

Civic participation and Educational Reform in the Sultanate of Oman

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Many recent reforms and educational policies in more industrialised countries include a focus on civic participation. Similarly, this focus is arising as a concern in many developing countries, such as the Sultanate of Oman. This paper aims at establishing a framework to study the direction and progress of the development of civic participation in Oman. It bases such analysis, firstly, on a critical analysis of the Philosophy and Objectives of Education (PaOE) (Ministry of Education, 2003). Secondly, based on a wide review of the literature, it proposes a theoretical model for conceptualising civic participation that would provide a basis to discuss the educational reform in the country. Lastly, the paper outlines the basic components of the educational reform of 1998 in terms of its contribution to civic participation, as well as highlighting the research needed in this area.

I. Back ground

The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the south east of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the United Arab Emirates in the north-west, Saudi Arabia in the west, and the Republic of Yemen in the south. The country covers an area of about 309,500 square kilometres with a population of 2,340,815, according to the 2003 census, including about 25% non-Omanis working or living in the country.

In the last three decades, Oman has accomplished remarkable development in political, economic and social life. The modern state in Oman has given special attention to improving the political practices amongst its citizens. In 1996, the Basic Law of the State (which plays the role of a constitution, which is familiar in many nations) was established to secure the freedom and protection for all individuals and to encourage citizens to actively engage in public life in the support of democratic values (Alkanjari, 2005). Similarly, since 1976, the country embarked on comprehensive 5-yearly Development Plans leading to rapid economic development. The latest published statistics (Ministry of National Economy, 2008) indicate that Gross Domestic Product developed from 7,639 million R.O in 2000 to 15,512 in 2007. Furthermore, the openness and transparency of the economic plans qualified the State to participate in World Trade Organization in 2000, and also helped Oman to sign a free trade agreement with the United States of America in 2005. Nevertheless, the social life developed as a result of economic growth and the government's commitment to improve the quality of

life of its citizens. The Basic Law of the State confirms that the “State guarantees assistance for the citizen and his family in cases of emergency, sickness, incapacity and old age in accordance with the social security system” (Ministry of Information, 2007).

Educational development in Oman

Prior to 1970, Oman was classified as one of the poorest and most isolated countries in the Arabian region. Those Omanis who could afford it, were travelling abroad seeking security, education and a better future for their children. A report published by Ministry of Education in Oman summarizes the educational conditions in Oman in 1970 in this way: “Oman had only 3 schools with 30 teachers educating 909 students. Nearly 66% of Oman’s adults were illiterate” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.25). These schools provided only primary education and only to males. At the time, the majority of Omani territories were denied any form of modern education. However, some villages were providing religious schooling to equip children with basic Islamic beliefs and practices.

Conditions took a sharp turn in 1970 as a result of the new leadership in the State. The primary mission of the new government was to set-up schools in all parts of the country and to make education equally accessible to all Omani children. In the 1970s, the majority of schools were under the “shadow of trees” or in tents (Ministry of Education, 2003, p.8). The student numbers increased from 909 in 1970 to 563,602 in 2007. Furthermore, schools increased from 3 in 1970 to 1,053 by 2007 and teacher numbers jumped from 30 in 1970 to 39,993 by 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2008).

In 1996, the government announced its commitment to improve the quality of education by implementing new form of education called, Basic Education. In 1998, the plan of Reform and Development of Education in Oman (RaDEO) took place in 17 schools. By 2007, around 63% of Omani public schools were implementing the new system (Ministry of Education, 2008). In 2005, the government devoted more than 25% of the state budget to the education sector (Ministry of Education, 2006).

II. The Philosophy and Objectives of Education

The Philosophy and Objectives of Education (PaOE) document, first developed in 1978, was updated at the start of the educational reform plan in 1998 and translated into English in 2003 (Ministry of Education, 2003). This document plays a crucial role in setting the trends for education reform in Oman.

The role of the document in the educational system

Oman is not a constitutional monarchy. The rights of citizens are not established by bill or rights or constitution. Nevertheless, the document establishes a direction for education based on principles and values that many Western countries are very familiar with and adhere to. The sense of authority in the document is based to a large extent on the priorities of a benevolent Sultan. The English version of the PaOE contains several quotes from different speeches made by His Majesty over a period of thirty years, initiating and giving direction to the educational reforms in the country. The very first sentence on the Introduction of the PaOE establishes the priority the Sultan places on educational agenda as well as the role of education in development, placing the citizen at the centre of development. In this sense, the people are not only the “means” of development, but also its “purpose”.

Since the ascension of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to the Throne of Oman at the beginning of the blessed Omani Renaissance, education has received great care of

His Majesty the Sultan due to the strong belief in the pioneering role that education plays in preparation of the Omani citizen who is considered as the centre, purpose and means of development. (p.15)

However, the document is also based on principles of the Basic Law of the State established in 1996 by Royal Decree that guarantee many rights for citizens. Some of the principles enshrined by the Basic Law that relate to civic participation include:

- Emphasis on justice, consultation, equity and the right of involvement in public affairs
- Enforce of national unity among Omani citizens
- Develop standards of public culture among citizens
- Develop scientific thinking and research approaches
- Meet the requirements of social and economic development plans through education
- Provide basic and general education for all and fight illiteracy
- Preserve national heritage and encourage sciences, arts, and literature and scientific research. (p.23)

In many ways, the document is a blue print for education that identifies principles and values. It is not a strategic plan in the sense education systems in some Western Countries are used to, for it does not deal with the means of implementing of the principles outlined. It is not meant to deal with specific policies and government priorities for action. However, it consists of “‘a set of principles, beliefs, concepts and obligations’ which are stated in an integrated, coherent and harmonious manner to serve as a guide and a mention for the educational process It is the first source on which construction and writing of curricula depend” (p.19). It may be that there is no equivalent statement in many educational systems in Western countries, where individual policy statements and strategic action plans replace such an overall statement of the aims and principles of education in a country.

In this context, we will not attempt to summarise the basic principles of the document. Rather, we will identify selected principles reflected in the different assertions of the document that are based on balancing potentially competing demands and values of education in the Omani society. While these themes are not discussed as tensions in the document as such, they are well reflected in its different sections.

A future vision grounded in tradition

The PaOE document highlights the foundation of its principles on the Islamic faith and tradition of Oman as part of the larger Arabic world. In identifying the main sources of principles guiding the construction of the document, it states that the “Teaching and values of Islamic faith which organises the relationship between the individual and Allah, other people, the universe and life are considered one of the sources of educational philosophy in Oman” (p.20). Further, in identifying the characteristics of the Omani society, it states

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab Islamic country. Its people are considered as one social cohesive unit resulted from the continuous interaction which goes for centuries between Arabism and Islam. ... Thus the loyalty of the Omani individual is for Almighty Allah first, then to the country, the Sultan, the society, Arab and Islamic nations and to the Mankind. (p. 24)

However, in the same context, the document acknowledges the challenges of being a nation for today's age and times. It states

The Sultanate of Oman, while it is aware of the nature of the current social, cultural and economic challenges that face the Omani society, confronts these challenges through

employing all its efforts and using all their capabilities to create a modern strong society which can cope with the current realities of life, and can bear national responsibilities and duties. (p.25)

Similarly, the document reflects a sober awareness of the role of the country in the international scene and the need for its citizens to be members of the international community.

The Sultanate of Oman endeavours to achieve an international endeavour to achieve an international cooperation among all nations based on freedom, justice and equity. It also contributes to the development of world civilisation and the enrichment of the human heritage. (p. 25)

This forward-looking vision includes a focus on scientific and critical thinking as one of the basic Principles of the education vision for the country. It is worthwhile mentioning here that this principle is asserted with no sense of tension with traditional Muslim beliefs or Arabic identity – nor should it be, we argue.

Education endeavours to develop mental abilities of individuals and provides them with objective vision, logical inference, scientific and critical thinking, research approaches and the ability to innovate and create. (p.29)

Empowerment of the individual for social development

In educational policy one can identify two potentially conflicting sets of values and aims that guide educational planning and development. One set of values and aims is constructed around the development of the individual citizen's capacities and interests, while the other is constructed in terms of social and national development. The amount of focus on either agenda varies from one policy document to another and from one society to another. In the context of Oman, the PaOE targets both values of education – often in the same sentence. It asserts that developing the individual is for the purpose of being an active citizen in the development of the country itself. The Sultan in one of his National Day addresses, emphasises the importance of

taking necessary action with secure the good nurture of the citizen and provide him [sic] with science and culture, and prepare him in an integrated and comprehensive manner that makes him a productive element in the society, well aware of the things that are useful to the nation and endowed with insight and proper appreciation of different matters so as to be able to serve his country and contribute to making proper decisions. (p.20)

These foci on the roles of education for personal empowerment and social development run parallel throughout the document. For example, the Introduction states:

The reform of education process comes within the framework of the Conference of the Future Vision of the Omani Economy 2020 with regard to the development of human resources which aims at training a generation of the Omani citizens who are capable of achieving success and making progress in their society, and who can face the Challenges of the twenty first century". (p. 15)

It concludes with the following assertion:

There is no doubt that the human being is the centre of such huge developments with the scientific progress that the mankind is witnessing in all aspects of civilization. Such progress puts big responsibility on the shoulder of education in the preparation of individuals to co-exist with these developments and to benefit from them. This task will

not be fulfilled unless new educational policies are adopted to construct a human being who has capabilities and characteristics that enable him [sic] to interact with the facts of today and the future, respond to the current international educational approaches, acquire self learning and lifelong learning skills, master the skills of computer and information technology and learn how to co-exist with others. (p.19)

The construction of a citizen in the document reflects a degree of agency and self direction for “self learning” (p. 30) and with “an appropriate amount of freedom”. However, this is balanced by the role of education to

Implant the sense of belongingness and national pride, and to assure the solidarity of the Omani society since both values are considered as foundations of the national unity which every citizen should be proud of. (p.31)

The PaOE identifies four major goals in education. One of these goals is to “build the well integrated personality of the Omani citizen who can interact positively in the present and the future”. And the second is “achieve comprehensive development of the Omani society” (p.41). The third goal combines both foci by constructing an education system that “emphasize[s] the necessity of [enabling individual] coping with changes of the present time and participating in making them”.

In the document, citizens’ freedom and participation is regulated by an “awareness of the importance of a common order that makes all members of the society bound by social regulators and controls which direct their behaviour and interactions” (p. 31). Further, these “controls are represented in a set of social values and principles derived from the principles of Islam, tradition, customs, laws and regulations, and all of them are based on justice, consultation, equity and participation in public affairs” (48). In particular, “education endeavours to liberate capabilities of individuals and groups and calls for justice and equity and for casting away fanatical instincts, partisanship and extremism” (p.32).

Glocalisation¹

Similarly, the PaOE document presents a vision of an active citizen with a balanced focus on both their local and the global citizenship. Above, we have identified sections that illustrate the primary focus in the document on traditional development of the Omani society, in particular the influence of Islam and its Arabic identity. We also illustrated its identification of the aim of individual development of capacities *in order* to meet the national needs.

However, the construction of the Omani citizen extends beyond the local context into the international scene. An analysis of the special characteristics of Omani society conducted in the PaOE document includes the assertion that

The Sultanate of Oman endeavours to achieve an international cooperation among all nations based on freedom, justice and equity. It also contributes to the development of world civilisation and the enrichment of the human heritage. (p.25)

On the international scene, education aims to install “values of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect” (p.33).

¹ “Glocalisation is a portmanteau of *globalization* and *localization*” see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glocalisation>

We now turn to the international educational literature as a model to study the role of education in developing civic participation.

III. Education for Civic Participation

In the educational literature, the concept of civic participation has been used to reflect many different understandings. Often civic participation is discussed within broader discourses of citizenship education or civic education. The use of these constructs is not consistent in the literature, with different authors using the same term to mean different things or using different constructs with the same understanding. Kerr and Cleaver (2004) indicate that debates will continue in the literature about their essential meaning as a result of the nature of these concepts and the ongoing changes in civic life, both at local and global levels. Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, & Silbereisen (2002) state that the concept of civic participation includes “knowledge of government structure and functions; attitudes towards proper political behaviour; and behaviour itself, such as voting, commitment to society, and, of late a host of actions that comprise participation in civil society” (p.124). Adler and Goggin (2005) examine different definitions of this concept and conclude that there are many perspectives used to define the term civic participation. They state that scholars define this concept according to their ‘perspective and interest’ (p.237). Therefore, they suggest four categories of civic participation namely: as community service, as collective actions, as political involvement as social change. Finally, they suggest that civic participation “describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (p.241). This definition appears to be comprehensive because it emphasises the important role of citizens to remake their society’s future.

Furthermore, the term “active citizenship” is used extensively in the literature to indicate civic participation. Nevertheless, this concept appears to be problematic as well. The final report of the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks study (INCA) (Nelson & Kerr, 2006) confirms that the term active citizenship “is not yet clearly understood or defined within and across” (p.iv) all countries participating in the study. However, the writers state that most countries link this concept to the ‘participatory form of citizenship’. Moreover, Kennedy (2007) examines the literature with regards to the definition of the concept ‘active citizenship’ and states “There is not a single definition of ‘active citizenship’ different contexts create different understandings of what it means to be an ‘active citizen’” (p.306). The particular, cultural context is very important for a local understanding of this central theme in the citizenship education. The authors conclude that “Active citizenship is a mixture of active and passive components dependent on the culture and historical context of countries and their approach to citizenship education” (p.11). These differences reflect alternative cultural values and/or differences on existing political systems. In some countries, civic participation is measured as citizens’ involvement in political decision making and as a measure of political action. However, in other nations, where the political systems may not be built on representative democracy, civic participation might place less value on political life and highlight other factors, such as social and economic participation. Such alternative foci on the meaning of the term are a cause of difficulty in many international comparisons.

Education towards civic participation

Here we identify the role of education in developing civic participation as constituted by developing the *knowledge, skills and disposition* required for active citizen participation.

While many authors in the literature might be in agreement with this triad, few elucidate them explicitly. Torney-Purta and Vermeer (2004) propose detailed proposals to develop different components of citizenship education from kindergarten until grade 12. They describe how schools could develop knowledge, skills and dispositions in order to encourage citizens for active engagement in their society. Kennedy (as cited in Nelson and Kerr, 2006) provided a detailed proposal for the most important components of the term active citizenship. The author identifies four main components including conventional citizenship by participating in political activities, social movement citizenship, social change citizenship, and economic citizenship. Kirline (2007) presents an alternative model for teaching civic education. This model aims at “combining knowledge and interest, intentionally developing civic skills and providing myriad opportunities to learn collective decision making skills and values” (p.34). Here we will expand on each component identified above.

Knowledge: Civic knowledge is a prerequisite for enabling informed, engaged and active citizens. Undoubtedly, students need to learn about government structures and the characteristics of civic life in the society. Furthermore, learners should be informed about the nature of political, economic and social institutions in their society. They need to be aware about their home country’s history, constitution, legal system, and their rights and responsibilities.

Civic knowledge enables individuals to make their decisions based on valid and sufficient information linked to their society practices and belief systems. Also, the global dimension of civic knowledge is very important. In her argument about the role of civic education, Branson (1998) affirms the importance of this global view in our ever-increasingly interconnected world. Learners need to be aware of the relationships which drive different nations to cooperate and interact on global issues. Undoubtedly, there is room for an increased focus on this aspect of citizenship education in the literature.

Skills: Civic skills are the second component of the role of education in enabling civic participation. They relate to the individual’s ability to take actions in different local or global affairs, based on their civic knowledge discussed above. Kirline (2007) defines civic skills as a set of capacities “required to act politically and participate in one’s community” (p.5). The author categorizes civic skills into four themes: communication, organizational, collective decision making and critical thinking. Similarly, Patric (2002) identifies other civic skills to be core issues of general education in the United States of America. He states that cognitive skills and participatory skills are the main requirements of developing active citizenship. In the cognitive skills area, students need to learn how to “identify, describe, organize, interpret, explain and evaluate information and ideas in order to make sense of their political and civic experiences” (p.8). He argues that these skills are essential to enable students to defend their positions, to think critically and to constructively regard different components of civic life. Further, the author identifies six general participatory skills (p.8), namely:

- Interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interest.
- Monitoring public events and issues.
- Deliberating and making decisions about public policy issues.
- Influencing policy decisions on public issues.
- Implementing policy decision on public issues.
- Taking action to improve political/civic life.

Disposition: Finally, civic disposition is a fundamental factor in civic participation. Branson and Quigley (1998) explain that civic disposition refers to the citizen’s commitment to “maintenance and improvement of constitutional democracy” (p.11). Similarly, Vontz,

Thomas, Metcalf and Patrick (2000) identify civic disposition as “traits of public and private characters that enable one to exercise rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy and to promote the common good of the society” (p.11). According to these researchers, citizenship education should be organised to develop values such as independence, respecting the opinions and rights of others, commitment to participating in public events, and being thoughtful about public issues. Partic (2002) nominated five elements to explain his understanding of civic disposition (p.8)

- Affirming the common and equal humanity and dignity of each person.
- Respecting, protecting, and exercising rights possessed equally by each person.
- Participating responsibly in the political/civic life of the community.
- Practicing self government and supporting government by consent of the governed.
- Exemplifying the moral traits of democratic citizenship.
- Promoting the common good.

IV. Educational Reform in Oman and Civic Participation

The Reform and Development of Education in Oman (RaDEO) emphasises civic participation dimension as an important outcome of the educational system in Oman. The theoretical framework of Basic Education states that this form of education is aiming to develop the students’ ability to “internalize the values and ethics of mastery of work, production, sensible use of leisure time, and participation in civil life” (p.9). In this section we will discuss three domains identified by the reform plan that can contribute to the development of civic participation: *curriculum*, *co-curriculum* and enriching the *learning environment inside classroom*. In discussing each domain we will identify their potential to develop students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions about civic participation.

Curriculum: The curriculum focus on developing civic participation can be achieved through both specialised school subjects and a special focus in all subjects. Educational Reform in Oman identifies two school subjects that have the potential to contribute directly to equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills for healthy civic life: Social Studies and Life Skills. The Social Studies subject is designed to provide students with the essential knowledge about government structures and the nature of political, economic and social institutions in society. It also helps to raise students’ awareness about their home country’s history, constitution, legal system, and their rights and responsibilities. This subject is compulsory for all students, from grade three to twelve (Ministry of Education, 2001). Life Skills is another important opportunity to enhance civic participation through the curriculum. This subject focuses on the necessary skills that students need in their daily life. Improving students’ ability in communications skills is one of major aims of this subject. It is also designed to enhance the students’ sense of responsibility about problems within their community and to actively contribute to the resolution of these problems. The global dimension of citizenship education is another central focus in this subject where students are given the opportunity to learn about global issues, such as environmental challenges, the need to promote peace, and tolerance across all nations and cultures (Alshedee, 2004). In Basic Education, 240 hours from grade one to ten are devoted to Live Skills (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Similarly, the reform plan emphasises the role of other subjects to expand students’ knowledge and skills needed for their civic life. A study conducted in 2006 analysing the textbooks used in Basic Education to examine whether they support citizenship education found that all subjects included aims of citizenship education (Ministry of Education, 2006).

In fact, this approach to developing citizenship across the curriculum is in harmony with many studies that confirm the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching citizenship education. Crick (1998) emphasises that 'certain combinations' (p.52) of content from different subjects can enhance citizenship education. He explains how Religious Education, Mathematics, Science, Information Technology, Physical Education, Music, Art and Foreign Languages could contribute significantly to serve the citizenship education outcomes. Avard (2006) argues that the science classroom should be designed to support the civic mission in the educational system. Vatter (1994) discusses the role of mathematics to developing citizenship. His work explains how linking the content in the subject to civic issues in the society, such as, race, gender, poverty, wealth and the environment skills, increases the awareness of students about these social issues.

Co-curriculum: Basic Education draws attention to co-curriculum activities as another important venue to enhance civic participation. There is wide agreement among scholars that as much as students are involved in the extracurricular activities, they become more able to engage actively in the civic life. Several authors have pointed out the important role of activities such as student government, academic clubs, sports and school ground tidiness to enable students to participate in activities for the common good (Meisel, 2007; Billig, 2000, Morgan&Streb, 2001; Walker, 2002; Dávila & Mora, 2007; Youniss & Mclellan, 1997). Therefore, the education reform plan in Oman redesigned co-curriculum to provide a positive environment and better opportunities to encourage the students' involvement in schools and their communities. The 'Educational Activities Guidance' published by Ministry of Education (2003) lists 23 type of activities planned to enrich the learning environment and to provide a wider space for students to express their interests and strengthen their learning experiences. Students have the chance to practice self government and to exercise their interests through a variety of committees devoted to areas such as sport, media, social affairs, art, community service, scouts, library, environment, school tidiness and health (Ministry of Education, 2006). These types of activities have positive effects on students' participation at both school and society levels (Zaff, Moor, Papillo & Williams, 2003). Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that students involved in extracurricular activities are likely to engage in civic life. Giving students the chance to practice different aspects of civic life inside and outside the classroom is essential to their development of civic skills as discussed above.

Learning environment: Finally, Basic Education has identified the need to reform the learning environment in the classroom as essential components for education towards civic participation. Providing a supportive learning environment is one of the main issues in Basic Education. The Basic Education program places a priority on pedagogies that enhance positive classroom environment that is consistent with civic participation. Teachers are encouraged to abandon using only traditional approaches to teaching based on memorising and drills and practicing which had dominated the schooling system in Oman. Therefore, professional development for teachers from different subjects is made available to strengthen their ability to employ alternative teaching strategies. Teachers are encouraged to design learning environments to be more child centred, such as cooperation learning, peer work, field work, inquiry, active dialogue and discussions. This focus is parallel to results from previous studies which indicate that classroom characteristics could play a crucial role in advancing students' civic development. Homana, Barber and Torney-Purta (2005) argue that the school and classroom climate is an "often neglected dimension of civic learning" (p.1). Communication culture inside the classroom could play an important role in building civic efficacy amongst learners. Teachers need to give more attention on developing students' capacities to communicate well. Students need to develop skills such as active listening,

speaking, verbal and nonverbal communication, sharing thought and feeling, accepting feedback, open mind and acknowledging different. Furthermore, students need to learn and practice critical thinking in order to be good citizens. Educators should encourage openness in the classroom environment, so students are able to express their ideas, opinions and dispositions in a free atmosphere. Researchers show strong evidence of the correlation between the learning environment in the classroom and the development of knowledge, skills and dispositions of civic life. For example, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald and Schulz (2001) analysed the data gathered from twenty-eight countries in the (IEA) and found that students who reported an open learning environment in their classroom showed a higher interest in civic issues. The authors state that “countries that recently experienced political transitions appear to have a less open climate for discussions” (p.133) in the classrooms. The importance of an open learning environment in classrooms is emphasised in Campbell’s (2005) investigation. He demonstrated that students who enjoy freedom to exchange ideas and express their opinions in the classroom develop positive dispositions towards political and social participation. In her argument about the civic education policy in the United States of America, Branson (1998) emphasises the importance of the learning environment within the classroom to achieve desirable civic outcomes. She calls schools to encourage pupils to participate actively in both the classroom and in school governance as a practical means to enhance civic development. When students get the opportunity to speak, argue and comment about public affairs, they will possess the necessary confidence to engage in civic life. Wyatt, Kim and Katz (2000) found that feeling free to talk in the classroom contributes positively to some form of civic participation such as public protests.

V. Challenges for Future Research

This paper discussed educational reform in the Sultanate of Oman during the last four decades. In particular, we focused on the conception of education for the development of civic participation. We argued that the latest reform documents and policies in the country are based on principles of increasing civic participation of the citizens in all aspects of public life. A critical analysis of the Philosophy and Objectives of Education document demonstrated its aims to develop an education system for individual empowerment *for* the service of the common good. Similarly, the document provides a balance between developing education towards a vision for the future while grounded within the history and religion of the people. Finally, citizenship is constructed at a national and international level.

While the term civic education remains not fully theorised, based on reading the literature in this area, we identified three roles of education in promoting civic participation, namely developing civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions in students. Finally, we summarised some of the components of the RaDEO for providing the development of these roles at the curriculum, co-curriculum and classroom environment levels. We conclude this paper by outlining some areas in need of further research.

Arguably, in spite of the huge achievements in educational reforms, both quantitatively and qualitatively, during the past four decades, Oman is looking forward to develop tradition and expertise in educational research and evaluation. Undoubtedly, the scope for research in the country is wide and the priorities might need to be set. There is always a danger in developing countries to “copy” research conducted internationally. However, as demonstrated in the Philosophy and Objective document discussed here, we hope that the country’s awareness of its uniqueness and history would translate into setting agendas based on its own needs and context.

In particular, research that informs policy is essential in any educational context. The particular mode of development of educational reform in Oman, which is based on an articulated set of philosophies that guide the blueprints of education reform, is noted here. We hope that future research agendas can provide some means for evaluation whether these principles have been achieved in practice. The doctoral research program for the first author of this paper specifically targets the focus of educational reform on civic participation. In particular, his research aims to determine the major changes supported by the (RaDEO) Plan to improve civic participation among students. Also, it aims to investigate the students' experiences in and views about their participation in the school's life, and to investigate their perceptions and expectations of their civic participation in different aspects of public life. The research project will identify the role of factors such as gender, socioeconomics, and school locality in developing students' dispositions of civic participation.

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