

Teacher Formation for Islamic Education: The experience of Sultan Qaboos University

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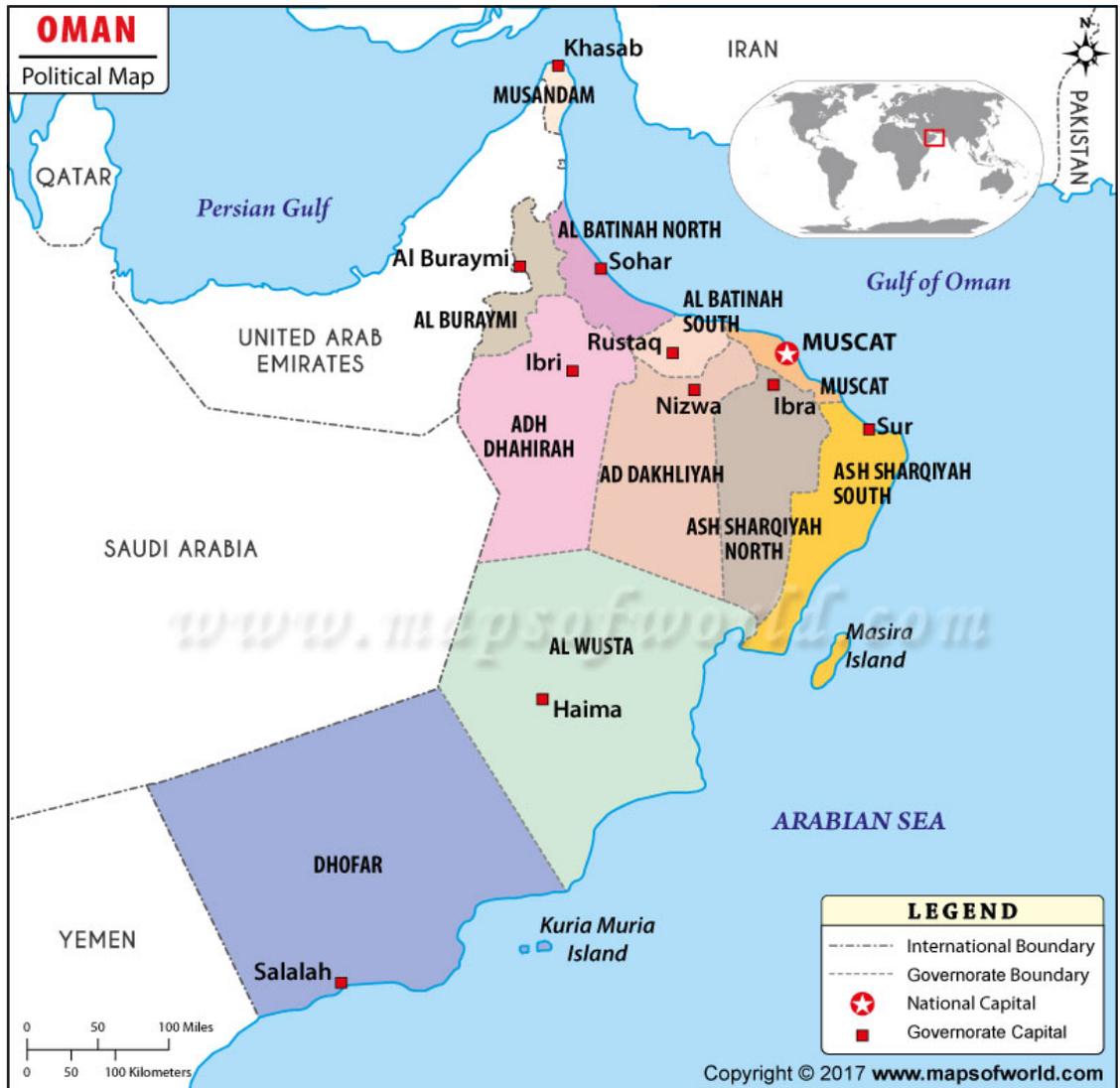
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Introduction

- The development of Islamic education curricula and teaching methods in the Islamic and non-Islamic world has become a field of interest for academic scrutiny.
- This is particularly true with the duality of instruction that takes place in most parts of the Islamic world today, where scientific curricula are often imported or taught in a foreign language (Abdul Kabir, 2016). The assessment of teacher training and educational programs is a point of major concern, not only in the developing world (Al-Ayasrieh, 2005).
- Changes in demography, societal and labour market demands, have, sometimes in unison with neoliberal privatization policies, led to calls for changes in the educational system over the last decades. Studies on students' performance worldwide and their discussions may be witnesses to these developments.

The Importance of Teacher Education

- Teachers are regarded as agents of change and key to improving the quality of education (Chapman et al, 2012); probably more so in striving countries in the developing and Islamic world than elsewhere. Teacher education and commitment is a vital indicator for the success of the endeavors for improvement.
- **In this vein, this paper gives an insight into:**
- The formation of teachers for **Islamic education in Oman**, more particularly at the **College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University**.
- It discusses the **historical background of Islamic education in the Sultanate**, its most important developments, **the integration of Islamic education into the public school system**. It details the Islamic education teacher program at SQU and discusses various points of interest, related to **degree plans, practical training, accreditation, employability** and others.
- In conclusion, it opens the discussion on **possibilities for further development**.



The Sultanate of Oman

- The Sultanate of Oman had approximately 4.4 million inhabitants as of 2016, with an expatriate percentage of nearly 45%. About half of the country's inhabitants reside in the capital Muscat. Life expectancy at birth is 74.9 years for males, and 79.3 for females (Statistical Year Book 2017).
- Rapid Population growth and average age need to be taken into account upon planning future needs for teachers generally and Islamic education teachers in particular.
- **In 2014, nearly 56% of the population were under 25 years of age (Ladewig, 2017, p.19).**



Sultan Qaboos University.



The total number of students at the College of Education in semester 2015/2016 was 1874, of which 1188 were females.

Oman and its educational history

- The people of Oman embraced Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet, p.b.u.h.
- The first mosque was built by Māzin b. Ghadūbah, who accepted Islam after meeting the Prophet, p.b.u.h.
- The mosque is still to be found in Samā'il, a small town between Muscat and Nizwa.
- Earliest mosques in the country show traces of two qiblas, alluding to their construction even prior to the changing of qiblah in 2 AH.
- Many Sahabah are of Omani descent. The Tābi'ī Jābir b. Zayd, considered to be the first Imam of the Ibadhi madhhab, hails from Oman.
- Islamic scholarship therefore has a long tradition in the country. Becoming home to the Ibadhi school in Umayyad times, the region followed its own way in many aspects and was largely self-ruled either in independence from or formal affiliation to the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman States.
- Omani history is also a history of numerous internal and external wars, impacting the educational system over the centuries (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.55).

Oman's tradition in Islamic scholarship

- Locally reputable schools and libraries date back to the 3rd century AH/ 9th century AD. Most reputable in the Islamic sciences were the schools of **Maḥbūb b. Al-Ruḥayl in Sohar**; **Mūsā b.a. Jābir al-Izkawī**; the school of **Ibn Barakah in Bahla** as well as the schools of **Nizwa and Rustaq** (Sultan Qaboos Higher Institute of Culture and Sciences, 2013, p. 340ff).
- Famous were also the **Yaʿrūbī school in the fort of Jibrin in the 17th century AD**, or the school of **al-Khalīlī in Samāʿil** in the **19th century**, and the school of **Nūr al-Dīn al-Sālimī in Biddiyah** in the **19th/20th century** (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.65f). The later have been influential on teaching Islamic sciences far into the twentieth century. Outstanding contributions have also been made in the fields of medicine, astronomy, history, geography and language, to name but a few.
- **Many of these schools yielded a considerable educational outcome over the centuries** (Sultan Qaboos Higher Institute of Culture and Sciences, 2013, p. 340ff).

Oman's tradition in Islamic scholarship

- While basic Qur'anic education was traditionally present in any masjid, higher education was available in particular schools. Education was organized around two circles; the first comprised of learning to read the Qur'an and write, dictation, principles of the Arabic language, fundamentals in 'Aqīdah and Fiqh, as well as basic arithmetic, and memorization of poetry. The second circle comprised of the science of 'Aqīdah, tafsīr, fiqh and uṣūl al-fiqh, rules of inheritance, and the sciences of Arabic language, as well as logic, history, sīrah and sunnah. The student was only transferred from one study circle to the next if he had complete mastery of the subject. (Sultan Qaboos Higher Institute of Culture and Sciences, 2013, p. 340).
- **There was therefore no difference in the educational administration and conceptualization as compared to other parts of the Islamic world through the ages.**

Oman's tradition in Islamic scholarship

- The traditional ijāzah system was active and functioning in Oman as well as in other places in the Islamic world around the globe. Education was holistic in that it corresponded to the exigencies of Islamic culture and concepts; with the basic education in Qur'an and Sunnah, Fiqh and Uṣūl al-Fiqh, Arabic language and grammar.
- Features of the traditional system of instruction of the Islamic sciences:
- Sheikh or teacher was usually remunerated by the state or through the *waqf* system,
- had a small number of students. This enabled him to focus on both excellence and students' needs.
- Education and scholarship were considered an *ʿibādah* (an act of worship) in the first place and not subject to the commodified learning-against-diploma-against-job-deal to the extent we find it today.
- The educational methods used, rather than being only rote-learning with physical punishments (as is anecdotally repeated in parts of the contemporary literature) were guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah. The writings of earlier scholars, as well as the teachers' biographies testify to this (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.72).
- Negative aspects of the system may have been the lack of accessibility for every child in some areas and a focus on memorization and dictation, at least in the earlier stages of education (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.73).

Pre and post 1970 teacher education in the Sultanate of Oman

- The advent of modernity in education, or rather, an interruption or sidelining of the traditional system of learning and teaching of the Islamic sciences may have had a different picture in Oman than it had elsewhere in the Islamic world, as accessible formal institutionalized modern education started only with the advent of Sultan Qaboos Bin Said in 1970.
- Oman, and more particularly the hinterland, used to be a largely secluded place up to the 1970ies. In addition, it seems that there was no directly implanted colonial system of education, comparable to North Africa under French rule. The incorporation of Islamic education into the system of formal education took place in a very succinct time period as compared to other countries in the Islamic word, due to the comparatively late exposure and exponential growth of the public school system. Problems and perspectives may, however, be comparable to some extent.

...more than a foundational myth

- The number of 'modern schools' combining religious and secular knowledge in the Sultanate of Oman was only **three schools** (in Muscat, Matrah and Salalah) enrolling 909 boys in 1970, prior to the rule of Sultan Qaboos b. Said, with a staff of thirty male (mainly Palestinian) teachers. (Ladewig, 2017, p. 180).
- There was only one modern hospital and only 10 km of paved roads. (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.79) **This is more than just a foundational myth. The Sultanate has seen mind juggling developments, not only in the field of education, within the last four decades.**

...some facts to bear in mind

- World Bank Report of 1974 evaluates the educational program in the Sultanate as being of “poor quality and with little relevance to the national needs” (Ladewig, 2017),
- World Bank Report of 2006 describes the Omani educational system as being “massive, unprecedented and unparalleled compared to other countries” (Al Barwani 2016, p.163)
- In 1972, 50% of teachers had never completed secondary education and a mere 8% held tertiary qualifications. (Ladewig, 2017, p.189).
- **It is vital to bear these facts in mind while talking about the modest beginnings of the introduction of ‘modern’ schools which integrate different specializations from math and science to foreign languages, physical and musical education to Islamic education.**

Education in Oman

Prior to 1970

- Four types of education; the Qur'an school, the mosque, the sheikh's (private) schools and modern primary schools.
- General education until 1970 was limited to the primary stage.
- There was no department or ministry of education to supervise these institutions, nor a teacher education program.

After 1970

- State education was organized along four lines; general Islamic, technical, and further education
- Introduction of secondary schools from 1973/4 (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.74ff).
- Upon the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1971, a similar level of public schooling to that of other Arab countries was prescribed. Initially the Lebanese curriculum was adapted for other subjects, then to be replaced by the Qatari curriculum (Al-Salimi 2011, p.149).
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First training programs for Islamic education

- 1976/77: first training program for Islamic education.
- Length of study : one year for students who had completed grade 7;
- Only some 25 students graduated from this program.
- 1977/8: establishment of male and female secondary teacher institutes; for students who had completed grade 9.
- Length of study: three years, with the graduates being eligible to teach Islamic education in primary schools.
- Curriculum focused on Islamic studies, Arabic, but also starred educational theory, science, math and physical education.
- Over the years, teacher programs became more demanding and sophisticated. The initial programs showed some development in organization and content; **real breakthrough in pedagogical and administrative terms was made with the establishment of SQU and the College of Education.** (Al-Salmi, 2001, p.87ff)

The educational system today

- Currently, there are some 1000 schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, enrolling over 600 000 male and female students and a total of 43000 teachers, most of them being Omani, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. (Al Barwani 2016, p.63.)
- Al Barwani aptly summarizes: **“Over the forty-year history of formal education in Oman, the recruitment of teachers evolved from being an open access job to being a highly selective one and from being a job that needed practically anybody who was willing to teach, to being a job that requires qualifications with highly specialized knowledge and skills.”** (2016, p. 162)

Challenges in quantitative terms give way to qualitative concerns

- As Al Barwani (2016) states, Oman experienced a decline in the quality of its graduates as the system continued to rapidly expand.” (p.163). Major reforms attempted to accommodate these changes, starting with the 1998 reform process *Vision 2020* which involved professional development programs; with limited achievements in terms of student outcomes. In its wake, employment examinations were put in place for teacher candidates (Al Barwani, 2016, p.164). The newly developed *Vision 2040* reinforces the need to prepare students with the necessary skills needed to survive the challenges of a rapidly changing world (Al Barwani and Bailey, 2016).

The case of Islamic Education

- 1977 : Omani Ministry of Education developed its own curriculum.
- Islamic education is made compulsory from grades 1 to 12.
- The Ministry implemented the new curriculum by utilizing but also updating traditional teaching methodologies; “education in Oman already preserved a strong connection between teacher and pupils, and the Ministry of Education sought to preserve the positive aspect of the system.” (Al-Salimi, 2011, p.149).
- A specialized department in the Ministry of Education initially controlled Mosque schools (for the elementary level) in five towns, namely Nizwa, Bahla, Izki, Sinaw and Bididiya. Those schools, up to their closure in 1996, offered a different curriculum for Arabic and Islamic education and no music or art lessons. The goal was to preserve the traditional structures while modernizing “so that tradition was not discarded too suddenly in those cities.” (Al-Salimi, 2011, p.150).
- A number of Islamic education institutes in the country, as in Khasab, Sohar, Ja’lan and Salalah, functioned between 1988 to 1998. They taught both secondary school classes and four-year university degree courses and were closed due to the provision of other higher education options in the country (Al-Salimi, 2011, p.150).

The case of Islamic education...

- **In the new millennia, curriculum shifted the focus “from dogma and doctrine to Islamic culture and civilization” (Al-Salimi, 2011, p.155), favoring a cultural rather than religious approach.**
- **As compared to other countries in the Arabic and Islamic world, the Sultanate’s policy has succeeded in integrating traditional scholarship (with the establishment of institutes and colleges of Islamic sciences) while modernizing the Islamic education curriculum without considerable resistance from traditional scholarship. (Al-Salimi, 2011, p.151)**

Programmes for Islamic education teacher formation

- Tertiary academic teaching in Oman started with the establishment of **Sultan Qaboos University in 1986** and the establishment of Six Intermediate Colleges for Male and Female Teachers in 1990 under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education with a teacher formation program of two years, which have been transformed into University Colleges awarding bachelor degrees. (Al-Ayasrieh and Mustafa, 2009, p.368).
- Prior to the establishment of these institutions, Omani teacher candidates (also but not only for Islamic education) studied abroad in Arab countries to pursue academic studies, e.g. in Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE.
- **The first Master degree in education in Oman was awarded in 1995** at the College of Education, SQU (Al-Ayasrieh and Mustafa, 2009, p.369), **in the specialization of Islamic education.**
- As of now, secondary school teacher preparation programmes can also be pursued at Sohar, Nizwa, Dofar and Al-Sharqiyah private universities, where the graduate of other specialisations take a one-year-course.
- In 2010, the number of SQU graduates of teacher preparation programs teaching in secondary schools in Oman was 2,733 (Chapman et al, 2012, p.395).

Omanisation

- By 1980, 92 percent of teachers in Oman were expatriates (Chapman et al, 2012, p.392).
- Omanisation of the sector took effect with domestic teacher programs, with 38,000 Omani teachers or 89 percent of teachers in Oman. (Chapman et al, 2012, p.392). Due to the excess of teacher supply, recruitment into the profession after graduation is no longer automatic (Chapman et al, 2012).
- MoE qualifying tests prove to the advantage of SQU Islamic education teacher graduates with a 100% success rate of SQU teacher candidates in Islamic education.

Female teachers

- Female teachers constitute 75 percent of the teaching force in grades 1-6, due to a MoE policy demanding that primary schools should be co-educational and staffed by female teachers only (Chapman et al, 2012, 392).

Intake requirements

- **Intake requirements** for SQU are highly competitive. While female students currently need a general high school diploma of more than 90 out of hundred, male students may be accepted from 85% onwards.
- It is the university's policy to have a 50/50 intake distribution between male and female students per year. Female high school graduates have had a higher percentage over the years, therefore, affirmative action for the male graduates is one of the university's policies.
- Upon registration at SQU, the student registers the specialization of his choice. The Deanship of Admission generally distributes students on the basis of the percentage acquired in the General High School Diploma rather than proclaimed interest, with the highest percentage needed for Medicine. **Anecdotally, this policy leads to students being admitted who may have chosen Islamic education as a last resort; while excellent students wishing to become Islamic education teachers may be absorbed by other specializations.**

Intake

- As SQU intake is linked back to the demands and capacities of the job market, approximately 20 students are taken in every year for the Bachelor of Islamic education yearly.
- The same number is taken in for the M.A. specializations of Fiqh and Uṣūl al-Fiqh and Usūl al-Dīn and Da'wah, while the M.A. curriculum programme with specialisation in Islamic Education takes in some 6 students per year, and some 2 for the PhD program in the same time period.

...some more info on SQU

- General studying conditions are quite conducive; female students are accommodated on campus, while male students – with the exception of special needs students – receive a monthly token and accommodate outside of campus. Transport on campus and outside is provided. Students receive a monthly stipend of 120 OMR, have free access to WIFI; sports halls (male and female) and other facilities. There are several libraries on campus, including the Main Library, The Omani Studies Library, the Mosque Library and libraries in each College, among them the College of Education. The Main Library opens 24 hours in the last phase of exams; and reduces hours to 8 am-1pm during the summer break. Textbooks are provided for free. SQU students and staff generally are highly esteemed in the country.

Islamic education teacher education Degree Plan

- Students generally have to go through foundation courses before they enter their specialized studies in the Colleges, where they are to take courses in English, Math and IT in the first semester, followed by Foundations of research methodology in the Second semester.
- Year One of the College studies (which generally corresponds to year 2 at SQU) comprises in its **first semester** of Recitation, Memorization and Tajwīd of the Qur'an I, (2), Educational Foundations (3), Introduction to Fiqh (2), Sciences of the Qur'an and exegetical methods (3), Sciences of hadith (3), Contemporary Omani Society (1), in addition to a university elective (2). The **second semester** stars Recitation, Memorization and Tajwīd II (1), English for Educational Purposes (3), Islamic ʿaqīdah (3), Family Law (3), Fiqh al-ʿIbādāt: Purity and Prayer (3), Prophetic sīrah (3)

Degree Plan

- Year 2, **semester 3** comprises Recitation, Memorization and Tajwīd of the Qur'an III (1), Fiqh al-ʿibādāt II (Fasting, Zakāt, Hajj) (3), Psychology for educational purposes (3), Arabic language (3), University Elective (2), Functional Grammar (2).
- In **semester 4**, the student is asked to study Recitation, Memorization and Tajwīd of the Qur'an III (1), Analytical exegesis (Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, al-Raḥmān) (3), Takhrīj and Study of asānīd (3), departmental elective (3), consultative psychology (3), Uṣūl al-Fiqh (3), University elective (2). Semester 5: Recitation, Memorization and Tajwīd of the Qur'an IV, Analytical exegesis (Sūrat al-Nūr, al-Ḥujurāt) (3), Rules of Inheritance (3), Introduction to Instructional Technologies (3), School Methodology for Islamic Education (3), Oman and Islamic culture or Islamic culture (2).

Degree Plan

- **Semester 6:** Memorization and Tajwīd of the Qur'an IV (1), System of Governance (2), Analytic hadith (3), Methods of Instruction, Islamic education (3), Criminal Law in Islam (3), Measuring and Assessment (dep. of psychology) (3); The Educational System in Oman and the Gulf countries (3).
- **Semester 7:** Memorization and Tajwīd of the Qur'an V (1), department elective II (3), Fiqh of transactions (3), Tawhīd (3), Methods of Instruction in Islamic education II (3), Introduction to school administration (2).
Semester 8: Practical education (field training) (9).
- Numbers in brackets give the credit hours per course.

Islamic education teacher education

- **The pedagogy – content knowledge ratio** is a contested field. The ratio at the moment is some 60 : 40, if we include the practical training. While this ratio seems to correspond to international standards such as NCATE standards; academic staff at the department of Islamic sciences frequently complain that the high percentage of pedagogical courses comes at the expense of specialized content knowledge. An additional twist is to be found in the fact that the pedagogical knowledge courses are taught at different departments in the College of Education and not linked to any Islamic approach. **The Islamic vision of education, educational history, the role of the teacher in Islamic culture are not necessarily part of these courses.** Criticism is internally being vocalized that the relative loss in specialized content knowledge finds reflection in a resulting weaker teacher personality.

Practical training

- Lately, the full last semester (semester 8) has been devoted to practical training. Student teachers are supervised during this time by a member of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methodologies as well as a cooperating teacher in the school. The student teacher candidate is assessed with 80/100 by the College of Education supervisor, and 20/100 by the cooperating teacher. On an anecdotal note, both staff and students involved with the Islamic education teacher program point out that students feel without academic and spiritual guidance during their field training.

Madhhab affiliation and the programme

- Although the Ibadhi madhhab is the majority Islamic school in the Sultanate, the B.ed. program does not focus on the school but rather follows, in its content knowledge courses, a comparative approach. This corresponds to the MoE vision (Al-Salimi, 2011, p.149) and is also reflected in **the academic staff**; with Omani and non-Omani staff with a diversified background. The department has currently 9 Omani and 5 international staff, ranking from full to assistant professor; with only two female academic staff at the moment. Omani staff has been trained both in Oman as well as abroad, with academics taking their M.A. and/ or PhDs from Jordan, Egypt, Tunis and the UK.

Accreditation

- With the new millennia, the College Higher Management envisaged raising teacher education standards through international accreditation (Al Barwani, 2016, p.164f).
- The College went through the accreditation process with NCATE, an American based teacher formation association, meanwhile represented by the follow up organization CAEP.
- This organization was chosen due to a number of reasons, among them NCATE's previous presence in the Gulf region, and that leading College administrators had received their degrees from American Universities (Al Barwani and Bailey, 2016, p.147f). First contacts and preparations started in 2008, the final cycle was completed in 2014 and accreditation awarded to the year 2020 to the College programs.

Accreditation

- The accreditation process for the Islamic education program (as well as Arabic language) through NCATE is unique in that the program coordinators set up their own program standards and do not link back to educational systems abroad.
- “Accreditation for the CoE at SQU is a significant milestone in the Arab world, because it is the first time a nationally administered university with an indigenous leadership and programs, has achieved this recognition of excellence. The Deanship of the College of Education, with one exception, and six of the eight department heads, are all Omani. Other accredited universities such as Zayed University in the UAE are aligned with American universities, courses and qualifications and have predominantly expatriate faculty.” comments Ladewig (2017, p.197).

...and some thoughts on accreditation

- This, however, does not completely deny the possibility of outside interference through accreditation, as the foreign body is perceived as both identifier and measurement of what excellence means, and programs and standards may have been channeled accordingly.
- It will need time and more research to assess in how far the accreditation procedure the College of Education has gone through really affects the quality of teacher candidates, and in how far this change may materialize in better standards of education in schools if it yields positive results; or whether it affects the academic achievements of teacher candidates and students at school at all. This is true for student development in schools generally, as incorporating teaching of Islamic education. Though acknowledging positive aspects of the process, critical voices may see in the procedure a mere focus on formalities, a change in shape, rather than development in content (Bouzenita, 2015).

Critical Thinking Skills

- Aspects ***of critical thinking*** in teacher education generally have been a major focus of contemporary research (Neisler et al 2016, Ladewig 2017). Traditionally, teacher education focuses on content knowledge and content related pedagogical skills (Neisler et al, 2016, p.2). International accrediting agencies, such as NCATE (now CAEP) do not list critical analysis for the acceptable level, but the target level only (Neisler et al, 2016, p.2).
- With critical thinking and analytic skills being part and parcel of the Islamic sciences particularly, it may be asked why students of these sciences and teacher candidates seem not to be endowed with them. Ladewig's analysis suggests that (female) Islamic education teacher candidates are, among other College of Education teacher candidates, least inclined "to endorse SQU's understanding of Critical Pedagogy or to demonstrate a preference for learning experiences that require critical thinking." (Ladewig 2017, p.337).
- Chances are that the teacher candidates identified critical thinking as a Western, non-Islamic concept, rather than a concept that may be contextualized Islamically. While previous teacher centered rote learning experiences may have contributed to this evaluation, it should be taken into consideration that international evaluations on these skills may be decontextualized or distorted by cultural ambiguities. On another note, the teaching of Islamic sciences itself may have become decontextualized through its adaptation into a hybrid system. It is therefore questionable if the focus on conveying these skills through the educational system can be successful without prior analysis of the root problem. Ladewig suggests an Islamic framing of the intended reforms so as to make them acceptable to the stakeholders (Ladewig, p.384f).

Job Market

- Exigencies of the **job market** are increasingly voiced in the discussion on teacher formation. As Chapman et al (2012) state, there used to be a tacit understanding that graduates of the teacher formation programs at SQU were to be employed by the Ministry of Education. As a matter of fact, the program was so bound by the demand of the workforce that two specializations of the program were closed over the years due to lack of teachers. In turn, concerns about the employability of CoE graduates with regard to growing demands in view of internationalization and globalization are raised (Al Barwani 2016). A generally declining economy and sinking oil price contribute to this insecurity. Can our graduates compete internationally should the need for it arise? It may be a good idea to have them prepared. But there should be a discussion on along *which lines*. By endorsing “international” criteria under gradual discarding of models of Islamic education? Or by trying to reformulate an epistemology that reflects innate authentic Islamic values?

The Pedagogical Vision

- ***The question of the pedagogical vision*** Primary and secondary schools in Oman do not necessarily follow a holistic Islamic pedagogy. They are modern secular schools in terms of the worldview they have come about in; however, Islamic education with five weekly lesson units from grades 1 – 12 is considered to be one of the core subjects expressing the importance of Islamic culture and Islamic education in the Sultanate at large. We may state that the Islamic approach is realized through societal background and the Islamic belief of the stakeholders rather than a particular pedagogy. Islamic concepts are naturally translated into action without being theorized. MoE visions, as well as the College of Education conceptual framework, relentlessly emphasize the importance of the particular Omani Islamic Arabic identity and Islamic and Omani values. The MoE, in 1978, published “The Philosophy and Objectives of Education in the Sultanate of Oman”, outlining its philosophy in 14 principles, among them the promotion of new instructional strategies; encouragement of lifelong learning and critical thinking abilities. Emphasis, however, is on the preservation and promotion of the Omani Islamic identity. Arabic language and Islamic education therefore remained an integral part of the curriculum (Ladewig 2017, p. 184).

College of Education Conceptual Framework

- The B.A. program for Islamic education is embedded in the general conceptual framework of the College of Education. The conceptual framework was developed in view of the accreditation process and needs to be understood against the background of MoE strategies, university vision and the country's demands. It already reflects and is a result of the preceding developments and official visions and guidelines.

College of Education Conceptual Framework

- The conceptual framework focuses on five key areas,
 - 1. Academic Rigor and Specialized Experiences;
 - 2. Diversified Teaching;
 - 3. Dispositions and Values;
 - 4. Research Culture & Lifelong Learning;
 - 5. Technological Skills.
- These are further broken down; the diversified teaching, for instance, states: “Graduates of the College of Education diversify their methods of teaching in a way that takes into consideration all learners who are central in the learning process. They believe that every child is capable of learning. They continuously reflect on their teaching and utilize findings of current research in pedagogy and learners’ characteristics to improve their work.”

College of Education Conceptual Framework

- The distinguished graduate, according to this concept, “is a leader who is empowered with specialized knowledge, expert skills, values of the field and society, and has the ability to utilize contemporary research findings to maximize self-learning through reflective practice and life-long learning in order to provide diversified optimal learning experiences for all students.” (CF for CoE, www.squ.edu.om) Due to the accreditation process, all program outcomes and course outlines need to be aligned with this conceptual framework. Students are supposed to be exposed to the conceptual framework in the beginning of the semester, with the introduction of the course outline.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION VISION

The College of Education aspires to be a professional and contemporary centre of excellence that affirms societal and scientific values, contributes to the quality of life for each individual, and enhances the prosperity of society as a whole.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION MISSION

The College of Education is committed to preparing distinguished graduates in teaching, training, counseling, and research through undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The College strives to be a centre of excellence that uses scientific research to develop sustainable systems and programs that meet the needs of the society while also fostering its values.

THE DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE

The distinguished education graduate is a leader who is empowered with specialized knowledge, expert skills, values of the field and society, and has the ability to utilize contemporary research findings to maximize self-learning through reflective practice and life-long learning in order to provide diversified optimal learning experiences for all students.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COLLEGE

1. Academic Rigor and Specialized Experiences

Graduates of the College of Education employ their acquired academic knowledge and specialized experience to teach in their disciplines in a distinguished manner.

2. Diversified Teaching

Graduates of the College of Education diversify their methods of teaching in a way that takes into consideration all learners who are central in the teaching learning process. They believe that every child is capable of learning. They continuously reflect on their teaching and utilize findings of current research in pedagogy and learners' characteristics to improve their work.

3. Dispositions and Values

Graduates of the College of Education embody Islamic principles

and the values of the Omani society while pursuing their teaching career. This is reflected in their commitment to their profession and their contribution to its development. They sincerely cooperate with their colleagues and interact with their communities in order to improve student learning.

4. Research Culture & Lifelong Learning

Graduates of the College of Education apply the principle of lifelong learning to improve their teaching practices. They continuously make use of research and employ their reflective skills and advanced research experience to develop their teaching performance in order to ensure that they effectively meet the needs of the learners.

5. Technological Skills

Graduates of the College of Education employ modern technology to construct an interactive teaching learning environment which enables all learners to understand, evaluate and use technology in a way that improves their performance and ensures positive interaction with the knowledge society.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE COE GRADUATE

1. ACADEMIC RIGOR AND SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCES

1-A: Demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the theories and philosophical principles that govern the discipline and guide its research activities.

1-B: Transfers and applies knowledge in real-world situations.

2. DIVERSIFIED TEACHING

2-A: Demonstrates in-depth knowledge of differentiated instructional strategies.

2-B: Initiates, designs and/or adapts instructional materials creatively to respond to students' developmental characteristics, psychological needs and diverse backgrounds.

2-C: Utilizes instructional techniques that promote critical thinking, reflective thinking and problem solving.

2-D: Designs and implements varied and fair assessment techniques in order to assess students' different abilities and uses data to inform instructional practice.

2-E: Reflects on own educational practices critically and continuously in order to improve student learning.

2-F: Collaborates with schools, families and community to support student learning.

3. DISPOSITIONS AND VALUES

3-A: Observes Omani, Islamic and professional ethics/values in performing his/her professional tasks.

3-B: Creates and maintains continuous, supportive and safe learning environments.

3-C: Develops positive attitudes towards the profession and contributes effectively to it.

4. RESEARCH CULTURE & LIFELONG LEARNING

4-A: Demonstrates in-depth knowledge of qualitative and quantitative research designs.

4-B: Conducts action, basic and/or applied research.

4-C: Analyzes and interprets research studies properly.

4-D: Makes his/her decisions based on research evidence and data.

5. TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS

5-A: Uses technology to enhance professional development, collaboration, and communication.

5-B: Utilizes technology to support and assess student learning.

5-C: Develops students' use of appropriate technology to enhance student learning.



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Future Outlooks

- ***Possibilities for further development. The issue of specialization.*** Teaching Islamic sciences in the past used to be embedded in an overall Islamic culture. There was no specialization as we have it now; in fact, the most outstanding Islamic scholars had a firm knowledge on all the available sciences at their time and age, rather than being 'experts' in one field of knowledge.
- Incorporating Islamic education into the modern teacher training is part of a general emphasis on a special field. This may be one of the exigencies of our time and age; given that the sheer bulk of available knowledge surmounts individual capacity. However, to avoid the negative backlashes of specialized cocooning in education (and elsewhere), it is advisable that the teacher student is exposed to contemporary knowledge and general societal developments so as to enable him to understand his role in society. The current degree plan provides exposure to general knowledge, but could be developed accordingly.

Future Outlooks

As far as educational, psychological and administrative background knowledge is concerned, the degree plan seems to provide the necessary foundations. The cooperation between the departments of curriculum and instruction and psychology at CoE asserts to this fact. What may be missing, however, is a general introduction on the history, vision and mission of Islamic education or education in Islam and the function and responsibilities of the Mu^callim. This induction is being informally taken care of by the department's academic staff.

Conclusions..

- ***Conclusion*** Islamic education teacher formation and training at SQU is embedded in and needs to be understood as against the background of demographic, socioeconomic and political developments in the Middle East and cultural and historical particularities of the region. The future of training programs for Islamic education teachers in Oman and beyond is likewise dependent on internal and external factors.

Conclusions...

- Improving teacher education is considered to be one of the highest priorities of countries across the Middle East (Chapman, 2012, World Bank Report 2008). Efforts have, however, not always paid off. (Chapman, 2012).
- **Academics who are critical of current developments in the educational systems in the Islamic world may find fault in the initial analysis and methodology. The question may be in how far imported solutions, standards as represented in the accreditation process will lead to an overall improvement of teacher education programs generally and Islamic education teacher programs in particular, or in how far a new epistemology is needed. Previous research has already alluded to this missing link.**

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