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From Oil to Non-Oil: How are Private Higher Education Institutions Confronting with Quality Issues?

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Abstract. Plummeting oil prices have been a cause of concern for Omani economy and the state is strategizing to provide impetus to non-oil sectors. One of the prime sectors which are being given the desired push is that of higher education wherein private sector is being given ample opportunity to further the economy of Oman by contributing towards its human capital. Private higher educational institutions in Oman have collaboration with international university partners. However, issues of quality management remain to be addressed. The key contribution of the paper lies in the emphasis on the role and significance of the international university partners in furtherance of quality management in these private higher educational institutions. For the present purpose, four metrics of quality assurance shall be taken into consideration; viz. academic quality, infrastructure, research collaboration and professional development. Document review shall remain the edifice for research evidence.

Keywords. Oman, Internationalization, Higher education, Privatization.

JEL. H52, H75, I00.

1. Introduction

Since Oman's Vision 2020 aims to spearhead economy through diversification into non-oil sectors with key emphasis on privatization (Callen, *et al.*, 2014). Given that the oil reserves are depleting and revenues earned from the oil sector are not sustainable to fund education, it is important that higher education be accorded a priority status by the state (Al-Hajry, 2002; Chapman, Al-Barwani & Ameen, 2009). Impetus on economic diversification, in light of the fact that oil reserves are fast depleting, is not a recent phenomenon (Ernst & Young, 1990). Collapse of oil prices has occurred as much in the past as it is recently. Such an occurrence was witnessed in 1986 when it was realized that oil-based economy is not sustainable. Back then, austerity measures were taken and the third five year plan was put on hold. Presently, Oman faces a second phase of plummeting oil prices since 2014. The state is gearing up towards adopting austerity measures and cutting government spending. In fact, oil crisis has been perceived as an opportunity for economic reforms and diversification (Deutsche Bank Research, 2015).

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Oman ranks 52 in the Human Development Report (HDR 2015). Thus, in terms of international rankings, Oman has been in the forefront in ensuring that its human capital is robust. In alignment with this assertion, the state has been heavily investing in education for a safe future for the Omanis in the post-oil scenario. In 1986, out of the total public educational expenditure, higher educational expenditure amounted 15.3% which tumbled to 5.8% in 1993 (UNESCO, 1997). Education and training were allocated 10% of all projected state spending in Oman's budget for 2013 which was higher by 25% than the preceding year (KPMG, 2013). In 2015, the budgeted expenditure on education was 13% of the total allocation which was 27% higher than the preceding year which is in line with impetus to higher education (KPMG, 2015). The 2016 state budget has accorded emphasis on education (Royal Decree 2/2016). Thus, the state is investing heavily in higher education with the belief that its educated workforce would easily find work assignments abroad (Ameen, Chapman & Al-Barwani, 2010).

The purpose of this study lies in basing itself on the quality issues in private institutions of higher education. It has been underscored that private higher educational institutions have a significant role in churning out Omanis who are well-equipped to face the competitive post-oil scenario and to maintain quality standards in higher education (Ameen, Chapman & Al-Barwani, 2010). However, given that all private higher educational institutions have affiliations with international universities as a policy stipulation, the role and significance of these international university partners in instituting and furthering quality mechanisms in the local private higher educational institutions cannot be written off. The paper shall tread its course through a brief outline of the privatization of higher education, state's role in the monitoring of these private educational institutions, issues of quality in furthering efficiency of these private institutions through the support of international university partners and concluding remarks.

2. Privatization of higher education

The need for the collaborative efforts on the part of the private and public sector in education were underlined quite early in 1990 (Ernst & Young, 1990) even though the process was initialized a few years later. Privatization of higher education was supported in line with the broader state policy of providing greater access and equity in education to Omani students (Al-Lamki, 2002). The other rationale for the furtherance of privatization of higher education was to ensure greater quality in the sector through the contribution of the international university partners (Goodliffe & Razvi, 2008; UNESCO, 2007). Another reason for the enhanced impetus to privatization of higher education springs from the fact that the state wishes to churn human resources which are skilled and may be better employed thereby contributing to the Omanization of the workplaces. Further, a diversified range of subjects were available for the students to choose from. Finally, the demand for higher education was on the rise concomitantly with the impetus to technological and scientific development (Sanyal, 1998). Since higher education is exempted from taxes in Oman (Ameen, Chapman & Al-Barwani, 2010), therefore, there are ample opportunities for the privatization of higher education. Further, for enabling students hailing from humble backgrounds to pursue their studies in the private institutions, state has been offering scholarships for them to cover their tuition fees (Chapman, Al-Barwani & Ameen, 2009; UNESCO, 2007).

The private higher educational institutions emerged in 1995 (Royal Decrees 68/96; 34/99; 36/99; 41/99; 42/99) and they are 27 in number as of now. All the private higher educational institutions are required to have affiliation with

international universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002). These private higher educational institutions function under the aegis of different Ministries like Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, besides other private entities.

3. State role in monitoring private educational institutions

Political landscape is replete with norms and procedures emphasizing upon maintenance of quality standards in higher education. In Oman, a lot of emphasis is being given to institutional accreditation for ensuring quality maintenance in higher educational institutions, both public and private (Al-Bandary, 2005). Thus, public authorities have been concerned about quality assurance issues in myriad ways. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), through the Director General of Private Universities and Colleges (DGPUC), is involved in developing accreditation procedures and overseeing the licensing processes. The DGPUC plays a crucial role in ensuring that private higher educational institutions are functioning in compliance with the government rules and regulations and in-line with strategic directions in higher education. Oman Quality Network (OQN), a not-for-profit body, set up in 2006, is responsible for assisting Omani higher education sector in sharing information and good practices in different quality assurance aspects. It is entrusted with ensuring quality standards in higher educational institutions envisages quality enhancement as its mission (OQNHE Guidelines). Furthermore, the OQNHE lays emphasis on collaborative arrangements with external partners as well (OQNHE Strategic Plan 2011-2016). Further, MoHE is the overseeing authority of the private higher education institutions and ensures that all regulations regarding staffing, buildings and safety are being followed by the private higher educational institutions (Royal Decree, 1996). The MoHE counts maintenance of quality standards as its strategic objective. Education Council (EC) has been responsible for ensuring that the higher education provision meets the needs of Omani populace while maintaining international standards at the same time. The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) is the chief accreditation authority for public as well as private educational institutions. Set up as Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) in 2001 (Royal Decree No. 74, 2001) and restructured as OAAA in 2010, it is entrusted with the responsibility of programme and institutional accreditation and maintenance of quality standards in all higher educational institutions in Oman, including private higher educational institutions. Further, the Higher Education Admissions Council is responsible to regulate the students' admission in higher educational institutions and making recommendations to the Council of Ministers regarding improvisation in higher education.

In the Plan for Omani Higher Education Quality Management System (OAC, 2006), four areas were identified as infrastructural policies and frameworks and these were: institutional quality assurance, programme quality assurance, quality enhancement; and capability development. Institutional audit is conducted since 2008 as a first cycle for institutional accreditation wherein an institution's quality assurance and quality management enhancement processes are evaluated in terms of an institution's affirmed goals as well as the requirements mandated by the government and other external sources like professional bodies or affiliate institutions (OAAA, 2008). As a result of institutional audit, Quality Audit Reports are compiled wherein commendations, affirmations and recommendations are reported to aid the institutions to improve its quality assurance setup and assure the efficiency of its internal quality system as suggested by the external reviewers. The

second cycle of institutional accreditation pertains to the assessment of the performance of the institutions against a set of standards (institutional standards) wherein the institutional efficiency is tested to ensure the compliance of its activities with the international norms. OAAA is also in-charge of programme accreditation process wherein curriculum is reviewed and ascertained by local and international experts. OAAA has finished the first cycle of institutional accreditation but the second cycle of the assessment of institutional standards remains to be done. In addition, OAAA is working to finalize the programme accreditation manual and until now there is no formal programme accreditation activity conducted for any academic programme. Though MoHE responsible for licensing both the private higher educational institutions and their programmes, however; the licensing procedures and requirements set by MoHE does not assure the quality of functionality and efficacy of different activities in different private higher educational institutions. Since a majority of local private higher educational institutions are offering offshore programmes which are designed, developed and quality assured by foreign universities the chief concern is whether “these programme(s), subject to any appropriate contextualization , (are) maintaining the standards by which (they are) legitimately approved in (their) place of origin” (Carroll, *et al.*, 2009: 24).

4. Challenges ahead for private educational institutions in quality management

While improvement of quality standards is one of the significant reasons for the establishment of private educational institutions in the higher education, issues of quality management remain to be addressed. It has been maintained that for the sustenance of private higher educational institutions, four conditions should be met; viz. the quality of education offered by the private higher educational institution should be competitive with that offered by the public higher educational institution; students’ socio-economic background may be factored while covering the tuition fees; private financial institutions should be willing to fund the students’ expenses, and the state should lend its direct and indirect financial and technical support to the private higher educational institutions (UNESCO, 2007). However, this paper adds to the framework by proposing that the role and contribution of the international university partner may also be a key factor in ensuring and furthering quality education in the private higher educational institutions given that these international university partners are significant stakeholders of the higher education system and their expertise may be leveraged by the local private higher educational institutions in a better way. Therefore, this paper calls for changes in the procedural norms governing the association between the local private higher educational institutions and their international university partners to involve the latter in the quality management process in a more holistic manner. Their role should not be limited to curriculum design and award of degrees. Although the Ministry of Higher Education has underscored the need to identify the “areas of cooperation” in the affiliation agreement between the local private higher educational institution and the international university partner, the specification and clarity are missing. Besides ensuring “quality of contents of programs and courses... the issues are how these programs are delivered, and whether these (international affiliates) institutions assure the provision of adequate resources (e.g. libraries, laboratories, classrooms, etc) for delivering these courses” (Al Harthy, 2011).

5. Methodology

This study is based on document review drawing largely from published and unpublished resources. These documents pertain to Quality Audit Reports which are available in published as well as uploaded on the website of OAAA. Given that quality is a broad indicator, for the present purpose, the notion of quality shall be limited to improvement of academic standards in academic programmes, infrastructure, research performance and professional capacity and development. Each of these four dimensions shall be discussed in line with the OAAA observations in the Quality Audit Reports. It is acknowledged by OAAA that all private higher educational institutions are not well-equipped with the expertise and infrastructure to ensure quality standards and the support from the international university partners may be crucial in spearheading quality assurance initiatives in these institutions. OAAA maintains that “current best practice in transnational education indicates that a planned approach to the selection of affiliates and the establishment of affiliate relationships will deliver improved outcomes” (OAAA Quality Audit Report 14, 2010: 15).

Academic programmes must be quality assured in higher education. Right from the curriculum framing task down to the delivery of the text, academic standards should meet international standards keeping in mind adequacy and efficiency of students’ learning. It has been pointed out clearly that affiliation agreements should ensure that academic quality standards are met (Criterion 1.4, OAAA Programme Standards). For instance, one of the private higher educational institutions offering joint degrees was finding it difficult to standardize its academic programmes in terms of the award of degrees by two different international university affiliations (Quality Audit Report, 2011). Further, maintenance of academic quality standards is the shared responsibility of the local private higher educational institution as well as the international university partner. Following table underscores the gaps identified by the OAAA pertaining to academic quality (Table 1).

Table 1. OAAA observations in Quality Audit Reports pertaining to maintenance of academic quality standards

Quality Audit Report	Observations made by OAAA
Audit report 35 (2013)	“... The relationship with (international university partner) is long standing, crucial and defined by an affiliation agreement between the two institutions. However, (local private higher educational institution) and (international university partner) need to clarify their mutual expectations and obligations and ensure that where the responsibility for assuring academic standards lies is made clear...”
Audit report 30 (2012)	“... the current affiliation agreement between (the private higher educational institution) and (international university partner) needs to be reviewed and revised in order to ensure that it supports the quality assurance of academic standards...” “... (there is no evidence as to) how the activities specified in the (affiliation) agreement explicitly guarantee the quality of education in line within an international accreditation system...”
Audit report 29 (2012)	“... While (international university partner) has provided (local private higher educational institution) with the curricula for its programs and continues to provide valuable support and advice at program level, it does not engage in activities that can assure the integrity of awards...” “... There is a need for the formal responsibilities of the (local private higher educational institution) and (international university partner) regarding academic standards to be clarified and systems to be enhanced where required...”
Audit report 36 (2014)	“...The (local private higher educational institution must) develop and implement a system to monitor the implementation of its Academic Affiliation Agreement with (international university partner)...” “...Undergraduate courses taught by fly-in professors can be very intensive, leaving students at times overwhelmed with the amount of material covered, and the relative lack of faculty interaction...”
Audit report 25 (2011)	“...There may be possibilities in the future for the delivery of a suite of postgraduate programmes with (international university partner) with the involvement of (local private higher educational institution’s) staff. This initiative may provide opportunities for increased understanding and development of the research-teaching nexus...” “... Greater input could be sought from (international university partners) to ensure that

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	the (academic) programmes more explicitly consider the needs of the Omani context... “...College graduates of (international university partner’s) computing programmes are eligible for membership of the (international professional associations)... Unlike (international university partner’s) own students, however, Oman-based graduates have to make individual applications to these associations...”
Audit report 2 (2009)	“... (There is no) evidence to indicate that (international university partner) regularly monitors or reviews activities and academic programmes... (The local private higher educational institution) has significant areas of concern regarding the interaction with (international university partner). These include: delay in getting letters from BIT; delay in the publication of student results; lack of senior staff from (international university partner); and delay on the part of (international university partner) in response to (local private higher educational institution’s) suggestions for new programmes...” “...In academic areas, the curriculum and materials from (international university partner) underpin the approach to teaching and learning... However, there is a need for the establishment of consistent curriculum development and review processes in order to ensure that the programmes meet the needs of the local students...”
Audit report 14 (2010)	“... (The private higher educational institution) is working on developing new programs and this is done in consultation with, and approval from, (international university partner). However, (it remains) unclear as to whether criteria for selection of potential programs involved completion of a comprehensive needs analysis. For example, a... program has received approval from (international university partner) but the relationship of this to the future employment market on a local, national or international basis was not evident...”
Audit report 18 (2011)	“... (There is) lack of contextualisation of the (international university partner’s) curricula for the needs of Omani students...”
Audit report 19 (2011)	“... (The) entry criteria for the (academic) programme in particular appeared to be a grey area and noted that this issue has been a subject of discussion between the (private higher educational institution), (international university partner) and the Ministry of Higher Education...” “...The (private higher educational institution) and respective (international university) affiliates need to ensure that a high level of rigour is applied to the implementation of its dissertation assessment process, and subsequent evaluation of results...”
Audit report 20 (2011)	“... (Students) expressed some concern regarding the currency of information presented, especially about new developments in technological fields, and about the age of the equipment in instructional labs...” “...As a learning management system, Moodle needs to be integrated with learning strategies...”

As a significant stakeholder along with the local private higher educational institution, it is important that the international university partner assists in instituting the infrastructure of the local private higher educational institutions as far as maintaining quality standards are concerned. Thus, libraries should be provided with the required wherewithal and online resources should be shared by both sides. Accessibility to books and learning resources of the international university partner should be made available for the students and faculty from the local private higher educational institutions ([Quality Audit Report, 2013](#)). Following table underscores the gaps identified by the OAAA pertaining to institutional infrastructure (Table 2).

Table 2. OAAA observations in *Quality Audit Reports pertaining to institutional infrastructure*

Quality Audit Report	Observations made by OAAA
Audit report 35 (2013)	“... Although the affiliation agreement indicates that there will be interaction between the libraries at (local private higher education institution) and (international university partner), there was no evidence in support of this...” “... Both institutions (local private higher educational institution and international university partner) are unclear of (international university partner’s) role in the localization and contextualization of courses and programs...”
Audit report 25 (2011)	“... Postgraduate students... have limited use of the (international university partner’s) Library...”
Audit report 3 (2009)	“... (Collaboration with international university partners) may need to be increased to sustain research as well as the requirements for research infrastructure including ejournals and edatabases although... there is limited access to electronic resources via (international university partners)...”
Audit report 1 (2009)	“... The Library is reported to have books, mostly donated by (international university partner). However, many are out of date... The library (of local private higher educational institution) has no relationship with the (international university partner’s)

	library...”
Audit report 41 (2014)	“...The e-library system was difficult to access and it was described as not being user friendly... there is a need and opportunity for improved access and use of the e-library system... At the current time, students and tutors do not have access to the (international university partner’s) library resources...”
Audit report 36 (2014)	“... Additional training of research students in the use of (international university partner’s) electronic library is required...” “... (There are) reported difficulties of students with handling the OPAC of (international university partner’s) online library...”
Audit report 25 (2011)	“... (The local private higher educational institution) needs to upgrade its Library provision but it also needs to consider improving the level of IT provision in order to support the student learning experience...” “... Access (to international university partner’s library) is sometimes limited due to insufficient or nonfunctioning computers and Internet access...” “... Joint initiative (with the international university partner to develop a Research Centre) is ‘at an early stage’...” “...While Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are made available to postgraduate students at (the local private higher educational institution) through (international university partners) (although there are connectivity issues mentioned earlier)... its introduction into undergraduate programmes will be of great benefit to the (the local private higher educational institution). IT support will be required in order to implement this plan...”
Audit report 2 (2009)	“...There appears to be no long term planning or budgetary system for the library, with requests for books and other resources being dealt with on an ad hoc basis...”
Audit report 14 (2010)	“... There is currently no full electronic catalogue of the library collection... There is no formal inter-loan provision with other institutions; such a facility could assist the library as it grows its collection...”
Audit report 18 (2011)	“... (Steps should be taken for) ensuring access to learning support resources and materials at (international university partner)...”
Audit report 19 (2011)	“... There is a need to address the fact that the Library is currently used as a social gathering place, due to a lack of alternative space...” “...Another area that requires (private higher educational institution’s) attention is the opening hours of the Library...”
Audit report 20 (2011)	“... (The private higher educational institution is encouraged to) provide reliable, fast and comprehensive computer, internet and intranet access to all its staff and students...” “... (The private higher educational institution needs to) review existing mechanisms for oversight of the currency and condition of IT equipment (especially workstations available to students) and ensuring a regular maintenance cycle...”

Transnational education provides opportunities for shared research outputs and collaborative scholarship (Stella & Bhushan, 2011). The paper shall be able to underscore as to how the foreign university partners may collaborate with the local private higher educational institutions in promoting and furthering research performance of the latter. Quality Audit Manual stresses upon yielding quality research performance (Quality Audit Manual, 2008: 23). For instance, research-aligned teaching has been emphasized in the Quality Audit reports. Following table underscores the gaps identified by the OAAA pertaining to avenues for research collaboration (Table 3).

Table 3. OAAA observations in Quality Audit Reports pertaining to research collaboration

Quality Audit Report	Observations made by OAAA
Audit report 35 (2013)	“... (The private higher educational institution’s) ties with (international university partner) and professional bodies are limited which further jeopardizes opportunities for collaborative research...”
Audit report 30 (2012)	“... Access to (international university partner’s) resources is not part of affiliation agreement...”
Audit report 27 (2012)	“... (The international university partner) has the capacity to support (local private higher educational institution) in its medium to long term aspirations to evolve a research-oriented culture...”
Audit report 3 (2009)	“... (A) strong relationship with (international university partners) could provide a good foundation and source of advice to (local private higher educational institution) in its efforts to develop its strategies for a detailed research management plan to include key research fields linked through key performance indicators/targets...”
Audit report 41 (2014)	“... There are some faculty who are not involved in research yet (therefore) faculty workload (needs to be) reviewed in this regard...”
Audit report 14 (2010)	“... (There is a) low level of research activity across the faculty body...”
Audit report 18	“... (The local private higher educational institution) should focus on exploring

(2011)	measures to involve more members of the faculty in research pursuits and even consider inviting visiting research scholars. The relationship with (international university partner) could be used to advantage in this regard...”
Audit report 20 (2011)	“... Most research output to date has been focused on conference presentations... Further initiatives from (the private higher educational institution are required) in order to increase research output by its staff, particularly in conjunction with local industry (, international) partner universities and in journal contributions...”

Professional capacity and development implies that the academic staff should be well-qualified and adequate and avenues for their professional development should be provided. This research shall underscore how the foreign university partners may contribute towards conducting faculty development through conferences, seminars, workshops, educational grants and the like. Such efforts on the part of the international university partners are visibly lacking (Quality Audit Report, 2009). Following table underscores the gaps identified by the OAAA pertaining to professional development (Table 4).

Table 4. OAAA observations in Quality Audit Reports pertaining to professional development

Quality Audit Report	Observations made by OAAA
Audit report 27 (2012)	“... From the staff viewpoint, the Library does not offer enough resources to carry out research, and access to (international university partner’s) electronic sources is not made available to teaching staff members of (local private higher educational institution)...”
Audit report 29 (2012)	“... The (local private higher educational institution’s) academic affiliation agreement with (international university partner) provides for professional development of Omani faculty and administrative staff, staff exchange... (however) activity in this regard appears to have been limited...”
Audit report 41 (2014)	“... More awareness workshops should be conducted for faculty (for understanding plagiarism and how to avoid it)...” “... (The private higher educational institution needs to) develop its staff research and consultancy function effectively...” “...professional development needs of staff in the area of research need to be determined and addressed through implementation of a focused plan...” “... (There should be) a more integrated and formalised approach to planning, management and evaluation of the different components of Academic Support Services strategy...”
Audit report 25 (2011)	“...The volume and character of activities (like seminars, scholarships, study and travel grants” will need to be increased significantly if the (local private higher educational institution) is to create an academic culture capable of achieving its stated objective of improving its research capability to match international standards...” “... Staff acknowledged that there was not formally allotted time to undertake activities related to scholarship and research, pursue higher degree studies or to engage with industry and community...”
Audit report 2 (2009) Audit report 14 (2010)	“... (There is) no evidence of a documented system for training new teaching staff...” “... The ongoing development of the undergraduate curriculum is carried out in close collaboration with (the international university partner)... Faculty members were not able to show a full understanding of the requirements and implications of an outcomes-based curriculum and clearly require ongoing professional development in this area...” “... There is no clear plan for professional development... This is an area in which the (international university) academic affiliate could provide significant assistance...”

6. Discussion

Previous research concludes that the international partnership has not been very conducive in quality assurance in private higher educational institutions (Ameen, Chapman & Al-Barwani, 2010; Goodliffe & Razvi, 2012). However, the precise nature and scope of such partnership, in furthering quality assurance in the private higher educational institutions, remains under-emphasized. This paper has sought to cover this gap. As is evident in the Quality Audit Reports, the contribution of international university partners is visibly lacking. Two lessons may be learnt here. First, the political framework needs to ascertain that the terms of agreement governing the affiliation between the private higher educational institutions and their international university partners must be specific in terms of the latter’s contribution towards enhancing quality culture in the former. Second, the private

higher educational institutions must ensure that their international university partners are significant stakeholders in the private higher education system and they should work in a collaborative manner for ensuring quality assurance benchmarked against international standards. As mentioned earlier that one of the rationales for opening higher education space to private sector was to ensure quality standards in higher education which would benefit the Omani students in engaging in the international knowledge economy in a better way. An international perspective may evolve through the collaboration with the international university partners given that quality measures are well in place.

7. Conclusion

This paper began with the emphasis that Oman has shifted from an oil-economy to that of a non-oil economy wherein impetus to higher education is accorded priority. Hitherto, oil revenues would sustain the education sector but with the non-replenishing oil resources at the disposal of the state, diversification of economy has been resorted to with increased impetus to privatization. Among the non-oil sectors which have received the push from the state counts education. Oman has come a long way from 1970s when there was lack of formal education and infrastructure was lacking. With the opening up of economy and impetus given to the privatization of higher education, higher education has afforded opportunities to Omani students to pursue their higher education in their home country with the added advantage of picking up courses of their choice. Internationalization of higher education has contributed towards quality management in higher education but the private higher education has not been much forthcoming in concretizing its quality assurance mechanisms (Ameen, Chapman & Al-Barwani, 2010). However, given that the private higher educational institutions have affiliating partnerships with the international universities, it is important that the latter play a significant role in furthering quality in the private higher education system. The state must be proactive in specifying the role and contribution of the international university partners in furthering and maintaining quality in higher education. These standards must be key parameters for assessing the quality of the private higher educational institutions, especially for the purpose of audits. Future research may be undertaken on a comparative perspective between the quality management practices in the public versus the private higher educational institutions. A second line of inquiry may reflect upon the role of international rankings of the international university partners in boosting the quality assurance norms of the local private higher educational institutions. Finally, in line with the paper's title, future research may underscore how private higher education sector is contributing towards employability of Omanis in non-oil sectors given the shrinkage of the oil-based sectors.

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