministry got convinced on some new initiatives, they implemented them at schools which take lots of effort from the principal and the teachers. For example, some years ago the Ministry implemented the new initiative of 'Integrated Curriculum', and suddenly two years later it was cancelled for unknown reasons.

Similarly, another respondent added that there are many initiatives taking place at the same time. Each initiative is managed by a different department within the Ministry and the regional DG. A respondent explained further:

There are various initiatives taking place at the same time at our schools, for example the 'knowledge development initiative' and the 'cleanliness initiative'. These initiatives take lots of time and effort from us besides our usual duties. The Ministry should consider reviewing the current initiatives to reduce the burden on schools.

Another principal added that there are a couple of committees that come and visit schools to inspect particular issues at the school which creates extra pressure for school principals as well, a respondent explained further:

Currently, there are various committees visiting schools, some of them are central from the Ministry, some others are local from the DG of Education. Each committee inspects something in a school. Besides, there is a project for school evaluation. This practise should be more organised as it currently creates more bureaucracy and repetition which distracts school work. R.18

Eleven experienced and seven less experienced described the reforms that followed by what is known as the 'Arab Spring' in 2011. The Ministry employed all teachers who had been unemployed for years, they were in thousands. The respondents commented that this politically driven change brought some unqualified teachers to the schools, an issue which was seen by respondents as contradictory to the aims of the PLT in creating transformational and instructional leaders. For example, a respondent explained:

The newly appointed teachers after the crisis of 2011 are creating challenges at schools because of their low standards as most of them studied on their expenses

outside Oman. For example, one of these teachers came to me and said: please principal, I cannot teach and I do not know how to teach, please give me another task to do at school instead of teaching. With such cases, why the Ministry is creating extra challenges for principals instead of solving the previously reported challenges. R.14

Another experienced principal was less optimistic in his comments on education change in Oman, he commented:

I have advised the people of the Ministry since a long time: we had a meeting with one of the Ministry's officials eight years ago and I told her that education reform in Oman is not going on the best track and the Ministry should review its plans. That official was not happy with my comment. Now, what can I say is that the Ministry should save what can be saved; the position of reform in Oman is deteriorating. R. 8

Another issue with regard to the PLT and its proposed changes was the support from the regional level and from the Ministerial level, a respondent clarified:

During the PLT sessions, we were trained on various issues that were proposed to be implemented on our schools. However, no body checked if we introduced new changes or not either from the region or from the Ministry. R.15

Four of the experienced principals explained that the change from management to leadership should start at the Ministry rather than the regional DG then ends at schools. For example a respondent argued:

Why is the Ministry introducing change at schools and ignoring the staff at the Ministry and the regions? Change of the mind sets should start at the Ministry and the regional DGs before changing the principals. R.8

Additionally, some other respondents (four) reported some stories that contradict with the proposed changes in the PLT. For example, a respondent clarified:

At the region level, it seems that the officials here are unaware of the aims of the PLT. Some principals were transferred from their schools to other schools for no reason after they have developed new vision and mission statements. Such practices contradict with what we have learned at the PLT programme of strategic thinking and strategic planning. How a principal will think strategically and plan strategically if he/she will be transferred at any time. R. 20

7.8 Policy Borrowing and Transfer

Most of the respondents (eight of the less experienced and thirteen of the experienced) stated that the current education policy in Oman should be evaluated before adopting any more policies. For example, a respondent stated:

The Ministry has introduced lots of policies since the 1990s. These policies brought lots of changes to our schools. The Ministry should evaluate these policies before adopting more policies. We should make sure which policy works well and which doesn't. R. 14

Nine of the experienced respondents explained that the adoption of new policies should consider the context of schools rather than how far the policy makers favour those policies or not. For example, a respondent argued:

Policies should assist learning at schools. They should be realistic and chosen for the favour of students learning. Some policies are adopted because when some policy makers travel to see other education systems they want to bring new policies from there to Oman.

Another respondent explained this point further:

Some policies were adopted on the basis of visiting other countries by the Ministry's officials. For example, after the Ministry's official visited Scotland in the 1990s, they imported the new strategies of assessment and they were introduced to schools here. However, teachers and schools were not prepared well and there were lots of challenges in implementations. R.26

Similarly another respondent added:

The basic education was introduced on the basis of a study by a Canadian international consultancy. It introduced brought new policies of child centred leaning and formative assessment. However, because at the school level they were not well implemented, the standards of literacy went down. R.4

For the centralisation/decentralisation policies, respondents explained that there should be a match between the currently adopted polices and the professional development programmes for principals. A respondent explained:

The Ministry should not adopt policies with regard to decentralisation before it prepares the regional DGs and the schools to handle the new responsibilities and ensure good implementation at the school level. R.8

Nine respondents suggested that the Ministry should consider policy transfer from non-Western countries like Singapore as there are more similarities with their education systems. For example, a respondent explained further:

The Ministry should not keep on reforming education through using the expertise of consultancies from the West. Education systems in the West have lots of differences than the education system here. The Ministry should learn from education systems that are more similar like Singapore and Malaysia. R. 16

Similarly, four respondents explained that before the Ministry adopts decentralisation policies or any other policies at school level, it should consider reviewing the implementation of such policies in other similar contexts such as Qatar which has a major decentralisation of education initiative.

7.9 Summary

This chapter has added further findings to complement the findings reported in the previous fifth chapter discussing focus groups. Data from the two categories of respondents were analysed: the less experienced and the most experienced. Data have shown variation between the two types of participants in many aspects, though they were involved in the same programme. The issues discussed in this chapter as well as the previous chapter from the perspective of the participants requires comparing them from the other levels of local trainers, master trainers the national level and experts at international level.

Chapter 8

Discussion of Findings

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data from a vertical multi-layered perspective. The rationale is to investigate the PLT as a change initiative from multi-level. The epistemological rationale in this procedure of discussion is that people of various levels are involved with PLT, and in order to understand the relationship between the local action at micro-level and the national and international actors and forces (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2006). This methodological strategy relates to Wedell's (2009) conceptualisation of educational change and its multi-layer realities. Consequently, the discussion will combine findings from the three chapters on data analysis in order to provide the whole picture in the discussion.

Besides the above mentioned vertical multi-levelled procedure of analysis, there will be a discussion (Section 8.4) of a *horizontal analysis* at micro level to show 'how similar policies unfold in distinct locations' through the discussion of the data from the sample of the three regions (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009:9-13, Vavrus and Barlet, 2014:131). The data is also discussed through *transversal comparison* across the various levels (Vavrus and Barlet, 2014:131). This discussion aims to highlight the *bricolage* of education policy which is the result of the 'appropriation by various actors in various locations', 'appropriation describes the process through which different actors creatively improvise when making, applying, re-casting, and living educational polices, programmes and pedagogies' (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009:13). A discussion from a transversal comparison perspective will be in Sections 8.2, 8.3 and 8.5.

8.2 The Initiation of the PLT

8.2.1 The decision to initiate the PLT

This section traces the rationale for initiating the PLT project in order to answer the first research question. It aims to discover how the PLT fits within the major reform of education in Oman from the perspective of international and national level, and then compares these justifications with the perceptions of people at local level. This discussion will link to the

review of literature on education change and its connection to the preparation and development of school leaders.

The initial proposal to for PLT was recommended in the joint study (MEPI-Oman Secondary School Assessment Report, Creative, 2005) between the Ministry and the international consultancy, Creative Associates International, a study funded by the US-MEPI. The study recommended four areas of change - 'competency-based approach to instruction and assessment', 'improving teaching quality', 'technology in education' and 'training capacities of secondary administrators and managers' (Creative, 2005:14). For the recommendation to build the capacity of principals, two interconnected proposals were recommended - developing a decentralisation programme and initiating a programme to train secondary school principals and deputy principals. The consultancy suggested that 'this programme should create professionally-written training modules, train regional trainers and deliver quality management training to school principles' (ibid:14). This recommendation, dated before the programme, will be traced to evaluate how correctly it was interpreted and implemented at micro level.

To interpret the above listed recommendation, the MEPI, Creative Associates in collaboration with the Ministry, assigned the task of the design and delivery of the PLT to a US-based specialised consultancy in international development education - Seward Incorporated. The documents and the data from the interviews with the international expert show that the design of the programme was based on a two week visit to Oman in order to assess the training needs at various levels of the education system. The policy makers' rationale for the project was to assist the education reform in Oman as the Ministry introduced various reform initiatives at school level, and they rely on the principals and teachers successful implementation of the reforms. The rationale of the MEPI interest in the PLT was in its aim to build the capacity of locals, increase decentralisation and reduce the authority of the Central Ministry, an issue that MEPI sees as a way of promoting democracy in Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, recalling Wedell's (2009:15) four reasons for initiating change, the policy makers rationale was the first 'to enable the national education system to better prepare its learners for a changing national and international reality'.

To compare the above described macro level rationales with micro level (trained school leaders), the rationale for the PLT is not shared at micro level. The interviewed principals and deputy principals' responses show that they were not expecting such a training programme. They received the invitation to join the training shortly before the start of the programme. Further, data have showed that they found out about the goals and the content of the programme just after joining the training. Therefore, two of the Wedell's (2009:22) factors for a proper educational change are missing: 'starting where people are' and 'identifying and communicating the need for change'. Although those at macro level are aware of the intended change and policy behind the PLT, the implementers do not have this knowledge. The following sections will detect if there are any effects for the absence of these two factors.

8.2.2 The delivery of the PLT project

After the discussion of the initiation of the project, this section discusses how the PLT was managed. This is part of the *transversal comparison* of the PLT (as a vertical case study) in order to trace its adaptation and appropriation across *time* and *space* (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2014:131). After the international consultancy delivered the programme to a selected sample of secondary school principals in 2007 through three two-week workshops, a decision was made to nationally scale-up the programme. The training provider document (Seward, 2008) shows that the Ministry did not have a clear vision for the future of the programme during the early stages of the project. Similarly, the interviews with local trainers who were trained by the international experts (eight of the fifteen local trainers) stated that they did not know that they would be trainers after completing the workshops. The reason is that the decision to scale-up the programme came about after the workshops in 2007. The consultancy delivered two 'Training the Trainer' workshops in 2007 in order to prepare local trainers.

The context of Oman and the way the education system is managed has influenced the way the programme is managed. The geographical distribution of Oman to eleven regions and the tri-level of the hierarchy of the education system implied adopting a cascade model to scale-up the training. To refer to Wedell's (2005) description of the cascade model, one of the reasons for adopting it for the PLT was the cost effectiveness factor. The other reason was the

time required to train over 1200 principals and deputy principals, and the cascade model enabled the Ministry to provide training in all regions at the same time in large numbers. However, there was an issue of quality in the cascade model, as explained by Wedell (2005). The Ministry's actions to maintain quality was to train the local trainers at central level. However, with the shortages of the number of local trainers, regions joined trainers from the principals who were trained in the early cohorts. This is an example of how the implementation becomes distorted from the initial planning.

The other action for replicating PLT training was the phasing of the programmes into two phases. The initial training provided by the international consultancy was three consecutive workshops with short pauses between them. This was inapplicable to do for large scale training because of the time constraints of both participants and local trainers, and the provision of facilities of training. Consequently, as the data have shown, in the scale-up plan the PLT content was phased into two phases of two-week training periods. The first phase (2008-2010) was on transformational leadership. The second phase (2011-2013) was on instructional leadership, an action which created quite a long gap of time between the two phases. These alternations in replicating the programme affected the quality of delivery. For example, the analysis of the participants' interviews showed that they did not realise the connection between the transformational leadership and the instructional leadership in leading changes in their schools.

The other issue with regard to managing the project was changes at regional level in the second phase of the project. The data have shown that there were changes in the local trainers, particularly in of the two regions: Muscat and Dhofar. For this reason, the interviewed participants explained a decrease in the quality of delivery as they described some local trainers as 'incompetent'. This is an issue which affects the implementation of the planned policy to build the capacity of principals. These examples show the impact of the management of change initiatives in implementing policy to practice. This discussion leads to the discussion of the issue of tri-level change in the following section.

8.2.3 The PLT and tri-level change

Fullan's (2009) concept of 'tri-level education change' is relevant to the way the PLT was introduced as a change initiative. The Ministerial decree endorsing the scale-up plan for the PLT states that PLT aims to build the capacity of principals in order to assist the Ministry's actions regarding extension of decentralisation. However, the data have shown that the intended policies by the policy makers that are related to the PLT are not well supported at regional level or at school level. For example, the trained principals commented that although they were trained on strategic planning and developing a mission and vision as one of the skills for transformative leaders, it is not practised at regional level or at the Ministry's level. Many of them commented that such changes in administration should start from higher levels instead of starting at school level.

Additionally, the data have shown that the change was not well supported at the regional level. For example, the trained principals commented that the degree of autonomy remained the same and they had limited authority to practise 'leadership' in their schools. Similarly, the local trainers explained that they did not receive training on how to assist changes at schools. In some cases principals reported a resistance of change from local supervisors as they wanted principals to strictly adhere to the regulations from the local education authority. After the discussion of the initiation of the PLT project, the next section will discuss the issue of impact of the PLT, as well as other issues relating to educational leadership programmes.

8.3 Impact of the PLT, and the Status of Developing School Leaders

8.3.1 Professional needs of school leaders

The PLT initial programme started with the identification of training needs of principals. That was carried out through the interviewing of a sample of secondary school principals in 2006 and 2007. The institutional needs were identified through interviewing policy makers and administrators at the Central Ministry and the regions. The consultancy used the content of the programme to train a group of 22 secondary school principals in 2007. However, the same content was used for the national scale-up of the programme, which was the reason for the variation of responses in the focus groups and in the individual interviews. This action did not match with Buckley and Caple's (2000) proposed systematic approach to training that starts with needs.

Additionally, the joining of the PLT programme was through inviting every principal. Data showed that there was no documentation of professional needs at regional level. An issue which contradicts with one of Hallinger and Murphy (1987) characteristics for administrative training: 'job related learning'. This also shows the absence of one of Walker and Dimmock (2006) factors for effective school leadership training - linking learning to real school contexts and ensuring cultural sensitivity. This was probably the reason for some participants' comments that training was 'irrelevant to their needs'.

To compare with the views at national level, the master trainers commented that the PLT goal was to introduce changes rather than addressing specific individual needs. Similarly, the policy makers' aim was to build the capacity of principals in order to enable them to manage the reforms introduced by the Ministry in their schools. This is an issue which may interpret the provision of the same content for all principals from the perspective of people at national level. However, the data from the principals does not show their awareness regarding the intended policy by the Ministry. As Chapman et al. (1997:3) comment on the Ministries of Education centralised systems initiatives to improve school-level practice: 'Ministry policy never gets communicated to the schools. Principals and teachers do not even realize they are supposed to be doing something different'. As the data showed, the invitation to the programme did not inform participants on the intended changes or policy.

8.3.2 Impact on participants

One of the aims of the PLT programme was to change the mind-set of principals. The consultancy document (Seward, 2008) explains that at the beginning of the training the participants opposed the idea of becoming leaders and being able to introduce change; however, towards the end of the programme the international experts were able to convince the participants that they 'had a choice'. However, after the national scale-up of the programme, the data showed no change in the mind-sets of the participants. Almost all of the participants explained that the context did not allow them to be leaders. This variation of mind-sets of the group trained by the international experts and the participants shows the

impact of the processes of training over the content. As Bush (2008) describes, leadership skills are developed through the processes of training.

For the leadership behaviour, most of the trained principals reported changes with regard to strategic planning. As the data showed, the most frequent learning was writing the school's vision and mission. Similarly the local trainers explained that the trained principals wrote visions and missions for their schools and displayed them within the schools. The skill of building vision and planning is one of the seven strong claims of Leithwood et al (2006), and is also 'knowledge of action' (Bolam: 196).

However, the data from the local trainers and master trainer show that there is no formal systematic documentation of impact. There is also no formal plan of support, an issue which was emphasised in the interview with the international expert. This lack of post-training support for a 'systematic change' seems to have reduced the impact on the institutional level (Fullan, 2009). Additionally the data showed that there was no mentoring or coaching for the participants by the local trainers after the workshops to meet individual needs, an issue which will be further discussed in the following section.

8.3.3 The content and processes of leadership development

The content of the programme consisted of modules on transformational leadership. It included topics on leading change, leading teams in school, changing school culture, strategic planning and strategic communication. It also contained modules on instructional leadership such as student-cantered learning, assessment of learning, teacher evaluation and involving parents. The international expert explained that the choice of this selection was on the basis of the international team's experience in the international delivery of educational leadership programmes. The selection of the content matches Bush and Jackson's (2002) hypothesis of international curriculum in educational leadership. According to their hypothesis there are four common areas in educational leadership programmes, two of which are transformational leadership and instructional leadership. However, Bush (2008) differentiated between developed and developing countries in how school leaders should be developed as the context differs.

To compare at national level, the master trainers explained that the selection of the content was carried out by international experts. The policy makers explained that this was the second experience in the programme delivery in educational leadership after a programme was delivered by the UK-National College, an issue which may show the globalisation of the knowledge on educational leadership, and how it influences the choices of policy makers and practitioners in a centralised system such as Oman.

At local level, many of the respondents explained that they noticed from the beginning that the programme was translated from English. As the needs of the participants varied, they commented that it should have been adapted to their context and needs. Furthermore, with the diversity of participants and their various needs, the issue of providing the same content in a cascade mode remains challenging. Such a challenge is also linked with the quality of delivery by local trainers and the processes they use.

There was a variation in the quality of the processes of leadership, between the phase of introducing the programme and the later phases after the national scale-up through the cascade mode. The experts used active learning strategies and were aware of how to introduce the activities as they developed them themselves. Some of the trained principals by the international experts commented that they were inspired by the processes of training rather than the content.

At local level delivery, the processes depended on the skills of local trainers. Respondents in the regions of Dhofar and Muscat explained that most of the training in the second phase of the programme was delivered by lecturing, an issue which negatively impacted their evaluation of the value of the content. This raises concerns over delivery in a cascade mode as Wedell (2009) emphasised the need to maintain the quality of delivery until the implementation level.

8.4 Micro Level Variation: Horizontal Comparisons

8.4.1.1 The experienced and the less experienced school leaders

All principals and deputy principals were trained in their regions within the PLT project. As the analysis of focus groups and individual interviews has shown, participants were of various levels of experience in principalship. Although the documents of the project did not consider the factor of experience in delivery, the data show a variation in responses of the experienced principals and the less experienced principals with regard to what they want to learn, how and when.

The experienced principals, particularly those who did postgraduate programmes in educational leadership and management, explained that the content was not new to them as knowledge. As Weindling (1999) argues, what is relevant for the principals at the early stage of their profession may not be relevant for experienced principals. The experienced principals explained that they were aware of most of the concepts in the programme. They also noted that they wanted to learn how to further improve their skills in order to face the emerging challenges in their schools. This issue relates to Leithwood et al. (2004) suggestion to provide on-the-job professional development for the experienced principals.

Additionally, the experienced principals commented on the quality of the training. They explained that some of the local trainers were less experienced than them and that some of the trainers held lower academic qualifications in educational administration than them. Many of them commented that they wished to be trained by the expert trainers. Some noted that the combining of the experienced and less experienced in the same workshop was a sign of disrespecting their long service. This is an issue which may influence the aim of changing the mindset of principals from managers to leaders, which was one of the PLT goals. It seems that the way the cascade mode of delivery, with no consideration for experience, has influenced on the quality of the replication of training.

For the less experienced principals, they explained that they had expected to be trained on basic management skills relevant to their needs. They noted that at an early stage of principalship, a novice principal needs to learn about policies, regulations, and how to

manage the school. They stated that the message of the PLT was to change from a 'manager' to a 'leader'; they commented that leadership is an advanced stage of principalship after mastering management. This raises again the issue of needs in leadership development programmes as emphasised by Bush (2008) as the starting point for the design of leadership programmes.

The less experienced participants also commented that the methods of training them as novice principals and deputy principals are inappropriate. They explained that they need practical training in schools provided by the experienced principals. Similarly, Wong and Ng (2003) discovered that new principals learn more effectively through 'on-the-job' learning from supervisors and experienced principals than from training programmes. Similarly, Bush (2008) suggested using coaching and mentoring in order to develop the skills of principals. Similarly, Bush and Coleman (1995) noted that coaching and mentoring are effective methods to develop the newly appointed principals. In the PLT, the local trainers were not professional trainers able to use the specialised strategies of coaching and mentoring.

The discussion of the issue of the experience in principalship leads to the discussion of progression in leadership. The data show that there is no systematic linkage between progression in principalship and leadership development programmes. Participants of the PLT were of various stages of leadership progression, an issue which may lead to the inappropriate provision of training. To compare with England, Bush (2008) describes five levels of development by the National College that are linked with the stage of leadership progression. Principals need to be trained according to their needs and roles in order to enable them to develop. Gunter (2006) used the Vygotskian concept of zone of proximal development to explain how the training of principals should take place and how they can be assisted.

To compare vertically, master trainers at national level have a different point of view. They explained that the combination of the experienced and the less experienced has the advantage of sharing ideas and learning from others. They explained further that the experienced can assist the less experienced in their learning. However, the interviews with local trainers did

not show that they were prepared to handle such processes of managing the experienced and less experienced. This is an issue that shows how delivery is improvised at local level within the cascade mode of delivery. The discussion of the issue of experience of principals and their development leads to discuss another related issue - the stage of schooling and how it was addressed in the PLT.

8.4.1.2 Type of school

There are three types of school in the education system of Oman: Basic Education Cycle One (Grades 1-4), Basic Education Cycle Two (Grades 5-10) and Secondary School (Grades 11-12). The goal of the initial phase of the PLT introduced by the international experts was to train secondary school principals. However, when the PLT was nationally scaled up, the same content was used to train principals and deputy principals of all types of school.

The data from the trained principals' shows that it was agreed that the management at all levels is the same, however the leadership is not. They explained that at each level, a principal should have particular skills to deal with students of particular ages. They explained that the level of the school and the type of curriculum and activities in each type create a distinctive school culture. They noted that schools are not all the same, and some of them reported examples from their experience, and how they found a particular type of school to be more challengeable than the others. Similarly, the literature shows that schools with regard to their type cannot be managed the same way (Mohr, 2000).

With regard to instructional leadership and type of school, each type has distinctive teaching strategies and assessment methods. The content of the instructional leadership module of the PLT did not address the context of each type. The Basic Education Cycle One school principals noted that the teaching and learning at this primary stage differs from the other stages creating differences for principalship. The instructional programme of a school, the learning climate, and school's mission are three key goals in the Hallinger's (2003) conceptualisation of instructional leadership. This shows how the neglect of the factor of the school at local level contradicts with the conceptualisation of the instructional leadership model.

8.4.1.3 Gender

The issue of gender is one of the factors for variation at local level. The project's documents do not state any consideration for the gender issue which may show an assumption that schools are the same, regardless of the gender. However, the female participants explained that although the administration is similar in schools, because of the centralised education system, the way a female principal leads her staff differs from the way that a male principal leads his staff. Similarly, male principals commented that male principals act differently when dealing with people and situations. For example, they explained that female principals focus on details, such as the neat organisation of the schools' records and the appearance of the school. Also, females are stricter with rules, policies, and the norms in the schools. Also, the responses of principals show that leading the same gender staff differs from the male principals to the females. This finding is similar to that of Grogan et al. (2012), in that female principals lead in a different manner to male principals.

For leadership preparation, the local trainers described that the performance of female participants was different from the males. They explained that they were more punctual and more eager to learn. In contrast, the local trainers explained that male principals have a tendency to raise challenges to change and question the policy. These findings concur with Lumby (2014) who noticed that women use strategies to thrive in the workplace. Therefore, I argue that the issue of gender should be addressed in the educational leadership programmes in Oman.

8.4.1.4 Regional variation

The cascade mode of the PLT delivery assumed that regional delivery of the programme would be typical. The documents of the project do not state any considerations and plans for regional delivery. However, the data have shown variations in terms of the quality of delivery between the three regions. Also, there was a variation between the first phase of transformational leadership and the second phase of instructional leadership. This is relevant to the two factors regarding the success of educational change - the approach and the planning of change and the awareness of context (Wedell, 2009).

Additionally, the data show variation with regard to context in each region. Although there is a national context of education as the system is centralised, but because of the geographic and social variation, the context is different. Therefore, there is a macro context for the whole education system, but there is also a micro context within each region. As Walker and Dimmock (2006) suggest, leadership development programmes should link learning to the real contexts of schools. The principals explained that besides theory they want to find solutions for the challenges they face at school level through the training programmes.

8.5 Cross-Cultural Insights

8.5.1 Cross-cultural considerations

The PLT programme was designed by American experts specialising in international and cross-cultural educational leadership. The targeted audience are the principals in Oman where there is a different societal and organisational culture. The interview with one of the programme's designers showed that their source to understand the culture of Oman was to read about the history of education in Oman, and to review the role of the Ministry and the principals. They also reviewed Hofstede's leadership dimensions for the Middle East. The experts included the findings of The Globe's study on cultures of the world in the PLT's content.

With regard to leadership frameworks, I argue that the frameworks of Hofstede's and The Globe are general and represent the general organisational and societal culture. The societal and organisational culture in Oman is unique as culture is related to people and place. Common (2011:219) paraphrases: 'Schieffer et. al. (2008) emphasized the human-social dimensions of management in what they referred to as the 'Arabic-Muslim' region, which they present as having the potential to complement Western concepts rather than simply adapt'. The PLT content was adapted, to some extent, to the frameworks in order to provide culturally relevant material for training for Omani principals. For example, the respondents commented that they cannot use the recommended leadership tip of saying 'No' as a time management skill. They clarified they are obliged socially to meet visiting parents even without prior appointment.

Additionally, the concept of leadership is embedded in Western values and philosophy (Dimmock, 2000). The cross cultural perspective usually attempts to adapt the current knowledge on leadership to other contexts, similarly to the experts for the PLT the concepts were translated to Arabic with attempts to provide examples from the local context. However, as Shah (2010:29) argues ‘the concepts of educational leadership and its practices vary across societies and cultures’. The use of global knowledge on educational leadership in the context of Oman is more sensitive than the use of knowledge in classroom learning and teaching, because leadership concerns people in their societal settings. Additionally, with regard to Walker and Dimmock (2002) cross-cultural school focused model, the organisational structures and leadership and management processes differ in the education system of Oman. Additionally, Walker and Dimmock’s framework shows that the education system in Oman should be cautious of policy borrowing, an issue that will be discussed in the following section.

8.5.2 Policy transfer and borrowing

Policy transfer and borrowing relates to the PLT project through the aim to introduce changes to policy and practice, recommended by an international consultancy. At the policy making level, the aim of such policy transfer is improving the education system and competing globally with the other education systems. The adoption of PLT as a national initiative went through the stages of Phillips and Ochs (2003), of cross-national attraction, decision, implementation, and internalisation. However, at the stage of implementation, the changes were not supported as shown by the data.

In addition, principals explained that there are many initiatives taking place at school level. They explained that the implementation of the various initiatives takes much time and effort. The policy makers should consider the third and fourth stages of Phillips and Ochs (2003): implementation and internalisation. At implementation, principals explained that the Ministry should consider the context of their schools. Furthermore, they explained that the Ministry should evaluate the current initiatives before adopting any more initiatives.

The principals also noted that the Ministry should be cautious on policy borrowing through the international consultancy providers from the West. They explained that the Ministry should consider the needs of context. These responses correspond with Schweisfurth (2008:34) comment, ‘the notion of borrowing was gradually questioned as educational systems came to be regarded as interwoven in the fabric of their society’. Alternatively, principals suggested learning from education systems that have similarities with the education system in Oman, such as Singapore.

8.5.3 Translation of educational leadership terminology

Language has an influence on mind, thought and communication (Bloom and Keil (2001). The translation of knowledge in educational leadership and management from English to Arabic creates a different reality, as language represents different mental constructs according to background and culture. Jackendoff (2009) explains that language integrates with consciousness and culture to form cognition. For example, the respondents commented on the Arabic translation for the term ‘transformational’ which was unfamiliar term in the usual discourse and gives strong connotations in Arabic. As the international expert indicated in the interview, there is a scarcity of literature on the use of the Arabic language for developing educational leadership programmes.

The leadership and management concepts were semantically developed in English (West Burnham, 1997). They were developed on certain eras of reforms in the West to represent changes in the context. As Bush (2008) comments, the use of the term ‘leadership’ came with the era of school autonomy. This raises concerns over the equivalence of the translated terms to the current context in Oman, for example, the translation of ‘instructional leader’ as it does not describe the actual roles. Also, the Arabic term for ‘leadership’ may also mean ‘commandership’, a term which was confusing to explain in Arabic for some local trainers. Similarly, the Arabic term for ‘change’ is usually not used to describe reform because it may give negative connotations. Such variations in the use of language are context specific and there is no published research in this field, as the American expert commented.

8.5.4 Revisiting transformational and instructional leadership

The PLT programme was based on two theoretical models: transformational leadership and instructional leadership. The two models are recognised as tools for educational change (Hallinger, 2003). However, the data show inconsistencies between the two models and the reported centralised practices in schools in Oman. This finding is similar to Bush (2011:3), who comments that ‘the recent emphasis on instructional leadership is based largely on research and practice on decentralised or partly decentralised contexts’. At local level, as the local trainers were not experts in the field, it was demanding for them to link the two models with context and practice.

Additionally, the two models were introduced in two separate workshops. The data showed that the principals were unaware of the link between both models. Bush (2014) suggests that linking both models is possible. One of the reasons for the difficulty in such linking was the long time-gap between the two workshops, as a result of the cascade scaling up. Furthermore, there was no linkage with the real practices and policies in schools, an issue which created an impression for the participants that they are theoretical and do not represent reality. As Bush (2011:23) describes, ‘practitioners tend to be dismissive of theories and concepts for their alleged remoteness from the ‘real’ school situations’. Therefore, I argue that there is a knowledge gap in the current literature on appropriate theoretical models for the context of Oman.

Consequently, I propose having a version of the two models that suits the schools in Oman. The proposed version of the model should consider the roles of the local education authorities as they share with schools’ transformational and instructional roles. Furthermore, the two models should be linked through redefining principals’ roles in Oman, with a focus on learning rather than the bureaucratic management. The model should be adapted to the level of decentralisation in order to be contextually relevant, the model is explained further in the implications chapter.

8.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the data from the various respondents. In accordance with the use of the vertical case study in international and comparative educational research, there were three strategies of discussion - vertical, transversal and horizontal. The purpose of vertical comparison was to investigate the data from the various levels - international, national and local. The purpose of the transversal comparison was to describe how policies and actions are improvised through levels, space, and throughout time. The aim of the horizontal comparison was to discover the variations at the micro-level of implementation. The three types aimed to understand the PLT project as a change initiative through the development of school principals in Oman. The next chapter will draw conclusions and suggests implications.

The discussion has shown that the rationale for the PLT project varied between the three levels of policy making. At the international level, the rationale was to assist educational reform in Oman through the application of educational leadership theory and practice theory based on principalship in the USA from a comparative and international perspective. At the national level, the rationale was to borrow 'best international practices' in order to assist reforms in Oman. However, at the local level, the rationale of principals and local trainers was one of reactive compliance with the directives and requirements of the central ministry. These differences have clearly been indicated in the contrasting responses between the training providers and the training recipients, which has resulted in a mismatch between educational policy and practice.

Chapter 9

Conclusion and Implications

This chapter begins with a summary of the thesis (9.1). It then goes on to outline the contribution of the study to knowledge (9.2). Later, it draws implications for international collaboration in the field of educational leadership and management (9.3). Following this, the chapter then describes implications for policy and practice (9.4). The limitations of the study follow and are clarified altogether with implications for research (9.5). Lastly, the chapter concludes with a vision for the future after the PhD journey, as an impact of this study.

9.1 Summary of the Study

This research has investigated the issue of developing school leaders in Oman as a way of assisting educational change. A large scale project for leadership development was investigated through a vertical case study approach: the Principals Leadership Training (PLT) project. A contextual advantage provided for this research was that various players were involved in the initiation and delivery of the PLT at multi levels: international, national and local. It has provided an opportunity to reflect on the ‘four pillars’ of research in educational leadership and management: theory, policy, practice and research (Bush, 2010).

The findings at international level have shown how the issue of leadership in education is linked to reform and the initiation of change. The interest of the US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in the contribution to the project was its goal of liberalising and democratising the Middle East. Its aim is to reduce the authority of the Central Ministries of Education, and empower those at local level. The MEPI contracted certain US-based consultancies specialising in international development education to design the programme and deliver it to a small group of secondary schools principals in 2007. The design of the PLT programme was based on the knowledge provided for the experts on international and cross-cultural leadership.

At national level, the Ministry of Education considered the PLT as an assistant to its national education reform through increasing the proactivity and building the capacity of those at the

implementation level. Therefore, with its own national capacity and funds, the Ministry replicated the training nationally for all school leaders from 2008 to 2013. A cascade model was used to scale-up the training to the eleven regions by creating local training teams supervised by a team of national trainers. The choice of cascade model was based on the verticality of policy implementation from the Central Ministry to the school level. It was also based on the horizontal administrative organisation of the Sultanate into eleven regions where schools in each region are administered by a local education authority.

At local level, school leaders were invited to join the training through formal communication from the local education authority. The programme was organised into two phases: the first on 'transformational leadership' and the second on 'instructional leadership', which are the two types of leadership that are linked to educational change at school level. The findings show that school leaders joined the programme regardless of their professional needs, their experience, their level of schooling, or their gender - an issue which created various variables to investigate through this study.

Epistemologically, in order to find out about the issue of change and leadership development through the above described case study, comparisons were carried out at various levels as they were varied but also interconnected. Consequently, a vertical case study methodology was adopted in order to compare vertically, transversally and horizontally. Data were collected from all three levels in order to investigate the perception of each level with the purpose of comparing with the other levels. Focus groups and individual interviews were used to collect data on the basis of the interpretive and constructive paradigm of the study.

The analysis of the data showed that the PLT project was managed as a top-down initiative of educational change. Capacity building of people at what Fullan calls systematic change within a tri-level was not considered. Additionally, at national level, there is a limitation for 'knowledge for change' (Fullan, 2009, Wedell, 2009). The changes proposed in the PLT were not assisted at local level, an issue which contradicts with the goals of the project. The findings showed principals' resistance to the suggested changes because they think they contradict with their context.

The cascade model of replicating the PLT impacted the quality of the delivery in the regions. Though the PLT was initially delivered by international experts, the replicated delivery was provided by the local trainers, who were less experienced in the content and the processes of development. As a result, as the evaluation data of the focus groups showed, the processes of delivery at regional level reduced the expected impact of the programme. The cascade model was not effective for educational leadership programmes as the focus was not on the content per se, but the processes of delivery are more influential in building the skills of participants.

Additionally, it was found that the way the instructional leadership and transformational leadership models were introduced was not relevant to the context of schools in Oman. Within the centralised context of schools and not contextualising the models, they were seen as irrelevant to the context. It was explained that the two models should be adapted to the context of schools on the one hand, and to the goals of educational change on the other hand.

9.2 Answering the Research Questions

The research outcomes provide important insights into the policy and practice of school principal in-service training, both generally in respect to non-Western contexts and more specifically in relation to school leadership training in Islamic countries. These insights are summarised in answer to each of the four research questions (see section 1.1, page 11).

In answer to the first research question on the motivations behind the PLT project, it is clear that the driving force was from central Government and the Ministry of Education: a top-down initiative to improve the quality of school leadership practice to drive up educational standards and enable Oman to develop its education system and compete internationally. It is for this reason that international ‘experts’, especially distinguished American academics and trainers, were recruited to help in the delivery of the programme. For those school principals who participated there was a reasonable expectation that their willing involvement would enhance their effectiveness as leaders and contribute to their professional growth and development.

The extent to which the PLT project indeed impacted on the on leadership development was answered through data collected in answer to the second research question. In positive terms, the project was underpinned by a clear vision of the Ministry of Education to build leadership capacity as a means of achieving more effective educational decentralisation and school-based management, with budgets to scale-up the plan and disseminate (or cascade) expertise through involving principals who had completed the training in its future delivery. The evidence also shows clearly that the first phase of the training had a positive impact and was valued by the participants, because the key focus on transformational leadership was consistent with perceived training needs and participants' understanding of the core tasks of school leadership and management. However, the second phase of the training was less well received, largely because the focus on instructional leadership was an unfamiliar, Western idea which had not been adequately explained, and its relevance to the Omani context had been seriously questioned. The impact of the programme was also limited by a lack of post-training follow-up support and a failure to take individual development needs in to account, for example, according to gender and experience of school leadership. Moreover, there was a lack of evidence, from the way that the PLT programme had been evaluated, of the impact of the leadership training on schools, including improvements in student learning outcomes.

These limitations of the PLT project were highlighted in answers to the third research question relating to cross-cultural insights. The focus on instructional leadership in the second phase of the project was illustrative of a lack of sufficient cultural awareness and sensitivity to context. However, cultural difficulties ran deeper than simply the choice of course content. Confusion and misunderstanding were compounded by language and inadequacy of translation of course materials, which could have been better adapted to the Omani context. A key ontological challenge in the translation of such concepts as 'change', 'development', 'improvement', 'management' and 'leadership' were not adequately addressed. Similarly, course participants questioned the contextual relevance of Western theoretical models and an absence of leadership examples drawn from Islamic and Omani tradition. It was also clear from the evidence that there were perceptions of cultural and contextual differences beyond the societal level to include both the regional and school organisational differences which had not been sufficiently addressed in the generic nature of the programme delivery.

Answers to the fourth research question on the implications of the research findings for leadership development theory, policy and practice provide insights into how some of the problems associated with the PLT project can be addressed, especially in the planning and delivery of future school leadership training initiatives. What adds credence to these insights is that they are based on the recommendations of those who experienced the programme first-hand – the PLT project participants. Significant lessons are to be learned from the process of education transfer and policy borrowing, particularly from Western contexts to non-Western, Islamic contexts. There is undoubtedly much that Oman can learn from the West in its educational reform programme, especially in moving towards greater educational decentralisation and school-based management, but policy implementation can only be successful if due attention is paid to contextual and cultural sensitivities in managing the change process including the mind-sets of school principals. Closer collaboration between so-called Western ‘experts’ and Omani educationalists with local contextual and cultural knowledge therefore offers a way forward. Recommendations from programme participants also included a request for a more systematic, long-term plan for school leadership training, especially ongoing follow-up support, to avoid what was perceived as ad hoc provision; to strike a more appropriate balance between theory and practice in the training; and to build in provision which takes account of differing needs according to school leadership experience, gender, and both regional and school contexts. This raises questions not only about strategies for future policy implementation but also the consultation of school principals in the initial process of policy formulation.

While the research findings are significant for the future planning, delivery and implementation of school leadership training programmes in Oman, they also provide valuable insights for educational policy makers and practitioners in other non-Western and Islamic countries engaged in the process of education reform through the building of school leadership capacity. While the opportunity to learn from theory and best practice in other countries is to be welcomed, it is crucially important to be responsive to local cultures, contexts and needs if development programmes are to be fully successful.

9.3 Contribution of the Study

This study has contributed to the field through various ways. The first is by providing an understanding of how educational change is linked to the development of school leaders in the context of Oman, an area with a knowledge gap in the published research. The study has consolidated Fullan's arguments of 'tri level change' and the concept of 'systematic change' in order to assure the impact of the educational leadership programmes at school level. The study also consolidates Wedell's claims regarding the use of the cascade model in scaling up initiatives to school level with regard to the relationship between the quality of training delivery and the impact at school level, and the findings have shown that the intended goals of the PLT at national level were not achieved at local level because of the quality of training delivery.

The second contribution was through explaining the interplay between the global, national and local forces of change within the context of Oman. This study is the first to research the PLT as an initiative with actors at the global, national and local levels. The borrowing and transfer of policies and the globalisation of knowledge which are adopted at national level usually contradict with the realities of the local level. The transfer of notions of 'leadership', 'transformation' or 'leaders of change', for example, from the decentralised systems of the West to the centralised system of Oman creates contradiction at the implementation level of schools. Therefore, the universalising of theory to the context of Oman is inadequate. The current epistemology of educational leadership and management is linked to ontological and axiological considerations in the West. Therefore, the transfer of current knowledge to the context of Oman, as in the PLT, creates ontological inappropriacy due to the societal and organisational culture. It also creates axiological inappropriacy due to the variations in values and societal culture.

Thirdly, it was found that the use of language in educational leadership programmes makes a difference when translated from the language of the source knowledge: English into Arabic. The use of directly translated leadership terminology from English to Arabic does not provide a 'meaning equivalence' (Scandura and Dorfman, 2004). Additionally, the Arabic terms used as equivalent to the English have other connotations from the culture and from the way they

are used in the discourse. This issue shows variation in reality and how it is constructed differently by Omani principals as a result of language. Therefore, from a constructivist paradigm, I argue that an indigenous creation of knowledge in educational leadership and management is essential to provide knowledge that is relevant to policy and practice in Oman.

Fourth, the study has shown that the current knowledge on international and cross-cultural educational leadership does not provide sufficient understanding of the context of the school system. Although the PLT developers used the Hofstede and Globe models to comparatively understand the culture and context of Oman, they were insufficient to provide explanation for the unique context of Oman. Furthermore, the study has shown that the international providers of training were unaware of the indigenous concepts and practices of leadership and management. The teaching of leadership should consider how leaders influence followers within the national context and culture of Oman. For example, it was found that the use of culturally relevant values and morals is an important factor in how principals influence their staff.

Fifth, it provided an understanding on the use of the transformational and instructional leadership models in the context of Oman and on how they are relevant to its educational change. It was found that the two models, in their original forms, were irrelevant to the current context of schools. The two models, as Hallinger (2003) explains, were developed as a result of the changes in the context of North America. Similarly, Bush (2011) explains that they are relevant to decentralised systems in democratic countries. Therefore, to make the two models fit to the context of educational change in Oman, they should be adapted and integrated in a unified model in the training programmes in Oman. The proposed model (see figure 7) shows the extent of transformation available for the Omani principals during the training on educational leadership. Also, the process of transformation should be linked to the instructional leadership roles expected by Omani principals.

9.4 Implications for International Collaboration

The sixth contribution is methodological. This study used a vertical case study methodology which is considered as a recent trend in international and comparative education research (Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009). It provided insights from various levels with various ways of comparison. Future researchers in the field can learn from the way it was applied in this research and can build on it. The study has shown that the use of the vertical case study approach in researching educational leadership and management in the context of Oman can provide a deeper understanding of what is happening at each level. In each level, there is a distinctive reality that should be considered from an ontological perspective. Additionally, within regions, there are various realities as a result of variation in the context, although policy makers centrally make one decision for all. Additionally, this vertical comparison type of study can add a further paradigm to Ribbins and Genter's knowledge provinces (Gunter and Ribbins, 2003).

Drawing implications at international level is a consequence of the vertical case study approach used in this research as it reflects on the three levels of local, national and international. The international consultancy providers are usually linked with the transfer of theory, policy and practice to its beneficiary. Consequently, international providers of training can learn from the findings of this study when they develop programmes for Oman. For example, during my internship at the NCTL, the staff at the international unit were interested to know about the PLT as they were drafting a programme for Oman. Therefore, as this study provides an analysis for the roles of international providers of training with implications, training providers like the NCTL can learn from the following implications.

The relationship between theory, policy and practice is a controversial issue in education including the area of education leadership and management (Bush, 2011). The analysis of the data from respondents at various levels of the PLT has shown interplay of theory with policy and practice. The policy makers are interested in theory because the practice at the best performing education systems depends on theory, and in order to compete they need to use the same knowledge. This trend extends with the active involvement of the Ministry of Education with international organisations such as the UNESCO and the World Bank. The international development education bodies provide their consultancy to the Ministries of

Education in the less developed countries using similar theories either for learning and teaching, or for educational management and leadership.

Training providers in educational leadership and management are advised to consider the context of schools in Oman and the level of decentralisation provided. Also, the indigenous concepts of leadership and management should be considered. Additionally, the examples used in the content of programmes should be from the context of participants' schools as the linkage to practice is essential for skills development. The findings have shown that the participants see examples from the education systems of the developed world as inapplicable or irrelevant to their context.

The international providers should consider the choice of content. The content should consider the roles of the participants in management and leadership. Additionally, the choice of the content should be according to the stage of leadership progression. Additionally, the translation of the content to Arabic should be aligned with the discourse that is locally used in Oman as the translation of the educational terminology differs from one Arab country to another. Furthermore, an additional explanation of the concepts in Arabic is important in order to provide an adequate clarification for participants.

International providers should be cautious about the use of theory in educational leadership programmes for Oman. The choice of using theoretical models in the content of the programmes should be linked to the policy and practice with regard to principalship in Oman. As the findings have shown, participants value theory when it is linked to their practice, and it can provide them with guidelines to improve their schools. Therefore, participants should have more opportunities to reflect on their practice during the training programmes and should be encouraged to link their practice with theory. As a result, the processes of development are more influential than the content as they develop the skills of the participants.

9.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

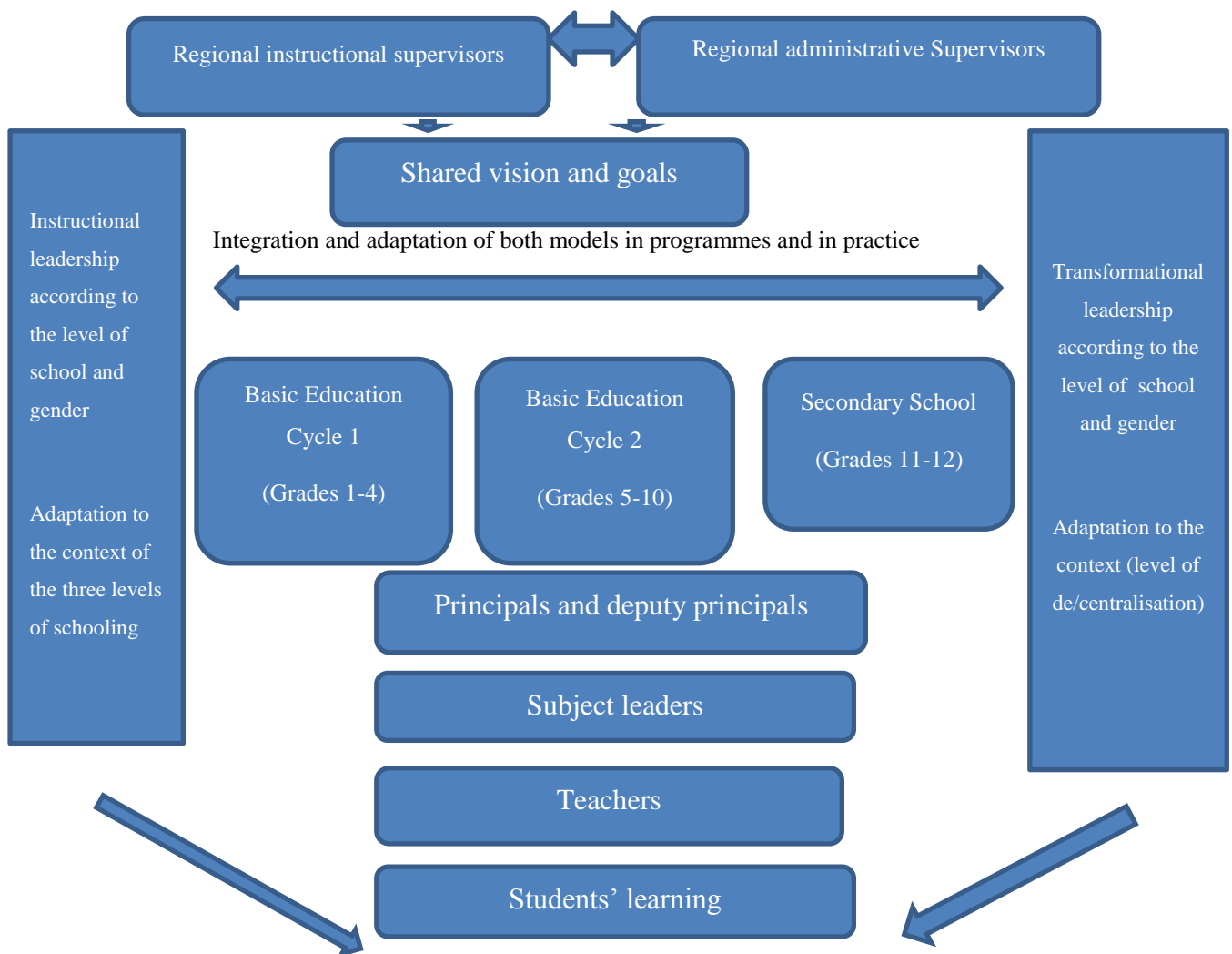
The data on the PLT have shown how policy makers perceive theory and practice. They explained that contemporary modern education in the world is based on theories, which are important to inform policy and practice. They also think that theory can be linked to practice through the knowledge of practitioners at school level in adapting theory to practice. For the international consultancy, the PLT programme was designed on the assumption that learning the theoretical models and being able to apply them can bridge the gap between the practice and the capacity of the principals. It seems as there is an assumption that training principals on the theoretical models will improve practice in schools.

At the practice level, principals explained a different point of view regarding theory. They explained that the Ministry's policies should be reformed to assist the real practice at schools before training them on new theories. For example, they explained that they should have more authority over teachers before training them to be 'transformational leaders'. Additionally, they explained that the focus should be on the needs of practice in schools instead of adopting new policies and introducing new initiatives. This shows how the perception theory differs at the micro level from the way it is perceived at the macro level. Therefore, theoretical models of educational leadership and management should be introduced to principals in a more applied way to their practice in order to provide value for theory.

Consequently, I propose to adapt both the transformational leadership model and instructional leadership model in a unified model. The proposed model is based on the findings of this research on how the instructional and transformational models were introduced in the PLT. For example, it was found that the two models were introduced in separate fragmented workshops. Participants were not able to identify the relationship between the instructional leadership and the transformational leadership. Additionally, because of the type of supervision and monitoring they receive from the local education authority, they have identified their roles in school as mainly managerial and implementers.

The proposed model requires changes of policy and practice at Ministry level, regional level and school level. At the Ministry level, this will be through redefining the roles of the administrative supervisors, the instructional (curriculum) supervisors, principals, deputy principals and head of subject roles. The goal of this proposed alignment of the roles is to direct the focus of all people and their actions towards learning and student attainment, rather than on bureaucratic managerial issues. At regional level, the practises of supervising schools should be reformed in order to provide assistance and support to school leaders in order to achieve a shared vision for the school. At school levels, school leaders should be developed through proper coaching and mentoring on the basis of the model of transformational and instructional leadership.

Figure 7: A proposed shared transformational and instructional leadership model for Oman



The data has shown that initiatives are mainly centrally initiated. Therefore, the educational change in Oman should pay more consideration to the actual needs of the implementation level, as suggested by Wedell (2009). The centralised systems create the condition for policy makers to easily initiate new initiatives and policies from their hierarchal position in the system as the managers of the change. Therefore, there should be a reform to the current role of the Central Ministry in how it plans and initiates new changes.

An evaluation of reforms is essential to inform policy and practice. Additionally, new initiatives should not be nationally scaled up before being evaluated, similarly to the prescription of Philips and Ochs (2013) model of four stages in policy borrowing. The evaluation should consider the people at the implementation stage. Additionally, the initiatives should be evaluated on the basis of their relation to teaching and learning. Providing such an evaluation will provide data for policy making for the Ministry, regional educational authorities for monitoring and supervision, and for schools to improve their practice. The Ministry is advised, through the findings of this research, to initiate a new department responsible for education policy, and to be responsible for actions relevant to the stages of Philips and Ochs's framework.

With this proposed change, when an initiative is introduced, appropriate training should be provided to build the capacity of those at school level, particularly principals. As the analysed data proved Wedell's (2009) claims that proper implementation at school level requires appropriate training within the cascade model. Therefore, the Ministry should build the capacity of local training teams when it adopts the model. However, the development of principals should be of a much higher quality than a cascade model usually provides.

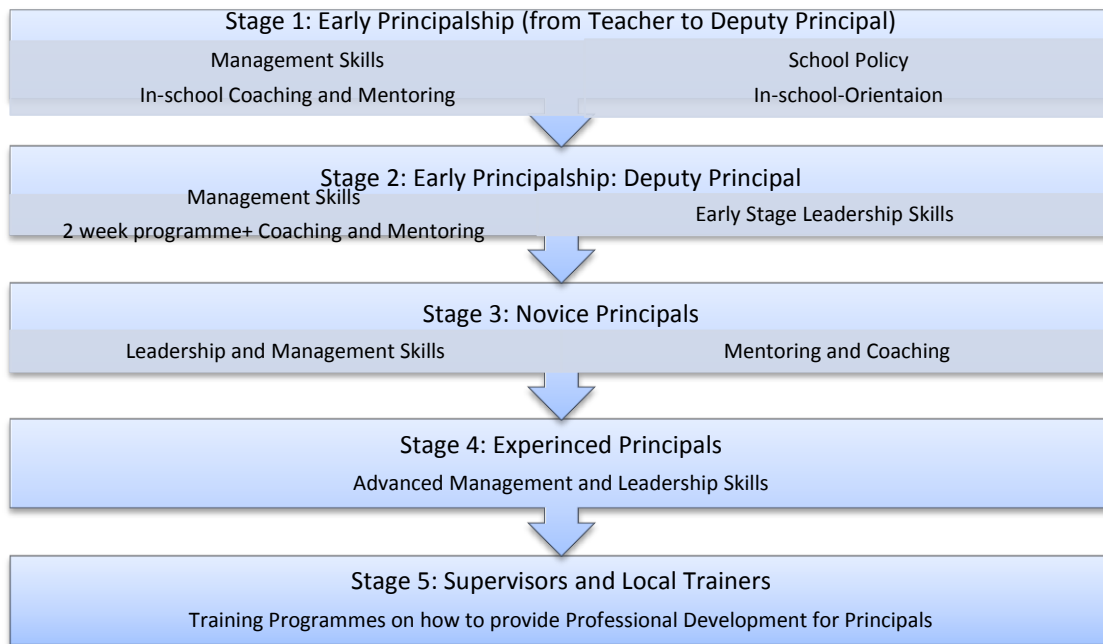
Additionally, it was known from this research that training alone in workshops without follow up support and assistance, the proposed changes will not be well implemented in schools. Policy makers usually assume that change can happen through the replication of training to regions. Therefore, for future initiatives, there should be a support plan for implementation.

Further, as shown by the data, there are various variations at regional and school level that were not considered during the initial plan of replicating the PLT training. It may show that the top level in a centralised system views the micro level as being the same, while in reality they are diversely varied. Consequently, the level of policy making should consider these variations and address them at the planning phase. Additionally, the capacity of local education authorities should be built on in order to provide such support according to the distinctive needs of each region.

Lastly, for a sustainable educational change in Oman, the issue of capacity building of the Ministry is its tool to succeed in education reform. As the data have shown, it was challenging for the Ministry to take over the PLT project after the consultancy delivered the early workshops. The Ministry should empower and develop its own personnel and develop its expertise in education reform. The international consultancy providers can provide expertise but their knowledge on the context cannot be as that of the national experts.

Additionally, with regard to the educational leadership development, the data has shown that there is no system of progression and development for principalship in Oman. It has also shown that the participants in the PLT are of various stages in principalship. Their evaluation of the PLT was influenced by their stage in principalship. Therefore, on the ground of the data from the context, this study proposes a five-stage model of principal progression for Oman. The five stages were identified from the analyses of data from the participants of the focus groups and the individual interviews. Each of the stages, as shown below, should have a particular scheme of professional development. Additionally, the experienced principals of Stage Four and the supervisors of Stage Five should be given the role of coaching and mentoring school leaders during the early stages of principalship.

Figure 8: A proposed model for principals' progression and development in Oman



Additionally, the development of school leaders should be developed beyond the current top-down style of supervision in the form of observation and writing reports. The data has shown that the processes of development are more important and influential than the content of programmes. Consequently, supervisors and local trainers in the regions should be developed to be able to provide coaching and mentoring. As the data have shown, the novice deputy principals and principals require on site coaching and mentoring.

Professional development programmes for school leaders should be designed according to the needs of each of the proposed stages of progression in principalship. The data have shown that the PLT programme was inappropriate for the level of novice deputy principals and principals, and equally inappropriate for the experienced. There should be a scheme of leadership programmes, each with a particular level of proficiency similar to that provided by the UK National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). The programmes should be designed and delivered by experienced trainers as the findings have shown the impact of the cascade model when unexperienced trainers handle the training at local level. The newly established Educational Academy should play a similar role to the NCTL.

9.6 Limitations of the Study, and Implications for Research

As for any study, this study has limitations. The first is that the data collected from principals and local trainers are self-reporting data which were suitable for the aims of this study. However, it would be better if there was observation of the training sessions to assess how the training was delivered and provide an evaluation of the training according to this observation. This particularly would be of great use to recommended further improvement for the processes of delivery.

Additionally, it would have been more beneficial if the participants of the focus groups were from different roles and positions in the PLT, in order to generate more ideas through their interaction instead of interviewing each group in isolation. However, this action needs extra preparation and arrangement at regional level. If well arranged, focus groups, with participants representing various actors, such as teachers, principals, local administrators and policy makers, have the potential to provide rich data from various levels from one focus group.

Regarding implications, the use of vertical case study methodology in this research has provided various comparisons to better know about the studied phenomena of educational leadership development. Researchers are recommended to compare between the various levels - global, national and local, as they are interconnected. This is particularly important for researching educational leadership and management in the context of Oman. The vertical case study also provides the opportunity to study educational leadership from a cross-cultural perspective through comparing global knowledge and theoretical framework to national and local reality.

Additionally, the use of focus groups provided rich data for this study. Many of the participants told me that it was the best way for them to share their experience. One of the participants commented: 'Usually, I do not fill in questionnaires of researchers, but I do very much welcome participating in group discussion. This is the proper way for us to share our experiences'. However, on the basis of the experience of this study, the conduct of focus groups should be well organised in advance. It is advised to set the norms for discussion in

advance, to provide a briefing on the aims of the discussion. The rationale is to control the topic of discussion because in focus groups it is very easy for discussion to become diverted to discuss other issues; socially, it is not appropriate to stop participants discussing these issues, because they may think it is valuable to tell.

This study has shown various areas that need further research. The first is to research policy and decision making in the Ministry, and how it can be improved. Such research will not only fill a current gap but will also assist the Ministry in reforming its current policy-making process. It is recommended that such research should provide comparisons with other education systems from different regions, and provide options for reform.

Additionally, it is recommended to study other educational leadership models rather than the two studied in this research in order to learn about their applications in the context of Oman. Such research will create linkages between the current theory on educational leadership and management, and the nature of actual practice in schools. It will also inform the design and delivery of educational leadership and management programmes designed for Omani principals.

Furthermore, it is recommended to research the transition period of school leaders from teachers to deputy principals and to principals. Such research will provide more of an understanding on their selection, preparation and development. This is a critical period in the preparation of effective school leaders. Currently, there is scarcity of knowledge in this area in the context of Oman. The research should collect data from various stakeholders, including parents and students.

9.7 The Future

The end of one journey is the start of another! I have decided to end my thesis with a comment on the present that leads to the future. Throughout my PhD study, I have attended various academic events on the issue of the impact of research, an issue which is of interest to me as a member of the Central Ministry of Education. As a result, my future plan is to take the initiative to provide the opportunity for this research to have an impact: an impact to

academia through journal publication, an impact to policy through providing a summary for policy-makers at the Ministry, an impact to practice through publishing a book in Arabic by translating this thesis, and through investing what I have learnt in my future career at the Ministry.

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Appendices: Research Instruments

Appendix A: Key questions in the interview with the PLT content designer

Q.1 What was the rationale to initiate the PLT project for the context of Oman?

Q.2 How was the PLT training content designed?

Q.3 What actions were taken to understand the context of Oman's schools, as there is limited published knowledge on education in Oman?

Q.4 How did you assess the professional needs of the participants, and how did you investigate the reform plans for the Ministry of Education?

Q.5 How was the choice of educational leadership models made to train the Omani principals on educational leadership?

Q.6 Why were the instructional and transformational leadership models chosen in particular for the PLT content?

Q.7 How was the translation of the content to Arabic ? Were there any considerations by you for the translation?

Q.8 What were the comparative and cross cultural considerations in designing the PLT?

Q.9 How was the sequence of topics decided, and also the phasing of workshops?

Q.10 Did you face any unexpected issues with regard to context, culture and language when you delivered the programme in Oman?

Q.11 What cross cultural, comparative and international issues have you learned from your experience with the design and delivery of the PLT?

Q.12 What implications do you suggest to improve the policy and practice of developing school leaders in Oman to assist educational reform?

Q.13. What other recommendations do you suggest?

Q.14. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix B: Key questions in the interviews with policy makers

- 1- What are the Ministry's goals behind the initiation of the PLT project?
- 2- Why an international collaboration in introducing the PLT project?
- 3- How was the education reform linked to the role of the school principals from the perspective of the Ministry?
- 4- How was the PLT project aligned to the Ministry's plans and policies related to the developing of school leaders?
- 5- What are the considerations adopted by the Ministry in policy borrowing and transfer from the other educational systems?
- 6- How did the Ministry assess the professional needs of school principals?
- 7- What were the reasons to scale up the PLT training?
- 8- What were the changes to policy and practice that accompanied the introduction of the PLT training?
- 9- How were the topics of instructional and transformational leadership in the PLT aligned with the Ministry's reforms?
- 9- What type of support was provided for the trained principals to assist them with implementing the proposed changes?
- 10- Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix C: Key questions in the interviews with master trainers

- 1- How did you join the PLT?
- 2- What type of preparation did you receive to become a master trainer?
- 3- What were the considerations taken to scale up the PLT project?
- 4- What actions have you taken to prepare the training teams in the regions?
- 5- How did you address the local variations in the regions?
- 6- What were the procedures taken to consider the variation of experience of participants?
- 7- What changes were introduced to the content of the programme to address the variation of roles of principals and levels of schooling?
- 8- What actions were taken to assure the quality of translation of the content into Arabic?
- 9- How did you handle the issues related to policy borrowing and transfer introduced in the programme?
- 10- How were the topics of instructional and transformational leadership introduced, and how were the models of leadership aligned with context?
- 10- How would you evaluate your experience with PLT, and what lessons did you learn on the basis of this experience?
- 11- Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix D: Key questions in the interviews with local trainers

- 1- How did you join the PLT project as a local trainer?
- 2- What type of preparation have you received?
- 3- How were you trained to comprehend the content of the PLT, and the processes and skills of training?
- 4- What were the main challenges in delivering training in your region?
- 5- Would you like to comment on the first and second phases of the PLT project, and how are they different or similar?
- 6- What challenges did you face in delivering the content of the programme?
- 7- How were the models of instructional and transformational leadership introduced?
- 8- How do you think that the models of instructional and transformational leadership are related to practice in schools in Oman?
- 9- Would you like to explain your experience regarding how applicable the models were to practice at regional level and at schools?
- 10- What do you suggest to improve the introduction of models?
- 11- Is there anything that you would like to add on the basis of your experience in the PLT?

Appendix E: Key questions in the interviews with school leaders

- 1-When did you start your principalship role?
- 2- What type of preparation and development did you have before and after you joined school administration?
- 3- How did you join the PLT programme?
- 4-What were your expectations when you joined the programme?
- 5-Did the programme address your professional needs? If so, how?
- 6- Was the content of the programme relevant to your own practice?
- 7-What did you learn from the programme?
- 8-Would you like to comment on your experiences with the first and second cycles of the programme?
- 9- How relevant were the transformational and instructional leadership models to the policy and practice in schools?
- 10- What type of support did you receive from the local education authority?
- 11- How do you evaluate the performance of the local trainers?
- 12- What do you recommend to improve the educational leadership programmes on the basis of your experience with the PLT?
- 13- Would you like to add anything on the basis of your experience in the PLT?

Appendix F: Key themes of discussion in the focus groups

Six key areas of discussion

1- Joining the PLT

2- Evaluation of content and processes of delivery

3- Education reform and the PLT

4- Cross cultural issues

5- Educational leadership frameworks: instructional and transformational leadership

6- Recommendations