

U N I K A S S E L
V E R S I T Ä T

Private Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman:
Rationales, Development and Challenges

Masoud Ali Majid Al Harthy

Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Kassel

February 2011

Die vorliegende Arbeit wurde vom Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften der Universität Kassel als Dissertation zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie (Dr. phil.) angenommen.

Erster Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler
Zweiter Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Barbara Kehm

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 8. Juni 2011

Author's Declaration

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation selbständig und ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt und andere als die in der Dissertation angegebenen Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus veröffentlichten oder unveröffentlichten Schriften entnommen sind, habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht. Kein Teil dieser Arbeit ist in einem anderen Promotions- oder Habilitationsverfahren verwendet worden.

I herewith confirm that I wrote the present thesis independently and without illegal help and that I did not use other resources than those indicated in the thesis. I have marked all text passages, which are literally or in a general manner taken out of published or unpublished writings, as such. No part of this thesis was used in another doctoral examination procedure or habilitation procedure.

Masoud Al Harthy
Kassel, February 2011

Abstract

From merely three primary schools with 900 boys in 1970 to more than half a million students of both sexes studying in 1,046 state schools, the general education (primary, preparatory, secondary) sector in the Sultanate of Oman has taken an active role in achieving this level of education for all.

This active and rapid expansion of Oman's general education system outstripped the capacity of the public (state) higher education system, resulting in a huge number of secondary education leavers denied opportunities to enrol in higher education. This dilemma created a serious challenge to the government and has become a national concern. Moreover, the rising demand of labour market for qualified workers created a social and economic demand for higher education.

To address these issues, the Government of Oman has invited the private sector to participate in higher education through establishing private colleges and universities. The government legalised private higher education and endorsed its development through a generous set of incentives to those willing to operate or invest in this field. It provided the land on which to build private universities and colleges, exempted private institutions from taxes for five years, provided them with scholarships for students from low-income families, and awarded each of the private universities a capital grant of up RO 20 million (\$52 million).

In order to ensure the quality of the programmes delivered by these institutions, it was required that Oman's private institutions be affiliated with recognised foreign universities. Moreover, the private sector was also required to get the permission and approval of the government for opening private higher education institutions. Furthermore, the Oman Accreditation Council was established in 2001 to evaluate and accredit higher education institutions and the programmes offered.

Since their beginning in 1995/1996, private higher education institutions have grown quickly. During the academic year 2008/2009, twenty-four private higher education institutions (five universities and nineteen colleges) were established. Student enrolment in these institutions rose from 150 students in 1995/1996 to 33,521 in 2008/2009.

The main aim of this study is to examine the rationales and objectives of establishment of private higher education in Oman, its development, and the challenges facing this sector. The research questions relate to the rationales and objectives of private

higher education, whether this sector contributes positively in achieving these rationales and objectives, and what challenges this sector faces.

To generate the required information, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 18 university vice-chancellors and college deans, along with 7 decision-makers in the Ministry of Higher Education. Government and non-government documents and statistics on higher education, particularly private higher education system and labour market demand were utilised and analysed.

The findings indicate the relatively high cost of enrolment in these institutions particularly for the large number of nationals who are not in a position to afford such cost. The academic and administrative structure of some of these institutions is fragile as they are still new and are not yet completely established. Most of these institutions are heavily dependent on tuition fees and government subsidies. The results also confirm that many private institutions seek profit maximisation and this is linked to a relatively high cost and no proven higher quality of provision.

Regarding quality aspects, the findings show that few private institutions attempted to diversify the mechanisms of quality assurance to show that they provide relatively high-quality study programmes, while many of them considered academic affiliation with recognised international universities, whose programmes are already accredited, as an essential factor for ensuring quality.

The present study also reveals that the more systematic scheme of quality assurance currently adopted by the Oman Accreditation Council is so-called quality audit, as the first stage in institutional accreditation. The emphasis of this approach is to assess the effectiveness of an institution's quality enhancement process against the vision and mission stated by the institution, besides the requirements and regulations set by the government and affiliate institutions.

A number of recommendations are put forward to enhance the contribution of private higher education in the country. Moreover, suggestions are made for further research for the benefit of this sector, together with the promotion of a policy of human resource development in the Sultanate.

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis was inspiring, even though it has also been a challenging experience. I am grateful to Allah for giving me the endurance, health, and ability to achieve this goal.

I owe a lot to many people without whom this research would not have been possible. First of all, I am truly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Ulrich Teichler, for his generous support during my study at Kassel. I am deeply indebted to him for his great advice, help, evaluation, and constructive comments throughout the course of this research project. Without his excellent support and encouragement this work would not have completed.

I would also like to thank Professor Barbara M. Kehm for her help, constant encouragement, and important advice in several aspects. My gratitude also extends to the members of the International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel) in the University of Kassel for their valuable assistance.

My sincere appreciation goes to the authority in the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman for offering me the opportunity to study for the Ph.D. degree, especially H.E. Dr. Rawya Al-Busaidia, the Minister of Higher Education, who authorised my scholarship to complete my Ph.D. I am also indebted to all individuals who helped me to conduct the fieldwork for this study; their kind support and cooperation has been of great value in this study. Thanks go to my brothers and friends for their constant emotional support during my study in Germany.

My deepest gratitude and a very special expression of appreciation is extended to my wife and children for their patience while I was far away from them and their constant support. Without their encouragement and understanding it would have been impossible for me to finish this work.

Last, but certainly not least, my heartfelt gratitude is dedicated to my father and mother for their constant support and prayers.

Table of Contents

Author’s Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	xi
List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms.....	xii

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The Sultanate of Oman: An Overview.....	4
1.3 The Problem of the Study.....	6
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	7
1.5 Research Questions.....	8
1.6 The Significance of the Study.....	8
1.7 The Study Approach.....	11
1.8 Structure of the Thesis.....	11

Chapter Two Rationales and Types of Private Higher Education: International Perspective

2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Privatisation versus Private Higher Education.....	15
2.3 Development of Private Higher Education.....	18
2.4 Rationales and Objectives of Private Higher Education.....	26
2.4.1 Decline of public expenditure on higher education.....	26
2.4.2 Meet growth in student population.....	28
2.4.3 Provide different education.....	34
2.5 Types and Classifications of Private Higher Education.....	37
2.5.1 Based on financial dimensions of private higher education.....	37
2.5.2 Based on rationales and functions of private higher education.....	42
2.6 Market Orientation Approach in Higher Education and the Role of the State.....	45
2.7 Summary.....	50

Chapter Three Rationales and Objectives of Private Higher Education in Oman

3.1 Introduction.....	51
3.2 Rationales from the Government’s View: A Brief Overview.....	51
3.3 Impact of Globalisation on Higher Education: Oman’s Perspective.....	52
3.4 Demography and the Construction of Educational System.....	54
3.5 Capacity of Public Higher Education in Oman.....	56

3.5.1 Secondary school graduates in 2007/2008.....	58
3.5.2 Students admitted in higher education.....	59
3.5.3 Distribution of students in higher education according to gender.....	62
3.6 Reduction in the Number of Students Studying Abroad.....	64
3.7 Financial Rationale.....	68
3.7.1 Public expenditure on higher education in Oman.....	70
3.8 Meeting Labour Market Demand and the Challenge of Omanisation.....	74
3.8.1 The needs of the public sector.....	76
3.8.2 The needs of the private sector.....	81
3.8.3 The private sector: ongoing arguments about Omanisation.....	84
3.9 Promoting Scientific Research.....	87
3.10 Summary.....	90

Chapter Four Development of Private Higher Education in Oman

4.1 Introduction.....	91
4.2 A Brief Overview of Higher Education in Oman.....	91
4.3 The Genesis of Private Sector Provision of Higher Education in Oman.....	96
4.3.1 Colleges offering diplomas.....	97
4.3.2 University colleges.....	98
4.3.3 Private universities.....	99
4.4 Does Merger Suit the Omani Case?.....	107
4.5 Admission Policy in Oman.....	110
4.5.1 Student population in private higher education.....	112
4.5.2 Distribution of students according to financial means.....	114
4.5.3 Students' distribution according to gender and nationality.....	115
4.6 Nature of Programmes/Courses Offered.....	118
4.7 Relevance of Programmes to the Labour Market.....	124
4.8 The Contribution of Omani Academic Staff.....	130
4.9 Summary.....	133

Chapter Five Funding Mechanisms and Financial Regulations of Private Higher Education

5.1 Introduction.....	135
5.2 Public versus Private Finance.....	136
5.3 Funding Models of Private Higher Education Institutions.....	141
5.3.1 Rationales for governmental subsidy to private higher education.....	142
5.3.2 Public sources of support.....	145
5.3.3 Private sources of support.....	149
5.3.3.1 Tuition fees.....	149
5.3.3.2 Philanthropy and endowment.....	160
5.3.3.3 Research funded by private companies.....	161
5.4 Mechanisms for Supporting Students.....	163
5.4.1 Government-funded student financial aid.....	164
5.4.1.1 Non-repayable aid.....	164
5.4.1.2 Repayable aid.....	165
5.4.2 Institutional financial aid policies.....	169
5.5 Suggested Model of Student Loans Scheme for Oman.....	171
5.5.1 Description of the suggested model.....	171

5.5.2 Mechanism of repayment system.....	173
5.6 Summary.....	174

Chapter Six

Quality Assurance Regimes of Private Higher Education

6.1 Introduction.....	175
6.2 What is Quality?.....	175
6.3 Rationales for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.....	177
6.4 Quality Assurance Schemes: International Experience.....	184
6.5 Mechanisms of Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education in Oman.....	192
6.5.1 State approval of higher education institutions (licensing procedures).....	193
6.5.2 Supervision.....	195
6.5.3 Quality network.....	198
6.5.4 Quality audit.....	199
6.5.5 Accreditation.....	202
6.6 Summary.....	205

Chapter Seven

The Research Methodology

7.1 Introduction.....	207
7.2 Research Design (Qualitative Method).....	207
7.3 Interviews in Educational Research.....	211
7.4 Validity and Reliability in Interviews.....	213
7.5 Target Population and Sample.....	216
7.6 Procedures of Preparing for the Interviews.....	219
7.6.1 Selecting interview questions.....	219
7.6.2 Piloting interview questions.....	220
7.6.3 The conduct of the interviews.....	221
7.7 Analysis of the Interviews.....	223
7.7.1 Informal data analysis.....	224
7.7.2 Formal data analysis.....	224
7.8 Documentary Data.....	224
7.9 Summary.....	225

Chapter Eight

Data Analysis

The Interviews: What Do They Tell Us?

8.1 Introduction.....	226
8.2 Results of Interviews with 18 Vice-chancellors and Deans.....	226
8.2.1 Rationales behind establishing private institutions.....	226
8.2.2 Private institutions' performance of functions of higher education (teaching, scientific research, and community service).....	232
8.2.3 Admission criteria adopted in private institutions.....	235
8.2.4 Factors that attract students to study at a particular private college or university.....	240
8.2.5 Schemes/policies adopted by private institutions to ensure both equity and accessibility.....	245

8.2.6 Mechanisms/options for increasing access into private higher education.....	250
8.2.7 Key sources of funding in private higher education institutions.....	255
8.2.8 Efforts of private higher education towards ensuring quality education.....	258
8.3 Results of Interviews with 7 Officials in the Ministry of Higher Education.....	261
8.3.1 Rationales behind establishment of private institutions.....	262
8.3.2 Teaching, scientific research and community service.....	266
8.3.3 Access and equity.....	267
8.3.4 Funding sources in private higher education institutions.....	271
8.3.5 Quality aspects in private higher education institutions.....	272
8.4 Summary.....	274

Chapter Nine Discussion of the Findings

9.1 Introduction.....	276
9.2 Contribution to Objectives and Challenges that Remain.....	276
9.2.1 Increasing access in higher education.....	277
9.2.2 Access and equity.....	280
9.2.3 Omanisation and the labour market.....	294
9.2.4 Funding challenges.....	298
9.2.5 Research activities.....	301
9.2.6 Quality aspects: its implications in private institutions.....	309
9.3 Summary.....	315

Chapter Ten Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Introduction.....	318
10.2 Overview of Research Project.....	318
10.3 Summary of the Research Findings.....	320
10.4 Recommendations.....	326
10.5 Suggestions for Further Research.....	336
10.6 Concluding Remarks.....	338
References.....	339
Summary in German (Zusammenfassung)	358
Appendices.....	365

List of Tables

Table 1.1: The number of schools, students and teachers in 2008/2009.....	2
Table 2.1: Varghese's five forms of privatisation of public institutions.....	17
Table 2.2: Private universities and colleges established in the GCC, 2001/2002.....	20
Table 2.3: Percentage of public funding in OECD countries.....	27
Table 3.1: Age cohort of the Omani population, Census of 2003.....	55
Table 3.2: Number of secondary school graduates, enrolled and had no higher education opportunity, 2003/2004-2007/2008.....	57
Table 3.3: Secondary school graduates by age group & gender, 2007/2008.....	58
Table 3.4: Students enrolled in higher education institutions, 2007/2008.....	60
Table 3.5: Students in higher education by means of funding, 2007/2008.....	61
Table 3.6: Omani students studying abroad at undergraduate level by gender and means of funding, 2007/2008.....	65
Table 3.7: Omani students studying in GCC countries (first degree) at their own expense, 2007/2008.....	66
Table 3.8: Expenditure on tertiary education institutions as a percentage of GDP in some selected countries.....	70
Table 3.9: Expenditure on education and percentage of distribution by educational stage, 2002-2005.....	71
Table 3.10: Cost of a university student in Oman compared to some Arab countries in 1997.....	73
Table 3.11: Civil service employees from 2003 to 2008.....	76
Table 3.12: Civil service employees (Omani/non-Omani) by grade and group, 2008.....	77
Table 3.13: Employees (Omani/non-Omani) in civil service by educational level, 2008.....	78
Table 3.14: Employees (Omani/non-Omani) in public corporations by educational level, 2008.....	79
Table 3.15: Distribution of Omani employees in the private sector by gender and wage group, 2008.....	81
Table 3.16: Distribution of non-Omani workers in the private sector by educational level, 2008.....	82
Table 3.17: Distribution of expatriate workers in the private sector by occupational groups, 2007 & 2008.....	83
Table 3.18: Labour market requirements in Oman up to 2020.....	84
Table 3.19: Research capacity in Oman compared to different countries in the world.....	88
Table 4.1: Public (state) higher education institutions in Oman.....	95
Table 4.2: Private universities and colleges in Oman, 2008/2009.....	101
Table 4.3: Programmes and qualifications awarded by private higher education, 2008/2009.....	119
Table 4.4: Students in private universities and colleges by field of study, 2008/2009.....	120
Table 4.5: Master programmes in private higher education, 2008/2009.....	121
Table 4.6: Omanisation in private higher education, 2008/2009.....	131
Table 4.7: Percentage of Omanisation proposed for private higher education.....	132
Table 5.1: Non-tuition fees charged by Oman's private institutions, 2008/2009.....	150

Table 5.2: Bachelor degree tuition fees in private higher education in Oman, 2008/2009.....	152
Table 5.3: Average tuition fees at four-year private higher institutions in some selected countries.....	158
Table 5.4: Contracted and granted research at the College of Engineering, SQU, 2006.....	163
Table 7.1: Semi-structured interviews conducted with vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions.....	219
Table 8.1: Rationales behind establishing private higher education institutions.....	227
Table 8.2: Functions of private higher education institutions.....	232
Table 8.3: Admission criteria in private higher education institutions.....	235
Table 8.4: Factors that attract students to study in private institutions.....	241
Table 8.5: Schemes/policies adopted by private institutions to ensure equity and accessibility.....	245
Table 8.6: Mechanisms/options for increasing access into private higher education institutions.....	251
Table 8.7: Current key sources of funding in private higher education institutions...	255
Table 8.8: Efforts/activities of private higher education towards ensuring quality education.....	258
Table 9.1: Qualifications and mode of teaching for academic staff in Oman's private universities and colleges, 2008/2009.....	305
Table 10.1: Recommendations.....	327

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Map of the Sultanate of Oman.....	5
Figure 1.2: Key elements of the study's objectives.....	8
Figure 4.1: The institutional structure of higher education in Oman.....	93
Figure 4.2: Development of private higher education institutions, 1995/1996- 2008/2009.....	100
Figure 4.3: Geographical distribution of private higher education institutions, 2008/2009.....	105
Figure 4.4: Development of students registered in private higher education institutions, 1995/1996 – 2008/2009.....	112
Figure 4.5: Students' distribution in private higher education by financial means, 2008/2009.....	115
Figure 4.6: Development of graduates from 1997/1998 to 2007/2008.....	127
Figure 5.1: Proposed student loan model for Oman.....	172
Figure 6.1: Licensing process of private higher education provision in Oman.....	193

List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms

2020 Vision:	A comprehensive 25-year plan (1995-2020) for the economic and social development of Oman.
Average Score:	Average of all subjects taken by an applicant \times 40% + average of the specific subjects which are mentioned as requirements for a programme \times 60%.
DGPUC:	Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges
GATS:	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HEAC:	Higher Education Admission Centre
GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
INCHER-Kassel:	International Centre for Higher Education Research-Kassel. The Centre is an interdisciplinary research unit within the University of Kassel, Germany.
INQAAHE:	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.
Low Income Applicants:	Consists of students whose sponsor income does not exceed RO 400 per month.
OAC:	Oman Accreditation Council
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Omanisation:	A national plan that aims to replace foreign workers with Omani nationals
OQN:	Oman Quality Network
PDO:	Petroleum Development Oman
Public institutions:	State or governmental institutions
RO:	Omani Rial. RO 1= US\$2.6 in 2010
ROSQA:	Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance
SAT:	Standardised Attainment Test
Social Welfare Applicants:	Consists of students who are identified by the Ministry of Social Development -Oman- as social-welfare students, have a social welfare number, and receive a monthly grant from the Ministry.
SQU:	Sultan Qaboos University
SSC:	Secondary School Certificate
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UK:	United Kingdom
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA:	United States of America
WTO:	World Trade Organisation

Chapter One

Introduction

“We devote great care and attention to the development and reform of education in Oman. Our aims include the raising of standards and updating the curriculum to make it richer and more relevant to the needs of an ever changing world. These efforts recognise the importance the Sultanate assigns to the development of its human resources, to the fostering of scientific and technological understanding and the creation of an educated population who can make a positive contribution to the development process by dealing confidently with change and new development.”

(From the speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to the 33rd Session of the UNESCO, Paris, October 4, 2005, Ministry of Education, 2009: 3)

1.1 Introduction

Formal education began in earnest in Oman in 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos assumed power. In 1970, there were only three primary schools for boys, with a total of 909 students and not more than thirty teachers. There was neither an Omani curriculum nor text books (Al-Nabhani, 1996). Therefore, all resources available were exploited by the Ministry of Education in order to implement the policy of spreading education as widely as possible. Since 1970, His Majesty’s speeches have repeatedly touched on this topic in one way or another. Educating Omanis, “even under the shadow of a tree” was his main concern.

This strategy was successful in spreading modern education to most parts of Oman. Education in Oman has continued to grow. In the first Five-Year Plan of 1970-1975, education started growing very fast in all parts of the Sultanate, by the year 1975, the number of schools had reached 207, and in 1983 the curriculum for all three stages, primary, intermediate and secondary was Omanised (Al-Hammami, 1999).

By the academic year 2008/2009, there were 1,047 state schools providing education at primary, intermediate and secondary levels, with a total number of 540,332 students, half of whom were female, as shown in Table 1.1 below. The number of teachers reached 43,149, of whom 38,398 were Omani nationals (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Table 1.1: The number of schools, students and teachers in 2008/2009

Schools	Male	Female	Coed.	Total
	354	221	462	1,047
Students	Male	Female		540,332
	275,229	265,103		
Teachers	Male	Female		43,149
	17,023	26,126		

Source: Ministry of Education (2009), Oman.

At the beginning of the seventies, the Sultanate of Oman witnessed several changes that affected social, economic and cultural life. In the 1980s it began to direct public policies towards the development of higher education to meet the needs created by rapid social development.

Oman, like many countries in the world, guarantees that every citizen has the right to education. This has been well documented in Omani Law. Article 13 of the Basic Statute of State (Official Gazette, 1996: 8), which deals with matters relating to education, states that:

- *“Education is a cornerstone for the progress of society, which the state fosters and endeavours to spread and make accessible to all.”*
- *“Education aims to raise and develop the general cultural standard, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of research, respond to the requirements of economic and social plans, build a generation that is physically and morally strong, that takes pride in its nation, country, and preserves its achievements.”*
- *“The state provides public education, works to combat illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under its supervision and according to the provisions of the Law.”*

Furthermore, Oman’s successive Five-Year Development Plans have concentrated on upgrading national human resources with education and training. The objective has been to prepare Omanis with skills and knowledge to enable them to participate effectively in national comprehensive development and serve their society. In line with the government’s concern regarding its human resources, the public expenditure on education has increased from one million Omani Rials to 866.7 million in 2008 (Ministry of National Economy, 2009).

However, in the 1990s the Sultanate concentrated on the aims and policies of private higher education, with the aim that it should contribute in comprehensive development. Both the government and private sector have exerted efforts to expand the

base of higher education in order to accommodate the increasing number of secondary school leavers who cannot be admitted into state higher education institutions due to their limited capacity and lack of financial and human resources. The policy of private higher education in Oman aims to provide additional opportunities for higher education and at the same time to alleviate the financial burden on the government. This trend has been focused on in the Five-Year Plans and in the long-term strategy, known as the 'Vision for Oman's Economy 2020' (Ministry of National Economy, 2001). The Vision Conference for Oman's Economy 2020 was convened in July 1995. The resulting conference report recognised that the world we are living in today is changing at a faster rate and in more fundamental ways than ever before. The gaining of global knowledge, information and technology and the development of advanced human skills are becoming essential prerequisites for progress. In view of the current situation, and the challenges at local and international levels, the broad focus of the vision of human resource development is to:

“develop human resources and the capabilities of the Omani people to generate and manage technological changes efficiently, in addition to facing the continuously changing local and international conditions, in a way that ensures maintaining the Omani traditions and customs.”

(Ministry of National Economy, 2009: 71)

The vision also suggested that the Sultanate should achieve numerous targets by the year 2020. Among these targets are: a) an efficient and competitive private sector, b) a diversified dynamic globalised economy, c) well developed human resources, and d) sustainable development within a stable macro-economic framework (Ministry of National Economy, 2008).

To keep pace with targets set in the 'Vision for Oman's Economy 2020', the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2001-2005), for example, concentrated on numerous targets in human resource development as well as economic dimensions. Among its objectives was to increase the rate of enrolments in higher education to 52% with government support and the allocation of scholarships to students joining private higher education. Besides, promoting the Omanisation policy in the private sector, education quality assurance, and supporting and encouraging the private sector to establish universities and colleges to meet the needs of the labour market were also amongst the plan's aims (Ministry of National Economy, 2004).

Investigating the outcomes of the above mentioned Five-Year Plan reveals that a number of the aims reviewed above have been achieved. For instance, the first private

university, Sohar University, has been opened, and many private colleges have been established. Moreover, more attention has been given to the quality of education with the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council.

However, the current Five-Year Development Plan (2006-2010) is the third phase of the long-term development strategy for the period 1996-2020. Therefore, the formulation of its main objectives was based on the long-term objectives and the main dimensions approved for this strategy. The Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (2006-2010) contains several components, among which are: improving the standard of living; upgrading education and expanding higher education opportunities; providing employment opportunities for nationals; developing the tourism and industry sectors; and encouraging local and foreign private sector investments.

With the application of the privatisation policy, the Sultanate endeavours to encourage individual initiatives for establishing institutions and investing money in development, especially in the education sector. The private sector has responded by establishing a number of private universities and colleges, which amounted to twenty-four institutions in the academic year 2008/2009.

As the main objective of this study is to understand the rationales and objectives behind the emergence of the private higher education sector in Oman, in addition to the obstacles and challenges facing this sector, the following section offers the reader brief background on the Sultanate of Oman. This is important as aspects of this context will help create as full a picture as possible.

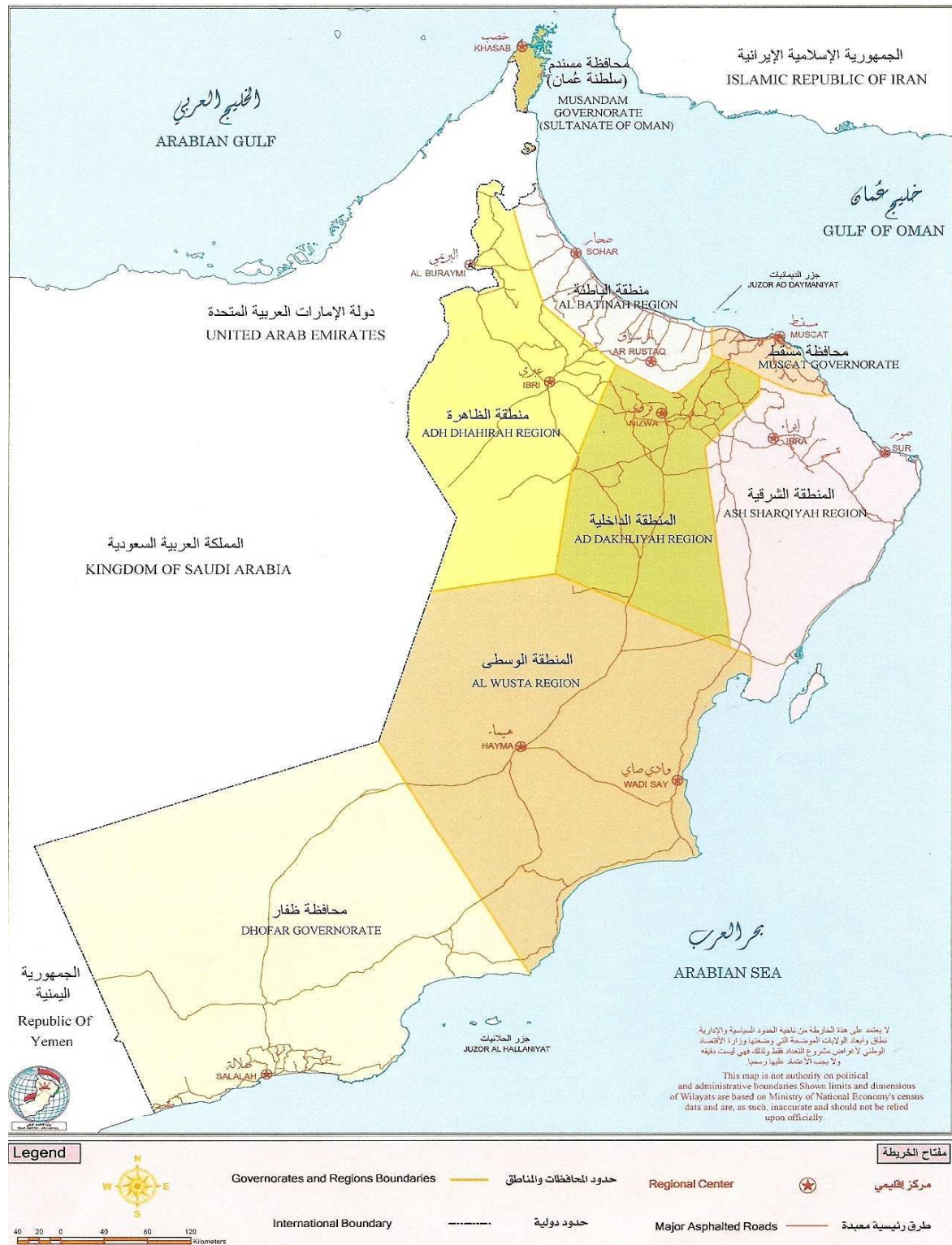
1.2 The Sultanate of Oman: An Overview

Throughout history, the Sultanate of Oman has been known by various names. The best known are Majan, Mezoun and Oman. Sumerian tablets refer to a country called Majan, thought to allude to Oman's ancient copper mines. Mezoun is derived from the word *muzn*, which means clouds and plentiful water, an indication that historically, water was abundant in Oman in comparison with neighbouring Arab countries. The name Oman is said to originate from Arab tribes who migrated to its territory from the Uman region of Yemen (Al-Taie, Pickersgill, & Al-Taie, 1999; Ministry of Information, 2009).

Oman occupies the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula and shares borders with the Republic of Yemen to the south-west, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, the United Arab Emirates to the North, and the Arabian Sea in the east (see Figure 1.1). Oman is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula after the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia and the Republic of Yemen, with a total land area of 309,500 sq km (Ministry of Information, 2009).

Figure 1.1: Map of the Sultanate of Oman



As shown in Figure 1.1, Oman has four governorates: Muscat (the capital area), Dhofar, Musandum and Al Buraimi. There are also five regions: Al Batinah, Adh Dhahirah, Ad Dakhilyah, Ash Sharqiyah, and Al Wusta.

The population of Oman according to the 2003 census is 2,331,391, of whom 1,781,558 (76%) are Omani citizens and 549,833 (24%) non-Omani citizens (Ministry of National Economy, 2004).

1.3 The Problem of the Study

As noted earlier, due to the fact that most efforts were placed on expanding general education (pre-tertiary education) in order to accommodate the growing population of young Omanis, the government, in 1990s, started to face a serious problem, namely, the high increase in the number of secondary school graduates and the limited capacity of public higher education institutions, which are unable to absorb them. This has led to the fact that the growing number of Omani secondary school graduates had no chance but to look for higher education abroad, after the public higher education institutions failed to enrol most of them, as will be noted in Chapter Three.

Moreover, Oman's long-term economic strategy ' Vision 2020', which aims to reduce dependence on oil and diversify the economy in the Sultanate, requires highly educated nationals to participate in this field, and to replace many skilled non-Omani citizens who now occupy higher positions in Oman's labour market, particularly in the private sector. To achieve this goal efficiently, higher education institutions must be expanded in terms of both quantity and quality. Quantitatively, the capacity of higher education must be developed to a level sufficient to meet the socio-economic demands. Qualitatively, the types of programmes and fields of study demanded by the society and the labour market need to be focused on. With only one public university in the country, Sultan Qaboos University, offering a comprehensive study programmes, and the remaining public institutions focused on specialisations such as Nursing, Islamic studies, and banking and financial studies, it would be not easy for the existing public institutions to meet the needs of the 'Vision 2020' for Oman's economy.

To sum up, owing to the sharp increase in the number of secondary school graduates and the rising demand of the labour market for qualified manpower, as well as other economic and social reasons, together with financial austerity measures as a result of competing demands from other public needs, the government encouraged, from 1996 onwards, the promotion and development of private higher education in Oman. The Omani

government believes that the private sector should also work alongside public sector in the development of human resources. Therefore, private higher education in Oman is expected to play a crucial role, first, in recruiting those who do not have opportunity to enter public higher education institutions; second, to contribute actively in the policy of Omanisation, particularly in the private sector corporations and, third, to participate in Oman's comprehensive development, which requires qualified human resources in different fields and specialisations. The significant question that might be asked is to what degree Oman's private higher education can achieve these rationales and objectives.

Moreover, in recent years, the private higher education system has started to face certain challenges which it needs to address. Some of the major challenges facing this sector include funding, access and equity, and quality aspects. The issue which this study will investigate, therefore, is:

"Private Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: Rationales, Development and Challenges".

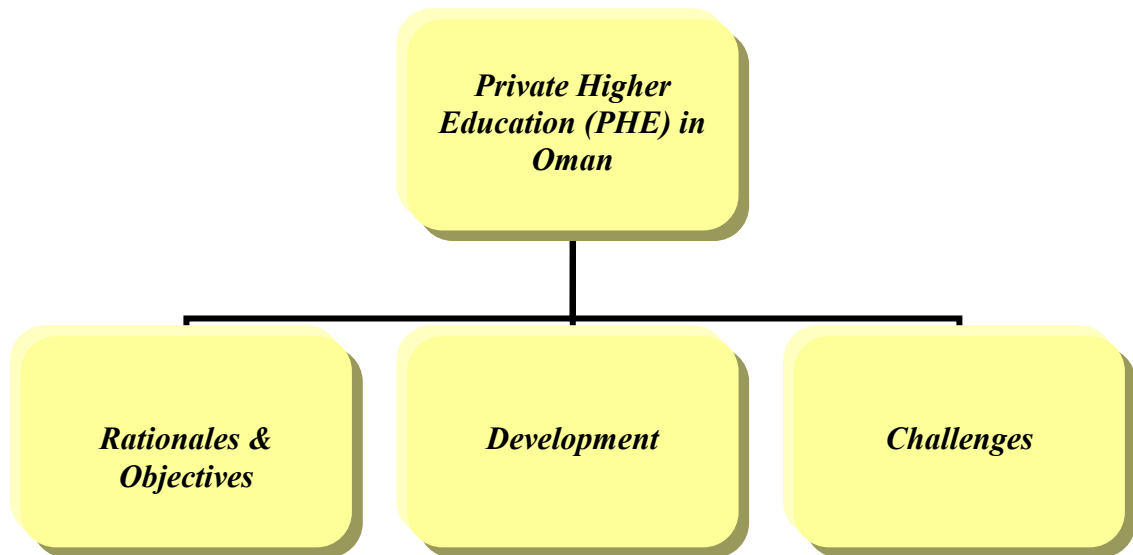
1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this research is divided into the following specific objectives which are to:

1. Investigate the rationales and objectives behind establishing private higher education institutions in Oman, especially under the influence of current social and economic demand;
2. Survey and analyse the development of private higher education in the country together with the current status of this sector;
3. Examine the current challenges facing private universities and colleges in the Sultanate;
4. Provide some recommendations to enable this sector to contribute effectively in promoting the role of higher education in Oman.

Figure 1.2 illustrates the main elements this study focuses on.

Figure 1.2: Key elements of the study's objectives



1.5 Research Questions

To accomplish the above mentioned objectives, the research will attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the rationales and objectives behind allowing the private sector to establish private higher education institutions in Oman? And does this sector positively contribute in achieving these objectives?*
- 2. What are the challenges and issues that Oman's private higher education faces?*
- 3. What procedures are recommended or suggested to improve private higher education and increase the effectiveness of its contribution to comprehensive development in the Sultanate?*

1.6 The Significance of the Study

Research on private higher education is a relatively new phenomenon in the main sphere of higher education research in the Arab region. As Levy (2005) emphasises, although there has been a remarkable increase in research and publications about private higher education in the West, this issue remains peripheral on the higher education research agenda in the Arab world.

The situation of private higher education in Oman and the role it could play in Omani development, together with the challenges it faces, have not received adequate attention as a topic of research. A perusal of previous academic studies reveals no specific research dealing with private higher education in Oman, and the challenges that arose in this sector. This might be due to its being a new phenomenon in the country, since the first private college was established in 1996. There are, however, a few studies that deal with basic education and higher education in Oman in general, such as Al-Hammami (1999), “Education for the 21st Century: General education Reform in the Sultanate of Oman: Motives, Nature and Strategies of Implementation”, which examines the nature of this reform and the strategies of the ‘General Education’ reform in Oman. His study analyses general education in Oman between 1970 and 1998. He concludes that reform is an important endeavour in the educational system in the country, particularly as Oman is moving to a new phase of the long-term strategy, 1996-2020, since educational syllabuses must keep pace with that strategy.

Al-Manthri (2001a) has carried out a study entitled “Education Reform in Oman 1970-2001: The Changing Roles of Teachers and Principals in Secondary Schools”, in which he examines the development of education, including higher education, in Oman. He also points out that in 1971 around 700 students were selected by the Ministry of Education to continue higher education studies outside Oman, as well as a thousand students who had already sent abroad to pursue their university education. Al-Manthri concludes that both school teachers and principals should be well prepared and rehabilitated in order to acclimatise to the new education reform.

Another study looks at higher education and its role in human resource development in Oman. Al-Lamki (1992), “Higher Education and Underemployment in Oman”, describes the role of the government with regards to human resource development. The study discusses the degree of relevance of post-secondary education level, particularly vocational education, to the local labour market. Al-Lamki also lists some obstacles, which she believes hinder Omanisation programmes, particularly in the private sector. These include:

- The majority of employees in the private sector labour market are non-Omani citizens.
- The training environment in the private sector is comparatively neglected. This situation has led to many nationals lagging behind non-national employees, who have longer work-life experience.

- Lack of a coherent link between vocational institutions and the skills required by the labour market.

At the end of her study, Al-Lamki recommends that the government should initiate a comprehensive strategic human resource plan by taking into account the national economy and labour market demands.

The higher education system in the Sultanate has also received attention from other researchers. For example, Al-Hajri (2002) describes in his study, “Human Capital Theory and the Financing of Higher Education in Oman” a few authorities in charge of higher education and the establishment of Higher Education Council. The study examines the financial system of higher education in the country, arguing that funding of public higher educations needs to be improved. Al-Hajri concludes by suggesting that the capacity of higher education institutions in Oman should be increased to meet socio-economic demand.

In another study, by Al-Ramadhani (2003), “Higher Education Development in Oman 1970-2002: Challenges and Achievements”, the researcher traces the development of higher education since the 1970s. The study also discusses the efforts made by the government during the 1990s to achieve stability in the higher education system. The author recommends that the role of the Council of Higher Education should be activated in drawing up general policies of higher education in Oman, and that concrete links should be established among all institutions to achieve maximum collaboration.

Al-Bulushi (2003) has conducted a study that examines the accreditation system in Oman and the importance of this mechanism to enhance quality in the local higher education institutions. In his study, “Accreditation in an International Context: Prospects for Implementation in the Omani Higher Education System”, Al-Bulushi suggests that since the subject of accreditation is new in the country, workshops about the accreditation process need to be designed for higher education institutions.

Al-Hashmi (2005) discusses the main factors influencing secondary school students’ decisions to enter higher education in his study, “Factors Influencing Secondary School Students’ Decisions to Enter Higher Education: Implications for Higher Education Capacity in the Sultanate of Oman”. The study examines the capacity of higher education in the country to meet the high demand for higher education in the country. He suggests that part-time study courses should be offered at Sultan Qaboos University and other public institutions of higher education to meet the increasing need for higher education, and that more scholarships should be allocated. He also proposes that public expenditure to

higher education should be increased to keep pace with the growing number of secondary school graduates.

Based on the foregoing, it can be noted that the above-listed studies do not discuss the private higher education system in Oman, nor the challenges facing this sector. By investigating the rationale for the recent moves to develop higher education, the current role of the sector, and the issues affecting the ability of these institutions to contribute in Omani development, this study makes an original contribution to knowledge.

Furthermore, this research can support higher education policy makers in their decision making process and in mapping a constructive strategy for private higher education in the country. This study is also important in practical terms because, based on examination of the current state of private higher education in Oman and the challenges it faces, it will present some recommendations for promoting the role of this sector in the Sultanate.

1.7 The Study Approach

This study is based on the analysis of numerous texts and official documents, which are rarely made available to anyone apart from decision-makers in education. Examples of these documents include official reports and correspondence, governmental statistics and unpublished papers, which have to do with education, the economy and human resources development.

Moreover, the writer has obtained supporting materials and documents concerning conferences, seminars and meetings on higher education at national and international level, besides academic studies, selected references and books on the subject of this research, collected from libraries in Oman and Germany, particularly from the library of the International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel), University of Kassel.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to survey the current state of private higher education in Oman and the challenges it faces (the seventh chapter explains the research method in greater details).

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This study has ten chapters, including this chapter. **Chapter One** includes background information about the research problem. It highlights the research questions and objectives and sets out its significance, approach with reference to previous studies, approaches, as

well as structure of the thesis. In addition, it provides an overview about the Sultanate of Oman. In **Chapter Two**, empirical evidence is reviewed on rationales for the emergence of private higher education together with its functions from the international perspective. **Chapter Three** focuses on the motivations and rationales behind establishment of private higher education institutions in Oman. It analyses governmental and non-governmental documents and reports related to this subject. **Chapter Four** examines the stages of development of the private sector in Oman. Moreover, the certificates and programmes that private higher education offers, and its link to the demands for labour market are highlighted. In **Chapter Five**, funding mechanisms of private sector higher education together with the challenges facing this system are discussed. In addition, mechanisms for providing students with aid to make their study possible are presented. **Chapter Six** focuses on the regulatory regimes of private higher education, with special reference to the regulations in place related to the Oman's private institutions. The system of supervision of these institutions is highlighted, and some observations are made on the Omani private higher education institutions. Moreover, the role of the government in promoting quality assurance in this sector is discussed. **Chapter Seven** describes the research methodology selected and then goes on to explain in detail the application of the methodology in the field and the limitations faced. **Chapter Eight** analyses the semi-structured interviews. It uses a descriptive approach to describe the rationales, motivations, and the challenges and issues faced by private higher education in the country to answer the questions of the study. In **Chapter Nine**, the findings from both the documentary data and the semi-structured interviews are discussed and construed. In **Chapter Ten**, conclusions, policy implications and recommendations are presented. In addition, suggestions for further research are offered.

In the next chapter, Chapter Two, the relevant literature and empirical evidence regarding the rationales of private higher education and its functions are reviewed.

Chapter Two

Rationales and Types of Private Higher Education: International Perspective

2.1 Introduction

Higher education has always been a priority on the state agenda. It is an engine for national growth, a repository for and creator of knowledge, a catalyst for innovation, and the principal instrument for the conservation of national heritage and culture. Higher education, undoubtedly, is an investment in a nation's most crucial resource, human resource, whose return on investment is pivotal in a country's drive for social and economic development. It can be argued that higher education is one of the building blocks for national development driven by the demands of a growing, upwardly mobile population.

The former president of the United States of America, Bill Clinton (1992), emphasised that:

“The key to our economic strength in America today is productivity of growth...in the 1990s and beyond, the universal spread of education, computers, and high-speed communications means that what we earn will depend on what we can learn and how well we can apply what we learn to the workplaces of America.” (Bill Clinton, 1992, cited in Nafi, 2005: 19)

Thus, the nucleus for development will be knowledge and skills, if the nation wishes to take its place in international competition.

In the case of Oman, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Sultan of Oman, in his speech on the occasion of the graduation of the first group of students from Sultan Qaboos University in 1990, emphasised the importance of education in general, and higher education in particular, in developing the country. He asserted that:

“Forming and training man is a laborious process. Yet it is a necessary process. We shall, for our part, spare no effort to provide opportunities for the training of Omanis at all levels of education, particularly higher education.” (Ministry of Information, 1992: 20)

Therefore, nations which seek to develop and command respect regard education as an essential passport to individual and social progress, as well as economic growth. Moreover, in the changing world, education must not be seen merely as a fundamental right but as a vital tool for the development process and for shaping the globalisation phenomenon.

UNESCO (1996: 79) pointed out that:

“Education should fit humanity to take control of its own development. It must enable all people without exception to take their destiny into their own hands so that they can contribute to the progress of the society in which they live, founding developments upon the responsible participation of individuals and communities.”

In the 21st century, global wealth is greatly concentrated in the knowledge, skills and resourcefulness of people, which are increasingly critical to the world economy. In an increasingly knowledge-driven society, more and more people are seeking education for a better future, as they believe that education is the key to good jobs and a higher standard of living.

Malcolm Gillis (1999) strongly asserts this point, emphasising that:

“Today, more than ever before in human history, the wealth- or poverty- of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and a greater capacity of learning can look forward to lifetimes of unprecedented economic fulfilment. But in the coming decades the poorly educated face little better than the dreary prospect of lives of quiet desperation.” (Malcolm Gillis, President of Rice University, 12 February 1999, cited in World Bank, 2000: 15)

The above statement implies that states, as well as individuals, have an interest in the availability of high quality higher education as a means of developing citizens and contributing to their welfare.

However, the recent economic development, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has led to the reconsideration of many principles, including those of education (Tilak, 1991). One major characteristic of this change is a reconsideration of the responsibility of the state for education, and recognition of the need to allow the private sector to participate in this process. As Geiger (2004: 1) states:

“The global picture of changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union Empire. The higher education vacuum created by dysfunctional and deteriorating communist systems was gradually filled by private ventures. Suddenly, a large part of the globe was transformed from having no private higher education to relying on a large and differentiated private sector for a substantial part of their needs.”

However, the call to establish private higher education institutions (Tilak, 1991) is not ascribed to economic factors, but rather to the difficulties that governments face in financing the advancement of state higher education, while at the same time demands for access and skilled personnel remain high. Thus, privatisation is suggested. Altbach (1999a: 68) maintains that the prominence of private higher education is linked to the ideology of privatisation that is so influential at present, and with the trend, worldwide, to cut public spending:

“Private higher education is one of the most dynamic and fast-growing segments of post-secondary education at the turn of 21st century. A combination of unprecedented demand for access to higher education and the inability or unwillingness of governments to provide the necessary support has brought private higher education to the forefront.”

Oman is no exception to this international trend. In Oman, the existing higher education system does not fully meet the needs of the private sector, in terms of the required mix of specializations and necessary competencies. For this reason, and owing to the difference between basic and post-secondary education, coupled with the financial austerity as a result of competing demands from other public needs, a Royal Decree was issued in 1996 to promote the development of private higher education in the Sultanate (Ministry of Higher Education, 2005).

With this in mind, for the purposes of this study, in order to build a wider understanding of the phenomenon of private higher education, the rationale for and roles of private higher education need to be considered. To achieve the above objectives, this chapter will attempt, by reviewing the relevant literature, to examine key priorities, motivations and rationales for the appearance of private higher education worldwide and with special reference to Oman. The aim in so doing is to establish a background for the next chapter, which will discuss in greater details certain elements related to rationales and motivations for the emergence of private higher education in the Sultanate. These themes will be discussed through the analysis of numerous texts and official documents in this domain. This will provide a broad view of this field, enabling discussion of the topic of private higher education in Oman to be contextualised.

2.2 Privatisation versus Private Higher Education

The concept of 'privatisation' is well developed and elaborated in the economic and industrial sectors but not so in the educational field (Tilak, 1991). It is not easy to define the concept because it comes in many forms. According to Walford (1990), it does not have a clear-cut definition because, contrary to what is thought by many writers (Altbach, 1999b; Al-Mulais, 2001) it does not relate only to ownership, finance and control. Privatisation in its holistic framework should be reviewed as an integrated process within the parameters of a free market place and economic structure, including flexibility, profitability, competition and quality. Given the challenges of funding, indeed, it is necessary to rethink the traditional concepts of private and public education by providing a framework that can include quality and profitability, as well as innovation and flexibility.

Thus, privatisation is a concept that needs to be more closely examined. Perhaps it signifies the taking over of ailing, unmanaged public sector enterprises by the private sector. But can a university be put up for sale? As a matter of fact, privatisation is an economics-related term which is hardly applicable in this context. Education experts (see for example, Geiger, 1986; Altbach, 1999a) claim that privatisation in higher education does not entail the selling of government universities to the private sector, which is the general understanding of privatisation in economic institutions, or floating shares in the security markets to be exchanged by businessmen. As Fahmi (2000) indicates, it simply means allowing higher education institutions to be established by individuals or companies or non-government authorities which do not primarily intend to make profits; yet this should not prevent those who establish and invest in these institutions from acquiring economic returns. From the researcher's point of view, the concept of privatisation proposed by Fahmi cannot be generalised worldwide. This is due to the fact that many of the private institutions of higher education operating in developing countries are for-profit institutions, which rely mainly on student fees as a major source of financing, offer courses in market-friendly subject areas, and at times are affiliated to universities based abroad. Further explanation on this point will be provided later in this chapter. Starr (1988: 5) argues that privatisation has come primarily to mean two things: (1) any shift of activities or functions from the state to the private sector; and, more specifically, (2) any shift of the production of goods and services from public to private.

Translating the meaning of privatisation to the higher education field, it is very difficult to find a unified approach, as privatisation meanings vary from the emergence of a considerable number of higher education institutions in Central and South Eastern Europe to the definition of privatisation for Western Europe (Teixeira & Amaral, 2001: 364), where, with the exception of Portugal, privatisation has meant diversification of funding sources and increased competition among institutions associated with the development of quasi-market structures for higher education. The notion "quasi-market", as identified by Reisz (2003), refers to the creation of an environment where choice can influence the supply of services from a number of providers. He claims that quasi-markets are in many respects not markets, since the major difference is the fact that purchasing power comes from the state or another appointing agent acting as a purchaser for the benefit of the real client (e.g. students).

New funding sources, however, have been identified, for example by selling services, increasing tuition fees or outsourcing some services to the private sector (Hauptman, 2006a).

Varghese (2004b) distinguishes between privatisation and private sector in higher education. He suggests that privatisation entails applying private sector or market principles in the operation and management of the institutions of higher education while ownership rests within the public domain. Private sector, in contrast, signifies the growth of the non-public sector in higher education. In most cases, this sector does not receive funding from the government and as Tilak (1991) notes, it does not rely on state funding for its increase and expansion. According to Varghese (2004b: 7), there are five forms of privatisation of public institutions: privatisation of services in public institutions, privatisation as cost sharing, public-financed privatisation, corporatisation of universities, and private management of public education. Table 2.1 describes briefly the features of each form.

Table 2.1: Varghese's five forms of privatisation of public institutions

Form	Feature	Example
<i>Privatisation of services in public institutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many public utilities, support services, and student support systems are contracted out to private agencies on a full pricing basis. - Engrosses the withdrawal of subsidies on lodging and food provided in student hostels. 	<p>This form currently exists in many public institutions worldwide.</p> <p>In Oman, for example, many of supporting services (restaurants, transport, sport centres, cleaning, etc.) in public institutions are contracted out to private enterprises.</p>
<i>Privatisation as cost sharing</i>	<p>Includes two forms:</p> <p>A. cost recovery which is affected mainly through levying fees from direct beneficiaries.</p> <p>B. delayed payment that comes when students are supported through loan scholarship schemes, which they have to repay at a later stage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student loans are very common in many African countries (e.g. Ghana, Nigeria). - Uganda and Kenya have introduced a system whereby private sponsored students pay a low rate of fees.
<i>Public-financed privatisation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The voucher system is an example of promoting competition across private sectors through public funding. - It permits parents to choose institutions for their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Florida in the US has already legislated on this issue. - Netherlands has introduced such a scheme.
<i>Corporatisation of universities</i>	<p>Some universities have established cost units, companies or corporations with functional autonomy.</p>	<p>Malaysia permits public universities to borrow money, acquire investment shares and enter into business ventures.</p>
<i>Private Management of public education</i>	<p>Funding for private institutions is offered by the public authority, but private institutions manage the institution, including the funds.</p>	<p>Countries such as India, where a very high proportion of colleges is private, represent a good example of this trend (Tilak, 1999).</p>

Own analysis after Varghese (2004b).

However, a simple definition was proposed by Al-Humaidi (1999: 230). He defines private higher education as:

“Post-secondary education implemented by the private business sector, with full responsibility for establishing, administrating and funding, either through student paid tuition or through scholarship granting organisations.”

Applying the above definition, private higher education in Oman can be defined as different types of programmes provided by universities and colleges established by the private business sector for study periods from two and a half years to seven years after secondary education, and for those who have obtained a higher diploma and wish to proceed towards a university degree. It also provides opportunities for graduate studies (currently they offer some master programmes, mainly MBA and Educational Management) in coordination with foreign universities.

However, since higher education is considered as mix-goods, the Government of Oman heavily subsidised the commencement and ongoing operation of private institutions. Financial and technical incentives were provided directly and indirectly (for further details, see Chapter Five).

Thus, whenever the term “privatisation” appears in this study, it is intended to refer to private higher education. In other words, and to avoid contradiction and confusion to the reader, the terms ‘private higher education’ and ‘privatisation of higher education’ will be used interchangeably in this research.

By and large, the types and functions of private higher education will provide a clearer picture of the terminology. This, however, will be discussed later in greater detail.

2.3 Development of Private Higher Education

Although privatisation has assumed greater importance as a policy strategy in the development of education recently, from a historical perspective, privatisation is not a new phenomenon, since this type of education was the only option (Tilak, 1991) until the establishment of state education. In the Middle Ages, private sector higher education in Europe was established and monitored by students or staff unions. Such education institutions were normally affiliated to religious organisations or supported by province governors (Al-Ramadhani, 2003). According to Geiger (1986), church and state were the major designers of higher education institutions as the beginning of the modern era.

In Europe, for instance, the origins of non-governmental higher education can be traced back to the eleventh century, with establishment of Bologna University in Italy in 1088, as the first university offering a university degree in the world (Al-Sarmi, 2009).

In the United States of America, the commencement of higher education dates to the nineteenth century, as non state (non-profit) higher education, relying on tuition fees. In 1860, private higher education institutions numbered 750 universities and colleges (Al-Sarmi, 2009). However, compared to non-state higher education in the United States, state higher education has increased dramatically. This can be contributed to the policy adopted by the government of strongly supporting state universities. For example, in 1816, the Morill Act was issued, granting lands only for public or state universities (Mohammed, 2009).

In Asia, particularly South Asian countries, establishment of these institutions was based on a non-governmental funding formula. Its ideology was concentrated on non-profit organisations and the objective of founding such institutions was to contribute in spreading knowledge in certain specialisations. Some of these institutions adopted cultural and religious dimensions (Altbach and Levy, 2005). The number of these institutions was not large. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, a tremendous change occurred in these countries, with a rapid increase in numbers of private universities and colleges, of which the majority tended to become profit-driven.

In the Arab world, private higher education emerged earlier than the appearance of state education, and was in the form of religious or missionary institutions, which were administered by Muslim scholars, such as Al-Azhar University in Egypt and A'Zaytona University in Tunisia (Al-Ramadhani, 2003).

In Oman, private education was established many centuries ago and was available in mosques, private houses, public buildings and castles. Resources for financing this education were grants and donations, or the payment of fees, but sometimes the teaching was voluntary. However, religion, Arabic, history, basic mathematics, poetry and literature were the only subjects taught at these establishments. According to Al-Dhahab (1987), private schools were the only education available until the end of the 1960s. The American Missionary School was situated in Muscat Governorate, the capital of Oman, and there were some other private schools in different regions of Oman. However, these schools ceased to exist when state schools were opened throughout the country.

Based on the above, it can be argued that the concept of private higher education is not new. However, due to the development in the international economy, the accelerated progress of information science and technology, governments' financial deficit in financing higher education, or as Geiger (1987: 6) suggests, their unwillingness to pay any more, and the noticeable growth in population, "there has been a resurgence of interest in

private higher education. Oman, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, shares, to a great extent, these global rationales, and has invited the private sector to invest in higher education.

The Arab world generally has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of private universities. By 2001 there were some 72 private universities, representing some 41% of the total number of Arab universities (Mahmoud, 2001).

The newest regional site, in the Middle East, of sudden private development from near zero to a considerable number of private higher education institutions is the Arab Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates).

In the Gulf countries, as in many countries of the world, private higher education is valued for many reasons, with different emphases according to national circumstances - intellectual independence from the state, diversity of provision, additional capacity and operational effectiveness. Although the second half of the last century was the period of the appearance of private higher education in the Gulf region, most private universities in the Gulf countries were established in the first decade of the new millennium particularly in 2001/2002. Table 2.2 gives examples of these institutions.

Table 2.2: Private universities and colleges established in the GCC, 2001/2002

Country	Institution	Affiliated with	Year
Kuwait	The Gulf University for Science & Technology	The University of Missouri at St Louis, USA	2002
Bahrain	The University College of Science & Technology	Georgia College, Canada	2002
Oman	Sohar University	The University of Queensland, Australia	2001
Qatar	Weill Cornell Medical College	Cornell University, USA	2002
United Arab Emirates	British University	The University of Edinburgh, UK	2002

Source: Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) (2002).

Alternative institutional models in the region are the Syrian Virtual University, in partnership with various North American universities, and the Arab Open University, working with the UK Open University (OBHE, 2002).

Another feature of transnational education that can be seen only in the Gulf States is so-called 'education hubs'. This is another illustration of the level of interest in this kind of education. In 2007, Bahrain announced plans to establish a higher education hub in cooperation with a foreign partner. Three such establishments are already in place: Knowledge Village in Dubai, University City in Sharjah, both in the UAE, and Education City in Qatar (OBHE, 2007). However, the question might be asked whether there is sufficient demand in the region for establishing such projects. If population size is

considered, then Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE have only small populations (around 3 million collectively) and already have a range of foreign programmes in operation.

Recruitment of regional and international students seems to be important to the successful development of the hub, since in Bahrain and Kuwait, expatriates make up over half of the population, and in Qatar and the UAE, non-citizens represent 80% of the population (Coffman, 2003). However, enrolment figures for the three hubs currently in operation are relatively small, at least in two of these zones. According to OBHE (2007: 3), collectively the 15 institutions operating in Dubai's Knowledge Village enrol 6,000 students, but on average this is fewer than 500 students per university. Similarly, in Qatar no university is reported to have more than 400 students enrolled. Based on the brief data available about these hubs, it can be argued that whether there will be adequate demand to operate such hubs in the region will depend on whether participating institutions can succeed in attracting students not only from the Gulf region but from the whole Middle East region and beyond. Moreover, demonstrating sufficient student demand and/or already viable operations will also have an impact on the attractiveness of these hubs for foreign institutions. Although facilities and financial subsidies provided by the host countries might attract foreign providers, well-known international universities will most certainly be looking for other benefits, such as academic benefits, increased brand visibility, research and development collaboration, in order to provide an ongoing commitment to these establishments.

Based on the above, the revolution from small to large private enrolment is mostly a phenomenon of the developing world. The only developed country with majority private enrolment is Japan. If we consider South Korea and Taiwan as now developed, then they join the short list. Generally speaking, education in developing countries is more privatised than in many advanced countries. Compared to the rest of the Middle East, Oman was early in initiating private higher education, in the second half of the 1990s.

It is important, however, to examine the phenomenon of private higher education from different aspects, besides its development, by highlighting its functions, types and rationales. By so doing, a clearer picture will appear. In addition, issues such as whether or not private higher education is a healthy phenomenon in the general system of higher education will be debated. This will allow us to investigate the validity of Bernasconi's (2004: 2) claim that "the literature of private higher education internationally shows that private higher education brings diversity, especially when compared to the public tertiary education sector, along the dimensions of finance, control, mission, and scope of

functions. We know that, in general, private universities rely on a narrower range of financial sources than publics, with tuition fees as the paramount resource”. Or is it simply, as the World Bank (2000) declares, that with the liberalisation phenomenon and strain on resources, governments would like to dilute their support and shift the burden to the private sector? Nowadays with the unprecedented expansion of higher education, it is difficult for governments to perform their role. The most frequent arguments found in the literature in favour of private higher education are related to its ability to reduce the burden of government expenditure, to increase the diversity of choice and access, and to make education providers more accountable to their clients. The proponents of private education argue that private provision would result in more resources flowing into education, more efficient use of resources, and consequently, more equitable access to education (World Bank, 1994; Sanyal, 1998). From the World Bank (1994) point of view, the private provision of higher education enlarges educational opportunities at little or no direct public cost, particularly in countries where the capacity of public institutions is very limited. Moreover, it is also argued that private sector higher education can respond efficiently and flexibly to the changing demands of both students and the labour market. Patrinos (1990: 162) emphasises that private suppliers are more attentive to the needs and requirements of their patrons “because they depend heavily on tuition fees for covering their operating costs”.

However, rapid growth of the private sector of higher education often left behind a question of quality. This situation could be more likely in developing countries (Tilak, 1991) where the nations lack the resources to fund the expansion of the public sector higher education, yet face increasing demand based on ideologies of educational development and growth in population. Levy (1999) supported this view, attributing this situation to the insufficient, if not absent, government subsidies in developing countries to the private institutions of higher education. Moreover, there is usually little state aid to students in the private sector institutions, in the form of either means-based scholarships or student loans.

Gregory (2001) claims that in some countries such as Brazil and the Philippines, private institutions of higher education cost less per student, especially in excess demand situations, since many private universities’ expenditures per student were 30% to 40% of public ones. However, Gregory’s statement should be further and more deeply explained and discussed. For private sector higher education, low cost does not, in all cases, mean full commitment guaranteeing quality in the educational process. Rather, it may result from low-quality inputs per student, such as the ratio of academic staff per student, books per

student, laboratory equipment per student, and teaching hours of staff per week, as well as the ratio of part-time to full-time academic staff.

James (1991) mentions one of these criteria or elements that have direct effect on the issue of quality; recruitment of academics. He emphasised that recruitment of low-quality academics with inadequate qualifications at low salary might reduce the cost of education at the cost of quality. For instance, in Japan, teacher cost per student was four times higher in public universities than in many private ones, excluding Waseda University and Keio University from the list, since all private universities in Japan aspire to become a little Waseda or a little Keio (Asonuma, 2002). In the Philippines, teacher salaries in public universities could be as high as two times that of private universities. These explanations gave the political rationale for introduction and increase of public subsidies to private universities in Japan (Oba, 2005).

Moreover, cost reduction might affect the educational process in academic circles and in society as a whole; for example, teaching as against research, undergraduate programmes as against postgraduate programmes, human and social sciences as against applied sciences and engineering. In fact, it is likely that the private sector applies negative procedures to secure a greater and faster profit by imposing higher fees and focusing on commercial programmes, which aim at securing employment and professional success, without giving any consideration to knowledge, research, values and community service. In a document, “Higher Education in the Arab Region 1998-2003” prepared by UNESCO (2003: 7), it is pointed out that “of the twelve new [private] universities established since 1999 in Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Somalia, Syria and Tunisia, only four emphasise science and technology in their curriculum while the rest are heavily skewed towards the humanities”. In the researcher’s view, this could be ascribed to two main factors. First, humanities programmes are less costly compared to scientific programmes such as medicine, engineering, etc. Second, there might have been no authentic survey as to whether these programmes meet the demands of students, the labour market and society. Supporting the argument above, UNESCO (2003: 7) points out that:

“There is as yet no evidence that these new universities have succeeded in lifting the strain and alleviating the pressure on the higher education system in the region. Nor is there any evidence, with few exceptions, that they have provided students with more diversity or are succeeding to meet the needs of students, society, the labour market and the requirements of the global economy.”

UNESCO's statement highlights a very critical issue with regard to the higher education strategies in the Arab region. It is very important for the benefits of societies in this region that a clear vision should be formulated of different aspects of national development, and education, particularly higher education, would be a priority. To accomplish this goal, missions of higher education should be set in line with the needs and interest of all segments of the community. Moreover, advancement and rapid changes in the world labour market, not only within the countries of Arab region, but also globally, must be considered.

Thus, one issue among others, which this study attempts to highlight, is the degree of relevance of programmes offered in Omani private higher education institutions to the requirements of the Omani labour market.

Another argument put forward in favour of private higher education, as Schneider (1997) emphasises, is that in differentiated demand situations, private institutions of higher education would appear to be superior in quality in some important respects because they are freely chosen when less costly public alternatives are available. Schneider (1997) draws an example from Pakistan, where a sectarian teacher training institution shows how a private institution can do better than public institutions just by increasing the motivation of the staff and the students and improving work ethics. Shortage and inflexibility of public service has been cited as an obstacle to enhancing the work performance of the academic staff. However, Schneider's view in this respect cannot be generalised, and more research is required to prove this phenomenon

In the Omani context, the government is aware that private higher education needs special support at the stage of its inception. Therefore, encouragement and financial assistance have been provided through a number of actions, such as the provision of suitable land for buildings, financial contribution to the paid-up capital, exemption from custom taxes on leading material (for further details, please see Appendices 1a, 1b and 1c).

A wide range of research (Altbach, 1999a, 1999b; Asmal, 2004; Levy, 2005) warns that, while private higher education helps meet the growing demand for tertiary education, provides more opportunities to students, and creates diversification, it also brings problems of finance, quality, access and equity. Although these challenges will be discussed in greater detail in this study, a brief discussion might be useful for the reader. Regarding financial problems, it is worth mentioning that private higher education bylaws, in many cases, do not provide incentives for private contributions. In Oman, for example, under Royal Decree 41/99 allowing the private sector to found universities, the goal of such

universities should not be profit-making (Official Gazette, 1999). However, laws of establishment of private higher education institutions in many other countries such as Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon and Morocco, do not refer to this point. The Kuwaiti law of private higher education No. 34/2000, for example, has left this issue open (Al-Atiqi & El-Azma, 2007).

The issue of financial supervision and accountability concerns, to a great extent, not-for-profit public or private institutions. Nevertheless, the topic is also of crucial concern to other degree-granting, for-profit institutions. For-profit educational institutions are a relatively recent phenomenon (Geiger, 1986). The University of Phoenix, the largest provider in the United States initiated operations in 1998 and had enrolled over 150,000 students by 2004 (Phillips, 2007). These suppliers are the fastest growing academic institutions with their central companies often included or listed in the common stock market and are the most difficult for regulators and controllers. A lawsuit filed in 2004 accused the University of Phoenix of providing recruiters with incentives to enrol unqualified students, a case that Phoenix University settled for around \$10 million (Phillips, 2007).

However, one might question, if most institutions of private higher education in developing countries do not seek profit, then how will they survive. In fact, the issue here is how can profitability in educational institution be measured? In the researcher's view, this is based on the founders' background and their views on investment on higher education. If the founders mainly concentrate on profit-making, educational goals, such as creating a scientific research environment, giving attention to knowledge, values and community service, will be neglected.

For this reason, government should pay this issue careful attention. This can be achieved by enacting bylaws and regulations determining the goals and objectives of these institutions. However, given the absence of a culture of donation towards educational institutions, coupled with the weakness of the business sector in supporting higher education, the link between higher education institutions and the labour market as well as a society as a whole, in developing countries, remains limited.

Al-Manthri (2001b: 506), the former Minister of Higher Education in Oman, and currently the Chairman of the State Council, described this important issue as follows:

“We look forward to seeing a society interested in higher education, a ‘donor’ society that willing the support higher education institutions. We are encouraging to support of well-to-do individuals, businessmen and private sector organisations to contribute to higher education, , whose returns will be for the country as a whole.”

From the discussion and argument above, simple but important questions need to be asked: what is the role of the private higher education? While private education has existed at all instructional levels, why does private higher education have special characteristics and deserve separate consideration? The following section attempts to answer these questions.

2.4 Rationales and Objectives of Private Higher Education

In the introduction to his book, “Private Prometheus: Private higher education and development in the 21st century”, Altbach (1999c: VII) emphasises that:

“Private higher education is perhaps the fastest-growing segment of postsecondary education worldwide, yet it is little understood.”

Experts and practitioners (Buchbinder & Newson, 1990; Salmi & Verspoor, 1994; Levy, 2003, 2005) argue that private higher education helps meet the growing demand for higher education, provides more opportunities to students, promotes diversity, and expands access to higher education and improves services. Experience of other countries’ private higher education has demonstrated that privatisation allows more flexibility and adaptability of higher education to market needs. This has resulted in adoption of a market orientation approach in higher education (Buchbinder & Newson, 1990; Salmi & Verspoor, 1994). However, as Levy (2005) argues, one of the major challenges facing private higher education institutions is the issue of merging or combination between quality and profitability as well as innovation and flexibility.

Researchers like Geiger (1986); Levy (1986); James (1991); Zumeta (1997) and Altbach (1998, 1999) have paid a great deal of attention to the issue of state higher education policies’ effect on private higher education, and hence to the rationales and functions of private education within a given state’s policy. This section highlights the motivations and factors that foster the emergence of the private higher education sector.

2.4.1 Decline of public expenditure on higher education

With a contentious trend towards inability or unwillingness of governments or states (Levy, 2006) to foot the bill for the great bulk of higher education, together with increasing numbers of students wishing to continue their higher education, a new way of providing

educational service has appeared, through for-profit private higher education institutions. In other words, higher education has come to be seen as a commodity that can be provided like any other paid-for services. There has been a spread of this idea of establishing higher education institutions with profit-making objectives in many countries of the world, together with the opening of doors to the private sector to enter this sphere. Nevertheless, experts in higher education have issued warning signals about the dangers of this trend and its possible negative impact on higher education (see for example, Tilak, 1991; Altbach, 1999a; Levy, 2005). Despite this pessimistic view about private higher education, there are optimistic attitudes toward this sector and the role it could play in the field of higher education. These contrasting views on the private higher education phenomenon will be highlighted in this chapter.

By and large, private higher education in many countries cannot meet the demands of the majority of the society (Tilak, 1991). Conversely, many public higher education institutions are geared towards being investment organisations in many of their activities and functions, with encouragement and support from their governments in order to minimize their dependence on direct support from states and governments (Varghese, 2004b). However, in the vast majority of developed countries, governments contribute in different ways in funding the higher education sector, with not less than one third of their budgets. For example, the average contribution of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states in funding higher education is 76% (King, Douglass & Feller, 2007). Table 2.3 shows the percentage of governmental funding of higher education in OECD.

Table 2.3: Percentage of public funding in OECD countries

Countries	% of funding
Sweden, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Swiss.	< 90
France, Ireland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belgium, Germany, Iceland.	< 80% > 90%
Italy, Spain, Hungary, Netherlands.	< 70% > 80%
Poland, Mexico, United Kingdom	< 60% > 70%
Canada, New Zealand	< 50% > 60%
S. Korea, Japan, United States of America	< 23% > 50%
Average	76%

Source: King *et al.* (2007).

However, the Arab region spends 5.4% of GDP per year on public universities and colleges, compared with 5.0% in industrialized countries and 3.8% in developing countries. It has been calculated that 20% of Arab total spending on education goes to public higher education (Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, 2002). The

issue of funding higher education, however, will be discussed in greater details in Chapter Five.

The shortage of expenditure on higher education, the increasing number of students seeking higher education, and the inability of public universities and colleges to meet these demands, are all together forming a factor in the appearance of private sector higher education. In many Arab countries, public expenditure on higher education is complemented by the private sector. Jordan and Lebanon, for instance, have launched numerous community colleges and universities financed solely by the private sector. This initiative has spread quickly all over the Arab region. Jordan has 11 private universities; its public universities number only nine. Lebanon, on the other hand has expanded into private colleges and universities, which now number 34 (Al-Mulais, 2001). Oman is not exempted from that trend, since the number of private universities and colleges has dramatically increased during the last decade to reach 24 private institutions of higher education in 2008/2009.

2.4.2 Meet growth in student population

Higher education systems worldwide have experienced tremendous and fascinating changes during the last few decades, which significantly contributed to the growing importance of higher education for society. At the same time, various developments outside academia, such as demographic, social, cultural and economic, have had significant influences on the higher education landscape. In developing countries, for instance, the growth rate was 1.9% between the period 1995-2000 and 1.7% in 2000-2005 (Haddad, 2006).

During the past three decades, there has been a progressively increasing demand for places in higher education institutions, which has caused some challenges to the higher education sector. UNESCO's educational statistics (1998) revealed that worldwide the higher education sector served 82 million students in 1995. This represents a phenomenal increase in enrolment over the course of a few decades. For example, in 1960, world enrolment was 13 million, in 1970 it was 28 million, and in 1980 the enrolment was 51 million students. This figure (Bohm, Davis, Meares & Pearce, 2002) is expected to grow from 97 million in 2000 to 263 million in 2025. This means that the higher education sector will face a great challenge to absorb this growing number of general education graduates. James (1991) pointed to several reasons behind the development of the private sector in education; among them, excess demand for higher education when the absorptive

capacity of the public system of higher education is less than the demand for places. The increase in the secondary education output is an international challenge that each country is attempting to solve, so as to secure higher education for the majority of its students. The objective is to educate and train them to be productive and self-reliant. The number of secondary school leavers around the world rose to 372 million between 1991 and 1995 (UNESCO, 1998).

According to Longanecker (1998), the higher education sector in the United States now faces some issues, among them an increasing population of young adults looking for university education.

However, the international participation rates indicate that although there is a high social demand for higher education, the participation rate in the developing countries is modest. For example, out of 100 adults of tertiary age, 69 are enrolled in tertiary education programmes in North America and Europe, but only 5 are enrolled in sub-Saharan Africa and 10 in South and West Asia (Al-Ramadhani, 2003).

In the Arab world, the trend in investing in private higher education is, in some cases, similar to the global tendency with regard to the limited capacity of state universities and their failure to meet the increasing demand, as well as the inability of many universities to handle advanced technology. UNESCO's statistics (1998) show that, in the Arab countries, enrolment in higher education in 1995 was 3.1 million. This figure is double the number of students in higher education in the region in 1980. However, the ratio of enrolled students to population in higher education in Arab countries is lower than in Latin America in the period 1980-1995. In contrast to advanced countries, the level of enrolment in higher education throughout the period was less than 30% and the difference between the two groups grew over time. The gap between Arab countries and the Asia/Oceania region widened even faster, especially since 1985, that is, at the height of popularity of the recommendation to reduce the expansion in higher education. These observations show that Arab countries, now more than ever before, need to expand their higher education sector in order to cope with advances in science and technology.

The Gulf countries have also started to face growth in demand for higher education since the last decade. The reason for this is the dramatic increase in their population. Coffman (2003) points out that nearly 60% of the population is under 16 years of age. However, in some Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, another factor contributing to the exploding demand for higher education is, as mentioned earlier, the growing population of children of the enormous expatriate communities living

there long-term. Consequently, the first waves of thousands of their children coming out of secondary schools are now seeking university places in the Gulf States.

In the Omani context, too, it could be said that this factor has contributed to the appearance of private higher education. Oman has a relatively large number of young people. According to the statistics of the Ministry of National Economy (2004), 67 % of the population are under the age of 24, while only 5 per cent are over the age of 60.

However, the enrolment in higher education in Oman is still lower than in some Arab countries which are at the same level of development as Oman. According to UNESCO (1998), the number of students enrolled in higher education in Oman was 433 per 100.000 inhabitants, compared to, for example, 2,543 in Jordan, 1,530 in Saudi Arabia, and 1,459 in Qatar.

Educational statistics in the Ministry of Higher Education (2008) revealed that the intake capacity of state higher education in Oman was only 14,514 students for the academic year 2006/2007; that is, only 21% of the number of secondary school graduates in the same year. As a result, 51,787 students out of the initial cohort of 66,301 would have no chance of access to state higher education within Oman. This problem was clearly highlighted by the World Bank (2000: 14) in its study to examine the cost effectiveness of education in Oman:

“A major challenge facing the higher education system is the mushrooming number of secondary school graduates who are facing difficulties in finding a place in higher education.”

Owing to the limitation of opportunities for higher education to Omani applicants at local institutions of higher education, a large number of them study abroad. According to the Ministry of Higher Education’s statistics, 11,988 students at undergraduate level were registered at universities abroad in the academic year 2005/2006. Of this number, half of them paid their own way (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). These facts indicate that there is a high demand for higher education and, at the same time, there are limited opportunities for higher education in the country. As a response to these factors, coupled with financial austerity in the wake of competing demands from other public needs, the Omani government allows the private sector to participate in the field of higher education. The above clearly shows that the increase in the student population represents a great challenge for the higher education sector worldwide. Since public universities lack the capacity to absorb all secondary school outputs, privatisation in higher education is seen as a key element to meet this challenge.

As Levy (2006) points out, today private higher education accounts for roughly 30% of total global enrolment. However, according to the World Bank (1994: 36), private higher education may vary within countries. For instance, in many industrial countries in Europe and the United States, the private sector caters primarily (Williams, 1996) for those who want something different, whether it is higher education with a particular religious or vocational emphasis, or merely what is perceived as higher quality. Even where places in the public universities are sufficient, private universities still exist to meet different preferences, and in many cases, are partly financed by subsidies from the government (James, 1986). Most countries in Western Europe are dominated by public universities, whose size and function within academic systems are growing, since private higher education still constitutes a tiny minority. However, more than 95% of students in Western Europe attend public institutions (Altbach, 2007: 69). According to Geiger (1986), private sectors in most of the Western countries can appropriately be described as “peripheral”. However, recent years show some changes, since the main public-private shift involves partial privatisation of the public sector. Private higher education in Germany is (Stannek & Ziegele, 2007) small in size and is not expected to develop rapidly in the near future. The proportion of students in this sector represents only 3.7%. Portugal is an exceptional case in Western Europe, with the highest private sector share, at 27.4% (Levy, 2006).

Similarly, in the United States where many of the most famous universities are private, approximately 80% of students are enrolled in public higher education institutions. In contrast, in Eastern Europe where, due to financial scrutiny, governments are unable to devote sufficient funds to expanding public higher education, private higher education is having its greatest European success (Levy, 2006).

However, Latin America, for example, has a long history of dual-sector development. In the 1980s (Altbach, 2007) there was a dramatic shift from public to private post-secondary education. Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela now enrol at least half of their students in private institutions.

In Asia in general and East Asia in particular, where private higher education has long dominated higher education, private shares are 78.3% in South Korea, 77.1% in Japan, 75% in the Philippines, and 71.9% in Taiwan (Levy, 2006: 5).

In the Omani context, since its beginning in 1995/1996, private higher education has grown rapidly. Currently, there are 24 private higher education institutions. Enrolment in this sector went from only 150 students in 1995/1996 to 33,521 in 2008/2009 (represents 37% of the total enrolment in higher education in 2008/2009).

For most private higher education systems with majority or even large minority enrolments in the private sector, this quantitative domination is caused by excess demand. Levy (1999) argues that in this situation, the private providers are generally highly specialised and usually non-elite institutions, in contrast to the public institutions, which are often limited in size and often selective in their admission policies. However, one might argue that a fully open entry system in private higher education institutions may lead to concerns about the adverse impact of massification on the quality of private education. In the researcher's view, this depends on the type and function of private institutions themselves, as will be discussed later in this chapter, on the one hand, and is subject to the extent of regulations and rules imposed by states on the other. It is worth mentioning here that if a state allows private bodies to access the market, should not, at the same time, leave private institutions of higher education to perform without regulations or/and state oversight.

Another way of meeting the growth in demand for higher education is through using distance learning technologies. Nowadays, rapid development in knowledge and technology is a common fact. While technology was once considered a means for acquiring information, it has since become a tool for directing this information. The World Bank Report (2002: 11) depicts the effect of the development of knowledge and technology on the higher education sphere, emphasising:

“One specific dimension of scientific and technological progress, which has already started to have a very strong impact on the tertiary education sector, is the information and communication revolution.”

This has challenged universities to adapt to this growth of knowledge and technology and to transmit it effectively to their societies. Therefore, it is expected that any change in the system of the higher education sector should be in line with the developments in information and technology. Such developments greatly increase the potential for distance education.

However, this type of education is itself not new. According to Altbach (1999b: 114), correspondence courses and other means of delivering education “without bringing students together have long been in existence”. For example, the University of South Africa has (Altbach, 1999b) for more than a half-century chiefly offered academic degrees through correspondence. The British Open University (BOU) which started in the 1960s began its educational programmes with a combination of written course materials, television, and direct meetings with course tutors in small group settings (Altbach, 1999b).

The growth of distance learning has an international dimension, since the development of distance higher education that makes use of the new technologies has appeared in many countries of the world. The University of Air in Japan, the Western Governors University in the United States, and the Everyman's University in Israel are examples of higher education institutions offering degrees through distance learning. However, the most dramatic expansion of distance higher education is in several developing countries, particularly in Thailand, India, and China, where there have been major initiatives in this area (Altbach, 1999c). Eaton (2001: 4) summarises the international initiatives toward this trend:

“Many countries around the world are using distance learning technologies to enlarge their own course, programme, and degree offerings and to import and export education programmes and services. Countries such as India and South Africa are heavy importers of distance learning programmes as they seek to expand educational opportunities for their own citizens. China, Thailand, and Japan employ distance learning technologies to develop their own programmes and degree...The United States, Australia and the United Kingdom are major exporters of higher education through electronic technologies.”

In Eton's (1999) view, it is clear that distance learning provides another option for students to continue their education, particularly students from developing countries. According to Altbach (1999c), several million students are participating in this sector worldwide, the large majority in developing countries.

In the Arab world context, the trend is consistent with the global tendency in which the expansion of higher education has been the most significant single post war trend worldwide. As UNESCO (2003) points out, in the 1950s, there were around ten universities scattered across the Arab countries, whereas in 2003 there were more than 200 higher education institutions. As stated earlier, Arab countries have witnessed a notable increase in enrolment rates in higher education institutions. This increase has resulted from a growing public demand for education and an increase in population. However, due to the fact that most Arab countries are unable to provide for the dramatic increase in the number of students wishing to pursue higher education, coupled with the challenges of providing flexible enrolment and life-long learning availability, Arab higher education institutions have not been able to meet the new needs and demands of their societies.

In view of this, the Beirut Declaration urgently calls for the adoption of modern information technologies to (UNESCO, 1998: 45):

“Contribute in the provision of courses and degree-awarding programmes through multiple and advanced means, thus breaking through the traditional barriers of space and time.”

As a response to the imbalance of supply and demand, distance education relying upon modern information and communication technologies is utilised in many Arab countries, including Oman. Besides distance higher education programmes offered through traditional universities such as the Open Learning Centres in Egypt and Distance Education Centre of Juba University in Sudan, there are single mode distance education universities such as the Open University in Libya (Libyan Open University, 2009), the Continuing Education University in Algeria (UNESCO, 2002), Al-Quds Open University (QOU) in Jerusalem (Al-Quds Open University, 2009), and the Arab Open University (AOU), with a main campus in Kuwait and branch campuses in Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman (Al-Kindi, 2008). Moreover, Syrian Virtual University (SVU) is the first online university in the Arab region. It aspires to provide world-class education without boundaries, to award internationally accredited degrees and to link the Arab region to the western world (SVU, 2009).

Distance education has become, according to Mohammed (2009), the most important evolution of the twenty-first century. It is a tool for meeting the needs of a global exponentially growing information economy on the one hand, and an instrument for meeting continuing demand for higher education on the other hand. Nevertheless, few studies have been done of the effectiveness of the instruction provided through distance education (Mohammed, 2009). Furthermore, the financial implications are also not clear, although limited data demonstrate that costs are lower, but not considerably so. As Altbach (1999b: 114) clarifies, even though the BOU is somewhat less expensive than traditional higher education, it is not substantially cheaper.

2.4.3 Provide different education

During the last few decades, traditional higher education systems have been gradually put under pressure to meet increasing demand from society. Clark (1997) identifies two major elements of demand that have emerged in higher education. Besides the above-mentioned demand for greater access to higher education, he also highlighted that more positions in the labour market now require a university degree. Clark's second element has to do with individuals. In order to keep up with recent technological changes and to remain competitive in the labour market, more and more people have been encouraged to upgrade or change their qualification through further and higher education. In addition to the above,

it can be argued that the driving force behind the increased demand for higher education has also been the expectation that a higher degree would advance the social and economic status of the graduate. Sanyal (1998: 33) categorised the individual demand for higher education into two dimensions, vertical and horizontal. He pointed out that:

“The individual demand for higher education has a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension stands for level of education and the status of occupation that may follow from it. The horizontal dimension stands for the type of education. Both these dimensions are important from the point of view of educational planning.”

Different types of education are needed to respond to heterogeneity in people’s preferences regarding educational content and method for linguistic, cultural, and ethnic reasons, on the one hand, and the need for special skills among private sector enterprises, on the other.

The pressure of market forces (Geiger, 1986: 14) gradually “shaped private universities into an identical pattern”. In Japan, for example, the chief function of the new private universities is to train white-collar workers for Japan’s companies. In Oman, one rationale of private sector emergence, among others, is to meet the rapid change of labour market demands, particularly in private enterprises. This point was clearly stated in the 4th Article of the Royal Decree No. 41/99 (Official Gazette, 1999), of the ordinance providing for private universities. It stated that, amongst other objectives, a “private university shall aim to offer courses in modern academic specialisations to provide competencies in various fields so that the objectives of the university are linked with the ever increasing requirements of the society”.

However, not only are the private institutions of higher education striving to be closer to industry needs, but public institutions are also keen to follow this trend. Sultan Qaboos University, the only public university in Oman, for instance, has not only developed and modified its academic programmes and specialisations but also incorporated new colleges, to be in harmony with the labour market demands. With regard to specialisations, philosophy, for example, was dropped and is no longer taught at the university. On the college level, the faculty of commerce and trading was added to the university colleges in 1994, since this college was not integrated with the university’s colleges at the time of establishment of the university in 1986. The same could be said with regard to the colleges of education -six colleges, which are under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. These colleges have witnessed several changes since being upgraded in 1994/1995 to institutions offering bachelor degrees. The most recent change

was in 2007, when Royal Decree No. 62/2007 converted five Colleges of Education into Colleges of Applied Sciences, offering specialisations other than Education (Ministry of Information, 2008). The rationale behind this measure is the fact that almost all government schools are Omanised with national teaching staff on the one hand, and to provide specialisations and programmes which are required for the comprehensive development in the country on the other hand. In the researcher's view, the humanities should not be ignored in education policy, as they play a significant role in forming the cultural concepts of the individual and society and accordingly contribute in preserving the Omani identity. At the same time, there should be a focus on scientific and technical subjects needed by the labour market, where there is a shortage in specialists. Although this issue is beyond the scope of this research, careful consideration needs to be given to such measures, and deeper research would be desirable, in terms of the possible future impacts on Omani society of changing the function of these colleges, as well as the degree of fit between the programmes offered in these colleges and the demands of the Omani labour market in its wider conception.

To keep pace with the rapid global changes, higher education has greatly changed in the past two decades, and those involved in the academic organisations have yet to struggle with the implications of these changes. As the curriculum has expanded, new departments and institutes have been created. According to Altbach (1999b: 117):

“Entire new fields have grown in the past several decades. Computer science and informatics, for example, did not exist several decades ago. Now, these fields are among the most important in academe. Management studies have gained in importance, as have fields such as international trade.”

From the foregoing, due to the lack of public higher education institutions in many countries to fully meet the requirements of the changing labour market and consequently meet students' interest, private higher education institutions are assumed to fulfil this objective.

In the Omani context, the economic factor was also an important rationale for introducing private higher education in the country. This can be attributed to certain elements: first, inability or failure of state higher education to meet the private sector demands; second, the shortage of skilled and professional Omani workers, particularly in the private sector. Oman's development and modernisation programme depends heavily on expatriate labour (Al-Hashmi, 2005). Indeed, all the Gulf States import much of their labour force from other countries, particularly South Asian and Arab countries. According

to the 2005 labour force statistics in the Gulf countries, expatriate labour in this region amounts to 10 million (represents 20.8%), out of a total Gulf population of 38 million. The vast majority of this foreign labour is in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the smallest proportions are in Oman and Bahrain. In the UAE, it represents 80% out of the total Emiratis population, 72% in Qatar, 63% in Kuwait, 30% in Saudi Arabia, and 26% of the population in Oman and Bahrain (*Al-Khaleej*, 8 December, 2006). These statistics provide clear warning signals not only in the short term but also in the long term. Economically, an economy based on foreign labour would not serve the nation in the longer term. Experienced and skilled workers remain foreign to the country and one day or another will leave that country. Moreover, the currency transfers of these expatriates reached \$27 billion in 2005 (*Al-Khaleej*, 8 December, 2006). Apart from the other cultural and social affects of these workers in the Gulf countries societies, knowledge and experience will be controlled by foreigners. Omani citizens' lack of skills in specific areas affects the balance in the labour market, so that it leans towards more expatriates being employed. The Omani labour market demand for Omani skilled workers will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In the light of this situation, almost all Gulf States have established a policy of encouraging replacement of these workers by citizens of the Gulf countries; Oman's, Omanisation programme and the Saudisation policy in Saudi Arabia, for example. However, introducing such a policy without good education and training will not achieve the intended results. Therefore, there is a strong need for higher education institutions, particularly private ones, to play a greater role in promoting and enhancing this trend.

2.5 Types and Classifications of Private Higher Education

Typologies of private higher education can provide some hints on the functions and trends of this sector. However, in order to establish a wider and full understanding of the typology of private higher education system, classification of private higher education based on its financial dimensions and mechanisms of funding will be discussed, and types of this sector based on its function will be highlighted.

2.5.1 Based on financial dimensions of private higher education

Researchers such as Steier (2003); Varghese (2004b) and Levy (2006) claim that there are two types and forms of private higher education, classified according to financial dimensions: '*not-for-profit private institutions*' and, '*for-profit higher education institutions*'.

According to Levy (2006: 11), determining the scope and size of for-profit private higher education depends greatly on the definition of for-profit. In Levy's view, the definition is very important. So how can the private for-profit and non-profit sectors be distinguished? Is the financial issue (generation income) enough evidence that an institution is for-profit? Or, is the distinguishing feature the laws or regulations that each country sets when allowing establishment of private higher education institutions? Or, is it a mixture of many factors? In order to answer the question and consequently acknowledge the distinction between the two terms, it is necessary to discuss the issue from different perspectives.

A. Nature of programmes offered. As we mentioned above, it often depends on the definition of higher education and how this term is interpreted in different countries. In the United States, for example, for-profit institutions are limited to the largely vocational sector and these institutions are not normally assessed by the higher education accreditation agencies (Altbach, 1998).

In China, the Ministry of Education is committed to establishing requirements regarding training institutions that require them to make clear their mission concerning profits (Kinser & Levy, 2006). Similarly, in Poland, although it allows no for-profits among its private universities, institutions offer some training in language and business fields, (Jabecka, 2007) and similar situations exist in several countries around the world including Oman, where private higher education institutions are allowed to offer some training courses in language and business areas during the universities' and colleges' vacation, when most students are not on campus.

B. Eligibility for funding subsidies. For-profit private institutions of higher education are not eligible for government subsidies, which is another criterion to distinguish between the two dimensions of private higher education. In China, for instance, local governments have in effect accepted them as for profits. Unlike China, the Japanese government restricts its subsidies to the private non-profit sector (Steier, 2003).

In contrast, in Oman although there is no clear indication in the private higher education regulations regarding the distinction between private for-profits and non-profits, the government's tendency toward these institutions is to view them as non-profit. In the Omani context, this is implicit in Article 1 of the Royal Decree No. 41/99 issuing the private universities ordinance, where the Government has indicated that "... their main objective is not profit-making" (Official Gazette, 1999: 22). Moreover, Article 17 of the Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000 issuing the regularity ordinance for private higher

education institutions (Official Gazette, 2000: 17) prohibits these institutions from increasing tuition fees unless permission is given by the government:

“The Higher education institution shall not increase approved tuition fees for any programme of study except after obtaining the approval of the Minister [of Higher Education] three months prior to the beginning of the academic year.”

Therefore, the governmental financial subsidy for private higher education is on the basis that private higher education institutions should operate as non-profit undertakings, together with the aim of enhancing quality. Similarly, in Russia, education law insists on non-profit status, disallowing tuition fees that lead to profit (Suspitsin, 2007).

However, although regulations state such criteria, still there are certain elements to be acknowledged and understood, in order to judge whether institutions are making profit with the purpose of upgrading their educational and research activities or simply to increase the wealth of their owners or shareholders. This issue, however, will be discussed in the following section.

C. Lack of a legal framework. It is understood that lack of regulations often leads to the existence of institutions, whose main objective is to reap a profit (Slantcheva, 2007a). However, sometimes the term ‘for-profit’ may not be explicitly used in some countries’ legislation, while insisting on provisions that propose it, as in the Georgian law regarding the use of income, for example (Kinser & Levy, 2006). Similarly, many private higher education institutions adopt a non-profit designation even where institutions are set up by a corporation and the profitability of private institutions depends on savings made by them by employing a part-time teaching staff. The Africa University of Zimbabwe is a good example of this trend (Varghese, 2004b). Unlike the above two examples, Australia endeavours to create elite private higher education associated with for-profit initiative and indirect ownership while keeping the institution non-profit (e.g., Bond University) (Kinser & Levy, 2006).

The above indicates that labels do not necessarily always reflect the actual situation of organisations, particularly private higher education institutions. Their activities and ways of performing their functions indicate their status and mission. This issue was clearly declared by Levy (2005: 79). He emphasised that:

“A for-profit surge is one striking dimension regarding the general expansion of private higher education globally. Many private higher education institutions maintain formal non-profit legal status while functioning like for-profits.”

Thus, the sort of activities and facilities provided by these institutions plays a vital role in reflecting the extent of reliability of the label.

D. Generation income. This criterion alone cannot be evidence for profitability in private higher education institutions. According to Levy (2006: 11):

“Many observers falsely construe generation of income as evidence that an institution is for-profit. The perception is especially sharp when the institutions are seen as poor in quality. But it is legitimate for non-profit organisations in any field to generate income and use it to cross-subsidise needy or targeted units that themselves may not be generates.”

The argument above clearly indicates that for-profit higher education institutions are defined not by making money; rather, by what they are able to do with that money. The way and the purpose for which money is used can determine the designation of a private higher education institution. Kinser & Levy (2006) emphasise that non-profit institutions can only use money left over after expenses are paid to enhance and develop the institution and continue its other non-profit purposes, whereas for-profit institutions can basically do whatever they want with it, including distributing profits to their owners or shareholders.

However, as Altbach (2005) claims, in a situation where there is a sense of philanthropy or social responsibilities, creative thinkers with ideas about education establish private non-profit higher education for the good and well-being of the society. An example of this idea is (Altbach, 1999c) the private non-profit Ivy League universities in the United States (e.g., Harvard, Yale, Berkley, MIT, etc). Altbach's view is in line with Levy (2006), who suggested that the practice and traditions of the culture of donation, philanthropy, and an accommodating tax system support the availability of a non-profit system of higher education possible. However, these conditions cannot be found all over the world. In the less developed countries with weak economic systems, for-profit higher education tends to be more widespread. As Altbach (2002) argues, usually in such economies, for profit private institutions have been active in assisting governments in situations when social high demand for higher education is unmatched by supply and the government is unable to offer the essential support and funding. Despite these conditions, which might not totally free from some negative aspects, private higher education (Hentschke, 2003) has created more opportunities, flexibility, efficiency and services for the public's interest. Its organisational structure, management and market orientation approach, are all elements that allow private higher education to adopt innovative educational methods (Hentschke, 2003). Compared with traditional public higher education institutions, for profit education concentrates on vocational programmes linked

directly to the labour market. This could be attributed to the fact that these institutions are influenced more by the markets than by academics; therefore, they tend to focus on programmes for employment sectors with high demand. The above discussion indicates that since for-profit higher education institutions have a different mission and role in higher education from non-profit ones, according to Levy (2005), the for-profits have identified and secured a strategic position and developed a distinctive characteristic different from the traditional public higher education.

In conjunction with the categorisation of private higher education based on its financial dimensions, Levy (1986, 2002) suggested additional classification of this sector based on its means or mechanisms of funding.

A. Single or Dual system. In this typology, Levy considers whether the system has only one sector, a 'Single' system or has double 'Dual' systems. The indicator that may provide a clue regarding the classification of the system, whether single or dual, comes from the degree of participation of each system in higher education. So the question can be rephrased as, to what extent do the private and public sectors contribute in the system of higher education? This relationship depends on the funding pattern, and if it is, for example, a single system what is the participation of private funds to the public sector?

B. Statist or Public-Autonomous. In this pattern, the nature of funding determines the type of system. If institutions are fully publically funded, it is a 'Statist' pattern, but if the providers have mixed public and private funding then it can be considered as a 'Public-Autonomous' pattern. According to Levy (1986), if the operational scheme in a given state reaches at least 90% public enrolments and 90% of funding relies on the state, the pattern can be categorised as a 'Statist' system. In this pattern, there is a diversity of government aid student programmes (e.g., scholarships, grants, student loans, etc.). Various Western European countries, where the private sector still plays a small role in the statist higher education system, fit this type.

Unlike the 'Statist' pattern, the 'Public-Autonomous' system differs in terms of the state's policy of financing higher education. In this pattern, public policy allows institutions to compete autonomously in the internal allocation of funds and, usually, the states introduce competitive systems in the process of providing public funds to higher education institutions. In the Public-Autonomous pattern funds are not submitted directly to the institutions, since public funding of higher education is made through students enrolling particular institutions or is offered by different public agencies in a competitive approach. In the Public-Autonomous pattern, a very small number of private institutions

are almost entirely funded by the state, and are treated similarly by the governments to their public counterparts. The United Kingdom may be an example of this pattern (Levy, 1986).

C. Homogenised or Distinctive system. In the 'Homogenised' pattern, both sectors- public and private- are funded in a very similar manner. Based on the idea that the private sector in many countries would not be able to perform its functions while totally dependent on private resources, the private institutions fruitfully obtained public funding. In this type, the governments see private higher education as socially valuable, and decide to back up this sector financially (Levy, 1986). Because of this public subsidisation, governmental regulation remains stronger, but this does not mean that the distinction between public and private institution is diminished. In this case, private enrolments account for more than 10% of the total. Private institutions are considered as quality competitors to the public sector and provide a wide range of study programmes.

In contrast, in the 'Distinctive' system, although classified as a dual system, the public sector is almost totally funded by state subsidies, and its income from private sources remains very modest. While most private institutions are heavily dependent on tuition fees, only a few private institutions, mostly prestigious ones, can attract additional private resources from endowment or donations, for example.

D. 'Minority Private' or 'Majority Private'. This form emerges when the public sector is fully supported by the government and the private sector is left to finance itself. Unlike the Minority pattern, the Majority one occurs in countries where the public institutions are funded totally by government, whereas private ones are funded privately. However, in the Majority pattern, the private sector offers lower quality programmes and most students enrolled in this type are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

2.5.2 Based on rationales and functions of private higher education

Besides the topology of private higher education based on its financial dimensions, reviewed above, this sector can also be categorised by another typology or dimension. Authors like Geiger (1986) and Reisz (2003) classify private sector higher education based on its functions and the motivations for its establishment. Geiger's (1986) classification of private higher education, for example, consists of three key elements: '*mass private higher education*', '*for different education*' and, '*for better education*'.

A. Mass private sector. According to Geiger (1986), this type has emerged in response to an increase demand for higher education and, at the same time, the inability of

public sector higher education to meet this demand. According to Geiger (1986: 13) “mass private sectors essentially fulfil the role of accommodating the bulk of popular demand for higher education”. The defining characteristic of mass private sectors is based on the public-private relationship, rather than the relative size of the two sectors. As mentioned previously in Section 2.4.2, the Korean private sector enrolls 78.3% of the country’s university students, and that of Japan accounts for 77.1%. The private sectors of Philippines (75%), Taiwan (71.9%) and Chile (71%) also fit this type. However, the German private sector, for example, with only 3.7% of the total enrolment in this sector, is clearly not a mass private sector, and usually incapable of competing academically with the public sector.

The private sector in this category is described as more vocationally oriented and usually composed of non-elite institutions and, according to Reisz (2003), mass private education with the open entry system in this sector may lead to conflicts of massification, particularly in terms of quality of private education. If the main function of private institutions is more higher education, and there is a lack of resources to fund the expansion of the public higher education, the issue of quality likely to receive less attention. As Geiger (1986) emphasised, besides the size, the character of the private education is crucial, since the distinguishing feature of mass private sectors is the enrolment of a large proportion of students with low tuition fees and low selection criteria.

The policy dilemma for this category of education is the danger that despite low quality, this sector will become the preferred higher education for the majority of students, chiefly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. For this reason, and with the aim of protecting students from such a problem of low quality private higher education, governments should establish certain regulations as to the content and method of instruction, in order to ensure certain minimum standards. As stated earlier, the non-elite option is a feature of developing countries, as state financial support in these countries is usually limited and support or aid mechanisms to students in the private sector institutions are also small.

B. Different education is Geiger’s second category. In addition to what was mentioned above in section 2.4.3, the private higher education sector according to Geiger (1986) provides different education under the sponsorship of diverse cultural or religious interests. In the United States and Latin America, for example, the religious type was most significant in the early period of expansion of private higher education. As we noticed earlier, a similar situation was characteristic of the first appearance of private education in

the Arab World, including Oman. This is, however, a normal and expected initiative in countries where religion and cultural themes are of great interest in their societies. In Oman, as in most Arab countries, mosques were the main places for learning in the early stages of informal education.

Although these institutions are mostly privately operated and financed, this does not mean this type of education did not receive any support from the state. Because religious and cultural communities were keen to ensure the education offered in these institutions was no less valuable than that offered by the state, state support was sought, but without sacrificing autonomy.

C. Better education is the third type of private provider in Geiger's categorisation. This type, according to Geiger, can appear under certain conditions. In Mexico, for instance, the search for better higher education is a response to the decline in quality of the public higher education system. According to Geiger (1986), students from low or middle income families enrol in private institutions, which often prepare them directly for a job in private enterprises.

However, it is not always the case that students prefer studying in prestigious private higher education in a particular country because of higher quality than in public higher education, but it may occur where students face severe challenge and competition to enrol in the best public higher education institutions. This situation can be clearly observed in Japan, where students turn to high quality private universities as another option after failure to obtain an enrolment opportunity in the best public higher education institutions (Oba, 2005).

In the United States, however, Geiger (1986) suggests different categories of concept of 'better', including the private research universities, as accomplishing this function; liberal arts colleges as 'different'; and large urban universities as 'more' higher education.

Bearing in mind the above classifications and typologies of types and functions of private higher education, in the researcher's view, there is no simple fixed mechanism for classification. Differences appear from the above views of authors, which clearly show that there is no clear cut basis for classification. We have noted that in some cases, there is an integral and overlapping relationship between these types or categorisations. However, it is worth mentioning that these criteria and elements are of great significance for classifying private higher education and its function in a given society.

However, one might question, how is the Omani system of higher education classified? The above explanations about the types and functions of private higher education, particularly derived from the works of Geiger and Levy, can provide an idea about the classification of higher education system in Oman. In other words, they offer a suitable framework to clarify in which category it best fits.

Based on the types and classifications of higher education sector discussed above, higher education in Oman fits, to some extent, Levy's classification of a so-called '*Statist*' system. As we noted earlier, Levy (1986) defines this pattern as appearing in a country where 90% of enrolment is public higher education institutions, and 90% of funding coming from the state. Applying Levy's '*Statist*' terminology to the Omani context, it is partially applicable to Omani situation. Public higher education institutions are totally (100%) funded by the government. However, educational statistics for the academic year 2007/2008 reveal that the total number of students enrolled in public higher education institutions was 11,860, representing 57% of the total enrolments. In contrast, private higher education institutions enrolled 7,853 students, representing 37% of the total enrolments in this year. This means that, if the government policy on admission in public higher education institutions remains as it is as present, with limited enrolment capacity, the majority of enrolment will be in the private sector (please see Chapters Three and Four for further details). It is expected that in the near future, the private sector is likely to fit Geiger's classification, 'mass private sector'. Therefore, these typologies or classifications might be changed accordingly. Current evidence shows that from the moment the door was opened to private investment in higher education, the sector has seen dramatic growth either in terms of both student enrolments and number of institutions. Private higher education institutions have increased from one college in 1995/1996 to twenty-four colleges and universities in 2008/2009. Similarly, student intake has also increased from 150 students in 1995/1996 to 33,521 students in 2008/2009.

The statistics presented above, along with the government policy of not expanding public higher education in the near future (Al-Busaidia, 2009), clearly indicate that the current trend of the government is oriented towards encouraging and supporting the private higher education sector.

2.6 Market Orientation Approach in Higher Education and the Role of the State

A market orientation approach in higher education is, according to a number of authors (Johnstone, Arora & Experton, 1998; Jongbled, 2003; Steier, 2003), linked to

decentralisation, privatisation and deregulation. As Johnstone *et al.* (1998: 5) point out, a market orientation implies (a) tuition fees, which shift some of the cost of higher education, or nearly the full cost, from government to students and their families; (b) the private sector, including both non-profit and for-profit providers of higher education; (c) regional decentralisation, or delegation of authority from the central government to the regions; and (d) institutional autonomy, or the transfer, partial or total, of authority from government to institutions.

In line with the above discussion, and as a consequence of the market orientation approach, according to Varghese (2004a), two trends characterise the major changes in higher education; privatisation and the appearance of the private sector in higher education. The former involves applying market ideologies in the operation and management of higher education institutions, while ownership remains within the public domain. The private sector, on the other hand, means the growth of the non-state sector in higher education, which, in most cases, does not receive funding from the government.

In the Omani context, appearance of the private sector, based on Varghese's classification, is so far the dominant feature of marketised higher education. Although there have been some experiences of privatising some public organisations, the educational field has not witnessed similar cases and is not expected to do so in the near future. However, what is not in line with Varghese's statement regarding the private sector is that in Oman, private higher education does receive plentiful support from the government.

Realising constraints on the government budget, and in an attempt to cope with the ever increasing demand, many countries have moved towards the private provision of higher education. Recent trends demonstrate that private higher education institutions are beginning to develop under the pressure of financial austerity in publically funded institutions. Steier (2003) supports this view, arguing that one of the main reasons for the appearance of a market approach in higher education is the reduction of the government expenditure on higher education.

In Oman, the government is allowing the development of a private higher education system in recognition of its reduced capacity to fund further expansion of public higher education. In addition to the financial austerity, the public sector is less able to offer sufficient places for higher education, as well as to fulfil Oman's long-term strategy 'Vision for Oman Economy 2020', which requires qualified and skilled nationals to achieve the Vision's objectives as outlined in the preceding chapter.

However, the appearance of a market-oriented approach in higher education in the form of private higher education institutions presents major financial and academic challenges. A number of studies (see for example, Buchbinder & Newson, 1990; Altbach, 2002; De Boer, Huisman, Klemperer, Van der Meulen, Neave, Theisens & Van der Wende, 2002; Asmal, 2004) warn that emphasis on a market-driven curriculum has affected values and the notion of knowledge as a public good is, according to Buchbinder & Newson (1990), being replaced by focus on the building of knowledge as private good or as a market driven product. Buchbinder & Newson (1990: 367) argue that:

“Although [universities] have always had to concern themselves to some extent with managing their financial affairs, [they] now increasingly adopt the style, form, and methods of business organisations. Which courses to teach, which research initiatives to fund, which funding agencies to approach, which students markets to serve, which enrolment policy to adopt - all decisions which may have once been based on academic criteria alone - are now considered in terms of detailed cost-revenue calculations and the assessment of whether they represent good business decisions.”

Buchbinder's & Newson's view is consistent with Asmal's (2004) argument, when he stated that:

“Education is not merely a value-free instrument for the transfer of skills across national and regional boundaries, as some might like us to believe. On the contrary, education must embrace the intellectual, cultural, political, and social development of individuals, institutions, and nations. The ‘public good’ agenda should not be held hostage to the vagaries of the market.”

Consistent with the above argument, Barr (2003) emphasises that a market-oriented approach shifts, partly or fully, the burden of educational cost from the government to students and their families. Barr (2003) goes on to argue that this shift must be accompanied by a certain approach of financial aid in order to maintain equity and accessibility. Steier's view is in line with Barr (2003), who claims that in order to maintain equity and accessibility, an appropriate approach of financial aid must be guaranteed. Steier (2003: 163) emphasised that:

“From an equity perspective, increased institutional choice for students is meaningful only for those who can afford to pay tuition at private institutions or for those with access to financial aid.”

Likewise, a market approach in higher education should not be isolated from ensuring quality aspects in private institutions. As Steier (2003: 163) claims, a market-oriented approach in higher education "can have adverse consequences if there is unbridled competition without adequate regulatory and compensatory mechanisms".

However, an important question needs to be asked about the role of the state towards avoiding the negative impact of a market approach in higher education. In Steier's (2003: 170) view, the significant responsibility of government in this regard is (1) to establish a regulatory environment that "encourages rather than stifles innovations in public institutions and initiatives by the private sector to expand access to good-quality tertiary education", and (2) to offer appropriate financial incentives. The above mentioned characteristics will be discussed in greater details in Chapters Five and Six.

Conversely, in a study prepared by Zumeta (1997), "State Policy and Private Higher Education: Past, Present and Future", the researcher pointed out three different forms of state policies toward private higher education, with the aim of improvement of this sector. These forms are: laissez-faire, central-planning, and market-competitive. In the first model, laissez-faire, state interference in private institutions does not exist, leaving the private sector to behave and perform freely without any control or supervision. In this pattern, there are neither state financial subsidises to this sector nor academic control of the programmes offered. The nature of the relationship between the state and the private sector is mostly limited to licensing institutions to operate and function. Moreover, most private institutions under this category are vocationally-oriented, financially challenged and with low quality standards (Zumeta, 1997). Unlike the first approach, in the second form of policy, central-planning, the divide between private and public higher education is quite blurred. In this pattern, as Zumeta (1997) argues, private institutions of higher education become quasi-public. On the one hand, private institutions enrolments by and large represent less than 50% of total enrolment and, on the other hand they are able and eligible to compete successfully for state funding, in the same way as public institutions. In this approach, the state compensation system of funds and control creates some kind of self assessment and quality assurance among higher education institutions. In this pattern, there is a competitive relationship environment between the two sectors.

Applying the above approaches to the Omani context, it can be argued that the private higher education system lies, to some extent, under the second model of Zumeta's classification, central-planning. The Government of Oman supports private higher education financially and logistically, directly and indirectly. Therefore, the government supervises the private higher education institutions. The supervision system implemented by the government extends from the step of the application for licensing, to the following-up of the performance of these institutions. However, the gap between private and public higher education systems in Oman remains large. The government is still the only source

of funds and governance of public higher education. Moreover, competition both within a single sector and between the two systems is relatively absent and is not expected to occur in the near future. This can be attributed to certain factors. First, the public higher education system is relatively new in Oman and has no long-standing experience, since the first university -SQU- was established in 1986. Second, some other public higher education institutions are in search of stability. For example, the six Education Colleges which come under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education have witnessed several changes. These institutions were upgraded in 1994 from institutes only offering diplomas in education, to university status, offering bachelor degrees in education. In 2005, five colleges were transformed from Education Colleges into so-called Applied Science Colleges, and their mission and vision were modified accordingly, to fit the new objectives of these institutions, as these colleges no longer offer education programmes. Changes have also occurred with Technical Colleges, supervised by the Ministry of Manpower. Third, in terms of access to the public institutions, qualified graduates of secondary education are eligible to enter these institutions free of charge. Fourth, private higher education is a rather new phenomenon in the country, since the first private college was founded in 1995/1996. Fifth, as will be pointed out later in Chapter Four, most private higher education institutions are currently in the stage of building their infrastructures, whether in terms of their permanent buildings, academic staff or research activities. Similarly, with regard to academic programmes, no systematic evaluation been conducted in these institutions to identify whether there are differences in quality or they are of a similar standard. Sixth, many students enrol in these institutions because of inability to get a place in the public system. Even students with government scholarships in most of these institutions are from disadvantaged backgrounds and their grade in secondary education is between 65%-70%. The exception is scholarships for students in medical programmes, which are provided for students whose grades in secondary education are not less than 90%.

Based on the factors mentioned above, the aspect of competition between public and private higher education institutions is still absent. In order to activate these institutions, they need to establish a cooperative approach to strengthen their academic and administrative areas.

In the third pattern of policy identified by Zumeta, market-competitive, in contrast to the other previous two models, public and private institutions are more autonomous with regard to academic issues.

To conclude this section, it is suggested that Zumeta's work offers some useful thoughts, information and concepts that may help us in understanding the state policies of higher education and their impact on the institutional framework of private higher education.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has presented a review of literature pertaining to theory and research on privatisation in higher education and the rationales and motivations for it worldwide. A selected review of studies was therefore undertaken. Throughout the chapter, the researcher has discussed in some detail major issues related the aim of this study.

Use of institutions of education as a mechanism for shaping values, ideologies and socialisation has influenced the development of the private sector. As we mentioned previously, government policies have also shaped the enhancement of the private sector, for instance by restricting public spending, provision of public subsidies to private institutions, legislating corporatisation and privatisation, even allowing, in some cases, business organisations and private agencies to set up institutions of higher education for profit.

Most of the studies reviewed (Tilak, 1991; Altbach, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Levy, 2006) attributed the demand for private higher education to, on the one hand, the increased number of secondary education graduates seeking places in higher education institutions, particularly university education, and, on the other hand, the economic factor, including the declining of governmental funding to higher education institutions. These motivations and demands for privatisation, to some extent, coincide with the Omani situation. Oman adopted privatisation policies in the field of business in the early stages of development of social and economic sector (Ministry of Information, 2008). Now, the Omani government believes that the private sector should also work alongside the public sector in the development of human resources. It has been briefly shown in this chapter that private higher education in Oman is expected to play a vital role, first, in recruiting those who did not have opportunity to enter higher education; second, to contribute actively in the policy of Omanisation, which requires qualified human resources in different spheres and specialisation. However, the significant question that might be asked is to what extent Omani private higher education can achieve these goals. Before we can answer this, it is necessary to have an overview of the rationales and objectives of private higher education in Oman. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Rationales and Objectives of Private Higher Education in Oman

“We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy and perception, and there is no way of doing that except through education.”

Senator William Fulbright (1976)

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the main rationales and objectives of private higher education from the global perspective were discussed, and types and functions of this sector were also highlighted.

In this chapter, then, the rationales and objectives behind allowing private sector provision in the Sultanate to participate in the higher education sphere will be discussed. This will be achieved through examination of the governmental documents related to this issue, such as Royal Decrees and Ministerial Decisions, along with governmental and non-governmental published and unpublished documents.

3.2 Rationales from the Government’s View: A Brief Overview

The rationales and motivations behind establishing private institutions in Oman have been set out in Royal Decrees. For example, Article 4 related to the ordinance of private universities promulgated by Royal Decree No. 41/1999 states that:

“A private university shall aim at making a positive contribution towards the improvement of scientific research and education standards. It shall also aim at offering courses in modern scientific specialisations to provide competencies in various fields so that the objectives of the university are linked with the ever increasing requirements of the society. The private university shall make available the most advanced equipment required for the achievement of its aims.” (Official Gazette, 1999: 20)

Similarly, the objectives of establishment of private higher education are also declared in the Ministerial Decisions of the Ministry of Higher Education. For instance, Article 3 of Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000 concerning the Regulatory Ordinance for Private Colleges reveals that:

“A higher education institution shall aim at: a) preparation of qualified national work force needed by the Sultanate for its economic, social and cultural development plans and, b) encouragement of research and scientific studies and provision of consultancy services.” (Official Gazette, 2000: 33)

The statements above highlight three objectives: promoting scientific research, offering quality education, and preparing qualified Omani nationals in order to serve the comprehensive development of the country.

However, there are some other objectives and motivations behind allowing the private sector to participate in higher education, such as the lack capacity of public higher education to meet increasing numbers of secondary school graduates, the wish to alleviate the financial burden of government expenditure on higher education, promoting the Omanisation policy, and joining international trade agreements such as WTO and GATS. These rationales and objectives have encouraged the government to permit the private sector to participate in higher education, as stated by the Minister of Higher Education:

“The educational renaissance that the Sultanate witnesses along with the increasing numbers of General Certificate graduates both make the institutions of higher education unable to absorb all the output of these graduates, especially as mainstream pre-higher education does not meet the contemporary needs of the labour market.”

(Oman Newspaper, January 29, 2007)

“From the perspective of national partnership between the government and private sector, and in the light of global trends towards activating the role of the private sector in the management and operation of certain public services, including higher education, together with the accession of Oman to the WTO, and to benefit from the experiences of countries that have preceded us in this area, and taking into consideration the high cost of operation of higher education institutions, the government has invited the private sector to establish universities and colleges.”

(From the researcher’s interview with the Minister of Higher Education, Oman, September 17, 2009)

The following sections, then, clarify the above-mentioned objectives and rationales for private higher education in Oman.

3.3 Impact of Globalisation on Higher Education: Oman’s Perspective

In the framework of the WTO, and under the GATS, universities are fast becoming entrepreneurial institutions, both domestically and internationally (Tilak, 2006). Indeed, the complicated relationship between globalisation and higher education has generated endless discussion and is an issue of debate in a growing number of conferences and lectures worldwide.

The deficit of many public institutions of higher education, especially in developing countries, led to emergence of private higher education institutions to fill this gap. Therefore, it can be said that the globalisation phenomenon could be one of the most

visible factors for the appearance of private higher education sector. Altbach (2004: 1) describes the impact of globalisation on higher education, stating that:

“It is argued that all of the contemporary pressures on higher education, from the pressures of massification to the growth of the private sector are the results of globalisation.”

In Altbach’s view, higher education institutions, particularly universities, have always figured in the global environment and therefore been "affected by circumstances beyond the campus and across national borders" (Altbach, 2004: 4).

Since Oman became a WTO member in 2000, it has made a commitment to the higher education sector. The current practice of private higher education in Oman represents the model of affiliation or/and cooperation with foreign universities. The only visible example of foreign universities operating in Oman is the Arab Open University, which is one among many branches in many different Arab countries. Even the German University in Oman cannot be considered as an absolute model of a foreign university operating in Oman, since the present pattern of managing this institution is that administration and financial affairs are under the Omani investors, while the foreign university, Aachen University of Technology, is responsible for academic affairs. This means that the university is an Omani private university affiliated with Aachen University of Germany. However, once a WTO member proposes to liberalise its higher education sector and allow foreign universities to operate alongside its own public and private universities in their country, this may create certain challenges for domestic institutions, particularly private ones, in the case of Oman. The question one might raise is why would such a practice create a challenge for the local institutions? In the researcher’s view, when a recognised and well-known foreign university operates in Oman, students will prefer to enter that university, particularly if the tuition fees are fairly similar to those of the local private institutions. The challenges that would face local private institutions, then, could be summarised in two elements, academic and financial. In terms of the academic issue, the foreign university will have credibility among the public due its reputation. Financially, as a consequence of the academic issue, when large numbers of students apply to foreign universities, private institutions domestically will, undoubtedly, lose financially.

However, this is much more likely to occur in the case of those local private institutions that are lower in quality than the foreign institutions. Since there is nothing to prevent such an experience taking place in Oman, private institutions locally need to take this issue into consideration and prepare themselves accordingly. On the other hand, if

such an experience occurred, it might encourage local institutions to improve their quality and attempt to compete academically. Indeed, this issue can be considered as one of the consequences of GATS. Therefore, it can be suggested that further study needs to be conducted of the higher education system in the country.

3.4 Demography and the Construction of Educational System

The rising demand for higher education varies according to the rate of population expansion worldwide and Oman also shares the global trend. According to the OECD (2008), demography has become a subject of concern in a growing number of countries. The population of some OECD countries is rapidly ageing, especially in Japan, Korea and Southern and Eastern Europe. By contrast, in countries such as Mexico and Turkey, the population is continuing to grow, in spite of a decrease in the fertility rate. In 2008, the OECD identified several key demographic trends for the period to 2030. A number of the key elements (OECD, 2008; Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009) are:

1. Student participation will continue to expand, as will higher education systems. Only a few countries will see a contraction in student numbers.
2. Women will form the majority in student populations in most developed countries and will substantially expand their participation everywhere.
3. The mix of the student population will become more varied, with greater numbers of international students, older students, part-time students, and other types;
4. The social base in higher education will continue to broaden, along with uncertainty about how this will affect inequalities of educational opportunities between social groups.
5. Attitudes and policies relating to access as well as the consciousness among disadvantaged groups will change and become more central to national debates.

According to Mizikaci and Baumgartl (2007), demography plays a vital role, with chief policies of education determined by the composition of the population. The rate and dynamics of population growth are crucial to education planning.

Therefore, population statistics, in terms of population size, growth rates, characteristics and features, are key data upon which development planners rely for estimating their needs, planning educational, economic and social policies, and labour force planning. The current available data regarding the population of Oman are those of the results of the population census in Oman, carried out at the end of 2003, which provided a large amount of demographic data and information. According to this census, the total population of Oman was found to be 2,331,391, of whom native Omani citizens

accounted for 1,781,558 representing 76% of the total population. The total number of non-Omani citizens who were working and living in Oman was 549,833, representing 24% of the total population (Ministry of National Economy, 2004).

The population distribution by gender is characterised by a disparity between Omani citizens and non-Omanis. Among Omanis, males constitute 50.5% and females 49.5%, while among non-Omanis, the ratio of males is much higher at 79.2% compared to 20.8% for females. Table 3.1 shows the age cohort of the Omani population in 2003.

Table 3.1: Age cohort of the Omani population, Census of 2003

Age cohort	Male	Female	Total	%
0-4	109,544	105,987	215,531	12
5-9	121,222	116,259	237,481	13
10-14	137,646	132,705	270,351	15
15-19	130,471	124,757	255,228	15
20-24	107,506	106,781	214,287	12
25-59	246,696	252,648	499,344	28
60+	47,455	41,881	89,336	5
Total	900,540	881,018	1,781,558	100

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2004), Oman.

Table 3.1 above clearly shows that Oman has a proportionately large number of young people, with the age cohort (0-24) representing 67% of the total Omani population, while only 5% are over the age of 60. This demographic structure reflects the impact of the availability of services such as health, employment opportunities, improvement in social welfare, housing, transport, water and electricity, and other social services on the quality of living standards and population growth rate.

Oman's population growth rate, 1.84%, is considered one of the highest in the world compared with, for instance, 1.58 in UAE; 1.51 in India; 0.15 in Japan; 0.05 in Italy and 0.02 in Britain (Ministry of National Economy, 2004).

It can be said that although this phenomenon can be viewed as a natural response to the huge improvement in living standards which resulted from the economic development in the last three decades, the demographic structure will continue to put pressure on the Omani government to develop and enhance the social and economic infrastructure and facilities. In these conditions, all types and levels of education and training, especially higher education, will have to be expanded in terms of both quality and quantity. Special attention should be given to higher education, to be ready for the demand which can be

expected as those of the population still in the early stages of education, primary, preparatory and secondary school, complete their basic education.

During the period of renaissance (1970 to the present), investment in basic education has taken precedence. Consequently, free basic education has been made available for all Omani nationals under a programme of continuous and rapid expansion across the whole country. According to figures released in May 2009 by the Ministry of Education, there are around 540,332 students, of whom nearly half are female students, in 1,047 state schools (Ministry of Education, 2009). Although the number of basic education students in private schools increased from 16,500 students in 2000 to 37,374 in 2009, the role of these schools is still limited; the proportion of private education students in the total number of students did not exceed about 6% in 2009. This, however, can be attributed, as mentioned above, to the fact that Omani students can receive education free of charge from the primary education stage through to university.

The increasing growth of population has already created some challenges for the higher education sector. Among these challenges is the lack of capacity of public higher education institutions in the Sultanate.

3.5 Capacity of Public Higher Education in Oman

In our review of the population of Oman, we have shown that increasing growth of population has created some challenges for the higher education sector. In the last six years, the number of secondary school graduates in Oman has increased considerably.

In light of the rising number of secondary school graduates seeking higher education and the widening gap between them and the recruiting capacity of public educational institutions, the government adopted policies and strategies to encourage the participation of the private sector in provision of higher education. Table 3.2 shows the number of students enrolled in higher education in Oman and abroad, compared with the number of students who graduated from secondary education during the period 2003/2004 to 2007/2008.

Table 3.2: Number of secondary school graduates, enrolled and had no higher education opportunity, 2003/2004-2007/2008

Academic Year	Secondary school graduates	Enrolled students in HE	Non-enrolled students
2003/2004	41,573	16,961	24,612
2004/2005	40,404	17,798	22,606
2005/2006	44,880	19,823	25,057
2006/2007	41,225	20,250	21,975
2007/2008	47,466	21,586	25,880

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009a), Oman.

According to Table 3.2, it can be seen that although both secondary education outputs and higher education inputs have increased during the period under review, the proportion of students enrolled in higher education has slightly increased. For instance, the proportion of students who had higher education opportunity in 2007/2008 was 45% compared to 41% in 2003/2004, constituting only a 3% increase in enrolment during that period. In other words, the number of students who had no higher education opportunity compared to the number of secondary graduates also increased. In 2007/2008 there were 25,880 students who did not find places in higher education compared to 24,612 students in 2003/2004.

Al-Manthri (2002: 17) emphasised that:

“As a result of the increase in the number of secondary school leavers, the government adopted the universal trend of involving the private sector in the development of human resources and providing it with investment opportunity in higher education.”

The above statement implies that Oman, like many developing countries, will be dependent on the participation of the private sector to meet enrolment needs at present and in the future. This perception is consistent with the view of Altbach (1999d: 322) when he said that “the inability of the state to provide access to post-secondary education that is demanded worldwide contributes to the rise of the private sector”. This means that higher education is no longer considered as a ‘public good’, since it is treated as providing a ‘product’, that is, knowledge and skills used by individuals to increase their incomes and to achieve further prestigious jobs. At the same time, as Altbach (1999d) argues, higher education develops the human resources needed for societal growth and the operation of modern economy. Without going into the debate on the subject, data from many countries, although it is acknowledged that there are variations among countries, shows that post-

secondary education ensures a higher income and greater opportunities for graduates (Machin & McNally, 2007).

For the purpose of constructing a wider picture with regard to the capacity of higher education system in the country, a comparison between secondary school graduates and those who had access to higher education in the academic year 2007/2008 will be analysed in further detail in the following sections.

3.5.1 Secondary school graduates in 2007/2008

According to the Ministry of Education's statistics, the total number of secondary education graduates in academic year 2007/2008 was 66,301 students, of whom 47,466 students were in the 18-24 age group, as shown in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Secondary school graduates by age group & gender, 2007/2008

Age group	Gender		Total	%
	Male	Female		
18-24	23,964	23,502	47,466	72
25-26	2,824	652	3,476	5
27-28	2,774	606	3,380	5
29+	10,301	1,678	11,979	18
Total	39,863	26,438	66,301	100

Source: Ministry of Education (2009), Oman.

It can be seen from Table 3.3 above that secondary education graduates in the 18-24 age group represent 72% of all graduates. According to the Admission Centre policy, this age group is the only one eligible to apply to higher education via the Centre. It can be noticed from the table that the percentage of male to female in this age group is very close, 50.4% for male to 49.5% for female.

The data also indicate that students who successfully completed secondary education above 24 years old accounted for 28% out of all graduates. This can be attributed to the 'jumping policy' adopted by the Ministry of Education. This policy allows students above 24 years old who have already successfully completed preparatory education to enrol directly in the third year of secondary education. Such students are then eligible to sit the General Certificate exam. Another indication that can be noticed from the table with regard to students above 24 years old is that male students represent the vast majority of graduates in this category, with 15,899 (84.4%) compared to 2,936 (15.6%) for female students. This can be attributed to certain factors. First, there is a high demand for higher education since most of these students, particularly male students, aspire to continue higher

education. Second, the small number of female students in the table above is not necessarily an exact reflection of women's desire to continue their study. Rather, it can be attributed to the fact that most female students in this age group are likely to be married and have not enough time to balance between their family responsibilities and study life. Although this is beyond the scope of this research, further investigation is required to gain accurate information with regard to the circumstances and conditions motivating this type of student to gain the General Secondary certificate.

Opening the opportunities for those students who, for whatever reasons, might have stopped secondary education, could be considered as an equity issue. However, one might question their situation with regard to post-secondary education. Does the government guarantee them equal opportunities to enter higher education? Since the Admission Centre policy only deals with secondary education graduates in the 18-24 age group, older students seem unlikely to obtain an opportunity to study in higher education at the government's expense. However, some of these graduates are already in a work situation and they may get financial support from their organisations. Although this might add another challenge for the government in long run for the expansion of the higher education system in the country, the current concern in this study is the fresh secondary education graduates who are eligible to apply via the Admission Centre, i.e., those in the 18-24 age group. To aid clarity about the capacity of state higher education in Oman to absorb secondary school graduates, a comparison of enrolments of secondary school students by means of funding and type of institution will be presented, highlighting the limited capacity of the higher education existing in Oman. According to the current and detailed data available for secondary school graduates, the focus will be on academic year 2007/2008.

3.5.2 Students admitted in higher education

The total number of students who were admitted in higher education institutions in academic year 2007/2008 at government expense was 15,100, and the number of students admitted at their own expense was 5,432 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a). Moreover, 1,054 Omanis were enrolled at higher education institutions in the UAE (Oman Cultural Attaché in the UAE, 2009). Overall, the total number of Omani students enrolled in higher education institutions in academic year 2007/2008 was 21,586 students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a). Table 3.4 shows Omani students enrolled in higher education institutions in Oman and abroad in academic year 2007/2008.

Table 3.4: Students enrolled in higher education institutions, 2007/2008

Institution	Student		Total	% of total enrolments
	Male	Female		
Sultan Qaboos University	1,353	1,341	2,694	12.5
Colleges of Applied Sciences (6 colleges)	1,035	985	2,020	9.4
Technical Colleges (6 colleges)	4,448	1,831	6,279	29
College of Banking & Financial Studies	191	395	586	2.7
Health Institutes (12 institutes)	196	499	695	3.2
Institute of Shari'a* Sciences	77	95	172	0.8
External Scholarships	149	84	233	1.2
Internal Scholarships	943	1,478	2,421	11.2
Private universities & colleges in Oman	2,687	2,745	5,432	25.2
Private universities & colleges in UAE	420	634	1,054	4.8
Total	11,499	10,088	21,586	100

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009a); Oman Culture Attaché in UAE (2009).

* Islamic studies

Owing to the importance of reviewing the current status of enrolment of secondary education outputs in higher education institutions to the educational policy makers in the Sultanate, it can be concluded that:

1. According to the data for secondary education graduates in the academic year 2007/2008, students over 24 years old represented 28% of the total graduates, while students over 29 years old formed 18% of the total students. This is, as we pointed earlier, due to the 'jumping policy' introduced by the Ministry of Education.
2. The access rate is low and does not match with the targeted objectives and policies of the government to reach at least 50% of those in the 18-24 cohort continuing on to postsecondary education by 2020, up from 19% in 2004 (Chapman, Al-Barwani and Ameen, 2009: 201).
3. The increasing in number of students admitted at government expense was not commensurate with the increase in the number of secondary education graduates in 2007/2008. The total number of graduates aged 18-24 years was 47,466 in 2007/2008 compared to 41,225 in 2006/2007, an increase of 15%. However, growth in the number of students admitted to higher education with governmental finance in the same year, according to the Ministry of Higher Education, did not exceed 3.8%. Table 3.5 shows the total students admitted in higher education by means of funding.

Table 3.5: Students in higher education by means of funding, 2007/2008

Mean of funding	%
Governmental funding	70
Own expense in the Sultanate	25.2
Own expense in UAE	4.8

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009a), Oman.

The table above indicates that the percentage of students admitted to higher education institutions by means of governmental funding amounted to 70% of the total admissions to higher education in 2007/2008, compared to 25.2% for those who studied at their own expense or another's expense in the Sultanate, and 4.8% who were enrolled at their own expense in the UAE. Thus, students admitted at their own expense or the expense of (non-government) others made up of 30% of the total admissions in the academic year 2007/2008.

Regarding students admitted in higher education by type of institution, as can be seen from Table 3.4 above, public higher education institutions enrolled 11,894 students in 2007/2008, representing 55% of total enrolments in this year. However, private universities and colleges in the Sultanate enrolled 7,853 students, forming 36% of the total admissions, which can be considered as a reflection of the role of these institutions in raising the rate of enrolment in higher education in the country.

In terms of the absorptive capacity of public institutions, the Technical Colleges absorbed the highest proportion of total admissions in higher education, 29%, followed by Sultan Qaboos University, 12.5%, and then by the Colleges of Applied Sciences, 9.4%. A further 6.7% were enrolled in College of Banking and Financial Studies, Health Institutes and Institute of Shari'a Sciences, while government scholarships and grants abroad accounted for 1% of total enrolments in 2007/2008.

It can be seen that despite the large number of Health Institutes (12), they absorbed only 3% of the total admissions. As these institutes are supervised by the Ministry of Health, it sets the admission policy in these institutes based on the number of hospitals available for practical training.

Another indicator that can be noticed in the above table is that the number of external scholarships and grants was also small, forming only 1% of the total admissions.

From the above discussion, it can be noted that the intake capacity of state higher education (at government expense) in that year was only 15,100 students (Table 3.4), leaving around two thirds of school leavers with no access to higher education within

Oman unless their families could afford to pay the tuition fees demanded by the private colleges within Oman or elsewhere in the world. With this limited enrolment, the gap between secondary school outputs and access to higher education institutions will continue to increase (Table 3.2). This will be disastrous for Oman, because without the benefits of higher education qualifications, skills, and knowledge, a large number of secondary school graduates will be deprived of the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Moreover, they will be at a disadvantage in the labour market and unable to assume the positions currently held -as will be noted later in this chapter- by many expatriate workers. In order to maintain Oman's position in global economic and social demands, this situation should not be continued. Some solution must be found, together with some interventions designed to address this gap in supply and demand. Public higher education institutions should be expanded. Private higher education would not be the ultimate solution to achieve this goal, since despite this sector's contribution in absorbing some secondary school leavers, its participation remains limited. However, further discussion about this issue will be presented in Chapter Four.

3.5.3 Distribution of students in higher education according to gender

Before discussing the distribution of Omani students in higher education according to their gender, it is worth examining the impact of gender on access to higher education from a general perspective.

Among the demographic factors that can be considered as relevant in a discussion of the demand for higher education, is the secondary school students' gender. A number of studies have examined the impact of gender on access into higher education. The available data of some Europe countries, for instance, indicates that entry into higher education by females no longer represents a major problem in many of these countries. In Germany, for example, Mayer, Müller and Pollak (2007: 265) stated that among male and female students who start and finish a tertiary course of study, female students are more likely to enter university education. They attributed this to the fact that female students are more likely to find attractive specialisations at university on the one hand and they also seem more likely to be unfocused on tertiary education than male students because they have alternatives in non-tertiary vocational education, such as in nursing and high-level secretarial, on the other hand.

In the United Kingdom, in a study by Cheung and Egerton (2007) regarding the changes of class and gender inequality of higher education, they emphasised that although

the pattern of social class disadvantages in terms of access to higher education is still unchanged, the gender gap between male and female secondary school students has been reduced.

The gender issue has also been examined in Asia. In Japan, for example, Ishida (2007) revealed that the gender gap in educational attainment has been reduced considerably in the post-war period, both in high-school enrolments and in attendance at higher education, especially during the late 1980s and the 1990s when the university sector expanded rapidly. The exception to the decreasing gap of gender inequality according to Ishida (2007) can be found among students of two-year junior colleges. This is due to the fact most junior colleges are not coeducational and they continue to be dominated by females.

In Taiwan, as Tsai and Shavit (2007) pointed out, females still suffer disadvantages in access to higher education, although the expansion of higher education in Taiwan has significantly benefited females over the past few decades.

In addition to the impact of gender concerning access in higher education, is that of ethnic groups. Although the influence of minority ethnic groups in terms of access to higher education is well documented worldwide, the ethnic minority factor in Oman does not represent a serious problem, since Omani citizens are from the same social origin or race.

As Al-Hashmi (2005: 284) pointed out, among Omani secondary school students, a very high percentage of students aspired to higher education, and the demand for higher education was similar among male and female students. Therefore, the demographic factor with regard to the gender issue has been given attention through policies that give a slight advantage to male secondary school graduates, to compensate for the high percentage of female students applying to and eligible for higher education. However, it is necessary that this policy be reconsidered in such a way as to provide equal opportunities for both males and females to gain access to higher education.

Regarding students admitted in higher education by various means of funding, the statistical data revealed that females accounted for 46% of total admissions in the academic year 2007/2008, compared to 54% for male students. The data also indicate that the proportion of male students admitted at government expense in the academic year 2007/2008 was more than the proportion of females, 56.5% compared to 43.5% of females. However, with regard to students admitted in private higher education institutions in Oman

and in the UAE, it can be noted that female students constituted 52%, compared to 48% for males (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a).

It is worth emphasising that the existing admission policy gives male students preference in order to achieve a balance between the number of males and females admitted in higher education. This policy was adopted as a result of the increased numbers of females enrolled in higher education. Female Omani students gain better grades, in general, than do male Omani students. Hence, the reason for adopting this policy was not a result of their inability but rather their cultural backgrounds. The stereotypical Omani way of thinking is that arts and teaching fields are suitable for women and that science and technology fields are suitable for men. Consequently, Omani female students have had a tendency to choose arts and education courses, which became oversubscribed. However, in the light of these statistics and in order to achieve equal opportunities for both males and females, this policy needs to be reconsidered and reviewed.

Oman needs to expand and diversify the system of higher education to meet the population's need for post-secondary education. The total enrolment in public higher education for the academic year 2007/2008 was barely 19% of the relevant age group. This is low compared with most of the GCC countries. According to the 'Arab World Competitiveness Report 2007', enrolments in higher education among the 18-24 age group were 22% in UAE, 22% in Kuwait, and 32% in Bahrain. Data for Saudi Arabia and Qatar were not available (Arab World Competitiveness Report, 2007).

From the foregoing, it can be suggested that a clearly defined comprehensive national strategic plan is needed to cope with the challenge of an ever-increasing demand for higher education and the corresponding manpower needs of the national economy.

3.6 Reduction in the Number of Students Studying Abroad

One of the rationales for establishment of private institutions in Oman is to reduce the number of students studying abroad, particularly those doing so at their own expense. It is worth emphasising that during the 1970s, the government relied on foreign scholarships to educate Omanis to the level required for employment in the governmental sector. It was more efficient to provide scholarships for the small number of secondary school graduates than to establish local institutions at that time. The number of Omani students that were sent abroad on scholarships started to decline during the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s as a result of the establishment of local higher education institutions, notably, Sultan Qaboos University and the Colleges of Education. However, as we have noted in section

3.5 above, the current intake capacity of state higher education must be expanded to meet the growth of secondary leavers.

However, statistics demonstrate that one of the main issues facing private higher education in Oman is the competition of foreign universities and colleges, particularly in the neighbouring countries. Table 3.6 shows Omani students studying abroad at undergraduate level in 2007/2008.

Table 3.6: Omani students studying abroad at undergraduate level by gender and means of funding, 2007/2008

Country	Means of funding						Total
	Government scholarships			Grants and own expense			
	M	F	T	M	F	T	
GCC	12	20	32	1,604	3,531	5,135	4,787
Other Arab Countries	6	6	12	580	376	956	2,688
Foreign Countries	379	228	607	1,470	498	1,968	2,572
Total	397	254	651	3,654	4,405	8,059	8,710
Grand Total	8,710						

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009a), Oman.

As seen from the above table, in the academic year 2007/2008, the total number of students studying abroad at their own expense was 8,059, representing 92.5% of the total students studying abroad. This means that the number of scholarships provided by the government is limited (only 7.5% of the total number of Omani students abroad) compared to those studying at their own expense. Females account for 57.8% of Omanis studying abroad compared to 42.2% for males. Although this implies that there is a high demand for higher education by Omani students, most of those studying abroad were concentrated in human sciences, particularly education, due to the belief of students and their parents that this would guarantee employment after graduation. The majority of students were in GCC countries, representing 63.7% of the total of the Omani students abroad.

On the level of the GCC countries, the majority of Omani students are concentrated in the UAE. This could be due to the fact that this is the closest GCC country to Oman (see the map of Oman on page 5). For example, there are 5,135 Omani students studying in GCC countries' universities and colleges at their own expense, of which 4,425 are studying in UAE universities and colleges, forming 93.5% of the total number of Omani students in the GCC, as indicated in Table 3.7 below.

Table 3.7: Omani students studying in GCC countries (first degree) at their own expense, 2007/2008

Specialisation	Bahrain			Kuwait			Qatar		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Medicine & Health Science	2	32	34	2	7	9	2	3	5
Engineering	1	2	3	7	12	19	0	1	1
Science	1	1	2	2	25	27	4	20	24
Education	1	2	3	6	43	49	3	6	9
Computer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4
Literature	0	0	0	2	38	40	8	10	18
Business Studies	9	3	12	1	8	9	2	3	5
Islamic Science	0	0	0	0	16	16	1	1	2
Other subjects	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	4	4
Total	14	70	54	20	153	173	21	51	72

Table 3.7: (Continued)

Specialisation	Saudi Arabia			UAE		
	M	F	T	M	F	T
Medicine & Health Science	5	3	8	4	72	76
Engineering	25	1	26	39	30	69
Science	0	8	8	0	0	0
Education	1	8	9	135	1,358	1,493
Computer	0	2	2	9	11	20
Literature	0	1	1	14	132	146
Business Studies	2	0	2	39	71	110
Islamic Science	4	0	4	960	1,424	2,384
Other subjects	1	0	0	39	88	127
Total	38	35	72	1,239	3,186	4,425
Grand Total	5,135					

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009a), Oman.

As can be seen from the table above, most of the Omani students in the GCC universities and colleges were concentrated in Education and Islamic Sciences, accounting for 77.3% of students. There is a large number of students studying Education and Islamic Science in UAE universities and colleges, representing 75.5% of all students in the GCC countries. Females studying Education and Islamic Science in UAE represent 71.8% compared to 28.2% for males in the same specialisations. This trend can be also noticed in

the other Arab countries, since the majority of Omani students studying abroad at their own expense were studying human sciences. For example, out of 956 students, 528 students were studying humanities, representing 55.2% of the total students in different specialisations. Education was another popular specialisation, especially for females, who constituted 64.2% of all Omani students in this field.

From the previous comments, and the above tables, the following points can be made:

1. There is a large number of students studying abroad, especially in UAE universities and colleges, and most of them, particularly girls, are studying Education. This can be attributed to certain factors. First, from a traditional social viewpoint, females prefer to become teachers, although this view has begun to be challenged since males and females now work together in different spheres. Second, it is worth emphasising that there is a general belief by students and their families that an employment guarantee exists for those graduating in Education. However, this is an unrealistic view, since some graduates from colleges of education in Oman have faced difficulty in finding employment in public schools during the last few years. The purpose of admitting more students to the colleges of education in Oman during the last three decades was to accelerate the Omanisation of teaching staff in state schools. According to the Ministry of Education, the planned target has now been reached. For this reason, the government has not allowed private universities to run such programmes until 2006/2007. The rationale behind allowing private universities to offer educational programmes was not because the Ministry of Education reviewed its plans and consequently needed more graduates in Education; rather, it was due to public pressure both from students and their families on the one hand, and from private universities in Oman, since many Omani students were studying Education abroad, on the other hand.

However, educational statistics reveal that in the academic year 2008/2009, the total number of non-Omani teaching staff in government schools was 2,650 (Ministry of Education, 2009). Although this issue is not closely relevant to the scope of this study, further investigation by researchers needs to be undertaken.

2. As explained above, many Omani students study humanities either in GCC countries or in other Arab countries, as shown in Table 3.6. This can be attributed to the fact that students after graduating in some humanities fields would be able to take a one-year so-called 'educational qualification' programme which would enable them to become teachers. Another factor that can be added here is the fact that the medium of study in some

neighbouring private universities is Arabic, which is easier for students, whereas in Omani private higher education, the main language of study is English and most of the text books used are written in English.

3. There is a belief among students and their parents that studying abroad, particularly in GCC countries and other Arab countries, costs less than the local private higher education, and that the education offered is higher quality than in the local institutions. However, if careful consideration is given to this issue, the estimated cost incurred by Omani families for securing a university education for their children abroad is usually more or less similar to that for students staying in Oman, especially if other fees such as residential fees, transport, and food, among others, are added to the tuition fees. Further discussion about this issue will be in Chapter Five.

Based on the foregoing, it can be suggested that intensive efforts should be made by both the government and private higher education to encourage more Omani students to continue their studies at home. To this end, annual exhibitions of private universities and colleges are organised by the Ministry of Higher Education together with an annual symposium entitled 'Higher Education and Labour Market' held by the Ministry in coordination with some governmental organisations. The aim of this symposium is to introduce students to those specialisations required by the private sector. However, it can be seen that there is lack of a wider effort from the Omani private higher education sector including, for example, a shortage of information about the programmes and facilities offered. Also, there is a lack of a previous relationship between students and these institutions. This could be addressed by organising various visiting programmes for the students in the final year of secondary education. By so doing, this would play a role in introducing these institutions and programmes, together with facilities they offered to students.

3.7 Financial Rationale

As mentioned previously, in many developing countries, including Oman, the existing and the projected provision of public higher education is insufficient to meet the ever-increasing demand. Although it is generally accepted that higher education is important for the development of the nation, it is increasingly recognised that public funding alone is insufficient to guarantee access and coverage of the college-age population.

Although the decline is more prevalent in developing than in developed countries, even many industrialised countries are also being confronted with similar challenges. As

Tilak (2006: 5) emphasised, the “decline in public expenditure on higher education has been a global crisis and the most important trend”.

Similarly, Teichler (2003: 3) points out that:

“In the wake of higher education expansion, growing fiscal problems, and the increasing popularity of neoliberal economic doctrines, private funding and the privatisation of higher education institutions have gained ground in many countries traditionally dominated by public higher education.”

Based on Teichler’s statement, it can be argued that as a response to the decline of public expenditure there has emerged a dramatic expansion of private higher education in many countries of the world, to alleviate the financial burden of government expenditure on higher education. As Tilak (2006: 6) describes, privatisation has become “the mantra of the day everywhere, including the case of higher education”. To this end, governments promote the growth of private higher education institutions, most of which can be categorised as ‘for-profit’ institutions.

Oman is not exempted from the above financial trends towards higher education. The financing of higher education in Oman in the wake of an ever-increasing demand for higher education is a critical issue of concern and a major challenge to the government. It became clear in the early nineties that the sole university in the country was unable to meet the rising demand for university education. By the middle of the last decade, public meetings demanded the establishment of another university. However, a decision on this subject was not taken, for financial reasons, including continued fiscal deficit and fluctuating oil prices (Al-Jahwari, 2001). Therefore, the growing number of Omani secondary school graduates had no choice but to seek higher education abroad, as seen in the previous section. Thus, the financial factor was one of the reasons for allowing the private sector to invest in the higher education field. According to Al-Lamki (1999), due to the many obligations of the government, it is unable to finance higher education institutions to meet the increasing demand, in the light of the cost of university education. In the government’s view, in order to increase access to higher education, students and their families should participate in this domain. This view is clearly stated in the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (2006-2010). One of the objectives assigned for the Ministry of Higher Education, to be achieved during this plan, is to:

“Work with different actors to increase access into higher education institutions, both in the mean of governmental finance and by the mean of students’ own expenses.”

By permitting the private sector to establish higher education facilities, the government aims to achieve a number of objectives, of which the most important is to relieve pressure on the budget, not only in capital expenditure but also in the current expenditure, which will continue to be a steady drain during the coming years.

However, for the better understanding of the issue of financing public higher education in Oman, a quick comparison of international public expenditure on this sector will be made in the following section.

3.7.1 Public expenditure on higher education in Oman

According to Hauptman (2006a), one measure of financial commitment is to compare the money expended by higher education institutions and students as a percentage of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Unfortunately, many countries do not report this figure, and there is a great variability on this measure across countries that do provide it, ranging from as little as 0.1 or 0.2 % of GDP in a number of underdeveloped countries to as much as 2.5 to 3% of GDP for some developed countries, including the United States, New Zealand, and Canada. Overall, the average proportion of GDP devoted to higher education across the world appears to be about 1% (Hauptman, 2006a).

Based on figures presented in the OECD's Education at a Glance (OECD, 2007), Table 3.8 shows the expenditure on tertiary education institutions as a percentage of GDP in some selected countries.

Table 3.8: Expenditure on tertiary education institutions as a percentage of GDP in some selected countries

Country	% Expenditure
Czech Republic	1.1
Germany	1.1
United Kingdom	1.1
Netherlands	1.3
Norway	1.4
Spain	1.2
OECD Average	1.4

Source: OECD (2007).

The table above indicates that although Norway is in the top position among the countries listed in the table with regard to expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of GDP, the differences between countries are not great (between 1.1 % and 1.4% of GDP). However, except Norway, none of the countries listed reach the OECD average.

According to the World Bank (2000), most countries tend to spend between 2% and 5% of their GDP on education, with developing countries at the lower end of this range and developed countries on the higher side. However, regarding the percentage of education spending dedicated to higher education, the figure averages between 15% and 20%, with developing countries often at the higher end of the range.

In Oman, public education expenditure on higher education did not exceed 8% in 2005, as shown in Table 3.9, which details some Arab and non-Arab countries' expenditure on education by stage in 2002-2005, as indicated in the Human Development Report 2007/2008 (2007).

Table 3.9: Expenditure on education and percentage of distribution by educational stage, 2002-2005

Country	Public expenditure by stage (as % of all stage)		
	Pre-primary& Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Oman	50	41	8
Morocco	45	38	16
Tunisia	35	43	22
Kuwait	31	38	30
Iran	24	37	14
Malaysia	30	35	35
Japan	38	40	14
Germany	22	51	24
France	31	48	21
Spain	39	41	20

Source: Human Development Report 2007/2008 (2007).

The statistics show that compared to other countries listed, Oman spends a greater proportion of its budget on primary education, and a higher proportion on secondary education than all but three of the comparison countries. However, the share allocated to tertiary education is the lowest among all the countries listed. This fact may reflect the recent priority accorded to reforms in the general education system and particularly the introduction of the Basic Education System. Equally, this data is indicative of the fact that Oman initially concentrated its finances on promoting early education through to secondary education, whilst higher education has been comparatively neglected. During the last three decades, investment in basic education has taken precedence. Free basic education has been made available to all Omani citizens, which resulted in a large population of secondary school graduates competing for limited opportunities for higher

education in the country. Undoubtedly, aspirations are created in students as a result of the promotion of secondary school education, only to be frustrated when they complete secondary education and find there is nowhere to go to pursue their higher education. It could be argued that Oman's modest percentage (8%) of its public expenditure on higher education could contribute to the limited capacity of higher education.

We have stated previously that in many developing countries, the bulk of the education budget went to general (pre-tertiary) education, leaving a very small share or proportion for higher education. Such practices can no longer be sustained and in order to achieve access (equality of educational opportunity), maintain quality and ensure fiscal prudence and value for money, various approaches to allocating basic funds supplied by the government to higher education need to be addressed. These options will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

The amount spent per student is another measure for comparing the level of financial commitment. This calculation has the advantage of placing overall spending on higher education within the context of how many students the funds are supporting. However, in order to be calculated correctly, the comparison requires currency adjustment. According to the OECD (2003), there is a big gap among countries, since many less developed countries often spend less than \$1,000 per student. By contrast, developed countries spent on average \$10,000 per student in 2000, whereas in the United States, spending was twice this amount.

Regarding how much Oman spends per student in higher education institutions, figures presented by UNESCO (2002) show that the cost of each student at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) is the highest among all the Arab countries. It was found to be \$15,701, compared with \$11,313 for university students in Kuwait; \$10,351 in Bahrain, and the lowest in Yemen with \$511 as indicated in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Cost of a university student in Oman compared to some Arab countries in 1997

Country	Cost/Student (\$)
Oman	15,701
Kuwait	11,313
Bahrain	10,351
Saudi Arabia	9,868
United Arab Emirates	8,731
Qatar	7,620
Jordan	2,855
Egypt	1,191
Yemen	511
World Average	3,703

Source: UNESCO (2002).

As can be seen from Table 3.10 above, the cost of each student in SQU is four times the world average of \$3,703 as indicated by UNESCO (2002). This cost is a particularly severe burden on the government, especially as Oman is a developing country with strong internal competition for resources to develop other economic and social services sectors. It can be argued that the very high cost of each student could be another reason for the limited capacity of higher education in Oman.

However, average expenditure per student in other state higher education institutions in Oman is less than in SQU. For example, the average expenditure per student at Teachers' Colleges in 2000 amounted to \$ 4,632 (Human Development Report, Oman, 2003). This means that expenditure per student at SQU is around four times higher than average expenditure per student at Teachers' Colleges.

Indeed, all sectors need growth and support, and the correct principles of resource allocation are still subject to debate; primary vs. secondary vs. tertiary is an ongoing policy issue.

All in all, enhancing efficiency of expenditure on education requires reallocation of funds either to various stages of education or within educational stages. To this end, funding models need to be adopted, moving toward a flexible system that draws on both the public and the private purse. Supporting this view, the World Bank (2000) pointed out that the financing of higher education does not need to be limited to the public purse, since higher education can be provided and financed either entirely publicly, or totally privately (including non-governmental organizations), or by some combination of the two. However, as the main scope of this study is concerned with private higher education, an intensive

examination of the funding mechanisms and financial regulations will be provided in Chapter Five.

3.8 Meeting Labour Market Demand and the Challenge of Omanisation

One of the principal and most integral objectives of ‘Oman’s Vision 2020’ is the development of human resources. In Oman’s Vision 2020 conference held in Muscat in 1995, His Majesty’s address to the nation clearly emphasised the need for the private sector to play an active role in the development of the economic process and in the achievement of the national objectives. Nonetheless, this was not considered in isolation from the development of the national human resources, but rather in conjunction, as stated by His Majesty:

“Development is not a goal in itself. Rather, it exists for building man, who is its means and producers. Therefore, development must not stop at the achievement of a diversified economy. It must go beyond that and contribute to the formation of the citizen who is capable of taking part in the process of progress and comprehensive development.”

(Ministry of Information, 1996: 316)

Similarly, the former Minister of Higher Education stated in his keynote address at the International Conference on the ‘University of the 21st Century’ in 2001 in Muscat:

“Oman Economic Vision 2020 places great importance on the development of human resources and the support of development programmes aimed at achieving economic diversification and, enhancing the role of the private sector in participating in the national development...this new development provided the private sector higher education an opportunity to assume its role in contributing to the development process in graduating qualified and trained national cadres needed by the country.” (Al-Manthri, 2001b: 501)

The Omani government is realising the importance of enhancing and improving the higher education system to meet the demand for national development in the 21st century. Consequently, besides calling for private sector enterprises to take part in this strategic plan, it is allowing them to participate in higher education to educate qualified national citizens in different spheres to meet these objectives.

It is worth emphasising that for Oman to achieve the aims stated in that strategy, the training and education of national human resources to a high level of efficiency and competency is urgently needed. As we have noted above, given the country’s demand for specialists and qualified personnel in several fields of knowledge, there is a tremendous need for Omani national higher education graduates. This is due to the need to reduce reliance on expatriate manpower (as indicated above), and to diversify the economy to be

less dependent on oil, as well as to changes that have occurred in global markets, which have influenced Oman's labour market.

However, the significant questions that might be asked are what is the characteristic or the status of Omani labour market? And, to what extent can Omani private higher education achieve these goals?

Oman is one of the countries that host expatriate labour, as is the case with the rest of the GCC countries. The employment of large numbers of expatriates was originally a prerequisite for accelerating development, made possible by vast flows of petrodollars, given the absence of sufficient indigenous labour in terms of quantity and quality at that time. According to Kapiszewski (2006: 3), in the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait, foreigners constituted a majority of the population; 80%, 70%, and 64.4% respectively, whereas in Oman and Saudi Arabia, they constituted 24% and 27.1%, respectively.

It is noted that the share of the government sector in many of the GCC countries, including Oman, in expatriate labour has decreased. This, however, led to another challenge for these countries, as the favourable situation which the nationals have enjoyed for the last four decades has started to change. A growing number of them have experienced difficulties in finding the kind of employment for which they have been looking. The public sector, in which most nationals used to find employment, has already become saturated, while the private sector has remained too competitive for the majority of them. As the number of job seekers among nationals began to grow, many governments of these countries decided to embark on the formulation of labour market strategies to improve this situation, to create sufficient employment opportunities for nationals, and to limit the dependence on expatriate labour.

In the Omani context, as part of the efforts made by the Omani government to Omanise jobs in the private sector, Ministerial Decision No. 127/94 was issued, prescribing varying minimum percentages of Omanisation in private sector establishments operating in various sectors of the economy, in accordance with the nature of their activities (Ministry of Information, 2006). Moreover, the number of expatriate staff allowed into the country was subject to a maximum quota. A fee was also levied as a deterrent measure to curb the inflow of expatriate labour and to make way for the Omanis to get employment. In line with the emphasis of the government on encouraging Omanisation, a number of constructive policies and measures were clearly documented in the development plans. For example, the Fourth Five Year Development Plan (1991-1995)

committed an initial allocation of 40 million Omani Rials for the implementation of Omanisation policies (Ministry of Development, 1995).

The policy of Omanisation and nationalisation of jobs applied in the country aim at tackling the distortion in the labour market rooted in imbalances in the supply of and the demand for labour and excessive procurement of expatriate personnel, when there is a surge in the number of citizens searching for work.

In order to understand the pace of Omanisation in the public and private sectors together with their need for higher education graduates, the Omani labour market will be highlighted in the following sections, starting with the public sector.

3.8.1 The needs of the public sector

An examination of the structure of the Omani labour force reveals a large proportion of expatriates in the private sector, compared to the public sector. This can be noted in some statistics on the number of workers in both public and private sectors in the Statistical Year Book published by the Ministry of Economy in 2009. Table 3.11 below presents details of the government staff for the period 2003-2008.

Table 3.11: Civil service employees from 2003 to 2008

Year	Civil Service			Public Corporations (1)		
	Omani	Total	Omani%	Omani	Total	Omani%
2003	79,099	95,158	83.1	6,320	8,251	76.5
2004	83,883	99,386	84.4	6,378	8,191	77.8
2005	87,891	103,707	84.7	6,564	8,400	78.1
2006	93,507	108,995	85.7	6,782	8,645	78.4
2007	99,896	114,624	87.1	8,251	10,279	80.2
2008	104,927	118,990	88.2	6,716	8,778	76.5

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Statistical Year Book, Oman.

(1) A public corporation is an organisation the majority of whose shares are owned by the Omani government.

From the above table it can be seen that the great majority of employees in the government sector are Omani citizens. With 104,927 in civil service and 6,716 in the public corporations, the total in 2008 was 111,643, out of a total work force of 127,768. Further, the proportion of Omani citizens has increased over the last few years both in the civil service and to a lesser extent in the public corporations, where most are traditionally employed. The number of indigenous employees in the civil service in 2003 was 79,099, which is equal to 83.1% of the total number of workers, leaving 16,059 positions, 16.8% to be occupied by non-Omani citizens.

By 2008, the number of Omani employees in the civil service had reached 104,927 out of a total of 118,990 forming 88.2%, meaning that 14,063 -11.8%- would be non-Omanis. These statistics indicate that the proportion of non-Omani citizens has decreased slightly. However, expatriates still occupy almost a fifth of all civil service positions. In the public corporations, the number of Omani citizens employed in 2003 was 6,320 representing 76.5% of the total number of employees, and by 2008, the number had risen to 8,251 constituting 80.2% of the total labour force in the public corporations in that year. The decreasing employment of Omani citizens in 2008 was due to the fact that Oman Telecommunication Company was separated from the public corporations in 2008, and is now owned by the private sector. Thus, the percentage of positions in the civil service occupied by Omani citizens is higher than in the public corporations. However, in the government sector as a whole in 2008, it can be calculated from the above table that there were 16,125 non-Omani employees, 14,063 in the civil service plus 2,062 in public corporations.

Although qualified and proficient indigenous employees would be required to Omanise current positions in this sector, other qualified people will be needed to cope with the continuing process of development and future expansion. The problem, however, is not simply one of numbers of Omani citizens relative to non-Omani citizens, but also their distribution within the sector.

Statistical indicators show that indigenous employees in some sectors are concentrated in the lower-ranking occupations, while specialist expatriate workers are in the intermediate and upper-ranking positions. Table 3.12 details the distribution of the labour force in the public service according to their group and grade.

Table 3.12: Civil service employees (Omani/non-Omani) by grade and group, 2008

Grade & Group	Omani	Non-Omani	Total	%Omani
Special grade	66	0	66	100
Ambassador grade	25	0	25	100
Special group	1,263	1,408	2,671	47.3
Group I	35,225	2,429	37,654	93.5
Group II	48,183	9,914	58,097	83
Group III	20,165	312	20,477	98.5
Grand Total	104,927	14,063	118,990	88.2

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Oman.

It can be seen from Table 3.12 that non-Omani citizens constitute the majority of special group staff, forming 52.7% of the total number, compared to 47.3% for Omani citizens in the same group. Non-Omanis constitute 6.5% of the workforce in Group I, and 17% in Group II. With the exception of the special grade and ambassador grade, the percentage of Omanisation is highest in Group III, where Omanis account for 98.5% of the total employees. This means that positions which require higher education –a first degree and higher studies- are mostly occupied by non-Omani citizens, while indigenous employees are heavily concentrated in positions which do not require such qualifications. These are positions with lower salaries and involving less participation in decision-making.

The above explanation of the figures is confirmed by Table 3.13 below, which indicates the distribution of the employees of the civil service (Omani and non-Omani citizens) according to educational level (Diploma, Bachelor degree, post-graduate diploma, Masters, and Ph.D.) in 2008.

Table 3.13: Employees (Omani/non-Omani) in civil service by educational level, 2008

Educational Level	Nationality & Percentage					
	Omani	%	Non-Omani	%	Total	%
Illiterate	3,683	98.0	78	2.0	3,761	3.2
Can read and write	8,179	97.9	180	2.1	8,359	7.1
Primary	3,870	99.7	9	0.2	3,879	3.2
Preparatory	4,162	99.6	17	0.4	4,179	3.5
Secondary	15,153	99.4	98	0.6	15,251	12.8
Diploma	22,476	84.2	4,201	15.8	26,677	22.4
Bachelor degree	42,989	86.0	6,949	14.0	49,938	42.0
Post-graduate diploma	2,276	72.3	873	27.7	3,149	2.6
Master's degree	1,922	58.6	1,359	41.4	3,281	2.8
Ph.D	214	41.7	299	58.3	513	0.4
Total	104,927	88.2	14,063	11.8	118,990	100

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Oman.

Further, the table above shows that at all levels of education up to secondary level, the number of Omani citizens is considerably higher than that of non-Omani citizens. For example, among illiterate people occupying menial positions, the number of Omani citizens is 40 times that of non-Omani citizens. Up to Diploma and Bachelor degree level, the great majority of government employees are Omani citizens. While at post-graduate diploma and Master's degree the number of Omani citizens is slightly higher than non-

Omani citizens, the majority of government employees at Ph.D level are non-Omani citizens.

In 2008, a total of 13,681 non-Omani citizens with Diploma or higher level qualification were employed in government positions; in other words, for these organisations to be staffed by indigenous personnel, 13,681 highly qualified Omani citizens would be needed, merely to cover current needs, without allowing for expansion in this sector.

Statistics regarding the educational level of employees in public corporations demonstrate that although the education gap between Omani and non-Omani employees is not as high as in the civil service, most non-Omani citizens in public corporations occupy specialised jobs which require higher qualifications. Table 3.14 details employees in public corporations according to their educational level.

Table 3.14: Employees (Omani/non-Omani) in public corporations by educational level, 2008

Educational Level	Nationality & Percentage					
	Omani	%	Non-Omani	%	Total	%
Pre-primary	481	7.2	4	0.2	485	5.5
Primary	436	6.5	6	0.3	442	5.0
Preparatory	469	7.0	8	0.4	477	5.4
Secondary	1,466	21.8	27	1.3	1,493	17.1
Diploma	959	14.3	487	23.6	1,446	16.5
Bachelor Degree	1,960	29.2	625	30.3	2,585	29.4
Post-graduate Diploma	30	0.4	36	1.8	66	0.8
Master's Degree	566	8.4	366	17.7	932	10.6
Ph.D	293	4.4	476	23.1	769	8.8
Not stated	56	0.8	27	1.3	83	0.9
Total	6,716	100	2,062	100	8778	100

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Oman.

It can also be seen from the table above that the pre-primary, primary and preparatory groups are almost completely occupied by Omani employees. In contrast, non-Omani citizens outnumber Omani citizens by more than 2 to 1 at Ph.D level. This fact means that the technical positions necessitating specialist expertise would be occupied mostly by non-Omanis. Currently, there are 1,990 posts occupied by non-Omani citizens who have a Diploma or post-graduate qualifications.

Indeed, the relationship between the level of education and job opportunities as Al-Maskeri (1992) argues, is acknowledged and recognised by Omani citizens. He emphasised that because of the enormous gap between Omani and non-Omani employees, Omani students are motivated to invest in education:

“...they [Omani citizens] are motivated to invest in themselves in the form of education and training because they expect education will bring better job opportunities and higher salaries during their work life.”

(Al-Maskeri, 1992: 336)

However, as we noted in section 3.2 above, due to the limited capacity of higher education in the country, these ambitions might not be allowed to be fulfilled. Given this fact, it is important to expand higher education capacity not only to meet the needs of Oman, but also of other Gulf countries, especially after the decision of the GCC countries' leaders to establish the Gulf labour market in 2007. The aim behind establishing such an undertaking is to achieve economic integration among the GCC countries for the direct benefit to the citizens of the region and encourage investment in training and employment among the residents of the area (<http://www.gcclsa.org/home.php>, April 10, 2010).

This view is also supported by Al-Jahwari (2003: 27) who underlined the value of increasing the capacity of higher education to meet the needs of Oman's market as well as other Gulf countries:

“The Sultanate actually suffers from lack of specialised technical knowledge and specialisation in fields such as medicine and engineering. Planning for higher education in Oman should take into account the needs of the labour market in the other Gulf States with which Sultanate has many agreements for economic integration that include the merging of labour markets and equal treatment for Gulf States' citizens.”

The statement above clearly shows that human capital is undoubtedly the most important capital needed to be accomplished through the provision of higher education. However, this goal should not be achieved merely through the expansion of higher education and graduating more Omani nationals. What is equally important is that the quality of human capital should be improved in order to be capable to meet the current and future challenges of the labour market.

So far, this section has only highlighted the situation of employment in the government sector. However, do Omani citizens fare any better in the private sector? This will be investigated in the next section by reviewing the pattern of employment in the private sector.

3.8.2 The needs of the private sector

A statistical survey made by the Ministry of National Economy (2009a) excludes the distribution of Omani citizens employed in the private sector according to their educational background and level of attainment when considering the needs of this sector. However, there are data available on the wages earned by Omani citizens in the private sector, and it may be suggested that there is a logical link between the amount of salary and the demands of the position in employment. In other words, in most jobs, involving more responsibility and higher skill demands equate to a higher salary. Table 3.15 provides details of Omani employees in the private sector by gender and wage group.

Table 3.15: Distribution of Omani employees in the private sector by gender and wage group, 2008

Wages Group (RO)	Gender		Total	% Female
	Male	Female		
100-120	39,157	12,072	51,229	23.6
120-140	17,744	2,215	19,959	11.1
140-160	20,307	2,389	22,696	10.5
160-180	9,372	1,073	10,445	10.3
180-200	6,093	1,286	7,379	17.4
200-300	12,306	3,349	15,655	21.4
300-400	5,695	1,776	7,471	23.8
400-500	2,989	1,004	3,993	25.1
500-600	1,752	542	2,294	23.6
600-700	1,069	325	1,394	23.3
700-800	832	194	1,026	18.9
800-900	596	118	714	16.5
900-1000	554	98	652	15.0
100-2000	1,532	166	1,698	9.8
2000+	564	25	589	4.2
Total	120,562	26,632	147,194	18.1
Average Salary	218	211	217	-

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Oman.

In 2008, the total number of Omani and non-Omani employees in the private sector was 942,129, of which Omanis constituted 147,194, representing 15.6% of the private sector labour force, and non-Omani citizens 794,935, forming 84.4% of all private sector employees. If we assume that salaries reflect the needs of the job and that higher-paid posts need higher educational qualifications, it would be expected that employees in the lower

wage categories of RO 100-120 to RO 280-300 have education below diploma level. As can be seen from Table 3.15, the number of Omani employees who draw salaries ranging between RO 100-300 is 127,363 out of 147,194. This means that the majority of Omani citizens' employment is concentrated at these low levels, representing 86.5% of this labour force.

On the contrary, the salary categories of RO 300-400 up to 2000+, at which employees can be expected to have a diploma and above, Omanis number only 19,831, forming 13.5% out of all Omani employees in the private sector.

From the above statistical pointers it can be argued that Omani citizens are not only critically disadvantaged in their opportunities for employment in the private sector, but they are also disadvantaged once they have attained employment in this sector by the fact that most of them do not have the level of educational attainment required to obtain high positions and high wages. This is a matter of serious concern, the importance of which can be appreciated when the occupational groups of non-Omani citizens in the sector are considered.

Economic pointers also reveal that non-Omani workers in the private sector who have a diploma, bachelor degree and post-graduate degree number 115,154, as shown in Table 3.16 below. This indicates that there is a large number of non-Omani citizens compared to the small number of highly educated Omani employees deduced from Table 3.14 above. It also draws attention to the importance of higher education for supplying the labour market with qualified Omani nationals, if Omanisation is to be accomplished.

Table 3.16: Distribution of non-Omani workers in the private sector by educational level, 2008

Educational Level	Number
Pre-primary	283,642
Primary	77,427
Preparatory	216,995
Secondary	100,935
Diploma	27,493
Bachelor degree	83,475
Master's degree	2,379
Ph.D	1,807
Not stated	782
Total	794,935

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Oman.

In addition to the exemplar of educational levels highlighted above, the pattern of occupational groups presents some clue to the educational specialisations that will be required by Omanis if they are to be employed in positions presently occupied by non-Omani citizens.

Table 3.17 indicates non-Omani citizens employed in the private sector according to their occupational groups. It can be noticed that the distribution of expatriate employees in this sector was almost similar in the two years. From the table it can be observed that the majority of non-Omani citizens are concentrated in engineering, which represents 41% in 2007 and 44.3% in 2008. In contrast, there are very few non-Omani employees in clerical positions.

Table 3.17: Distribution of expatriate workers in the private sector by occupational groups, 2007 & 2008

Occupational Groups	2007	%	2008	%
Administration, Directors & Managers	20,675	3.2	25,012	3.1
Scientific, Technical & Human Matters Specialists	52,026	8.1	61,788	7.8
Scientific, Technical & Human Subjects Technicians	48,731	7.6	54,072	6.8
Clerical Occupations	2,058	0.3	2,361	0.3
Sales Occupations	23,354	3.7	27,922	3.5
Service Occupations	136,269	21.3	162,959	20.5
Agriculture, Stock Breeding, Agriculture & Hunting	61,404	9.6	67,025	8.4
Industrial, Chemical & Food Industries Occupations	33,119	5.2	41,723	5.3
Principal & Auxiliary Engineering Occupations	260,811	41	352,073	44.3
Gross Labour Force	638,447	100	794,935	100

Source: Ministry of National Economy (2009a), Oman.

These economic statistics demonstrate that considerable Omanisation of the private sector will obviously require skilled and qualified people in a variety of economic and technical specialisations, especially engineering. As the data reveal, currently there are 130,834 non-Omani citizens who have a diploma, bachelor degree or post-graduate degree, and who need to be replaced by skilled and qualified Omani citizens.

The previous illustration highlights the current situation of the Omani labour market and its need for qualified and skilled Omani citizens to work in the civil sector, public corporations, and the private sector, if Omanisation is to be a reality. Estimates of forthcoming labour market needs imply that thousands of highly qualified Omani citizens will be needed to meet the goals and objectives of Oman's vision, "Vision 2020 for Oman's Economy".

In a quick review of the initial estimates of the Omani labour market needs in 2020 according to a study made by the Ministry of Development (1995), it can be observed from Table 3.18 below that the Sultanate will require, by 2020, nearly 1.3 million nationals with a diploma, first degree or post-graduate degree in various specialisations.

Table 3.18: Labour market requirements in Oman up to 2020

Occupation	1993 Figures			2020 Figures	
	Omani	Non-Omani	Total	Required	Available
Specialists	19,300	43,300	62,600	153,200	127,700
Technicians	15,600	17,400	33,000	91,100	86,600
Skilled Workers	110,300	47,200	157,500	453,600	295,200
Semi-Skilled Workers	9,100	101,900	111,000	246,400	174,900
Other Semi-Skilled Workers	84,100	218,900	303,000	344,300	103,300
Total	238,400	428,700	667,100	1,289,000	891,800

Source: Ministry of Development (1995), Oman.

It can be seen from the table above that the total employees (Omani and non-Omani) in 1993 was 667,100, of which 238,400 were Omani citizens, representing 35.7% of the total employees, compared to 428,700 non-Omani citizens. It is estimated that in total the country will require, by 2020, 1,289,000 citizens and the total number of Omanis available for employment is estimated to be 891,800 in the different professions. This means that the excess demand of 397,200 positions will have to be met by non-Omani citizens. It is also expected that by the year 2020 the requirements for specialists and technicians will increase from 95,600 in 1993 to 244,300, and the outputs of higher education institutions in the Sultanate available to be employed in these occupations is estimated to be around 214,300. This means the deficit will be 12.3% of the demand for specialists and technicians. It can be said that the Omani labour market demand for higher education graduates would exceed the supply even by the year 2020. The movement of the Omani economy from low skill based activities to more advanced sectors that require higher skills, in the long term makes the actual demand for higher education graduates likely to be significantly more than estimated at present. Therefore, there is a strong need for expansion in higher education institutions in the various specialisations, especially the scientific ones.

3.8.3 The private sector: ongoing arguments about Omanisation

The vision of human resources (Ministry of National Economy, 2009b: 429) as declared in the 'Vision 2020 for Oman's Economy' involves:

“Creation of well developed Omani human resources with capacities and skills that conform with the technical and technological developments and characterised by high efficiency for management of changes. Also, in order to meet the local and international continuously changing conditions and ensures maintenance of Omani traditions and customs.”

It can be inferred from this statement that the objectives of the human resources sector in the long-term development strategy up to 2020 involve provision of employment opportunities in public and private sectors for Omanis, and their training and qualification in a manner consistent with labour market needs. It also means that expatriate labour should be replaced with highly qualified Omani labour. Also, the efficiency of the Omani labour market should be increased through reducing the differentials in advantages between public and private sectors.

Apparently, the above vision comes at a time when the private sector is dissatisfied with the skills of Omani citizens to meet their job requirements. The private sector attributes the low percentage of Omanisation to a host of reasons mainly concerning productivity, expertise, wages and working hours (*Al-Markazi, 2003*). These arguments, however, differ from the findings of a study conducted by the Omanisation Monitoring and Follow-up Committee regarding the reality and constraints hindering Omanisation and training in the private sector. The committee concluded that several obstacles were responsible for impeding the progress of Omanisation and nationalisation of jobs. These can be summarized (*Ministry of National Economy, 2003: 127*) in the following:

1. The turnover of Omani staff in the private sector is very high as they continually look for better prospects, particularly in the public sector.
2. Expatriates have strong influence and control of the decision-making process in the private sector organisations; in addition, there is a lack of trust between Omani employees and business owners.
3. The private sector claims that it employs expatriates due to the low productivity and lack of experience of Omani workers, besides their unwillingness to work longer hours for lower pay.

In the researcher's view, this issue needs further study by researchers and concerned government organisations (e.g. Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Higher Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry), since up to date there have been no studies on the impacts of Omanisation on the standard of performance. It goes without saying that the replacement of experienced employees by inexperienced individuals will most likely reflect negatively on the criterion or standard of performance, particularly in the education and health sectors, which form the centre of human development. Having said that, a study needs to be carried out to assess the effects of Omanisation on efficiency of performance. This does not mean in any case the cessation of the Omanisation policy; rather, that Omanisation

should be implemented in accordance with well-arranged steps with a view to enhancing the performance and upgrading the competencies and skills of working Omanis so that they achieve their mission satisfactorily. This will indeed reflect positively on human resources development and consequently on socio-economic development as a whole.

Although there is much controversy regarding the measurement of the relative contribution of education to economic growth, there tends to be agreement on its critical role. Schultz (1993) argued that economic growth is not determined by the quantity of labour or physical capital invested, but it is the quality of labour that is more important. Here, the role of education is critical in determining the quality. Using human capital theory, Schultz (1993) explained that economic growth is related to level of educational investment. He claims that schooling increases the future earnings of a student and the productive capacity of labour, and therefore, it should be considered as investment, rather than consumption. He assumed that rational people would attempt to invest in education up to the point where returns, in terms of extra income, are equal to the cost of undertaking education. Although heavily criticised, his study initially established the relationship between education and economic growth.

Schultz's declaration is consistent with a study made thirty years earlier by Blaug (1972). In a comparative study between countries in the United States and Europe, Blaug (1972) found that there was a wide variation in the contribution of education to economic growth. The contribution varied from 25% in Canada, 15% in the United States, 14% in Belgium, and 12% in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, it is clear that both studies demonstrated that investment in human capital, particularly through education, has made a significant contribution to economic growth.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be argued that a critical issue that must not be ignored by the policy makers in the country is that employment conditions in the private sector are seen as unappealing to Omani graduates. As a result, if this issue is not tackled, the outcome will be inflation or over-supply of Omani employees in the governmental sector, while the private sector, which holds most of the job opportunities, as mentioned earlier, continues to depend heavily on non-Omani workers. Clearly, this would be entirely opposite to the main objectives of Omanisation.

As we asserted above, a systematic evaluation regarding the effect of Omanisation on performance in the private sector should be conducted. This would make clear to policy makers and decision-makers the reason, if such is the case, why Omani citizens are less interested in the sorts of employment available in this sector. The findings, certainly,

would reveal the strengths and weaknesses in this matter. In other words, it will be quite clear whether the defect lies in the quality of output, in which case there will be a need to review the level of programmes offered in higher education institutions and their ability to meet the labour market demands, or whether the defect lies in the private sector itself, in terms of lack of encouragement and desire to recruit citizens.

However, this study will help to provide a greater understanding about the nature of the efforts made by private higher education institutions in this respect, and thus will help to clarify whether the problem can be solved simply by increasing private higher education, or whether there are other factors and measures that need to be adopted by these institutions.

3.9 Promoting Scientific Research

As mentioned in section 3.2 above, among the rationales for encouraging the establishment of private universities and colleges in the country is to enhance the capacity for scientific research activities.

The importance of scientific research derives from its role in the development of nations socially and economically, and it can be argued that in the era of globalisation, scientific research is considered as a cornerstone for boosting not only economies but also social stability and pride in national identity. As Eggins (2003) pointed out, globalisation and the pressures of international competition are dissolving boundaries between nations, institutions and disciplines, creating and distributing knowledge in a production system that has become increasingly global. Hence, higher education institutions, particularly universities, as well as public and private organisations, should play a pivotal role in this context. Conffield and Williamson (1997) emphasise that universities can be considered as key players in generating new knowledge through research.

In the Omani context, Al-Manthri (2002: 23) has declared the importance of research findings in educational institutions, to meet the demands of the new century. He suggested:

“We are now on the verge of the 21st century trying to foresee the future with all the anticipated advancement in sciences knowledge in the various aspects of life. This entails that we work hard in steering education into the right track of development and progress. Modern technologies of communication and information system and the highlighting of research findings in our educational institutions will be the tools to cope with changes of the approaching century.”

Although there is awareness among the policy makers with regard to scientific research, only a few public and private organisations show interest in R&D. With the exception of Sultan Qaboos University, almost all public higher education institutions are entirely teaching oriented. Further details on the contribution of these institutions will be presented in Chapter Five.

However, it is necessary to present an overview of the capacity for scientific research in the country. Such a presentation will provide us with a general picture of this activity on the one hand, and what efforts are expected from private higher education sector in this domain on the other hand.

Indeed, the research capacity in Oman needs serious attention. The research capacity can be measured from different aspects, such as expenditure on research as a percentage of GDP, numbers of active researchers for every million inhabitants, and number of international research papers per million inhabitants (Scientific Research Council, 2007). Table 3.19 shows the research capacity in Oman compared to various countries of the world.

Table 3.19: Research capacity in Oman compared to different countries in the world

Country	Research expenditure as % of GDP	Researcher/million inhabitants	Scientific publications/million inhabitants
Oman	0.10	100	47
Sweden	3.98	5,332	1,131
Finland	3.49	7,421	1,000
Japan	3.15	5,070	470
USA	2.67	4,605	726
Korea	2.64	3,003	-
Denmark	2.63	4,749	980
Germany	2.56	3,222	537
France	2.22	3,120	532
Austria	2.22	2,968	606
Singapore	2.15	4,353	743
Belgium	1.9	2,960	635
Norway	1.75	-	726
Saudi Arabia	0.24	64	25
Egypt	0.20	-	24

Source: Scientific Research Council (2007), Oman.

The table above shows that compared to all the countries listed, Oman's research spending as a percentage of GDP is at the bottom of the list, representing only 0.10% of GDP. Strangely, none of the Arab countries listed above reach the worldwide average level of research spending as a percentage of GDP. Apparently, the percentage of expenditure on R&D in most Arab countries has not developed much since 1990; the percentage on R&D in all Arab countries did not exceed 0.75% of their GDP in 1990 (Shaban, 1998). This clearly shows that such countries need to pay greater attention to this field to meet the needs of the 21st century. The 'Arab Human Development Report' (2002) has recommended that Arab countries should work to increase the budget allocated to scientific research to 2% of GDP in 10 years time.

Regarding the ratio of researchers per million inhabitants, the figure also is not encouraging. Oman has only 100 researchers for every million inhabitants, which is a very modest proportion compared to a country like Finland with 7,421. Oman is higher only than Saudi Arabia, which has about 67 researchers per million inhabitants. However, the data do not indicate clearly whether all researchers are nationals. In Oman, for example, the percentage of Omani researchers compared to non-Omanis is relatively small. There are a total of almost 1,050 Ph.D holders in Oman, out of which only 30% are locals (Scientific Research Council, 2007).

Similarly, the table above indicates that Oman is also short of publications, with only 47 internal recognised research papers per million inhabitants. Unlike Oman, Sweden for example has 1,137 recognised publications. Therefore, Oman with such a low level of research output cannot compete internationally.

In the plan, 'Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020', special attention is given to scientific research and development as primary support for creation and sustainability of development. The document seeks the intensification of efforts to upgrade scientific research and development and the support of such efforts through increased expenditure. Undeniably, without proper funding for research activities, little would be achieved in this field. As shown in Table 3.19 above, the percentage of expenditure on research in the Sultanate is low, not exceeding 0.10% of GDP in 2007, compared to 0.8% of GDP in 1996 (Ministry of National Economy, 2003). This means that the growth in percentage of expenditure on research did not exceed 0.2% during the last decade. It also indicates that Oman, like many Arab countries, has not yet achieved the percentage (2% of GDP) recommended by the 'Arab Human Development Report' (2002).

The above is an overview of the current capacity of scientific research, particularly in terms of the public expenditure on it. As mentioned earlier, except for Sultan Qaboos University, the only public university in the country, almost all public institutions are entirely teaching-oriented. This implies that a significant role is expected to be played by private universities and colleges in Oman to fill this gap. An important question one might ask is to what extent private higher institutions could effectively contribute in this area. This will be identified in chapters Four, Eight and Nine of this study.

3.10 Summary

The rationales presented in this chapter can be summarized in the following points.

First, the government's interest in private higher education is a result of the high and increasing cost of higher education and the increasing demand for education, often accompanied by economic reasons.

Second, the gap between the numbers qualified to enter post-secondary education and the annual places available is massive, so the private sector was seen as the principal option available to potential students.

Third, the long-term economic strategy 'Vision 2020', which aims to diversify the economy in the country and reduce dependence on oil, requires more qualified citizens to take part in this field, and to replace many skilled expatriate currently occupied higher positions in Oman's labour market, particularly the private sector.

Fourth, the government also hoped that this sector would play an active role in scientific research, this area being almost absent in public higher education.

The rationales and objectives that were introduced in this chapter serve as a first step towards a more thorough analysis of the development and current status of private higher education in the country. The next chapter addresses these issues more extensively.

Chapter Four

Development of Private Higher Education in Oman

4.1 Introduction

As we have noted in Chapters Two and Three, nowadays the private sector is the fastest growing segment in higher education in many countries. For instance, a greater number of private higher education institutions than public ones now operate in transition economies, making the private sector a significant partner in the provision of higher education. This change has taken place within a short period of a decade and a half. Market-friendly reforms in the developing countries, including Oman, are also creating beneficial conditions for the growth and expansion of the private sector.

This chapter will highlight the development and current status of private sector higher education in Oman. The provision of these institutions will be indicated and their intake capacity and programmes offered will be reported. Moreover, rules and bylaws regulating this sector will be discussed.

However, before discussing the above-mentioned themes, it may be useful to provide the reader with a brief overview of the higher education system in Oman. This is also important because it establishes a preliminary step for the study's main focus area, the development of the private higher education system in the country.

4.2 A Brief Overview of Higher Education in Oman

For the best understanding of the structure of higher education in Oman, it is necessary to place it in the context of the education system as a whole. Currently, there are two different structures. The first is the 'general education system' that has existed for the last 35 years and is still in place. The general education system is structured into three stages. The elementary stage extends for a period of six years from the age of 6-12, the preparatory stage extends for a period of three years from the age of 13-15, and the secondary stage covers a period of three years from the age of 16-18. In the second year of the third stage, students can choose to study sciences or arts.

The second is the 'basic education system', which was introduced about ten years ago and consists of three cycles. The first covers grades 1-4 and the second covers grades 5-10. The third cycle is still under development. This reform was a part of long-term social

and economic development strategies for the period from 1995 to 2020 under the ‘Vision 2020’. This system was introduced particularly to improve the quality of education, and to enhance students’ ability to acquire knowledge and skills at later stages in higher education and vocational training. As stated by the Ministry of Education (1995: 1):

“The challenges facing Oman, particularly the need for self sufficiency and the need to diversity the economy and keep pace with technological change, require new educational goals to prepare Omanis for life and work in the new conditions created by the modern global economy. The proposed educational reforms are designed to achieve the knowledge and mental skills and attitudes that young Omanis will need to learn and adapt to the very different future most of them will face.”

The implementation of this reform is proceeding in gradual stages, both in terms of educational level and geographical aspect. The key reason behind this procedure is the large amount of resources, both human and financial, which are required for this tremendous development. However, the Omani Government is committed to this reform and is willing to provide moral as well as financial support (Al-Hajri, 2002).

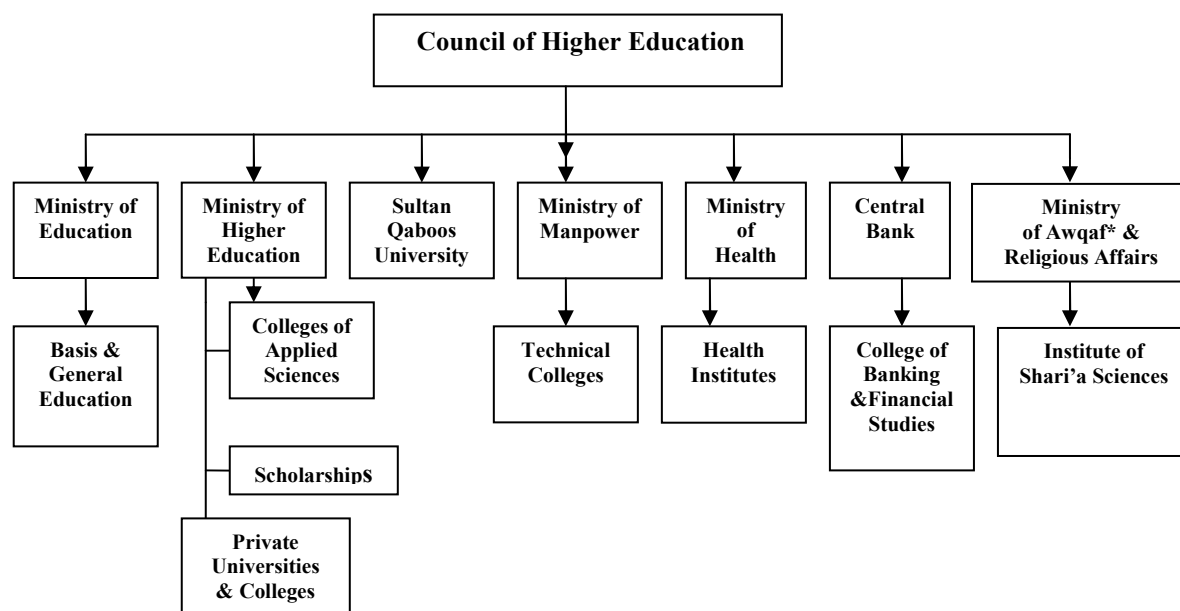
A systematic evaluation of the output in comparison with the set of goals that were mentioned above would not be meaningful at this stage. Such feedback will be more appropriate after the completion of all the stages and the availability of some cohorts of graduates who will proceed to higher levels of education and training or the labour market. In the researcher’s view, the extent of success will depend on the factors determining the practical implementation of the system, especially the quality and support of the teachers.

By and large students who graduate from secondary school proceed to the fourth stage in the education system. This stage comprises either a four-year higher education programme or a technical and vocational training of up three years. It can be argued that currently this is the most important and critical stage in the education system in the country. The type of post-secondary education that students can follow depends on their attainment in the final year of secondary education’s general examinations, together with the number of places available in higher education institutions. In this regard, admission policies in the public higher education system are revised and set regularly by the concerned authorities, such as the Council of Higher Education and the individual institutions.

The institutional structure of education, including higher education in the Sultanate, is divided into two major levels. The first one is the policy-making level, represented by the Council of Higher Education, and the second level is represented by different ministries and institutions that are responsible for implementing the policies and strategies approved

by the Council of Higher Education. Figure 4.1 shows the institutional structure of higher education in Oman.

Figure 4.1: The institutional structure of higher education in Oman



* Endowments.

Higher education is a pivotal sector and in many Arab countries, including Oman (e.g., Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia) its administration is entrusted to a council with membership drawn from experts and specialists, who apply their experience, knowledge and research for the benefit of this important sector and its various establishments (Al-Manthri, 2002). For example, the Council of Higher Education in Jordan has significant power over private higher education institutions. The council must approve the types of studies and fields of specialisation at various levels; set admissions criteria; and review performance through examination of budget and reports (Burke & Al-Waked, 1997).

Consistent with this approach, Royal Decree No. 65/98 established the Council of Higher Education in 1998, with the mandate of formulating and setting the objectives, policies and strategies for the education system as a whole, and for allocating tasks and responsibilities for individual organisations (Official Gazette, 1998). In addition to the above, the Council's mandate also includes reviewing challenges facing higher education and proposing suitable solutions, and considering applications for establishing new private universities and colleges (for more details about the Council's tasks, see Appendix 2).

The Minister of the Diwan of the Royal Court was appointed as the president of the Council and the Minister of Higher Education as the vice president. It also contains a number of ministers concerned with the educational and training process. The Council has held several significant meetings since its establishment and many promising policies have been discussed and approved for both public and private higher education. An example of these is the decision to allow the establishment of private universities with government support in terms of financial aid and other incentives, as will be reviewed in Chapter Five.

However, it is the writer's belief that the success of the Council would be further enhanced if some additional measures were taken. For example, the membership should be expanded to include other institutions such as the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Health who are also responsible for training and employment, as shown in Figure 4.1 above. Another step that would promote the work of the Council is the formation of a permanent committee supported by experts and professionals in the areas of planning, educational policy and other affairs related to education in general and higher education in particular. The aim of this committee would be to support the Council technically, especially with regard to studying and assessing the subjects suggested by educational institutions.

On the other hand, as can be seen from Figure 4.1 above, the system of higher education in Oman is governed by a number of different government regulatory structures and authorities. Table 4.1 below summarises higher education institutions and their awards.

Table 4.1: Public (state) higher education institutions in Oman

Institution	Awards	No. of students, 2008/2009	Brief overview
Sultan Qaboos University	Diploma, Bachelor, Master and PhD	14,701	It received its first student intake in 1986, currently comprises ten colleges: the Colleges of Science, Education, Engineering, Arts & Social Sciences, Commerce & Economy, Agriculture and Marine Sciences, Medicine and Health Sciences, Law, and Nursing.
Colleges of Applied Science	Bachelor	7,856	Formerly Colleges of Education. In 2007, the government converted Colleges of Education into Colleges of Applied sciences. Six colleges are distributed in different regions of Oman. Programmes offered in these colleges are: Information Technology, Business Administration, Communication Studies, Engineering, and Design.
Technical Colleges	Diploma and Bachelor	18,790	There are six Technical Colleges distributed in six different regions of Oman. These colleges offer a number of programmes such as Engineering, Business Studies, Information Technology, Applied Sciences, Pharmacology, Photography, and Fashion Design.
Institutes of Health	Diploma	2,050	There are twelve Health Institutes located in different regions of the country. These institutes offer a variety of courses including Nursing, Medical Laboratory Science, Diagnostic Radiography, Physiotherapy, and Dental Surgery Assistant.
College of Banking & Financial Studies	Diploma, Bachelor and Master	1,674	This college was established in 1983 as an institute for banking and financial studies with the main objective to educate and train secondary school graduates for a period of up three years. Most of its graduates are employed in the banking and financial sector.
Institute of Shari'a Sciences	Bachelor	1,000	The institute comprises three specialisations: Jurisprudence and its Foundations, Foundations of Religion, and Islamic Studies.

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009a), Oman.

To conclude the above brief section on the structure of higher education in Oman, it can be noticed that public higher education institutions are supervised and governed by several organisations as shown in Figure 4.1 above. This, however, creates competition among these institutions for resources and limits consensus for improving performance and quality. Therefore, centralised supervision under one organisation, which should be the Ministry of Higher Education, would help in creating a unified vision and policy on the one hand, and in making decisions on financial resources on the other. It would also assist in improving the quality and accessibility of higher education in the country. The above suggestion, moreover, is consistent with the responsibilities of the Ministry of Higher Education determined by Royal Decree No. 36/2000, as Article 11 of the Decree stated that:

"The Ministry of Higher Education shall follow up coordination and integrating between higher education institutions with respect to fields of specialisation and degree awarded by each of them."

(Official Gazette, 2000: 18)

The above is a general introduction for the main focus of this chapter; the development and current status of private higher in Oman.

4.3 The Genesis of Private Sector Provision of Higher Education in Oman

Private higher education in the Sultanate of Oman is a recent phenomenon. Traditionally, the practice has been for the government to provide free higher education to all Omani nationals. This tendency started, as we have already noted previously, in the 1970s, with government-sponsored scholarships for studies abroad, there being no higher educational facilities in the country at that time. Consequently, the government initiated a programme to develop and establish local postsecondary institutions in the country, including the opening of the first and only public university in 1986.

However, by the end of the 1980s, public institutions of higher education faced a serious challenge as the absorptive capacity was no longer able to absorb the growing numbers of secondary education leavers.

In Oman, as in many other countries (see Table 3.9, Chapter Three), during the last three decades, investment in basic education has taken priority. Accordingly, free basic education has been made available to all Omanis under a programme of continued and rapid expansion across the whole country. This has resulted in a large population of secondary school graduates competing for limited opportunities for state higher education in the country. For instance, the total capacity of public higher education could not admit more than 31% of all secondary school graduates in 2006 (for further details please see Chapter Three).

Thus, due to the sharp increase in the number of secondary school graduates and the rising demand of the labour market for qualified manpower, together with financial austerity measures as a result of competing demand from other public needs, the government encouraged, from 1996 onwards, the promotion and development of private higher education in Oman. There are now five private universities (and another three private universities in the pipeline) and nineteen private colleges under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education.

However, the development of private higher education institutions in Oman has taken three main phases. In fact, establishment of private higher education at the beginning

was not an acceptable idea to the majority of Omanis. This was due to several considerations. First, the concept of free education has been deeply rooted since the 1970s, when His Majesty the Sultan took power in the country and Omanis still believe that higher education is the responsibility of the state and should be provided for everyone who is eligible to enrol in higher education. Second, the quality of education that would be provided by these institutions was a major concern from the beginning. Third, many Omanis, especially lower income groups, were concerned about inability to educate their children in these institutions. All these and other considerations were the subject of interest and study by the government, and it was decided not to rush to allow the establishment of private universities. It was the government's view that the gradual establishing of private higher education institutions would provide them with an opportunity to assess that experiment.

The stages of the development of private higher education will be reviewed in the following sections.

4.3.1 Colleges offering diplomas

Two years after establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman, a Royal Decree was issued in 1996, which provided the opportunity for the private sector to invest in colleges awarding diploma degrees. Accordingly, Ministerial Decision No. 9/96 was issued in 1996 to set out the functions and objectives for the private institutions and colleges. These objectives (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002) can be summarised as:

1. Providing qualified national human resources required by the Sultanate for its developmental plans in the socio-economic and cultural fields.
2. Providing the opportunity for the preparation of qualified and trained Omani employees required by the labour market to replace foreign expatriate labour.
3. Encouraging and supporting research and scientific studies and providing consultancy to assist the development of private establishments and enhance their efficiency and performance.
4. Preparing and implementing training programmes during the service of nationals in the labour market in order to develop their capabilities and raise the levels of their performance.

Generally, these objectives are consistent with the major aims and purposes of higher education in Oman. However, the aims of higher education have developed with time to become broader, so that, besides preparing qualified people to participate in the

development of the country, it also produces people with ability to cope with new and advanced technologies and aware of the knowledge society. The above objectives are also a guideline for private bodies to take into consideration when thinking of establishing a higher education institution. The detailed and comprehensive vision and mission are left to individual institutions to design in accordance with their goals and objectives. Moreover, these institutions should revise, when appropriate, their mission and vision statements according to the labour market demand and the requirements of the educational process as a whole, since one of the rationales of private institutions is to meet the labour market needs, as addressed in the preceding chapter.

In this phase, the government, while offering the opportunity for the private sector to participate in this field, has also laid down certain conditions and decided to limit the initial awards of colleges to the level of diplomas. Subject to a thorough evaluation and assessment of their performance, colleges may subsequently be allowed to award a first degree. The organising regulation referred to above specifies the academic level of the colleges' academic and educational programmes, which will not exceed two years after General Secondary School. These programmes are university courses provided in collaboration with international recognised institutions of higher education. Graduates of these diploma programmes can continue university education in the institution the college is affiliated with to obtain a Bachelor Degree. Article (27) of Regulatory Ordinance of Private Colleges and Higher Institutions issued by the Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000 (Official Gazette, 2000) has declared this issue:

“The higher education institution shall abide by its agreement with the educational establishment. In case a student wishes to complete at the establishment, the period spent at the higher education institution shall be considered and the student shall resume studies at the appropriate standard in the educational establishment.”

4.3.2 University colleges

The issue of the Royal Decree No. 24/99 in 1999 regarding the establishment of colleges and higher institutions was a further step in development of private higher education in Oman. It provided the platform for the colleges to award the Bachelor Degree in approved specialisations. The Ministry of Higher Education in 2000 also issued a Ministerial Decision issuing the organising regulations for private colleges and higher institutes. The new regulations organised the process of upgrading the existing colleges to university colleges and the establishment of private university colleges. According to the Ministry of

Higher Education (2002), the university colleges can be defined as those offering one or two educational programmes including their different specialisations that admit students holding the General Secondary Certificate or equivalent. The regulations stipulate the duration of the programme, which leads to a first university degree or equivalent.

4.3.3 Private universities

Although private higher education started with the establishment of colleges offering diplomas or bachelor degrees, the private sector called to invest in private universities, which could be financed by the private sector and subsidised by the government. Accordingly, Royal Decree No. 41/99 was issued in 1999, allowing the private sector to establish universities, provided that the majority share capital is held by Omani nationals and that their main objective is not profit-making (Official Gazette, 1999). Executive regulations for these universities' ordinance were stated in the Ministry of Higher Education Decision No. 36/99. These include the establishment procedures, conditions of staff appointment, student affairs, finance and plans of cooperation with higher education institutions at home and abroad.

To keep pace with such rapid development in higher education, some changes had to be made to the structure of the Ministry of Higher Education. As a result, a Royal Decree No. 70/2000 was issued in 2000 to establish the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges (Official Gazette, 2000). The function of this Directorate is to oversee private higher education institutions. Another change equally important was the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) in 2001. The government, recognising the importance of maintaining the quality of higher education in the country in line with international standards, established the OAC to control quality in higher education institutions. For further details of the Council and its functions please see Appendix 4.

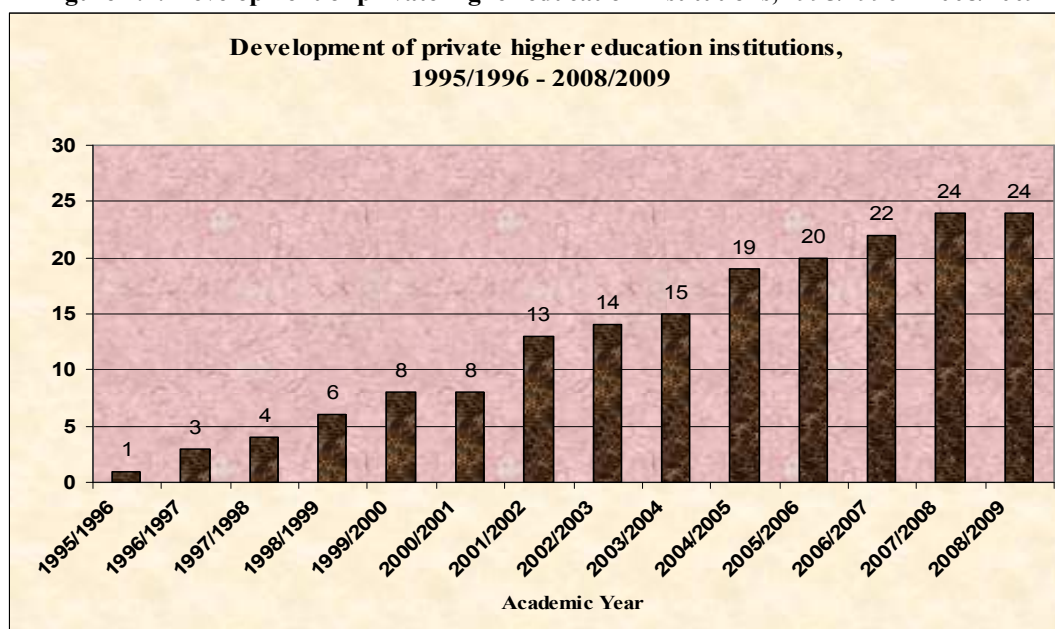
In 2000, approval was given for the establishment of four private universities in different governorates and regions in the country, namely, in Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, and Muscat (for more information about these areas see map of Oman, page 5). Sohar University was approved as the first private university in the Sultanate in 2001. The university is affiliated to Queensland University, Australia. Another two universities, Nizwa and Salalah, were also approved and were established in 2004/2005.

Muscat University has not been established yet. The government have tried to encourage some private colleges to merge in order to form Muscat University. In the

government's view, a merger of some private colleges will help them in promoting quality of education and strengthening their financial situations. However, proposals to merge some private colleges to form the nucleus of 'Muscat University' have twice failed. Conflicts of interest between the investors or owners of these colleges were the main reason behind this failure. The issue of merger of private higher educations will be further highlighted in coming sections of this chapter.

Currently there are twenty-four private higher education institutions (5 universities and 19 colleges) in different areas of the country. Private institutions account for 43.6% of the 55 higher education institutions in Oman. Figure 4.2 below shows the development of private higher education institutions from 1995/1996 to 2008/2009.

Figure 4.2: Development of private higher education institutions, 1995/1996 – 2008/2009



Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

However, due to the governmental regulations, private institutions of higher education are required to affiliate with recognised foreign universities. Table 4.2 below shows private universities and colleges, by the year of establishment and academic affiliation.

Table 4.2: Private universities and colleges in Oman, 2008/2009

University/College	Year established	Governorate/Region	No. of students 2008/2009	Academic affiliation
Sohar University	2001/2002	Al-Batinah	4,588	University of Queensland, Australia
Nizwa University	2004/2005	Al-Dakhilia	5,173	Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Jordanian University, Jordan Oregon State University, USA Leipzig University, Germany University of Exeter, UK University of Reading, UK
Dhofar University	2004/2005	Dhofar	2,153	American University of Beirut, Lebanon
German University of Technology in Oman	2006/2007	Muscat	136	RWTH Aachen University, Germany
Arab Open University	2006/2007	Muscat	1,004	Open University, UK
Majan College	1995/1996	Muscat	1,670	University of Bedfordshire, UK
Modern College of Business & Science	1996/1997	Muscat	806	University of Missouri-St.Louis, USA
Caledonian College of Engineering	1996/1997	Muscat	2,395	Glasgow Caledonian University, UK
Muscat College	1997/1998	Muscat	1,000	Scottish Qualifications Authority Sterling University, UK
International College of Engineering & Management	1998/1999	Muscat	1,067	University of Central Lancashire, UK
Al-Zahra College for Women	1999/2000	Muscat	868	Al-Ahlia Amman University, Jordan
Mazoon College	1999/2000	Muscat	982	University of Missouri, USA
Oman Medical College	2001/2002	Muscat	945	West Virginia University, USA
Sur University College	2001/2002	Al-Sharqia	622	Bond University, Australia
Waljat Colleges of Applied Sciences	2001/2002	Muscat	1,695	Birla Institute of Technology, India
Oman Tourism College	2001/2002	Muscat	320	International Institute of Tourism & Management (ITM), Austria University of Applied Management Sciences, Krems, Austria
Middle East College of Information Technology	2002/2003	Muscat	2,367	Coventry College, UK
Al-Buraimi College	2003/2004	Al-Buraimi	1,565	California State University-Northridge, USA
Scientific College of Design	2004/2005	Muscat	696	Lebanese American University, Lebanon
Oman College of Management & Technology	2004/2005	Al-Batina	668	Al-Yarmouk University, Jordan
Gulf College	2004/2005	Muscat	1,785	University of Staffordshire, UK University of Hull, UK University of Reading, UK
International Maritime College Oman	2005/2006	Muscat	662	Shipping & Transport College, Netherlands
Oman Dental College	2006/2007	Muscat	171	A.B Shetty Memorial Institute of Dental Sciences, India
Al-Bayan College	2006/2007	Muscat	183	Purdue University Calumet, USA

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

It can be observed from the above table that these colleges were founded in the second half of the 1990s. Majan College was established as the first private college in the country. It was an initiative from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, based on its awareness of the financial and other intangible benefits that could be expected from this investment.

As mentioned previously, all private higher education institutions in the Sultanate are required to have an academic affiliation with reputable and recognised international institutions of higher education. Therefore, a letter of understanding of academic affiliation should accompany any application to establish a private institution submitted to the Ministry of Higher Education, and termination of this affiliation should be approved by the ministry:

“The higher education institution shall not break off its affiliation to the educational establishment or make a new affiliation except after obtaining approval from the ministry.” (Official Gazette, 2000: 40)

Eight of these universities/colleges are academically affiliated with British universities, six with American universities, three with Jordanian universities, two with German universities, two with Indian institutes, two with Australian universities, one with a Dutch university, and one with an Austrian university. This affiliation indicates that the majority are tending toward the UK and the USA. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the investors in these institutions have obtained their higher education in those two countries. However, affiliation to universities in other countries is taking place and in a progressive trend; Germany, Australia, Lebanon, and Jordan for example.

It can be seen that in the Omani case, the affiliation is restricted to educational institutions. Unlike Oman, in Chile for example, the affiliation might be with organisations outside of education. Interventions of these affiliated [sponsored] organisations might negatively affect the academic goals of private institutions of higher education. According to Bernasconi (2004: 3), affiliation of a university with an organisation outside of education “may foster distinctiveness by supplying the university with a sense of mission, economic resources, human talent, a set of goals and policies, a development strategy, and a source of legitimacy that comes not from the field of higher education, but from the association of the university with a socially recognised institution”.

The question one might ask is to what extent the affiliation of private universities to external institutions of higher education is consequential and meaningful to the local institutions both academically and financially. According to the Ministry of Higher

Education (2002), the importance of the academic affiliation agreement is to assist the private institution in all technical and educational areas, including curriculum development, follow-up and evaluation of colleges' and universities' academic performance, and the awarding of degrees. While most of the programmes offered by private institutions are entirely affiliated to foreign institutions, the delivery and management are undertaken jointly by the local private institutions and the foreign institutions, while the structure, design, content and assessment of curricular and programmes, along with degrees awarded are the responsibility of the foreign universities. In other words, the major task for most local institutions is to provide administrative facilities, including ensuring buildings and equipment, hiring academics and other support staff, and marketing.

However, from the private institutions' point of view, the expenses paid to the foreign universities constitute a major part of the institution's budget. According to Al-Jahwari (2001), this varies between 10% and 15% of the institution's total revenues, depending on the negotiating abilities of each institution. It can also be pointed out that due to the inexperience of these institutions in this matter, some private institutions suffered acute economic problems when first established.

However, although this affiliation adds some financial burden to the local private higher education institutions, in the end it should assure stakeholders that the quality of education they are receiving is relatively no different than they would receive by going outside the country. In this sense, the extra expenditure on private higher education should pay off when it comes to quality (Chapter Six highlights further details about the role of academic affiliation).

The government body entrusted with the supervision of the private higher education institutions had good reason for requiring the affiliation of these institutions with renowned educational institutions abroad, due to the absence of any local institutions that could assist their academic programmes. Such a situation is by no means unique to Oman; private colleges in Malaysia are also required to affiliate with foreign higher education institutions. Private colleges in Malaysia are not allowed to award degrees, and many private universities lacked the expertise to design their own curricula when they were first established in the mid-1990s (Lee, 2003). Yet demand remains strong for degree programmes and professional courses in the education market. Therefore, many private higher education institutions have entered into formal arrangements with foreign

universities to offer educational programmes ranging from certificate courses to postgraduate programmes (Yusuf, 2003).

However, the motivations to form international linkages can also be viewed from the perspective of the foreign as well as the local institutions. On-going budget cuts for higher education in countries like Australia, for example, have made universities keen to “export” their educational programmes to secure additional revenue. According to Marginson (1997), unlike the Dutch or American idea of creating a dual private-public system with both sectors publicly funded, Australia decided to partially marketise the public universities.

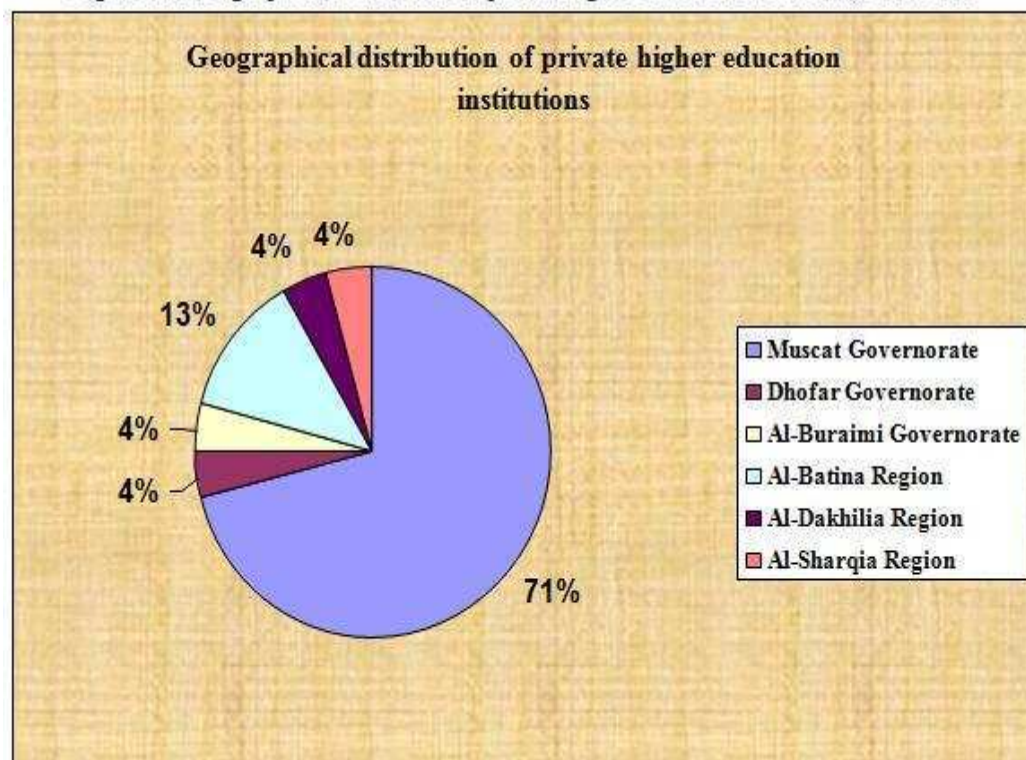
One might ask why Omani private higher education institutions do not affiliate with national public institutions, as is the case in some countries such as India (Gupta, 2004) and Bangladesh (Hopper, 1998) where private institutions are required to be affiliated with national public universities. It can be argued that at present this may not be relevant to the Omani context, since there is only one public university, while the numbers of private higher education institutions are increasing every year, so it would not be possible for all those institutions to collaborate with only one national university. That is why the idea of affiliation with foreign universities arose.

However, it is worth mentioning that despite the financial burden for local institutions, international linkages provide local institutions with the opportunity to enhance staff development in new fields of study. Most activities related to the development of programmes, such as curriculum development, assessment, evaluation, and the award of degrees, are the responsibility of the foreign universities. The local institutions are chiefly responsible for the marketing and delivery of these programmes and qualifications. Moreover, if a particular programme is popular, it then translates into an additional source of income for all parties concerned.

It can also be seen from Table 4.2 above that of twenty-four private higher institutions, two universities and sixteen colleges are situated in the capital (Muscat) area, representing 71% of the total number of private higher education institutions in the Sultanate. This is apart from the other private university, “Muscat University”, planned to be established in the governorate of Muscat. The reason why many investors wish to invest in higher education institutions in the capital can be attributed to the wide range of facilities and utilities available in Muscat. However, governorates and regions like Dhofar, Al-Batina, and Al-Sharqia also have an adequate infrastructure in many facilities and

public services. Figure 4.3 indicates the distribution of private higher education institutions in the different areas of the Sultanate.

Figure 4.3: Geographical distribution of private higher education institutions, 2008/2009



The location of most institutions in the capital could be one of the factors in the weak performance of some colleges. Each one attempts to attract a greater number of students than the others by offering similar programmes. The population in Muscat Governorate is 786,000 according to statistics of the Ministry of Economy (2008), including 423,000 Omanis and 363,000 non-Omanis. More specifically, statistics of population by age group also indicate that the population of the 15-24 years age group in Muscat is 152,908, whereas in Al-Batina it is 178,480 (Ministry of Economy, 2008). The above figures reveal that Muscat has a smaller population compared to Al-Batina Region. It would have been better if these institutions had been established in the more heavily populated regions. In this way they could have absorbed more students, developed and promoted their programmes of study and, as Al-Ramadhani (2003) argues, added other programmes to meet the need for higher education.

In this respect, Oman can learn from the example of other countries that have faced a similar situation. For example, Chen (2002) revealed that in China the first large-scale reform of higher education was put into practice in 1952 and 1953 and the geographical

rationalisation of the higher education layout was one of many aspects in this reform. In order to improve the geographical balance, from 1955 to 1957 a small scale restructuring was initiated by moving some coastal universities to the hinterland, and building other new universities there and many programmes were set according to the sectors' needs. Chen (2002: 51) explains that:

“Geographically, higher educational institutions were located in coastal areas. In 1949, while 79 of the 205 were in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong provinces, there were only 9 in the large north western areas. In the structure of disciplines, there were too many arts, literature, social sciences and humanities programmes on campuses, but few engineering, agriculture, medical sciences, and teachers’ programmes. There were 100 institutions that offered programmes in politics and law, and 70 offered programmes in economics and finance. Students studying engineering, agriculture, and medical sciences accounted for only 31.5% of all enrolments.”

One might ask whether location plays a role in attracting students or influencing their preferences to study at an institution close to them. Although no accurate statistics are available and no survey has been conducted in Oman with regard to the effect of geographical location on students' enrolments in private institutions, there is a general indication that the location of these institutions, to some extent, influences students, especially female, in choosing to study at a particular private higher education institution. For example, most students, particularly females, from Dhofar governorate study at Dhofar University (DU) (Interview with DU's vice-chancellor, April 7, 2009). Similarly, in Al-Dakhilia region where Nizwa University is located, most female students are from that region (Interview with Nizwa University's vice-chancellor, February 10, 2009).

Based on the above and for the benefit of the private higher education institutions, particularly colleges, approval for establishing new private institutions in Muscat should not be given unless they offer new, different programmes. The government has recognised the importance of this issue, and the likely long-term implications for these institutions. It has also taken into consideration geographical distribution in the establishment of private universities. Additionally, advice has been given to some private colleges in Muscat to merge together to form a private university, “Muscat University” in Muscat Governorate, as this idea would encourage provision of high quality education, as well as avoiding duplication of programmes.

An important question one might ask is whether this idea of ‘merger’ suits the situation of private institutions in Oman.

4.4 Does Merger Suit the Omani Case?

Although the issue of merger is not at the heart of this study, a brief overview of international experiences on this theme might be meaningful and would positively serve the private higher education system in the Sultanate. The aim of such a review is to clarify the role expected of these institutions, and to provide evidence of the importance of mergers in assisting small organisations in strengthening their situation, financially and academically.

Goedegebuure & Meek (1994: 128) define merger in higher education as:

“The combination of two or more separate institutions into a single new organisational entity, in which control rests with a single governing body and a single chief executive body, and whereby all assets, liabilities, and responsibilities of the former institutions are transferred to the single new organisation.”

Taking into account that the definition above is not confined only to the academic world, institutional merger is no stranger to higher education. As Goedegebuure & Meek (1994) emphasise, universities over the years have increased their size and reputation through the merger process. Furthermore, many governments have seen mergers as an effective mechanism for structuring and restructuring their respective higher education systems. For instance, in the early 1970s, the Australian and British governments used mergers to create so-called binary systems of higher education by respectively establishing the Colleges of Advanced Education and the Polytechnics as counterparts to universities (Goedegebuure & Meek, 1994). Similarly, in the 1970s merger was a major instrument in the German experiment with the *Gesamthochschulen* and in the Swedish higher education reforms (Skoldberg, 1991). Again, in the 1980s merger was used in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as an efficient mechanism to rationalise teacher training (Goedegebuure & Meek, 1994). A series of mergers continued in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. By the beginning of the third millennium, many universities in the UK had merged. For example, in 2002 the University of North London and London Guildhall University were merged. Similarly, in 2004, Cardiff University and the University of Wales, College of Medicine merged. The Vice-chancellor of Cardiff University (<http://www.cardif.ac.uk>, July 17, 2009), describing this merger, emphasised that “merger created improvements in the student experience, from teaching and learning to support services, exciting new interdisciplinary opportunities and career prospects for staff, and enhanced service and returns for all our many stakeholders, including the National Health Service in Wales”.

In 2007, a new university was created in Scotland as a result of a merger between Paisley University and Bell College. The University of the West of Scotland is now the largest modern university in Scotland. However, not all mergers have gone so smoothly; the merger of Darlington College of Arts and University College Falmouth was not successful, for example (Guardian.co.uk, 2008).

The British government still encourages merger among higher education institutions. In the government's view, mergers ensure adequate funding and better serve students. In an address delivered at a Universities UK event entitled 'The Future Size and Shape of Higher Education Sector', (<http://www.journal-online.co.uk>, July 23, 2009) the Minister of State for Higher Education warned that "in order to survive and prosper, universities will need to consider mergers and seek less conventional sources of funding". The above statement summarises the vision of British strategy towards higher education institutions. This trend, however, was greatly affected by the funding crisis. As the British Minister of State for Higher Education argues, "in the commercial sector there would have to be many mergers over the next few decades-far more than we have seen in higher education".

In the Gulf region context, although merger within education institutions is rare, there was an experiment of merging in the educational field in Bahrain. The national Bahrain University was formed in 1986 through a merger between a local college and polytechnic (Mohammed, 2009).

However, opponents of merger may argue that radical merger is full of risk (Lang, 2002), especially when it involves institutions that are forced or are at least reluctant to be combined. In opponents' view, the act of merger does not always raise the quality of university, but by contrast, might even dampen the enthusiasm of those institutions which have been forcibly merged. However, in the researcher's view, merger is a key option for institutions confronted with threats from the environment, threats usually arising from the actions of other institutions. The rapid enlargement that can be accomplished through merger can supply institutions with more resources, and as Goedegebuure & Meek (1994) argue, rarely is merger a combination of equals; in both the private and public sector merger is often characterised by the strong plundering on the weak.

In short, bigger does not always mean better. Merger between bigger and stronger universities can result in difficulties caused by the mixture of campus cultures, personnel, disciplines, and the pressure of management of large-scale universities. Writers like Lang (2002) and Jansen (2004), for example, oppose merger between bigger and stronger

universities, but support it in the case of smaller and weaker institutions, and also approve of the annexation of smaller and weaker institutions by bigger and stronger universities because of the relative ease with which the former can be manipulated and managed. The above statement implies that mergers among the Omani colleges could be considered as an alternative to establish stronger more fruitful higher education institutions.

In the Omani context, experiments with merger of some private non-educational organisations have already taken place. For example, in the 1990s Al-Ahli Bank and Muscat Bank were merged to form Muscat Bank, which is now one of the strongest banks in the country. Moreover, merger has also taken place among sports clubs around the Sultanate. Although these practices have been encouraged and supported by the government, the initial impetus came from the organisations themselves.

Proceeding from this principle, the government has urged private colleges in Muscat Governorate to merge to form a private university, "University of Muscat". By way of encouragement, the government offered financial support if the undertaking was fulfilled, besides other support such as land, exemption from taxes, etc., and a sum of twenty million Omani Rials (see Chapter Five for further details about governmental subsidies to private higher education).

Nonetheless, the project of merging some private colleges was unsuccessful. This can be attributed to the fact that each college focused mainly on the financial issue, since academic considerations were not seen as a challenge against merger, either in terms of academic affiliations or in terms of programmes and exit points.

Needless to say, unless the initiative comes from those colleges that are to be merged, it will not be successful. In other words, it would be preferable if the initiative derives from the institutions themselves, rather than from the government.

It could be that the current institutions of private higher education are doing quite well financially and in terms of the numbers of students. From a merger point of view, it can be argued here that the private higher education institutions are no different from other enterprises, for example banks; banks unite because they feel they are threatened by other or bigger banks, so they come together in order to have a bigger capital and become stronger and this happens gradually.

However, as the merger process has not proceeded successfully among private colleges in Muscat, Oman's capital, the government has opened the door for serious investors who can provide a good feasibility study for establishing the private 'Muscat University'.

In the researcher's view, if new investors proposed to establish a new university in Muscat, this would be a serious issue for the many private colleges in the same area, and could lead to their closing their doors, especially as enrolment in this university would be preferred by students, to enrolling in colleges. Similarly, a university with good facilities and preparations is more likely to attract academics, either locally or from abroad, than a college. These are issues that Omani private investors must take into consideration.

4.5 Admission Policy in Oman

Highlighting some features of the existing admission system in Oman would be a supportive step before investigating the student population in private higher education and analysing the current capacity of this sector.

In many countries all over the world, school grades and university exams play a significant part in university entrance. For example, Australia, although many universities may use additional criteria such as employment experience, interviews, etc., selects students on the basis of their overall academic achievement, considering this to be the best predictor of academic success (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). In the US, admissions tests in the form of the Standardised Attainment Test (SAT) are much more common (Bollinger, 2005). SATs, according to Bollinger (2005: 6), are standardised tests which examine both general intellectual aptitude in verbal and mathematical reasoning (SAT 1) and subject knowledge (SAT 11). However, SAT 1 has been criticised on the basis that the 'intellectual skills' are indefinable, to which the response is that they test important critical skills in the use of language and the ability to solve problems, for which the best preparation is wide and critical reading rather than cramming (Bollinger, 2005: 6). Unlike the US, in Egypt, students must pass the secondary school exam, or university exam, and a high score (Holmes, 2008) will open doors to dentistry, medicine, pharmacy and engineering, while low scores lead to no admissions or to some humanities subjects where there are fewer job opportunities.

In the Omani context, as in many other GCC countries, the mark obtained in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) is the sole criterion for students' selection. Limited space in the public higher education system prevents many talented and enthusiastic applicants gaining access to higher education (Mohammed, 2009).

This trend has serious consequences concerning higher education access for graduates of secondary schools. As we have mentioned elsewhere, the public higher education system admitted only about 36% of secondary graduates in 2008/2009. In public

higher education there are always more candidates than places. The limited access to this sector means that students who fail to gain admission and cannot afford to pay for tuition opt out of the education system.

The strict admission strategy also affects the students' interest in programmes, since a large number of students are unable to register for their preferred programme, as very high marks in secondary education examinations are required to secure a place on specialisations such as medicine, engineering, health sciences, etc. The result may be that students look for an opportunity to change courses later, or may drop out. The same applies to the type of institution in which students want to study. According to statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), of 18,642 applicants whose first preference was to study at Sultan Qaboos University, 926 students (representing 5%) were enrolled in 2008/2009. Likewise, the total number of students enrolled in the Higher College of Technology was only 1,257 (10.7%) students out of the 11,709 who listed it as their first preference in 2008/2009. In addition, this selective admission policy has an impact to limit the number of female students enrolled in higher education. According to educational statistics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a), of 11,243 female applicants whose first preference was to study at Sultan Qaboos University in 2008/2009, only 415 (3.7%) were enrolled in this institution. In the Omani context, it has been found that females usually achieve higher grades than males in the SSC. This situation has led policy-makers to specify the numbers of female graduates to be admitted to higher education institutions in each year, in order to prevent female applicants outnumbering male students (Al-Hashmi, 2005). Consequently, some institutions allocate no more 50% of the total available seats to female students, irrespective of the number who meet the admission criteria. For example, in 2008/2009 the total number of applicants enrolled at Sultan Qaboos University was 2,722, of which 1,336 were females, forming around 50% (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a).

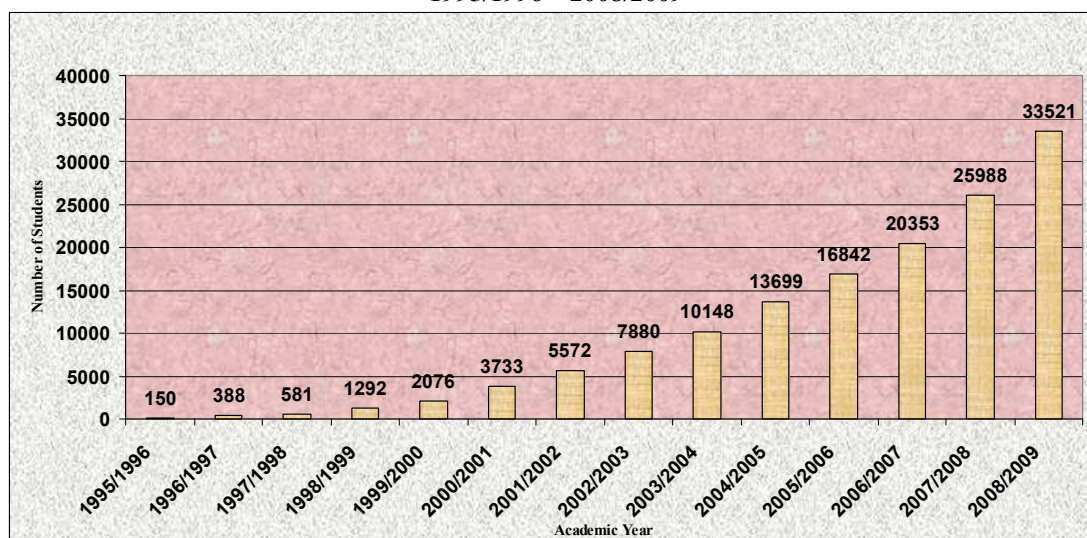
However, the challenge of insufficient institutional capacity is not unique to Oman. Most of the GCC countries (Mohammed, 2009) suffer the same problem, with limited intake capacity of public higher education institutions compared to the growing numbers of secondary school leavers. Similarly, outside the GCC countries, many countries around the world share a similar problem with regard to the limited capacity of public higher education. For example, in Colombia's educational system, public institutions admitted only about 15% of secondary education graduates in 2005 (Uribe, 2005).

Regarding private higher education, the situation is different; with the exception of particular disciplines such as medicine and pharmacy, the entry requirement is to pass the final examination of the SSC. The Minister of Higher Education indicates that the policy of admission to private higher education institutions is set by these institutions in the light of the requirements of individual programmes and disciplines. The pass grade in the Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent is the essential prerequisite for enrolment in private higher education. These institutions determine the number of admissions each year in accordance with their capacity and the criteria for admission to each programme (Al-Busaidia, 2009).

4.5.1 Student population in private higher education

The demand for private higher education is increasing every year with the growing numbers of secondary school leavers. Figure 4.4 shows that the number of students in the private institutions has steadily increased during the last few years. The number of the first batch of students that joined the College of Administrative Sciences (currently Majan College) in 1995/1996 was only 150. By 1997/1998, the total number of students had risen to 581. It increased by 122% in the following year to reach 1,292. By 2008/2009, it was 33,521, an increase of 29%, compared to 25,988 students in academic year 2007/2008. The number of female students in these institutions is 19,329 forming 57.7% of total students, compared to 14,192 male students representing 42.3% (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009b).

Figure 4.4: Development of students registered in private higher education institutions, 1995/1996 – 2008/2009



Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

The increase in enrolment at these institutions is the result of three complementary trends. The first is the increase in numbers of graduates of secondary education level. The second is the limited capacity of the public higher education system to absorb secondary education graduates. The third is the increasing demand for post-secondary education from people outside the traditional student population: adults seeking higher education, either for the first time, for a second degree, or to upgrade their current training.

However, from a review of private higher education statistics, student populations at these institutions can be classified according to educational institutions, financial means, mode of study, gender, and nationality.

In academic year 2008/2009, the five private universities (Nizwa, Dhofar, Sohar, German University of Technology in Oman, and Arab Open University) enrolled 34%, 13,054 students, of the total number of students enrolled in this system, whereas the nineteen private colleges had 20,467 students, 66%. However, there are also variations in the number of students between one university and another. For example, Nizwa University and Sohar University enrolled the greater numbers of students, 5,173 and 4,588 respectively, while the other three universities, Dhofar University, Arab Open University, and German University of Technology in Oman, together enrolled 3,293 students; 2,153, 1,004, and 136 respectively (Table 4.2). If we bear in mind the year of establishment of these institutions, it can be noticed that with the exception of Sohar University, which was created as the first private university in the Sultanate in 2001/2002, the establishment of the remaining universities was relatively close. For instance, Nizwa University and Dhofar University were established in 2004/2005, and the German University and the Arab Open University founded in 2006/2007. However, we can see a difference in the number of students between universities set up in the same period, for example, the German University and the Arab Open University; while the former enrolled 136 students, the latter enrolled 1,004 students. The reason for this can be attributed to two factors. The first is the nature of courses at both universities, and the second is the tuition fees. Courses at the German University are limited and confined to engineering programmes, for which tuition fees are relatively high compared with engineering specialisations at the other Omani private institutions. On the other hand, the Arab Open University is the first and only private institution in the Sultanate to offer an open learning system; moreover the programmes provided are geared towards the humanities, with lower tuition fees than in other higher education institutions in Oman. Accordingly, the proportion of students

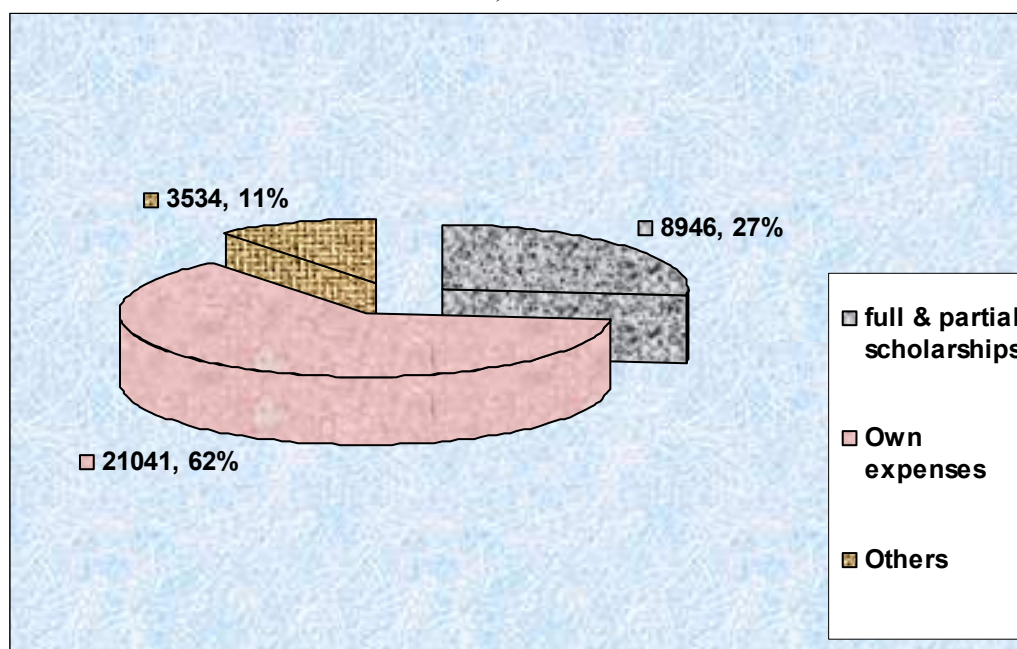
studying in this institution can be expected to be larger. However, academic programmes will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

By and large, it can be said that despite the newness of establishment of private universities compared with colleges, they have been able to attract a third of all private institution students. Perhaps this is due to the multiplicity of programmes offered. In contrast, some colleges, which are considered as the oldest institutions of higher education in the Sultanate enrolled smaller number of students compared to other institutions which were set up after later. For example, in Sur College, which was founded in 2001/2002, the total number of students registered in 2008/2009 was 622, even though the programmes offered by this institution are, to a great extent, similar to those programmes offered in a number of private higher education institutions in the country. Similarly, the Modern College of Business and Sciences, which was established in 1996/1997, had 806 students in 2008/2009. Mazoon College, founded in 1999/2000, has a similar intake; the total number of students in 2008/2009 was 982. In fact, the limited student number in these colleges does not necessarily reflect a policy by these colleges of selecting the best students. Instead, it probably reflects the level of educational services provided by these institutions; besides it is likely an indication of the lack of serious efforts made to attract students from inside and outside the Sultanate (Al-Jahwari, 2004).

4.5.2 Distribution of students according to financial means

Figure 4.5 below indicates that most students in private higher education institutions are studying at their own expense, representing 62% of the total number of students (33,521 students) in 2008/2009. In contrast, the students receiving either full or partial scholarships accounted for 28% of all students in private higher education. The figures show that the largest percentage of students in these institutions were self-funding, unlike the situation in 2002/2003, when around 80% of students enrolled were funded by the government through a scholarship scheme. However, the number of students enrolled in these institutions annually at government expense has not decreased; therefore the change can be attributed to two factors: first, the marketing efficiency of these institutions in attracting a larger numbers of students, and second, a growing culture of private investment in education.

Figure 4.5: Students' distribution in private higher education by financial means, 2008/2009



Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

4.5.3 Students' distribution according to gender and nationality

Gender has hardly been studied in the international literature on private higher education, despite both the great international surge in private higher education and the increased attention to gender equality in general.

Examination of trends in female enrolment in private higher education in Oman shows that the number is slightly higher than the number of male students, forming 57.7% compared to 42.3% male students in 2008/2009 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009b). The increasing number of females attending private universities and colleges in Oman can be attributed to a number of reasons. Not only do many female students prefer to study close to their families, but more male students have had educational opportunities to study outside the Sultanate. Moreover, for social, cultural and financial reasons, some parents prefer to educate their daughters within the country. Additionally, many young males are responsible for supporting families, and so seek employment at early stage. Furthermore, female students are able to compete for the available educational opportunities due to their high grades in secondary education. All these factors have contributed in increasing the number of female students in private higher education institutions. However, this situation is not unique to Oman; private institutions in Kenya for example, face a similar trend, where enrolment of female students slightly exceeds that of male students. For example, in 2000/2001 the number of female students was 4,162 (51%) compared to 3,963 (49%) male

students (Ngome, 2003: 365). However, the reason behind this phenomenon in Kenya, according to Abagi, Nzomo & Otieno (2005), is that female students fail to secure admission into the public universities, forming only 30% of total enrolments in the public universities. As more females than males fail to qualify, they turn to the private universities.

In contrast, the experience of Japanese private higher education shows that although female enrolments have increased a little, they still amounted to only 38% of the four-year university enrolment in 2002 (Nagasawa, 2005). However, private higher education in Japan, where the private sector accounts for 86% of higher education institutions, is characterised by extensive differences across private subtypes. Thus, to understand issues like gender in Japan we should explore the above factor beside the private versus public dimensions. In short, there are associations between gender and private higher education in Japan: (1) fewer females than males in prestigious private universities, and (2) female concentration in the private subsector, which is less prestigious than the public subsector (Nagasawa, 2005).

However, the nature of programmes could also be a factor. This will be discussed later in this chapter, particularly in the section on programmes offered in private higher education in Oman.

Regarding students' distribution according to nationality, the private universities and colleges admit both Omani and non-Omani students, most of the non-Omanis coming from the families of expatriates (the majority from India) working in the country. Academic affiliation could be a factor in expatriates choosing a particular private college. For example, Waljat College, which is affiliated to India's Birla Institute of Technology, enrolled 372 non-Omani students in academic year 2008/2009. This figure was consistent with the results of a survey conducted by *Business Today Magazine* regarding preferences for study in private institutions by Omani and non-Omani students. 20% of expatriate respondents regarded Waljat College as the "best institution as against 3.7% of Omanis" (*Business Today*, 2008: 34).

In academic year 2008/2009, Omani students numbered 32,063 forming 95.7% of the total students, and non-Omanis numbered 1,458, representing 4.3% of the total students at private institutions in the country.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that the rapid development of the student population in private higher education is not necessarily a consequence of the lower tuition and fees in these institutions. Nor does it mean they are preferred to public institutions.

Instead, the regime of internal scholarships adopted by the government since academic year 2000/2001 has played a vital role in increasing the number of students in Oman's private universities and colleges. Additionally, private higher education enrolls a significant number of older, part-time students, who have different requirements that public higher education institutions find it difficult to provide for. Some of these students are employed either in the private or public sectors and others are housewives. In 2008/2009, out of 33,521 students, 3,167 were part-time students (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009b). Moreover, the introduction of open learning by the Arab Open University (AOU) in Oman opened more opportunities for many students whose circumstances either in terms of geographical location or in terms of grades in the secondary school certificate, prevented them from attending traditional or totally face-to-face learning. According to the AOU prospectus (AOU, 2008), the University relies on an open system of education, the main paradigm of which lies in its flexibility to accommodate a wide base of higher education seekers, thereby offering educational opportunities to all qualified applicants in accordance with student need and ability. Moreover, the teaching method in the university is distinctly different from study by correspondence. Unlike distance education, which does not involve face to face interaction between students and instructors, the AOU open learning platform involves a tutoring process that aims, in turn, at promoting a proactive environment for learning. To accommodate working students and those commuting from remote areas, tutorials are scheduled according to their convenience. It is not surprising, then, that the number of students enrolled in this institution reached 1,004 within only two years of its inception (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009b).

However, an important question needs to be asked about the degree of contribution of private higher education in absorption particularly of secondary education leavers. To answer this question, certain indicators such as comparison of inputs in public and private higher education, and students studying abroad, need to be considered.

We have already noticed that enrolments in private higher education increased gradually during the last decade. However, compared to public institutions, private institutions enrolments are still lower. As mentioned previously, private institutions formed 43.6% of total higher education institutions in Oman, which contained 55 institutions (31 public institutions and 24 private institutions) in 2008/2009. According to educational statistics, the total enrolments (diploma & bachelor degrees) in both sectors reached 79,592 students; private higher education represented 37% of total enrolments compared to 63% for public higher education in 2008/2009 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009b). Taking

into consideration the period of establishment of the two systems, it can be argued that the trend of enrolments is geared toward private higher education and it seems to be increasing in the next few years. However, this is subject to the capacity of the private sector and the capability of these institutions, financially and academically, to absorb a large proportion of students. It also depends on whether the admission policy in the public sector will change or will remain as currently applied. In any case, in the Omani context the competition factor seems to be absent. This can be ascribed to the fact that public sector education currently is free of charge. In addition, with the exception of Sultan Qaboos University, most public institutions are also in the process of accreditation. Moreover, the policy of admission in the public sector is still merit-based, in contrast to most private institutions, which accept students with a pass grade in secondary education. For these reasons, increased enrolments would naturally be expected for private higher education institutions.

4.6 Nature of Programmes/Courses Offered

One dominating feature of private universities and colleges in Oman is a strong tendency towards the management and computing fields such as business administration, accounting, financial management, human resources management, computer sciences, etc. In contrast, science specialisations such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, and nursing are not widely provided.

Traditionally, higher education institutions in Oman were established to provide teachers, nurses, and, to a modest extent, financial sciences, in order to keep pace with the country's growth and meet the diversity of development requirements in Oman, economically, socially and culturally. However, these programmes became insufficient to meet the objectives of this stage and the stages to come. Bearing the above rationale in mind, together with the annual increase in the numbers of secondary education graduates, in order to adapt to these conditions, the government encouraged the private sector to assume the role of establishing private universities and colleges, first to meet the increasing demand for higher education that public institutions could not meet, and second to provide a variety of courses and programmes to serve the country's development plans, particularly in the private sector.

Thus, private universities and colleges responded to this demand by creating programmes in marketing, business, computing, management, engineering and medicine, among others.

However, in most private institutions in Oman, programmes in medicine, engineering and science specialisations constitute an insignificant component of the curriculum. The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the cost factor as these are capital-intensive courses demanding heavy investment. In addition, such courses are time-demanding, expensive to set up and require qualified personnel who are often in short supply and who can demand high salaries. Most private institutions, therefore, have shied away from mounting such programmes. What most of them have done is provide a middle ground between programmes in high demand and cost considerations. This explains the proliferation of ‘market courses’ such as accounting, marketing, business and computing, among others. Table 4.3 below indicates undergraduate courses currently offered in private institutions.

Table 4.3: Programmes & qualifications awarded by private higher education, 2008/2009

Institution	Programmes of study	Language of Instruction	Qualification
Sohar University	Business studies, Applied sciences, Engineering, Computer studies	English	Diploma/BA/BSc
Dhofar University	Arts & Applied sciences, Commerce & business administration, Engineering, Computer studies	English	Diploma/BA/BSc
Nizwa University	Arts & Applied sciences, Engineering, Pharmacy & Nursing, Computer studies	English	Diploma/BA/BSc/ Master
German University of Technology in Oman	Engineering, Information Technology, Management & tourism	English	BSc
Arab Open University	Computer studies, Business administration, English literature	English	BA/BSc
Majan College	Business administration, Computer studies	English	Diploma/BA
Modern College of Business and Science	Business administration, Computer studies	English	Diploma/BA
Caledonian College of Engineering	Engineering	English	Diploma/BSc (Honours/Ordinary)
A'Zahra College for Women	Business Studies, Computer sciences	Arabic & English	Diploma/BA
Mazoon College	Business studies, Computer sciences	English	Diploma/BA
Oman Medical College	Medicine, Pharmacy	English	BSc/MD
Sur University College	Management sciences, Computer studies	English	Diploma/BA
Waljat Colleges of Applied Sciences	Engineering, Computer sciences, Business studies	English	Diploma/BSc
Middle East College of Information Technology	Computer sciences	English	BSc
Al Buraimi College	Computer sciences, Business studies	English	Diploma/BA

Table 4.3: (Continued)

Scientific College of Design	Graphic design	English	Diploma/BA
Oman College of Management & Technology	Business studies, Computer sciences	English	Diploma/BA
Gulf College	Business studies, Computer sciences	English	Diploma/BA (Honours/Ordinary)
Muscat College	Business studies	English	Diploma/BA
International College of Engineering & Management	Fire safety engineering, Well engineering	English	Diploma/BSc
Oman Tourism College	Tourism and hospitality management	English	Diploma
International Maritime College Oman	Marine engineering, port & transport management	English	BSc
Al-Bayan College	Media studies	English	Diploma/BA
Oman Dental College	Dental surgery	English	BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery)

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

Although at the present stage most programmes are offered through affiliation agreements between the Omani private institutions and foreign universities, local institutions can offer their own programmes if they so wish, and if they have the resources required to provide accredited programmes and qualifications. Table 4.4 below shows the distribution of students by field of study in 2008/2009.

Table 4.4: Students in private universities & colleges by field of study, 2008/2009

Field of study	Omani			Non-Omani			Total			% of total
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Foundation programme	3,586	3,683	7,269	212	48	270	3,798	3,741	7,539	22.5
Medicine & health sciences	72	543	615	39	73	112	111	616	724	2.1
Pharmacology	166	1,259	1,425	1	29	30	167	1,288	1,455	4.3
Engineering	2,354	1,228	3,582	210	75	285	2,564	1,303	3,867	11.5
Sciences	80	306	386	3	15	18	83	321	404	1.2
Computer studies	2,130	2,397	4,527	89	60	149	2,219	2,457	4,676	14
Arts & Humanities	643	4,185	4,819	18	32	50	683	4,217	4,900	14.6
Commerce & administrative sciences	3,988	3,563	7,553	338	196	534	4,326	3,761	8,087	24.1
Education	105	1,517	1,622	0	0	0	105	1,517	1,622	4.9
Other subjects	151	108	259	7	3	10	158	111	269	0.8
Total	13,275	18,788	32,063	917	541	1,452	1,458	14,192	19,329	100
Grand total	33,521									

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

In addition to undergraduate programmes, private institutions also deliver a few master programmes, mostly in business administration. In most cases, they use the same staff, hiring local academics, and if they bring in any specialists, they do so for short periods to offer intensive courses. Table 4.5 shows master programmes in private institutions.

Table 4.5: Master programmes in private higher education, 2008/2009

Institution	Specialisation	No. students	Total
Sohar University	Educational Administration,	91	257
	Curriculum Instruction	166	
Nizwa University	Psychological Counselling	233	583
	Educational Administration	182	
	Arabic Language & Literature	168	
Majan College	Business Administration	164	184
	Teaching English Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)	20	
Caledonian College	Management Information Systems	14	32
	Maintenance Management	5	
	Process Engineering	13	
Mazoon College	Information Technology	19	19
Waljat College	Business Administration	86	86
Middle East College of Information Technology	Business Administration (IT)	55	55
Gulf College	Business Administration	153	163
	International Security Studies	10	
Total No. of students		1,379	

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

As shown in Table 4.3, Table 4.4, and Table 4.5 above of programmes and degrees offered, the following points can be presented:

1. There are two categories of private higher education institutions: colleges and universities. These institutions offer both Diploma and Bachelor Degree programmes. If a given student obtains a Diploma in a particular private institution locally, he/she is enabled, if he/she so wishes, to complete his/her degree at the university with which the private institution is affiliated, or at any university that follows the same system.

Regarding students' academic rights, Article 27 of the Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000 pointed out that:

“The higher education institution shall abide by its agreement with the educational establishment, the period spent at the higher education institution shall be considered and the student shall resume studies at the appropriate standard of educational establishment.”

(Official Gazette, 2000: 40)

2. As noted from Table 4.3 there are three different types of degrees awarded by private institutions: Diploma, Bachelor Degree, and Doctor of Medicine (MD).

However, the title of some degrees creates confusion among students as well as employers. For instance, the Diploma and Higher Diploma are both similar with regard to the academic weight. Unlike the former case, Bachelor (Honours) and Bachelor (Ordinary) differ with regard to the academic weight. The former is equivalent to a Bachelor Degree, while the latter is equivalent to an Advanced Diploma (Caledonian College of Engineering, 2004). However, because of the similarity in names, students may think that both are of equal standing. Thus, the institutions should make this clear to the students in advance, by including this information in their prospectus. It is also the government's responsibility to set regulations to protect students' rights. To this end, the Ministry of Higher Education has set certain conditions to ensure the validation of these certificates in order to secure the rights of students who study in these institutions. The Regulatory Ordinance for Private Universities and Colleges provided that the higher education institution shall have an internal system of regulations to be approved by the Ministry. It shall specifically include the objectives of the institution, its system of study as per the approved programmes and degrees awarded (Official Gazette, 2000, 2000). In addition, the Oman Accreditation Council issued a document of "Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ROSQA). This document contains key elements of the overall quality assurance framework, including the national qualifications framework, the processes for evaluating accrediting higher education institutions, and a guideline about institution and programme accreditation (Oman Accreditation Council, 2008).

3. It is evident from the previous review of these institutions that English is the main language of instruction in all private universities/colleges except one college (A'Zahra College for Women) which teaches in both Arabic and English. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that English is the language required by the labour market. No one can ignore the importance of the English Language today, not only in Oman where it is used as a second language, but globally as well.

It has been argued that in order for the Sultanate to participate successfully in today's global economy, Omani citizens must be competent users of the English language (Ministry of Education, 1995). However, most secondary school graduates face a lack of proficiency in English. This can be considered as one of the challenges facing private higher education institutions, since a considerable number of students study in private universities of different Arab countries where teaching is mainly in Arabic. Those students

may be at a disadvantage in finding a job, particularly in private sector where English is the operational language. To tackle this issue, private institutions offer foundation programmes for students who do not have the required proficiency in English prior to taking up the specialisation courses. The level of proficiency is tested by these institutions and, depending on the outcome of the placement tests, assessment would be made. Deficient students may take up to 3 semesters (around ten months) of preparatory studies subject to passing all requirements. As Table 4.4 above indicates, students in foundation programmes accounted for 22.5% of total students in 2008/2009. This means that the majority of secondary school graduates have to go to a foundation programme, not directly to the academic course.

However, foundation programmes should not be the sole option for preparing applicants to study in English. Students must be given intensive courses in secondary school, to make it easy for them to make a smooth transition to these institutions. By so doing, time, money, and efforts will be saved. Students would not have to spend extra expenses for a foundation year. Also, the government could offer more scholarships if students directly attended academic programmes.

It can be suggested here that, although it is a part of the Ministry of Education's aim to align the objectives and functions of secondary education to meet the new realities of the 21st century (Ministry of Education, 2002), correlation and cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education in terms of knowledge, skills and methodology of teaching in secondary education level need to be strengthened.

4. Private higher education institutions differ in their market. Most of them offer a wide range of programmes in various field of study, while a few others specialise in particular areas. It can be seen from Table 4.3 that fifteen of the twenty-four private institutions offer programmes in business administration, financial studies, and computer studies. However, only four of these institutions offer specialisation in Medicine Sciences, Engineering, Media studies, and Tourism. These specialisations, as mentioned earlier, are provided based on assumptions about the needs of the labour market.

Most of these institutions are concentrated in the areas of business studies and computing, which are those with a high potential for paying students. Private higher education institutions are business and market-oriented, not only in the developing countries but also in industrialised ones. Altbach (1998: 3) supports this view, arguing that:

“Private higher education is very much influenced by the market. Even the prestigious private universities in the United States and Japan must concern themselves with their reputation and their place among the other universities, both nationally and internationally. Less prestigious and newer private institutions must be even more concerned about market forces, competition from other educational institutions, trends in the employment market, and other factors.”

However, another feature of private institutions in the country is that there is a lot of duplication in the fields of study offered and most of these institutions offer similar programmes. Table 4.4 shows that there is an obvious imbalance, especially if the practical needs of Oman are taken into consideration. Although all education is desirable and useful to an extent, medicine, health sciences, pharmacology, engineering, and sciences account for only 19% of the total, whereas computer sciences and administrative sciences form 38% of the total programmes offered. The remainder are in the areas of the humanities and social sciences (see Table 4.4). This to a certain extent reflects the fact that the private sector tends to offer courses that more easily achieve profitability by requiring less expensive equipment and therefore are easier and cheaper to offer.

From the foregoing, some questions might be raised. For example, what is the relevance of the programmes to the labour market? To what extent is there cooperation and coordination between the government, the private sector and private higher education in determining the programmes required? The following section will attempt to shed light on these issues.

4.7 Relevance of Programmes to the Labour Market

Teichler (1999: 286) points out that at the beginning of the 21st century, the connection between higher education and the world of work is again among the key issues of debate whenever challenges for ‘innovation in higher education are at stake’.

In the 1990s, policy makers and institution managers in many developing countries inspired by reports from international organisations such as the World Bank and UNESCO, began diversifying major offerings based on the notion that traditional options were ill-suited to the demands of the new knowledge-based society (De Vries, Cabrera and Anderson, 2009). These policies were mostly based on expectations for future regional economies. To this end, students were advised, encouraged, and sometimes pressed to avoid majors that were not well matched to labour market needs (De Vries *et al.* 2009).

The Omani higher education system is no exception to the global trend of education. We have mentioned earlier that one of the aims of private higher education was to prepare the qualified national work force needed by the labour market.

Although most programmes offered in private institutions are market-driven, public institutions also reformed some of their programmes following trends of the market. For example, in 1990s the Sultan Qaboos University closed its department of philosophy due to the fact that graduates in that major faced great difficulty in finding suitable jobs. Likewise, since 2004, Education Colleges under the Ministry of Higher Education have also been reformed to become Colleges of Applied Sciences, offering courses in engineering, information and communication, and public administration, among other majors. Consequently, these colleges no longer offer Education as a major. Indeed, most of the current programmes offered are designed to meet the needs of private sector enterprises. Furthermore, funding decisions with regard to some public institutions have also been made that encourage new majors.

Moreover, students who study at their own expense, either locally in private institutions or abroad, are always advised and encouraged by the government to opt for specialisations needed by the labour market sectors in the country. The Minister of Higher Education emphasised this view, stating that:

“The Ministry works to provide advice and guidance to students and their parents whom their children study abroad at their own expense, about recognised universities and courses they offer, and their consistency with the needs of labour sectors in the Sultanate.”

(Al-Watan Newspaper, March 23, 2009: 3)

As mentioned above, many governments around the world have reformed their higher education based on the changing demands of the labour market. For example, in Latin American countries, “two decades of policies based on the assumption of saturated majors have modified the systems of higher education throughout Latin America” (De Vries *et al.* 2009: 21). In almost all countries in Latin America, governments have created new majors or new institutions. In addition, funding has been assigned to particular programmes, qualified staff appointed, and equipment obtained to create attractive alternatives. Not only this, but also students were also advised and encouraged to avoid majors such as law, accountancy, medicine, administration, or civil engineering and to choose options like nanotechnology, tourism, design, or environmental engineering (De Vries *et al.* 2009).

Although globalisation has influenced countries worldwide to modify their education systems based on the requirements of this phenomenon, social and economic dimensions and priorities vary from one country to another. In other words, some programmes and courses that may go well with and meet the needs of Latin America's labour market do not necessarily suit the Omani labour market, at least in the current stage. For example, while majors like medicine and civil engineering, are encouraged less in Latin America, these majors are in high demand in the Omani case, while the converse applies with regard to specialisations like nanotechnology and ecotourism, for example.

As noticed above, in recent decades, there has been rapid growth of higher education across many countries. This, according to Machin and McNally (2007), has had important and profound impacts on labour markets and on the way in which employers use highly educated labour. They suggest that expansion of higher education has been founded on the assumption that more education is good for individuals, employers, and for society as a whole, both economically and socially. In terms of economic outcomes, it promotes wages or employment, and in terms of social outcomes, more education leads to improved health, reduced crime and greater well-being. By and large, there is an ongoing debate with regard the above statement.

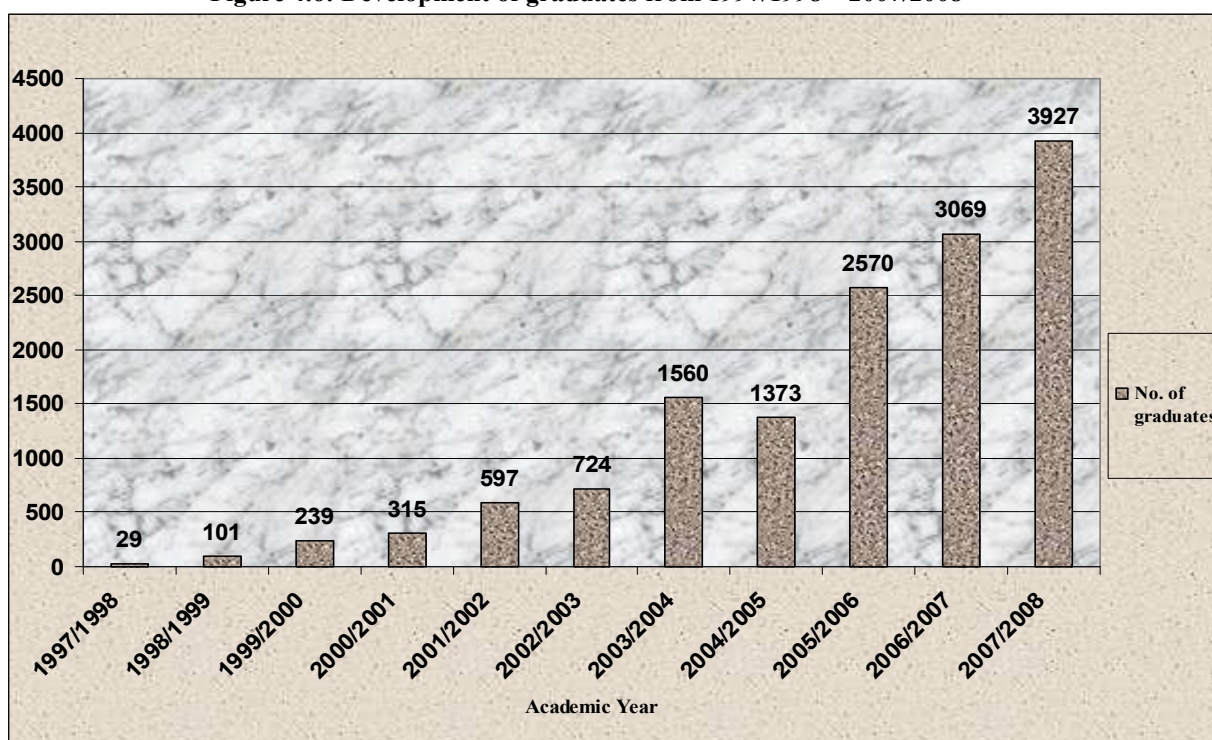
Many writers (De Weert, 2007; Machin and McNally, 2007) argue that unless employers demand more graduates, 'over-supply' and/or 'over-qualification' might lead to a reduction in the wage premium, as employers have a wider range of similarly qualified people to select from. The wage premium depends on the interaction of demand and supply. As Machin and McNally (2007) emphasise, in many countries, although there has been continued expansion of higher education in the last decade, the wage premium attached to higher education has increased. They assert that 'under-supply' is more of an issue and concerns about the 'over-supply' or 'over-qualification' of graduates are misplaced. The above statement also reveals that the existence of over-qualified individuals in the workforce does not mean that there is an over-supply of graduates. Therefore, skill mismatch or inadequate levels of skill are likely to be more of a problem than over-qualification. The increase in global market competition has given rise to the need to produce graduates able to meet the skill needs of the modern employment world. Relevance in higher education should be assessed in terms of link between what the labour market expects of institutions and what they do. Consistent with the above premise, Yusuf (2003) emphasised that success in the graduate labour market is characteristically defined

as graduates securing employment in jobs which make appropriate use of the skills and knowledge developed in the course of their university studies.

Regarding the developing countries, it can be argued that the relationship between higher education and the labour market is in at a crossroads. In a study by Bibtanah (1990) on higher education and the lack of linkage between it and the labour market, he found that this is a problem particularly in the developing countries, where the separation between the two sides is very clear.

In the Omani case, the growth in student enrolments in private institutions is reflected gradually in graduates' population. The number of graduates from these institutions rose from 29 in 1997/1998 to 101 in the following year. In 2007/2008, the total number of graduates was 3,927. Figure 4.6 below indicates the development of graduates from private higher education from 1997/1998 to 2007/2008.

Figure 4.6: Development of graduates from 1997/1998 – 2007/2008



Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

As shown in Figure 4.6 above, there is a remarkable development in the number of graduates of private institutions. However, there is a lack of comprehensive data on the relationship between higher education and the labour market in Oman, such as labour market requirements of disciplines and the various programmes, employment rates, the number of entrants to the labour market of higher education graduates, and the role of

higher education institutions in providing students with adequate knowledge and skills that qualify them to engage smoothly in the labour market, among others. Consequently, it may be illogical to judge, at least for the time being, the degree of the relevance of these graduates to the requirements of the labour market.

As shown earlier in Chapter Three, employment in the private sector requires a large number of qualified Omanis as planned in ‘Vision 2020’, both programmes and graduates’ skills need to be assessed. In other words, the changing requirements of the labour market should be considered by the higher education institutions, and programmes offered by private institutions should be evaluated by the Oman Accreditation Council. Additionally, graduates need to be tracked and evaluated to ensure that their skills match labour market demands. Taking into account that up to now, more than ten cohorts have graduated from these institutions; their performance in the world of work must be assessed. Also, as only a few private institutions offer specialised scientific programmes, while the majority are geared towards graduating nationals in business studies and computing, as mentioned earlier, evaluating their activity will be of great value for all stakeholders.

Although it is difficult to realise the direct linkage between the higher education and the labour market (Hills, Robertson, Walker, Adey & Nixon, 2003), there is an urgent need to attempt to harmonise the two in the interest of the graduates, to enable them find job opportunities suitable for their qualification and ambitions, and to meet the requirements of the labour market.

A very crucial question one might ask is whether the skills of graduates of these institutions meet labour market demands. Are students studying the ‘right type’ of subjects? And is there now an ‘over-supply’ or ‘over-qualification’ creating challenge for graduates, employers, and society as a whole?

Based on the above, it becomes obvious that there is an urgent need for conducting a graduate survey in the Sultanate to study the role of the curriculum in higher education institutions in educating and preparing qualified students with the knowledge and skills necessary to join the labour market on the one hand, and to investigate the extent of relevance of the graduates of these institutions to the needs of the labour market and requirements of the comprehensive development on the other hand.

However, the government has realised the importance of this issue. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has repeatedly called for the development of human resources in terms of education, training and employment. On the occasion of the annual cabinet meeting, on August 26, 2008, he reviewed education policies in relation to their output and available

job opportunities, at the same time, directing the government to assess these policies with a clear and comprehensive vision (*Oman Daily Observer*, August 27, 2008).

Recognising the significance of this theme, the Ministry of Higher Education of Oman, in cooperation with the Centre for Higher Education Research, University of Kassel, Germany, is currently working on a project called the 'Graduate Survey Project'. This project is the first of its kind in Oman, and perhaps in the Gulf region, which is applied at the level of universities and colleges to evaluate their outputs through the assessment of three cohorts of graduates. This project aims, in the first place, to evaluate these outcomes in terms of graduates' knowledge, skills, competencies and their eligibility to move to different employment sectors. It also examines the suitability of the disciplines offered in these institutions to labour sectors. Undoubtedly, this will contribute to the enrichment of higher education programmes. Additionally, the indicators and data derived from this project will serve policy makers and decision makers concerned with the sector of higher education, employers, professional associations, students expecting to enrol in higher education and their parents, and career guidance organisations. Furthermore, the information provided by this project will support the process of accreditation and quality assurance implemented by the Accreditation Council.

To conclude this section, it can be suggested that it is necessary to set a long term strategy for private higher education graduates. To achieve this goal, it is important to form a joint committee comprising private and governmental higher education and the private sector. The task of this committee would be to identify the existing specialisations and the specialisations needed for comprehensive and continuous development. Recently, the Ministry of Higher Education has taken the initiative to fulfil the above objective. As the Minister of Higher Education points out:

“Due to the importance of the harmonisation of higher education and the requirements of employment sectors, the ministry sought to coordinate efforts with the Ministry of Manpower, through the formation of a joint committee to obtain data on the disciplines required by the sectors of work. The Ministry is also periodically writes relevant organisations such as the Ministry of National Economy, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Civil Service, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Oman, and military institutions for the latest data on the disciplines required. These data are used by the Ministry as a guideline for determining the scholarship programmes on the one hand and dissemination to institutions of higher education to be invested in making new specializations.”

(Interview with the Minister of Higher Education, September 7, 2009)

An important point to emphasise is that private higher education should play a vital role in promoting this goal, through establishment of a solid academic infrastructure. In other words, higher education institutions should create an academic environment that develops students with a concrete base of knowledge, innovation and creative thinking. To accomplish this objective, certain procedures should be adopted. First, sufficient and qualified academics should be employed. Second, students' theoretical knowledge should be sharpened through internship or practical activities. Third, educational assistance services such as laboratories and libraries should be established.

While these issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Eight and Nine, the following section highlights the situation of academic staff in these institutions.

4.8 The Contribution of Omani Academic Staff

Oman, like many other countries in the Gulf, relies heavily on academics from different countries in its higher education institutions. Altbach (2004) points out that many scholars, particularly from various Arab countries, working in the Gulf States universities, are not national citizens. He attributes this situation to the availability of better working conditions on the one hand, and to the shortage of local academic staff in these institutions on the other. It can be said that the significance of national scholars can be derived from certain criteria. Nationals can be more active in serving their societies, due to their knowledge and experience about their own countries' issues. In addition, they can play a pivotal role in promoting scientific research, through establishment of communication channels between higher education institutions and governmental and private organisations. This, undoubtedly, will create a degree of cooperation between these sectors and also will encourage and assist these organisations to fund some research in higher education institutions.

The limited contribution of Omani academics in higher education can be considered as a challenge for these institutions, and this is significantly noticeable in private higher education. Table 4.6 shows the level of contribution of citizens in the teaching staff of private higher education.

Table 4.6: Omanisation in private higher education, 2008/2009

Staff	Nationality			% of Omani
	Omani	Non-Omani	Total	
Academic staff	179	1,212	1,391	13
Administrative staff	523	253	776	67.4
Assistant academic staff	339	160	499	68
Other support staff	351	124	475	74
Total	1,392	1,749	3,141	44.3

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2009b), Oman.

In 2008/2009, the total number of staff in private institutions was 3,141, of which Omanis constituted 1,392, forming 44.3% of the total staff in these institutions. As can be seen from Table 4.6 above, the total employees (Omanis and non-Omanis) in administrative and assistant academic posts was 1,275, of which 862 were Omani citizens, representing 67.6% of the total employees. However, the percentage of Omanis among academic staff does not exceed 13%, including part-time lecturers. This situation could be due to the scarcity of highly qualified Omanis.

However, shortage of Omani academic staff is not only a problem of private higher education. For example, the percentage of Omani academic staff does not exceed 17% in some state higher education institutions such as Health Institutes and Colleges of Technology (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a). The government, however, has realised the importance of Omanisation in academic circles. To this end, it has embarked on a programme of sending talented professionals from different higher education institutions, as well as governmental organisations, to continue their postgraduate education. In this regard, educational statistics reveal that the total number of post-graduate students (Masters and PhDs) studying on scholarships from the Ministry of Higher Education was around 126 in 2007/2008. During the academic year 2008/2009, more than twenty employees were sent on post-graduate scholarships (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a). Regarding the Ministry of Higher Education's plan for Omanisation of academic teaching staff in the Colleges of Applied Sciences, Al-Busaidia (2009) points out that the percentage of Omani academic staff in these colleges reached 23% in academic year 2007/2008, while the academic support staff and administrative staff were completely Omanised. She also emphasised that the Ministry has set an annual scholarship plan for Omanising the academic circles in these colleges, and currently there are forty students on a scholarship programme studying for Masters and Ph.D degrees in specialisations related

to these colleges. It is clear that the percentage of non-Omani teaching staff is higher compared with academic support staff, who are all Omanis. This can be attributed, in the case of Colleges of Applied Sciences, to the fact that these colleges, as mentioned earlier, were established relatively recently.

Regarding mechanisms of promoting Omani academics in private higher education, one of the objectives adopted for the Ministry of Higher Education in the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan ‘2006-2010’ states that the “Ministry should raise and encourage Omanisation rates in colleges under its supervision, and in private higher universities and colleges” (Ministry of National Economy, 2009b: 432).

Reflecting the interest in the subject of Omanisation in the private higher education sector, a joint committee was formed whose members include the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Manpower, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Oman, and representatives of the private higher education institutions. One outcome of the meetings of this committee is the Ministry of Manpower's Decision No. 25/2006 which determines the proportion of Omanis in the private higher education institutions, as shown in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7: Percentage of Omanisation proposed for private higher education

Employment	Year & percentage of Omanisation				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Academic	8%	10%	12%	14%	16%
Non-Academic	62%	65%	68%	71%	74%

Source: Official Gazette (2006), Oman.

The aim behind this procedure is to promote a higher proportion of skilled Omanis working in the field of higher education.

However, although most of these institutions have achieved the desired rates of Omanisation among non-academics, as indicated in Table 4.6 above, private institutions are still heavily dependent on non-Omanis to occupy academic posts. A number of private institutions have appointed a small number of distinguished former students as academic staff, but this practice remains on a very limited scale.

It is worth mentioning in this regard that Omanisation in the academic field, or any other field, must not be at the expense of quality. Moreover, Omanisation does not mean that academics should be totally Omanised, since it is important that these institutions have diversity in both students and staff. Also, the diversity of academic experiences is an important requirement to enrich in the educational process and research alike. However,

the intention of Omanisation here is to make a balance between the Omanis and non-Omanis in academic posts. Therefore, in order to promote the academic contributions of nationals at private higher education institutions, certain elements are suggested in favour of this theme. First, higher education institutions should take the financial responsibility to develop their human resources, whether in administrative or academic positions. Second, a portion of their income should be allocated for enhancement of nationals in academic fields. Third, private higher education institutions can benefit from their academic affiliation and cooperation in finding grants or scholarships for their privileged students to continue post-graduate studies at those universities. Fourth, private institutions that receive approval to offer Master programme/s should provide a number of free places for their outstanding students.

The above are suggestions, but the most important issue is the earnest desire of these institutions to promote and equip Omani academia, especially with the increasing number of Omanis obtaining higher qualifications. To achieve this goal, certain initiatives should be adopted. For example, good salaries and other incentives should be offered to attract qualified Omanis, in addition to a strategy of sending privileged students on scholarships to continue their post-graduate studies abroad, to be employed later in these institutions. Up to date, a clear strategy and/or regulations related this subject do not exist in most of the private higher education institutions in the country.

4.9 Summary

Private higher education in Oman, as in many countries in the world, is a new phenomenon, with all private universities and colleges established in the second half of the 1990s. It has been noted that private higher education was established in several steps. First colleges offered two-year diploma courses, then three-year higher education diplomas, and eventually, university colleges and universities offered bachelor degrees. One reason for these developmental stages, as shown in this chapter, is the fact that the experiment of private higher education is relatively new, and the government was keen to ensure its success, and also to monitor to what degree these institutions can achieve the intended objectives from their establishment.

It has been noted that private higher education institutions in Oman in their present state of development face new realities, and there are certain tasks and challenges which they need to address. This chapter has reviewed some of these challenges facing this sector. Among these challenges are the limited capacity of these institutions, their inability

to contribute effectively in research activities, and the fact that most programmes offered in these institutions are geared toward business and computing. For private higher education to continue its functions, funding resources must be diversified, and quality should be one of the top priorities among senior managements and academics alike. The next two chapters, therefore, will investigate these themes in greater details. The current means of private higher education funding in Oman and its potential impact on these institutions will be examined in Chapter Five, and the regulatory mechanisms for assuring quality will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five

Funding Mechanisms and Financial Regulations of Private Higher Education

“In the wake of higher education expansion, growing fiscal problems, and the increasing popularity of neoliberal economic doctrines, private funding and the privatisation of higher education institutions have gained ground in many countries traditionally dominated by public higher education.” Ulrich Teichler (2003: 22)

5.1 Introduction

Enrolment growth, among many other new pressures, has raised financing and quality issues in both advanced and developing countries. According to Clark (1998), most systems of higher education during the last two decades have become more competitive, more diverse in their students, less well funded, more efficient as measured by external criteria, and increasingly expected to serve national, regional and local needs. Therefore, the higher education system in many countries has increasingly been seen as part of the country's trade policy.

In line with those trends, Oman's higher education system has been no exception to the international mobility and changes of higher education systems. There has been increasing demand for higher education, economically and socially, compared to a limitation in the capacity of the higher education system to absorb the growing population of secondary school graduates, together with the phenomenon of participation of private higher education institutions. All these have put government under pressure, and caused it to rethink seriously the issues of funding and quality in the system of higher education in Oman.

In this chapter, the issue of financing of higher education systems worldwide and in Oman particularly will be discussed. The aim of this chapter is to discuss different models of financing higher education systems, with special reference to private higher education. To accomplish this objective, certain themes will be examined. Experiments of diverse models and mechanisms of financing higher education institutions across different countries will be mentioned. Moreover, strategies for helping students and their families will be discussed. The aim in so doing is to identify a suitable model that can be adopted and applied in the Omani system of higher education on the one hand, and to offer some

suggestions to overcome the challenge of financing, particularly in private higher education on the other hand. While this chapter examines the financing aspect, the issue of quality in higher education will be the main subject of the next chapter.

However, for the better understanding of the issue of financing higher education institutions, a quick comparison of international public education expenditure on this sector will be made in the following section

5.2 Public versus Private Finance

The debate about financing higher education has not been concerned only with funding of institutions. Equally important is financial support for students. Of course, these are interrelated issues and literature (OECD, 1990; World Bank, 1994; Sanyal, 1998; Bray, 2000; Bloom, Hartley & Rosovsky, 2006) describes a wide range of funding arrangements and financial resources that are possible means for assisting higher education expansion. These may include improving efficient utilisation of resources, encouraging income generation, adopting cost recovery policies including cost-sharing with students either in terms of tuition fees or student loans, and also through private sector provision of higher education.

Differences of views on education as a public good or private good are attributable, in the first place, to the fact that there is no agreement on these concepts either among scholars or among the people (Psacharopoulos, 1999).

Supporters of the idea that education should be partly privately funded argue that this is because the benefits of higher education are thought to accrue to both individuals and to society as a whole. Consequently, as the World Bank (1994) claims, it is generally accepted that education is a shared responsibility between students and/or their families and the State. For individuals, the benefits of higher education take the form of personal, cultural and economic rewards. For example, in most cases it is observed that the private rates of return for higher education are greater than the returns to society (Psacharopoulos, 1994). Based on such observations, recent policy recommendations have suggested that the 'consumers' of higher education should be the ones who should pay, rather than the government (Saha, 1991; World Bank, 1994). This perspective perceives education as an investment in human capital and as Larrain and Zurita (2008. 685) argue, the decision to pursue a study programme is similar to a decision to invest in physical capital. This is consistent with the main idea of human capital theory which precisely means that the

greater subsequent income represents compensation for the investment made (Larrain and Zurita, 2008).

The relatively high private rates of return to investments in higher education compared with the social rates of return justify large investments by individuals. According to Bloom *et al.* (2006), in almost all cases, graduates typically enjoy considerable advantages over non-graduates in the labour market. An estimation of the regression-based rate of return on investment in schooling in the United States from 1964 to 2002 indicates that the rate of return on investments on education has increased over time, from nearly 7% to roughly 12% per year over a 40-year period. During the same period, there was a steady increase in the percentage of full-time U.S. workers with a college degree, from 12% in 1964 to 31% in 2002 (Bloom *et al.* 2006: 296). Another study conducted in Brazil in 2002 revealed that incomes of persons with 15 years of more schooling -that is, higher education- are about three times the income of those with 11 years of schooling- secondary education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). Over the past two decades, industrial jobs have increasingly been replaced by 'knowledge work'. Consequently, corporations have sought well-educated people for high-skilled (and higher-paid) jobs, and a college education has come to be seen as a fundamental asset for a successful career. In the United States, for example, a survey conducted in 1995 on public perceptions of higher education found that most Americans see a college education as a requisite for a good job. Similarly, a recent study carried out by the American Council of Education also found that job attainment is the most important benefit that Americans associate with going to college (Bloom *et al.* 2006). This indicates that there is a common view that a college degree is an investment in securing a higher-paying job, primarily a personal economic benefit. Therefore, it is argued that there should be a charge for individuals to enrol in higher education (World Bank, 1994). This, however, raises fundamental efficiency, equity, and quality issues that need further examination.

Despite the justification for private finance, there is also a strong case for public funding of higher education. According to the World Bank (1995: 54), there are three main reasons for public financing of higher education. First, an individual's consumption of education is likely to bring positive effects to others through externalities and spill-over benefits. Therefore, government should ensure that individuals are encouraged to consider the social rather than the private costs and benefits of behaviour. It is often argued that this is true for many features of education at all stages. At higher stages of education, the externalities and spill-over benefits to the society from teaching and research findings may

be substantial. For example, non-graduate workers are likely to benefit from the knowledge of graduate workers, and the society is likely to benefit from many important research findings. Second, government funding may be necessary because limited financial markets do not allow students to borrow sufficient amounts, on the basis of improved future earnings, to cover costs. This may be true especially amongst less wealthy and disadvantaged families. The private 'purchase' of schooling, particularly for higher education, is, in most cases, beyond the means of many poor families. Therefore, loans, grants and other forms of subsidies are important to ensure greater and equal access to higher education within society. Third, human resource investment is a principal strategy in poverty alleviation, and therefore it must also be a government concern.

One may argue that public spending on higher education can reduce inequity, open opportunities for the poor and disadvantaged, compensate for market failures in lending or providing for education, and make information about benefits of education more generally available. However, on the other side, government's inability to develop higher education sufficiently, because of financial restrictions, excessive bureaucracy, and inefficient use of resources, provides a rationale for the development of private higher education. There is sufficient evidence to show that public spending on education is often inefficient and inequitable. It is inefficient when it is misallocated among competing users. It is inequitable when qualified potential students are unable to enrol in higher education because educational opportunities are limited, or because of their inability to pay. Many claim that present systems of financing and managing education often fail to meet these challenges (Burnett, 1996; World Bank, 2000). In addition, public funding is becoming more difficult to provide as enrolments expand.

Based on the ideas discussed above and to reconcile these views, the related concepts of efficiency, equity and quality that characterise the market of higher education provision need to be explored.

According to Psacharopoulos & Woodhall (1985), *efficiency* is a term used to describe the relationship between inputs and outputs, but because this relationship can be analysed from several different perspectives, a clear definition of the concept of efficiency is crucial. A system is said to be efficient if a maximum output is obtained from given input, or if a given output is obtained with minimum input. Efficiency has thus to do with the ratio between output and input: how much do we get for what we put into the system? The analysis of efficiency thus deals with a comparison of cost and benefits. The output may be measured as a goal within the education and training system, such as employment

probabilities or earnings returns on the labour market. There are two main aspects of efficient resource use. First, efficiency is about allocating efficiently between different kinds of resources -e.g., between teachers and blackboards, or between more teachers per student and better-qualified teachers- that is, about choosing the most efficient input mix (allocative efficiency). Second, efficiency is also about using each resource efficiently, that is, making the best use of each given input (technical efficiency).

The assessment of efficiency in education and training has both an external aspect, where investments in education are compared to alternative investments outside the education system, and an internal aspect, which refers to the internal functioning of the education and training system (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985; World Bank, 1995; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). Internal efficiency is concerned with the relationship between inputs and outputs within the education system or within individual institutions, as indicated by the quantity and quality of inputs and outputs involved. This refers to the effective management of financing to improve the efficiency of investment decisions and increase the overall academic and institutional performance. External efficiency is concerned with how education influences economic performance, as indicated by the employment prospects and earnings of students. Subsequently, external efficiency include equitable access to education, producing the right types of educational activities based on national needs, lower unemployment rates amongst graduates, better paid jobs and consequently higher earnings (Patrinos, 1990; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). For example, higher education is considered efficient when it supplies the right level of skilled or educated workers to the labour market. Therefore, a shortage or a surplus of graduates relative to social demands should be considered a sign of inefficiency.

Regarding *equity aspects*, as Chapman (1999) emphasises, the term equity is more elusive than the concept of efficiency. This has largely to do with the general lack of clear scientific definitions of issues of fairness and justice. The concept of equity understood in terms of equality in opportunity would call for equal access to education and training programmes independent of students' circumstances, as well as for equal treatment of all students independent of their circumstances (Chapman, 1999).

Based on the above brief definition of equity, it can be argued that the issue of equity and access must be considered very carefully in the process of privatisation of higher education in the Sultanate. The very nature of a private sector of higher education whose aim is to make a profit suggests that it will allow access only to those who can

afford the fees. Therefore, if private higher education institutions are to be part of widening access, students need to be subsidised by the government.

We have already mentioned in Chapter Four of this study that 28% of students in Omani private higher education institutions in academic year 2008/2009 have government scholarships. This means that without government subsidy, equity would not be enhanced by franchised programmes. However, these governmental scholarships are allocated only for some students from low-income families, and do not exceed about 1600 scholarships annually (Ministry of Higher Education, 2008). Moreover, having a large number of private higher education institutions is not necessarily a guarantee of ability to absorb the high demand for higher education in the country, because of the considerable differences in fees structure amongst these private institutions. To this end and in order to promote equity, financial assistance in the form of loans and grants would become part of the revenue supplementation reform agenda. In other words, when the government shifts costs to the student and their families, it must introduce a parallel system of financial assistance and subsidies in order to maintain accessibility and ensure equity.

Another equally important component with regard to enhancing access and equity in private higher education institutions in Oman is the location of these institutions. At present, most private colleges are located in the Muscat area, Oman's capital. In terms of access, this gives a distinct advantage to the poorer students who live in this area, since in most cases the daily cost of living in the capital is, in most cases, beyond their financial ability. It can be argued here that potential students who live outside the area are at a disadvantage. Therefore, government should reconsider the impact of this issue on the poorer students who come from interior areas of Oman, by limiting the number of colleges in the Muscat area. To achieve this, the location should be considered by the government before approval to establish a new private higher education institution is given.

However, equity is also about fairness and in this refers to the way the cost and benefits of an educational investment are distributed among different groups in society. According to Psacharopoulos & Woodhall (1985: 244), the question of equity in educational investment is "whether the cost and benefits are equally distributed among different social, economic or ethnic groups, and also among different regions". The main concern is to have fair and equal access to educational facilities.

According to Psacharopoulos & Woodhall (1985), there are two types of equity: vertical equity and horizontal equity. Vertical equity is about giving the same opportunities to the poor as to the rich, whereas horizontal equity is about fairness among equals, which

means giving equal treatment to equals. Both concepts are vital since disparities in educational participation may exist in terms of gender, socio-economic background, urban and rural areas, and also language and religion.

In Oman, most public higher educational institutions share a common selection system, in which admission depends on the mark or grade obtained in the secondary school certificate. Consequently, students may apply to any institution for which they achieve the required mark. However, as we have noted earlier, in practice, fulfilment of the specified criterion does not guarantee a place, due to the fact that the number of candidates is usually far higher than the number of places available (Al-Ghanboosi, 2002). However, in terms of private higher education, the system is different, since institutions are open to all who are able to pay the tuition fees required.

Concerning *quality aspects*, it has been argued that quality is one concept that is difficult to define and measure (Randall, 2002). A clear definition of this term is likely to provide better results in measuring the level of quality. It has been suggested that the quality of education can be defined both by the learning environment and by student outcomes (Harvey & Green, 1993). For the learning environment, quality may include the quantity and quality of inputs in use, a campus setting that is conducive to learning, and the availability of supporting services. A significant indicator of the quality of education for student outcomes is the value added of schooling in the form of the amount of knowledge and skills gained, and the increased probability of income-earning activity (Lockheed & Hanushek, 1988). In the case of higher education, the value added also includes research productivity.

However, quality issues along with recent trends and the key challenges for quality in higher education will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

5.3 Funding Models of Private Higher Education Institutions

According to William (1992: 39) there are, generally, “six ways in which academic institutions can supplement their core income: gifts, investments, research grants, research contracts, consultancy, and student fees”.

However, developing efficient financing models, which would ensure the quality and accessibility of education, is an urgent issue in higher education systems, particularly private higher education. Governments’ objectives for higher education can be reflected in their operational funding policies. The models or mechanisms of funding private higher

education may vary according to the nature of system adopted in different countries worldwide. According to Teichler (2003:1):

"The debate over private and public funding, however, often involves a confusing mix of three issues: student costs, the role of public subsidies, and the level of government supervision."

As mentioned in Section 5.2, there are two main sources of private higher education institutions: public sources of support and private sources of support. However, before discussing the mechanisms of funding in greater detail, a question that may arise is why do governments support private higher education?

5.3.1 Rationales for governmental subsidy to private higher education

Although public sources of support, in most countries, represent by far the largest resource for public higher education institutions, the way in which these public funds are distributed and the signals that these funds provide to institutional officials are critical in defining the financing structure of the country. If there is such debate about the public funding of public higher education, what about public money for private higher education? In fact, this is a key issue for governments, the general public, and of course private institutions. So far, the general situation is that public funding of private higher education is the exception, not the rule. According to Levy (2007), this reality is often hidden by contrary examples that lead to the absurd notion that sources of income do not seriously distinguish the two sectors of higher education. Levy's argument may be true, since, in many countries, while public higher education is overwhelmingly sustained by public funds, private higher education is as overwhelmingly sustained by private funds, as addressed earlier in Chapter Two.

However, this is not always the case, since public higher education institutions, in many countries, attempt to diversify their funding resources through relying on private income. In the United States, for example, whereas public institutions have previously received a majority of their funding from the state, these institutions now increasingly rely on private revenue. According to Eckel *et al.* (2005), out of the 22 institutions of higher education engaged in funding-raising campaigns in excess of billion, 15 are public institutions.

Rationales for public funding vary, as do arguments against that policy. One rationale, as we noticed earlier, is fair and equal treatment of students, regardless of their institutions. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985: 137) asserted that:

“If education was provided under market conditions, only those who could afford to pay tuition fees could enrol. Not only would there be under-investment from the social point of view, but income inequalities would be preserved from one generation to the next since education is itself a determinant of lifetime income.”

To explain the statement above, if education is treated as a private good and its provision is left exclusively to the market without any financial supports or subsidies from the public sector, it will be difficult for students who cannot afford to pay tuition fees to benefit from education.

Another reason for public funding is access, particularly if the private sector offers slots beyond what the public sector provides yet needs certain cost-sharing (Levy, 2007). The access rationale strengthens in areas where the populations are less privileged. In Bangladesh, for instance, the Non-Governmental Universities Act mandates that 5% of all seats be reserved for ‘poor but meritorious’ students who are exempted from tuition charges (Hopper, 1998). However, some new private universities in Bangladesh go beyond the minimum financial aid requirement. For example, the Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology claims to offer a 50% tuition discount to an additional 5% of its students (Hopper, 1998). Such financial aid is intended to ensure a minimum of diversity in the student body. It can also be considered as one function, among others, of the university toward society, ‘society service’.

The above notion can be applied to the Omani context. New applications for establishing private higher education institutions should include the founder commitment of providing a certain percentage, at least 5% of seats annually for students of low-income families.

Other major rationales involve quality and motivation. Where this orientation is found, the whole private sector does not qualify for funding; instead, public money is dispersed according to sets of criteria. Public funding thus may motivate private institutions to improve quality. Although many writers (Geiger, 1986; Altabach, 1999; Levy, 2005) reveal that often private institutions continue to pursue their most basic goals supported by private money, this sector goes further when these institutions can add public money.

An example of the above can be drawn here from Japan, since the Japanese government subsidies policy for private higher education is based on a number of strong reasons, particularly from the viewpoint of the role of private universities in supporting the public provision of advanced education for society (Asonuma, 2002). The first reason for

the strong support of government subsidies for Japanese private higher education is the serious financial difficulties that most of these institutions faced during the 1960s, such as " financial strains and the deterioration of institution and equipment, financial distress of teachers and students, inadequate educational systems, deficiencies in administrative and managerial organisation, and lack of understanding of the leading ideas of the universities new system" (Oyama, 2008: 410). A second reason is the widening gap in the quality of education between private and public universities. Although the private universities absorbed the largest share of the tremendous growth in students' enrolment in the 1960s, they failed to obtain the support of the public at large. Because of the perception of most people that most private universities are less prestigious and less popular than public ones, the government, in 1967, established a bumper organisation to handle the allocation of funds (Oyama, 2008) from the national government, known as the Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private School of Japan (PMACPSJ).

By contrast, in most developing countries, decades of reliance on private higher education for the bulk of enrolments supported access but left concerns over quality, providing a strong rationale for public funding to enable the private sector to reach the next level (Levy, 2005). In the Middle East a number of governments have joined local private, and sometimes international, actors to initiate a private sector of higher education. For example, the government of Bahrain recently announced plans to establish a higher education hub in cooperation with foreign partners. Thus, through an agreement between Bahrain's Economic Development Board and a Kuwaiti investment company, a 'Higher Education City' will be established, featuring fully fledged branch campuses of international universities. There are already two similar projects in operation in other Gulf countries, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. With the financial means to make it attractive for foreign institutions to establish a presence, these countries now host a number of well-known universities from across the world (OBHE, 2007).

Based on the ideas discussed in this section, it can be argued that although there are a variety of reasons for governments to fund private higher education, it is difficult to anticipate how far public funding of private higher education will extend internationally, or in what forms. Currently, many governments, as we will see, adopt certain criteria and mechanisms to fund private higher education institutions. These models, together with some examples of the mechanisms of public funding to private higher education systems, will be examined in the following section.

5.3.2 Public sources of support

Although private higher education institutions in most countries across the world cover most of their expenses via their own means, these institutions have, to a certain degree, access to public funds. There are a number of funding governance issues, including accountability models, research activities and tax-based support, which help to characterise public support of higher education for private higher education institutions. To this end, and for the purpose of clarity, the experiences of some countries, along with examples of some models of public funding mechanisms to private higher education institutions, will be highlighted.

Some countries seem to fund private higher education by providing lump sums to these institutions. In Estonia, for example, the Estonian State budget provides for a line financing of private higher education, around EEK 300,000 to 400,000, without any obligation to account for its use. However, in 1996, it became a public procurement, with 5% for private higher education, and the rest for public higher education (Habakuk & Alas, 2007). In the researcher's view, the problem with this approach is that it does not adopt a basic rule for funding these institutions. Moreover, it does not encourage private higher education institutions to engage in active and positive competition, in terms of either research activities or quality of teaching.

In Germany, most private higher education institutions receive some form of financial support (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005). The German state supports private higher education institutions through legislation for non-profit organisations, through the allocation of former state property, or through direct financial support during the foundation process of private institutions of higher education. For instance, the University of Witten/Herdecke receives from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia an annual governmental subsidy of 15% of its annual income (i.e. 28.2 million Euros) (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005). According to Stannek & Ziegele (2005: 44), nearly all private higher education institutions in Germany receive some sort of public funding. For example, in 2001, 79 million Euros went from public sources to private higher education institutions, and the largest share (67.9 million Euro) went to a private University of Applied Sciences. In most cases, the German model of funding or financial aid for private higher education institutions takes a lump sum approach. For example, the state Baden-Wuerttemberg supported the foundation of the International University in Bruchsal in 1998 by financing the infrastructure and the facilities of the university and gave an annual support of about 1 million Euros from 2000 to 2005. Similarly, the International University of Bremen

reached an agreement with the city-state Bremen which supported the foundation of the institution with a total of 109.7 million Euros, and the total assets of this University in 2003 were 204 million Euros.

However, in the Japanese context, governmental subsidies to private universities, in spite of their large numbers of students (77.1% in 2000), constituted about 9.1% of total income in 1997. The amount of the government block grants to private universities totalled \$2,009 million in fiscal year 1999 (Asonuma, 2002: 110). In Japan, by contrast to the above-mentioned European examples, the government support for private universities is based on certain criteria, which can be categorised into two forms: special subsidies and general subsidies. Special subsidies (SS) are linked to research, whereas general subsidies (GS) are computed simply based on the number of students, academic staff and administrative staff members, and the cost of research education (Baba, 2002).

Based on their academic situation, each university applies to obtain governmental subsidies, and for the purpose of accuracy and in order to avoid misconduct in subsidy distribution, the Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private School of Japan adopts the following specific formula:

$$GS = F (0.3 \alpha + 0.2 \beta + 0.5 \gamma)$$

where F is standard cost for every institution by types of staff and department, α is the adjustment coefficient related to the percentage of currently enrolled students relative to the student admission capacity, β is the adjustment coefficient related to ratio of students per faculty member, and, γ is the adjustment coefficient related to the total costs of facilities for education and research costs paid using student fees, such as the expenditure for full-time teacher research, book allowance, and travel-research expenses. Each adjustment coefficient has a unit value where the highest unit value is γ , through which 50% of the total GS is allocated, compared to 30% for α and 20% for β . In the second type of subsidy, the special subsidies (SS), awards are based on the principle of targeted funding (Baba, 2002), and are given to private universities that can contribute by performing a number of specific functions. Since funds are planned or targeted, special subsidies differ for each year depending on national priorities, which are mostly evaluated on a yearly basis. According to these governmental priorities, private universities send proposals for programmes and activities to be implemented. Through a deliberation process, the government decides the most suitable proposal, as well as the amount of subsidy to be awarded.

From the above discussion with regard to the Japanese mechanism of funding private higher education institutions, it can be noted that both types of subsidies use quantitative parameters in order to determine the amount of subsidies that will be distributed to the different private institutions of higher education. Despite the claim (Asonuma, 2002) that the amount of subsidies has never covered 50% of private universities' operational cost, this policy, to a certain degree, plays an effective role in alleviating universities' problems, particularly in financial respects. Meanwhile, this policy could be seen as an entry point of government to control the quality of education of the private universities. Thus, it can be argued that the government of Japan uses both a separate funding approach and performance-based funding.

By contrast, in Korea, for example, where most private higher education institutions have no profit-making enterprises, government financial support for these institutions dates back (Lee, 1998) only to the two decades. In 1990, the government financial support for private, 4-year institutions was 0.29% of the total education budget. In 1997, this portion was raised to 0.76%, but this was provided disproportionately. For example, around 54% of the government appropriation was offered to the top 10 institutions among 124 private institutions (Lee, 1998).

In the United States, although direct funding is not provided, students in private higher education institutions are eligible for government loans and grants, and private universities can compete for government research funding. According to Levy (2007), two types of funding dominate at the national level, though often with a strong echo at state levels. First, concerning research, almost wherever significant costly research has been conducted at private universities, public funding has been crucial. Leading US private research universities often outdo their public counterparts in winning federal research funding. Second, concerning students, the other main type of US public funding subsidising private institutions is student loans and grants. As mentioned earlier, students are eligible as long as their institutions are accredited; this funding applies even to for-profit institutions. The loans and grants are usually needs-based and go hand-in-hand with access and efficiency rationales.

In a review of the subsidies for private institutions in the Gulf States, two features can be specified. First, nearly all private higher education in these countries are legally not allowed to obtain direct funds from the government (Mohammed, 2009), except in Oman and, to some extent, in Kuwait. Second, all private higher education institutions in the

region are legally stipulated as for-profit corporations, except in Oman where, by law, these institutions are considered as not-for-profit institutions.

In Kuwait, governmental subsidies to private higher education include land grants, scholarships granted by several government agencies for their employees to study in these institutions, and scholarships for only 1,000 secondary school graduates in the academic 2006/2007, which covered 80% of the tuition cost. However, officials of the Kuwaiti Private Universities Council (PUC) admit that all private institutions in Kuwait achieved profitable status before this programme commenced. This information was derived from the annual financial reports prepared by the institutions. According to the governance rules for private higher education institutions in Kuwait, an "Annual Financial Report prepared by the institution [of private higher education] should be audited by an independent auditor in accordance with International Auditing Standards (IAS). The Audit Report should include the auditor's opinion as to the institution's adherence to the Law of Private Universities in Kuwait and to its executive by-laws" (Al-Atiqi & El-Azma, 2007: 69).

Examples and experiments of models of public funding to private higher education have been highlighted. Now we turn to focus on the Omani context of governmental subsidies for private higher education institutions. To encourage the private sector to assume a role in the higher education sphere, the government of Oman has initiated attractive subsidies. Financial and technical incentives are provided, directly and indirectly.

Direct support: the government has shown its willingness to provide direct financial support for the establishment of private colleges and universities, as well as exempting them from direct and indirect taxes, and allocating free land to build their premises. Another direct financial incentive is the government's allocation of hundreds of scholarships, as mentioned earlier, to secondary school graduates from low-income families to study in the private universities and colleges. In addition to these subsidies, His Majesty has given grants of RO17 million (US\$ 44 million) to each of the Omani private universities (Ministry of Information, 2007). These provisions were legally established by Royal Decree No. 67/2000 which provided various means of support to these institutions (see Appendices 1a, 1b & 1c). This action has had a positive impact on the survival of many of these institutions, which were struggling to sustain their activities.

Indirect support: The Educational Services Department at the Ministry of Higher Education provides details on investment and facilities in the private sector. It also facilitates the steps and procedures needed to establish a private university or college. The

Ministry also organises annual exhibitions on private universities and colleges in the Sultanate, together with web-site links to these institutions.

From the foregoing, it is clear that governments support private sector higher education, although this support differs from one country to another. However, it is not expected that government should pay the whole cost. Usually, private universities and colleges receive a certain amount of government funding, and public universities and colleges finance a part of their budgets through non-governmental sources. To this end, private higher education institutions themselves must seek other financial resources to promote and develop their functions and performance on the one hand and, on the other hand, to be capable to compete with other private or public higher education institutions.

5.3.3 Private sources of support

Owing to the limitation of public funds for private higher education institutions, additional sources of financial support must be obtained. In doing so, it is important to know the available sources of funding. Apart from public subsidies, there are many models of funding private higher education. In the large majority of cases, institutions are financed by tuition fees from students. Altbach (1999: 70) emphasised that "the central reality of most private [higher education] institutions is that tuition payments are the financial basis of the institutions, and without them, survival would be impossible". With the exception of universities sponsored by religious organisations, which sometimes have funds from these groups or can rely on help with staffing, most private higher education institutions have other financial resources available to them. According to Hauptman (2006a), these private sources of revenues including tuition fees, grants, gifts and other forms of philanthropy, payment from a variety of services, and the commercialisation of research conducted on campus and for the support of other private entrepreneurial enterprises.

5.3.3.1 Tuition fees

Before reviewing tuition fees in Oman's private institutions it is worthwhile to identify the meaning of this term, since there is a distinction between tuition fees –or in the United States, simply tuition, and other type of fees. In the American system, 'tuition' means instruction or teaching and is often used to refer to a fee charged for educational instruction, whereas in the UK and in English language usage in most of the rest of the world, the word 'tuition' means instruction, and a fee charged must therefore be called a tuition fee (<http://www.answers.com/topic/tuition>). The researcher will follow the latter practice and refer to tuition fees. On the other hand, 'fees' as opposed to 'tuition fees'

generally refers to a charge levied for most of the expenses associated with a particular institution to cover the cost of non-instructional services provided by that institution, such as the cost of processing admission applications, accommodation, transportation, internet access, health services, food, and sometimes insurance, graduation service (ceremony) and text books, as in the Omani case. Table 5.1 summarises the non-tuition fees charged by the Oman's private institutions.

Table 5.1: Non-tuition fees charged by Oman's private institutions, 2008/2009

Service	Fees (RO)
Admission process	25-120 (mostly paid once a year, with one institution charged yearly, Majan College)
Transportation	120-180 annually
Internet service	16 annually
Insurance (general, undefined)	20-200 annually
Accommodation	600-1,200 annually
College facilities/ Insurance/ Service fees (undefined)	20-200 annually
Supplementary fee for particular programmes (e.g., Engineering and Media studies).	100-150 (in some colleges –e.g., Al-Bayan College and Caledonian College of Engineering)
Graduation service	25 at graduation time
Estimated annual fees	1500-1800

Source: Own analysis based on publication of Private Higher Education Statistics, Ministry of Higher Education (2009c), Oman.

It can be seen from the table above that fees charged students by these institutions are a considerable amount that imposes a further financial burden on them and their parents.

Bearing in mind the issue of differences in fees between the private institutions, nevertheless most of them are quite similar in practice. For example, regarding the fee for the admission process, most institutions charge this fee only once, except Majan College, which charges it on an annual basis. Moreover, institutions charge students so-called 'college facilities', 'insurance', or even 'service fees'. There is no clear rule on what students must be charged for, which always creates a kind of dissatisfaction among students due to the poor service that they have to pay for. Furthermore, in most institutions, fees like internet access, text books, laboratory materials and usage are included in tuition

fees, while some other institutions treat these fees separately, as in Caledonian College of Engineering and Al-Bayan College where they charge around RO 100 to RO 150 under the title of supplementary fees. However, initiatives have been taken by some institutions, with regard to students from families on welfare or social security, to reduce and/or facilitate the payment system of these fees.

It is worth emphasising that services provided by these institutions must be clarified and set on a basis that helps students and facilitates their university life during their study period. It is also the responsibility of the concerned department of the Ministry of Higher Education to clarify the nature of these fees.

The above was a general overview about the non-tuition fees. However, in most countries tuition fees represent the largest private sources of revenues for private higher education. In Korea, for example, the tuition fees make up on average 63.2% of the entire finances of private institutions of higher education (Lee, 1998). Similarly, in Japan, private universities received 61.7% of their entire income from student tuition and fees in fiscal year 1997 (Asonuma, 2002). In Germany, private higher education institutions raised 90.1 million Euros by tuition fees in 2001, compared to 41.4 million Euros obtained from third parties (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005).

Private higher education in Oman currently relies entirely on tuition fees, either from students and their families or from the government through its scholarships and grants. This is not because these institutions are labelled as for-profit, but because private higher education is a new experiment in the country. Moreover, most founders of these institutions lack experience in academic affairs, particularly university management and academic requirements. This indicates that in practice, private higher education in the country is profit-making, although, in theory, this is not the case. As shown in Table 5.2 below, the level of tuition fees differs from one institution to another and from one programme to another. As an example, fees for foundation year programmes range from RO 1,800 to RO 2,000 in private universities, whereas private colleges charge from RO 1,500 to RO 2,500 for the same programme. In terms of universities, business course fees range from RO 2,100 to RO 2,220.

As can be seen from Table 5.2, the minimum tuition fees of bachelor degree programmes at private universities and colleges were RO 2,200 per year on average, since some specialisations are relatively costly, up to RO 5,950 in the case of medicine studies. This could be one of the main reasons why private institutions, in the beginning of their establishment, endeavoured to expand programmes in low cost areas such as humanities

and the theoretical fields. According to Anton (2000), the more specialised scientific disciplines which require high expenditure will be postponed until these universities are financially able to add them.

Table 5.2: Bachelor degree tuition fees in private higher education in Oman, 2008/2009

Institution	Courses	Tuition fees/per annum (RO)
Private Universities	Foundation Programme	1,800-2,000
	Business Studies	2,100-2,200
	Computing Studies	2,100-2,400
	Humanities & Social Sciences	2100-2250
	Engineering	2,400-4,800
	Nursing	2,600
	Pharmacy	2,700
Private Colleges	Foundation Programme	1,500-2,500
	Business Studies	2,000-2,700
	Computing Studies	2,000-2,700
	Humanities & Social Sciences	2000-2,500
	Medicine	5,490
	Dental Surgery	5,950
	Pharmacy	3,467
	Nautical Studies & Marine Engineering	3,500
	Engineering	2,900

Source: Own analysis based on publication of Private Higher Education Statistics, Ministry of Higher Education (2009c), Oman.

However, according to publication of Private Higher Education Statistics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009c), with the exception of the International College of Engineering Management, private institutions do not distinguish between Omani and non-Omani students, whether residing in Oman or international students, in terms of tuition fees. This may be due to the fact that programmes (e.g., Fire Safety Engineering and Well Engineering) offered in this institution are in great demand and many students from different countries in the Middle East study in this college. Moreover, most private institutions do not differentiate in the tuition fees on the basis of full-time or part-time mode of study. However, some organisations have introduced lower tuition fees if the mode of study is part-time; the Middle East College charges RO 2,000 for full-time students and RO 1,200 for part-time students at the bachelor's level, for example (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009c).

Based upon the aforementioned, a question that arises in this regard is, how are tuition fees set? Hauptman (2006b) differentiates for-profit from non-profit institutions with the notion of tuition fees. He argues that for private non-profit institutions, tuition fees are typically the main part of revenues, with endowment income, gifts, and payments for services trailing as other sources of funds. However, at for-profit institutions, tuition fees are the primary sources of funds.

Tuition fee levels, as Altbach (1999) suggests, should be adequate to provide sufficient funds for institutional survival. Errors in these calculations or failure to meet enrolment goals, or unanticipated expenses can cause disorder in institutional budgets, and in some cases may even threaten an institution's survival. According to Tilak (1991), most new private institutions do not have much of a financial cushion. The fact of tuition dependency means that students must be able to afford to pay the fees charged, which has an impact on the social class of students who study and the kinds of programmes that are offered. The proponents of private provision of higher education claim that tuition should be charged at rates that will eventually lead to an equalisation of the private and social rates of return of education. Researchers like (Andrian, 1983; Psacharopoulos *et al*, 1986) emphasised that those who can afford to pay should pay the full cost of their education, while those who cannot should be subsidised. These subsidies may include loans to certain disadvantaged groups or grants in the form of scholarships (Woodhall, 1989). However, mechanisms for supporting students will be discussed later in this chapter.

According to Turner, Baba and Shimada (2000: 397), tuition fees are “not just a matter of the amount of money charged for teaching. They are one of the important key concepts that have a defining influence upon the qualitative and quantitative development of higher education system”. For Turner *et al.* (2000), the way in which tuition fees are set and paid is representative of a range of attitudes towards higher education, for different programmes of study, or for different institutions.

By and large, for private institutions, tuition fee is done by the officials at the institutions, although in a number of countries government officials set guidelines or even actively engage in the fee setting process at private non-profit institutions. In Philippines, for example, which has a very high percentage of private enrolments, 75% in 2000 (Levy, 2006), government officials review private sector tuition fees as part of the institution's charter (Hauptman, 2006b). Similarly, in Japan, individual universities cannot decide the rate of tuition and other fees (Asonuma, 2002). In Kuwait, the officials at PUC allow for a

reasonable fee structure that is compatible with the cost of living, and cannot be increased before an elapse of five years (Al-Atiqi & El-Azma, 2007).

In Oman, by contrast, private higher education institutions must obtain government (Ministry of Higher Education) confirmation in determining tuition fees. This is clearly declared in the Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000: “The higher education institution shall not increase approved tuition fees for any programme of study except after obtaining the approval of the Minister three months prior to the beginning of the academic year” (Official Gazette, 2000: 35).

Another factor in setting tuition fees in the view of Turner *et al.* (2000) is the reputation or social prestige of higher education institution and the programmes they offer. In fact the status of higher education institutions has an important influence on their value. This is subject to the quality and transparency of information that is available to students in making their decisions to select a particular institution. However, the question might arise, what is the relationship between tuition fees and the reputation of the institution? From an economic point of view, one might presume that high prestige will be linked to high fees. Turner *et al.* (2000: 404) have described three characteristic patterns among institutions of higher education.

Type A: A positive correlation between higher fees and higher prestige. Institutions with high prestige -a higher quality product- can charge a more for their programmes. This model represents a free market model which might consist of a big number of private institutions with a range of academic standards and reputations, and a matching range of tuition fee levels. When students pay higher tuition fees to enrol in the esteemed institutions, they expect a better job and higher return after graduation.

One might question whether high tuition fees always mean quality of education and facilities provided in the institution. Johnston (2003: 6) denies such a relationship, emphasising that:

“There is no evidence, at least in the United States, that academic responsiveness, educational quality, or efficiency improves with higher tuition.”

If this is the case in the United States, it may also hold true in Oman, or anywhere else in the world. As mentioned earlier, tuition fee levels should be sufficient to provide adequate funds for institutional survival. However, some studies on fees and levels of demand would be informative. If there is a high demand on the part of students for a particular course of study, the fee levels might be raised to the highest level possible,

irrespective of the actual cost of providing the educational service. Such investigations could help clarify the questionable relationship between fee levels and quality of provision.

Type B: A negative correlation between tuition fees and the prestige of an institution. This type assumes that the more esteemed institutions are able to keep tuition fees low because of the diversification of funding sources (e.g., government subsidies, endowment, research activities, etc.), while the students in low-prestige institutions which are heavily dependent on tuition fees have to pay higher fees. Although the more prestigious institutions keep the admission criteria as strict as possible, they provide grants and scholarships for the most able students to offset the financial obstacles that might face talented, intelligent-but-poor students.

Type C: All institutions charge similar tuition fees regardless of the prestige issue. In this model the tuition fees have nothing to deal with prestige, and government intervention can sustain uniform tuition fee levels irrespective of field of study or geographical location. Most public institutions that charge tuition fees conform much more closely to this type (Turner *et al.* 2000).

Now, a question might be asked as to the strategy adopted by Oman's private institution in terms of tuition fees. To answer the above question, it may be necessary to examine first the admission policy of these institutions and its relation to level of tuition fees.

As indicated previously, the necessary requirement for Oman's higher education system in both the public and private sectors is the Secondary School Certificate. However, the insufficient number of public higher education institutions and the limited number of places offered by public institutions allowed them to introduce selective, strict entry requirements. Therefore, in the 1990s, the precondition of having the secondary education examination in practice did not secure entry to any public higher education institutions. The situation looked different in the private sector. However, it is worth mentioning that up to date, education in the public sector is offered free of charge to all Omani citizens.

The analysis provided in previous chapters has confirmed our expectations about the kind of study programmes offered in the private sector and the rapid expansion of enrolment in this sector. Analogously, we may expect that private higher education institutions in Oman that rely heavily on tuition fees and government subsidies will often be low or non-selective providers, without strict entry requirements.

The majority of private institutions require of candidates only that they submit a set of documents, such as the secondary school certificate, a completed form, photographs,

etc. within a fixed period of time. The candidates also have to pay the entrance fee, as shown in Table 5.1, which is on average RO 75. Only a few private providers have decided to introduce some additional entry requirements, such as a high grade or marks in secondary school certificates, particularly for students applying to Medicine and Health Sciences. Nevertheless, the great majority of private higher education institutions do not impose any additional requirements, other than the secondary certificate, which is required by the Ministry of Higher Education. Therefore, Oman's private higher education can be categorised as non-selective or in a few cases as a low-selective sector. This in turn contributes to the relatively low standing of the private sector, as society is used to the strict admission requirements adopted in the public sector.

Applying Turner *et al.*'s (2000) classification of tuition fees, it can be argued that most of Oman's private institutions fit type B, where the level of tuition fees per se is not always perceived as an indicator of the quality of a higher education provider, unless a higher education provider enjoys high prestige and reputation and its graduates have well-paid jobs, when a high level of tuition fees is acceptable. However, this view does not apply to private institutions in the country.

Assuming that private institutions target selected student segments, like part-time students or those from lower socio-economic groups, they might go for the low cost option. Private institutions that adopt this strategy are usually vocationally oriented and offer a small number of fields of study. Although there is a significant number of students who are from low-income families in private institutions in Oman (many of them receive government scholarships), the level of tuition fees is high, which suggests that these institutions do not explicitly target those groups of students. On the other hand, the strategy of charging high tuition fees, according to Tuner *et al.* (2000), can be adopted by institutions that try to position themselves as the best and aim to be perceived as high quality providers. In the case of Omani private institutions, since they are not able to compete academically and financially with their public counterparts, they will mostly be demand-absorbing institutions. Although the main function will be to attract many students in these institutions, so far this does not imply that private providers adopt a low cost strategy. This can be ascribed to the economic rule of equilibrium between demand and supply. As Begg, Fischer & Dornbusch (1991) emphasise, when demand is increasing it is easier for the producer to increase the price without fearing a decrease in demand. As we have mentioned elsewhere in Chapter Three, many Omani students seek higher education because it is a viable means to obtain better jobs and high wages. The skills and knowledge

required by these jobs are most likely acquired through higher education institutions, and because of those skills and knowledge, the students will have a greater opportunity to get these jobs and possibly better salaries. In a study by Al-Hashmi (2005) concerning factors influencing secondary school students' decisions to enter higher education, he found that 63% of secondary education students indicated that their reason for entering higher education was to get a better job and draw a high wage. The reason behind this attitude among Omani students, as explained earlier, is due to the large number of expatriate employees, particularly in Oman's private sector, who hold higher qualifications. This fact is also clearly reported by secondary education students, of whom 78% stated that replacing non-Omani professionals was a factor that encouraged them to go on to higher education.

In addition to the above mentioned considerations in setting tuition fees, another important factor that must be taken into account while setting tuition fees, is the average per capita income and the family level of income. Comparing the tuition fees with the average per capita income of citizens and the ever-increasing cost of feeding a family, one can realise the inconsistency between the rate of increase in the secondary education output and the private higher education intake. According to the Family Expenditure and Income Survey conducted by the Ministry of National Economy in 2001, the average size of an Omani household is 8 individuals, and the average family income is RO 638 monthly or RO 7,656 per year (Ministry of National Economy, 2007). Taking into consideration the average size of the Omani family, and average family income, then, it can be said that a large number of families cannot afford places for their children in private higher education, especially when tuition and other fees are payable. A question one might ask is why parents should pay tuition fees, and not students themselves. In fact this situation is very common in Oman. When parents pay tuition and other fees for their children's higher education they would expect that this will help their children's future life by increasing their access to better job opportunities, ability to get married, and social respect. Within the social structure of Oman, this sort of behaviour can also be considered as a form of investment, where some kind of return is expected from children to parents; parents might expect to receive care from their children when they become elderly. The above considerations encourage parents to pay tuition fees on behalf of their children. However, another question can be asked with regard to the parents; if most of them have more than three or four children, would they be able to afford to pay for them all? Indeed this is a serious issue facing many parents and as a result, tuition fees may discourage or prevent

participation of students particularly from low-income families, or from rural areas, from continuing their higher education. As revealed in Table 5.2, tuition fees are high and already beyond the reach of many families, especially when two or three children in the family are ready to seek access to college education. If other fees are added, then the financial burden will be doubled.

All in all, there is considerable variation around the world in what private institutions charge. Changes in private sector fees (Hauptman, 2006b) tend to be related to changing market conditions, including competition with public institutions, trends in other private sources of revenues such as endowment income and gifts, and the increasing practice of charging higher tuition fees while providing more student aid.

Private sector tuition fees generally far exceed 50% of recurrent cost per student, and many private institutions, particularly for-profit institutions, charge fees that equal or exceed their recurrent cost per student (Altbach, 1999; Levy, 2005). Table 5.3 shows average tuition fees per academic year at private higher education institutions in some selected countries.

Table 5.3: Average tuition fees at four-year private institutions in some selected countries

Country	Average of tuition fees
Oman	RO 2,100-5,950 (\$5,460-\$15,470)
Germany	€2,500-15,000 (\$3,293-19,758)
United Arab Emirates	AED (Emirate Dirhams) 18,000-56,000 (\$4,940-\$15,340)
United States	\$23,712
Spain	€5,700 (\$7,509)

Sources: Ministry of Higher Education (2009c); Omani Cultural Attaché (2008); Wells, P.; Sadlak, L; & Vlasceanu, L. (2007); Ehrenberg, R. (2007). NP. Rate of US\$ is in 20/11/2009.

As can be seen from the table above, in almost all countries listed, including the United States, private higher education institutions are heavily dependent for their survival on the income from tuition fees. Omani private higher education is no exception to the global pattern in this respect. The minimum tuition fees, as shown in the table above, range from RO 2,100 (\$5,460) to RO 5,950 (\$15,470) per year.

Conversely, some discounting in tuition fees could be attributed to the competition aspect among private higher education institutions in a given country, or amongst these institutions in the neighbouring countries. An example could be drawn from the United

Arab Emirates (UAE) as a neighbouring country to Oman. Compared with some private higher education in the UAE, for example, tuition fees in these institutions range from Emirate Dirhams (AED) 18,000 to AED 56,000 per year (Omani Cultural Attaché, 2008). This means that tuition fees in UAE private universities are somewhat close to those for private higher education in Oman. However, the distinction between them is that while in UAE universities the tuition fees include the summer semester, tuition fees in Omani private higher education do not. Moreover, the former have some arrangements for helping students financially. For instance, University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD) offers part-time employment opportunities for students. Scholarships are also provided by the university. In academic year 2007/2008, 25 full scholarships were announced by UOWD (UOWD, 2008). Similarly, Ajman University of Science & Technology Network (AUST Network) (2008) sets certain criteria for exempting students from all or part of their tuition fees. For instance, 100% exemption from the fees shall be granted to the student holding the top position at the Faculty level, 50% reduction of the fees shall be granted to the second top position at the Faculty level, and 40% reduction of the fees shall be granted to the third top position at the Faculty level (AUST, 2008).

To be fairer and objective, a few private institutions in the country provide a modest number of scholarships and grants, as well as offering part-time work for students, especially those from lower income families. However, not only are these activities very limited in these institutions, but also they are not declared in their leaflets or prospectuses. Consequently, most students and the public lack information on what institutions offer and the services they provide, which leaves an image that most of these institutions are profit-making.

However, as we mentioned in Chapter Three, there is a large number of Omani students in UAE universities. This, however, cannot be entirely attributed to the tuition fees, since, as we noticed above, the tuition fees in UAE universities are more or less similar to those of Omani private higher education institutions. What is important to highlight is that the decision to study abroad depends not only on tuition fees, but also on the subject of study. For example, Law is not yet offered in local private higher education institutions, while Education has only recently been offered, in 2006/2007. As shown in Tables 3.5 and 3.6, the majority of Omani students studying in the Gulf States and other Arab countries are concentrated in the humanities, particularly Education.

In this situation, private higher education institutions in Oman must review their strategies with regard to tuition fees. At the same time, they must study the policies of

other private universities both regionally and internationally. The aim behind this is to investigate the practices adopted by these universities in terms of tuition fees, opportunities provided to students and ways of helping them financially.

5.3.3.2 Philanthropy and endowment

Although tuition fees remain the major source of private support for institutions, there are a number of other private sources of support upon which many institutions increasingly rely. According to Altbach (1998: 6):

“Although, financially, private colleges and universities depend for the most part on the students who pay tuitions, there are some variations. In some countries, private institutions receive financial support from the government. Private schools also may have other sources of income, in the United States, the prestigious universities and colleges have large endowments that provide income.”

In the United States, for example, philanthropy has traditionally represented a main source of funding for higher education. It usually comes in the form of gifts to institutions that then become part of the endowment (Hauptman, 2006a). One of the major uses of this philanthropy is to pay for nonrecurring expenses, including the construction and renovation of buildings, the acquisition of equipment, and the permanent funding of academic faculty positions. In recent decades in the U.S, endowments have become more targeted to specific needs, such as expanding scholarship funds. For instance, 85% of Harvard University’s endowment is restricted, consisting of 11,000 individual funds that support items such as faculty salaries, financial aid and facilities maintenance. In fiscal year 2007, Harvard University’s endowment totalled \$34.9 billion, accounting for 33% of its total income. In fiscal year 2006 alone, Harvard University collected \$595 million (Harvard University Gazette, 2007). Similarly, Yale University’s endowment in fiscal year 2007 totalled \$22,500 billion, compared to \$18,030 billion in fiscal year 2006.

In Japan, Keio University, one of the most prestigious private universities in the country, received \$67.5 million from donations in fiscal year 2005 (Dolan, 2007).

It is also noticeable that in Germany, donations play a vital role in supporting private higher education institutions. In relation to their annual budget, private higher education institutions with university status could realize 26% of their annual budget with private donations, whereas the majority of private higher education institutions (universities of applied sciences) obtain 34.5% of their annual budget through private donations and third parties (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005).

In Oman, given the weakness of the business sector in supporting higher education, coupled with absence of a culture of donation to educational institutions, the link between higher education institutions and society as a whole remains limited. Al-Manthri (2001b: 506) describes this important issue as follows:

“We look forward to seeing a society interested in higher education, a ‘donor’ society that willing to support higher education institutions. We are encouraging to support of well-to-do individuals, businessmen and private sector organisations to contribute to higher education, whose returns will be for the country as a whole.”

Activating the issue of philanthropy towards higher education, a culture of philanthropy and endowment to supplement government and private operated institutes of higher learning must be introduced. Such a tradition requires a favourable tax treatment of charitable contributions, which shifts some of the philanthropic burden onto the government in the form of lost tax revenue. Another requirement is the availability of a critical mass of wealthy alumni or those who have made sufficient wealth to make significant contributions. Equally important is to promote a culture of private sector sponsored grants and scholarship systems as a form of financial assistance to enhance equity and access for disadvantaged students who have demonstrated potential for academic success and to scholars based on academic merit.

5.3.3.3 Research funded by private companies

According to Hauptman (2006a), in a number of countries, an increasing amount of campus-based research is being paid for by private companies that share in the benefits of basic research discoveries and applied research. This has the advantage of increasing the resources available to do research in a campus setting, and reducing the institution’s reliance on public resources or tuition fees, but (Hauptman, 2006a) it raises a number of ethical questions regarding the degree of authority private entities then have in setting research priorities. As we noticed earlier, in the United States, major costly research has been carried out at private universities. However, in the US, the prestigious private universities and colleges have larger opportunities of high income from either research contracts or endowments. To compare this situation with the private sector higher education in Italy, for example, it can be noticed that self-financing through research is quite small in Italian private universities, accounting for only 1.8% of their total income (Trivellato, 2007). This is an indicator of the sector’s capacity for self development.

Similarly, in Poland, funding research projects by way of grants is highly selective, since the assessment is focused on the project itself, the qualifications of the team, as well as on the academic community in which a given research project will be carried out (Jablecka, 2007). Therefore, in 2003, for example, Polish private higher education institutions only generated 0.3% of their income from research, while state higher education institutions generated 13.6% from research (Jablecka, 2007).

In Germany, however, 14 private institutions of higher education, out of 54 institutions, have registered with the German Research Foundation [*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* - DFG] and can apply for financial support for their research projects, and between 2000 and 2004, five private higher education institutions received €8.7 million for over 90 different research projects (Stannek & Ziegele, 2007: 185). Moreover, the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHE) data on the fundraising capacities of German higher education institutions include 11 institutions of private higher education that have provided specific information in response to questions on fundraising. Individually, investment in fundraising was effective in terms of increased funds. For example, in 2004, the University of Witten/Herdecke, the HfB Frankfurt, and the Otto Beisheim Graduate School raised funds of €11.6 million, €1.47 million, and €6.6 million respectively (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005). In addition to the above sources of funding for research programmes at these universities, the donation of a chair or a research programme is another funding instrument for both German private and public higher education. In 2004, private sponsors and the Donors' Association donated 12 chairs to the private higher education institutions.

It can be noted that (Stannek & Ziegele, 2007) the disciplines sponsored are clearly in the Economics, Business and IT fields. It is also noteworthy that most endowed chairs go to Universities and not to Universities of Applied Sciences. Regardless of the size of donations, most important is the existence of a culture of endowment and donations for such activity. Also, regardless of the competition amongst public and private higher education institutions to obtain funds for research programmes, both sectors appear to be active in this domain.

However, the question might be asked, to what extent is the Omani private sector involved in this area? Unfortunately, private sector support or research funding can be described as a very limited. The researcher observed that there are only two local corporations -Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Oman Gas Company- interested

in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). Table 5.4 shows research grants and contracts in SQU during 2006.

Table 5.4: Contracted and granted research at the College of Engineering, SQU, 2006

Research title	Type of fund	Funded by	Budget (RO)
Mechanical Profile Control: Performance of Elastomer Seals in Open and Cased Holes	Contract	PDO	325,355
Well-bore Tubular Expansion Research	Contract	PDO	434,887
Second Generation SQU Solar Car Project	Contract	PDO	23,255
Testing of Japanese Solar Panels under the Prevailing Weather Conditions in Oman	Grant	Japanese Government NEDO & JQA	387,600
Pre-Treatment for R.O. Desalination Plants Phase II	Grant	Water Reuse Promotion Centre	1,400,000
First Generation Solar Car Project	Grant	PDO	36,670
Implementation Plan for Revision and Updating of Existing Regulation and Legislation on Control and Monitoring of ODS	Grant	MoRMEW	1,153
SQU Eng for Kids Initiative	Grant	Oman Gas Company – Oman Indian Fertilizer Co.	1,000
Water Conservation Programme in the GCC Countries	Grant	Kuwait Environment Protection Society	1,158

Source: Sultan Qaboos University (2008), Oman.

As can be seen from the above table, the private sector contribution in scientific research is very limited. Even at Sultan Qaboos University, its participation is concentrated in the Engineering College, while other fields, such as business administration, agriculture and transformative industries, are semi-neglected. While this is the situation in the SQU, the only public university with comprehensive programmes in the country, the situation is worse in private universities where the academic level is still limited to certain undergraduate programmes. As Altbach (2007) pointed out, the increase of the private sector, with its shortage of focus on research, may threaten the research role of universities in most of the world, especially in developing countries.

5.4 Mechanisms for Supporting Students

In the last few decades, mechanisms and strategies for assisting and supporting students and their families in paying for higher education have become an increasingly important element of financing for the enterprise worldwide (Hauptman, 2009). These strategies include the aid that is funded or sponsored by governments; provided by the institutions themselves; or given by private individuals or organisations. It is worth mentioning here that these strategies might be applicable for both sectors of higher education, public and private.

5.4.1 Government-funded student financial aid

One of the issues frequently raised in the development of student aid programmes is whether aid should be provided to students attending private higher education institutions. The argument against extending aid to private sector students is that government subsidies should be limited to students at publicly funded institutions. The argument for extending aid is that it is often cheaper for government to provide student aid to private institutions than to build new seats in the public sector. In the case of Oman, the government has announced recently that there is no intention, at least at the present time, to establish another public university. At the same time, it announced that 4,000 scholarships will be partially subsidised by the government (50% of tuition fees will be paid by the government and the rest will be paid by students and their families) for students from low-income families to study at private universities and colleges (Al-Busaidia, 2009).

It is also important that students in public institutions should be supported by the government, particularly in countries that have introduced tuition fees in their public institutions of higher education. However, the focus here will be on private sector students.

In most countries of the world, government funded or sponsored student financial aid has different forms, which can be categorized as (Hauptman, 2006a) non-repayable aid and repayable aid.

5.4.1.1 Non-repayable aid

Non-repayable aid grants which are typically based on the financial need of the students and their families, as well as scholarships or fellowships which are based on merit criteria and need. In Oman, for example, the government has allocated nearly 1600 scholarships for students from low-income families to study at private higher education institutions. However, the student's grade in secondary school also matters. A female student should obtain not less than 70% or equivalent (good), while male students should be awarded not less than 65%. The difference is due to the higher number of female graduates in secondary school than of male graduates, on the one hand, and the higher grades that girls obtain in secondary school than boys, on the other hand, as addressed in the preceding chapter.

Another example is an Indian practice of governmental grants to students in private sector higher education. In India, the large majority of students studying at private colleges are financed in part with government money (Altbach, 1999).

5.4.1.2 Repayable aid

Repayable aid includes a large range of *student loan* arrangements. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985: 137) pointed out that:

“Individual students cannot normally borrow to finance their education without providing collateral, and investment in education is risky and uncertain. Therefore governments in many countries provide loans or loan guarantees to help students finance their education.”

The statement above provides a strong justification for the importance of governmental subsidies for students.

OECD (1990: 9) supports this view, emphasising that:

“The rationale for finance aid for students has been based on both equity and efficiency considerations. Without some form of financial support, lack of money would prevent many able people from undertaking and completing higher education course. This is widely considered to be politically unacceptable on grounds of economic efficiency as well as equity.”

Despite the fact that financial assistance in terms of grants and loans is being introduced in order to maintain accessibility in the face of increasing costs borne by students and their families, arguments as to whether financial aid for students should be given in the form of grants or loans have appeared. Woodhall (1995: 422) claims that those who advocate student loans believe that the government should subsidise higher education on grounds of national welfare, since education brings both "monetary and non-monetary benefits to the society". It is argued that a loan system will impose a lesser burden and be more equitable than grants, since those who will themselves benefit from higher education, in the form of higher lifetime earnings, will contribute to the cost of their education through repaying their loans. In contrast, the opponents of loans argue that student loans will be less effective than grants in encouraging students to continue higher education because of the fear of debt, especially among poor students. Since students may be so concerned about the size of their debts, the risk of wastage and dropout might increase. Moreover, it has also been argued that the costs of administering a loan scheme and the problems of students who default on repayments are likely to reduce the potential saving from introducing such schemes (Woodhall, 1995).

A number of comprehensive reports, reviewed by Woodhall (1991, 1992, 1995), which evaluate student loan programmes introduced within both the developed and developing countries, offer a helpful account of the system. According to Woodhall (1995: 422), in many countries, student loan programmes provide "long-term low-interest loans",

sometimes interest-free loans, for students to enable them to pay tuition fees, and to some degree, living expenses. For example, the United States has a long tradition in this field and several forms of student based funding have been developed, both on a federal and on a state level. Many other countries have benefited from the American experience, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Newlands, Chile, and some Scandinavian countries (Barr, 2003).

There are, however, substantial differences with regard to repayment and in the rate of interest. If there is interest, the rate charged on the money borrowed is typically lower than market rates of interest. For example, Estonia has established a system of study allowances and created a study loan. The aim is to encourage and motivate students to study full-time and to successfully complete the study programme in the normal period of study (Alas & Habkuk, 2007). According to the Study Allowances and Study Loans Act, both Estonian students and non-Estonian students with permanent residence have the right to apply for a study allowance for a number of years during their nominal period of study. They also have the right to obtain a study loan which is secured by the Estonian government. In the loan scheme, the recipient commences repayment of the loan amount, which is at a lower interest rate than any other loans, from the second year after completing the study programme. Moreover, Estonia has a relatively good system of securing bank loans and therefore students are also able to finance their studies on their own (Alas & Habkuk, 2007).

In Germany, students at private higher education institutions are eligible for public maintenance grants and loans if the university is recognised by a state. For example, 16% of the students at the Bucerius Law School (BLS) receive financial aid according to the Federal Training Assistance Act, and this group of BLS also pays only 50% of the tuition fees (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005).

In Oman, by contrast, the only way available currently is the government grant and scholarships scheme for students from low-income families. No comprehensive loan system is established as yet, and although schemes exist in some banks, they remain an additional financial burden to the students and their families, particularly poor students, due to the high rate of interest that students or their families are required to repay after graduation.

In line with the above, student loans that apply, according to Woodhall (1995), can be classified into two types: means-tested loans and income-contingent loans. The former means that the eligibility of the student for loans depends on the level of the student's

family income. In this case, loans are specifically intended for needy students who would otherwise be unable to afford to pay fees or living expenses. The latter refers to loans that must be paid by students as a "fixed proportion of their graduate income" each year until their debt is repaid (Woodhall, 1995: 422).

Occasionally, the income-contingent loans scheme is confused with a graduate tax, which might be another source of financing higher education, because both use the tax system as a mean of collection. The key difference is that the means-tested loans system involves repayment of a debt, and payment comes to an end when the debt is fully acquitted, while a graduate tax involves a continuous contribution from a graduate (Woodhall, 1995).

In addition to Woodhall's (1992, 1995) typology of student loans, Hauptman (2006a: 99) categorises student loan schemes that different countries employ into three basic models:

A. Government funded loans, often with income contingent repayment terms in which repayment is fixed to the borrowers' income once they begin repayment. New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden are examples of this model (Chapman, 1997; Courtious, 2008).

B. Privately funded loans, usually with amortised repayments and guarantee requirements. This is the most frequent model of student loans, and examples can be observed in Canada, Colombia, Spain and the United States.

C. Institution-based loans that are, to some degree, a mix of grant and loan and entail non-commercial repayment arrangements. These are not very common among the existing student loan programmes and are usually restricted to private institutions. Philippines, for example, offers a good example of private institutions providing deferred payment loans to their students.

Based upon the above discussion, it has to be acknowledged that student loans are associated with several challenges. Experiences from other countries show that the cost of establishing and managing the loan mechanism is very high (see for example, OECD, 1990; Woodhall, 1991, 1992, 1995; Hauptman, 2006a). The more serious challenge is that the recovery rate for these loans is very low. This could be due to repetition, dropout, unemployment, and other socio-economic reasons. These challenges have proven to be very serious, to the degree that they undermine this method as an "option for funding higher education systems" (OECD, 1990: 46).

Hauptman (2006b: 8) enumerates the problems with student loans in three factors. The first factor is the lack infrastructure to ensure sufficient levels of repayment of student loans. The second factor is related to the long time required for student loan programmes to "develop and mature", and the third one concerns the "default of loans repayment". Woodhall (1992) supports Hauptman's view, emphasising that lack of the financial and administrative infrastructure required to ensure effective management and loan recovery, especially amongst developing countries, hinders the positive contributions of a loan system. Although the issue of lack of repayment structure concerns a number of developed countries, it represents a great challenge with regard to developing ones. Rogers (1971: 26) identified this challenge four decades ago, arguing that:

"Many have suggested that loans for education are impossible to collect in developing countries. What I am suggesting is that if the right programme is instituted with sufficient incentives and sanctions, repayment will not be politically or socially impracticable."

An example of the problem of defaulting caused by non-repayment of loans can be seen in Malaysia. In 1998, Malaysia formed the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (NHEFC) to organise and provide loans for higher education students (Ismail and Serguieva, 2009). Up to 2008, the total number of borrowers was 1.14 million, with total loans of Malaysian Ringgit 23 billion. 49% of all loans were not repaid by the borrowers (Ismail and Serguieva, 2009: 2). As a consequence, NHEFC took legal action against 18,532 borrowers because they defaulted on their loans. Ismail and Serguieva (2009) attributed the failure of the system to the lack of establishment of a sufficient infrastructure, particularly in terms of repayment collection mechanism, graduate income being uncertain, unemployment among graduates, and many students failing to pay back the loans.

However, as we noticed earlier, the main problem consists in the lack of establishment of an adequate infrastructure to manage and administer the scheme in a proper manner. So the issue of failure and success depends on setting up a sufficient infrastructure to run this scheme. This argument is supported by the Chilean experience of introducing a student loan scheme. The Chilean system stands out for being the most privatised and opened to the market within the developing countries (Larrain and Zurrita, 2008). In 2005, Chile introduced a new higher education student loans system guaranteed by the State and by higher education institutions, financed by the private capital market. The new system was intended to meet the loan needs for a large and growing number of

students each year, and also meet the needs of the state and private universities (Larrain and Zurruta, 2008: 685). The new system meets the designed objectives of financing higher education in Chile and helping students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to pursue their higher education. Larrain and Zurruta (2008: 701) summarised the desirable characteristics of the loan scheme in Chile:

“It is targeted to those students in need, it is distributed in a centralised way that protects the system against the natural discrimination that would affect a private assignment of the loans; it uses the expertise of the private banks in the collection of the loans, the loans are structured so that their repayment does not use more than 10% of the graduates’ income.”

Despite the challenges and problems of introducing loan schemes for educational purposes, it is noticed that student loan programmes in one form or another now have been introduced in many countries around the world, besides many countries are seriously considering student loans as a means of financing higher education. However, it is important to consider the situation of a country in deciding which of these models is the most convenient in a particular case. Developing a student loan programme requires policy makers to decide on a number of policy variables, including who is eligible to borrow (Hauptman, 2006a).

5.4.2 Institutional financial aid policies

According to Hauptman (2006a: 100), the aid that institutions provide can be classified into two forms: either aid is provided as a "discount from the tuition fees that students and their families would otherwise pay", or institutions use other sources of funding to reduce the price that students and their families pay. Private institutions of higher education traditionally have been much more aggressive in their use of institutional aid policies than public institutions. This can be attributed to the fact that private institutions tend to charge higher prices than public institutions and therefore to discount more in order to attract students. In the United States, private institutions over the past quarter century have become increasingly "aggressive in adopting high tuition/high aid policies" as a method for maximising revenues while promoting access (Hauptman, 2006: 101).

Similarly, in Germany, private institutions provide special financial arrangements for their students. At International University Bremen, for example, 60% of the students pay no tuition fee at all, due to the 'need-blind admission' policy, which allows students to gain high aid after their application, based on excellence and personality. It seems that the university follows the United States tradition of a 'high tuition/high aid' strategy (Stannek

& Ziegele, 2005). The University of Witten-Herdecke, a private university in Germany, practises another example of student aid called the "inverted contract between generations" system. This contract is managed by a student association, and it determines three (Stannek & Ziegele, 2005: 51) different modes of payment for a student:

A. Income-contingent repayment of course fees after graduation: graduates passing a certain income threshold pay 8% of their income over a period of eight years.

B. Fixed up-front payment: students pay their sum divided into monthly instalments, with no payment after the end of the regular study period.

C. Later payment by halves: this means that the student pays half of the fixed amount in monthly instalments during the study course, and an income-related repayment of 8% after graduation over four years.

Based on the above examples of student aid models practised in different countries around the world, and although private higher education institutions charge high tuition fees (e.g., ranging from 9,000 Euros to 15,000 Euros per year for undergraduate programmes in German private institutions), they are practising different forms of substitution and financial assistance schemes.

In Omani private universities and colleges, the strategies for student aid remain very limited, if not absent. There are one or two colleges that adopt the strategy of exempting students from low-income families from accommodation fees. Some other institutions may allow students to defer their tuition fees payment from one academic year to the next, but not after graduation. This strict strategy adopted by private institutions, along with the shortage of other actual student aid, such as free or low interest loans, negatively impacts on these institutions and prevents large numbers of students, particularly poor students, from studying at these institutions. Therefore, serious and active efforts should be exerted by officials in relevant governmental bodies, private higher education and the private sector, to develop suitable and effective strategies to help students to study at private higher education institutions.

From the above discussion, it can be argued that the function of educational loans is to provide an opportunity to students, particularly students from low and middle income backgrounds, to continue their higher education. As the World Bank (2007) asserts, as education is considered a route to economic development and progress, educational loans are becoming a major feature of financial support for students, particularly in developing countries.

In this regard, it can be suggested that a National Higher Education Fund (NHEF) needs to be established, to supply loans to Omani students wishing to study in private higher education institutions in Oman.

5.5 Suggested Model of Student Loans Scheme for Oman

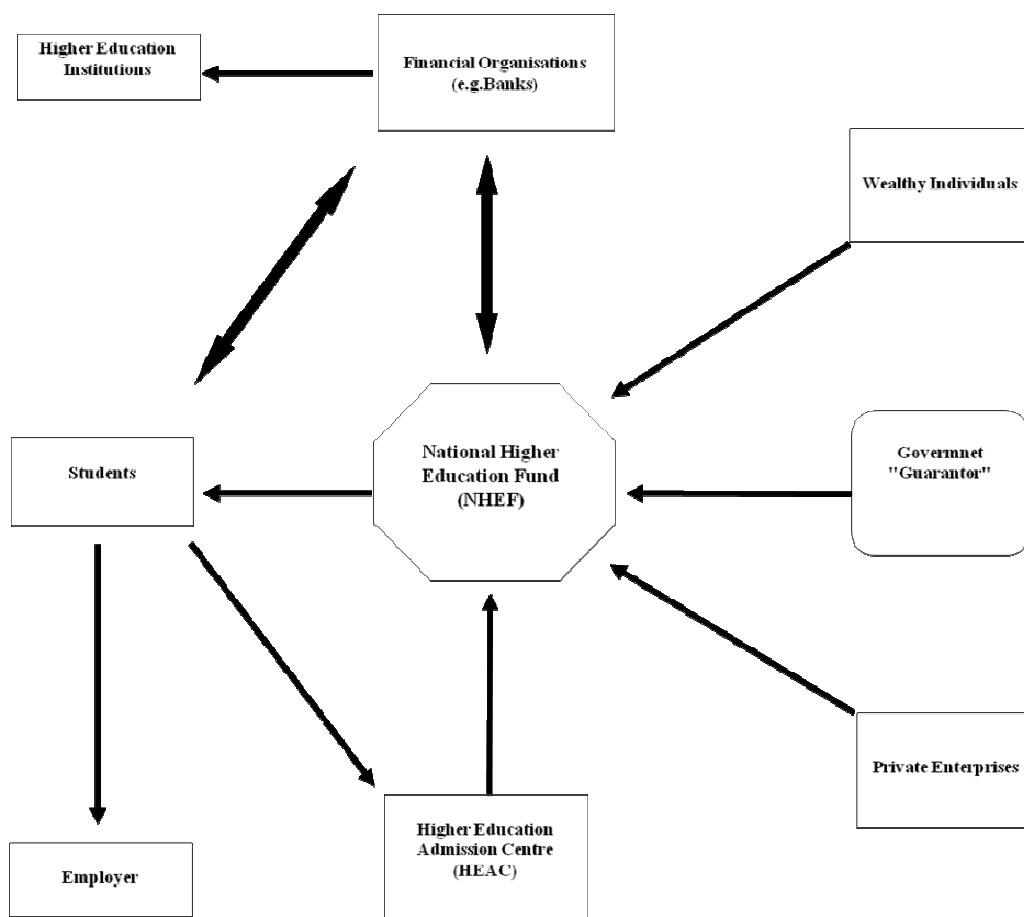
As mentioned above, the importance of establishing the NHEF is to provide an opportunity to Omani students to pursue their higher education. The students would have to repay the cost of their education after graduation and during the first 15 years of their working life. Moreover, wealthy individuals and businessmen should be encouraged to contribute through financing a number of scholarships for secondary school graduates. The main aim of this alternative is to introduce a funding mechanism whereby individuals and society contribute to the cost of higher education. In this model it is assumed that all the cost of higher education will be funded by student loans from private financial institutions such as banks and finance corporations, at a 5% annual interest rate, which is the average for long-term borrowing in the country. The government would provide the guarantees required to secure these loans and would subsidise the interest rate. Students would have to repay the original amount of the loan after their graduation, on the basis of 23% of the borrower's income, payable on monthly instalments as soon as they start full employment and during their first 15 years of work. An example of the participation of private financial organisations can be cited from Germany, namely in the *Lander* (State) of North Rhine-Westphalia. In this Lander, students have to pay back three years after graduation, but only if they are in a job with a certain level of salary. Moreover, banks are not allowed to charge more than 10,000 Euro interest on educational loans (Personal Information by the Vice-Chancellor of German University in Oman, February 24, 2009). The above-mentioned German examples indicate that private banks, beside their commercial functions, have to play a role in serving the community.

From the foregoing, the researcher proposes here a conceptual framework for student loans to be implemented in Oman.

5.5.1 Description of the suggested model

Six key agents may participate throughout the process: students, government (e.g. Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Finance), Admission Centre, financial organisations (e.g. banks), higher education institutions, businessmen and wealthy individuals. Figure 5.1 below summarises suggested procedural steps in this process.

Figure 5.1: Proposed student loan model for Oman



Students: Apply online to the loan system through the Admission Centre, by filling an application prepared for this purpose.

Admission Centre: Studies all applications and reports to the Ministry of Higher Education about the cases that are eligible to obtain the loan.

Ministry of Higher Education: Reviews the list received from the Admission Centre and then reports to the Ministry of Finance.

Ministry of Finance: Informs the banks or other financial organisations with which it has already coordinated in order to facilitate the financial procedures for students listed in that statement. The Ministry of Finance also supervises the NHEF.

Banks or other financial organisations: Grant loans to students. After they receive the official documents together with the students' list from the Ministry of Finance, loans will be processed. The loan will be divided into two parts: the first part is tuition fees, which will go directly on an annual regular basis to the higher education institution at which the student wishes to enrol, while the second part is for the cost of living, which will be

remitted to the student. Financial organisations maintain a follow-up relationship with the students after graduation in coordination with their employers.

Higher Education Institutions: Reports to the Ministry of Higher Education on the academic process of students when it is required. The reason for this is to update the Ministry on the students' situations and also to ensure that students invest the loans obtained properly.

Private Enterprises: Government can require private enterprises to pay an annual tax for higher education. In this regard, it is suggested that the private sector allocate a certain percentage of the net annual profit (e.g. 1%) to fund NHEF, especially as it is also benefiting from providing Omani cadres, efficient and highly skilled in the required disciplines for the development of the Omani economy. Moreover, this initiative can be considered as a social responsibility towards the community.

Wealthy Individuals: Likewise, government should encourage wealthy individuals to participate in funding higher education through endowments and donations. These endowments and donations will be considered as an additional source of income for the NHEF.

Employers: When students graduate, the employers are expected to be involved through salary deduction from students' accounts to repay the loan. Such a measure secures recovery of the loan amount during the specified period.

5.5.2 Mechanism of repayment system

It is assumed that the percentage of students benefiting from these loans in the first year is 10% of the output of the Secondary School Certificate. The study period is four years for a Bachelor, and if the foundation year is added, then it becomes five years. The value of the loan is RO 5,000 annually, so the total amount is RO 25,000 per student for the five years period.

For example, the total number of graduates in 2007/2008 was 47,466. On the assumption that 10% of those students are eligible to obtain the loan, then 4,800 students will benefit from the student loans. In the case that 5% is the loan interest rate be paid by the government, the total interest for 4,800 students during the period of the loan-15 years- is RO 6 million.

On the other hand, students will pay 23% of their salaries on a monthly basis to the banks. For example, if the salary of a bachelor graduate is RO 600 per month, RO 138

would be deducted monthly from his/her salary to repay the loan. This repayment scheme will be during the first 15 years of the student's working life.

This option looks reasonable and favourable since the fact that the original cost is repayable by graduates during the first 15 years of their working life should not have a negative impact on the demand for higher education. In other words, improvements in equity aspects can be better achieved with this method of financing. In addition, the establishment of such a body as NHEF will largely depend on the combined efforts of the government, private sector enterprises, and national wealthy individuals. It will also be a clear message to private higher education institutions that they should participate in this area by offering grants and scholarships among other financial aid for students, particularly those from low income families.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the mechanisms of funding higher education institutions, particularly private institutions. We have noticed that private higher education relies heavily on tuition fees paid by students, together with governmental subsidies. For private higher education institutions to continue its function, funding resources must be diversified.

Similarly, as we have mentioned earlier, Oman spends a small proportion of its budget on higher education (see Table 3.8, Chapter Three). Therefore, to ensure equity and access to higher education would require the expansion of the current capacity of higher education institutions by increasing the public expenditure on higher education. In this regard, the establishment of a national higher education fund would play a significant role in ensuring greater access to local higher education institutions. Moreover, banks and other financial organisations should be encouraged by the government to introduce student loan plans with some interest free loans in order to maximise opportunities of enrolment to these institutions. Bearing these options in mind, the issue of quality of education must be taken into consideration. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Quality Assurance Regimes of Private Higher Education

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed one of the key challenging issues that higher education institutions, particularly private ones, face; the funding challenge. Different international models and mechanisms were highlighted, and some options and scenarios that could be adopted in Oman were offered.

This chapter, then, focuses on another critical issue that also faces the sector of higher education, quality of education. To accomplish this objective, certain themes will be discussed. The rationale for practising quality assurance in higher education will be explained. Moreover, international comparisons of quality system models adopted will be discussed, together with the current situation of the quality system in the Omani context. The aim underlying this is to provide some suggestions to enhance and encourage the quality assurance system in the Sultanate.

6.2 What is Quality?

One might ask the question, what is meant by quality? What are the indicators and criteria by which quality can be measured? According to Randall (2002), it is common knowledge that quality is a slippery concept. Although there exists a range of overlapping interpretations of the term, there is no single, absolute agreed or universally accepted definition of it. Even if it is agreed that quality has become the central issue in higher education institutions, it is still difficult to find agreement on an exact definition of the concept, not to mention its different applications inside and outside higher education institutions. Stensaker (2004: 76) formulated the problem of using a single agreed definition of the term, asserting that:

"Quality by the mid 1990s had become the central organization-level variable in higher education, it was still difficult to find agreement on exact definition of the concept, regardless of its application inside or outside of higher education."

The concept of quality, according to the International Standards Organisation (ISO) (2006: 2) is always associated with the goodness of services or products.

"A quality is a characteristic that a product or service must have. For example, products must be reliable, usable, and repairable. These are some of the characteristics that a good quality product must have."

Conversely, Ball (1990) claims that the concept of quality is associated with the characteristics of fitness for achieving programme purposes, conformance to certain standards, and fulfilment of client satisfaction or requirements. However, these may be subjective, and in any case differ from one product or service to another, and in different contexts.

It can be argued that instead of trying to force a global interpretation on the word, different definitions of quality would be used depending on the circumstances. Reeves & Bednar (1994) have listed diverse ways in which quality has been perceived. According to them, quality has been defined as value, conformance to specifications, conformance to requirements, fitness for use, loss avoidance, and meeting or exceeding customers' expectations. However, those who see quality as transformative have opposed this view, and argued that emphasis should be taken away from a mere stakeholder or product role and directed towards an improvement-oriented approach, focusing more on those who can actually make a difference: teachers, students and internal processes of a higher education institutions (Westerheijden, Brennan and Maassen, 1994).

Similarly, Van Damme (2002: 11) indicates that in the era of globalisation the definition of quality has become more complex. He stated:

“...there is much more diversity in the concept [of quality] than ever before...Sometimes the concept of quality is also misused in order to standardize and homogenize academic contents and curricula. We thus also need a concept of academic quality that recognizes variety and diversity in contents and curricula. In short, globalization forces the international academic community to look into the heart of the concept of academic quality and to develop a definition that respects institutional autonomy, operational variety and cultural diversity, and that avoids conservativeness, standardization, and uniformity.”

Van Damme (2002), in his argument above, suggests that such a concept will be able to cope with the global educational marketplace, and it is a way to defend the sense of identity and community in the higher education world against the danger of disintegration and atomisation.

However, some initial guidance is needed regarding definitions of terms, because usage has varied across national contexts. There is growing agreement on terms, but some governments continue to use different definitions (El-Khawas, 1998). This leads to another question regarding the conceptual meaning of quality assurance in higher education. ISO (2006: 5) defines quality assurance as “a set of activities whose purpose is to demonstrate that an entity meets all quality requirements”. ISO also stresses that these activities are

aimed at inspiring confidence of clients and service providers. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2001: 2) defines quality assurance as “the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained”.

In the Omani context, the document, “Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education” (ROSQA), uses the term quality assurance to refer to “a system of policies and procedures for review, assessment and follow up relating to quality of performance” (Oman Accreditation Council, 2008: 27). According to ROSQA, however, quality as a general term, with reference to the “quality of higher education” refers to the critical factors which decide the value of the system of education. These factors (Ministry of Higher Education, 2008: 30) include the “level of staff, the effectiveness of teaching, learning and research activities, the standard facilities, educational technologies and equipments, the effectiveness of governance, planning and administrative process, and the relevance of programmes to the needs of students and the nation in the global economy”.

Based on the above, it is evident that an attempt to improve process of quality cannot be undertaken without focusing on stakeholders' needs and satisfaction. This, however, raises questions what is the rationale for quality assurance in higher education? And what are stakeholders' needs?

6.3 Rationales for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Mass higher education coupled with greater diversity of the educational sector has prompted governmental initiatives on issues on quality assurance. Traditionally, procedures for quality assurance have often been informal and suitable to only a few institutions and relatively small enrolment (El-Khawas (2006). Such procedures are now seen as inadequate for the diverse circumstances of a larger system of higher education (El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand & Holm-Nielson, 1998). As most states and governments in the world have reconsidered their agenda for higher education over the last few decades, issues of quality assurance have been a major focus of attention. Despite differences in the size and stage of development of their higher education sectors, many governments have decided that traditional academic controls are insufficient to meet today’s challenges and that more explicit assurance about quality is needed (El-Khawas *et al.* 1998).

According to El-Khawas (2006), quality assurance rose to prominence in policy discussions about higher education during the late 1980s and early 1990s, with specific

timing varying among countries. This shift to formal systems of quality assurance is among the most significant trends affecting higher education over the last decades. Emergence of the knowledge society and the commercialisation of the educational services have further strengthened the sense of urgency. As Bleiklie (1998) indicates, rising enrolment and increasing costs to government created new urgency among policy officials, both to manage rapid growth and to maintain quality while the size and number of institutions grew. Enrolment expansion represents one of the many new pressures that raised quality issues in both advanced and developing countries (Salmi, 2002). During the last two decades, systems of higher education became more competitive, more diverse in their students, less well funded, more efficient as measured by external criteria, and increasingly expected to serve national, regional and local needs (Clark, 1998; El-Khawas *et al.* 1998).

Many countries, according to El-Khawas *et al.* (1998), which have experienced a doubling or tripling of higher education enrolments and increased participation rates for young people in the last two decades have also seen the negative effect of rapid expansion on quality. As a result, issues of quality assurance and quality enhancement have been a major focus of attention.

This new situation requires governments to establish national organisations whose mission should be quality control of education. These organisations, according to Randall (2002), should study the needs of the learners, and those of the employers, who want to know the level of performance and skills of students and type of certificates awarded by the higher education institutions.

Baird (2008), however, identifies the key stakeholders in the higher education sector broadly. In Baird's view, they consist of students, employers of graduates, governments at varying levels (international, national, and provincial), academic and other staff of higher education institutions, and regulatory bodies, including professional associations and external accreditors.

Thus, another question might be asked, why are these users so important? As Teichler (2007) emphasises, nowadays with diversification of higher education systems, pressure towards increasing systematic knowledge in middle-level occupations has led to an upgrading of the institutions serving the training for these occupations. The growing university sector has come under pressure to diversify because the growing student body has become increasingly heterogeneous in terms of motivations, competencies, and career prospects.

Recognising the flaws in today's arrangements (El-Khawas, 1998), one can expect increased pressures for better clarification in the future as more students seek to expand their studies in other countries. To this end, quality assurance agencies should address the assessment, evaluation and monitoring issues that will arise as increasing numbers of students seek to continue their education or a specific component of a programme in another country.

Given the emergence of a global market in higher education (Baird, 2008), stakeholders and researchers alike have an interest in better understanding how this global market operates and how it interacts with the continuing presence of public regulation and coordination in national higher education systems. According to Baird (2008), one aspect of this challenge is to make sense of the multiple ways in which quality is judged by different stakeholders.

In this regard, individual motives for undertaking higher education will be complex and varied. Hence, more will study with a wish to be assured that their efforts will be rewarded with a qualification that will give them an advantage in the job market. Therefore, qualification is a common concern to both groups of users, students and employers. Qualifications should be meaningful and should attest to both past achievement and present ability. From the employer's point of view, it is standards of both general and specific competence that matter. However, from the students' point of view, the primary concern is that the qualification that attests to their achievement and ability should be recognised by those who will take decisions about their future careers.

According to Randall (2002), higher education has always been, and will continue to be, a global phenomenon. Ideas and knowledge have transcended national boundaries. In the 21st century, the globalisation of knowledge is no longer restricted to small communities of scholars with personal international links. This leads to the fact that education helps individuals to be mobile across national boundaries, using skills learned in one country to secure employment in another. Hence, whenever students enrol in other countries as part of a degree programme, their study plan must be evaluated in their home country or institutions.

In this market atmosphere, students and employers see quality assurance issues from two different angles. Students want assurance about the quality of the learning opportunities that are provided. For the intended outcomes of the course to be achieved, the learning opportunities must be fit for their purpose. Moreover, students are concerned about certain elements that create good quality, such as classrooms and small-group

teaching, adequate facilities of library and laboratory, and that they will obtain the personal and academic support that they need. However, is that the whole picture? Certainly not. The standards as well as recognition of the qualification or award obtained, matter. Both students and employers are concerned about the standards of the qualifications offered by higher education institutions. Randall (2002) has emphasised the importance of studying the needs of users of higher education when setting the criteria of quality assurance in higher education institutions.

In the conference held in 2001 for the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), Randall (2002:53) stated that:

“Accreditation schemes, whether national or international, must start from recognition of the needs of the customer. The customers of universities are students and employers who need to know, accurately, the standards of the achievement represented by degrees and other higher education qualifications, and the recognition that is accorded to those qualifications.”

Needless to argue here that providing transparency for suppliers, students and the employment market is a vital issue to be considered in the evaluation of higher education. In other words, transparent information is (Swan, 2001) a crucial part of the user’s needs. Swan (2001: 185) clarifies this importance, stating that:

“Perhaps transparency is the twenty-first century equivalent to trust. In many societies deferential systems have been replaced by an educated and questioning population with access to information that challenges previously accepted assumptions. Old trusts are broken down and individuals and the media demand a greater openness to more information and a greater understanding of the decision making process.”

Many countries have recognised the problem of evaluating academic study across country borders. Many of these countries adopt complicated procedures to recognise academic studies outside their borders. To solve this difficulty, some countries have signed bi-lateral agreements that exist between countries with large enrolments of foreign students and are not easily extended to other countries. The procedures in the United States, for instance, are based chiefly on detailed analyses that compare U.S programmes and degrees and those of another country, looking at details of courses and curricular structure, examination systems, etc (El-Khawas, 1998).

This subject has been and still is a critical issue in Oman. However, the government in Oman has set certain criteria for handling this issue. First, if an international student wants to study in Omani higher education institutions, his/her certificate must be evaluated and assessed either in the Ministry of Education or in the Ministry of Higher Education in

Oman. Secondary school graduates deal with the Ministry of Education, whereas higher education students deal with the Ministry of Higher Education. Second, a common committee has been formed within the Gulf countries, whose responsibility is to study and evaluate the qualifications and certificates of Gulf States students. Similarly, in the case of Omani students who graduate in non-Omani universities and colleges, their certificate must be accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education. To accomplish this objective, cooperation exists between the Ministry in Oman and the foreign higher education institutions and authorised organisations. Similarly, related to hiring whether in the private or the public sector, qualifications, both Omani and non-Omani, must be accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education.

When governments or individuals ask questions about the probity and quality of foreign universities' operation in their country, they first look for answers to the processes by which those universities are funded, regulated and supervised in their home policies and rules. A question that arises in this regard is, why does the government want to regulate the private higher education sector? The main reason for this, according to Fielden and Varghese (2009: 71), is due to the fact that "markets are more reliable in ensuring efficiency than equity, while their role in ensuring quality is debatable".

Fielden's and Varghese's statement is applicable to the Omani government's view on the rationales for regulating private universities and colleges in the country. The government standpoint towards this issue is that an unregulated free market in higher education may lead to investments in the sector by low-quality providers that would negatively affect all groups of stakeholders. Students and their parents consider that the government offers 'consumer protection' for them against any potential damage that could be caused by these institutions (e.g. degree mills).

Another important reason for regulation is to allow the collection and distribution of information for the public. By enabling the government to publish reliable and up-to-date information on the programmes and activities of private providers, everyone will benefit. For example, the government will know the size of what is being offered, students will be able to choose more confidently and the private institutions themselves will have a publicly approved mechanism for informing the public about what they provide. Therefore, in Oman there is a centralised information system represented by the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges of the Ministry of Higher Education, which provides a unified source of access to information.

The third reason for regulation is to ensure that public policy is based on accurate information about the activities of the private sector. Especially when the government subsidises these institutions financially, it is necessary that the state knows what is occurring. As Fielden and Varghese (2009: 72) pointed out, "as public policy favours private institutions, the objective of a government would be to achieve a regulatory system that provides the right balance between protecting the public and encouraging private providers to invest".

The quality of educational qualifications and programmes offered by private higher education institutions in Oman is a major concern for the government. The main objective is to protect students from unscrupulous operators and institutions. To ensure quality, such institutions must be academically affiliated to well-recognised foreign higher education institutions and only take on franchises for high-quality programmes. In order to achieve this, a detailed process of accreditation was established and incorporated in the overall procedures and requirements to establish private higher education, as mentioned above.

It is worth mentioning that presently Oman does not have its own programme standards. Student learning standards for narrow fields of study are being developed through a collaborative process of working groups, composed of national and international academic, professional and industry experts. The development of programme standards is intended to guide the processes of curriculum development, programme licensing and programme accreditation (Carroll, Razvi, Goodliffe & Al-Habsi, 2009).

As we have noticed previously, there is a large number of foreign programmes being provided through Omani higher education sector, particularly private ones. Consequently, the OAC is looking to develop an alternative quality assurance system called 'programme recognition'. The reason for this is that these programmes have already been quality assured by external quality agencies according to the standards in their place of origin, this being a condition for them to have been brought to Oman, precisely because they are valued in that form.

However, the question might be raised, how can it be guaranteed that the programmes offered through institutions franchised and affiliated to foreign institutions of higher education are totally accredited? And what are the mechanisms of quality assurance adopted in these cross-border institutions? These issues are extensively discussed by Altbach in his book, *Tradition and Transition: The International Imperative in Higher Education*. Altbach (2007) identified five issues related to quality assurance and the recognition of providers, programmes, and qualifications in cross-border education. The

first issue concerns the licensing or registering of institutions and providers who are delivering this type of courses or programmes. In other words, are the institutions that deliver these programmes registered, licensed, or recognised by both the home country and by the receiving countries? In fact, this is one of the serious challenges that face private higher education systems around the world in general and in developing countries, including Oman, in particular, since many countries do not have the regulatory systems in place to register or evaluate outside providers, either due to the lack of capacity or (Altbach, 2007) for political reasons. In this case, the receiving countries will be affected and, consequently, they should be more concerned about this issue. However, many countries around the world have built up their own regulatory systems for tackling this issue. For example, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and South Africa, as receivers of cross-border education, have established regulatory systems to register and examine the quality of foreign provision. Similarly, the United Kingdom and Australia as providing countries have introduced quality assurance for exported cross-border provision by their recognised higher education institutions (Altbach, 2007). However, it can be argued that there are other countries in the world that play a dual role as receiving and sending countries. Malaysia, India and Jordan are examples of such countries. Therefore, receiving countries must be well aware of this issue.

The second issue concerns the quality of the programmes offered and the academic experience of students. The growth of the phenomenon of cross-border education by institutions and commercial institutions has introduced a new challenge to the field of quality assurance (Altbach, 2007). This situation necessitates that the education sector keeps pace with the expansion of cross-border education, particularly from the new private commercial providers, which are usually not recognised by national systems of quality assurance.

The third issue focuses on the issue of accreditation. Regardless of the importance of accreditation in assuring quality of education, however, there are some marketing forces influencing this issue, since they highlight the profile and reputation of an institution or provider and its programmes. The increase in non-recognised accreditation organisations or “accreditation mills”, aiming to “sell” accreditation without any independent and realistic assessment, is similar to the degree mills that offer certificates and degrees with no or minimal course work (Altbach, 2007). Therefore, educational stakeholders, whether students, academic institutions, employers, or even the public as a whole, need to be aware of these types of accreditation mills, which often do not exist, except as web addresses.

The fourth issue highlights the recognition of the actual qualifications or awards offered for the purpose of employment and further study. Therefore, here a kind of protection of educational stakeholders is very much needed. To achieve this objective certain measures must be taken. Students, employers, and the public in general need to be made aware of the quality and validity of the programmes and awards offered. Moreover, governments should publicly assert the importance of this issue and the negative effects of poor-quality programmes.

The fifth issue is the need for a review of the policy and regulatory environments in which programme and provider mobility is functioning. The question one might ask is to what extent national-level quality assurance systems have the capacity to address the complicated factors of educational mobility across countries and their cultural systems. Undoubtedly, taking a country's academic programme without revising it, academically and culturally, can be considered as no more than a selling and marketing of that country's programme while ignoring the above-mentioned factors. From the author's experience in the field of reviewing of some academic programmes intended to be delivered by some private higher education institutions in Oman, it is of the utmost importance to examine their importance and fitness (in a broad sense), for all educational stakeholders and in the Omani environment, economically and culturally, before allowing these institutions to deliver such programmes. It would be wrong to open the door totally for private higher education providers to offer whatever they like. Revising and monitoring academic aspects remains one of the duties of national government, together with the concerned body or organisations.

Therefore, the issues and challenges discussed above related to quality assurance in a cross-border education system should be taken into serious consideration among and within the national-level quality assurance system. But this is not enough. All concerned authorities, the Ministry of Higher Education, or/and the Council of Higher Education along with private higher education institutions themselves, together share the responsibility for assuring quality of education.

6.4 Quality Assurance Schemes: International Experience

It is very difficult to generalise on the quality of private higher education institutions. They vary widely, depending upon the agency responsible for establishing the university, the legislative requirements for infrastructure, and other facilities, etc. Quality of educational institutions could be based on various factors, such as the level of infrastructural facilities,

quality of programmes offered, qualification levels of teachers, performance of students in their classes while in the university, and their performance once on the labour market (Hodson & Thomas, 2003).

In Africa, for example, many African countries, as Varghese (2004b) argues, have strict legislation on the infrastructural facilities to be provided. Some of them do not comply with these stipulations and are not recognised. Kenya, for instance, has very stringent regulations for establishing a private university, which apply to the programme, qualification levels of the staff, infrastructure, etc. In Cameroon, many private institutions of higher education are not recognised since they do not comply with the infrastructural requirements as stipulated in the regulations (Varghese, 2004c).

In the Omani context, the Ministry of Higher Education has the responsibility for setting the regulations and roles that will oversee the establishment of private higher education, and for monitoring and following up its performance. The private sector was asked to initially to get the permission and approval of the ministry for opening higher education institutions. Based on the clarity and the satisfactory outcome of the feasibility study that explains all the technical, academic and administrative aspects, the government will give permission for the project. The regulatory process for establishing private higher education institutions is discussed in detail later in this chapter. However, because of the complexity and in order to be able to handle the current situation of rapid expansion of private higher education, the Omani government will have to decentralise many of the procedures currently concentrated in the Ministry of Higher Education. To meet this requirement, the government has established an Accreditation Council to provide the quality assurance framework to assist local institutions improve their own local programmes and qualifications.

By and large, quality assurance involves a large range of practices. According to Randall (2002), three common quality assurance practices are: quality audit, self-assessment, and accreditation. The practice of these elements does not necessarily exist in all countries. In other words, different countries may focus on particular instruments, and it would be illogical to assume that without adopting all of these instruments, quality assurance would not be achieved. As will be noticed later in this chapter, different approaches are used in different countries in the world. The most important consideration in quality assurance is, as mentioned above, to review and evaluate of the teaching and learning process systematically in a way that brings the confidence of the stakeholders (Randall, 2002).

However, some other quality assurance practices (e.g., quality network, benchmarking, rating or ranking), are also employed in several countries around the world. Distinctions and differences in these mechanisms will be clarified within the later discussion in the following sections of this chapter, particularly in the section on Oman. To accomplish this objective, examples and models adopted in several countries worldwide will be cited. The aim in so doing is to investigate mechanisms whereby private institutions of higher education are regulated and quality is assured. The knowledge so gained may enable helpful and useful mechanisms to be suggested and recommended to be adopted in Omani private higher education institutions.

In Austria, private higher education institutions offering university education in Austria are (Pechar, Fiorioli & Thomas, 2007) regulated by the Austrian Accreditation Council (AAC). For the time being, there is no accreditation system for public universities in Austria. The AAC was established in 1999, with the intention of opening a university sector for private providers, “to ensure quality and to provide transparency for suppliers, students and the employment market” (Pechar *et al.* 2007: 51). In the Austrian context, accreditation may be defined as a formal and transparent procedure providing a quality label as proof that certain quality requirements are met. Moreover, accreditation is directly linked to the national framework in the sense that accreditation authorises the private university to award recognised academic degrees. Therefore, the AAC has two main tasks (Pechar *et al.* 2007): first, conducting institutional and programme accreditation. This task applies equally to accreditation of new courses of study at institutions already accredited. Second, supervision of accredited private universities. The AAC is not an advisory committee, but an independent body, which has full decision-making powers over the accreditation of private universities and is not subject to directives from any other body. The legal supervision of the AAC is the responsibility of the Federal Minister of Education. The costs of maintaining the AAC and its office are covered by the Federal government. The applicants for accreditation have to repay the expenses of the experts involved in the application procedure.

In the Bulgarian context, accreditation means recognition by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency that the activity and the quality of education at a given institution of higher education correspond to the Higher Education Law and the State Requirements. The accreditation requirements are the same for all institutions (Slantcheva, 2007b). Procedures for evaluation go through a self-evaluation process, peer review and site visits. Accreditation results are also linked to student enrolment allocations and State

subsidies. In 1999, some changes were made to the Law on Higher Education. The requirement for the introduction of internal institutions for evaluation and maintenance of quality of teaching and learning has been a major development. The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency awards a grade, issues recommendations or puts forth reasons for rejection, and sets the term for the validity of the accreditation. For example, if a university receives a very good or good, its accreditation is valid for six years; if it receives a satisfactory grading, then it becomes accredited for three years. However, in 2002 new changes in the Law of Higher Education further elaborated the accreditation and evaluation mechanisms, geared more towards improving quality standards within institutions. Thus, institutions are required to introduce systems for monitoring the effectiveness of their internal institutional quality systems and start focusing on student assessment outcomes and student programme evaluation. Requirements on improving student services (guidance, counselling, careers, support) and collecting information about students for monitoring purposes (e.g. drop out rates, qualifications, student profiles) are also present (Slantcheva, 2007b).

The situation in Estonia, however, takes another dimension, in the sense that private higher education institutions must have a teaching licence from the Ministry of Education in order to carry out instruction at a higher education level. However, accreditation is not compulsory for private higher education institutions. Nevertheless, accreditation of study programmes is necessary for them to have state recognition. According to the Law on Universities of 1995, all study programmes in universities must be evaluated and accredited once every seven years (Habakuk & Alas, 2007).

Comparing the above examples with the picture of quality assurance in the German higher education system, the situation is different. For decades, the German higher education system considered all universities to be of equal quality, and upheld a strong notion of university autonomy. According to Stannek & Ziegele (2007), up to the 1980s, notions of competition and quality assessment were opposed by many stakeholders within the higher education sector. During the 1990s a number of models for evaluation were developed and the first German evaluation agencies were founded in that period. Despite those trends in the German higher education system, Funereal (2003) argues that there is still no coherent national policy regime of quality assurance, due to the fact that accreditation in Germany is still in its infancy and limited to the newly introduced Bachelor and Master courses; rankings made by private institutions are the only nationwide instrument of comparison of higher education institutions. Looking in more depth at

the German approaches to quality assessment or quality assurance, four key instruments are currently implemented (Funereal, 2003):

A. *State approval of higher education institutions.* Although state approval of courses and universities cannot be interpreted as an instrument of quality assurance in a restricted perspective, it has at least some reference to quality. Approval refers to a programme's requirements in the context of state planning depending on the intake capacity of the courses in different specialisations, taking into consideration the existing resources for conducting the programme.

These procedures, however, are not restricted to the public universities. Private universities together with their individual programmes still need state approval, which is regulated by the university law of the state in which the university is located. However, the approval procedures of private universities, to some extent, differ in some aspects, and the way of handling the regulations also differs from one (*Lander*) state to another. Similarly, private universities, like public ones, should offer several degrees and resources should guarantee stability of the institution.

B. *Accreditation.* The mechanism of accreditation is a relatively new phenomenon within the German higher education sector. Accreditation was introduced in 1998, and is carried out by various partly regional and partly professional accreditation agencies.

However, Germany has two types of accreditation: programme accreditation and institutional accreditation. The former (programme accreditation), applies to public and private institutions in the same way. As Schwarz & Weserheijden (2004) emphasise, the rationale for the accreditation system comes from the Bologna process and the change from the traditional degrees to a Bachelor's and Master's structure. As an independent institution, the Accreditation Council has seventeen members, who represent the *Lander* (states), higher education institutions, students, and the professional practice. In addition to its responsibility for accrediting agencies, the Accreditation Council acts as a co-ordinator and critical observer of the work carried out by the accreditation agencies. It will also function as a central documentation office to guarantee transparency with respect to compatibility and equivalency of study courses (Schwarz & Weserheijden, 2004).

The second type of accreditation in Germany, institutional accreditation, aims to clarify the question whether a university is able to procure educational programmes, which can be regarded as belonging to the higher education sector. This procedure serves to secure the quality of private universities and to produce transparency and comparability between the educational programmes of private higher education institutions. As yet, only

private higher education institutions have undergone institutional accreditation procedures.

C. *Evaluation*. This instrument is the most common means of quality assessment in higher education. There is a two-step procedure; an internal self-evaluation and an external peer review. Since the 1990s, various concepts of evaluation have been developed and several agencies of evaluation have been established in Germany. However, until now, evaluation of teaching and research are strictly separated, since those agencies only deal with the evaluation of courses (Schwarz & Weserheijden, 2004).

D. *Rankings*. The idea of rankings of higher education institutions has a short tradition in Germany, being introduced in 1989. Since then, and for the purpose of knowing which university is the best, several rankings with quite different approaches have been developed. Most rankings were carried out either by magazines or in cooperation with magazines (Federkeil, 2003).

Based on the above discussion, it can be said that among its major purposes, the German accreditation system is basically recognised as a mechanism for quality assurance. In the German context, ranking can be understood as a particular system of performance indicators. It comes close to benchmarking, with one significant difference. Benchmarking should include performance indicators as well as underlying processes. This cannot be achieved by ranking, as the approach to the aims has to be broader in the sense of covering the whole field, while benchmarking normally is selective regarding the number of institutions involved. Moreover, ranking does not include an indispensable element of quality assurance within institutions. Therefore, if rankings are to produce important knowledge on quality, they should not refer to whole universities, but to single departments or courses, because departments of a university may differ in their performance. In other words, a university may be ranked high in one subject but ranked low in another field. Even within a single department, teaching performance may be ranked very good whereas research is quite poor. These are some examples of the differences that may be masked by generalised rankings (Federkeil, 2003). The statement above indicates that the ranking is not the perfect solution to ensure or measure quality education, since there is no international unified agreement of the mechanism or standards to be adopted worldwide, and it may vary from country to country. Nevertheless, the ranking of institutions of higher education, as Teichler (2008) points out, has currently become fashionable worldwide, to produce lists of high class universities. Most rankings are conducted by magazines and newspapers and in some cases by academic practitioners (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2009), and these means may be welcomed by universities or

colleges who are at the top of the list, whereas those who are not at the top believe that rankings are unjust. As Stensaker & Kehm (2009: VII) point out:

"Those universities that are not the best -and they are many- do not seem to be very pleased when journalists ask them why they are not at the top. They reply that the published rankings are unfair, methodologically unsound and measure only a small fraction of what universities do."

Looking at the policy of Colombia relating to quality assurance in higher education, currently the Colombian government exercises control in higher education through the tasks of inspection and observation (Pacheco, 2007). Evaluation is conducted at three levels: institutions, programmes, and students. Regarding institutional and programme evaluation, the establishment of a new public or private institution of higher education begins with the application, followed by the evaluation by a group of consultants, formed by the Ministry of Education, and a group of academic peers designed by the Inter-Institutional National Commission for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education (CONACES), and finishes with the decision issued by the Ministry of Education. If the decision is positive, the new institution is permitted to operate without a time limit.

Before starting operations, every academic programme must gain government authorisation, called 'qualified registration'. The process of obtaining this authorisation includes academic peers' evaluation, peers' report, and the formal authorisation of the programme by the Ministry of Education. The qualified authorisation is granted for a seven-year period, and it is required for seeking accreditation.

As for student assessment, this is done twice by the state: before entering higher education and then before completion. The first is through the "Exam for Access to Higher Education" which is typically scheduled in the last grade of high school. The government uses these results to collect information on students' level of knowledge as well as to gather demographic information, while most institutions of higher education use them as a criterion in the admission process. The second test is called the "Exam of Quality of Higher Education" and is administered to the students who are in the last semester of every academic programme. Although this exam is compulsory, is not a requirement for award of an undergraduate degree (Pacheco, 2007).

In countries like Poland and Turkey, the authorised organisations for maintaining quality in higher education institutions function roughly similarly. In Poland (Jablecka, 2007: 297), the Higher Education Act clarifies the tasks of the State Accreditation Board as follows:

- Drawing up opinions on applications regarding both the founding of a higher education institution and the launching of new degree programmes in existing institutions.
- Assigning specialisations to appropriate degree programmes
- Assessment of the quality of teaching and verifying compliance with the requirements for higher education degree programmes in all Polish institutions of higher education.
- Awarding approvals for establishing and conducting new degree programmes.

In Turkey, although there is no national accreditation and quality assurance system, the Council of Higher Education and the Interuniversity Board are responsible for the criteria for recognition of institutions (public and private higher education) and programmes. In order to have State legitimacy and recognition, private higher education institutions need to comply with a set of norms such as curriculum conformity, an approved credit system, length and programme of studies, adequate number of full-time staff and facility provision for teaching activities (Mizikaci, 2007).

Moving to the Malaysian system of quality in higher education; all courses taught at private colleges, including those conducted in affiliation with universities have to be approved by the Ministry of Education. The National Accreditation Board acts as the advisor to the Ministry on these matters and is vested with extensive legislative powers to determine the classification of qualifications, delivery standards and the qualifications of teachers appointed to teach in these courses. The Private Higher Education Act 1996 requires minimum standards as prescribed by the National Accreditation Board to be met before the award of qualifications (Menon, 2001).

In Kuwait, as a neighbouring country of Oman and one of the six Gulf countries has recently formed the Private Universities Council (PUC). Although it is an independent organisation, it is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education. Its main tasks are (Al-Atiqi, Alharbi & Ali, 2002: 2):

- To decide on the establishment of a private institution.
- To determine the requirements of the academic credibility of the private institution, and constantly apply quality and control measures to ensure full compliance with the approved terms and conditions in the decree of establishment. It also applies quality and control measures on the approved programmes of study.
- To adopt universal standards while approving programmes of study, and frequently reassess these standards for the better of performance and higher quality of higher education.
- To regulate measures of accreditation, validate degrees and certificates issued from private institutions, and compare them with their counterparts in the public sector according to the approved procedures and regulations.
- To look into cases where the activities of a private institution are to be suspended, combined and/or cancelled.

The accreditation scheme in Kuwait takes two main forms: institutional and academic programme accreditation. While the former is carried out by an independent external team formed by the PUC, the latter is conducted by an internationally recognised accreditation body in the programme field of specialisation. There are ten private higher education institutions in Kuwait, of which only one has been awarded institutional accreditation by the PUC for three years.

In the foregoing paragraphs, several examples of various countries' experiments regarding the application and mechanisms of quality assurance systems were reviewed. We have noticed that there are different methods, concepts and instruments of quality assurance, such as approval, evaluation, accreditation and ranking. Although some of these instruments cannot be totally treated or considered as 'genuine' forms of quality assurance in the strict sense, they nevertheless play a vital role in assessing and enhancing quality aspects in higher education systems. From the review of the models and instruments reported above, it is obvious that unified agreement on quality terminologies still does not exist. For example, accreditation as one process of assuring quality is considered as a compulsory procedure for establishing institutions and offering academic programmes in the cases of Bulgaria and Austria. However, in countries such as Estonia and Turkey, accreditation is a voluntary approach for assuring quality in higher education. Moreover, even though accreditation systems are adopted in many countries of the world, the period of validity of the accreditation process differs. For example, in Bulgaria, universities should be accredited every seven years, whereas in Kuwait, validation of institutional accreditation is for three years. The situation in Bulgaria is different again, since accreditation is categorised based upon the grade of the university. If a university receives a very good or good grade, accreditation is valid for six years, but if a university receives a satisfactory grade then the validation is for only three years.

In light of the aforementioned, a key question one might ask is to what degree Oman can benefit from those examples to improve its higher education system. To accomplish this objective, a separate section will be devoted to this issue and some suggestions will also be offered. Before doing so, it is important to highlight the current system of quality assurance in Oman.

6.5 Mechanisms of Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education in Oman

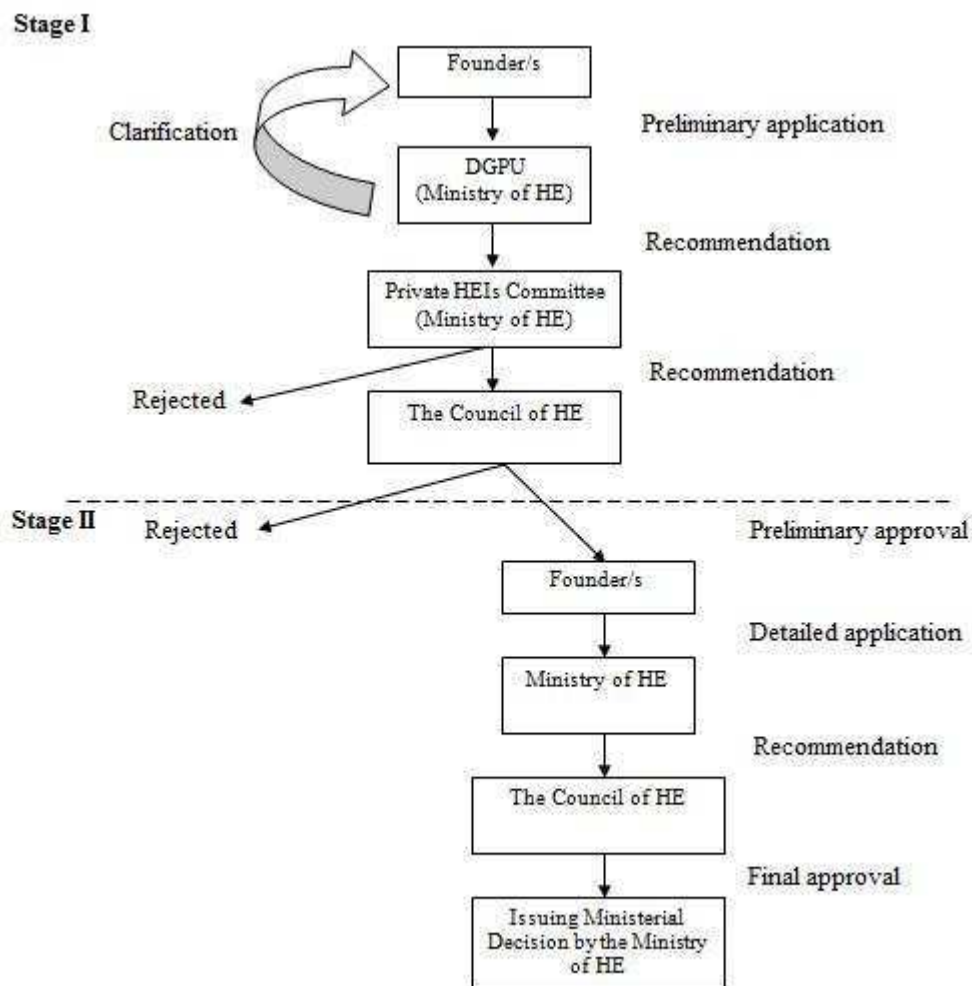
In reviewing quality assurance practices in the Omani higher education system so far, five types of practices can be found to take place in the system: state approval (licensing),

supervision, quality network, quality audit, and accreditation. However, some of these practices (e.g. state approval, supervision, and quality network) cannot be totally classified or considered as instruments of quality assurance in the strict sense.

6.5.1 State approval of higher education institutions (licensing procedures)

A first mechanism which has at least some reference to quality but cannot be interpreted as an instrument of quality assurance in a narrower sense, is the state approval of institutions of private higher education and the courses and programmes they offer. Figure 6.1 summarises licensing procedures for private higher education institutions.

Figure 6.1 Licensing process of private higher education provision in Oman



As can be seen from the figure above, the licensing procedure involves essentially two stages: a) a preliminary application will be put forward for a preliminary review. If approved, then, b) a detailed application will be supplemented.

The establishment of a new private higher education institution starts with applying to the Ministry of Higher Education. The application consists of several documents related to academic, legal, financial and administrative requirements (see Appendix 3). One of the most important documents in the establishment process is the ‘academic affiliation agreement’ between the Omani higher education institution and a foreign higher education institution. As mentioned earlier, most private universities and colleges in Oman have to be affiliated academically to foreign institutions, which will allow them to offer the academic programmes developed by these institutions. When all the required documents are submitted, the concerned department -Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges (DGPUC)- at the Ministry of Higher Education starts studying and analysing the application. The following step is that the Ministry of Higher Education forwards the proposal with its analysis and recommendations to the Council of Higher Education for approval and a final decision. If the proposal is approved, the applicants will be informed by the Ministry of Higher Education and asked to carry out the project. Until this stage, the approval as shown in the figure above, is only provisional. Within six months from the date of decision, the founders must provide the Ministry of Higher Education with details of the project implementation for the university/college buildings and infrastructure according to the regulations and rules applied by the ministry, together with a detailed academic, administrative, and financial organisational structure for the university. On completion of all implementation requirements, the Minister of Higher Education issues a ministerial decision that will formally establish the institution. It is worth mentioning that this is not the final step for opening the institution, since another decision must be issued by the Minister of Higher Education for commencement of studies. This ministerial decision will be based upon the report of a site visit by members from the DGPUC.

Based on the above and from data of the application form shown in Appendix 3, a number of comments can be put forward with regard to the licensing process of private higher education institutions.

1. The provisional registration that allows the applicant to proceed with the development of a campus and the recruitment of staff. The form filling and procedures behind this initial stage vary considerably in scale from one country to another, but the overall objective is to filter out the obviously incompetent or undercapitalised. As a result, applications often focus on the financial and academic credibility of the applicants, and their own outline business plan (Fielden and Varghese, 2009).

2. The Ministry of Higher Education requires applicants to provide a financial guarantee to ensure the availability of the required funds for execution of the project.
3. The applicant institution is expected to seek affiliation to a recognised foreign university. This ensures that it follows conventional models of practice, but also limits the opportunity for developing any new models of learning and teaching.
4. The present application does not require applicant to set a plan for institutional and programmes' accreditation. Unlike Kuwait, for example, founders are required to clarify their plan institutional and programmes' accreditation in the application form (Al-Atiqi *et al.* 2002).
5. In some countries such as Kuwait, Jordan, and Ghana, for example, names of proposed members of the first Council of Trustees and their CVs must be stated in the application (Burke & Al-Waked, 1997; Al-Atiqi *et al.* 2002; Fielden & Varghese, 2009). In Oman, by contrast, names of members of the proposed Board of Trustees are not required to be included in the application for establishment of the institution. Founders of private higher education institutions are required to elect and approve the Board of Trustees in accordance with the executive regulations of private institutions. Article 8 of the Ordinance of Private Universities clarifies this point, verifying that "the private university shall have a governing board to be formed from the founders and others in the manner stipulated in its internal regulations. The board shall include the vice chancellor and a number of experienced academicians. The first governing board shall be formed by a decision of founders" (Official Gazette, 1999: 27).

It is worth mentioning that when the government is designing its process, it has to balance various factors. The processes should not be so demanding and time consuming that they deter, but they should also be rigorous in academic and financial issues. Furthermore, they should be manageable and not so extensive that they are beyond the staff capacity and skills of the regulatory body to administer. Here, it should be taken into account that private higher education providers must assume the dual role or task of both commercial corporations and higher education institutions. Understanding this dual role is a key to success in the quest for continuous improvement and the realisation of the full potential of these educational providers.

6.5.2 Supervision

Royal Decree No. 36/2000 defines the responsibilities of the Ministry of Higher Education, and, according to Article 3 of the Royal Decree, "supervision of private higher education

institutions” is one of these responsibilities. However, the Council of Higher Education also supervises higher education institutions, since decisions to establish or close private universities and colleges should be made by this council. The distinction between the supervision of the Council of Higher Education and that of the Ministry of Higher Education is that the former is concerned with general supervision, without focusing on daily issues or daily following private institutions, whereas the latter is involved in continuous connection and contact with private universities and colleges, academically and administratively. To accomplish the mission of the Ministry of Higher Education successfully, the DGPUK in the Ministry of Higher Education was established in 2000 to be responsible for supervising private higher education. The major responsibilities of this Directorate as clarified in the Royal Decree No. 70/2000 (Official Gazette, 2000) are as follows:

1. Receiving applications for the establishment of private universities and colleges.
2. Following up the implementation of the decisions approving the programmes of higher education institutions.
3. Supervising the implementation of the standards, criteria and conditions that are required for the programmes of study in the institutions of higher education that are approved by the specialised and competent councils and committees.
4. Approval of the programmes of study provided by the institutions of higher education.
5. Following up the institutions of private higher education to ascertain that they use modern technological methods in education.

It is obvious that a major role in supervising private institutions of higher education is played by the DGPUK. Every year, this directorate makes supervisory visits to private higher education institutions. The purpose of these visits is to review whether private universities and colleges are correctly applying the relevant legislation and regulations. Another purpose is to help and support these institutions to strengthen and develop their own control mechanisms. Prior to the visit, the DGPUK sends an official letter to the private universities and colleges, stating the key points and subjects to be investigated, but sudden visits are conducted from time to time. From the researcher’s experience in this regard, the key points of the visiting schedules are meetings with senior administration in the universities and colleges, academic heads of departments, lecturers, and students. These meetings are conducted separately. Site visits also receive considerable attention from the visiting team. After investigation of all targeted issues, a final meeting will be held with the vice-chancellors of universities and the deans of colleges, to discuss specific weaknesses that the institution must tackle. A visit report will be sent to the university or

college within a week of the visit. Despite the fact that this instrument cannot be considered as a 'genuine' method or mechanism of quality assurance, it is a positive step towards enhancing and developing quality in these institutions. A similar approach can be noticed in Sweden, since the legal department of Swedish National Agency for Higher Education makes annual supervisory visits to several higher education institutions to check whether these institutions are complying with the rules and regulations. Prior to a visit, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education sends a questionnaire to the higher education institution, covering certain elements, such as the regulations regarding student representation and consultation, course and programme specifications (www.hsv.se/aboutus/publications, March 22, 2010).

However, there is an ongoing debate as to whether quality assurance, as conducted by the government and supported in the academic community, violates the constitutional guarantee of universities' autonomy. People who believe that the policy does not violate institutional autonomy consider that it is part of the constitutional obligation of the government to oversee higher education's quality (Fong & Lim, 2008). Others believe that the mere fact of authorising a university to offer a programme violates its autonomy (Agarwal, 2008). However, if the rationale for quality assurance is that individual students have the right to demand that their course or study programme is of a high standard, employers in the public and private sectors have a need for highly trained graduates, and the general public is entitled to be assured that generous donations, grants and high levels of taxation result in a high standards, then the growing demand for accountability will provide the government with stronger arguments to exercise its control over higher education. In the case of the private sector of higher education, where most of the founders are profit-oriented, governmental interference is needed, either through setting the laws, regulations and legislations or by practising different approaches in controlling and ensuring that quality comes first.

In the Omani context, the reports, results and recommendations of the contentious visits to the private universities and colleges have found an echo amongst the officials in the Ministry of Higher Education. For example, during the last two years, the Ministry of Higher Education has decided to distribute internal scholarships to the private universities and colleges based on these reports. This step itself creates a motivated and competitive spirit within and amongst private higher education institutions.

However, with the rapid development of private higher education in Oman, the Directorate urgently needs to be restructured. The Directorate, in its current situation, faces

three main challenges. First, shortage of administrative staff that can deal with day to day university and college matters. Second, lack of experts who can deal professionally with different academic issues. Third, the tasks and responsibilities, noted above, of the Directorate need to be reviewed. For example, task number four, above, implies that the Directorate has the authority to approve or reject any academic programmes in the private universities or colleges, whereas the actual duty of the Directorate is to study applications for these programmes and the decision to approve or reject them is the responsibility of the Council of Higher Education. Therefore, in order to activate the role of the DGPUC in supervising private universities and colleges sufficiently, full attention needs to be given to this issue by the authorities in the Ministry of Higher Education. However, with the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council, it is expected that responsibility for the assessment, evaluation and accreditation of these institutions will be transferred largely to this Council (Appendix 4, Royal Decree No. 74/2001, establishing the Accreditation Council and clarifying its responsibilities and functions).

6.5.3 Quality network

Networking and strategic alliances are among the key success factors of most endeavours in the globalised world. The importance of establishing networks for quality assurance in higher education has been highlighted by the OECD and UNESCO (Labi, 2005). For higher education, the largest network of quality assurance agencies is the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The main purpose of this Network is to collect and disseminate information on the current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education (INQAAHE, 2010). As a member of INQAAHE, Oman hopes to reap some benefits from the networking and strategic alliance with other members of the network for strengthening the quality aspects in the higher education sector in Oman.

Nationally, the Oman Quality Network (OQN) is an independent, not-for-profit network of Omani Higher Education Providers (HEPs) focused on quality enhancement in higher education (OAC, 2008). The OQN is a collegiate national network of HEPs, Ministry of Higher Education and OAC representatives. The OQN is concerned with "developing a strong and vibrant higher education sector by improving quality in higher education within the Sultanate of Oman". Similarly, it aims to "build a quality conscious, knowledge rich higher education sector through the sharing of ideas, strategies, research, and practices that inform the pursuit of quality improvement" (Carroll *et al.* 2009: 25).

Although, in its early stages, the OQN faced certain challenges, and as an informal network it seeks to use email communication rather than more formal process of official letters that must follow particular protocols for approval and dissemination, the OQN is now operating beneficially. For example, the OQN is currently assuming full responsibility for the national quality training programmes to "maximise the potential for pan-sectoral collaboration". It can be said that the OQN can be considered as assistance factor for the OAC as it develops a range of aspects of the national system. For example, "draft of the Quality Audit Manual is circulated to the OQN for comment", and workshops are organised with its representatives to explain the draft of this Manual (Carroll *et al.* 2009: 25).

6.5.4 Quality audit

Dr. Rawya Al-Busaidia, Minister of Higher Education, Oman, in responding to Oman News Agency (ONA) about the current status of private universities and colleges in Oman, particularly with regard to quality, expressed the hope that the Accreditation Council will shortly assume its role of accrediting private higher education institutions that meet standards of quality equal to those of leading international institutions. The instrument that will be adopted by the Accreditation Council for ensuring quality, as mentioned by Al-Busaidia, will be through quality audits using panels of local and international experts (*Gulf News*, August 4, 2002). According to the Minister of Higher Education, despite the fact that most private colleges and universities operating in Oman have their programmes of study accredited by external universities, it is expected that private higher education institutions will continue to improve their quality. She stated that:

"The emphasis will be on quality improvement. In today's highly competitive world no institution, no matter how prestigious, can afford to merely maintain current standards." (*Gulf News*, August 4, 2002: 7)

However, from 2002 up to the beginning of 2008, the Accreditation Council has not played an active role in this regard. In March 2008, a Quality Audit Manual was issued by the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC). This manual is concerned with Institutional Accreditation: stage 1. According to the Board of the OAC, this will be followed by a second stage (Institutional Accreditation: Stage 2) which is currently under development. Both stages, as we noticed above, are concerned with institutional accreditation. However, the key distinction between them is that Institutional Accreditation: Stage 1 sets out the protocols and processes for external quality audits of higher education institutions,

whereas, the Institutional Accreditation: Stage 2 sets out the institutional standards and the processes for assessing higher education institutions against those standards (OAC, 2008).

According to the ISO (2006: 3), “quality audits examine the elements of a quality management system in order to evaluate how well these elements comply with quality system requirements.”

Internationally, quality audits are an established form of external quality assurance. They are a key feature of the higher education systems of several countries over the world, including the UK, Australia, and New Zealand and, according to the Chairman of the European Consortium for Accreditation, at least 27 countries around Europe (Heusser, 2006). In Australia, academic quality assurance falls under the purview of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (Lawrence, 2007). The agency functions to investigate the quality of higher education in campuses in Australia as well as outside Australia, and accredits the qualifications from these universities (Woodhouse, 2007). In New Zealand, academic quality audit is under the responsibility of the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. This unit is “accountable to each university individually through external audit of mechanisms for monitoring and enhancing the ongoing academic quality of academic programmes, their delivery and their learning outcomes, and the extent to which the universities are achieving stated aims and objectives in these areas and processes” (Jennings, 2007: 3).

Quality audit is one of the key practices in organisations adopting a quality management system such as ISO. ISO systems were adopted by a few universities in the UK in the 1980s, but their acceptance in institutions of higher education has declined since. Such a quality management system is uncommon in institutions of higher education overseas in recent years.

In the Omani context, the objective underlying the introduction of a quality audit instrument, according to the OAC, is to evaluate the effectiveness of an institution’s quality assurance and quality enhancement process against its stated goals and objectives.

Quality audit, then, involves a self study of higher education institution’s activities, resulting in a quality audit portfolio, and then external verification of the portfolio by an external audit panel arranged by the OAC. The panel produces a quality audit report consisting of, amongst other elements, commendations, affirmations and recommendations (OAC, 2008).

The above statement, however, leads to other related questions, including, why does Oman practise quality audit instead of accreditation? What occurs if an Omani higher

education institution fails its quality audit? And, is quality audit a prerequisite for programme accreditation? These questions and others are of great concern to the public and stakeholders generally. It is worth mentioning here that quality audit is the first step in introducing a comprehensive system of external, institutional quality assurance, due to its significance in providing an introduction to the principles and practices of quality assurance. In this stage and in order to assure the readiness of higher education institutions, particularly private ones, standards assessment would be the next process to be applied in these institutions. The system here has been designed specifically for the Omani higher education sector, which has some unique features, such as mostly very young higher education institutions and a heavy emphasis on programmes sourced from foreign providers.

In reviewing the quality audit mechanisms in many countries throughout the world, it was observed that some countries use either standards-based accreditation or fitness-for-purpose quality audit for higher education institutions, and separate processes for accrediting programmes. Others use a combination of quality audit and standards assessment. For instance, South Africa requires its universities to experience a quality audit process that include standards assessment, while in Australia, private higher education institutions undergo quality audit and institutional accreditation as two separate processes (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Regarding the question of the negative results that higher education institutions might face, the key feature of accreditation is an answer of yes or no (Morley, 2003), while quality audit does not result in a score or a pass/fail. The quality audit report, as we noticed earlier, is a text-based document with a number of recommendations, affirmations and commendations. In other words, the principle of quality audit is that every institution of higher education is doing some things well, and other things in a manner that would benefit from improvement. This does not mean that the panel members will be less thorough or pay less attention in their investigations and reporting. Moreover, the quality audit report is a public document, meaning that the panel's findings, either positive or negative, may have some impact on the reputation of the higher education institution.

Again, as we mentioned previously, the aim of quality audit in Oman is to examine how each institution of higher education is identifying for itself the standards that are appropriate for its mission and achieving them. According to the OAC (2008), quality audit expects the higher education institution to exercise the leadership role expected of Oman's educators, and to show this role in the way it manages its affairs. Thus, quality

audit might be a helpful process to undertake prior to considering provider accreditation. In the current status of higher education institutions in Oman, particularly private institutions of higher education, this would be an important step and a reasonable instrument for quality assurance. This is useful for determining the capacity and capability of higher education institution to achieve its aspirations and continually improve. It also important because it evaluates the effectiveness of institutions' quality assurance and quality enhancement process against their own stated objectives and goals, and requirements set by government and other external sources such as affiliate institutions or professional bodies (Carroll *et al.* 2009).

6.5.5 Accreditation

In the Omani context, the existing practice with regard to accreditation is carried out through the Ministry of Higher Education in the form of licensing. However, we should differentiate between licensing and accreditation. While licensing gives the right to operate as an educational institution, which is the first step in the state accreditation process, accreditation, according to El-Khawas (2006), is a multi-step process that gives public recognition to an academic institution that meets certain standards, based on a self-assessment and some form of external review. Over the last decade, the term accreditation has become increasingly noticeable worldwide for its validation role, offering public recognition that an institution of higher education meets external standards of quality. In different country settings, the term has sometimes been given different meanings, for instance, to describe an initial governmental approval, or licensing of an institution (El-Khawas, 2006). In the United States, with its century-long history of accreditation, the term encompasses reviews of institutions as well as reviews of academic programmes of study

In a study of “Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area” covering twenty European countries involved in the Bologna process, the following definitions were adopted to maintain reliable distinctions between accreditation, evaluation and other approval schemes. According to Schwarz & Westerheijden (2004: 2), an accreditation scheme covers:

“All institutionalised and systematically implemented evaluation schemes of higher education institutions, degrees types and programmes that end in a formal summary judgement that leads to formal approval processes regarding the respective institution, degree type and/or programme.”

Accreditation in the above statement implies a policy instrument composed of two elements; evaluation and approval. Evaluation means activities implemented regarding the measurement, analysis and/or development of quality for institutions, degree-types and programmes. Such activity, however, differs from other evaluation schemes associated with other types of measurement of quality that do not fulfil the criteria of the definition of evaluation schemes, such as institution-based evaluation. In contrast, approval of institutions and programmes aims to grant the right to exist within the system, or to reject the right to exist, to an institution and programme (e.g. licence, accreditation). The approval can be conducted by one organisation or many organisations and is granted by one or more organisations. The other type of approval can be employed outside the accreditation scheme, including all major approval schemes of higher education institutions and programmes that are not parts of the accreditation scheme, for example, an approval provided by the state ministry that does not involve accreditation (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004: 3).

In the Omani context, as we mentioned earlier, an application to establish a private university or college shall be submitted by the founders to the Ministry of Higher Education to seek permission to go ahead with a franchise or affiliation scheme. Before giving permission, the ministry requires a feasibility study to be conducted and will itself investigate the proposal to discover, for instance, whether the franchiser or institution affiliated with had received accreditation in its own country. If the programme is not accredited in the franchiser's own country, then the ministry will require an alternative programme to be sought. In its drive for legitimacy, licensing and accreditation are imperatives for the private sector; without a licence, a private institution cannot legally operate, and without accreditation it cannot issue state-recognised degrees and qualifications, while unsuccessful accreditation automatically cancels the licence.

Accreditation is a lengthy, expensive and difficult business, but, as with any external inspection, there are considerable benefits that accrue to the programme or institution, just by going through the process. Having said this, however, it is undoubtedly true that institutions pursue accreditation in order to get the letters after their name (William, 2008). For these reasons, the Omani private higher education institutions are not ready yet to apply for accreditation. Moreover, they already pay for the academic affiliation with foreign universities, whose programmes are already accredited in their home countries. However, in the case that any institution of private higher education in Oman decides not to renew the affiliation agreement, then its academic programmes must

be submitted for accreditation. To this end, it is very important that the private higher education sector should prepare itself in this domain.

Frankly speaking, the higher education institutions in Oman, except Sultan Qaboos University, an 'elite' state higher education institution, are not yet ready for the accreditation process in its narrower sense. This can be attributed to two factors. First, the culture of quality assurance, especially the accreditation system, is relatively new in developing countries, including Oman. Second, prior to conducting a 'genuine' accreditation approach, higher education institutions must be qualified and ready for such activity. In the light of those factors, it is therefore essential that the accreditation bodies in Oman move towards finding a robust niche. Sadly, most of the general public does not know what the accreditation bodies in Oman are. Even worse, many higher education consumers know hardly anything about accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes. Accordingly, accreditation bodies in Oman need to take constant steps to introduce themselves and accreditation to the local general public, shifting their role from administrators in an office to public relations professionals. For instance, they could improve their presence by developing a national education information programme on accreditation, supporting local institutions by training them in accreditation, staging more regional and international conferences and meetings, and making use of local media and available technology. To this end, the OAC in conjunction with the Ministry of Higher Education has set a training schedule with the aim of spreading the quality assurance system within these institutions.

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that different mechanisms and instruments of quality assurance systems adopted in many countries around the world. However, there is no specific single approach agreed to be used as the definitive form of quality assurance system. In other words, every country has adopted many instruments to achieve quality assurance in its higher education system.

In the Omani context, as we noticed, efforts are being made to develop and enhance quality assurance in higher education institutions. Moreover, the Omani government is also keen to upgrade quality, giving this topic serious attention in its strategic agenda. For example, Oman was one of the first countries in the Arab region to establish an independent accreditation body to provide the quality assurance framework to assist local institutions develop their own local programmes and qualifications (Al-Ramadhani, 2003).

We have already noticed that, in most countries, accreditation, for instance, as an instrument for quality assurance is introduced to assure quality in private higher education.

Such a situation can also be seen in the Arab region. According to UNESCO (2003: 9), “several Arab countries have been establishing mechanisms for quality assurance. Until recently, these mechanisms have been targeting private institutions only”.

In order to practise quality assurance adequately in Oman, certain factors need to be taken into consideration. First, the Accreditation Council must be equipped with a sufficient number of experts in different academic specialisations. With the current status of the OAC, it is difficult to cope with the rapid development of private higher education institutions. More expertise and well-trained employees would help smooth the flow of work regarding accreditation matters.

Second, private universities and colleges should participate financially in the accreditation process. As we have noticed in Austria, the costs of maintaining the ACC and its office are covered by the Government, while the applicants for accreditation have to repay the expenses of experts involved in the application procedure. In Oman, so far the government is the only source of financing for all procedures of the accreditation process. This situation, however, is on the way to changing, since the OAC has introduced a quality audit scheme to be adopted by private higher education institutions as one mechanism of quality assurance and to be a preliminary step towards an accreditation system.

6.6 Summary

This chapter and the chapter before have reviewed the main challenges facing this sector. Chapter Five has discussed the challenge of funding, by noting that private higher education relies heavily on tuition fees paid by students, together with governmental subsidies.

Quality assurance is another of the challenges facing these institutions. To meet this, the government has established a number of bodies, the most recent one being the Accreditation Council, established in 2001. As Brennan *et al.* (1997) argue, evaluation is being mandated more by accrediting organisations, and it is through the assessment movement that many of the institutions have evolved and developed a broader quality emphasis. To this end, it is important that a properly managed OAC that strongly adheres to international standards of good practice has the potential to play an integral role in stimulating competition among private universities and colleges. This would ensure quality for students and promote enrolment as well as attracting funds from the government and other non-governmental sources in the form of endowments and donations, for example. It is equally important that the accreditation process through quality assurance standards will

ultimately determine which institutions will survive and which will perish. Therefore, it is important that the government put its theory into practice by providing the means for the Accreditation Council to carry out its function.

Other challenges, such as competition with private higher education in neighbouring countries, the contribution of Omani academic staff in these institutions, and research capacity were also discussed in previous chapters. If private higher education institutions in Oman are to meet these challenges, extensive efforts will be needed.

The concerns that emerge from this chapter and the preceding chapters, demonstrate clearly the need for better understanding of the willingness and contributions of private higher education institutions to meet the current challenges on the one hand, and to achieve the targeted objectives of their establishment on the other. The method adopted to explore these issues empirically will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

The Research Methodology

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology. Research methodology is defined by Leedeey (1997: 5) as “the systematic process of the collecting and analysing of information in order to increase our understanding of the phenomenon with which we are concerned or interested”. Taking Leedy’s above definition into consideration, the objective of this chapter, then, is to provide a description of the procedures that were followed in this study, in order to accumulate the data required to accomplish the study objectives.

This chapter is divided into nine sections in addition to this introduction. The second section describes the research design, identifying, at the same time, the benefit of using a particular method, the ‘qualitative approach’ as a means of allowing the participants to give much richer answers and valuable insight into the research questions. Next, reasons for implementing semi-structured interviews in this study rather than any other type of interview are discussed in Section Three. Issues of validity and reliability were taken into account throughout the research methodology, and are highlighted in Section Four. Next, the study population is described in Section Five. The procedures of preparing for interviews are discussed in Section Six. The instrument and mechanism used in the analysis of the interviews are then presented in Section Seven. Besides the interviews, documentary data was also deemed very important for achieving the aim of richness of this study; this aspect is highlighted in Section Eight. In Section Nine, a summary of the chapter is provided.

7.2 Research Design (Qualitative Method)

It is significant at an early stage to decide on an appropriate means of gathering data, while keeping the research within the constraints of time and resources as both are limited. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1994: 84) describe research designs as following:

“Research designs are about organising research activity, including the collection of data, in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims.”

The statement above clearly indicates that in order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher must choose the appropriate method for collecting required data.

Literature on research methods (Creswell, 1994; Bell, 1996; Punch, 2005) tends to classify research into two main approaches, qualitative and quantitative, as primary sources of collecting the required data. Differences between these two methods are clarified in Blaxter, Hughes & Tight (1996: 60):

“Quantitative research is, as the term suggests, concerned with the collection and analysis of data in numeric form. It tends to emphasise a relatively large-scale and respective set of data, and is often, falsely in our view, presented as being about the gathering of ‘facts’. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with collecting and analysing information in as many forms, chiefly non-numeric, as possible, smaller numbers of instance or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve ‘depth’ rather than ‘breadth’.”

In contrast to the above statement, Cresswell (1994) argues that qualitative research tends to use inductive logic which means the informant should expose the information rather than it being identified in advance by the researcher. Therefore, according to Cresswell (1994), the information supplied by the informant will provide a bounded context which in turn will lead to patterns or theories which will assist in explaining the studied subject area. In addition to the differences mentioned above, qualitative and quantitative approaches also differ in the forms of collecting and presenting data. Mayakut and Morehouse (1994) pointed out that quantitative research is based on observations that are converted into separate units that can be compared to other units by using statistical analysis. While there may be modifications and variations on this general description of quantitative research, statistical analysis is a vital part of quantitative research. On the other hand, qualitative research generally looks at people’s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways, more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants (Mayakut and Morehouse, 1994).

The nature of the differences between the two approaches also has implications for sample size. In the quantitative approach, samples are larger than in the qualitative; moreover, in quantitative research, representativeness of samples is important, for the sake of generalisation. In contrast, the qualitative approach is geared more towards cases where the researcher attempts to get closer to what is being observed; thus, samples are small (Punch, 2005). The strengths and advantages of each approach are summarised by Punch (2005: 238). He stated that:

“Quantitative data enable standardised, objective comparisons to be made, and the measurements of quantitative research permit overall descriptions of situations or phenomena in a systematic and comparable way... On the other hand, there are important strengths and advantages to the qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are flexible, more so than quantitative methods. Therefore, they can be used in a wider range of situations and for a wider range of purposes. They can also be more easily modified as a study progresses. Because of their great flexibility, they are well suited for studying naturally occurring real-life situations.”

Having said that, the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches do not necessarily mean that one approach is better than the other, nor do they indicate that they should be used together. The nature and objective of the topic being researched, what the study is trying to find out, and the sort of analysis to be used in investigating the study, are all elements that determine which approach is the most appropriate.

According to Verma and Mallick (1999:26):

“The choice of a particular perspective has implications for the type of evidence to be collected and the mode of analysis used in the investigation of a research question or issue...The way research questions are formulated and the research agenda specified make it clear what approach is most appropriate.”

Thus, whichever approach (qualitative, quantitative or both) is followed, it should be clearly stated why the chosen methods are selected and how they serve the research objectives (Myers, 2000).

In the light of the aforementioned, and based upon the nature of this study, the researcher has weighed the advantages of using a qualitative approach to be used in this study. As Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) emphasise, the strengths of qualitative research are seen as in its investigative nature, its in-depth focus, and the detailed complexity of the data provided. This is important because, despite the benefits of quantitative research, its ability to reach a large numbers of subjects is offset by lack of profound insight, and the focus on the number of the respondents, and the uniformity sought from their responses might lead to important details being ignored. As Myers (2000: 3) emphasises, “a major strength of the qualitative approach is the depth to which explorations are conducted and descriptions are written, usually resulting in sufficient details for the reader to grasp the idiosyncrasies of the situation”. Consequently, qualitative research was finally recognised as worthwhile research device that can provide in-depth information, which could not be derived from a quantitative approach.

Therefore, the rationale behind using a qualitative approach is because such an approach according to Patton (1987: 20) emphasises “the nature of understanding the

meaning of human behaviour and the social-cultural context of social interaction”. This method allows the study of selected issues, cases and events in depth and detail, unconstrained by predetermined types of analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 4) argue that researchers who use a qualitative approach “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry”.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that according to what is sought in the research, a researcher can decide the paradigm and the method/s he/she wants to use.

In this context, this research can be described as essentially exploratory and descriptive in nature. As stated earlier, it was intended to study the rationales and the challenges that private higher education sector faces. In this study, therefore, the philosophy and methods of the qualitative paradigm have been adopted mainly for the following reasons.

First, it is a new topic in Oman which has not been researched yet and according to Creswell (1994) the qualitative approach can be very useful in new areas of research.

Second, this research was not intended to test any hypothesis but relied on what could be inferred from its participants and documents. Induction is regarded as one of the most prominent characteristics of the qualitative paradigm, in which the process begins with data collection and ends with formulation of a theory (Merriam, 1988).

Third, most of the required data relied on fieldwork, in which data was gathered from people such as policy-makers/officials in the Ministry of Higher Education, Vice-Chancellors and Deans of private higher education institutions in Oman. The field is the key place for data gathering and the qualitative paradigm is regarded as better to use in policy process research; as Taylor, Rizvi & Henry (1997: 41) highlight:

“... [It] will be evident that all of the examples given above utilise qualitative methods. This reflects the fact that policy research is aiming to unravel the complexities of the policy process, a task for which qualitative approaches in our view are better. This is not to deny a place for quantitative methods within critical policy research, either alone or in combination with qualitative methods.”

Based on the above mentioned rationales and in order to obtain a deeper and broader range of authorities’ views and attitudes with regard to the state and challenges of private higher education in Oman, the researcher decided to use a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews.

7.3 Interviews in Educational Research

According to McKernan (1996), the interview is one of the most effective methods of gathering data because it is conducted face to face and involves direct verbal interaction between the researcher and respondent. The interviewing technique is easier to follow through as discussion flows in an informal conversational style from one topic to another. In addition, through a certain phrase or story made by a respondent it is easier to remember what emerged during an interview situation with a particular respondent. Similarly, Kumar (1999) emphasises that interview is a popular technique for collecting data from people. Kumar (1999: 109) defines interview as:

“Any person-to-person interaction between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind is called an interview.”

In addition to the above definitions, there are different types of face-to-face interaction. According to Wragg (1994), face-to-face interview can be categorised into three main types: structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews.

A. Structured Interviews. This type of interview depends on the use of a questionnaire as a data collection instrument, as highlighted by May (2003: 122):

“The theory behind this method is that each person is asked the same questions in the same way so that any differences between answers are held to be real ones and not the result of the interview situation itself.”

This implies that a structured interview is a standardised form where the wording and order of the questions are pre-prepared by the interviewer. Merriam (1988) supports this argument, stating that:

“In highly structured interview, questions and the order in which they are asked are determined ahead of time. The most structured interview is actually an oral form of the written survey.”

Although the above argument indicates that this type of interview may increase the reliability of the interview, it might not allow an in-depth discussion with the interviewee because (Kvale, 1996) the interviewee has limited opportunity to express his/her thoughts and opinions. Based on the above, the technique of structured interview was not applied in this research, because the researcher wished to have opportunities to explore participants' responses in depth.

B. Unstructured Interviews. Unlike structured interview, unstructured interview is more like a conversation. This type of interview is more helpful for obtaining greater information regarding a particular issue. According to Merriam (1988):

“[unstructured interview is] particularly useful when the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions. Thus there is no predetermined set of questions and the interview is essentially exploratory.”

Despite the fact that this type of interview may create a wealth of important information, such interviews require a great deal of expertise and great time to conduct and it can be a challenge for the interviewer to turn the discussion and maintain the focus of the interview. In addition, it may need an extensive effort to analyse the content of the data (Bell, 1996).

Thus, as the researcher lacked this high degree of expertise required to conduct totally unstructured interviews, and there were time constraints, this form of interview was not used.

C. *Semi-Structured Interviews.* This type of interview is situated in between the two previous forms, and makes use of techniques from both structured and unstructured interviews. May (1997:111) describes this approach:

“In between the focused and structured methods sits one which utilises techniques from both. Questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is more free to probe beyond the answers in a manner which would appear prejudicial to the aims of standardisation and comparability.”

Similarly, this type of interview, as argued by Kumar (1996), provides a chance for the interviewer to explore in-depth the topics under investigation by interacting with interviewees. Interviewing can be very flexible when the interviewer has the freedom to ask questions as they come to mind around the issue being researched. Based on this flexibility, as opposed to structured interviews where the interviewer must ask the same questions in the same sequence and cannot probe further to gain more information, Bell (1996) states that it is not necessary to ask questions in the same sequence or wording in every semi-structured interview.

Owing to the above considerations, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to add to the richness of the documentary data used by the researcher. The semi-structured interviews generated qualitative data that should support the research findings and validate its results. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews is based on the ability of this type of interview to allow interviewees to express themselves in greater detail. Wragg (1994: 272) supports this view, emphasising that:

“A semi-structured interview schedule tends to be the one most favoured by educational researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling.”

The interviewing approach, as Best (1991) argues, allows for probing which may uncover new clues for the researcher. Since some of the needed information is not well explained in documents, the interview method is considered as necessary to this study to probe further information through interviewing officials and top management of private institutions in the country. Also, it has been realised that many decision makers and executives prefer to be interviewed face-to-face rather than being asked to answer written questions. Best (1991: 164) supports this view, stating that:

"...with a skilful interviewer, the interview is often superior to other data-gathering devices. One reason is that people are more willing to talk than to write."

However, Bell (2005) is not completely in line with Best (1991); he warns that not all the information obtained from interviews is reliable and in some circumstances people may reveal less than they hide. In connection with this study, data collected from interviews will also be useful to compare with those obtained from documents and policy statements. Thus, the researcher believed that clear and well-constructed questions in the interviews would assist in obtaining the needed information.

What has been mentioned previously about the advantages of the interview method, does not mean that this method has not any drawbacks. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000), these disadvantages may be summarised as follows: (a) a good interview requires special skills; not everyone has the ability to carry out reliable interviews; (b) the lack of confidentiality and anonymity may cause reservations on the interviewee's part; and (c) what people say in interviews does not necessarily match or reflect what they do in practice. However, to minimise some of the above disadvantages, in the researcher's letters to the interviewees (see Appendix 5), he confirmed the principle of confidentiality, besides explaining the aims of the research (more detail about the procedures of preparing for the interviews is provided in Section 7.6).

7.4 Validity and Reliability in Interviews

Successful research depends on valid methods and the two main features for which researchers normally look in this respect are validity and reliability.

Cohen *et al.* (2000: 105), claim that it is "impossible to achieve absolute validity and reliability". However, validity and reliability are the fundamental principles and notions in the design of a project as a whole, or as Creswell & Miller (2000) argue, they are conceptualised as trustworthiness and quality in the qualitative paradigm.

A. Validity. Validity is a significant element of effective research. The value of the research depends on its validity. Although there are several definitions of this concept, most of them agree that validity is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research (Kvale, 1996). Kumar (1999) defines validity as the degree to which the researcher has measured what he/she has set out to measure, while Leedy (1997) argues that validity is concerned with the soundness and effectiveness of the measuring instrument. However, some qualitative researchers (see for example, Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Kvale, 1996) may argue that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, but at the same time, they have realised the need for some kind of qualifying measure for their research. However, validity in the qualitative approach, according to Winter (2000), is a slippery term, that depends to a great extent on a researcher's perspective of validity from the beginning of his/her study to the stage of data analysis. To this end, many researchers (Seale, 1999: 470) have developed their own concepts of validity and they have often "adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as quality and trustworthiness". This term 'validity' reminds the researcher of the term 'quality', and how it is interpreted by different researchers and organisations based on their own understanding of this term on the one hand and on the standards and criteria they have set out to achieve on the other. Winter (2000: 1) supports this view, arguing that validity is not a fixed or universal concept but rather a "contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the process and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects".

According to Cohen *et al.* (2000) there are many types of validity. For instance, in qualitative methods validity might be addressed through the depth, honesty, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, and the objectivity of the researcher. In contrast, in a quantitative approach, validity might be enhanced through appropriate instrumentation, careful sampling and appropriate statistical treatments of the data. The above argument leads to the concept that researchers should, to a great extent, seek accuracy and validity. However, as Cohen *et al.* (2000) argue, validity should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as a complete state. Validity, then, connects to accounts, not to data or methods; it is the meaning that subjects give to data and deductions drawn from the data that are important (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

From the foregoing discussion, and particularly what is suggested by Cohen *et al.* (2000), it can be added that the most important theme of fulfilling greater validity is minimising the degree of bias as much as possible. Kvale (1996) summarises the sources of bias in the three key elements: the substance of the questions, the characteristics of the

interviewer, and the characteristics of interviewees. Consequently, and in order to achieve a greater degree of validity, the researcher from the initial step of designing the interview guide was aware of the sensitivity of the subject being researched for the participants. The strength of the face-to-face interviewing was found to lie mainly in its flexibility, ability to generate dialogue, its high face validity and appropriateness in handling sensitive issues (Cohen *et al.* 2000). Therefore, questions were reviewed and reedited several times to make them free from sensitivity and, at the same time, ensure they fulfilled the objectives of the study. The aim behind this procedure was to avoid making the interviewees feel that the interview was interfering in their private world.

In addition, participants with known characteristics and who would add some meaningful thoughts to the study were included, particularly with regard to the officials of the ministry. As May (2003) emphasises, interviews seeking attitudinal responses have to ensure that people with known characteristics are included. Not only that, a good relationship with most interviewees has a positive impact in organising and conducting these interviews. Kvale (1996) argues that the concept of relationship is important in the interview situation; for an interview is not simply a data collection situation but a social and often a political situation. Thus, owing to the researcher's personal relationship with many of interviewees, all responded positively.

By and large, the diverse forms of validity which relate to this research were considered using the following process:

First, the fields -the key features of private higher education phenomenon- were derived from the review of the related literature.

Second, the fields related to the objectives of this study were divided into items.

Third, to make the items and elements easy and understandable for respondents, simple words were used. As Cohen *et al.* (2000) suggest, it is important that each interviewee understand the questions in the same way.

Fourth, to suit the Omani context, the items were reviewed and modified by the researcher.

Fifth, since Gay and Airasian (2003) indicate that content validity can be determined by expert judgment, the interview schedule was discussed with the research supervisor, and the outcome of this discussion with the supervisor was that some modifications were made, and some questions were added.

B. Reliability. Apparently the term reliability is a concept used that is widely for testing quantitative research. As Stenbacka (2001) argues, since reliability issue concerns

measurements then it has no relevance in qualitative research. She believes that the issue of reliability is an irrelevant matter to judge the quality of qualitative research.

However, this criterion is also used in qualitative research. Patton (2002) suggests that reliability is a factor which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. Lincoln & Guba (1985: 300) use the term “dependability” in qualitative research as a synonym for “reliability” in the quantitative approach.

The question one might ask is how the reliability of interviews can be promoted. Cohen *et al.* (2000) suggest that the reliability of interviews can be enhanced by careful piloting of interviews and use of open-ended questions. To ensure a nonbiased result, the researcher piloted the interview questions (see Section 7.6.2). The aim of this step was to identify problems in understanding and yield information concerning instrument deficiencies as well as suggestions for development.

A number of studies (Kvale, 1996; Cohen *et al.* 2000; May, 2003) have revealed that there is also the issue of leading questions and their impact on the answers of the respondents. Therefore, the researcher tried to avoid leading questions, by the careful selection of questions and giving the interviewee the freedom to say what he/she wanted.

However, interviewees (Kvale, 1996) might not answer a particular question clearly, and in order to gain additional information, the interviewer may ask another question to clarify a missing point or theme in the question being discussed with the interviewee, or in order to obtain information that the interviewer suspects the interviewee might be withholding. In this case, such questioning (Cohen *et al.* 2000) might be significant and useful for reliability checks with what the interviewee has already said.

To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning that the researcher was as objective as possible during the preparing for and conducting interviews, and the analysis of data and discussion of the findings.

7.5 Target Population and Sample

Deciding on the target population of the study is a very important stage of the method (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

However, one might ask what is meant by population here? The term population, according to De Vaus (1993: 60), refers to all members of a group. Thus, the population of a study is a group to whom the researcher plans to apply his/her research results, i.e. the target population of the study whose members are the people to be researched. In this

research the target group is top management of private higher education institutions as well as officials in the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman.

Conversely, Cohen *et al.* (2000) believe that sampling should describe the characteristics of the sample, regardless of what sampling technique is used, and, as Patton (2002) claims, in qualitative research there is no clear answer with regard to the correct sample size. Patton (2002: 244) stated:

"There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what [a researcher] wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources."

The above statement indicates that the size of the sample in the qualitative approach, according to Patton (2002), depends on four main queries. These are: (1) what a researcher wants to find out, (2) why he/she wants to find it out, (3) how the findings will be used, and (4) what resources he/she has for the research.

Based on the aforementioned, in this research, a purposeful sampling, sometimes called purposive sampling, technique (Cohen & Manion, 1994) was used to select for intervening 18 top senior management in the private universities and colleges in Oman, and 7 top officials in the Ministry of Higher Education. According to Cohen and Manion (1994), when selecting a sample, a researcher has to choose the sample which provides the information required. Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling which is popular in qualitative research. Patton (2002: 230) argued that:

"Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single case (N=1), selected purposefully. Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly."

The power of this technique, according to Patton (2002), is its usefulness in choosing information-rich cases for study in depth. Similarly, Cohen and Manion (1994: 89) highlight:

"In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs."

Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 202) support Cohen and Manion's view, suggesting that:

"Many qualitative researchers employ purposive sampling methods. They seek out groups, settings and individuals where...the processes being studied are most likely to occur."

Therefore, in order to learn as much as possible about issues -rationales, objectives and challenges of private higher education sector- of central importance to the purpose of the present study, vice-chancellors of private universities and deans of private colleges and top officials in the Ministry of Higher Education were targeted.

Organisationally, the vice-chancellor is the executive head of a private university, chairs the Academic Board and leads the Academic Management Team. The same tasks are functioning by the dean of private college.

The sample population for interviews was selected based on two main factors: first, the geographical element was considered, and second, diversity of specialisations and academic affiliation were also considered. Geographically, the researcher intended to include governorates/regions that have private colleges and universities throughout the Sultanate. Oman has four governorates: Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam and Al-Buraimi, and five regions: Al-Batina, Al-Dhahira, Al-Dakhilia, and Al-Sharqia, and Al-Wusta. These governorates and regions are composed of a total of 59 districts, or 'wilayats' (see Figure 1.1, map of the Sultanate of Oman).

As mentioned earlier, the total number of private universities and colleges was 24 institutions in the academic year 2008/2009. As shown in Figure 4.3 of Chapter Four, most private institutions are located in Muscat governorate, 18 institutions representing 76% of the total private institutions in Oman. In contrast, there were 2 institutions in Al-Batina region, 1 in Dhofar governorate, 1 in Al-Buraimi governorate, 1 in Al-Sharqia region, and 1 in Al-Dakhilia region.

However, as stated earlier, some private institutions offer a wide range of programmes in various fields of study, while others specialise in particular areas (see Table 4.3). Therefore, in order to cover different types of institutions, specialised institutions were taken into consideration in the sampling.

The total interviews carried out in the private higher education institutions were 18 vice-chancellors and deans of private higher education institutions out of 24 private higher education institutions. Table 7.1 below illustrates how the interviews carried out with vice-chancellors of universities and deans of colleges were distributed across Oman's different governorates and regions.

Table 7.1: Semi-structured interviews conducted with vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions

Governorate/Region	Vice-chancellors/deans
Muscat	13
Dhofar	1
Al-Buraimi	1
Al-Batina	1
Al-Dakhilia	1
Al-Sharqia	1
Total	18

In addition to interviews conducted with vice-chancellors and deans of private higher education institutions in Oman, seven officials from the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman were also interviewed.

The researcher picked out certain individuals whom he thought would be very beneficial to this research and would have something to contribute to its objectives, either because they are decision makers with regard to private higher education or because they have direct links with these institutions.

7.6 Procedures of Preparing for the Interviews

In order to conduct the interviews smoothly and effectively, the procedures were implemented in three main stages: first, preparation and selection of interview questions; second, piloting interview questions and third, preparation for conducting interviews.

7.6.1 Selecting interview questions

The findings of the literature review were very significant in selection of items for the research instrument. The interview constructed for this study directly reflects the areas identified in the literature as important with regard to privatisation of higher education and the challenges this sector faces. The illumination from the literature review together with the researcher's prior knowledge guided the researcher's decisions on the organisation of the interview and the shape of the data collection. It was decided to design an interview consisting of a number of items. Each item, which includes a number of questions, represents one segment of different aspects generated from the research questions and literature review, with some adaptation to fit the Omani context and at the same time go in line with the main objectives of this study. In addition, the questions selected and proposed for interview were discussed with the research supervisor. In fact the interview questions

were the subject of several discussion sessions with the supervisor before being approved. Moreover, comments of some officials in the Ministry of Higher Education and others whom the researcher thought would add some meaningful insights were also taken into consideration in preparing the interview questions.

Following the directions and advice of the supervisor and later his approval to conduct the interviews, the researcher developed an interview guide containing a list of topics that were covered in the literature context, but required more elaboration to support research objectives.

Kvale (1996: 129) points out elements that an interview guide, particularly semi-structured, contains, stating that:

“An interview guide indicates the topics and their sequence in the interview. The guide can contain just some rough topics to be covered or it can be a detailed sequence of carefully worded questions. For the semi-structured type of interview... the guide will contain an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions.”

Similarly, Gay and Airasian (2003) argue that the interview must have a written protocol or a guide containing certain elements such as what questions are to be asked, in what order, and how much additional prompting or probing is permitted.

Therefore, the list of topics used in this research was focused on the current situation of private higher education in Oman and its key challenges from the participants' point of view (Appendices 6a and 6b, for the interview guide used in this study).

7.6.2 Piloting interview questions

To ensure that they were clear, understandable and unbiased, interview questions were piloted. This procedure helped the researcher to be familiar with the steps and processes required during the interviews. As mentioned earlier, the questions used in this interview were adapted in varying degrees to fit the Omani educational context. Therefore, it was decided to pre-test them by means of a pilot study. Another objective of piloting the interview questions was to ensure the degree of interviewees' understanding of the meaning of question contents. Rosier (1988) supports this argument, suggesting that a pilot study enables the researcher to check that respondents understand the meaning of questions.

Due to the nature of the required information, which is only possessed by certain people, the pilot interviews could not involve many people. According to Gay (2003) the pilot study uses a smaller sample, representative of the sample intended for the main study.

Therefore, the researcher was only able to train himself by interviewing one of the private colleges' deans, and a work-colleague who is close to what is going on in the private higher education sector. Both of these interviews were recorded. The purpose of carrying out this process was to gain familiarity with what Robson (1996) calls 'the sequence of questions': introduction, warm up, main body of the interview, cool-off and closure. It is argued that certain methods of opening the interview help to establish rapport and gain the cooperation of the interviewee. Other purposes were to examine the clarity of the questions, to time the interview and to identify potentially threatening questions.

7.6.3 The conduct of the interviews

In this stage, certain administrative procedures were carried out. First, a letter from the research supervisor, Professor Ulrich Teichler at Kassel University, was handed to the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman, informing them that the researcher wished to carry out interviews on private higher education in the Sultanate, and asking them, at the same time, to facilitate the researcher's tasks in this regard (see Appendices 7a and 7b). Based on this letter, another two letters were issued by the Ministry of Higher Education: first, to the vice-chancellors and deans of private universities and colleges and, second to the officials in the Ministry of Higher Education (see Appendices 8a and 8b). Obtaining these letters was very helpful for gaining access to the field and, at the same time, was the beginning of a series of other organisational and personal assents which were later gained to start the investigation with informants. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 78) state, "seeking the permission of gatekeepers or the support of sponsors is often an unavoidable first step in gaining access to the data". Therefore, seeking the support of the research supervisor along with the Ministry of Higher Education saved the researcher a great amount of effort and time. Through these letters, access to places and informants was much easier, as these letters asked all relevant organisations and individuals to cooperate with the researcher. In addition, the researcher's personal relations together with his previous interaction with many officials in different governmental organisations minimised the time and effort needed to gain access to the data, and expedited procedures for gaining the required permission in these organisations.

However, in order to put respondents at ease and get them to feel more comfortable talking to the researcher, the official letters from both the supervisor and the Ministry of Higher Education authorising the research to be conducted was shown to each participant. This was deemed necessary due to cultural norms and expectations in Oman. Moreover,

the purpose of the interviews was clearly explained to the interviewees before the commencement the interview, and participants were promised total confidentiality.

Permission to use tape recording was gained before the start of each interview, and then all interviews were conducted in English since most of the participants speak English as their mother language or as a second language. The decision to use a tape recorder was considered significant in order to allow the researcher to focus on the interview. This was based on Kvale (1996:160) who recommended that:

“The usual way of recording interviews today is with a tape recorder. The interviewer can then concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview. The words and their tone, pauses, and the like, are recorded in a permanent form that can be returned to again and again for re-listening.”

Tape recordings are also helpful as they enable the researcher to check the wording of any statement that he/she wishes to quote and that the notes are accurate (Bell, 1996). Moreover, the use of a tape recorder assisted the in-depth interview method. Although use of a tape recorder could have had an effect on the respondents' answers as it can be intimidating and make people self conscious (Bell, 2005), the researcher's assurance on maintaining confidentiality and data protection did help in obtaining in-depth responses to a certain extent.

Prior to the starting the interview, factual questions were asked in order to establish a relationship with the interviewee and to create a good information base. This is an important step for conducting interviews smoothly. Bell (1996) recommends starting the interview with some basic ‘ice-breaking’ questions, as this helps both interviewer and interviewee to get familiar and feel comfortable with each other. Based on this, the researcher started with asking general information about the new batch of students that the university/college had received, and the readiness or preparations made by these institutions to cope with these events and so forth. A similar procedure was also applied with officials in the ministry.

The mechanism adopted here was very flexible. Respondents were encouraged to talk freely about their perspectives on the topics raised. Thus, the role of the researcher was one of a mediator who directed and controlled the interview under flexible conditions, allowing him to probe for further information and when he considered that there was a gap in information (Merriam, 1988).

The interviews were conducted from mid February to 17th May 2009, with each interview taking between 60 and 100 minutes. The researcher carried out all interviews,

which took place in meeting rooms to avoid disturbance and interruptions from phone calls or work routine.

7.7 Analysis of the Interviews

Data analysis is one of the crucial components of any research. Because the main goal of data analysis according to Merriam (1988) is to come up with reasonable conclusions and generalisations based on a preponderance of the data, data analysis in interviews needs to be clear from the first steps of data collection. Patton (2002) supports this view, suggesting that a prior analysis of qualitative data during data collection assists improves the quality of the collected data.

In data analysis (Dey, 1993), the researcher endeavours to organise what the data are about, why and what types of things might be said about them. The above argument clearly indicates that there is no single method data for analysing and interpreting qualitative interviews. Kvale (1996), for example, describes five analysis methods, which include (1) meaning condensation, (2) meaning categorisation, (3) narrative structuring, (4) meaning interpretation, and (5) generating meaning through ad hoc methods. Patton (2002), similarly, identifies a number of techniques for analysing qualitative interview data, and suggests that the most appropriate method of analysis for any given study will depend on the purpose of the researcher's evaluation, the nature of the material, and the time and resources available for this part of the process.

Taking the above discussions on analysing and interpreting interviews into account, transcripts of interviews were made in English. While the language used in conducting interviews was clear both for the interviewer and interviewees, the transcription process allowed the researcher to review the interviews and identify the areas of discussion relevant to the study. Some discussions irrelevant to this study had to be carefully dealt with. Redirection had to be handled diplomatically and some discussions were wide ranging, covering areas that were not included in this research. Therefore, both for the objective of the research and for confidentiality, it was suitable that these materials were not included in the detailed analysis. The included segments or parts of the transcripts were, then, categorised into material connected to specific elements or areas and then the questions in each element.

To this end and for the purpose of promoting the clarity and accuracy of the data analysis, both 'informal' and 'formal' data analysis procedures were employed by the researcher.

7.7.1 Informal data analysis

This scheme is intended provide the analysis with a wide range of the collected data prior to the stage of formal analysis. The researcher planned to gain an overview of the assembled data. He wrote notes after each interview and scribbled down general themes and ideas before starting to listen to the tape recorder. The next step was to listen to the interview once before beginning to transcribe each interview. This step gave the researcher confidence and made the process of transcribing go more smoothly. After transcribing, the interview was read several times, listing important themes and crucial ideas. A last step in this method was to identify the data collected in an interview and to note what required more examination in the light of the research objectives.

7.7.2 Formal data analysis

This procedure was intended to facilitate intensive analysis, through organising the collected data. Thus, to make the data manageable and with the assistance of word-processing, the researcher gathered all the interview transcripts on one file. This step helped the researcher to obtain a whole picture of the gathered data. Dey (1993: 40) reveals the importance of classification and categorisation of data for better analysis, emphasising that “without classifying the data, we have no way of knowing what it is that we are analysing”. The second step of organising the data was to classify them according to the interview elements and questions included in each element. The next task was to create a file for each interview question, using the facility of cut-and-paste in the word-processor. This was a build up of the data for a particular issue in its own file, labelled according to the main issue covered by the question.

7.8 Documentary Data

Besides interviews, and for the purpose of richness of this study, another research instrument applied was documentary data. Documents, as noted by Bell (2005), are a necessary source of data for analysing institutions and the policy process because they reflect the process of the development and functioning of activities and decisions that are central to institutional roles and functions.

According to Bell (2005) there are three elements of themes that researchers should take into consideration when using documentary data: access, cost and utility. Regarding access, documents may be lost, may not be available, or if they are available, may be confidential. Even if access to these documents is granted, there may be restrictions on using or publishing the data.

The researcher must also consider cost; attaining and analysing documents may be both financially costly and time consuming. With regard to utility, documents may be available but not have been compiled in a clear and reliable way, or may be kept for private rather than public use, with implications for clarity.

A classification of modern documents used in social research is offered by Kumar (1996). He identifies ten forms of document, classifying them according to authorship (personal, official private and official state documents) and access (restricted, closed and published documents). Besides books and articles, the majority of documents analysed in this study were official governmental and non-governmental documents, official unpublished documents, and statistics related to the higher education system in Oman, particularly private higher education, the economy, and human resources status. These documents include executive reports, conference papers, policy statements, manifestos and private correspondence.

In addition, during the fieldwork, the researcher also collected published and unpublished reports from interviewees. Information from these reports was used to validate and sometimes to supplement the information provided by the interviews.

7.9 Summary

This chapter has discussed the research methodology and the procedures of the fieldwork. It explained the reason for implementing a qualitative approach to collect and analyse the research data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain an in-depth understanding of the top management participants' views on private higher education in the country, and obstacles that face this sector. The appropriateness of the method in handling sensitive issues provided respondents with an easier way of revealing information about their institutions and the challenges faced. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of three months in different governorates and regions in Oman. The fieldwork was on the whole successful in terms of gaining cooperation and rich and detailed information from the respondents. Documentary data was also an important element in enriching the objectives of this study. The collected data are presented and discussed in the next two chapters.

Chapter Eight

Data Analysis

The Interviews: What Do They Tell Us?

8.1 Introduction

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that in order to supplement the documentary evidence and to enrich this study, several semi-structured interviews were conducted with the top management in the sampled private higher education institutions and with government officials in the Ministry of Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

This chapter analyses participants' views about the status of private higher education in Oman. It also examines their perspectives and experiences in this field and how they perceive the current situation of this sector. The chapter also sheds light on aspects of the challenges this sector faces.

However, it is worth mentioning here that factors like period of operation were taken into account when conducting these interviews. As some of the institutions were newly established, it would not be fair to compare them on equal terms with those that had already graduated several cohorts. For this reason, the operation period and circumstances of the institutions were reflected in the questions. However, the objective and importance of these interviews has been as a preliminary investigation of private institutions' authorities as well as governmental officials' trends towards this sector and their vision of its future in different aspects such as ensuring quality, financial challenges, access and equity, community service, etc. Moreover, acknowledging differences and similarities between the two parties will enrich the findings of this study.

The results are presented in two main sections. Section 8.2 provides the results of interviews with vice-chancellors and deans of private higher education institutions, while the results of interviews with officials in the Ministry of Higher Education are detailed in Section 8.3. A summary ends the chapter in Section 8.4.

8.2 Results of Interviews with 18 Vice-Chancellors and Deans

8.2.1 Rationales behind establishing private institutions

Question one concerns the rationales behind establishing private institution, in the view of top management of private higher education institutions. Four main rationales and objectives were drawn from interviewees' responses. Table 8.1 provides a general picture of responses to question one.

Table 8.1: Rationales behind establishing private higher education institutions

Question One	Rationale	No. of respondents	%
What are the rationales and objectives behind establishing your institution?	Contribution in absorbing secondary school graduates	18	100
	Meeting labour market demand/ Omanisation	16	88.8
	Offering different programmes	8	44.4
	Promoting scientific research activities	2	11
	Combination of these dimensions	2	11

As can be seen from Table 8.1, **contribution in absorbing secondary school graduates** in higher education was identified by 100% of the vice-chancellors and deans of private higher education institutions as the main rationale behind establishing private universities and colleges. From the transcription of the semi-structured interviews interviewee number 1 declared the rationale of meeting social demand, stating:

“Because of the Oman’s demographic situation, where 60% of population is under the age 16-25, coupled with limited places in the public higher education system, our institution plays an important role in absorbing a part of secondary school leavers who did not get an opportunity to enrol in public higher education institutions in the Sultanate.”

Similarly interviewee number 6 revealed:

“...our institution contributes with regard to increasing access to higher education. Tens of thousands of secondary school graduates every year wish to continue their higher education. More than half of these graduates do not get a chance to study in public higher education. Thus, we are providing another option for those seeking to continue their education in the country.”

Interviewee number 2 described the rationale of increasing access to higher education as one of the key motivations for allowing private higher education to enter this sphere, stating:

“Basically there is a shortage of government capacity in public higher education institutions; meanwhile there is a dramatic increase in secondary school graduates. To meet this demand for higher education, the government basically encourages the private sector to establish universities and colleges. For this reason, one of the key factors in preparing our feasibility study was to review the graduates of secondary school and how we can provide an opportunity to educate many of these students.”

Lack of opportunities for secondary education leavers to enrol at public higher education institutions has created public pressure as to the importance of creating

opportunities for thousands of these graduates, as this statement made by interviewee 18 indicates:

“...there was always public pressure on the government for expanding access into higher education. Because of the incapability of the public institutions of higher education to meet the increasing demand of university education seekers, along with the unwillingness of the government to expand public higher education, private institutions were seen as a solution to achieve that objective. I can argue that it is unsustainable to think about expanding higher education access without considering the role of the private sector.”

Indeed, interviewee 9 considered the rationale of increasing demand for higher education as the central factor that encouraged individuals’ investment in this sector. He stated:

“...without prior knowledge of the numbers of students wishing to enrol in higher education, investors will not be encouraged to set up a private higher education institution. The same can be said in our case; we realised that there was, and still is, a huge demand for higher education.”

Some interviewees considered that widening access to private higher education not only helps the government in reducing financial burden, but also there are other economic and academic reasons. Interviewee 10 summarised these reasons, as follows:

“...let me discuss this issue from a different angle. Although enrolling many secondary education graduates or even employees seeking to pursue their education was an important factor considered from the beginning of embarking on this undertaking, two other factors should be counted. First, the academic reason; curriculum and syllabus are approved and accepted within Oman, and second, financially, ensuring that all the money going overseas, due to the large number of students studying abroad, will be reinvested in the country, and this creates an economic return.”

Such respondents confirm the finding from reviewing the literature that access to Omani public higher education is very limited compared to the annual numbers of secondary graduates. Interviews also revealed that the majority of investors accord the demand of large numbers of secondary school leavers seeking higher education top priority when proposing to establish private institutions of higher education.

Next to the rationale of social demand for higher education, in frequency of responses, was **meeting labour market demand**, which 88.8% of the interviewees said contributed in their decision to launch private universities and colleges in Oman.

Most of the respondents highlighted that the labour market in the country suffers a shortage of professionals and qualified employees. For this reason, investors focused on labour market needs as a second high priority rationale for initiating higher education

institutions. To this end, according to the majority of interviewees, programmes offered in private higher education are intended to be closely linked to the labour market demand. For instance:

“From the beginning and at the time of application to the Ministry of Higher Education, there was clarification of the extent to which programmes would be presented by the college and their relationship to the labour market.”

(Interviewee 8)

“During the preparation of a feasibility study for establishment of our institution, we surveyed, at that time, the disciplines and academic programmes required by the labour market. Accordingly, we tried to set up programmes tailored to the needs of the labour market, whether in government or the private sector.” (Interviewee 7)

“...qualified human resources are required both in the local and in other Gulf countries’ private enterprises. Thus, without properly educated outputs, the private sector would not be encouraged to receive our graduates. For this reason, we tried our best to provide programmes that are linked to the labour market needs, and provide students with adequate skills to work in this sector.” (Interviewee 17)

Whilst the above comments generally reflect programmes offered at their colleges and universities, other interviewees mentioned a particular course, the management programme, as an example of the reasoning behind offering such a programme and the extent of its linkage to labour market. For instance, interviewee 1 stated:

“...with an increasingly competitive environment, developing the skills and expertise necessary to meet often complex and changing demands is vitally important. Relevant to all areas within an organisation, our management degrees provide students with a firm foundation for managerial excellence, providing both a theoretical and a practical understanding of what good managers do, why they do it and how they do it. This particularly develops students’ capacity to understand the role of management in contemporary business and society, critically assess the theory and practice of management, and appreciate the impact of management and organisations on society.”

Similarly, another interviewee whose college also offered management and business sciences outlined the employment prospects for graduates of such programmes, revealing:

“A degree of this type, with a broad management base, offers a wide range of career possibilities. Many of our students are employed in different types of organisations in the commercial, public and not-for-profit sectors. Opportunities also exist for careers in management consultancy. Because the degree allows you to specialise in other related business disciplines (for example, in human resource management), you may be sought after by a huge variety of potential employers.” (Interviewee 12)

However, many respondents focused on the issue of the Omanisation policy, which was introduced by the government to replace non-Omani citizens with Omanis, particularly in the private sector, as a factor that was taken into consideration when preparing to establish a private institution. Interviewee 5 expressed this view:

“The Omanisation policy introduced by the government must be accompanied with output in harmony with the labour market and its requirements, especially in the private sector. From this perspective, and given the lack of public higher education to achieve this objective alone, a chance has been given to private sector higher education to be able to graduate qualified people to enter the labour market, and this issue was one of the top priorities taken into account during the application process of this institution.”

In line with the above comment, meeting the government vision for Oman’s economy, “Oman Economic Vision 2020, was also a key reason why the government encouraged the private sector to invest in higher education. This argument was stated in the response of interviewee 9:

“...as the Oman Economic Vision 2020 places great importance on the development of human resources aimed at achieving economic diversification, providing sufficient academic programmes as well as good training will definitely enhance the government plans. To accomplish this objective, the participation of private higher education, including offering programmes that meet the requirements of this stage, was one of the rationales for allowing the private sector to enter the field of higher education.”

Whilst the above statements demonstrate to what extent the labour market component received consideration by investors as a rationale for establishing private universities and colleges, some officials of these institutions, interviewees 13 and 7, insisted that although courses -business and computing- offered at their institutions targeted labour market demands, they were less sure whether the skills and knowledge provided to students fit the labour market needs in these fields. For example:

“During the feasibility study, we paid great attention to the needs of the labour market with respect to business administration and computer programmes, including skills and knowledge that students should obtain to work in these two specialisations. Although many graduates work both in the private and public sectors, still we need to be sure whether the skills and information gained by students serve the work conditions.” (Interview 13)

Although the above examples reveal similarities and differences of opinion, it is clear that most vice-chancellors and deans who participated in the semi-structured interviews identified meeting labour market demand as a strong rationale for establishing private higher education institutions.

Following this, in the third highest position, 44.4% of vice-chancellors and deans indicated that one of the rationales for establishing their institutions was to offer **different programmes** from those offered at public higher education institutions. Interviewee 2 expressed this view, as follows:

“...our objective behind establishing this private institution is not only to fill a gap with regard to student segments, but also with respect to specialisations and disciplines. For example, we offer particular engineering programmes which are not available in public higher education institutions. Some other programmes, also in engineering, might only be taught in Sultan Qaboos University but not anywhere else in the country.”

Another interviewee asserted the rationale of offering unique programmes at his institution, particularly in the marine engineering field and maritime sciences, saying:

“I think the programmes we offer in the area of marine engineering and port shipping management are not taught at any public or private higher education institution in Oman. Even in the Gulf countries, there is a large shortage of such disciplines. So we are educating and training Omanis and non-Omanis to sail on ships and manage ports. As the industry in port shipping areas is booming, our graduates will be in demand not only in Oman but outside the country.” (Interviewee 14)

Similarly, interviewee 17 explained how keen the institution to which he belonged was keen to provide some different programmes from those offered in other public or private institutions in the country:

“As the tourism industry is developing in Oman as well as being given special priority by the government, this college offers programmes of study meeting the main segments of the tourism sector and offering, at the same time, a good future for Omani youths.”

However, programmes offered at private universities and colleges need not always be different from those provided in certain public universities or colleges. What is most important here is whether the type of programme is significant to the country. Such a view was expressed by one interviewee (No. 16) in reference to a medical programme provided at his college:

“Despite the country's need for Omani doctors, there is only one medical programme provided at Sultan Qaboos University. For this reason, we were very confident of the importance of this programme in meeting the urgent need for Omani doctors. Current available statistics show that 1% of the doctors in the Omani hospitals are graduates of this institution.”

In relation to the fourth rationale or objective, **promoting scientific research activity**, only two respondents identified that enhancing activities of scientific research was given relatively considerable attention. Interviewee 2 expressed this view in general terms, as follows:

“I believe that in today’s knowledge-based economy, educated and highly skilled human resources are the key to success. People need new skills; they must be prepared to question and challenge, able to learn quickly and to adapt to change. To develop the country economically and socially, enhancing science and technology in the country should be viewed as a very essential component and not a luxury. This is our view on the importance of scientific research, and from the beginning we have tried to employ and promote this concept within the university.”

Another interviewee expressed a clear view about the research component as one of the most important objectives in establishing his university, saying:

“Frankly speaking, all over the world the universities are the chief actors in the process of knowledge production and human resource training. Given the importance of this issue for the Sultanate of Oman, besides the interest of the Government for advancing this sector; we have attempted from the outset to focus on research activity as well as other university functions.”

(Interviewee 3)

The comments made in response to this question support the arguments and findings from the literature review and documentary analysis, particularly with reference to Oman. For instance, they confirm the need to increase access to higher education institutions, since Omani public higher education cannot meet the growth in demand for higher education, as the main reason for establishing private universities and colleges. However, to provide further evidence with regard to the first question, an additional question was asked. The following section highlights and discusses question two in the semi-structured interviews related to top managers of private higher education institutions.

8.2.2 Private institutions’ performance of functions of higher education (teaching, scientific research, and community service)

Question two enquired about the areas or functions on which private higher education institutions mainly focus at the current stage. The functions are categorised into three main elements, which are teaching, scientific research activity, and community service. Table 8.2 shows the number and percentage of respondents attesting to each of these functions.

Table 8.2: Functions of private higher education institutions

Question Two	Functions	No. of respondents	%
Are key functions of higher education (teaching, scientific research, and community service) currently performed in your institution? And how?	Teaching	18	100
	Scientific research activity	2	11.1
	Community service	7	38.8
	Combination of these functions	1	5.5

It can be clearly seen from the table above that the **teaching function** was the main function currently focused on and performed in private universities and colleges in Oman; 100%. This finding goes in line with the responses to question one. It also supports the findings from the literature, both from a global perspective and from the Omani context.

The majority of interviewees attributed their greater concentration on teaching to the initial idea that these institutions were teaching driven, rather than combining two functions; teaching and research activity. Examples of this idea were clearly demonstrated in interviewees' responses:

"...teaching has been our focus since the beginning. Scientific research needs specialised and qualified cadres with good experience in the field of research. However, we are still at the first stage, and we may need time to attain such a situation. To this end, teaching will be predominant in our institution." (Interviewee 13)

"Let me be frank with you. Although the goals of institutions of higher education are a combination between teaching and scientific research, the latter needs financial support and active participation from all sectors of society. Since we are still at the beginning, teaching is our main concern at this point." (Interviewee 5)

Whilst the above respondents viewed the issue from the perspective of their institutions, other interviewees believed most higher education institutions are not yet ready and equipped to function efficiently in scientific research. They attributed this situation to the lack of financial support, shortage of national researchers, and the restriction of the academic programmes offered in most of these institutions to bachelor degrees. Interviewee 12 explained the view, saying:

"...with lack of financial resources together with the majority of academic staff being non-Omanis, we will only concentrate on teaching."

Similar to the above view, interviewee 11 emphasised:

"Since our institution offers only a bachelor degree, we do not think, at this stage, that our focus is beyond teaching, and we need to strengthen our institution in teaching."

However, some responses indicated that the reason for focusing on teaching rather than research activities was to meet the labour market demand.

"In fact labour market impacts, to some extent, on shaping the functions of higher education institution. Our goal at the current stage is to educate and graduate national cadres to smoothly enter the world of work, and meet the labour market needs." (Interviewee 16)

In contrast, a few other respondents showed their interest in scientific research, believing that universities without the notion of scientific research could not serve society

in a proper and meaningful way. However, as seen in Table 8.2, the lowest percentage of responses was for **scientific research activity**, 11.1%. Although those interviewees demonstrated their enthusiasm towards the significance of research activity in academia, they claimed that serious efforts need to be made in order to build a reasonable and acceptable infrastructure for research. For example, interviewee 3 stated:

“In Oman, with the exception of Sultan Qaboos University, all higher education institutions cannot be considered as in a position to implement scientific research or combine between teaching and research activity. For this reason, our objective in establishing this university, besides teaching and learning activity, is to concentrate on scientific research. Our conviction from the outset as well as from the concept of the university we are affiliated with, is that there is no good teaching without research, because you lose the connection to state of the art science.”

Although also offering further explanations as to how his institution was initially keen to harmonise and balance between both activities, teaching and research activity, such as ‘research and teaching should be treated equally’ and ‘research activity enriches the educational process’, interviewee 2 stated:

“...from day one of establishment of this university both components [teaching and research] have been treated simultaneously. Of course, teaching took place from the launching of the university, but research was also our concern from that period; now we are in our 5th year. In terms of research, certain steps are adopted such as building the infrastructure, finalising the research policy and strategy, creating a research fund, and approving some projects.”

However, for enhancing research activities in private universities, interviewee 2 suggested certain mechanisms should be employed:

“In order for universities to contribute effectively in the research field, and if we hope and expect these universities to play a positive role in society, government and non-government organisations need to encourage and fund some of these research projects. With establishment of the Oman Research Council along with the government support for these institutions, research activity will be improved.”

Whilst there were few responses towards research activity, **community service** represented 38.8% of responses. Seven of the 18 interviewees pointed out that their universities and colleges contribute and participate in one way or another in serving society as a whole. Regardless of the degree and type of this involvement, many interviewees revealed some examples of this connection between their institutions and the society. Interviewee 2 described in general the relationship between his institution and the community:

“Community service is a pillar in the University’s beliefs and activities. Besides the normal effect or benefit of the university, we feel that we are trying to carry out activities to help the community directly. For example, we initiated the ‘Illiteracy Village’, whereby we hope to help government efforts in our town to declare an illiteracy free society. We are also providing training programmes for both government and non-government organizations.”

Interviewee 2 revealed the performance of his institution in promoting the notion of community service, not only among the institution staff, but also across students, saying:

“We have recently initiated what we call ‘Community Service Centre’. This centre ensures that a student participates with an equivalent amount of hours to his/her number of credits, donated to society. In other words, if a student gives around 20 hours public service to society, in that way we hope inject hundreds of thousands of hours per year donated by the students to the society. The aim behind so doing is to take citizenship to another level of practice rather than only talking about it.”

There are, on the other hand, those who believe that introducing or providing some paid for training programmes is a service to the community. Accordingly, they focus on setting up such training courses, which could not be performed by any other training institute. For example, interviewee 13 emphasised:

“...during summer time, the college organises some courses for the public, particularly courses such as English Language for secondary school leavers. The college also offers training programmes in the management area.”

By and large, it can be argued here that the theme of community service reflects the extent of interest of the institutions in providing meaningful services to society. Such services are not necessarily always charged financially. There is a so-called ‘social responsibility’ towards the community, and the contribution of these institutions in serving people falls under that concept.

8.2.3 Admission criteria adopted in private institutions

The percentage response rates to Question 3 are detailed in Table 8.3 below.

Table 8.3: Admission criteria in private higher education institutions

Question Three	Admission criterion	No. of respondents	%
What is the admission criterion adopted in your institution? And what are the reasons behind this?	Marks of the final exams in the secondary certificate	18	100
	Entrance Examinations	14	77.7
	Admission criterion related to a particular specialisation	3	16.6

As can be seen from Table 8.3 above, all vice-chancellors and deans (100%) reported that **marks of the final exams in the secondary certificate** are required for entering private universities and colleges. While some interviewees accepted the minimum percentage for passing the secondary certificate, others emphasised that they did not except students with less than 50% in the secondary certificate. This means that some institutions do admit students with less than 50%. In any case, private higher education institutions in Oman do not contravene government regulations in regard to the criterion of admission. Article 12 of the Executive Regulations for the Private Universities Ordinance (Official Gazette, 1999) declares that “students who do not have the secondary school completion certificate or its equivalent shall not be admitted to the private university”. However, the private higher education regulations allow these institutions to impose additional criteria according to the nature of the academic programmes offered in these institutions. Article 13 of the Executive Regulations for the Private Universities Ordinance (Official Gazette, 1999) clearly highlights this point, stating that “the private university shall decide the conditions of admission within the parameters incorporated in its establishment decision”.

Interviewee 12 demonstrated how this particular admission criterion was implemented in his institution:

“We are following the government regulations. We have fixed a minimum admission criterion, that is, 50% marks at the secondary school level. We do not admit anyone below that.”

Another interviewee described the situation of admission in his institution, which applies an open learning system, as open access. However, he claimed that the access policy coincides with the government regulations, and does not lower the quality of learning:

“...our admission is open to all students who have successfully completed secondary school certificate or equivalent. Therefore, bylaws should not put restrictions on the admission criteria. Moreover, the philosophy of open learning is open access which means that you initially provide access to those who would not otherwise receive these opportunities from other institutions. This admission policy, however, does not apply against the quality of learning, since we only admit students based upon our capacity intake and upon our financial and human resources ability.” (Interviewee 4)

However, another interviewee simply revealed that obtaining the secondary school certificate is enough for to a student to enrol in private higher education:

“...with secondary school certificate or equivalent, students are eligible to be admitted in private higher education institutions. Therefore, right now we only require students to provide their secondary school certificate.”

(Interviewee 13)

Clarifying the reasons behind the application of this criterion for admission across the majority of private higher education institutions, interviewee 1 explained:

“Private institutions should not act in the same way as public institutions. All public higher education institutions enrol only those who have achieved high grades in secondary certificate. If that were the case for private higher education, most of these institutions would be closed. Moreover, this is also not expected to be performed since one rationale among others behind establishing private institutions is to increase access to higher education.”

Whilst the majority of Omani private institutions accept students with the minimum pass grade in the secondary exam, 50%, there are a few institutions that do not accept students with less than 65% in the secondary certificate exam, focusing, at the same time, on the major that the student intends to specialise in. The reason behind this criterion, as expressed by one interviewee, is to ensure the quality of the institution’s inputs. As interviewee 2 stated:

“...in all majors we look first of all at student academic capacity; is he/she ready for that major? We look at the student’s marks or grades in the secondary education, and we look at total percentage as a minimal thing. So we check if he/she achieves above 65%, then students are welcome to enrol at this institution. In fact the aim for this mechanism is to promote quality of the institution’s inputs.”

However, as mentioned earlier, although the regulations governing private higher education emphasise the successful completion of the secondary certificate as a condition for admission to these institutions, each institution can set additional conditions in accordance with the nature of their programmes. For example, universities or colleges offering particular programmes such as Medicine, Nursing, and Engineering may add specific conditions for admission to these disciplines. This issue was clarified by some interviewees:

“...after considering the student’s overall grade in secondary certificate, we go to the specific major. If the student wants to study Engineering we look at Physics and Maths grades in secondary certificate and normally require a minimum C+ grade or above 70%. But if the student wishes to study Nursing or Pharmacy we check for example Biology and Chemistry, which also should get at least C+ grade or above 70% in the exam of the secondary certificate.” (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 16 pointed out the minimum grade or marks required for admission to a specialisation like Medicine:

“In disciplines like Medicine we do not make any compromise. One of our admission requirements is secondary certificate grades. Students should obtain not lower than 80% as an overall grade, and also 80% or above in subjects such as Chemistry and Physics.”

Although all respondents emphasised that the first criterion of admission into private higher education institutions is successful completion of secondary education, many interviewees highlighted that another institutional exam should be taken by students besides their secondary school certificate. For example, interviewee 12 stated:

“Besides the secondary school exam, we have our own admission test through which we evaluate the students as to which particular area they will best fit in and some of the students who are good at English language, we take them directly into the main course, otherwise we take them into the foundation programme where for the first six months they are taught only English and Mathematics, and in the second semester we teach them some of the relevant subjects which they are going to take in their majors.”

Similarly, interviewee 3 emphasised:

“...the student’s academic capacity is very crucial to both of us: the student and institution. For this reason and due to the nature of our programmes, we do a placement test for those freshly graduating from secondary education in Oman, to observe their ability in English and Mathematics, for example.”

A few respondents were uncertain as to the objective of introducing another test, as a ‘placement test’, since they believed that secondary school graduates are not proficient enough in English. However, this assumption, if it is true, raises two possibilities; first, secondary education graduates may be very weak in English and in this case they really need to be better prepared in general education. Second, there is a gap between general education and higher education in terms of preparing and qualifying secondary education students with necessary skills in order to be eligible for university study. However, if this is not the case, then the possibility is raised that implementing a placement test and requiring students to take a foundation year is only for profit making. To confirm or refute any of the possibilities mentioned above, further research would be essential. This is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

However, for many institutions, the objective behind introducing institutional exams or ‘placement tests’, according to many interviewees, is to ensure the level of students’ proficiency in English, since English language is the medium of instruction in almost all private higher education institutions, except one institution which uses both Arabic and English. Moreover, maintaining the quality of education was also another goal highlighted by a few officials of these institutions. For instance, interviewee 8 stated:

“As all of our courses are administered and delivered in English, students need to be very proficient to be admitted into the higher education institution.”

A few respondents revealed that besides English language, an exam in mathematics is likely to be held. The key reason for this procedure, as declared by interviewees, in addition to ensuring relative quality of the institution's inputs, is lack of confidence in many secondary graduates' grades in these disciplines. Interviewees 3 explained the situation in general terms:

"...after the placement test we draw a diagram, the outcome of the test is lower than what students obtained in the secondary certificate. In other words, the grade which many students got in secondary school differs from what they gained in the placement test. In the mathematics exam, for example, and it is really simple mathematics, the grades of many students in our placement test are less than their grades in secondary certificates. For this reason we do not rely totally on the secondary school marks, we do our placement test."

The third element, **admission criterion related to a particular specialisation**, was mentioned by only 3 interviewees out of 18, representing 16.16%. It must be noted here that the small number of respondents was due to the fact that the government only allows private universities to award a Bachelor of Education. The government has drawn up certain conditions for admitting students in this specialisation, including that the student's grade in secondary certificate should not be less than 80% as an overall score, and 80% in the subject he/she wishes to specialise in. Moreover, the number of students admitted to this specialisation shall not exceed 15% of the total students admitted at the University. For example, if a particular university admitted 1000 students in academic year 2007/2008, students of Education should not exceed 150 students, 15% of the total intake.

However, vice-chancellors of private universities believe that this criterion or procedure restricts the movement of universities in terms of the admission process. For instance, interviewee 2 stated:

"...in the Education specialisation, the government has set a certain criterion and we have to adhere to that. In addition to that, we are not allowed to exceed 15% of our total intake, and although there is a high demand on that specialisation, and the capacity of the institution is able to take them, we cannot enrol more than this percentage. That is really a complicated process and is restricting the academic process of the university."

It can be inferred from responses to this question that there is no direct intervention from the government with regard to the admission criteria as long as the student holds the secondary school certificate. Such government intervention is confined to the Education major, taking into account the favourable outcome of this specialisation to the needs of the Ministry of Education.

Although the majority of interviewees emphasised that there is no interference from the government, they argued that the quality of secondary graduates should be enhanced in order for students to be able to enter higher education smoothly. For example, interview 16 argued:

“...there is no interference from the government, but we would like the Ministry of Education to maintain higher and better quality of students from their secondary school education.”

In the same way, interviewee 12 emphasised:

“We urgently need to improve our secondary education system. Most secondary education graduates are required to take at least one year of foundation before entering an academic programme. Frankly speaking, one year of foundation is not sufficient, so maybe either we could increase the foundation duration or instead of doing so we should improve students’ skills at the school education level; as the students coming to university level must have a minimum level of knowledge as most of the higher education systems are delivering their courses in English.”

The above responses constitute a clear message calling on the Ministry of Education to re-evaluate the general education system in order to ensure it meets the requirements of the stage of higher education.

8.2.4 Factors that attract students to study at a particular private college or university

In today's competitive academic environment where students have many options available to them, factors that enable educational institutions to attract and retain students should be seriously studied. Higher education institutions that want to gain competitive edge in the future may need to begin searching for effective and creative ways to attract, retain and foster stronger relationships with students. Therefore, the aim behind this question was to identify those factors that attract students to study in private institutions in the country on the one hand and to recognise the role and efforts made by these institutions with regard to these factors, on the other.

To clarify and simplify the question and in order to encourage respondents to give focused answers, examples of these factors were provided. However, in addition to these examples proposed by the researcher, factors added by the interviewees were also considered. Table 8.4 summarises these factors.

Table 8.4: Factors that attract students to study in private institutions

Question Four	Factors	No. of respondents	%
What are the most important factors that attract students to study in your institution?	Lack of opportunity to enrol in public institutions	17	94.4
	Offering specialisation that student is interested in	8	44.4
	Geographical location (close to the students' homes)	5	27.7
	Lower tuition fees compared to other private institutions	3	16.6
	Quality of educational services supports (e.g. library, laboratories, entertainment facilities, hostels availability, etc.)	2	11.1
	Friends and relatives	2	11.1

As can be seen from Table 8.4 above, **lack of opportunities in public higher education** was the most obvious factor amongst the other factors listed in the table that were thought to influence and attract students to study in the private higher education institutions in the country, representing 94.4% of interviewees' responses. Again, this finding goes in line with the finding of Question One related to rationales behind establishing private higher education, since the majority of respondents emphasised the need to meet the high demand for higher education, given the lack of capacity in public institutions to meet this demand. Most interviewees revealed that when students lose hope of getting an opportunity to enrol in a public institution, private institutions would be the next option for most students who wish to continue their higher education. For example, interviewee 2 stated:

"...if we look at some students who lack the opportunity to study at government higher education institutions, for example, for students who want to study Education, even though their marks were high, but owing to the quota in public higher education institutions are full, then students come to us, that is a large segment of students."

Another interviewee made a similar point:

"Most secondary education graduates apply to public higher education institutions, as a first choice. However, those who do not succeed in enrolling in public institutions, go to the private institutions as a second option."

(Interviewee 11)

However, there is another considerable segment of students who apply directly to a private institution in which the medium of learning and teaching is a distance learning system, the Arab Open University (Oman branch), due to the nature and flexibility of learning, together with some circumstances of the students who apply. Most of them are

either females who for particular reasons apply to this institution, or males whose career situation and time constraints do not allow them to study except in this institution.

In relation to the **different specialisations or programmes** offered by these institutions, eight of 18, 44.4%, of respondents believed that because the programmes offered at their institutions differ from those of public institutions, students are interested to apply to their institutions, particularly when these programmes meet the needs of the labour market. For example, interviewee 14 commented as follows:

“Besides our institution is offering a unique specialisation which not available in the country, there is a lot of job opportunities available worldwide.”

Similarly, interviewee 3 indicated:

“What we understand is that our programmes are not available in any other institutions in the country.”

Interviewee 2 also stated:

“...many students want to study a particular specialisation which is not available at public institutions, for example, Nursing. The same could be said for Pharmacy, or certain areas in Engineering. We have so many students coming from different governorates and regions in Oman to study these majors.”

The third highest response (27.7%) was for **geographical location** and its role in choosing to study in a particular institution. Many respondents emphasised that a college or university being close to students' homes, was a reason why many, particularly females, prefer to study in these institutions. For example, interviewee 3 stated:

“...82% in Bachelor programmes are females, especially for those who want to study close to their families.”

Another interviewee believed that, in addition to the role of institution location in absorbing students, it also plays a significant part in reducing the financial burden on students and their families:

“Most of the students studying in this institution are inhabitants of this region and the surrounding areas. The advantage of the institution's location, besides the learning aspect, is that it provides students and their parents some other advantages such as reducing financial burden with regard to accommodation, transport and food expenses.” (Interview 13)

Although geographical location may be an important factor, particularly for students who live near to these institutions, in addition to its advantage in reducing the financial burden on students and their families, some disadvantages are likely to occur. In other words, geographical location should not be prioritised above the major in which the

student wishes to specialise in. This argument was clearly emphasised by many interviewees, who claimed that owing to some financial priorities, many students prefer to study at an institution close to their families, regardless whether they are very interested in the specialisation or not. For example, interviewee 1 commented as follows:

“Although there is no academic study so far in Oman regarding the impact of the geographical location on students studying in institutions where they are located at their home towns, I am afraid that there will be some students, who for some financial reasons, have chosen to study in such institutions, regardless of whether the nature of specialisation was their first option and interest or not.”

The above statement indicates that many institutions have not yet carried out any research to identify and analyse the factors that lead students to choose their institutions. One of these interviewees mentioned a preliminary effort to identify the impact of geographical location on students studying in his institution:

“...we have carried out a simple survey aiming to identify the geographical distribution of students studying in this institution. Among the outcomes of this study, we found that a number of students who live in the institution’s region chose to study here because of the financial priority; saving accommodation, transport and food expenses. Although some students, according to these findings, are studying in majors that they are interested in, some of them want to study outside their town.” (Interviewee 9)

Responses on this factor, ‘geographical location’, highlight that this factor may play a considerable role for students to study in institutions located close to their families, either because of their first choice and intention or due to other reasons such as financial considerations or social aspect, in the case of females. To make the picture clear and to identify the reasons and factors that lead students to study in particular institutions, a systematic study should be conducted by private higher education institutions.

Regarding the factor of **lower tuition fees**, a few respondents revealed that this factor attracts students to study at their institutions. Although they emphasised that their institutions' tuition fees are lower compared to other local private institutions, they claimed that there is no compromise in quality. For example, interviewee 12 said:

“I am not boasting our institution but assuring that our fees are the lowest in the Sultanate. We have tried to maintain a very reasonable fees structure so that the students can afford to come to our institution. However, one point I would certainly like to make clear is that the low fees of our institution do not at all compromise with the quality.”

Similarly, another interviewee stated:

“...regarding the cost, even those used to Ajman University [a private university in the UAE], and elsewhere, are realising that our institution is cost-effective and more efficient. Even locally, the Bachelor programme in Pharmacy, for example, costs half as much as in other institutions offering similar courses. So we are setting a good example of managing the cost, without affecting quality of education.” (Interviewee 2)

From the above responses, it can be noticed that interviewees usually emphasised that despite their institutions' lower tuition fees, quality of education is not neglected. However, whether tuition fees are high or low in private institutions does not necessarily provide strong evidence on the quality issue. To judge the theme in a systematic way, certain factors should be considered. First, the nature of programmes and means of teaching those particular programmes in these institutions should be compared. Second, the level of programmes, whether is bachelor or diploma, for example, should be considered.

Whilst some of the above responses reflect relatively modest efforts made by the institutions to identify the factors that most influence and attract students to enter their institutions, the following factors: **quality of educational services support** together with the factor of **friends or/and relevance** were represented among the factors shown in Table 8.4 above, as the factors thought least likely to attract students to choose a particular institution to study.

Very few respondents revealed that students chose their institutions because of these factors. Interviewee 2 expressed this view in general terms, as follows:

“This institution believes that the balance between these factors and resources benefits the educational process and encourages students to study in our institution. These resources are essential for students and researchers as well. For example, besides the main library at our institution including a good quantity of hard books and references, we subscribe to many e-journals which costs us a lot, and they are available for every student here.”

Another interviewee emphasised the factor of relatives' and friends' influence when students chose to study in his institution:

“...and in one of the studies which we conducted randomly last year, we found that 42% of fresh students were relatives of our existing students, which gave us a very big boost that our product has been well accepted and they are bringing their friends, relatives, brothers and sisters.”

(Interviewee 12)

8.2.5 Schemes/policies adopted by private institutions to ensure both equity and accessibility

The aim behind this question is to ascertain how keen private institutions are on the issue of equity, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It will also indicate the sort of activities carried out by these institutions in this regard. Table 8.5 shows schemes adopted by these institutions.

Table 8.5: Schemes/policies adopted by private institutions to ensure equity and accessibility

Question Five	Factors	No. of respondents	%
Is there any particular policy or scheme applied at your institution to ensure both equity and accessibility, especially for students from low-income families? What are these schemes?	Flexible payment for tuition fees	9	50
	Offering partial/full scholarships	7	38.8
	Reducing tuition fees	4	22.2
	Reducing/offering exemption from other fees e.g. accommodation, transport, food, etc.	4	22.2
	Offering part-time jobs	3	16.6

As can be seen from Table 8.5, **flexible payment of tuition fees** was identified by 50% of the vice-chancellors and the deans as the main scheme for ensuring equity and accessibility in private higher education institutions. For instance, interviewee 11 described the soft payment scheme applied in his institution, stating that:

“Our institution adopts a policy of not restricting the students, especially those of low-income families, with respect to instalments of tuition fees. These instalments can be paid in several periods within a particular academic year.”

Another interviewee offered further explanations as to why such a scheme was adopted in the institution:

“We have a system in place to make sure that students with financial difficulty are helped. Since our objective and responsibility is to support lower income students, schemes of exempting them from part of tuition fees or/and facilitating the process of tuition payment are highly considered.”

(Interviewee 1)

And interviewee 12 also stated:

“...we give students, particularly those from lower income families, a very flexible fees system so students can pay monthly fees instead of paying in advance.”

Although there are a few banks that offer soft loans, such schemes should be free of interest. While explaining the practice of his institution in this regard, interviewee 2 mentioned that loans might not always be helpful for students, stating that:

“...we have also a group of students who already know from the beginning that this institution has financial assistance. We have a ‘Student Support Fund’ programme. Therefore, we try to help students in different ways. Among them we have instalment plans without interest. We are really trying to help students with the scheme of payment. In other institutions, for example, if you do not pay cash they do not accept you or they try getting you a loan with a high rate of interest.”

Interviewee 2 above has mentioned an important point, which is that although some institutions of private higher education adopt the policy of instalment plans, interest charges might be levied. If this is the case, the instalment scheme would not be beneficial for students. In other words, it would be an additional financial burden for them and their parents. However, the policy of institutions in this regard depends greatly on the degree of understanding of the founder or investors of these institutions and their interpretation of the concept of helping the students.

Next to flexible payment of tuition fees in frequency of responses was **offering partial/full scholarships**; 38.8% of the interviewees said that they adopted such a mechanism to help students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to enter higher education. For example, interviewee 2 commented:

“...we have also tried to encourage students from remote areas like Al-Wusta region or from the remote part of Al-Sharqia region, who used not to have an opportunity to enter higher education. In this regard, our institution provides them with full or partial scholarships. Besides, our Board of Trustees also sponsors some of those students. This has helped a group of students, who are either from remote areas or with disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Interviewee 1 described the total number of scholarships offered so far, together with the nature of these scholarships:

“We allocate some scholarships to the Ministry of Higher Education for both students and staff. Until now we have around 50 scholarships ranging from 50% to full scholarships.”

Unlike interviewee 1, interviewee 14 declared that in his institution there are very limited scholarships allocated for students:

“Currently, the college awards one or two scholarships every year. However, we hope that in the future this number will be increased.”

From the interviewees’ responses on the subject of the scholarship programme provided through their institutions, it is clear that many of these institutions offered either full or partial scholarships, although the practice differs from one institution to another. Moreover, some institutions provided their scholarships through the Ministry of Higher Education, either for employees or for graduates of the Secondary School Certificate.

However, some interviewees argued that their institutions were not ready at present to provide scholarships, due to the fact that they were established only recently and for financial reasons. For example, interviewee 5 stated:

“Well, frankly speaking, not yet. At the beginning we have to struggle with our own finances since the institution is run privately. Up to now there is no room to give full scholarships.”

However, less than a quarter of the total number of interviewees (22.2%) indicated that they adopted an option of **reducing tuition fees** and **reducing/offering exemption from other fees e.g. accommodation, transport, food, etc.** For example, interviewee 6 explained the institution’s effort towards reducing tuition fees, stating that:

“...from the university side, the Board of Trustees has approved ten positions to give discounted tuition fees for lower income students. We have a committee which looks at this situation. We also support disabled students, and students with a very good grade at secondary certificate. Currently, there is a 50% discount for Distinction students and 25% for disabled and lower income students.”

It seems from the above statement that the institution has followed a specific policy to reduce tuition fees. However, one might ask why there is a greater reduction of the tuition fees for the distinguished segment of secondary school graduates, while more should be for low-income students. This can be explained as follows. Firstly, the outstanding high school graduates often study at state institutions of higher education or study abroad at the expense of government. Secondly, low-income students constitute a considerable proportion of those enrolled in private institutions of higher education and thus the university or private college has to take into account the impact of coverage of this segment on their budgets and availability of resources. Although there is no academic study on the socioeconomic status of students attending these institutions, statistics of the Ministry of Higher Education indicate that many of the students in these institutions are from low-income families. In addition, a study carried out by one of the private higher education institutions in the Sultanate indicates that 65% of students are from families with limited income. This was clearly stated by interviewee 2, who reported:

“The University has carried out a study regarding students’ socioeconomic background in the university. We found that 65% of the students are from the low-income families category in the society, which means that they cannot afford it, and even for those who can afford it they have so many kids; if they afford it for the first they will not afford it for the second or the third and so forth.”

Thirdly, by adopting such a mechanism it is possible to encourage students with a Distinction grade at secondary school who are considering studying a particular programme in a private institution which is not available at public higher education institutions. Fourthly, this can be a helpful factor in ensuring diversity of students' academic backgrounds in the institution's inputs.

Another reason for reducing tuition fees is where relatives are studying at the same institution. Interviewee 12 explained the situation:

"...there are also some tuition discounts in the case of relatives studying in the institution."

The above comment raises a number of questions, specifically on the issue of quality. If the private institution reduces tuition fees for students to encourage relatives and to attract a larger number of students, without taking into account the capability of the institution academically (academic staff, educational support services such as laboratories, library, etc.) and administratively (sufficient human resources, appropriate teaching rooms, restaurant, entertainment centres and others), this, in the long term will reflect negatively on the institution and the student.

Thus, the issue of reduction of tuition fees, if not accompanied by taking into account the aspects of quality in education will be meaningless; instead it will only present one meaning, propaganda for profit, and therefore the goal of such an educational institution will be no different from those of any other commercial enterprise seeking only to make money. Accordingly, the researcher discussed this subject in the context of the interviews, where officials said that this action does not mean sacrificing the quality of education. Interviewee 12, for example, argued that:

"Although we have found that students appreciate this financial aid, one point I would certainly like to make clear is that the discounts given do not at all compromise the quality."

However, the issue of correlation between the fees and quality of education in these institutions, which is beyond the scope of this study, needs to be further researched.

Another interviewee explained the mechanisms adopted by his institution regarding cases that eligible for tuition discount:

"Our institution offers 10% reduction of tuition fees for students who achieve the highest academic standards in the three academic programmes. It also provides 20% reduction for physically disabled students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also a 5% reduction for family members and for advance payment. As an appreciation of the institution's staff services, we offer 50% reduction in tuition for their children and 25% for their relatives." (Interviewee 18)

While some private institutions establish a particular strategy for assisting disadvantaged background students who are unable to access higher education without financial assistance, and feel strongly about this, the view of some private institutions, especially those that offer scientific disciplines such as medicine and engineering, was that there is a financial burden to be met which at this stage precludes setting up a specific plan of financial aid for students. Moreover, some suggested that the tuition fees were less than the actual cost of education in the institution, and this would lead to a deficit in the budget of their institution. For example, interviewee 17 stated that:

“The financial issue is a difficult matter. We need to raise the fees to be able to cope with the running of the college. At the same time, the fees may be too high for ordinary families and this will reduce the enrolment of private students. We do not have a policy at the moment of supporting low-income families, but we hope to have a Trust that will help some students.”

In line with the above argument, interviewee 9 claimed that:

“...furthermore, the tuition fees are significantly less than the actual cost of education at [this institution], thus leading to a budget deficit.”

Regarding **reducing/offering exemption from other fees e.g. accommodation, transport, food, etc.**, it was noticed from interviewees' responses that a few institutions reduced some of the accommodation fees and just one institution exempted students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds from payment of accommodation fees. However, only a very few of these institutions supported this segment of students. In the researcher's view, such an initiative would help students both financially and psychologically. From the financial side, it would reduce the financial burden of students from low-income families, and from the psychological side, it would assure them of an appropriate climate to focus on their studies. For example, interviewee 11 clarified the college's performance in these terms:

“The college takes into account the status of social security students, who are exempted from housing fees and transportation. In addition, the low-income students are also considered by the college since it reduces their housing fees besides offering flexible payment.”

In line with the above thought, interviewee 2 connected the university's consideration of the students' circumstances and their socioeconomic situation with the policy of the institution of both ensuring quality education and continuing to fulfil the institution's mission toward the community:

“...we are not only talking about study tuition fees, but also support some students for their living expenses, accommodation, transportation cost. Also for the food, we provide students with subsidised meals at the university restaurant, even for those who can afford[to pay full price]; if they cannot get a healthy meal at a reasonable price, the whole process of the university will not function and work productively.”

Offering part-time jobs was a measure reported by only 16.6% of the total respondents. Only four interviewees mentioned that their institutions supported students financially by offering them part-time jobs. Interviewees 2 and 6 described such initiatives:

“...some students, we offer them what we call part-time jobs. The aim behind establishing this option is first to assist students financially and second, to familiarise students with the working life and activities that run in the institution.” (Interviewee 2)

“As a part of the university commitment to help students, we offer them part-time jobs. Currently there are a number of students who balance work with their studies and social lives. By and large, this scheme helps, to some extent, students financially.” (Interviewee 6)

8.2.6 Mechanisms/options for increasing access into private higher education

As we have mentioned previously in Chapter Three, more than half of secondary school graduates do not get an opportunity to enrol in higher education institutions. For example, in academic year 2007/2008, the total number of secondary school graduates in the age group 18-24 was 47,466, of whom 15,100 were enrolled, at government expense, in both public and private higher education institutions (see Table 3.3, Chapter Three). The remaining graduates who are not absorbed into higher education will have two alternatives: a small minority will study at their own expense at private institutions locally or abroad, depending on their financial capability; or, they work in an unskilled job at a low wage. Otherwise, they will be unemployed and an added burden to their families and society.

Based on the above statement, and because the capacity of public higher education institutions is limited, and as the Minister of Higher Education of Oman (2009) declared that there is no intention at the moment to establish a second public university, options for increasing access to private institutions need to be considered seriously.

Therefore, the objective of this section is to highlight the interviewees' opinions and thoughts regarding these mechanisms.

Table 8.6: Mechanisms/options for increasing access into private higher education institutions

Question Six	Mechanisms/options	No. of respondents	%
In your opinion, what are the mechanisms or options to increase access into Omani private higher education institutions?	Introducing students loans scheme	17	94.4
	Increasing government scholarships.	15	83.3
	Increasing enterprises contribution	10	55.5
	Participating of individual wealthy people/donation	10	55.5

As can be seen from Table 8.6 above, the majority of interviewees (94.4%) believed that **introducing a student loans scheme** will, to a great extent, play a vital role in increasing access to this system. Currently, there are no governmental loans for education. Such a scheme is currently operated by a very few banks in the country that offer loans for education. However, the interest charged is a major concern for students and their parents. Interviewee 2 identified this point, stating that:

“Unfortunately, there is no governmental loan, which means that a lot of interest has to be paid by students and their parents.”

Interviewee 6 supported the above idea, and described his effort toward implementing a loan scheme in the country.

“I think this scheme needs to be implemented. I have discussed this issue with certain banks and with the government represented by the Ministry of Higher Education. The conclusion I came to after these meetings is that the issue needs a government initiative.”

It appeared that many banks and financial organisations would welcome the idea of offering such loans on a wider scale as long as the government becomes the guarantor for such loans.

The reason for the government interference in this domain, as interviewees argued, is to ensure repayment of the loans to these organisations. Interviewee 11 stated:

“I think once that is done the government can link the private sector and public sector and it can trace anyone and it can get the money back from anyone. I think if the government takes that initiative, facilitating and also taking some of the interest that is not to be paid by the individuals, this will help in increasing access in private higher education institutions.”

In line with the above statements, it can be mentioned here that currently the government is subsidising Omanis by providing soft loans for all development sectors, especially big enterprises and so forth. In the case of development loans, the government pays 6% interest and the receiver, the enterprise, pays only 3% (Ministry of Information,

2009). It would be beneficial to apply the above mechanism to education, which is considered to be an important field now and in the future, and consequently should continue to widen access. This is not only because it is socially just, but also because the Sultanate's future economy will depend on having more people with higher level skills. Interviewee 2 explained his view, stating that:

“It is really very important that the government should find the right way in implementing such a scheme. I feel here, even students have not paid the interest and they paid the capital amount received, is sufficient because the loan interest when it is done by the government it is minimal, e.g. health sector, housing, tourism sector, etc.”

Similarly, interviewees 1 and 12 argued that since many Omanis still think of higher education as a service that should be offered by the government free of charge, in the same way as general education, governmental intervention in this matter will be helpful to facilitate educational loans:

“In a country where still the majority believe that higher education is the government's responsibility, the government should show its willingness to support students and to pay the interest on their behalf.” (Interviewee 1)

“It is a very good scheme but only if the government can come up with such schemes through banks and other financial companies where the rate of interest can be lower and more flexible.” (Interviewee 12)

Banks and other financial organisations at the end of the day have a social responsibility towards society, and participating in lowering interest rates will be one of their responsibilities to the community. Interviewees 9 and 17 emphasised that:

“...although it is already implemented by few banks, the interest is high. I wish financial organisations would not to set high interest for educational loans and would treat the issue from a social responsibility view.”
(Interviewee 9)

“Many banks and financial firms are introducing an education loans service, but unfortunately as a business activity where the interest is high.”
(Interviewee 17)

From the foregoing, it can be observed that many interviewees supported the idea of introducing a free or low-interest student loan with governmental support.

However, another scenario is suggested by the researcher for the government; that is the idea of establishing a Central Funding System in Oman. The aim of such a body would be to fund students who want to continue higher education, and when they graduate, a certain percentage of their salary would go to that funding body. In fact, what the banks currently provide is purely on a commercial basis. However, if the government instituted

an independent funding body with initial investment from the government together with introduction of a small tax on different sectors for education, the funding system could function well.

Also, when students graduate, depending on the salary they receive, a certain percentage annually would be returned to help this fund grow and continue to give benefits to more and more students. Again, it is the researcher's view that at present the government is wealthy because of oil income but in the last few years we have seen oil price going down and as the rate continues to fall, the government has started to look for other sources of funds. To this end, it would be desirable to establish a funding body that could maintain itself over time.

Increasing the government scholarships (83.3%) ranked joint second among mechanisms for increasing access in these institutions as seen by interviewees. Although there are scholarships provided by the government for social welfare and low income applicants, these scholarships are few. Many interviewees thought the option of allocating more scholarships would help to increase access to private institutions. For example, interviewee 15 stated:

“Raising governmental scholarships will really help many students, particularly those from low-income families, to enter private higher education.”

Interviewee 7 also suggested increasing government scholarships, attributing his view to several factors:

“Since there are no free or low interest students' loans, and since there are a lot of students, especially from low income groups, government scholarships should be increased.”

The two other remaining scenarios that would increase accessibility according to the interviewees are increasing the **contribution of private enterprises or companies**, and **donation and participation of wealthy individuals**, which 55.5% of respondents advocated. For example, interviewees 9, 3 and 10 stated:

“...there are a few companies that sponsor a number of students' education at private higher education institutions. Private enterprises should play a vital role in providing scholarships for secondary graduates.”

(Interviewee 9)

“In fact companies like Oman Petroleum and Oman Gas offer some scholarships for secondary graduates, while there are many other companies should participate in this field.” (Interviewee 3)

“Unlike western societies, particularly the USA, it is not yet common to find generous contributions from most wealthy individuals in the Arab countries.” (Interviewee 10)

In the GCC countries, including Oman, this is partly related to prevailing values and partly to dependence on the state to provide free education and basic social services. In Oman, before 1970s, these practices were in place; people donated, people contributed themselves, there were *'Awqaf'* (endowments) for schools, roads and water channels were maintained through these means. However, after 1970, the government took over and really tried to build infrastructure and do many things. This has led to a situation where people become parasite, totally dependent on the government. However, the government has started to encourage people to participate, and of course it will take some time until the culture of citizen participation and self-reliance is re-established and revived.

As an example of encouraging Omanis to donate and endow, in the annual Royal Tours of the Sultanate's regions and meeting Omani citizens, His Majesty referred to his earlier directive to plant one million date palms in the Sultanate.

“All date palm plantations have so far been private farms and this is a good thing. These farms now contain 8 million date palms distributed in all regions of the Sultanate. We have decided that the million date palms will not be distributed, but they will be an endowment from the government to the Bait al Mal -public house of funds in Islamic economic system.”

(Oman Observer, 8 November, 2009)

However, one of the interviewees (interviewee 2) argued that the current government regulation still does not allow for open donations to private higher education institutions, and this might hinder many institutions from seeking donations.

In fact the current regulation does not prohibit private higher education institutions from accepting or seeking donations, provided the objectives and details of these donations are clear, and after advising the government. The aim behind this procedure is to protect the educational process from any influence on the learning and teaching in these institutions. Article 7 of the Ordinance of Private Universities (Official Gazette, 1999) declared this theme:

“The private university shall manage its funds by itself. It may accept, after advising the Ministry of higher Education, donations, grants, and legacies which satisfy its purposes and which comply with the public interest.”

The above statement, then, does not stand as an obstacle to these institutions. The government encourages such activities as long as they are consistent with universities' educational objectives and values, e.g. to ensure quality in a whole process of learning and

teaching in these universities. A good example of such a situation is the case of the German University in Oman. This university received a financial assistance from the DAAD "*Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*", also known as *German Academic Exchange Service*, for the purpose of maintaining quality (Personal Information by the Vice-Chancellor of German University in Oman, February 24, 2009).

In the Omani context, as most private higher education institutions were founded by wealthy individuals, this may require private institutions to convince donors of the lofty objectives of their institutions. Interviewee 3 explained why some wealthy individuals do not contribute in this activity:

“Up to now, we get some support from big companies via providing some scholarships, but not from individual wealthy people. Some wealthy individuals think that as these institutions are privately owned, they aim at profit-making.”

Indeed, efforts need to be made by private higher education institutions to encourage wealthier citizens to contribute to higher education. They should convince them that these institutions not only seek profit but also aim to offer a good education for students and for the benefit of society as a whole.

8.2.7 Key sources of funding in private higher education institutions

Table 8.7: Current key sources of funding in private higher education institutions

Question Seven	Source of funding	No. of respondents	%
What are the key sources of funding for your institution in the current stage?	Tuition fees	18	100
	Governmental subsidies	17	94.4
	Short & part-time courses	16	88.8
	Research activities	2	11.1
	Academic Affiliation	2	11.1
	Auxiliary and enterprises investments	2	11.1
	Consultancy services	1	5.5
	Donation/endowment	1	5.5

The aim of this section, then, is to gain a broader picture of the current funding sources of private higher education. This will provide us with some indicators about the current status of these institutions and, at the same time, will enable the researcher to offer appropriate suggestions for the benefit of this sector.

Table 8.7 above indicates the main funding sources of private institutions as emphasised by the vice-chancellors and deans. **Tuition fees** and **government scholarships** are the two funding sources on which private institutions currently most rely, representing 100% and 94.4% of respondents respectively. For example, interviewees 2, 9, and 18 emphasised this point. They stated:

“At the current stage, the tuition fees are a major element of funding in this institution.” (Interviewee 2)

“Frankly speaking, until now the tuition fee is the main source of our institution.” (Interviewee 9)

“Tuition and fees, together with government scholarships can be considered as key sources of funding for our institutions, at least in the current stage.”
(Interviewee 18)

Following on in third highest position, 88.8% of interviewees identified that **short and part-time courses** were also an important factor in funding their institutions. Interviewee 2 expressed this view in general terms, as follows:

“...we are running short courses, training programmes and part-time courses. For example, we are asked by some private enterprises to offer some short training courses in electronics engineering. We have also discussed with several governmental and non-governmental organisations about the programmes and/or any other activities that can be provided and designed for them. The objective in conducting such activities, besides the academic purposes, is to diversify our funding resources as well.”

Unlike tuition fees, government scholarships, and short and part-time courses, **research activities, academic affiliation, auxiliary and enterprise investments, and consultancy services** seem to be less important sources of funding at these institutions. Although there are modest initiatives by a very few institutions to encourage research activities and consultancy services, such efforts need to be expanded. Interviewees, however, did not hide the situation, arguing, at the same time, that private enterprises should be involved effectively in this regard. They said:

“We hoped that we can get research grants, but still we have not received any research grant from outside the university. We hope it will start this year [2009], and the Oman Research Council will start to fund some researches and projects.” (Interviewee 2)

“However, now we have a research project with PDO, we signed an agreement and 5% of this research will be used as additional revenue for the University.” (Interviewee 3)

“Well, not yet. We allocate some funds for these activities on the level of the University, but we hope that some private enterprises will financially support some research projects.” (Interviewee 9)

“Also, we are looking to adopt another resource which is from consultancy activity.” (Interviewee 13)

While the majority of interviewees considered affiliation to foreign universities as an additional financial burden on the institution’s budget, a very few of them believed that affiliation helped them financially. For example, interviewee 12 explained the type of support provided by the partner institution:

“...now we are trying to enhance our facilities like e-library, digital availability of the course material. We are also going to have video conferencing. All these activities will be achieved at no cost for technical services from our partner university.”

Auxiliary and enterprises investments. Although it is not a common feature for generating additional income for institutions, a few interviewees emphasised that this mechanism plays, to some extent, a positive role in diversifying the income of their institutions. For instance, interviewee 2 summarised the idea of this mechanism:

“The tuition fee is a major element, but aside from that we are trying to create additional income. We have created what we call the ‘University Investment Fund Company’. This company is a limited liability company and it is fully owned by our institution. As we are in the early phase now, this fund helps the institution in two ways. First, to reduce the cost we need, for example construction. Instead of asking another constructors to do it with high cost, basically we hire this fund to do it. Second, it has integrated facility management to cater for food, housing, etc. This in fact maintains quality but with minimal cost and from the benefit generated, we finance other projects.”

From the analysis of interviewees’ responses it can be realised that so far donation cannot be considered as a source of financial income for their institutions. Not surprisingly, this finding consists with the finding in the previous section, concerning the degree of contribution of wealthy individuals in higher education.

However, one interviewee described the recent experience of his institution. Interviewee 2 stated that in an initiative to spread the culture of donation among the staff:

“...the institution has insisted on another model of donation via the staff, especially Omanis, hired in this institution. In the first four months they receive the basic salary only, and the extra allowance is donated to the institution. The aim behind this is that to make staff feel that there is a tradition and to be a member of family in the organisation.”

To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning that although all private institutions are currently relying heavily on tuition fees and scholarships offered by the government, additional efforts are made by some of these institutions to diversify their sources of financial income.

8.2.8 Efforts of private higher education towards ensuring quality education

Table 8.8: Efforts/activities of private higher education towards ensuring quality education

Question Eight	Efforts/activities	No. of respondents	%
What efforts are being made by your institution to ensure a relatively high quality?	Programmes and courses offered	16	88.8
	Academic staff recruitment	15	83.3
	Supporting educational services (libraries, laboratories, career offices, etc.)	12	66.6
	Teaching & training/internship programme	10	55.5
	Establishing a quality unit/ office/ committee	9	50
	Quality audit/accreditation	7	38.8

We have noticed previously from reviewing interviewees' views that some institutions attempted to adopt specific criteria to ensure quality, admission criteria for example (see Table 8.3). However, assuring quality is not limited to one particular factor, but is a continuous process and encompasses many aspects and elements in the institution. Total quality, as Sarawat & Chowdhary (2000: 61) argue, is "not merely the responsibility of the teachers and the instructors and the other frontline personnel in the educational structure but also of the lady sitting on the reception".

This section then, summarises in general the current efforts and initiatives being undertaken by these institutions with regard to quality, from the interviewees' perspectives. According to the interviewees' responses, Table 8.8 above indicates the efforts adopted in private institutions related to quality aspects. As can be seen from the table, keenness to ensure quality of **academic programmes** accounted for most responses, 88.8%. However, the mechanism of ensuring quality for such activity also varied from one institution to another. For example, some interviewees thought that their institutions being affiliated with foreign recognised and accredited universities, in itself, ensured the quality of these programmes. Other interviewees believed that quality should not be seen from a narrow perspective; institutions locally should play a role and show stakeholders how concerned they are about quality.

Examples of such experiences can be drawn from the following respondents:

“...for example, in the foundation programmes, we insisted on certain criteria very essential to quality. For instance, we insisted on qualified native speakers teaching members of the programme, we insisted that the ratio in the classroom should be between 20-22 students, we also insisted that the students exit through the international exams like TOIFEL or ILETS. This means a lot of cost.” (Interviewee 9)

“We are still in the early phases, but we will take nursing and pharmacy as examples. These programmes were reviewed by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Health, and all input recommendations, we incorporated.” (Interviewee 2)

“Besides the reviewing of our programmes by the Ministry of Higher Education, these programmes are supervised by professors from the university we are affiliated with.” (Interviewee 3)

The criteria for **academic staff recruitment** (83.3%) ranked second among criteria or efforts made by private institutions to ensure quality of education. Many interviewees reported their experience of recruiting academic staff. Apart from the guideline prepared by the Ministry of Higher in this regard, and the process of recruiting academic staff requiring the Ministry’s approval, many institutions created additional criteria to ensure quality. For example, interviewees 3 and 9 emphasised that hiring of academic staff at their institutions must be approved by the foreign universities to which they are affiliated:

“Well, taking the Ministry of Higher Education regulation into account, recruiting of academic staff in this institution should also follow some other procedures. For instance, applications including the applicant’s CVs must be sent to our partner university, as a double check for applications and whether or not the qualifications of applicants fit job requirements and specifications.”

Similarly, interviewee 11 aspired to hire good staff by adopting certain criteria in this sphere, stating that:

“...we realised that although we are following the ministry’s procedures in this theme, our institution has created another mechanism for selecting and recruiting academic staff. We have established a particular committee consisting of deans and heads of department, besides the top management in our institution. The aim of this committee is to study applications carefully before hiring any academic staff.”

In relation to **teaching & training/internship programmes**, as shown in the table above, such activities have been introduced in some private institutions. For them, a combination between teaching and training can be seen as a tool that sharpens students’ skills. It also makes them aware of and able to acclimatise to the work environment. In other words, it gives both students and institutions an indication whether or not the

information and knowledge provided is enriching skills required for working life. In contrast, in some other institutions, the strategy of internship has not been given much priority. For example, interviewees 2 and 16 explained, in general, the internship process and how it is used as a tool for education quality, stating that:

“...we are also signing with other universities a memorandum of understanding in getting some training courses. For example, two years ago we took some students to the UK during the summer. We also did this last year; we sent students to France, Egypt, and the UAE. This year we have included training, so students will do a course in the morning session and after noon will take training.” (Interviewee 2)

“...they are also trained at the site. For instance, pharmacy and nursing are trained in either in governmental or private hospitals and pharmacies. Moreover, we have a committee that facilitates practical training and they give us feedback on our students.” (Interviewee 16)

Concerning **supporting educational services**, undoubtedly, supplying and equipping institutions with sufficient means for learning and teaching is considered as a means of enhancing and promoting quality. A lack of essential materials and equipment for teaching and learning in educational institutions reflects negatively on quality of education on the one hand and leaves a sign of carelessness of the institution concerned the learning process as a whole, on the other hand.

Some interviewees frankly revealed that the inadequacy of some supporting educational services at their institutions put them in an embarrassing situation with students. They attributed the reason for this to shortage of funds at this stage.

“...we know that many students are complaining about the shortage in some educational services, such as laboratory and library equipment. However, this is because of the lack of funding at this stage, but we plan to upgrade these facilities by the next academic year.” (Interviewee 13)

However, some institutions exert relatively sufficient efforts to provide essential resources for educational purposes. For instance, interviewee 9 summarised his institution's efforts in this regard, stating that:

“Well, we believe that without ensuring sufficient educational services for both students and teachers, the academic process will collapse. Although we are still a young institution, we have tried to build an adequate infrastructure in our institution. Therefore, library, laboratories, study halls, and centre for teaching and learning were taken into consideration from the beginning.”

Another scenario for ensuring quality education is the **establishment of a quality unit, office or committee**, which accounted for 50% of the total responses. Reviewing the interviewees' responses, it becomes obvious that a number of private institutions had taken

the initiative in this regard, while many of them were still, as they emphasised, under process. As there is always room for improvement in even the most prestigious universities in the world, interviewee 9 expressed his conviction of the need to enhance this activity, stating:

“Well, we are still a very young institution that is striving to achieve excellence in teaching, research, and community service. Based on the self-study that we have recently completed, we are working on an action plan to improve our current system. For example, we shall recruit a quality assurance manager and a risk management officer for the coming year as part of creating an improved quality assurance system.”

The last mechanism mentioned by interviewees was **quality audit or/and accreditation**; 38.8% of respondents said that they conducted such procedure at their institutions. Through transcribing the interviews it appeared that a number of institutions had their quality audited by the Oman Accreditation Council; up to the time of conducting these interviews, six institutions had completed the quality audit procedure.

In contrast, only one private institution had its programmes accredited by an international accreditation board. Interviewee 3 explained how the idea of accreditation was carried out in his institution, stating:

“...last year we started to accredit our programmes internationally. This is just to show students and their parents along with other stakeholders that there is quality. Similarly, a team from an independent quality agency from outside the Sultanate has visited us for evaluating the programmes we offer. So that is our main aim from accreditation, to show stakeholders that we are offering good programmes, and we are able to offer such programmes.”

From the above and from reading other responses related to criteria and efforts for ensuring relatively appropriate quality, many institutions, despite the newness of establishment, were undertaking serious efforts in this area. To activate this procedure in higher education institutions, the Oman Accreditation Council should step up its efforts in this regard. However, this issue will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

8.3 Results of Interviews with 7 Officials in the Ministry of Higher Education

In the previous part, interviews with vice-chancellors and deans of private higher education were analysed and a general picture about the current stats and challenges that this sector faces was highlighted.

In order to gain further information about the recent situation, performance and challenges that this sector faces, complementary views were sought through interviewing a group of officials in the Ministry of Higher Education. Therefore, the focal aim of this part

is to analyse these interviews. Five key elements were taken into consideration in these interviews, including rationales for establishment of private higher education institutions, trends and functions of this sector currently in place, access and equity features, the current funding sources of this sector, and quality assurance.

8.3.1 Rationales behind establishment of private institutions

From examination of the interviewees' responses, rationales for establishing private universities and colleges can be summarised into five dimensions: (1) increasing access to higher education, (2) enhancing research activities, (3) alleviating state budget, (4) meeting labour market demands, and (5) promoting Omanisation policy.

It can be observed that the above elements mentioned by officials in the ministry coincide with the general objectives and rationales declared in the literature and stated by vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions as well. However, the aim underlying this section is to examine the views and vision of the other side of educational actor -officials in the ministry- on these rationales and to what degree private higher education contributes in achieving these objectives. Therefore, this section analyses interviewees' perspectives related these rationales.

1) Increasing access to higher education. In response to the gradual growth in secondary school graduates and the limited opportunities in public higher education system for most of these graduates, the government has decided to encourage private sector to invest in the higher education sphere. The above argument was clearly revealed in interviewees' respondents. For instance, interviewee 1 stated:

"...is to meet the proportion of secondary education graduates who cannot enter public higher education in Oman, and the larger numbers of these graduates are not absorbed by state higher education. Thus, this is one of the key reasons for allowing private sector establishing private universities and colleges, to contribute in absorbing more secondary graduates."

Interviewee 4 also emphasised that one of the main reasons behind the participation of private sector in higher education is to absorb more secondary graduates:

"I think one of the key rationales behind establishing the private higher education institutions is to help the government in absorbing secondary school graduates."

Another interviewee also stated a similar view:

"Because of the high number of general education leavers most of whom seek opportunities to complete their higher education, compared to the low capacity of public higher education." (Interviewee 6)

However, the question is whether or not the private sector is functioning well to accomplish this rationale. While some interviewees believed that these institutions are effectively contribute in absorbing secondary school leavers, others perceived that due to their high tuition fees, most students cannot afford to enrol in these institutions. For example, interviewee 2 perceived that private higher education is functioning acceptably in this area, stating:

“Well, I think these institutions are doing fair enough and currently they have met the objective of absorbing secondary education leavers.”

Another argument viewed the issue of contribution of these institutions in this field from the perspective of general development of the student population since the first institution of higher education was established in 1995/1996:

“...in terms of the number of enrolments, I think the participation of private education in Oman is increasing. So, if we compare enrolments in 1995 to 2009 we will see a huge increase in the number of students enrolled in these institutions.” (Interviewee 5)

However, interviewee 1 argued that the contribution of private higher education in this regard is still limited:

“...with regard to absorbing secondary school graduates, private higher education is not participating as effectively as expected. We expected that the proportion enrolled in these institutions would be higher than in the current situation.”

Interviewee 6 considered the total enrolment in this sector to be lower than in public higher education, which means that it is still not as it was planned to be:

“The private higher education is still young, now the sharing percentage of enrolment in this sector is around 35% of total enrolments.”

The above clearly indicate that there are two different views with regard to contribution of private institutions on the matter of absorption, depending on the perspective from which interviewees considered the issue. Those who viewed the theme from the general aspect of enrolment through comparing student numbers enrolled during the period of establishment of these institutions and the current proportion, argued for the effective participation of this sector in this regard. In contrast, the other group perceived that there is still a limited contribution by this sector, in terms of the gap between enrolments in this sector and the total number of graduates from secondary education. However, Section 8.3.3 sheds further light on this issue, highlighting at the same time some factors that may help increase access to these institutions.

2. Enhancing research activity. Most interviewees agreed that scientific research is given little consideration in most private institutions. They attributed this situation to several factors, including insufficient research infrastructure in these institutions, new establishment of some of these universities and colleges, lack of encouragement from both public and private organisations in this field, and above all the attitude of leaders and top management cadres in these institutions toward the importance of scientific research. Therefore, although one of the reasons for establishing these institutions is to promote scientific research activity in the country, their current contribution remains modest, if not absent.

These views can be derived from interviewees' responses. For example, interviewee 2 emphasised that:

“Well, I think one of reasons for allowing the private sector to be involved in the higher education sphere is to effectively participate in promoting scientific research activities. This area needs to be given more consideration by these institutions. Plans and strategy should be well stated with regard to this issue.”

However, Section 8.3.2 also highlights further information regarding the status of scientific research in private higher education.

3. Alleviating state budget. The financial factor was also seen as another rationale for allowing the private sector to enter this field. Many interviewees mentioned that as the government is investing heavily in general education and it is free of charge, allowing the private sector to invest in this sphere is an indicator that students and/or their families should contribute to the cost of higher education. Similarly, some argued that there are many other developmental undertakings funded from the state budget, so the contribution of the private sector in higher education is expected to lighten the state budget. Interviewees 2 and 6 explained these views:

“Responding to the financial austerity in wake of competing demands from other public needs, the government has allowed the private sector to invest in higher education.” (Interviewee 2)

“While the government is responsible for general education which is completely free from grade one to grade twelve, government sees that the citizens should participate or students and their parents should participate in the cost of higher education, and that is why the private sector came to invest in higher education.” (Interviewee 6)

4. Meeting labour market demand. In recent decades, there has been rapid expansion of higher education across many countries. This has had important and deep effects on the

labour market and the way in which employers use highly educated labour. Oman is no exemption to these global economic trends. The government has realised that different types of higher education institutions are now needed if commerce and industry is also to develop its capability to sustain competitive advantage in increasingly fierce regional and global business competition. This view was expressed in the responses of officials in the ministry. For instance, interviewees 1 and 7 had the following to say:

“As the labour market is developing, specialisations should go in line to meet that change in labour market. Therefore, due to the shortage of programmes offered in public institutions, the government decided to permit the establishment of private universities and colleges.” (Interviewee 1)

“We want Omani graduates smoothly to join international labour market.”
(Interviewee 7)

5. Promoting Omanisation scheme. As we have noticed from the literature review, there are strong social pressures to create employment for Omani nationals by replacing expatriate labour. To cope with this situation and to do this successfully, it is clear that a broader and expanded higher education system must be developed. To this end the government's aim in allowing the private sector to establish private universities and colleges is to encourage the participation of qualified nationals to work in different fields, particularly in the private sector. The above is also a brief summary of what interviewees revealed with regard to Omanisation as one of rationales for establishment of private higher education. For example, interviewees 2 and 4 commented:

“Another rationale for establishment of private universities and colleges is to promote the Omanisation policy in the country.” (Interviewee 2)

“The Sultanate is making extensive efforts in developing manpower in order to make available a trained and qualified national manpower which will participate in developing the country and replacing the expatriate employees.” (Interviewee 4)

It can be observed that both the fourth and fifth rationales overlap. In other words, higher education institutions should make sure that the programmes offered meet both goals. In the researcher's view, although these tasks are terminologically different, objectively they should not be isolated, as the ultimate goal is preparing qualified and skilled Omani nationals who are able to work in Oman or anywhere else.

However, concerning the correlation between the programmes offered in these institutions and the labour market requirements, when the interviewees were asked to what extent the qualifications of graduates from these institutions match job needs, many of them indicated that since there is no accurate information regarding this issue, it was not

possible to answer. Indeed, without a systematic evaluation of graduates' performance in the world of work, judgment would be illogical.

8.3.2 Teaching, scientific research and community service

Almost all participants in this interview asserted that most of these institutions are currently teaching-driven. While community service functions fairly in many institutions, scientific research is nearly neglected. Interviewee 1 described this picture generally, stating that:

“In teaching, I think they are contributing very well, whereas in community service they are relatively acceptable. Some of these institutions contribute as a part of the community. However, the area of scientific research is really neglected. Only one or two institutions are showing initiative in this matter.”

Also, interviewee 2 agreed with the statement made by the above interviewee, emphasising that:

“All I can really see is some minor practices and modest efforts devoted to scientific research as if it is not a vital means of development of the country's economy as well as the institution's income. So far, actual scientific research does not actually exist in the private higher education institutions, all of which are only teaching institutions.”

Although it can be understood that many of these institutions are still in the embryonic stage and most of them are university colleges (not universities), initiatives and encouragement of this field should be accelerated by these institutions. To accomplish this goal, research infrastructure should be established. Moreover, and most importantly, the leaders' commitment should be witnessed in these institutions. Interviewees 2 and 5 emphasised the role that should be played by these institutions to promote research activities:

“...these institutions are expected to play a much greater role than what is now. Besides the teaching function they should also pay special attention to scientific research. This will not only serve students and institutions but it will benefit society as a whole.” (Interviewee 2)

“I think private institutions should invest different academic cadres in the scientific research field. In my view what is missing at the moment is just necessary labs and sufficient infrastructure for research which has started already in some of these institutions but it will take some time in other institutions.” (Interviewee 5)

In line with the above statement, interviewee 3 made a similar argument with regard to these functions. She emphasised that unlike the teaching function, only modest efforts had been made by private institutions concerning scientific research and community service. She stated:

“It could be said that, out of twenty-four institutions, two or three have really shown their preliminary interest in scientific research. The same could be said with regard to community service; there are a few private institutions taking the initiative in serving the community. However, most institutions are currently focusing on the teaching aspect.”

Another interviewee thought if that attention was given to all three functions of higher education, this would reflect positively on the reputation of these institutions. For example, interviewee 4 stated that:

“Currently I believe that all private institutions are focusing mostly one dimension, which is teaching. If these institutions are looking to build a good reputation, they should focus on three dimensions, teaching, research and serving the community.”

Similarly, interviewee 6 expressed a similar perception regarding functions of higher education:

“...most private institutions are teaching-oriented rather than research. In terms of community service, in fact there is some participation from many of these institutions, particularly universities, toward society, but it still needs to be improved.”

8.3.3 Access and equity

The aim of this section is to highlight the issue of access and equity from the governmental point of view. In the previous part of this chapter we examined this aspect from private higher education institutions' perspectives.

Many officials asserted that the government has taken this issue into consideration, as there are many scholarships offered by the government for low-income students and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, interviewee 5 stated:

“Well, the government have tried to solve this issue by having an internal scholarship programme for students coming from social security and from low-income families and this programme accommodated between 1,600 to 1,700 students.”

Interviewee 7 commented similarly, stating that:

“The government provides internal scholarships for the students coming from low income families and those coming from social security families. In fact this scheme gives another chance to these students to be educated and to have a better future.”

Although the government pays attention to this group of students, scholarships need to be increased. Many students from low-income families or from welfare groups are not

getting chance to enrol in higher education. This statement is supported by interviewee 6, who stated:

“...there is a scheme of internal scholarships for students from low-income families, and around 1,600 students every year enrol based on this scheme. However, there are many other socioeconomically disadvantaged students who need to be given attention from the government.”

Likewise, interviewee 4 shared a similar view, emphasising that the role of the government in this area should be enhanced:

“From the government side, there are 1,600 full and partial scholarships every year for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, but these scholarships should be increased to cover the majority of low-income and social welfare students who are eligible to enter higher education.”

Interviewee 1 also suggested that the current internal scholarships are not enough for social welfare students and those from low-income families. She thought that the number of secondary leavers who fall within this group is high:

“Indeed, having government provides scholarships to students from low-income families or the welfare scheme is a vital step. However, these scholarships need to be increased. 1,600 scholarships every year are not enough compared to the large number of graduates falling under this category.”

The above comments highlighted interviewees’ opinions about the issue of equity from a particular perspective; governmental support to social welfare and low-income groups to access private higher education. However, this is not the only scheme concerning access and equity in private higher education. Interviewees proposed some other measures related to this theme. Analysing the interviewees’ responses, these options can be summarised into four main schemes: (1) increasing the number of the government’s internal scholarships, (2) increasing the contribution of private institutions, (3) participation of individual wealthy people and private enterprises, and (4) introducing a student loans scheme.

We have already underlined interviewees’ statements related to the necessity to **expand the number of scholarships** for the socioeconomically disadvantaged groups as one way to promote equity. The second option, as mentioned above, is **increasing the contribution of private higher education institutions** themselves in this domain. Many interviewees believed that private institutions should pay attention to the issue of equity of access to these institutions. According to interviewees, two measures might be taken by these institutions: offering more scholarships and reducing tuition fees. For example, interviewee 3 saw the contribution of private institutions in this area as not encouraging:

“Well, I think many of these institutions have not much concern about the issue of equity, since they are willing to increase their tuition fees. Private institutions should also consider the issue of social responsibility, either by offering certain scholarships or by making some reduction in tuition fees.”

Similarly, interviewee 6 emphasised that:

“Private institutions are also required to be involved in this issue. In other words, they should offer a certain numbers of scholarships for secondary graduates, either to those getting high grades in secondary certificate or to students from social security or lower income families.”

Regarding the third option, ***participation of wealthy individuals and private enterprises*** in higher education, officials in the ministry emphasised the modest contribution of these sectors in the field of higher education. For instance, interviewee 2 said:

“Well, there are few people who are really willing to take part in this sphere.”

However, interviewee 7 ascribed the limited contribution in this area to a lack of awareness:

“I believe there are some people and some companies which provide some scholarships or fund scholarships for students in private higher education, but still I think we need to have some more awareness for them to have more participation in this field.”

Another reason for the scarcity of participation by some wealthy individuals and businessmen is probably due to the general image among those individuals that private institutions are profit making. Interviewee 4 highlighted this point, stating that:

“...the issue here is that most private higher education institutions are run by businessmen, and there is an image amongst people that these institutions belong to businessmen, and consequently they are looking for profit. This might be one of the reasons making people reluctant to donate.”

Introducing a student loans scheme was the fourth option mentioned by officials. The majority of interviewees emphasised the necessity of adopting soft loans or an interest-free loans mechanism, arguing that this would increase opportunities for students, particularly those from social security and lower income groups. For example, interviewee 1 asserted this idea, stating:

“Well, I think it is an important idea to implement an educational loan scheme either by the government or via banks or through mutual cooperation between these sectors to provide students a very good scheme free of interest and to be repaid after certain years of work period. This mechanism will help to increase the number of students willing to study at private higher education institutions, and it will increase the access rate to higher education in the country as a whole.”

Another interviewee had a similar view, arguing that this scheme would achieve, to some extent, a degree of equity in access to these institutions:

“In my opinion, a student loan scheme will give a great and equal opportunity to those students of low-income families who cannot win the opportunity for government scholarships.” (Interviewee 2)

Officials also highlighted that although currently there are a few banks that offer a student loan scheme, loan interest is considered to be high. Interviewees suggested that student loans schemes should not be treated in the same way as any other commercial loans. Rather, they asserted that so-called ‘corporate social responsibility’ towards the community should be well practised and performed by financial organisations. Interviewees 3 and 4, for example, referred to these principles:

“As far as I know, there are only one or two banks that offer education loans, but they are limited, at high interest and with certain restricted conditions. I wish that these organizations would treat the issue from the social responsibility perspective.” (Interviewee 3)

“...there may be one or two banks introducing a student loans option. However, due the high interest rate and restricted conditions, such schemes will not be meaningful for students, particularly those from low-income families.” (Interviewee 4)

Then, what is the appropriate mechanism to achieve this target? This question was posed to the officials in order to gain an overview regarding this theme. Indeed, half of them suggested that both government and banks or other financial organisations should be involved in this field. They also proposed that, in addition, government should play a part in encouraging and persuading these organisations to implement such a scheme at a low rate of interest. Since these are educational loans, the government can support and participate financially in these loans. It was their view that by so doing, the government would raise the awareness of these organisations regarding the importance of this issue. For example, interviewee 4 stated that:

“Government should discuss the issue seriously, drawing a very clear picture to these institutions, and convince them that their contribution is a part of their responsibility to society. Equally important, the government should also support and participate financially in student loans.”

Another interviewee also recommended a similar idea:

“I suggest that the government should play a part in influencing financial organisations to introduce a student loans scheme at low interest. Both the government and these organisations should work together in finding the best solution to promote access to higher education.” (Interviewee 2)

The other half, in contrast, threw the ball into the court of banks and other financial organisations. They also suggested that private institutions should discuss this issue with banks and persuade them to adopt a student loans programme with low interest. For instance, interviewee 5 said:

“Well, I think banks can work from the social and moral concept especially when we talk about educational loans. In many countries, banks and other financial organisations offer students loans for education at very low interest. Similarly, private higher education institutions should also confer with these organisations about this issue.”

Based on the above, it can be noticed that statements of the ministry’s officials are, to some extent, consistent with what the vice-chancellors and deans said concerning the student loans programme. While some views from each group suggested that the government should intervene in the issue of loans in order to ensure such a scheme is practised effectively by the banks, others believed that banks should take on this issue based on the principle of social responsibility towards the community.

8.3.4 Funding sources in private higher education institutions

We have pointed out in the previous part of this chapter the diversity of funding sources in the private higher education institutions from the viewpoint of vice-chancellors and deans of these institutions. We have also noted through these responses that private institutions in the Sultanate are currently heavily dependent on tuition fees and subsidies received from the government.

In this section we attempt to discern the views of officials in the ministry about funding sources in these institutions and the impact of those sources on the educational process in these institutions.

By and large, the results of interviews with the officials in the ministry with regard to the most important sources of funding of private institutions currently in place indicated that tuition fees paid by students and their families, along with government financial support, were the two major sources of funding in these institutions. According to the interviewees, activities such as scientific research and consultancy services cannot be considered as additional sources of revenue to these institutions, at least at the present time. For example, interviewee 1 indicated that:

“Currently, the main funding sources of Omani private higher education are two: tuition fees and the government direct and indirect subsidies to these institutions.”

Interviewee 4 also commented:

“Well, scientific research does not play any significant part in funding these institutions, because research activity is very modest and almost neglected by most of these institutions. Therefore, private higher education is totally dependent on tuition fees and government support.”

However, interviewee 3 mentioned some other initiatives taken by some private institutions for the purpose of generating additional income:

“...a few institutions invest in the stock market and in other business activities but still this cannot be regarded as a considerable financial resource. For the time being, private institutions depend heavily on tuition fees paid directly by students and their families, and government support.”

Likewise, interviewee 7 explained in general some initiatives by a few institutions to diversify their income, emphasising that:

“...the main resource is the tuition fees of students. A few institutions have started to create other funding resources like building hostels inside their campuses. Also, some of these institutions are offering short term training programmes which can be regarded as an additional source of income to them.”

However, to what extent do the current funding mechanisms or sources affect the operation of private higher education institutions? Most interviewees believed that without diversification of funding resources, private institutions will face obstacles and challenges to stability. Interviewee 1, for example, offered a straightforward prediction regarding those institutions that do not try to diversify their income resources to operate their institutions smoothly and effectively:

“Unfortunately, private higher education is highly dependent on these two resources (tuition fees and government subsidies). In the long term, this will be very dangerous for these institutions. For example, I think if the government decides to stop subsidising, some private institutions might close down.”

Interviewee 5 indicated the importance of a variety of funding sources for institutional stability, stating that:

“Private institutions should find other alternatives to generate income for their survival. I think it is time for these institutions to think seriously about scientific research in order to create another funding resource.”

8.3.5 Quality aspects in private higher education institutions

Most of the officials explained, at the beginning, steps and measures taken by the government on the issue of quality assurance in private higher education institutions. These procedures conform largely to what was explained in Chapter Six. However, the question

arises about the performance of private higher education institutions in promoting quality in their institutions. Therefore, officials' opinions and suggestions on this matter will be addressed in the following elements.

The majority of interviewees argued that a number of private institutions are newly established and also levels of quality differ between these institutions. They emphasised, at the same time, that although quality is expensive, the benefits will be even more for stakeholders. For example, interviewee 3 affirmed that:

“Well, taking into account that some of these institutions are newly founded, levels of performance and quality vary from the one institution to another. Although quality is not an easy job and it is expensive, the pay back will be much more benefit to the institutions, students and society.”

Another interviewee argued that some of these institutions tried from the beginning to emphasise quality, by adopting certain criteria for admission, balancing between student-staff ratio, and in the foundation programme, for example. Interviewee 7 highlighted these components, stating:

“Indeed, some institutions were keen from their commencement to ensure relatively suitable quality. For example, for students wishing to study engineering, pharmacy, and nursing, grades of Secondary Certificate should be 70% and above (good). Similarly, in the foundation programme, international exams are organised as another criterion for admission to academic programmes.”

Similarly, interviewee 5 stated that:

“...although it is an early effort, some institutions are trying to perform and work in order to show there is relatively good quality. For instance, some of them have invited external agencies or teams for quality evaluation in order to identify the strength and weakness at these institutions.”

However, in order to gain a wider picture about this subject, officials were also asked about their opinions regarding obstacles to quality assurance in private institutions, and the appropriate and effective mechanisms which they believed would help to overcome such challenges and promote quality in these institutions.

Indeed, a number of remarks and/or suggestions were proposed by interviewees related to this theme. For example, interviewees 1 and 4 pointed out that the absence of a clear policy and leaders' commitment in some of these institutions with regard to quality assurance could be considered one of obstacles in private institutions:

“I think the lack of a clear policy or strategy about quality assurance may be one of the factors that hinder quality application in many of these institutions.” (Interviewee 1)

“In my opinion, lack of leaders’ commitment in some private institutions can be regarded as a factor among others hindering assurance application.”
(Interviewee 4)

To overcome these obstacles, a number of options were suggested by the interviewees such as enhancing awareness of quality assurance in these institutions, establishing units/offices or committees concerned with upholding quality, setting a clear strategy for implementing quality assurance, and activating the role of the Oman Accreditation Council. For instance, interviewee 3, 4 and 6 made these comments:

“In my view, the government should set up a programme on how to convince investors or leaders of these institutions. Once they are convinced, then it will become easier to spread the culture and philosophy of quality among these institutions.” (Interviewee 3)

“...these institutions should design a clear strategy to implement quality assurance. Also, they should have offices or a consultant committee in place to maintain quality on a daily process.” (Interviewee 4)

“I think the Accreditation Council should take the responsibility for evaluating and accrediting these institutions. Also, the Council should work harder to spread the culture of quality in these institutions. To accomplish such objectives, the number of experts and professionals needs to be increased.” (Interviewee 6)

8.4 Summary

The results of the semi-structured interviews have shed further light on the development of private higher education in Oman and the challenges it currently faces. They showed the rationales and objectives of establishment of these institutions and the performance of this sector in achieving these objectives. Themes such as research capacity, mechanisms of funding, quality aspects and the issue of access and equity were also investigated.

Further insight was also provided into the weaknesses and strengths of private institutions. Predominant among the weaknesses were the heavy dependence on tuition fees, modest scientific research infrastructure, insufficient attention of some institutions to quality assurance, and failure to exploit academic affiliation productively. In contrast, a few institutions showed their endeavours to promote quality assurance, exploiting academic affiliation in an effective way, giving consideration to diversifying their funding resources, and addressing the issue of equity, particularly for welfare students, either in access arrangements or through offering part-time jobs during the study period, for example.

Indeed, interviewees' responses to the researcher's further investigations into how and why they responded are valid, as they allow comparison with documentary data. They support and authenticate the main issues raised in the theoretical part and educe further details that could be captured by literature and the researcher's findings.

Chapter Nine will discuss the results detailed in this chapter, and relate these to previous research findings in the literature.

Chapter Nine

Discussion of the Findings

9.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a discussion of the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews as well as documentary data. The semi-structured interviews were designed and developed to address the current status of private higher education institutions in the Sultanate along with the challenges these institutions face.

Results obtained in the present study revealed that rationales and objectives such as increasing access to higher education and/or meeting the growing demand for higher education, meeting labour market demands, offering different programmes from those offered at public higher education institutions, enhancing research activities, and promoting Omanisation were the key rationales for allowing the private sector to establish private colleges and universities. These elements coincide, to a large extent, with the general objectives declared in the literature (see for example, Geiger 1986; James 1986, 1993; Tilak 1991; Altbach 1998, 1999; Levy 1986, 2002, 2005, 2006; Teixeira & Amaral 2002). These findings are further supported by the evidence collected from the semi-structured interviews with vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions as well as officials in the Ministry of Higher Education. Furthermore, data obtained from the literature as well as from the interviews gave an indication regarding patterns of private institutions, in addition to challenges and issues this system faces. Consequently, findings from the interviews, documentary data and the relevant literature will enable the researcher to offer some suggestions and recommendations to promote the participation and contribution of private sector higher education in the comprehensive development of the country.

With this background, the following is a discussion of what has been found from the documentary data, together with information and perspectives inferred from the interviews. A summary of the discussion will conclude this chapter.

9.2 Contribution to Objectives and Challenges that Remain

Numerous studies in higher education (Wagner 1996; Altbach & Peterson 1999; Lee 2003; Teichler 2003) have pointed out that in many parts of the world, including most industrial countries, higher education has experienced pressures from an increasing number of

students, demands for accountability, the impact of rapidly changing technologies and their role in national development.

As already indicated, allowing the private sector to enter the higher education sphere was intended to meet several objectives. By synthesising the theoretical part of this study and the empirical evidence from interviews with officials in the Ministry of Higher Education together with the top management in private universities and colleges, this section analyses a number of these objectives. It also analyses the themes of challenges and issues that remain in private institutions. Undoubtedly, identifying these issues will help the researcher to offer a number of suggestions and recommendations for the development of this sector and enhancing its contribution in the higher education system as a whole.

9.2.1 Increasing access in higher education

As we mentioned earlier, in Chapter Three, the dramatic growth in numbers of secondary school graduates and the inability of public higher education institutions to absorb these portions of secondary education leavers was one of the rationales for allowing the private sector to participate in the higher education field through establishing private universities and colleges.

As detailed in Table 3.1, Oman has a very young population, with the age group 0-24 representing 67% of the total Omani population. Accordingly, demand for both general education and higher education can be expected to increase. This situation has created a serious challenge and pressure on the government in terms of developing and expanding provision, particularly in higher education.

The small capacity of public higher education institutions reviewed previously, along with the high financial cost of expanding them, has made it difficult for the public sector to meet this demand and meeting the needs of the public for higher education has become a national concern. This was made obvious by the Ministry of Higher Education (2002: 2) in emphasising that:

“The greater challenge faced by the government in human resource development in the past decade has been the widening gap between the increasing number of graduates from the secondary school system and the limited number of places available at institutions of higher education in the Sultanate.”

Therefore, private higher education is seen as a solution, since the government is unwilling, at least in the near future, to establish another public university, or to expand the funding of existing public higher education institutions. This argument was clearly

highlighted in interviewees' responses. For example, all the vice-chancellors and deans rated *contribution in absorbing secondary school students* in higher education as the number one factor among the other factors mentioned, as detailed in Table 8.1. From the transcription of the semi-structured interviews, interviewee number 2, for example, stated:

“There is only one public university in Oman. This university receives a small number of secondary graduates every year. For example, in 2008/2009, Sultan Qaboos University enrolled only 2% of the total secondary graduates. Thus, this is one of the key reasons for allowing private sector to establish private universities and colleges.”

However, the question arises, do private universities and colleges in Oman contribute effectively in achieving the government target of increasing access to higher education, particularly with regard to enrolling higher proportion of secondary school graduates?

In this study and from the data collected during interviews, it can be seen that this goal has been moderately achieved. The combined capacity of public and private higher education sectors along with scholarships and grants have provided a total of 21,586 (45%) post secondary opportunities (see Table 3.2). This capacity, however, does not meet the high demand of 47,466 secondary school graduates for higher education in academic year 2007/2008. Although the rate of enrolments increased during the period 2003-2008 as detailed in Table 3.2, the percentage rate of increase was below the rate of increase in secondary school graduation. This indicates that only one-third of the social demand for access to the higher education sector could be satisfied. This also means that the gap between supply and demand has rapidly increased.

In terms of the absorptive capacity of private universities and colleges in the Sultanate, the total enrolment capacity in 2008/2009 in these institutions was 7,853 students, forming 37% of the total admissions, which can be considered, to some extent, as a reflection of the role of these institutions in raising the rate of enrolment in higher education in Oman. However, one-third of all students enrolled in these institutions were funded by the government through the government scholarships scheme. Based on educational statistics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009b), students receiving either full or partial scholarships accounted for 28% of all students in private higher education (see Figure 4.5).

From the foregoing, it can be argued that although the private higher education system contributes, in part, in increasing accessibility in higher education in the country, such a contribution remains marginal. This can be attributed to a number of factors:

First, most Omani students are seeking, at the first stage, free public higher education in the Sultanate. Interviewee 1, of the vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions explains this reason as follows:

“I think the main factor is the lack of opportunity to enrol in public higher education. Around 95% of secondary graduates wishing to study at public institutions at the first option of study, are not focusing on studying at private institutions at all as the first option, and once they miss the chance or lose the hope to study at public institutions, they start looking to enrol in private institutions.”

Second, many Omani students cannot afford to study in private institutions, especially in science specialisations, because of high tuition fees and other fees on the one hand, and due to the fact that many students are from low-income families on the other. Interviewee 4 of the Ministry considered this issue as a challenge for students to study in this system. He stated:

“I think the tuition fee is a serious challenge for many Omani students wishing to study in private universities and colleges.”

It is worth emphasising that based on the findings of this research, the participation of private higher education institutions in increasing the rate of absorption of secondary education graduates remains lower than is expected. However, unless the government adopts appropriate policies to increase access to higher education, the objective would be difficult to achieve by private higher education alone. The capacity of public higher education as well as funding of this sector should be increased. This option is consistent with the intention of the government with regard to its goal of at least 50% of the 18-24 age group attending post-secondary education by the year 2020, up from 21.6% in 2009 (Al-Busaidia, 2009). For the government to achieve projected rates of enrolment, intensive efforts need to be made both financially and strategically. In terms of the financial aspect, expenditure on higher education needs to be increased. Al-Manthri (2001b) warned of the financial support that would be needed from the government if rates of enrolment are to keep pace with demand, emphasising, at the same time, the importance of increased capacity of public higher education institutions. Regarding strategic vision, the government should consider the strategy of expansion and diversification of higher education.

Evidence from the literature demonstrated that such a strategy has been recommended by the World Bank as an effective option to overcome the issue of rising demand for higher education. The World Bank's (2002) document *“Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education”* revealed that diversification

and differentiation in higher education institutions can effectively tackle the problem of increasing demand for higher education.

In the Omani context, there is a common feeling amongst the public in the country that the government should work either to establish another university besides the only public university, or to increase enrolment capacity in public higher education institutions. In line with this argument, a number of studies in the educational field in the country proposed a similar suggestion. For example, Al-Hajri (2002) suggests that in order to provide more opportunities for secondary school graduates who are eligible to enter higher education, capacity in public higher education institutions should be increased. Similarly, Al-Hashmi (2005: 332) pointed out:

“A multi-campus university system for Sultana Qaboos University could be introduced, in order to offer specialised degree programmes in selected campuses in the country and thus help to increase the higher education capacity while improving access for communities outside the capital region.”

Supporting evidence is found in the present study, where the majority of interviewees from the Ministry of Higher Education believed that the higher education capacity in public institutions needs to be increased to meet the high demand of secondary education graduates. For example, interviewee 1 from the Ministry of Higher Education expressed this view in general terms, as follows:

“Capacity of the public higher education institutions in Oman needs to be increased. Similarly, a part-time teaching scheme would help to increase access in these institutions. Therefore, such a scheme should be introduced in public institutions.”

9.2.2 Access and equity

The 2009 World Conference on Higher Education gave special focus to access and equity in higher education. UNESCO (2009: 3) emphasises that although increasing access and participation rates in higher education is a major international trend, equity and quality must be given high priority:

“In expanding access, higher education must pursue the goals of equity, relevance and quality simultaneously. Equity is not simply a matter of access; the objective must be successful participation and completion while at the same time assuring student welfare. This must include appropriate financial and educational support to those from poor and marginalised communities.”

The statement above evidently indicates that as access to higher education is rapidly expanding, especially in developing countries, quality has become a growing concern for stakeholders, i.e., students, parents, guardians, government, and employers.

However, the question that might be raised is whether admission procedures in the two systems are practised equally. A recent study conducted by Helms (2009), '*University Admissions: Practices and Procedures Worldwide*', examines one part of the public tertiary admissions criteria; undergraduate university admission procedures worldwide. The study found that university admissions procedures vary widely from country to country. However, according to Helms (2009), although there are many forms of admission process, three common patterns appear in most cases: comparatively objective, subjective, and multiple admission systems. The former focuses on a single entrance examination score, whereas the second pattern considers a “portfolio of examination scores, academic performance, references, and extracurricular work of a prospective student” (Helms, 2009: 5). Multiple admission systems may be practised within a particular country. However, these systems sometimes differ between public and private institutions.

The admissions system in Oman’s public higher education relies on ‘secondary leaving examinations’. These exams are generally nationally administered by the government. A candidate’s score may be the only factor considered in the admissions process. Students in Oman take national leaving certificate examinations at the end of secondary school, which are administered by the Ministry of Education. Institutions determine the number of places available in each of their programmes, but the admission process is centrally coordinated by the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC), an independent directorate supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. Applicants apply electronically, in one single application, through the HEAC. Applicants are allocated places according to their average score (see the average score definition on page xii) in the Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent, and are automatically matched by computer to programmes and institutions, based on their preferences and examination scores. Candidates applying to study in either public or private institutions which are fully or partially funded by the government may apply for up to 30 funded programmes, whereas those applying to study in private institutions at their own expense may apply for up to 5 programmes (HEAC, 2009). However, self-financing applicants can also apply directly to private institutions.

From the equity perspective, introducing the *electronic admission system* has, to a great extent, had a positive effect in terms of saving effort, time, and money for applicants and their parents. In the past, when applicants received their examination results, they had to travel to each institution to submit separate applications. This was a great inconvenience

to applicants and their parents, and they often incurred considerable expense. Although the system has been widely familiarised among the students, annual induction programmes are presented to final year secondary students in different regions of the Sultanate. Furthermore, in order to maximise the benefit of the system and to facilitate procedures for all applicants, particularly those who live in remote areas where the Internet facility may be unavailable or not as fast as in the regions, particular centres, which are often close to their villages or regions, are set up for this purpose.

However, equity concerns have been raised related to the *geographical location* of private universities and colleges. As shown in Figure 4.3, private institutions were established mostly in Muscat governorate. Although a few of them were located in some other regions in the country, which created some opportunities for regional students to enter higher education without the necessity of moving to a larger city, private institutions were not evenly distributed across the country. To enhance equity, it is necessary to diversify the geographical locations when establishing private institutions, to represent different regions in the Sultanate. By adopting such a policy, numerous benefits will accrue for both students and society as a whole. The presence of universities in a particular region helps to increase higher education options for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or from rural areas, who would probably not be able to study at far-away private institutions because of the high cost associated with living in larger cities. Moreover, the establishment of such organisations in a given region, certainly, helps that area to improve economically and physically, and therefore culturally.

Although there is a lack of scrutiny on the impact of geographical location of private institutions on disadvantaged students, some interview respondents among the vice-chancellors and deans clearly expressed this barrier. For example, interviewee 9 explained in general terms the financial and non-financial barriers facing some students of his organisation, as a result of being far away from their home towns:

“...sometimes, I receive letters from students, seeking some financial support from [this institution] to purchase necessary stuff until they get their annual fund from their parents or guardian. From our side, we try to do our best in offering sufficient support to them. I think geographical location may affect the educational attainment of some students, particularly females, due to feelings of homelessness. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many female students are very close to their families and they have not been used to being far away from them.”

In addition, 27.7% of interviewees reported that geographical location played a role when students choose to study in a particular institution (see Table 8.4). For example, interviewee 10, who was a dean of a private college, stated that:

“Based on the annual survey conducted by our institution with regard to the factors that attract students to study in this college, we found that many students prefer to study close to their families.”

This example, therefore, supports the researcher’s findings of the importance of establishing higher education institutions in different regions of the country.

In the equity context, it is worth emphasising that Oman has a relatively homogeneous national population. Consequently, the focus for equity concerns has not been on ethnic or class discrimination. Equity concerns have been related to gender, since the majority of female secondary graduates obtain high grades in secondary school exams, which give them greater opportunities to enrol in university education. For this reason, decision-makers in education have attempted to equalise the rate of access to public higher education between male and female students (for further details, see Chapter Four). Currently, the issue of most concern in terms of access and equity, especially after the emergence of the private higher education in Oman, concerns low-income and social welfare applicants. This topic has become a global concern and researchers warn that if this segment of students do not receive sufficient support from governments and higher education institutions alike, the situation will be even worse in the future. Anderson & Cook (2008: 193) reveal that if government support for postsecondary education institutions and its students does not increase, “access for low-income students will decline significantly”. Bearing in mind that Anderson & Cook (2008) express their concern about the declining access of low-income students in public higher education, an even a greater challenge can be assumed in relation to access to private higher education. This theme was one of the issues discussed with the interviewees, and the findings will be analysed later in this chapter.

Regarding the admission criteria, the regulatory ordinance of private higher education in Oman requires the satisfactory completion of secondary school or equivalent as a general condition for admission in private universities and colleges. Article 12 of the Ministerial Decision No. 36/99 (Official Gazette, 1999: 12) suggests that “students who do not have secondary school completion certificate or its equivalent shall not be admitted to the private universities”.

Based on the results obtained in the present study as detailed in Table 8.3, all vice-chancellors and deans reported that *marks of the final exams in the secondary certificate are required* for admission in private institutions. Students who have a secondary school completion certificate or its equivalent are eligible for admission to private universities and colleges. In other words, students with less than 50% in the secondary certificate would not be accepted in these institutions. Equally of importance is that in accordance with the equal opportunities approach, non-Omani students are admitted in private institutions on the same basis as Omani students, i.e., with qualifications as close to the Oman Secondary Certificate as possible.

Understandably, almost all Oman's private institutions adopt an 'open access' policy, to enrol secondary school graduates, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, public institutions, where learning is free of charge, can be highly selective in their admissions criteria. Those who not admitted to public institutions are left to attend private institutions. As a result, students with a very high grade or the strongest academically can attend public institutions, whereas those whose attainment in the secondary school certificate is lower will seek higher education in private institutions.

However, in this research, from the data collected during interviews with vice-chancellors and deans, it appeared that although the majority of private institutions accept students with the minimum pass grade in the secondary exam, 50%, a few institutions require not less than 65% in the secondary certificate exam. The reason for this procedure, as these institutions believed, is to ensure a certain quality in the institution's input. For example, interviewee 3 explained in the context of his institution:

“Although the government has identified the requirement of completion of secondary school as a basic criterion, however, we apply other criteria. In other words, we are not only relying on the General Secondary Certificate, not because we choose the best students, nor are we an elite organisation, but we are trying, to some extent, to feed this institution with quite good inputs, as we wish to produce a good output. This policy serves the institution and serves the student in the first place.”

In addition, some of these institutions set additional conditions in accordance with the type of their programmes. In Medicine, for example, students should obtain not lower than 80% as an overall grade, and also 80% or above in subjects such as Chemistry and Physics (interviewee 16, private institutions). Similarly, in Nursing, the overall grade in the secondary certificate should be above 70%, and also in disciplines such as Biology and Chemistry it should not be less than 70% (interviewee 2, private institutions).

This finding implies that there are a large number of secondary graduates who are obtaining 70% and 80% in the secondary certificate, but have no opportunity of access to public higher education. This means that the quota system, along with the strict admission policy in public institutions, prevent a significant number of students from entering 'free' public higher education. As mentioned earlier, in Chapter Four, the gender issue may affect female students' access to public higher education, since females achieve noticeably higher grades in secondary school than male students do, yet according to the policy adopted by decision-makers, enrolment in public institutions is 50% for females and 50% for males.

The results obtained in this study also show that some institutions carry out entrance examinations or 'placement tests'. The reason for introducing such a test, as reported by many vice-chancellors and deans, is to identify the skills of secondary school graduates particularly in English, and based on these exams the institutions decide whether or not a student needs to study a foundation year or can attend academic programmes directly. According to the respondents, the majority of secondary school graduates are not qualified to enter academic programmes directly, because of their lack of ability in English. Of course, English proficiency is an essential skill to ease academic study for students entering private institutions, since the medium of instruction in these institutions is English. According to Table 4.4, which indicates that 22.5% of the total students are in the foundation year in private institutions, and from the interviewees' responses, it appears that there is a mismatch between the skills obtained in general education and those required for post-secondary education. This is a clear message to the Ministry of Education that evaluation of the educational curriculum is urgently needed. As mentioned previously, in Chapter Four, the aim behind educational reform in 1998 was to upgrade education to cope with the comprehensive socio-economic development in the country on the one hand, and to meet the challenges of globalisation on the other hand (Ministry of Education, 1998). In this reform, disciplines such as English, Maths, and Sciences were given a large focus. Now it is time to reassess this reform in order to identify strengths and weaknesses, in order to establish harmony and a strong link between the two stages of education.

Bearing in mind that both public and private higher education institutions provide a one year foundation programme to raise the performance level of students, this creates an additional financial burden on students in private higher education, as most students need these programmes. Thus, good preparation of students at pre-university level has several advantages. Academic performance and attainment in higher education level will be

increased. Moreover, the cost of instruction for students studying at their own expense will be reduced. Furthermore, the number of government scholarships in private institutions can be increased when most students do not have to enter foundation programmes. In other words, this would enable more scholarships to be provided to low income students, since the cost of the foundation year is included in these scholarships.

From the access and equity perspective, tuition fees in Oman's private institutions need to be reviewed, since students' burden consists in paying high tuition fees and other fees in these institutions as shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

Students from wealthier and advantaged family backgrounds will be likely to attend private sector higher education, and these groups of students, particularly male students, may prefer to study in a quality university abroad rather than study at local private institutions, as mentioned previously. Therefore, the majority of students attending these institutions are from the social welfare group and low-income families who are studying on government scholarships, low-income students studying at their own expense, or female students who for cultural and social reasons prefer to study locally, close to their families.

From the equity standpoint, this may lead to unpleasant consequences when students search for a cheaper study programme just for the sake of continuing university education. The danger in this situation is that students may choose to study specialisations not of their interest, and they may or may not complete the study programme. Moreover, it would be expected that in a few years, a phenomenon of over-qualification, especially in particular specialisations like Humanities, would appear in the country. As a result, many of these graduates will not find suitable employment, and the government will not benefit from these graduates, since most of them will not match the labour market requirements. This finding is consistent with Agarwal's (2008: 15) argument, when he stated that:

“Since tuition fees are high for almost all professional education, most people find only professional education useful, but useful higher education is now inaccessible to the poor.”

We have mentioned previously, in Chapter Five, that the average family size in Oman is 8 persons. Therefore, further consideration must be given the financial implications of such large numbers of students related to their aspiration to higher education. Barr, however, argued that although the financial burden of education is shifted from governments to other stakeholders, particularly students and their parents, a system of financial assistance must be introduced, if accessibility and equity are to be ensured. Barr (1993: 106) pointed out:

“While market orientation shifts [partially or full] the burden of higher educational cost from the government to consumers of higher education, this paradigm shift must introduce a parallel system of financial assistance in order to insure accessibility and provide equity. For example, a provision that grants partial or full waivers based on academic merit or financial need... [However], excellence in education and scholarly activities should not be compromised.”

Moreover, internal government scholarships to students from low-income families should be increased. Since many secondary school graduates are from low-income families, affording higher education would be a financial challenge for their parents. Although the government offers scholarships for low income and social welfare applicants, these scholarships remain few compared to the number of secondary school graduates who fall in these categories. These findings are further supported by evidence collected from the interviews. Based on the results obtained in this research as detailed in Table 8.6, 83% of respondents believed that offering more government scholarships is a vital mechanism for increasing access in private universities and colleges. Responses revealed that there was an agreement between the officials of the ministry and private higher education institutions on the importance of this mechanism being implemented by the government. For example, interviewees 3 and 7 stated:

“I think one of the best options to promote increasing access to private institutions is to increase the government scholarships.”

(Interviewee 3, Ministry of Higher Education)

“Clearly there is an urgent need for offering more governmental scholarships for students, particularly those from low-income families.”

(Interviewee 7, private institutions)

This is in line with Yusuf (2003), who found that many Malaysian students from disadvantaged groups cannot enter university education because of financial difficulty. He suggested that in order that this segment of students should not be denied higher education, grants and scholarships should be provided by the government. Moreover, it is also completely in line with the findings of Agarwal (2008: 15), who found that there is an urgent need to support disadvantaged students to gain access to higher education. He suggested that scholarships and an adequate student loans scheme would be a useful option for these students:

“Besides preventing the fees to rise in general higher education in the name of equity, little is being done to introduce an adequately funded scholarship and loan scheme for the poor. Such an intervention is urgently required to promote access to higher education and address equity issues.”

Evidence from the literature showed that a student loan scheme is a crucial option to increase accessibility, ensure equity and reduce the financial burden of students. For example, Woodhall (2004) argues that student loans offer an alternative solution to the financial restrictions facing students. Moreover, they create the possibility of higher education for students from a poor socio-economic background, who would otherwise be unable to access higher education because of their inability to pay.

This option was supported by the majority of interviews (94.4%), as detailed in Table 8.4. The common responses suggested that a proper student loans scheme should be introduced. They emphasised that without establishment of useful financial aid mechanisms for students, particularly those from low-income families, access to higher education will not increase.

In Oman, a few commercial banks offer students loans with slightly lower interest than other commercial loans. However, these interest rates are not like those available from the governmental banks, such as Housing Bank, and Oman Development Bank. The latter, for example, charges a minimal interest rate (3% out of 9%), which is lower than the commercial banks charge on education loans (see Chapter Eight). However, the above-mentioned government banks provide non-education loans. The loans offered in these banks are limited to housing and other developmental undertakings run by Omani nationals. This means that student loans provided by commercial banks are adding further debt for students and their parents.

Students who receive bank loans are expected to pay the monthly interest rate when they graduate and to repay the full loan over a period of time specified by the bank. Moreover, these loans are not available for all students, since among the conditions imposed by these banks are that the students' parents meet a monthly wage criterion. This means lower salary parents cannot get loans for their children. Obvious concern about this was expressed obviously by many interviewees. For example, one interviewee (No. 2), who was a decision-maker in the Ministry, criticised the existing student loan scheme offered in some commercial banks, stating that:

“One of the obstacles to fair access to higher education is found in the current loan scheme offered by some commercial banks. Students particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds not only fear the amount of loan, but rather they often fear the high interest of this loan. Therefore, designing an efficient student aid programme together with introducing an interest-free student loan scheme can offset any discouraging impact that tuition fees have on the participation of low-income students.”

It is clear then, that introducing a proper and adequate student loan scheme would help students to gain access to private higher education, as if the total loan interest under the present system is calculated, the burden will be doubled. Interestingly, this finding is in line with a study carried out in the United Kingdom by Forsyth and Furlong (2003). The researchers detail the barriers to success within higher education faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among a number of factors that seem to lie behind these barriers, as Forsyth and Furlong (2003: 2) found was:

“a fear of debt, which could exert a much greater deterrent effect on disadvantaged students’ continued participation than could actual debt, especially when this fear was coupled with a lack of confidence, about both their chances of academic success and their chances of finding a job at the end of it all to pay off this debt.”

Forsyth and Furlong (2003) inferred the above-mentioned barrier based on a survey carried out over three hundred young people, most of them living in areas of disadvantage. One of the surveyed students clearly attributed her dropout from college to her fear of debt. She maintained:

“Probably the biggest factor why I left the college, well my mum and dad do not work so there is not a lot of kind of financial support at home, plus the student loans, the fact of getting into debt every year and then you are not guaranteed a job at the end of it.”

(Loretta, diploma dropout, cited in Forsyth and Furlong, 2003: 3)

Nevertheless, in the present study it appeared that the government is reluctant to be involved directly either by guaranteeing loans or introducing the scheme itself through its own banks. The government has recently introduced another scheme for supporting students financially; 4,000 grants for secondary school graduates to study in private higher education institutions. Tuition fees are shared between the government and students. Undoubtedly, this mechanism will help in increasing access to higher education as well as ensuring a part of equity among students. However, students must compete in order to get these grants. In other words, these grants are not available for most secondary school graduates, since they are limited in numbers and will be based on merit as well. Consequently, many secondary school graduates will still have no opportunities to enter higher education.

The above findings indicated that the government is undecided or unwilling, at least at the present time, to involve itself directly in the loans issue, since it anticipates some difficulties in repayment or collection of these loans, as mentioned in Chapters Five and Eight. This issue was highlighted by one interviewee (7), the dean of a private college, who stated:

“I think the government is unwilling to take the whole responsibility and does not want to involve itself directly in this programme. The problem perhaps lies in the repayment system and how these loans are collected.”

These findings are in line with the findings of Chapman (2005) and Woodhall (2007), who found that many developing countries have difficulties in applying student loan schemes, particularly income-contingent loans, in which students repay their loans as a percentage of their earnings after graduation; such difficulties are associated with the establishment of the policy's integrity and collection.

On the other hand, private universities and colleges could be unwilling to partially or fully guarantee student loans without retaining control over the lending and recovery process. Based on the findings of the present study, it seems that many private universities and colleges in Oman were unwilling to guarantee student loans, because of the previous unsuccessful experience of some institutions in this sphere. For example, Majan College had attempted seven years ago to deal with this issue by supplying many students with guarantee letters to certain commercial banks in the country. According to the College Dean, the College lost a considerable amount as some of these students did not repay their loans in the period previously agreed (personal information by the Dean of Majan College, February 22, 2009). This experience highlights the importance of continued support by the government to ensure financial sustainability and to establish a proper scheme of student loans.

Based on the above discussion, and in order to provide a useful option that might help increase accessibility as well as equity, the researcher has suggested a model student loan scheme (see Figure 5.1). In order to activate this approach, several actors would be involved: the government, commercial banks or financial organisations, higher education institutions, private enterprises, students, and employers. Evidence from the literature showed that several actors must be involved in student loans. For example, Johnston (1996) emphasised that four key stakeholders -students, parents, government, and institutions- including other donors and philanthropic organisations, are involved in student loans.

In this approach, establishment of a so-called 'National Higher Education Fund' is an essential. While the government would be the key supporter of this body, particularly in the early years, enterprises and wealthy individuals would be other significant sources of funding. The basic idea of this scheme is that repayment will be spread over the first 15 years of the student's working life.

In line with the above discussion, the issue of social responsibility can also be a useful indicator of an institution's general mission in terms of access and equity aspects.

Social responsibility at higher education organisations began to receive attention in the first decade of the 21st century. By reference to the declaration of the World Conference of Higher Education of UNESCO in 1998, some aspects related to the social function or mission of higher education institutions have been identified, such as “educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens”, giving students the opportunity to develop their own full aptitudes with a sense of social responsibility, for which they should increase their contribution to the development of the whole education system, among other activities by establishing curricula and educational research (UNESCO, 1998: 1). In the conference declaration of 2009, UNESCO (2009: 2) again reiterates that:

“Higher education must not only give solid skills for the present and future world but must also contribute to the education of ethical citizens committed to the construction of peace, the defence of human rights and the values of democracy.”

Since the beginning of this century, some universities have begun to work on developing the concept and implications of the Social Responsibility of University (SRU), either individually or jointly. An example of the latter form is the case of the Talloires network (Talloires Network, 2005), which includes universities in various countries. In their statement on the ‘Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education’ in 2005, concentration was given to commitment to promoting awareness of a deep sense of “social responsibility and a commitment to the welfare of society” (Talloires Network, 2005: 1).

It is worth emphasising that higher education institutions, including private universities and colleges, do not exist in isolation from society or from the communities in which they are located, regardless of the newness or oldness of these institutions. The Talloires declaration (Talloires Network, 2005: 1) supports this view, arguing that:

“Some of our universities and colleges are older than the nations in which they are located; others are young and emerging; but all bear a special obligation to contribute to the public through educating students, expanding access to education, and the creation and timely application of new knowledge.”

In the Omani context, as we have already mentioned in the previous chapter, there is considerable concern on the part of the government with the issue of social responsibility of organisations, and there is a strong expectation that the private sector will contribute actively in the development of communities side by side with the government's efforts. In

this situation, the contribution of private corporations in financing higher education should not be neglected. Enterprises, banks and any other corporations should be encouraged by the government to become more involved in higher education funding.

Al-Jabri (2009), the Chairperson of Muscat Capital, in Oman, in his article, “*Social Responsibility of Corporations and the Developmental Roles in Society*”, focuses on the roles that these organisations should play in their communities, besides their commercial objectives. He argues that whenever corporate social responsibility increases, the respect of individuals and society, as well as the confidence of the government and its institutions will be increased. Examples of activities in which these corporations can participate, according to Al-Jabri (2009), are supporting educational programmes, training young Omanis, and funding projects and scientific research activities related to different issues in society. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines social responsibility as a moral obligation of companies to continue to contribute to economic development together with improving the quality of life of the workforce in these companies and their families on the one hand, and the local community and society as a whole on the other hand (<http://www.wbcsd.org>, May 21, 2010). Taking into account that the above statement defines the social responsibility of private non-education organisations (business enterprises), the tasks and duties of private higher education institutions should be more affirmative of belonging to the community and integration.

Indeed, involvement in education is a real opportunity to build closer ties between the private sector and the local community. Higher education institutions, whether private or public, are not exempted from this trend. However, while the main focus of this study is the private institutions, to what extent, then, are they involved in this regard? Results obtained in the present study as detailed in Table 8.2 underscore the functions on which Oman’s private higher education institution mostly focus in the current period. These results demonstrated that one-third of the interviewees pointed out that their institutions participate and contribute in one way or another in *servicing the community* as a whole. This figure, however, did not explicitly express a deep understanding of the meaning of social responsibility. In other words, respondents did not emphasise the meaning of social responsibility as a sustainable moral responsibility performed by these institutions toward society.

These findings are further supported by the evidence collected from interviews with officials in the Ministry of Higher Education who expressed the view that some private

higher education institutions in the country should pay more attention to community service, as one interviewee pointed out:

“Regarding community service, there are few private institutions really show their interest in serving the community, such as opening their libraries to the public, organising free or nominal cost seminars or training courses that benefit society, assisting welfare families, and so forth.” (Interviewee 3)

It can be argued that one of the dimensions of the social responsibility of universities and colleges lies in the capability and willingness of these institutions to encourage and aid students socially and economically. In Oman, most private institutions provide access to those who can afford to pay for instruction. A few private universities and colleges in the country offer a few *scholarships for students*, particularly from low-income families. The findings of this study confirm this fact; 38.8% of the interviewees mentioned that private institutions adopted such a mechanism to help students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to study in these institutions. However, even for those who offer some scholarships, the practice differs from one institution to another. This indicates that there is no basic or concrete rule adopted in most of these institutions in this domain. Interviewees from the Ministry were also aware of this theme, arguing that private higher education institutions should increase their participation in offering more grants or scholarships. For example, interviewee 1 stated:

“Private universities and colleges should play an active role in offering sufficient scholarships for secondary school graduates, particularly from low-income families.”

Also, in a way connected to the SRU is *providing part-time jobs* for students, especially for those who are from low-income families or with social security. This concept or activity, however, has not yet received adequate concern in Oman’s private universities and colleges. The findings of this study showed that only four interviewees (16% of the total respondents) reported that their institutions supported students financially by offering them part-time jobs.

This finding does not coincide with the practices of most universities in the developed world, which attempt to find options for helping their students financially. In these universities, flexible schedules are designed to give students free time to work, in order to pay for their courses and, to some extent, help their parents with the maintenance of family expenses. Indeed, this has become one of the missions in these organisations (from the researcher's personal observation at the University of Kassel, Germany).

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that Omani private higher education institutions contribute little to SRU or to providing educational opportunities for disadvantaged students.

It is worth mentioning that neglect of community service by some Omani private institutions can be considered as profit-driven. Therefore, it is very important that these values should be embedded into the norms of institutions and instilled in their staff at the beginning. This finding is in line with Kinser and Levy (2006), who suggested that where private higher education is pointedly commercial in its mission and activities, it often looks like for-profit higher education.

To strengthen the responsibility of these institutions, clear objectives and plans need to be established for the best practices of responsibility in a sustainable manner to surpass the expectations of society. Moreover, to encourage private higher education institutions to participate actively in social responsibility programmes, the government should take this into account when governmental scholarships are distributed to these institutions. This practice has already been implemented in private companies, as the government provides a package of incentives to these enterprises when applying for tenders and bids.

9.2.3 Omanisation and the labour market

We have noted earlier in Chapter Three that both public corporations and private sector enterprises in Oman require supplementary qualified national citizens to take part in these sectors, and to replace numerous skilled expatriates at present occupied higher posts in the Sultanate's labour market, particularly in private sector (see Tables 3.14, 3.15 and 3.16). Besides, government plans towards labour market needs to meet the 'Vision 2020' for Oman's economy envisages an increase in the number of Omanis in the grade of technicians, specialists, skilled and semi-skilled labour to increase from around 36% in 1993 to 61% in 2020 (see Table 3.18). Although these data indicate the presence of many employment opportunities for Omanis to 2020, unfortunately there are no accurate data about what has been achieved so far in order to make a comparison of what was planned and what has been actually accomplished in this regard. Similarly, there are no indicators or surveys regarding the extent of the contribution of private higher education institutions in supplying the labour market with these jobs. This argument was clearly declared in the responses of the officials in the Ministry. One interviewee (7) stated that:

"It is not easy to give a clear answer about the extent to which the private higher education institutions to provide the private sector economy of their graduates. The reason for this simply is due to the absence of surveys on this aspect. "

However, the ongoing complaints of the private sector that most graduates lack sufficient experience, knowledge and skills for private sector employment, as well as lack of English language skills, were constantly mentioned as weaknesses of Omani employees. Despite the government's significant interest to enhance Omanisation in the private sector, slow progress has been accomplished in this respect and the ratio of Omanis to non-Omanis in the private sector is relatively low.

It is noteworthy that the major objective for setting the policy of Omanisation is not merely to replace non-Omani with Omani citizens. The ultimate aim of the Omanisation policy is to educate national citizens who are ready and qualified to assume the professional and leadership positions occupied by non-Omani citizens. Equally of importance, educating Omanis in higher education institutions should not be concentrated simply in the framework of Omanisation. It should include the overall strategy for educating young Omani citizens who can contribute effectively in an increasingly competitive world economy. Quality of education is an important issue that should not be ignored if the government needs qualified nationals that can compete in a challenging labour market, nationally and abroad. According to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2003: 8), the adequate development of "human resources is a fundamental requirement in the battle to resolve the inequities of globalisation". Therefore, if Omani graduates are to be successful in the labour market, they will need higher quality educational preparation. This issue presents one of challenges to the private universities and colleges for graduating professional national workers. Asked about the assessment of their graduates' performance and efficiency in the world of work, many interviewees confirmed that no particular systematic evaluation was carried out by private institutions to identify the quality of employees' educational preparation. For example, interviewee 17 expressed this view in general terms, as follows:

"In fact, we investigate the efficiency of our graduates through inquiring about their performance in their work whenever we have information of their workplace. However, this procedure has not taken a formal way, or by conducting specific surveys."

This finding was also consistent with Al-Barwani, Chapman & Ameen (2009), when examining the quality of graduates of Oman's higher education institutions in the

labour market; they found that graduates of these institutions required sufficient preparation in order to compete both in national or global labour market.

In line with the importance of the quality of graduates' preparation, a serious and urgent strategy to study and review all programmes offered in both public and private higher education institutions needs to be designed. The aim of this strategy would be to evaluate the relevance of these programmes to the needs of the labour market.

ESCWA (2003: 8) supports this view, arguing that:

"...to solve all the issues pertaining to the employment channels, efforts must be consistent with, and an integral part of, comprehensive economic and social policies."

From the data collected during interviews with officials in the Ministry of Higher Education, interviewee 5 stated that:

"Well, definitely the policies in higher education should be reviewed in regular basis and should be evaluated from time to time, so it suits the ongoing changes in the job market and need of the society. I believe that some programmes need to be introduced to our colleges very soon and even students that we send abroad on scholarships, we always introduce new specialisations."

This, however, is not to argue that a strict and inflexible relationship should be established between higher education and the labour market; nevertheless, they should be more closely aligned, so that educational institutions provide the skills and knowledge as well as academic programmes needed by this sector. The World Bank (2008: 27) argues that the relationship between higher education and labour market in most Arab countries needs to be reviewed, stating that:

"The relationship between education and economic growth has remained weak, the divide between education and employment has not been bridged, and the quality of education continued to be disappointing."

This complexity can recently be found in the case of graduates of Tourism in both public and private higher education in the country. For example, many graduates of Travel and Tourism Management have not been able to get job opportunities in their field. In contrast, based on the announcement of the Ministry of Tourism, future predictions indicate that Oman's labour market requires thousands of graduates with this specialisation to join this sector. According to the Ministry of Tourism (2008), by the year 2015 the hospitality industry in Oman is expected to generate more than 23,000 employment opportunities for citizens (*Khaleej Times*, 2008). This finding is also supported by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). According to WTTC, Oman's tourism sector is forecasted to reach around US\$ 8.84 billion in 2018 from US\$ 2.5 billion in 2008. The

tourism sector is expected to increase by around 5% per annum during 2009-2018 (<http://www.wttc.org>, June 29, 2010). Therefore, besides ensuring the quality of programmes offered, and the efficiency of outputs, review and study of the relationship between academic programmes offered and the requirements of the labour market also needs to be undertaken. This, as mentioned earlier, is a common responsibility of educational policy and decision-makers, higher education institutions and the labour market, both government and private organisations.

However, this situation is not unique to Oman. In Latin America, for example, De Vries *et al.* (2009) pointed out that policy makers and institutional managers have been encouraged by reports of international organisations including the World Bank and the OECD, in terms of diversifying specialism offerings, based on the idea that traditional options (e.g. business administration, accounting, management) were unmatched to the demands of the new knowledge-based society. This view was based mainly on forecasts for future Latin America economies. Based on these assumptions on what could be happening in the regional economies, students were advised and encouraged strongly to avoid specialisms such as administration, medicine, accountancy, or law, and to choose subjects like nanotechnology, design, tourism, or environmental engineering (De Vries *et al.* 2009). Not only this, but governments of Latin American countries have created new majors and funding decisions have been made that promote new majors. However, these policies were not heeded by the students or even the labour market in the region. Many novel alternatives appear to be too specialised, preparing students for very specific positions (e.g., ecotourism). Moreover, the labour market demand for graduates of traditional majors has remained stable. Based on the findings of De Vries *et al.* (2009: 21), “It would appear that policies and changes in system design over the last two decades have been poorly informed by data on the complex relationship between higher education and the labour market. Sometimes the labour market for university graduates seems unwilling to comply with predictions, most of all those launched by policy-makers “.

To conclude this section, it is worth emphasising that private higher education institutions must activate and intensify their efforts to ensure relatively adequate quality. To accomplish such an objective, universities and colleges should go beyond the mere gaining of skills. These institutions are expected to contribute, through research, to the development of human knowledge and to the creation of ideas. In this regard, students should obtain analytical and problem solving skills, so providing them to be able to extend

the learning process all through their life span. In addition, higher education institutions should also ensure that teachers have a clear vision of the new technologies and are aware of the most effective means of integrating them into curricula and delivering them to students, because, as ESCWA (2003: 6) argued, "effective curricula and sound educational system depend on skilled educators...[and] this responsibility is even more pronounced in the era of globalisation". To this end, strategies and plans to meet socio-economic development needs should also be given higher priority when designing a given programme.

9.2.4 Funding challenges

As mentioned previously, one of the rationales of establishment private institutions is to lighten the financial burden on the state budget. However, the argument that private higher education reduces the financial burden on government is, according to Tilak (2006), a possibility rather than a reality. In the Omani case, private sector education receives substantial funding and grants from the government (see Chapter Five). This trend, however, is not unique to Oman; private provisions in many developing countries have similar characteristics. As Tilak (1991) emphasised, in most developing countries, state subsidies cover more than 90% of the recurrent expenditure of private institutions. In Thailand, for example, where only 30% of students attend private institutions, the ratio of government to private expenditure on higher education is 93:3 (Malakul, 1985). In Uttar Pradesh (Northern Province) in India, Muzammil (1989) found that 77% of the government budget on higher education takes the form of aid to private colleges.

A similar situation can also be seen in many developed countries. Levy (1986) argues that direct subsidies or indirect government support are important sources of funding for private universities in the United States. He indicated that roughly 85-90% of scholarship money in California goes to students in private universities, while private enrolments benefit from only 10 to 12% of the total. In Belgium and the Netherlands, the private and public universities receive equal funding from the state (World Bank, 1994). In Japan, some 21% of private higher education expenditure is covered by state subsidies (Geiger, 1987). According to Geiger (1987), state subsidisation in Japan was derived from the aspiration to maintain mainly private institutions that had failed financially and faced closure.

Evidence from the literature showed that Oman's private institutions are adding to the financial burden on the state's budget. These findings are further supported by the

evidence collected from the semi-structured interviews. As detailed in Table 8.7, government subsidies are the second key sources on which private institutions currently most rely, representing 94.4% of respondents.

The main objective of the government's financial support and generous subsidies to private institutions is to assist these institutions in enhancing quality. The majority of interviewees from the Ministry of Higher Education supported this argument. For example, interviewee 4 stated:

"In fact, when the government subsidises private higher education institutions, it clearly shows its interest in promoting quality education in these institutions."

A number of officials who were asked their opinions about the government's financial support to these institutions thought that with the money currently spent on this generous support from the government it would be possible to establish another public (government) university, which could absorb many secondary school leavers. For example, interviewee 1 explained this view in general terms, stating:

"Well, in my point of view, with the munificent financial subsidies to private institutions, the government could establish another university."

Some other officials thought that it is possible to grant such aid to students, especially those from low-income families or social security categories, as a form of scholarship to study in Oman's private universities and colleges. Interviewee 5, for example, suggested that:

"...perhaps it would be helpful if part of these subsidies was transferred to students, especially those from low-income families, who had no opportunities to enrol in public higher education institutions, to [enable them to] study in private institutions."

From the above views it can be inferred that the government should reconsider the financial subsidies to private institutions. In this regard, specific criteria under which a particular institution is more supported than others could be formulated. For example, the institution could be subsidised based on quality or performance (performance-based subsidies), or subsidised based on the community service or social responsibility of the institution toward the community (community service-based subsidies). This proposal is consistent with the approach initiated in 1990s by the Mexican government, for example, where the universities are provided with supplemental funding for many projects, especially those involving modernising facilities and improving services, on the basis of the annual reports of achievement and efficiency of these institutions (El-Khawas & El-Khawas, 1998). These reports, which are reviewed by the government alongside external

reviews, identify strengths, weaknesses, and planned solutions together with valuable projects for institutional improvement (El-Khawas & El-Khawas, 1998).

In relation to the sources of funding in private institutions, the findings of this study, as shown in Table 8.7, showed that tuition fees is the main source of funding of Oman's private higher education, as 100% of respondents emphasised.

Although literature shows that in most countries tuition fees represent the largest private sources of income for private higher education, many private institutions are diversifying their sources of revenues (see for example, Altbach, 1998; Lee, 1998; Asonuma, 2002; Stannek & Ziegele, 2005; Teferra, 2008).

Diversification of funding sources undoubtedly keeps institutions stable financially on the one hand, and promotes quality in different aspects of education on the other hand. As Teferra (2008) emphasises, diversifying the funding sources of any undertaking, including education, plays a vital role in running and administering that activity productively.

In order to strengthen their status, therefore, private institutions in Oman need to diversify their funding sources. This finding is further supported by many interviewees. For example, interviewee 6, who was an official in the Ministry, stated:

"I think private institutions need to think and work seriously to diversify their sources of funding. If these institutions want to survive and positively contribute in society, should not only depend on tuition fees."

This is in line with Teferra (2008: 9), who suggested that private higher education institutions, especially those dependent on tuition and other fees are "generally unstable, precarious, and resource challenged".

From the aforementioned, it can be argued that the impact of dependence on tuition fees is not confined to the institutions themselves, but is reflected on students as well. This is because, when institutions rely entirely on tuition fees, this means that they would concentrate on admitting as many students as they can, regardless of their intake capacity. In this case, both academic affairs (e.g. quality of academic programmes, scientific research activities, laboratories, libraries, etc.) and students' non-academic affairs (e.g. sport centres, restaurants, etc.) will also be affected. This explains why the government financially supports this sector, in order not to damage the standard of the educational process. However, one might question how long these institutions will be subsidised by the government. It is not expected that government should pay the whole cost. To this end, private institutions themselves must seek other financial resources in order to promote and

develop their functions and performance on the one hand and, on the other hand, to be able to compete with other private higher education institutions locally and regionally. According to Altbach (1998), although most private institutions around the world depend on tuition fees, private universities and colleges, in some countries, receive financial support from the government, investing in scientific research, and the prestigious private universities and colleges have large endowments. Although Altbach's view applies to some prestigious private universities (e.g. Harvard University in the United States, Keio University in Japan), the statement above shows that there are some other financial resources which can be tapped by private higher education. This also indicates that in order for an institution to be credible, education quality must be one of the top priorities within its mission. In other words, unless quality aspects together with involvement in the community service are given greater consideration and awareness, it would be hard to convince wealthy individuals to donate to or endow these institutions.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that until recently, private institutions were adding a financial burden to the State's budget. Therefore, the rationale of alleviating the State's budget is not actually met.

9.2.5 Research activities

Regarding scientific research, this is also one of the most important activities for a university, both academically and financially. From an academic viewpoint, research plays a vital role in promoting the university's prestige and, at the same time, it creates a strong relationship with society. Financially, the university can undertake some research through an agreement with the industry and business sector.

It is expected that Omani private institutions should start to play an important role in this regard, since they have more freedom than state ones. Emphasising this view, Al-Manthri (2001b: 508), states that:

“The higher education institutions should benefit from advances in sciences, and conduct research which results in income generation and prosperity for the nation. Research should not be restricted to an elite group of university alone. It is important that private higher education institutions benefit from the scientific research they conduct rather than relying on student tuition fees and aid.”

However, in this study, from the data collected during interviews with vice-chancellors and deans, it appeared that scientific research activity seems to be a less significant source of funding in private institutions. For example, of 18 interviewees, only

two reported initiatives in this domain. So far, private universities and colleges concentrate basically only on teaching-oriented matters (see Tables 8.1 & 8.7).

It was found in the literature that although there are a few private research universities worldwide (i.e., in the United States, Japan, Chile), private universities performing dual functions, teaching and research, also exist in many countries of the world (Altbach, 2009; Rena, 2008). This is an indication that higher education institutions need to diversify funding sources, since research activities are difficult to fund by relying entirely on tuition fees. This is in line with Altbach (2009: 18), who pointed out that “tuition-dependent private institutions can seldom fund expensive research universities”.

At the same time, results obtained in this study emphasised that scientific research requires governmental and non-governmental organisations' support to promote this activity within higher education institutions. From the transcription of the semi-structured interviews, interviewee 6 (from a private institution), for example, stated that:

“Well, we have set a strategic plan for enhancing scientific research in this institution together with attention to conduct some research projects. However, the financial matter, particularly at this stage as we are developing, stands as an obstacle to achieve this objective.”

This is in line with Altbach (2009), who argued that because of the high cost of basic research, public support is required. It is also in line with Laroui (1991), who claimed that without governmental funds, private institutions, being funded mainly by students' fees, find it difficult to invest in research programmes solely for development purposes.

In an attempt to strengthen and foster the role of scientific research in higher education institutions in the Sultanate as a whole, the government, through the establishment of the Scientific Research Council, strives to promote a culture of scientific research and support it financially either on an individual level or within higher education institutions in Oman. The Council regulates and encourages scientific research and provides it with material and moral support. It also prepares a comprehensive strategy and national plan for scientific research, monitors its progress and development, defines priorities, sets out and oversees a programme – or series of programmes – for implementation and supports individual creativity and research projects, as well as the publication of scientific papers (Official Gazette, 2005). Therefore, grants are now available for institutions and individual researchers alike. The aim of these grants is to enhance the research culture and to promote the research infrastructure in the country. Moreover, the Council has implemented a so-called ‘Open Research System’ to encourage innovation. This system is not restricted with respect to areas of endeavour, or as to the

value of the grant. In addition, grants are also allocated for strategic or directed research projects to build capacity in line with national economic objectives and to solve problems faced by different sectors in the economy. Besides, the Council also aims to encourage private sector companies through adopting the idea of a 'Knowledge Brokers Programme'. This programme is being piloted through the industrial innovation programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates. The objective of this programme is to encourage organisations to think about how to improve their competitive edge through research and innovation (Scientific Research Council, 2009).

Besides the provision of the necessary funding for research activities, the results obtained in the present research revealed that there is a modest participation from the private sector enterprises in this field. Interviewee 2, who was a vice-chancellor of a private university, explained this situation, stated:

"...there are a few companies in the country that support scientific research through signing research contracts. However, most of these projects are conducted in Sultan Qaboos University."

This finding is in line with what has been noted in Table 5.7, that there are a handful of companies that are interested in research activities in the country, notably the company, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). This argument is further supported by the economic statistics. According to statistics of the Ministry of Economy (2009), the company allocates an annual cost of \$18 to \$20 million for research in the field of oil and gas in order to upgrade the technologies used in the operations related to these resources. This reflects the company's care for Research and Development (R&D).

Interviewee 7, who was a vice-chancellor of a private university, explained the impact of low involvement of private companies in scientific research on the development of this field in the country. He stated:

"...in many countries private sector companies play a significant role in promoting research and development. In Oman, private enterprises do not participate positively in this regard. This is one of the challenges that higher education institutions face related to the promotion of scientific research."

This finding also demonstrates that the participation of the private sector in R&D in the Sultanate is very limited, compared to the contribution of the private sector in this field in many countries in the world. In Europe, for example, countries like Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland, over 50% of research funding comes from industry. In the United States industry funding accounts for over 60%, whereas Asia, Japan and Korea

showed industry funding of over 70% (Olayiwola, 2010: 152). Therefore, it is no exaggeration to argue that all advanced countries, which hold a high standing in economic and social development, have devoted substantial attention to R&D through setting up suitable conditions and providing advanced physical and human resources. This supports the strong link between what has been achieved in these countries regarding sustainable development and the large development in this sector.

In a study on higher education and development in newly industrialising countries in Asia, Singh (1991) demonstrated two vital roles of higher education institutions that enable countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan to emerge as industrialising economies. First, higher education has supplied sufficient scientific and technological manpower, either in terms of quantity or quality, to work at the different levels of the economy. Second, higher education has been able to adopt and improve the technology that has been imported through research and development programmes. Therefore, apart from human resource development, higher education also contributes to the extension of the frontier of knowledge through conducting high quality research projects.

However, there is no academic study related to the role of Omani industry in funding research activities in the country, nor is there a clear strategy for this sector, apart from PDO, in promoting R&D. This situation can be attributed to three possibilities. First, private sector enterprise in the country may be unwilling to spend on research locally due to the absence of university-based research. As Altbach (1991) emphasised, university-based research is an important component of scientific and technological strength in an increasingly globalised world. Applied and basic research will yield new knowledge that may result in new services and products or improved forms of production.

Second, there is a lack of awareness of the role of scientific research in the improvement of products and services. Or, the third alternative is the absence of active cooperation between higher education institutions and those enterprises.

Based on the findings obtained in this study, it can be argued that the contribution of Omani private higher education institutions in the field of scientific research is almost absent. The current status of most private higher education institutions does not help to promote research activity, as two-thirds of private institutions operate on temporary campuses. As a result, educational facilities will undoubtedly not be as suitable and sufficient as if they were on permanent campuses. Moreover, laboratories and libraries

need to be well equipped. Furthermore, qualified academics need to be employed, since, as shown in Table 9.1 below, most of the teaching staff in these institutions hold Master and Bachelors' degrees rather than PhDs.

Table 9.1: Qualifications and mode of teaching for academic staff in Oman's private universities and colleges, 2008/2009

University/College	Academic Staff						Total	No. of Students
	Ph.D.		Master		Bachelor/SC*			
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT		
Sohar University	63	0	43	1	15	0	163	4,588
Sohar University	113	4	59	3	45	0	224	5,173
Dhofar University	45	0	75	0	1	0	121	2,153
German University of Technology in Oman	7	0	9	0	1	0	17	136
Arab Open University	3	1	9	16	0	11	40	1,004
Majan College	18	0	29	0	11	1	59	1,670
Modern College of Business & Science	9	0	12	0	18	0	39	806
Caledonian College of Engineering	18	0	73	0	15	0	106	2,395
Oman Medical College	51	2	12	0	10	0	75	945
Al-Buraimi College	12	2	30	0	5	0	49	1,565
Scientific College of Design	4	0	10	3	7	2	27	696
Sur University College	7	0	10	2	3	2	24	622
Waljat College of Applied Sciences	6	0	36	0	9	0	51	1,695
Middle East College of Information Technology	5	0	35	0	10	0	50	2,367
Oman College of Management & Technology	13	2	9	4	0	0	28	663
Mazon College	7	0	18	0	5	0	30	982
Gulf College	13	1	26	2	0	0	42	1,785
Oman Dental College	8	0	8	0	3	0	19	171
Al'Zahra College for Women	17	0	20	0	0	0	37	868
Al-Bayan College	1	1	2	3	8	0	15	183
Muscat College	1	0	39	2	8	0	50	1,000
International Maritime College Oman	1	0	16	0	17	0	35	662
International College of Engineering & Management	1	0	11	1	23	0	36	1,067
Oman Tourism College	2	0	12	2	36	3	55	320

Source: Own analysis based on the Ministry of Higher Education (2009c), Oman.

*SC: Specialised Certificate, FT: Full-time, PT: Part-time.

According to Article 10 of the Executive Regulations for the Private Universities Ordinance (Official Gazette, 1999: 22):

“ The majority of the teaching staff shall have Ph.D. in their respective disciplines. The number of teaching staff shall be proportionate to the number of students as per recognised norms. Full-time lecturers shall constitute at least half of the teaching staff.”

However, whilst, as shown in Table 9.1 above, Ph.D. holders in some institutions outnumber Master and Bachelor holders, the reverse is the case in some other institutions. This suggests that many institutions are not committed to the standards set by the ministry regarding the proportion of qualified doctoral members to all academics in the institution. For example, the number of academics who have a Ph.D. at Muscat College, International College of Engineering & Management, International Maritime College Oman, Al-Bayan College, and Oman Tourism College does not exceed two, compared to 41, 12, 16, 5 and 14 teaching staff who have a Master degree, respectively. This is another serious issue that should be given attention by both the Ministry of Higher Education and Oman Accreditation Council, and another of the critical elements that must be reconsidered by private higher education institutions themselves if the issue of quality is their main priority.

Indeed, the small number of qualified academics creates a heavy teaching load and does not provide them with the right environment to conduct academic research. This observation also appeared in the responses of interviewees from the ministry, as a third of them believed that in order to enable these institutions to participate actively in scientific research, an appropriate infrastructure must be established. For example, interviewee 2 stated:

“...well, the current infrastructure of most of private institutions could not encourage them to activate scientific research activities. In order that these institutions can productively contribute in this field, certain elements need to be considered. First, qualified academics with a lower teaching load should be ensured. Second, adequate libraries and laboratories should be established. Third, suitable funding to conduct given research projects should be considered.”

As another quality criterion, the second part of the 10th Article of the Executive Regulations for Private Universities Ordinance (Officials Gazette, 1999: 22) provides that “the number of teaching staff shall be proportionate to the number of students as per recognised norms”. In this regard, the Ministry of Higher Education developed some guidelines related to the establishment of private higher education institutions, in addition to the elements mentioned above in Article 10. For example, criteria set for academic

structure in private institutions contain several points, including (Ministry of Higher Education, 2005: 70):

- *“Student-teacher ratio must not exceed 15:1 for science majors and 20-1 for humanities, except in general lecture theatres.”*
- *“Not less than two-thirds of academics must be appointed on a full-time basis.”*

Apparently, the above criteria are not obligatory in the sense of being implemented rigidly by private institutions. It seems that the aim underlying these guidelines is to keep these institutions aware of the importance of these issues in education quality. However, the Ministry, whilst being flexible, asserts that if staff-student ratios exceed what has been set by the government, this must not affect the quality of education. Furthermore, if these criteria are neglected by some of these institutions, undoubtedly this would negatively affect them when quality auditing and accreditation are conducted.

Public institutions enjoy a considerably better student-teacher ratio than private institutions. For example, the student-teacher ratio in 2008 was 13:1 at Sultan Qaboos University, and 18:1 at Technical Colleges (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009). In contrast, the ratio in private institutions, as illustrated in Table 9.1 above, ranges from 18:1 in Dhofar University to 43:1 and 47:1 in Gulf College and Middle East College of Information Technology respectively. Indeed, this is one of the serious issues that should be given greater priority by both the Ministry of Higher Education and Oman Accreditation Council.

However, when we come to look at the mode of teaching, the situation, then, is different; most academics in Oman’s private institutions are in full-time positions, as shown in Table 9.1 above. This may be considered as an advantage for these institutions, as the literature reveals that most private institutions around the world tend to hire part-time lecturers rather than full-time. As Tilak (1991) reports, in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, and in several other developing countries, private universities are found to employ more retired, part-time, and under-qualified teachers. In Germany, Stannek and Ziegele (2007) found that the quantity of qualified university lecturers in part-time modes is high at private institutions and many of them are basically public sector employees who lecture at private universities on a contract basis.

Besides, as mentioned in Chapter Four, most of the academic programmes offered in these institutions are bachelors and diploma levels, with a small number of MBA courses franchised from foreign universities. This finding is in line with Teferra (2008),

who described private institutions in general as mostly teaching-oriented, with post-graduate programmes rarely offered. Therefore, research-based graduate programmes have to be designed to enable graduate students to undertake research in fields of national priority. Rena (2008: 13) supports this view, arguing that:

“It is believed that the graduate research may help meet the major developmental challenges and constraints afflicting the country. It may also improve the quality and relevance of education at all levels in the university and the newly established institutes of higher learning.”

Evidence from the literature showed that research-based graduate programmes not only help in tackling national issues and provide institutions of higher education with a prestigious position, but also generate additional funding to these institutions (Rena, 2008; Teferra, 2008; Olaviwola, 2010). In Eritrea, for example, Master’s programmes in the University of Asmara have been launched to contribute in solving Eritrea’s problems related to food security, exploration and management of natural resources, health, economic, social and cultural development, and other issues. The programme aims at generating 20% of its budget through consultancy and research contracts (Rena, 2008: 13).

In light of the aforementioned, if we aspire to strengthen the environment of scientific research among higher education institutions and their students, it is necessary that scientific research should be given high consideration both by higher education institutions and education policy and decision makers. Similarly, the culture of scientific research should be instilled in students in all educational levels. Both Bachelor and Master students should be joined with experts and qualified academics. Although the Scientific Research Council encourages and supports higher education institutions and individuals to participate in this area, these efforts need to be maintained with a clear and proactive strategy. What is currently in place is that when the Council grants a given project to a private college or university, the majority of participants in this research are non-Omani citizens, due to the lack of national academics and researchers. This situation, indeed, is not conducive to the ultimate objective of spreading the culture of scientific research. As detailed in Table 4.6, Omani academic staff in private institutions form only 12.8% of the total academics. Therefore, it is important that higher education institutions should prepare and qualify Omani citizens by sending them abroad to continue their higher studies in various fields in order to take their academic positions in these institutions. In addition, Omani students in these institutions should be trained and encouraged to participate in these projects. In the long term, this will contribute in establishing and promoting the culture and environment of scientific research in the country. Moreover, if private

universities in Oman aspire to transform themselves from teaching institutions to ones devoted to both teaching and research, the proportion of national academic staff needs to be increased.

Many respondents who were from the Ministry thought that private institutions should speed up the Omanisation process in academic positions. For example, interviewee 6 stated:

“...a few of these institutions send one or two Omanis to study a master or doctorate programmes abroad for the aim of recruiting them later in the academic field. However, it is not enough. To faster the Omanisation process in the academic area, both the government and private institutions should work together; the government can partially finance this process. ”

9.2.6 Quality aspects: its implications in private institutions

The quality of education offered in Oman's private higher education institutions is, undoubtedly, relatively varied. Evidence from the present study gained from interviews with vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions along with officials in the Ministry of Higher Education, suggested that efforts made by these institutions to ensure quality seem to be modest in some institutions and average in others.

However, the efforts of private higher education institutions to deal with possible weaknesses in quality are complicated by a variety of factors. As indicated previously, most private institutions are operated as profit-making enterprises. Although private institutions in Oman are required by law to “provide the Ministry of Higher Education with copies of their balance sheet and final accounts each year” (Official Gazette, 1999: 27), this requirement, up to now, is not being met. If it were done, the rate of expenditure on educational process could easily be calculated. The reason for this activity not being performed can be attributed to two main factors. First, many private institutions are wary that figures would indicate that these institutions are profit-making. Second, on the Ministry side, there is no appointed department in charge of studying such financial reports. The former factor is evidence that most of these institutions operate as profit-seeking enterprises.

Related to this issue, in this study, from the data collected during interviews with vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions, one interviewee (No. 3) briefly mentioned that the creation of private higher education as stock-issuing creates a lack of credibility and respect in society.

“There are some wealthy individuals who wish to donate to these institutions, who think that while these institutions are privately owned and listed in the stock market, they aim at profit-making. For example, someone from outside the country contacted me, and when he heard that the [institution] is registered in the stock market under the name of a private [higher education institution], he felt reluctant to donate. Therefore, we are thinking now of cancelling this registration, to be a non-profit institution.”

Many of these institutions have shareholders and invest in financial markets. This, to some extent, leads to a conflict between those who want to invest for quality enhancement and those seeking a financial return for their investment.

We have discussed in further details in Chapter Two the features and characteristics which can differentiate between an institution that seeks *profit for the sake of profit making* and an institution that invests its *profit in developing and enhancing the quality* of education. The former would indicate an institution that seeks to profit through imposing tuition fees as well as other entrepreneurial activities which are exercised only for profit at the expense of the quality of the educational process itself. The latter, in contrast, refers to an institution that usually reinvests its revenues and profits to develop its infrastructure and enhance the educational process in general.

Besides, many private institutions have attempted to increase profitability through concentrating on offering lower cost programmes such as business administration, accounting, finance, and computing, rather than offering higher cost academic programmes that require expensive laboratories and equipment, such as medical sciences and engineering. For example, of nineteen private colleges in the country, only three specialise in engineering and medical sciences.

However, the responses of the interviewees, to some degree, differed regarding the factors that hinder quality in these institutions. Officials in the Ministry of Higher Education believed that low quality in private institutions can be attributed to insufficient facilities, injudicious student admission, and absence of a dedicated unit or department of quality assurance. They also ascribed low quality in these institutions to the lack of commitment on the part of the leaders of these institutions toward ensuring quality, besides the lack of awareness with reference to the importance of quality aspects. For example, interviewee 5 summarised these factors in general expressions, stating that:

“Well, there are number of factors effect quality. In my opinion, factors such as lack of the commitment of investors, poor facility services and the absence of offices of quality assurance in these institutions are the key elements hindering quality improvement.”

On the contrary, a number of vice-chancellors and deans thought that clear standards established by the Ministry of Higher Education as well as the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) would definitely assist private institutions in applying these standards. Others thought that since these institutions were newly established, additional time, effort and money would be required.

However, data from interviews with vice-chancellors and deans with respect to the institutions' efforts to promote the concept of quality, as detailed in Table 8.8 in the previous chapter, revealed that 88.8% of respondents focused on their keenness to provide academic programmes and courses accredited by foreign recognised universities with which they were affiliated. In other words, they thought that the affiliation system had been successful in ensuring that the programmes offered in their institutions met satisfactory international standards. This procedure, however, does not constitute a complete vision about the quality of the programmes offered by these institutions. To be able to judge whether the quality of academic programmes/courses provided by private institutions is equivalent to that in most of the universities they are affiliated with, it is necessary to ensure that all the needs and requirements for offering a certain programme/course (for example, the availability of learning resource centres, references required, laboratories, the method of evaluation of the programme/course either by the students or teachers, etc.) are ensured when it is delivered in the local private institutions. It is also important to verify whether students' attainment in the local private institutions is equal to that of students at the foreign partner institutions. These concerns, then, should be considered by these institutions when offering academic programmes/courses. Furthermore, both the OAC and the Ministry of Higher Education should make sure whether these institutions are taking all measures to provide the programmes/courses in an efficient manner.

However, while the majority of interviewees considered the affiliation system as proactive in this aspect, around a third of them believed that the full efficacy of this system may not be realised in some other private institutions. For example, interviewee 2, who was a vice-chancellor of a private university, explained this idea, stating that:

"Frankly speaking, although many affiliation engagements are working well, less active affiliation arrangements also exist. I think the latter type of affiliation may be more interested in the financial revenue from this arrangement; being it gives little concentration to quality aspects...To my knowledge, even when the affiliate provides experts or administrative staff, they leave inner administration to their counterparts in Oman."

The above statement is consistent with our finding related to factors that hinder quality implications in private institutions; many interviewees attributed low quality to tension between the ambition for quality and profit in these institutions. Again, this explained the vision of operators of these institutions toward quality and how they can benefit from affiliation arrangements for quality improvement.

One might question why, if the affiliation system has not played an equally effective role in all institutions, the government requires private institutions to affiliate with international partner universities. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, driven by the need to ensure relatively adequate quality of the private higher education institutions in Oman, at a time when a national accreditation system did not exist, the government required all private universities and colleges to be affiliated with international recognised and accredited universities. The Ministry of Higher Education designed a guideline model or form for the contents of these arrangements, whereby the international partner reviews the overall curriculum and individual course content, engages in the appointment of teaching staff and administrators, and supervises and oversees the process of examination (Ministry of Higher Education, 2005). Nevertheless, private institutions have the right to add articles and points in these arrangements whenever it is necessary for quality enhancement. Then, it is a matter of what exactly a particular institution seeks from this affiliation and the mechanism of utilising and exploiting this affiliation arrangement in meeting the mission and vision of that institution. This finding is consistent with the interviewees' responses when the researcher asked them whether affiliation can be considered as an additional funding resource of these institutions; the majority of them considered affiliation to an international counterpart institution as an additional financial burden on the institution's budget. This finding revealed that an immense concern with academic affiliation was its cost. According to personal information from a number of vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions, the cost of affiliation with international universities ranges from RO 40,000 (\$104,000) to RO 80,000 (\$208,000) annually. The huge variation in the cost of affiliation reflects the type of services requested by the local private institutions to be provided by the international partner.

In connection with the above discussion, a third of interviewees from private institutions thought that if private universities and colleges were affiliated with local public higher education institutions, the financial burden on these institutions' budgets would be reduced and that the quality assurance that they currently get from affiliation with foreign

universities could be fulfilled locally. These views are consistent with what we mentioned earlier in Chapter Four. Theoretically, this idea sounds valuable for private institutions particularly in terms of alleviation of pressure on their budgets. However, practically, with only one public university in the country, it would not be a suitable alternative, simply because it is difficult for one university to review the curriculum and course content of 24 private institutions. It is also not easy for one university to oversee the examination process for these institutions. Having said so, Sultan Qaboos University has some cooperation with some private universities such as Nizwa University, Sohar University and Dhofar University (Ministry of Information, 2009). The researcher's view was supported by the majority of respondents. For example, one interviewee (No. 7) who was an official in the Ministry of Higher Education did not see this idea as an acceptable choice:

"Well, it is not a good idea. As you know we have only one public university, Sultan Qaboos University, and I think it is difficult for all private institutions to affiliate to it. It can cooperate at some degree with these institutions."

Despite ministerial concerns about programme quality, only 38.8% of respondents mentioned that they carried out quality audit or accreditation at their institutions. As noticed in the preceding chapter, only one institution had started to have programmes accredited by an international accreditation agency. However, these low responses could be attributed to two main reasons. First, between 2001, the year of establishment of OAC, and 2007 only two private colleges applied for accreditation. This process did not succeed, since the two colleges had no experience in such a procedure and the OAC did not support them adequately on the mechanisms of this process. Second, the quality audit approach was recently adopted by the OAC to be carried out within a period of five years (2008-2013) and will cover all private and public higher education in the country (for further details, see Chapter Six). The latter approach is considered as another option for quality assurance in these institutions, since the concept of accreditation is not fully acknowledged by these new institutions; in addition it requires qualified experts in this field, which currently the OAC itself lacks, as most of the members of review panels are invited from various countries.

Evidence from the interviews revealed that there are divergent opinions related to the idea of whether national accreditation can be implemented to replace academic affiliation with international partner institutions. Almost two-thirds of respondents thought that the OAC is not ready yet to commence review for implementing an accreditation plan in all private and public institutions, because, as they argued, applying such a plan requires

lots of work and effort, more time, and extra funding. Alternatively, around 30% of respondents considered that the implementation of national accreditation would add to the workload of private institutions. They thought that implementing the accreditation scheme might require these institutions to make many changes in the content of the educational process, such as curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment approaches. As interviewee 14, who was the dean of a private college, stated:

"Undoubtedly, for both OAC and private institutions, an accreditation plan requires significantly further efforts, time and funds. However, I think at this stage, with the lack of experts as well as administrative staff in the Council, implementing such a strategy would not be an easy task."

Nevertheless, a few respondents believed that implementing a national accreditation approach would have a positive impact on the international affiliation currently in place. In other words, they thought that both systems could subsist for the purpose of quality improvement.

The discussion above reveals that there were contradictory views regarding the move from international affiliation to national accreditation. Whilst most interviewees believed that this procedure is time and money consuming, a few respondents thought that implementing both schemes would benefit these institutions in enhancing quality. This finding is consistent with the finding in the literature that since most private institutions in Oman are not ready for accreditation, an active academic affiliation would help these institutions to assure adequate quality. In addition, the OAC also needs to prepare itself professionally in order to be able to implement such a system.

It is worth emphasising that in order to achieve successful quality implementation, a clear quality strategy or map needs to be well-planned, introduced and clarified to all stakeholders before implementing the system. Similarly, participants in the quality assurance system need to recognise and understand the framework and tools of implementing quality together with analysis of both the national and international higher education systems. According to Darandari, Al-Qahtani, Allen, Al-Yafi, Al-Sudairi & Catapang (2009: 49), participants "need to know where they are, where they want to go, how they are similar or different from others nationally and internationally, what should be changed and to what level and what the alternatives are". As a result, the OAC has commenced implementing quality audit, which aims to prepare these institutions for accreditation and to support them to ensure quality by implementing diverse schemes, not only affiliation with international institutions. The results of these assessments and evaluations will provide the public with initial indicators about the quality question.

In relation to the issue of quality improvement in private institutions, in this study, from the data collected during interviews with officials in the Ministry, vice-chancellors and deans of private universities and colleges, it appeared that merger would be another option for encouraging promoting education, besides reducing the financial problems. For example, interviewee 3, who was from the Ministry, stated:

"...merger may also solve some financial and academic challenges that some institutions face. However, the issue is how these institutions can apply this idea in a way that can develop their academic programmes together with other facilities provided in the unified institution."

Interviewees' responses were consistent with the evidence from literature with regard to the advantages of merger in higher education (for further details, see Goedegebuure & Meek, 1994; Chen, 2002). However, as mentioned previously in Chapter Four, although the government encouraged the idea of merger of some colleges to form a university, two experiences of merger failed to form a private university in Oman. The main issues concerning those colleges were the financial aspect and assets. One interviewee (4), who was from the Ministry, explained the situation in general terms:

"We had two experiments of merging some private colleges to form a private university. The latest one, for example, four colleges were supposed to be merged. However, as most of the investors of these colleges were much concerned with the financial aspect in the merger issue, this actually led to the fact that both experiments failed."

The success of merger in higher education institutions depends on the awareness of the owners of these institutions, and it would be ideal if the initiative were derived from the owners or investors themselves rather than from the government.

Based on the above discussion and from the responses related to the criteria or measures for ensuring relatively suitable quality, it can be argued that although there have been a variety of efforts in private institutions to diversify mechanisms of quality assurance, most of these institutions rely heavily on international affiliation.

9.3 Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings from interviews and documentary data. The discussion was organised around the first two research questions.

The findings on the contribution of private higher education in achieving the desired rationales and objectives revealed that the contribution of this sector can generally be described as a modest. In terms of meeting the social demand for higher education, the findings of this study demonstrated that private universities and colleges played, to some

extent, a role in increasing enrolment in higher education. For example, the total enrolment in these institutions in 2008/2009 formed 37% of the total enrolment.

Regarding the Omanisation policy, the findings implied that there was an understanding of the role private universities and colleges should play. Consequently, private institutions offer programmes and courses based on assumptions about the needs of Oman's labour market, particularly private sector enterprises. As addressed earlier, 15 of 24 private institutions offer programmes in finance studies, business administration, and computer studies, while only 4 of these institutions offer specialisations in Medicine Sciences, Media studies, Engineering and Tourism. Although private higher education in Oman coincides with the vision of most private provision worldwide, i.e. being business and market-oriented, the specialisations offered do not meet the actual need of the private labour market in Oman. The private sector needs skilled and trained workers rather than necessarily taking those with a degree.

Research activity has also received relatively little attention in these institutions. Most of these institutions are teaching-oriented rather than combining the two dimensions, research and teaching. More theoretical aspirations were noticed during interviews. It is acknowledged that building a research environment is not an easy task, since it needs funding, qualified researchers and academics, and is time consuming. Most interviewees declared that adequate research funding by government and private companies would undoubtedly enhance the research activity in these institutions. Findings, however, showed that there was a lack of efforts by private institutions to build stronger links with private enterprises in this domain.

Concerning other challenges and issues affecting these institutions, it was shown that quality and funding, in addition to issues addressed throughout this research, can be considered as key challenges facing private higher education. From the quality aspect, there is an ongoing question about the ability of these institutions to provide adequate quality higher education, particularly if these institutions operate on a profit-making basis.

Various criteria for ensuring quality were discussed in this study as well as obtained from the interview respondents. However, deep investigation on the efforts of these institutions to show relatively adequate quality revealed that there were several factors that hindered quality improvement, such as lack of awareness of the investors and teaching staff of the theme of quality assurance, inadequate mechanisms for assuring such an approach, the financial rather than academic motivation of some investors, and so forth.

These factors, as highlighted and discussed previously, would have a negative impact on the progress of these institutions academically.

The findings on key sources of funding in these institutions revealed that most private institutions relied heavily on tuition fees in the first place, followed by scholarships and grants offered by the government. It also appeared that most institutions attempted to adopt the easier route to gaining returns; the above mentioned sources. This is really a critical challenge that would lead many of these institutions to instability in the long term. Early preparation to diversify funding resources enables a given institution to compete and survive.

The following chapter, Chapter Ten, will present a) the conclusions of this research, b) recommendations based on the outcome of this research, and c) detailed areas for further research based upon the findings of this study.

Chapter Ten

Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the rationales and objectives of establishing private higher education institutions in Oman, and the main challenges facing this sector.

A wide-ranging literature review on various systems of private higher education in many countries was carried out in order to develop a deep and comprehensive understanding of this segment of higher education. To generate the required information for this research, a semi-structured interview was developed to survey the development and challenges of private higher education in Oman. Results obtained from this study have been highlighted and discussed in the pertinent sections of the previous chapter.

This chapter will provide a general overview of what has been discussed in this research. This will be followed by a summary of the main findings from the semi-structured interviews along with the analysis of documentary data. Next, the policy implications and recommendations for the development and enhancement of higher education, particularly the private higher education sector, in Oman will be detailed. The chapter will conclude with suggested ideas for future research.

10.2 Overview of Research Project

During the last four decades, the government has focused its investment efforts predominantly on the expansion of general education, in order to make basic education available to all Omanis. This has resulted in an expanding population of secondary school graduates who cannot be accommodated by the existing higher education institutions in the country. To meet the growing demand for higher education, while also relieving the financial burden on the government, the Omani private sector was allowed to establish private universities and colleges. However, the demand for private higher education in the Sultanate stems, in the first place, from the large numbers of secondary school graduates competing for limited opportunities in the public higher education system. Therefore, it is assumed that private higher education would play a role in meeting this objective. In the case of Oman, as we mentioned previously in Chapter Four, the public institutions are the first preference of students due to their being free of charge and much better equipped than their private counterparts. However, only those with higher academic ability or the best

results in the secondary education certificate will have the opportunity to enrol in public higher education, whereas students with lower attainment will either seek education in the private sector, or enter the labour market as unskilled workers, or alternatively will be without work and education and thus become a burden on society.

Besides the above-mentioned rationales and objectives, another rationale for establishing private institutions stems from the government's vision that this sector will play an active role in educating qualified Omani citizens to meet the requirements of the labour market. Apart from the fact that non-Omanis constitute 16.8% of the overall workforce in public sector, and 84.4% of them in the private sector, non-Omani employees dominate in technical and managerial positions that require special expertise (Table 3.18). It is worth mentioning in this regard that these positions not only command higher wages, but also confer decision-making authority. So in practice, the majority of non-Omanis occupy these skilled positions in the private sector, where global economic decisions concerning Oman's economy are made, with a minimal contribution from qualified Omani citizens. Therefore, if Oman is concerned to compete in a global economic world, this issue needs to be given serious consideration by the concerned stakeholders. Proper, practical and realistic policies should be implemented in order to prepare qualified and skilled Omanis, who are capable of participating actively in socio-economic policy-making benefiting the comprehensive development of the country.

Promoting the capacity of scientific research, especially through the establishment of a link between private higher education and business economy, was also among rationales for establishment of private sector higher education.

The challenges faced by private higher education were considered in Chapters Five and Six. It was shown that financing is a core challenge facing the progress of private higher education, not only in Oman but worldwide.

However, due to the financial austerity and constraints facing most governments, some of the costs of higher education have been shifted to students and their families, either through private higher education or through the introduction of tuition fees within the public higher education system; in the Omani context it is only through private sector provision. By and large, it is of concern that with high tuition fees, especially in science specialisations, students from low-income families will not be able to attend private higher education.

As we have mentioned in Chapter Two, a market orientation approach includes introducing tuition fees, privatisation within/of the public universities, and establishing private universities. The third example of this approach is currently in place in the Omani context. It has been shown that tuition fees are a significant and key source of funding in private universities and colleges in the country.

The research observed that private higher education in Oman, despite its development and contribution, to some extent, in increasing accessibility of higher education, still has certain challenges. Financing, quality assurance, access and equity, and enhancing the role of scientific research are the fundamental challenges facing this sector.

10.3 Summary of the Research Findings

The main findings of this research are summarised below:

- 1. Funding resources.* The findings in the present study indicated that currently, private institutions in Oman rely heavily on tuition fees, followed by financial support from the government (Table 8.7). Based on the findings of the study, few private universities and colleges practise clear policies towards diversifying their income sources. This situation may affect the quality of educational services in these institutions. The total dependence on tuition fees means that institutions mostly focus on making profit for financial investment, rather than making profit to enhance the educational process. This concern, however, is not confined to Oman's private institutions; it can be generalised to any private institution worldwide relying entirely on tuition fees and not diversifying its funding sources. Teferra (2008: 9), for example, suggested that private institutions, particularly those entirely dependent on tuition fees, are "unstable and resource challenged". However, the literature review demonstrated that many private institutions worldwide succeed in diversifying their funding resources, through research projects, endowment, alumni, and entrepreneurial activities that positively reflect on educational services (see for example, Tilak, 1991; Altbach, 1998; Barr, 2003; Hauptman, 2006a). It is worth emphasising in this regard that if private institutions in Oman seriously desire to generate additional funding and not rely solely on tuition fees, they have to pay more attention to quality aspects and also convince stakeholders that they are not performing only for profit but are capable to contribute in serving and developing social and economic objectives in the country.

2. *Quality aspects.* Although private colleges and universities provide education at a relatively higher cost, particularly in science specialisations, compared to some private universities in a number of countries (Table 5.4), there is no evidence that they perform better than those institutions. However, due to absence of fees in Oman's public higher education, comparison in this regard between the two sectors would be pointless. Similarly, it was found that private colleges and universities employed relatively lower qualified and junior staff and have high student-teacher ratios compared to public higher education institutions in Oman (see Chapter Nine). For example, according to educational statistics of 2009 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2009a) the student-teacher ratio in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University is 2,538:125, in the College of Arts and Social Sciences it is 2,099:166, and in the Engineering College it is 2,291:102, compared to 4,588:163 in Sohar University, 1,670:59 in Majan College, 2,367:50 in the Middle East College of Information Technology, and 1,785:42 in the Gulf College, as shown in Table 9.1. The above finding provides a serious sign to these institutions with regard to quality.

Compared to some international examples of private institutions in relation to the mode of teaching, indicators revealed that most academics in Oman's private institutions are in full-time positions. This can be regarded as a strength of these institutions, as the literature reveals that private institutions in many countries tend to hire part-time lecturers rather than full-time, e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, and many other developing countries (Tilak, 1991).

However, the demand-side information also seems to be connected with the above situation, the supply-side findings. As stated previously, since the first choice of students is for public higher education institutions and due to the limited places in these institutions, as they admit only students with a high grade or result in Secondary Certificate, only those with low attainment tend to enrol in the private universities and colleges. Here, it can be argued that the level of satisfaction achieved by students in the public institutions will be higher than in the private institutions. Consequently, it is important for the government to ensure that private higher education provides programmes and courses which are at least equivalent in quality to public higher education. It is also essential for the government that if the expansion of higher education is to be through private higher education, adequate

policies governing the cost of maintaining suitable standards of quality need to be established.

Total reliance on academic affiliation, as is currently in place, to ensure quality, would not be enough. As we discussed in a previous chapter, academic affiliation with foreign universities can be considered as an assistance factor for ensuring quality rather than a sole determinant, because foreign universities mostly focus on the quality of contents of programmes and courses. However, the issues are how these programmes are delivered, and whether these institutions provide adequate resources (e.g. libraries, laboratories, classrooms, etc) for delivering these courses. All these issues and others should be guaranteed by the local authorities, Ministry of Higher Education and above all Oman Accreditation Council (OAC).

Similarly, the study reveals that although many private institutions have formed committees or units as an additional tool for quality assurance, the functions and roles of these units were not performed systematically.

From the qualitative perspective, the literature and the present study revealed that merger in some colleges located in Muscat would be meaningful in terms of strengthening these institutions financially and academically, as addressed earlier in Chapter Four. Several practices from different countries around the world relating to this issue were cited in the present research as examples of the successful experiences of merger in higher education (see for example, Goedegebuure & Meek, 1994; Chen, 2002; Hazelkorn, 2008). The most important issue in the merger process is that the initiative must stem from the institutions themselves. Although there was a common agreement amongst respondents with regard to the significance of merger in private colleges, in reality they were reluctant due to conflicts in financial affairs. Thus, in order for merger to succeed, initiatives must be derived from founders/investors themselves.

In connection with the quality aspect, the quality of higher education is the consequence of the combination of many factors and processes. Higher education institutions, particularly universities, face social and economic pressures for many reasons, including increased access, the advancement of technology, rapid knowledge development, an increasingly global world economy, and financial austerities. These conditions impose a need re-evaluation of the output of universities in order to ensure their efficiency and linkage with the world of work

and the relevance of academic programmes to the labour market needs. One of the tools used to assist in identifying and improving quality educational services in higher education institutions along with identifying the relevance of study programmes to the labour market is so-called 'graduate surveys' (Schomburg & Teichler, 2006).

In the Omani context, due to the absence of basic information about the relevance of higher education institutions in accordance with the need for preparing quality graduates to meet the requirements of social and economic development in Oman, and owing to the fact that OAC is still in its embryonic phase, graduate surveys are urgently required. From the findings of this research study, none of the private higher education institutions conducted graduate surveys. The issue of efficiency of graduates in the world of work raises an on-going debate among the public. Therefore, the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman in collaboration with the International Centre for Higher Education Research at University of Kassel (INCHER-Kassel) conducted the first graduate survey in 2008. Besides its aim of providing first-hand information concerning the quality of private universities' and colleges' educational services, the findings of this project will contribute in offering important information on the evaluation process for careers and at institutional level. In addition, the findings will help both higher education institutions and policy makers to make decisions related to the planning and orientation of policies on higher education. This undertaking can be considered, then, as a message to higher education institutions about the significance of conducting such studies in order to measure the quality of their educational services.

To conclude the above discussion, it is worth noting in this regard that in spite of the obvious challenge facing higher education in relation to quality, local educational authorities are committed to maintaining a high-quality educational experience. For instance, in addition to the graduate survey project mentioned earlier, currently the OAC has introduced a quality audit scheme, which is focusing presently on the institutional accreditation of universities and colleges, as well as the establishment of the Oman Quality Network as an independent and not-for-profit network of higher education institutions. To raise the institutions' awareness of quality aspects, OAC in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education has designed and implemented a national quality training programme (Chapter Six).

3. *Access and equity.* The present study indicated that the higher education capacity in the Sultanate is not keeping pace with the fast expansion in numbers of secondary education leavers. For example, in 2007/2008, only 21,586 (45%) out of 47,466 students had opportunities to pursue post-secondary education. Taking into consideration the population structure of the Sultanate, with the age cohort 0-19 representing 55% of the total Omani population (Table 3.1), and that more than 40,000 students graduate yearly from secondary schools, it is expected that the dilemma of insufficient capacity of higher education in the country will remain for the near future. Besides, if the government wishes to increase the current rate of enrolment in higher education from 21.6% to reach at least 50% of the 18-24 age group attending post-secondary education by the year 2020 (Al-Busaidia, 2009), extensive efforts along with increasing expenditure on higher education should be guaranteed. Oman spends only 8% of its public expenditure on higher education (Human Development Report, 2007); this modest spending can be considered as another factor in the limited capacity of higher education (Table 3.9). In other words, ensuring equitable access for the rapidly growing number of individuals seeking education at the post-secondary level, and meeting the growing demand for higher education and providing its benefits to a diverse population of students, will require national commitment and a clear educational strategy. It is worthy of note in this regard that the competitive admission criteria affect, to some extent, the issues of access and equity, since the quota scheme based on gender disadvantages female secondary school students, who have higher attainment than male secondary school students, as previously addressed in Chapter Four. Likewise, the competitive admission system may also cause students to study specialisations that are not their first choice. This situation may affect both students' achievements and the labour market as well. For students, such a situation could lead to poor motivation and consequently low attainment and performance. Therefore, such circumstances may not help students to acquire the skills and knowledge needed by the labour market.

Regarding private higher education, its role in achieving access and equity is moderately satisfactory. Although private institutions reduce the shortfall in access to public institutions, the majority of secondary school graduates are still not able to ensure access to higher education institutions. As previously stated, owing to the high tuition fees of private institutions, duplication of programmes provided, and

the concentration of most of them in Muscat governorate, these institutions are less popular among students and their families. Findings revealed that, since its commencement, private higher education has contributed in increasing accessibility in higher education. In the academic year 2008/2009, for example, enrolment in this sector was 37% of the total admissions. The concern in this regard is the mode of funding the studies of these students; 28% of all students in 2008/2009 were studying on government scholarships, which are allocated to students from low-income families and social welfare students. The findings of this study also revealed that in expanding access, efforts should be made to meet the objectives of equity and quality simultaneously. Again, the above is consistent with the market orientation approach mentioned earlier. In order to ensure equality, government, private institutions, private enterprises, and wealthy individuals must contribute effectively to promote access and equity in private higher education. It is recommended that each of the above stakeholder groups should play a particular role in this domain. The next section presents several recommendations in relation to access and equity aspects.

4. *Scientific research activity.* Currently the status of scientific research in most higher education institutions in the country, with the exception of Sultan Qaboos University, as addressed earlier in Chapters Three and Five, is marginal. In examining the issues and problems of research activities in Oman's higher education institutions in general and private institutions in particular, at least five elements were identified which need to be given careful consideration: qualitative and quantitative aspects of academic staff, the teaching load, funding support, research infrastructure, and involvement of the business community.

Regarding qualitative and quantitative aspects, the data revealed that teaching staff-student ratio was insufficient in almost all private institutions. This indicates that the quantity of academics does not meet students' numbers; this in turn would affect their attainment. Similarly, the present study showed that most teaching staff in private institutions were Master degree holders. This means that the number of qualified academics that have experience in research field should be increased (see Chapter Nine). In connection to the above, the shortage of academic staff increases teaching load. This impedes research activities, since most time will be allocated for teaching rather than research. Moreover, as most private

institutions offered only first degree programmes, and mostly in finance, business administration, computing and management, with a few institutions offering Master programmes in business administration, this may not help in improving research capacity. Consequently, private universities should consider the significance of post-graduate programmes in promoting the culture of scientific research in different fields of study. Equally, as mentioned previously in Chapter Nine, private institutions claimed lack of funding support, particularly from private enterprises. Although, to a large extent, this is the case, extensive efforts need to be made by private higher education to persuade private sector companies of the services that can be offered to improve their products through research projects conducted by these institutions. Government expenditure on scientific research also should be increased. The national capabilities in the field of R&D are considered limited; Oman's expenditure in this field was estimated at about 0.1% of the GDP compared to about 1.1% in developing countries and 2.5% in industrial countries (Ministry of Economy, 2008: 277).

However, as the government provides considerable financial support to Oman's private universities (\$52 million), scientific research should be one of the core elements in these institutions. To achieve such an objective, better facilities and resources (physical and human resources) relevant to improving the research environment must be maintained by these institutions. Equally of importance, private enterprises should participate actively in supporting this field, for three main reasons: first, to improve the products and services offered; second, to support research activities in private institutions, particularly universities, so they can be both research and teaching oriented, and third, to contribute in the spirit of corporate social responsibility, through involvement in this sphere and providing quality services to society.

10.4 Recommendations

In light of the above findings about the system of private higher education in the Sultanate of Oman, the study presents the following recommendations for the development of higher education, particularly the private higher education sector in the country, to meet individuals' and society's needs. It is worth mentioning that although these recommendations are applicable to the case of private higher education in Oman, they may be transferable to other countries which have similar characteristics to Oman and share a

similar setting with regard to higher education provision. For example, they can be of use in other Arab Gulf countries which have, to a large extent, a similar political, social and economic situation. The recommendations are summarised in Table 10.1 below.

Table 10.1: Recommendations

Recommendation	Key words
a) General (for policy and decision makers)	Supervision of higher education institutions; statistical unit/department; a 'Career Guidance Centre'; English language; the scholarship committee; scientific research; higher education conferences.
b) To enhance capacity of higher education	Expansion and diversification of public higher education; cost per student; another public university; distance learning; expenditure on higher education; Awqaf.
c) To promote quality aspects	Merger in private colleges; performance-based funding; new licensing; strengthening areas of cooperation locally and internationally, Oman Accreditation Council.
d) To ensure access and equity	Businessmen; internal scholarships; decentralisation of private colleges; government subsidies; endowment and philanthropy; social responsibility; tuition fees; national higher education fund.
e) To promote Omanisation policy	Training programmes for employees; meeting the needs of the world of work; graduate surveys; polices of employment in the private sector; technical and vocational training.

a) General recommendations for policy and decision makers

1. As noted in Chapter Four, there are several organisations that supervise higher education institutions in Oman. This creates competition for resources and limits consensus for improving performance and quality. It also produces duplication of financial and administrative resources. Therefore, centralised supervision under one organisation, which should be the Ministry of Higher Education, would help in creating a unified vision and policy on the one hand, and in specifying the financial resources on the other. In other words, a centralised organisation that is solely responsible for supervision and quality assurance for higher education will assist in improving the quality and accessibility of higher education in the country.
2. As outlined in Chapters Four and Nine, due to the deficiency of accurate statistical data related to the number of unemployed Omani graduates either from Oman's higher education institutions or from abroad, and because the supervision of all institutions of higher education in Oman is not under one agency, a statistical unit or department should be established under the supervision of the Council of Higher Education. The Council would collect, analyse and store the data on higher

education and the numbers of graduates and their specialisations and qualifications. The availability of such statistical data would definitely help and benefit both researchers and policy-makers. It will also assist leaders of higher education institutions themselves to review the quality of academic programmes offered at their institutions.

3. To offer better advice to secondary school graduates about specialisations required by the labour market, the 'Career Guidance Centre', which is under supervision of the Ministry of Education, should be activated. To achieve this objective, a sufficient number of experts should be provided, and a proper action plan for visiting secondary schools around the country should be designed.
4. Since English is the medium of instruction in almost all private higher education institutions in Oman, and since it is the operational language in the Omani private sector, it is recommended that more attention should be paid to providing intensive courses in schools, particularly at secondary level. Implementing this recommendation will assist in achieving double benefits: first, students enrolled in higher education institutions will not face the difficulties that result from lack of proficiency in this language and second, preparing students at an early stage will save money, especially for those studying in private education, since they will not need to take a foundation programme.
5. Since the private sector participates in the higher education process, and since there is a large number of students studying at their own expense in Oman and abroad, the possibility of expanding the membership of the scholarship committee to include additional academically qualified members from the private sector should be considered. The reason behind is to keep this committee informed with updated data related to the requirements of the labour market, particularly the private sector.
6. In the present study, we have noticed that all advanced countries that hold a high status in economic and social development devote great attention to R&D through setting up proper conditions and providing advanced physical and human resources. This is an indication that there is a strong link between what is achieved in these countries and the extensive improvement in the R&D field. Countries like Singapore and Finland, for example, are both perceived as crucial examples of economically successful countries showing good practice in higher education and scientific research (Donn & Al-Manthri, 2010). In this regard, and in order to meet

the objectives set in the 'Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020' in relation to this area, average expenditure on scientific research should be increased (see Table 3.19, Chapter Three), and highly qualified staff in different knowledge fields should be prepared. Equally of importance, private enterprise should be involved in and fund R&D. Also, an effective and flexible framework among the Gulf countries could be created to mobilise and unleash research capacity on the regional level. In connection with the above suggestion, a 'week of science and innovation' at the level of Gulf countries could be organised annually in order to increase cooperation and examine development in scientific research in these countries.

7. Scientific research activity in higher education institutions is important as one of the functions of higher education, since these institutions are centres of knowledge production and research and innovation. Therefore, higher education institutions, either public or private, should consider intensively establishing adequate research infrastructure, i.e. classrooms, libraries and laboratories, where instruction and research take place. Moreover, to improve scientific research, higher education institutions should offer scholarship programmes for Omani citizens, participate in regional and international research projects and link institution libraries to international documentation systems. In addition, the quality of scientific research could be enhanced by strengthening collaboration between and among academic departments working with the same research agenda. Doing so will bring immense gains in terms of utilisation of technical expertise and sharing of common resources.
8. To keep pace with the changing development in the higher education sphere worldwide, relevant conferences and seminars need to be organised from time to time. The objective of this proposal is to enable local higher education institutions to see the international experiences in the field of higher education academically, administratively and technically. At the same time, this idea will enable the educational decision and policy makers to keep pace with ongoing international developments in higher education policies, and to take advantage of these experiences to serve the local situation of higher education.

b) Recommendations to enhance capacity of higher education

1. Expansion of higher education should not be left solely to private sector higher education. In this regard, Oman requires to expand and diversify public higher education in order to meet the higher demand for post-secondary education on the one hand and to meet the requirements of its citizens for personal development and compete in the global market on the other. It can be argued that it is only through the expansion and diversification of higher education that Oman will be able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. UNESCO (1988: 27) supports this view, suggesting that "...the solution of the problems faced on the eve of the twenty-first century will be determined by the vision of the future society and by the role that is assigned to education in general and to higher education in particular".
2. To ensure higher rates of investing in education and increasing enrolment rates, public higher education institutions should be encouraged to reduce the cost per student (unit cost), as statistics have indicated that it is much higher than the world average. As shown in Table 3.10, expenditure per student in Sultan Qaboos University is estimated to be \$15,701, compared to \$11,313 for university students in Kuwait; \$10,351 in Bahrain, and only \$511 in Yemen (UNESCO, 2002). If the government were to slightly reduce the cost of each student, establishing another public university would be another option for increasing access to higher education.
3. Building on this, and having looked into the situation of higher education in Oman, it is clear that another public university is needed to meet the rapid growth of secondary school graduates, since the only university in the country has limited capacity to absorb these students.
4. In addition, it would be desirable for Sultan Qaboos University to introduce distance and part-time education to enable national citizens who did not go to higher education to upgrade their knowledge, skills and qualifications whilst working. Introducing such schemes would be of great benefit in helping those in employment, housewives and those with special needs to further their education. This might also be an advantage to students from remote areas in the country. Indeed, this could help to solve the limited capacity of higher education in the Sultanate. UNESCO (2009: 3) supports the above suggestion, emphasising that "the increasing demand for higher education will hardly be met by traditional face-to-face delivery alone. Therefore, approaches like distance learning or online learning

will have to be utilised, especially for areas such as continuing adult education and teacher training".

5. To raise access to higher education, expenditure on higher education should be increased, as Oman spends only 8% of its public education expenditure on higher education.
6. The role of the civil society in financing higher education should also be emphasised, given the positive externalities of investing in this field. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Eight, Oman, like most Arab countries, has long experienced religious-based (*Awqaf*) volunteer participation in community service, including providing educational services. It is necessary to encourage and extend this form of participation to represent not only religious reasons, but also social responsibility.

c) Recommendations to promote quality aspects

1. Academically as well as administratively, the colleges in Muscat, Oman's capital, could be merged to form a university. Merger among the colleges could be considered as an option to establish stronger institutes of higher education. Moreover, this would attract students due to the great prestige and opportunities associated with study at university rather than at a college level. It would also unify the efforts of these institutions to promote their academic and financial goals.
2. Performance-based funding of private university. A particular model could be designed to allocate part of government subsidies among private universities and colleges. With this formula, each institution should improve the quality and quantity of its teaching and research to obtain that financial subsidy. The main objective is to encourage greater academic quality and strengthen institutional management. However, the issue of differentiation of universities and colleges as well as the period of establishment need to be considered. The above formula has been introduced in many countries around the world, regardless of the differences in the general and broader aims of this scheme, whether to encourage institutions in the embryonic phase -as in the case of Oman's universities and colleges- or for the purpose of strengthening higher education institutions to demonstrate their excellence at the international level, as in many European countries: France, Italy, Denmark, and Germany, where governments have started so-called "excellence initiatives" (see for example, El-Khawas & El-Khawas, 1998; Agasisti, 2008; Hazelkorn, 2008). Similarly, in Japan, for example, as mentioned earlier in Chapter

Five, one criterion of government support for private universities is linked to research projects (Baba, 2002).

3. For the purpose of re-evaluating the performance of private universities and colleges in the country, it is recommended that the government should not license establishment of new private institutions at least for the coming five years.
4. Oman's private institutions should consider the importance of academic cooperation with regional and international universities. The sole reliance of the local universities and colleges on the academic affiliation system, whereby each institution is affiliated with an international university, will not help Oman's private institutions to improve their educational services. Finding channels of cooperation with different recognised universities around the world in academic and technical affairs would reflect the keenness of each institution to improve itself academically and technically. A good example in this domain is Nizwa University, since it cooperates with many universities in Germany, Jordan, Portugal, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States (see Table 4.2).
5. To ensure quality assurance in higher education institutions, the role and contribution of the OAC must be made more effective. This can be done by adding more experts to the Council committees and activating the idea of exchanging experts with international agencies of quality assurance.
6. As noted in Chapter Six, the Royal Decree No. 74/2001 established the OAC as an independent body which reports to the Council of Higher Education. However, based on this Decree, the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges in the Ministry of Higher Education assumes the tasks of Technical Secretariat of the Council (see Appendix 4). This creates an image amongst some people that the OAC is part of the Ministry of Higher Education, and thus leads to confusion about the nature of the tasks and the boundaries between the two organisations with regard to operational affairs. It is therefore proposed that the Technical Secretariat of the Council should be within the Council itself, to follow-up all administrative and operational matters related to the Council. This, of course, would require additional specialists in the field of accreditation and quality assurance, in addition to a sufficient number of administrators to carry out and follow-up the technical and administrative issues addressed by the Council in a proper way.

7. A periodic review of programmes should be introduced, which may increase accountability for maintaining quality. To implement such an idea, procedures for periodic quality evaluation can be developed and monitored by the OAC.
8. As discussed in the preceding chapter, private higher education, and even public higher education institutions, are not prohibited, officially, from practising entrepreneurial activities as an additional option for diversifying financial resources, and, at the same time, investing and utilising such income in quality improvement (see Chapter Two). To achieve such a strategy, dynamic relationships and partnerships should be established between private higher education institutions and public and private sector organisations. Cooperation areas may include research activities, consultancy services, technological and communication transfer and settlement, specialised teaching and training courses, etc. Several benefits would accrue from such a scheme: a) additional income will be generated by private higher education, b) human resources of the business enterprises will be developed, and c) study programmes offered by these institutions will be reviewed regularly to meet the changing demand of the business community.

d) Recommendations to ensure access and equity aspect

Based on the findings of this research, and in order to take advantage of the 'market orientation' scheme, the following alternatives should be implemented in Oman.

1. To enable a large number of students to be enrolled in private higher education, wealthy individuals and businessmen should contribute through financing a number of scholarships for secondary school graduates.
2. Internal scholarships and grants provided by the government for students under the low-income schemes to study in private higher education should be increased. Since many secondary school graduates are from low-income families, affording higher education would be a financial challenge for their parents. This finding is further supported by evidence collected from the interviews. Based on the results obtained in this research as detailed in Table 8.6, 83% of respondents believed that offering more government scholarships is a vital mechanism for increasing access in private universities and colleges. Responses revealed that there was an agreement between the officials of the ministry and private higher education institutions on the importance of this mechanism being implemented by the

government. The private sector enterprises should also allocate scholarships for a number of these students. Some specialisations might be chosen by the private sector and students might be employed in these corporations after graduating.

3. Most private colleges are located in Muscat governorate, which means an additional financial burden for students and their families, since a large number of them come from different regions, and the cost of residence in Muscat is higher compared to many other regions in the country. Therefore, it is recommended that wider geographical distribution should be considered when establishing private higher education institutions in the future.
4. Governmental subsidies and incentives should be promoted particularly for private institutions that show that they strive to ensure quality of higher education together with participating positively in community service.
5. Endowment and philanthropy for the purpose of the development of the private higher education system should also be promoted by non-governmental organisations as well as wealthy individuals. The aim of encouraging such a culture is to support both the government and private higher education financially on the one hand, and increase accessibility in these institutions on the other hand. One option for accomplishing such an objective could be through introducing an educational tax system, where private enterprises contribute a small amount (e.g., 1%) of their net profits annually to the benefit of higher education in the country.
6. Private universities and colleges need to practise a spirit of social responsibility towards the community. For example, offering scholarships and exemption (part or full) from tuition fees to socio-economically disadvantaged students can be considered as a form of such a responsibility.
7. As mentioned previously in Chapter Five, there is a marked disparity in tuition fees of study programmes from one institution to another. For example, engineering programme fees range from RO 2,400 to RO 4,800. It is recommended that private institutions review their tuition fees carefully, so as not to be the cause of preventing many students from continuing their higher education. Equally of importance, the Ministry of Higher Education, as the supervisor of these institutions, should also take part in the review of these fees in line with the services provided for a given programme, and in line with the criteria and policies on setting tuition fees, as addressed in Chapter Five.

8. To ensure greater access to local private universities and colleges, an interest-free student loan scheme should be introduced. In this regard, a National Higher Education Fund needs to be established, to supply loans to all students wishing to study in these institutions. The students would have to repay the cost of their education after graduation and during the first fifteen years of their working life. Evidence from the literature showed that a student loan scheme is a crucial option to increase accessibility, ensure equity and reduce the financial burden of students. For example, Woodhall (2004) argues that student loans offer an alternative solution to the financial restrictions facing students. Moreover, they create the possibility of higher education for students from poor socio-economic background, who would otherwise be unable to access higher education because of their inability to pay. To accomplish such a scheme successfully, the researcher has suggested a particular student loans approach that fits the Omani context. However, it is important that in order to introduce this scheme smoothly and effectively, there is strong cooperation and coordination among stakeholders (see Figure 5.1, Chapter Five).
9. Omani banks should be encouraged by the government to introduce student loan plans with some interest free loans in order to maximise opportunities of enrolment to these institutions.

e) Recommendations for promoting Omanisation policy

1. In the light of worldwide advancement technologically and administratively, it is recommended that a specialised training programme to upgrade the skills and knowledge of employees in both public and private sectors should be designed. The main objective would be to make them more capable to cope with these advancements. This can be achieved through designing suitable training courses in private universities and colleges.
2. The discussion in Chapter Three revealed that the private sector at present is not wholly satisfied with the skills and knowledge of Omani graduates. Therefore, active coordination, cooperation and partnership between government, private and public higher education institutions, and the private sector enterprises needs to be established to bridge the gap between labour market requirements and the effectiveness of graduates of higher education institutions.

3. In addition to the above, conducting graduate surveys on a regular basis would help in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of higher education institutions' outputs whilst in the world of work. It will also provide an indication of the quality of educational services offered by higher education institutions.
4. Government schemes of Omanisation and incentives need to be continued to encourage and promote Omanisation, particularly in the private sector. In this regard, it is recommended to establish particular policies for employment in the private sector to promote employment of Omanis in this sector without compromising the efficiency and productivity of the institutional operations. To accomplish such an objective, studies should be conducted to identify and recommend realistic and practical solutions to obstacles to Omanisation in the private sector.
5. In order to qualify Omanis to fill the gap in the national labour market, particularly the private sector, which is currently dominated by expatriate technicians, greater attention should be given to technical and vocational training in the country. To achieve such an objective, it is necessary that the government as well as media should raise public awareness about the significance of vocational and technical training and change their perception toward these jobs. Moreover, it is also important that encouragement and clear information be given to students to study vocational and technical programmes and courses and work in these occupations.

It is hoped that the findings, implications, and recommendations offered in this study will contribute to the formulation of appropriate educational policy and management strategies with regard to the enhancement of the role of private higher education system in serving the community and educating qualified national citizens.

10.5 Suggestions for Further Research

This research is the only attempt to understand the rationales behind establishing private higher education institutions in Oman and they challenges face. It also attempts to shed light on the extent of the contribution of this sector in meeting those rationales and objectives and consequently its overall participation in the comprehensive development in the country. Several issues were encountered during the course of this study, which need to be addressed in further research activities.

1. As mentioned in Chapter Four, there is a considerable number of students studying abroad at their own expense in private universities, particularly in neighbouring countries. Therefore, a survey of the relevance of the programmes they study in relation to the requirements of the comprehensive development in the country needs to be carried out urgently.
2. There is contradictory evidence as to whether graduates from the private sector perform better compared to those from the public sector. In the case of Oman, it has been argued that graduates from the private sector have greater employment opportunities, especially in the private sector, because they are competent in English. However, as we have outlined in Chapter Nine, most students enrolled in private institutions because they had no opportunity to enrol in public institutions due to failure to attain the grades required by the latter, which raises question whether graduates from the private institutions really performed well compared to graduates from the public higher education institutions in the job market. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate, especially from employers' perspective, the difference in performance between graduates from both sectors. The findings from this research may be of use in assessing the quality of programmes offered by both public and private higher education institutions.
3. Further research is required to identify to what extent geographical location plays a role in students' decision to study in a particular private institution. From the information obtained in the present study relating to this factor, it was observed that some students prefer to study in institutions located close to their families, either because of their first choice or due to other factors such as financial substances or social considerations, e.g. to be close to their families.
4. A comprehensive national study on the labour market and the needs of the national economy is urgently required. The importance of such a study is to provide policy and decision makers in Oman with sufficient information and facts on the degree of linkage between higher education and the private sector labour market on the one hand, and between the skills and knowledge of their graduates and the needs of the labour market on the other.
5. This study highlighted briefly the factors influencing students to study in private universities and colleges as perceived by vice-chancellors and deans of private institutions. Thus, in order to obtain detailed and comprehensive information in

relation to these factors from the perceptions of Omani students, further study needs to be conducted.

6. Due to the ongoing criticism of private sector enterprises regarding lack of adequate preparation of Omanis to meet the new challenges and demands of the labour market, it is necessary that studies should be conducted to identify and recommend realistic and practical solutions to obstacles of Omanisation in the private sector.

10.6 Concluding Remarks

This concluding chapter has provided an overview of this thesis, summarised the key research findings, and evaluated the policy implications connected to this investigation. Several potential research areas were also suggested for further investigation.

It can be concluded that although private higher education has been developed during the past fifteen years, it still requires more consideration, particularly in the era of globalisation, where competition among these institutions for presenting relevant programmes will be strong. According to Altbach (1999: 82) the coming years "will see private higher education grow in importance in many nations, especially in the developing and middle-income countries". It is important to ensure that private higher education serves the needs not only of the marketplace but also of society. Furthermore, universities and colleges should show through action that they understand the socio-economic issues in the country and beyond, and, at the same time, contribute effectively in offering solutions to these issues. Moreover, as this sector expands, attention must be given to growth versus efficiency, equity and quality issues. This is to ensure that expansion of higher education will not be confined to those who can afford it. It is evident that several alternative mechanisms should be created and activated to ensure equal access to all. Similarly, the government should not renounce its role with regard to investment in higher education entirely to the private sector. It should, rather, encourage a partnership with this sector in order to maintain access and equity, while ensuring the high quality of higher education.

By and large, as the private sector in Oman has taken the initiative to participate in the field of higher education, it should continue pursuing this objective while, at the same time, government support, oversight and supervision should be maintained without compromising the administrative independence and academic freedom of higher education institutions.

References

- Abagi, O., Nzomo, J. and Otieno, W. (2005). *Private Higher Education in Kenya*. Paris: UNESCO, IIEP's Printing-press. Available online at <http://unesco.unesco.org/images/0014/001444/pdf>, Retrieved November 23, 2009.
- Agarwal, P. (2008). "Indian Higher Education at the Crossroads". *International Higher Education*, No. 51, Spring 2008, pp. 14-15.
- Agarwal, P., Said, M., Sehoole, M., Sirozi, M. and De Wit, H. (2007). "The Dynamics of International Student Circulation in a Global Context". In Altbach, P. & Peterson, P. (eds.), *Higher Education in the New Century: Global Challenges and Innovative Ideas*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Agasisti, T. (2008). "Performance-Based Funding of Universities: The Italian Experience". *International Higher Education*, No. 51, Spring 2008, pp. 21-22.
- Al-Ameen, A. (2001). "Private vs. Public Higher Education: From Competition to Complementarity & Partnership –A Case Study of Jordan". *Paper presented at the International Conference on the University of the 21st Century*, Muscat, March 17-19, 2001, pp. 446-465.
- Al-Atiqi, E., Alharbi, L. & Ali, F. (2002). *Privatization of Kuwait Higher Education: Policy and Procedure*. Unpublished document, 2002, Kuwait.
- Al-Atiqi, I. and El-Azma, M. (2007). "Funding and Financial Performance of Private Higher Education Institutions in Kuwait". *Paper Presented at the Regional Research Seminar*, 25-26 May. Rabat, Morocco.
- Al-Bulushi, K. (2003). *Accreditation in an International Context: Prospects for Implementation in the Omani Higher Education System*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, USA.
- Al-Busaidia, R. (2009). *Statement by the Minister of Higher Education before the Majlis A'Shura 'Consultative Council'*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Al-Hajri, A. (2002). *Human Capital Theory and the Financing of Higher Education in Oman*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, UK.
- Al-Hammami, H. (1999). *Education for the 21st Century: General education Reform in the Sultanate of Oman: Motives, Nature and Strategies of Implementation*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, UK.
- Al-Hashmi, S. (2005). *Factors Influencing Secondary School Students' Decisions to Enter Higher Education: Implications for Higher Education Capacity in the Sultanate of Oman*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Hull, UK.
- Al-Jabri, Y. (2009). "Social Responsibility of Corporations and its Developmental Roles in Society". *Capital Market Magazine*, No. 42, June 2009, Oman, pp. 14-17.
- Al-Jahwari, M. (2001). Private Higher Education in Oman, *Al-Markazi*, Vol. 27, pp. 12-17. Oman: Central Bank of Oman.
- Al-Jahwari, M. (2003). "Economic Determinants of the Labour Market Situation in Oman", *Al Markazi*, Vol. 28, pp. 23-28. Oman: Central Bank of Oman.

- Al-Kindi, M. (2008). "A Brief Overview of Open Arab University". *Resalat Al-Tarbia 'Educational Magazine'*, No, 9, December 2008. Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Al-Kahleej (2006). "An Interview with the Minister of Economy of the United Arab Emirates". *Al-Kahleej*, United Arab Emirates, No. 10064, pp. 3-4.
- Al-Lamki, S. (2002). "Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: challenge of access, equity and privatization". *Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 75-86.
- Al-Manthri, Y. (2001a). *Education Reform in Oman 1970-2001: The Changing Roles of Teachers and Principals in Secondary Schools*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, UK.
- Al-Manthri, Y. (2001b). "Status and prospects of higher education in the Sultanate". *Paper presented at the International Conference on the 21st Century*, March 17-19, Muscat, Oman.
- Al-Manthri, Y. (2002). *Statement by the Minister of Higher Education before the Majlis A'Shura 'Consultative Council'*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Al-Markazi (2003). "Omani Labour Market". *Al-Markazi*, Vol. 28. Oman: Central Bank of Oman, pp. 22-29.
- Al-Maskeri, M. (1992). *Human Capital Theory and the Motivations and Expectations of University Students in the Sultanate of Oman*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Missouri, St Louis, USA.
- Al-Mulais, S. (2001). "Role of Regional Cooperation in Private Higher Education". *Paper presented at International Conference on the University of 21st Century*, 17-19 March, Muscat, Oman.
- Al-Quds Open University (2009), "About Al-Quds Open University". Available online at <http://www.qudsopenu.edu.org>, Retrieved April 30, 2009.
- Al-Ramadhani, S. (2003). *Higher Education Development in Oman 1970-2002: Challenges and Achievements*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, UK.
- Al-Sarmi, A. (2009). "Overview on Private Higher Education in Oman". *Paper presented at the Symposium of Non-State Higher Education at the GCC States: Challenges and Opportunities*, 1-2 March, 2009, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Al-Taie, H., Pickersgill, J. and Al-Taie, N. (1999). *Oman: A comprehensive guide to the Sultanate of Oman*. Second edition, Muscat: Al-Roya Publication.
- Altbach, P. (1991). "Patterns in Higher Education Development: Towards the Year 2000". *Prospects*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 189-203.
- Altbach, P. (1998). "Private Higher Education: Themes and Variations in Comparative Perspective". *International Higher Education*, No. 10, Winter 1998, pp. 2-4.
- Altbach, P. (1999a). "Private Higher Education: The Public Responsibilities and Relationships of Private Post-secondary Institutions". Available online at <http://www.adbi.org/08altbach.pdf>, pp. 68-84, Retrieved April 24, 2009.
- Altbach, P. (1999b). "The Logic of Mass Higher Education". *Tertiary Education and Management*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 105-122.
- Altbach, P. (ed.) (1999c). *Private Prometheus: Private Higher Education and Development in the 21st Century*. Westport, CT, USA: Greenwood.

- Altbach, P. (1999d). "Private Higher Education: Themes and Variations in Comparative Perspective". *Prospects*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 310-323.
- Altbach, P. (2002). "The Private Sector in Asian Higher Education". *International Higher Education*, No. 29, Fall 2002, pp. 10-11.
- Altbach, P. (2004). "Globalisation and the University: Myths and Realities in an Unequal World". *Tertiary Education and Management*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 3-25.
- Altbach, P. (2007). *Tradition and Transition: The International Imperative in Higher Education*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Altbach, P. (2009). "Peripheries and centres: research universities in developing countries". *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 15-27.
- Altbach, P. and Davis, T. (1999). "Global Challenge and National Response: Notes for an International Dialogue on Higher Education". In Altbach, P. and Peterson, P. (eds.), *Higher Education in the 21st Century: Global Challenge and National Response*, pp. 3-10, Available online at http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/pgs/pdf, Retrieved March 9, 2009.
- Altbach, P. and Levy, D. (2005). "Private Higher Education: Global Revolution". *Programme for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE) Working Paper Series*, Available online at <http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe>, Retrieved March 27, 2009.
- Altbach, P., Reisberg, L. and Rumbley, L. (2009). "Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking on Academic Revolution". *A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education*, Paris: UNESCO.
- Anderson, E. and Cook, B. (2008). "Access to Post-secondary Education in the United States: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives". In OECD (ed.), *Higher Education to 2030 - Volume 1: Demography*. Paris: OECD, pp. 173-196.
- Anton, R. (2000). "Role of Private Higher Education in Promoting Higher Education", *Paper presented at the Conference of Privatization in Higher Education*, October 23-25, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman.
- Arab Human Development Report (2002). "Creating Opportunities for Future Generations". *United Nations Development Programme/Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development*, Amman, Jordan: Icons Printing Services.
- Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (2002). "The Unified Arab Economic Report". *AFESD Annual Report, 2002*, Kuwait.
- Arab Open University (2008). "The Arab Open University Prospectus". Available online, <http://www.aou.edu>, Retrieved November 27, 2008.
- Armstrong, L. (2007). "Competing in the Global Higher Education Marketplace", *A Preprint of an Article Accepted for Publication in New Directions for Higher Education*, Available online at http://www.globalization_nacub.pdf, Retrieved March 7, 2009.
- Asonuma, A. (2002). "Finance reform in Japanese higher education". *Higher Education*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 109-126.
- Baba, M. (2002). "The Rationale behind Public Funding of Private Universities in Japan". *Higher Education Management and Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 83-93.

- Baird, J. (2008). "Whose Quality Conventions? The Application of Convention Theory in Higher Education". *Tertiary Education and Management*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 67-79.
- Ball, C. (1990). *More Means Different: Widening Access to Higher Education*. London: RSA.
- Barr, N. (1993). *The Economics of the Welfare State*. Second edition. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, the Orion Publishing Group.
- Barr, N. (2003). "Financing Higher Education: Comparing the options". UK: London School of Economic and Political Science. Available online at http://econ.les.ac.uk/staff/barr_HE.pdf, Retrieved January 27, 2010.
- Begg, D., Fischer, S. and Dornbusch, R. (1991). *Economics*, Third edition, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Bell, J. (1996). *Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social science*. Second edition. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bell, J. (2005). *Doing your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science*, Fourth edition. England: Open University Press.
- Bernasconi, A. (2004). "External Affiliations and Diversity: Chile's private universities in international perspective". *PROPHE Working Paper Series*. Available online at <http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe>, Retrieved September 17, 2008.
- Best, J. (1991). *Research in Education*. Fourth edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Bjarnason, S. (2006). "Rhetoric or Reality? Technology in Borderless Higher Education". In Foster, G. and Altbach, P. (eds.), *International Handbook of Higher Education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 377-391.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. & Tight, M. (1996). *How to Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bleiklie, I. (1998). "Justifying the Evaluative State: New public management ideals in higher education". *European Journal of Education*, No. 33, pp. 299-316.
- Boer, H., Huisman, J., Klemperer, A., Meulen, B., Neave, G., Theisens, H. and Wende, M. (2002). "Academia in 21st Century: An analysis of trends and perspectives in higher education and research". Available online at <http://www.awt.nl/uploads/files/as28.pdf>, Retrieved May 20, 2010.
- Bohm, A., Davis, D., Meares, D. and Pearce, D. (2002). *Global Student Mobility: Forecasts of the Global Demand for International Higher Education*. Australia: IDP Education Australia Limited.
- Brennan, V., De Vries, P. & Williams, R. (1997). *Standards and Quality in Higher Education*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Brennan, J. and Shah, T. (2000). *Managing Quality in Higher Education: An International Perspective on Institutional Assessment and Change*. Buckingham, UK: OECD, SRHE & Open University Press.
- Bubtanah, A. (1996). "Enhancing Relationship between Higher Education and the World of Work". *Education Magazine*, Vol. 49, No. 17, pp. 39-55, In Arabic.

- Buchbinder, H. and Newson, J. (1990). "Corporate-university linkages in Canada: transforming a public institution". *Higher Education*, Vol. 20, pp. 355-379.
- Business Today* (2008). "Private Colleges, Survey Oman 2008". Vol. 7, pp. 34-37, December 2008, Oman.
- Caledonian College of Engineering (2004). *Unpublished Document about the College and its Academic Regulations*. Caledonian College, Oman.
- Campbell, C. (2001) The Role of Research in the Knowledge Economy. *Paper Presented at International Conference on the University of the 21st Century*, March 17-19, Muscat: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Carroll, M., Razvi, S. and Al-Habsi, F. (2009). "Progress on Developing a National Quality Management System for Higher Education in Oman". *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 17-27.
- Chapman, B. (1997). "Conceptual issues and the Australian experience with income contingent charges for higher education". *The Economic Journal*, No. 107, pp. 738-751.
- Chapman, B. (1999). "Reform of Ethiopian Higher Education Financing: Conceptual and Policy Issues". *Economics of Education Thematic Group, The World Bank*, Washington D.C.; The World Bank.
- Chapman, B. (2005). "Income Contingent Loans for Higher Education: International Reform". *Centre for Economic Policy Research*, Discussion Paper No. 491, The Australian National University.
- Chapman, D., Al-Barwani, T. and Ameen, H. (2009). "Expanding Postsecondary Access in Oman: Who Pays?" In Knight, J. (ed.), *Financing Access and Equity in Higher Education*. Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers, pp. 201-218.
- Chen, D. (2002). "A Study on the Amalgamation of Chinese Higher Educational Institutions". *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 48-55.
- Cheung, S. and Egerton, M. (2007). "Great Britain: Higher Education Expansion and Reform- Changing Educational Inequalities". In Shavit, Y., Arum, R. and Gamoran, A. (eds.), *Stratification in Higher Education: a Comparative Study*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, pp. 195-219.
- Clark, B. (1998). *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational pathways of transformation*. New York: International Association of Universities Press/Pergamon-Elsevier Science.
- Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. Fourth edition. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000). *Research Methods in Education*. Fifth edition. London: Routledge.
- Conffield, F. and William, B. (1997). *Repositioning Higher Education*. London: Open University Press.
- Courtioux, P. (2008). "How Income contingent Loans could affect Return to Higher Education: A microsimulation of the French case". Available online at <http://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de>, Retrieved February 3, 2010.

- Creswell, J. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. and Miller, D. (2000). "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry". *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 124-131.
- Darandari, E., Al-Qahtani, S., Allen, I., Sudairi, A. and Catapang, J. (2009). "The Quality Assurance System for Post-Secondary Education in Saudi Arabia: A Comprehensive, Developmental and Unified Approach". *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 39-49.
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (1994). "Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research". *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009). "Higher Education". Available online at <http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher-education>, Retrieved December 7, 2009.
- De Vries, W., Cabrera, A. and Anderson, S. (2009). "Higher Education and Wayward Labour Market". *International Higher Education*, No. 54, Winter 2009, pp. 20-21.
- De Vaus, A. (1991). *Surveys in Social Research*. London: UCL Press.
- De Weert, E. (2007). "Graduate Employment in Europe: The Employers' Perspective". In Teichler, U. (ed.), *Careers of University Graduates: Views and Experiences in Comparative Perspectives*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 225-246.
- Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A user-friendly guide for social scientists*. London: Routledge.
- Dolan, D. (2007). "Harvard Endowment Points One Way Forward for Struggling Japanese Universities". Global Communications Platform, August 27, 2007. Available online at <http://www.endowment%20in%20Japan.htm>, Retrieved May 19, 2008.
- Donn, G. and Al-Manthri, Y. (2010). *Globalisation and Higher Education in the Arab Gulf States*. The United Kingdom: Symposium Books Ltd.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Lowe, A. (1994). "The Philosophy of Research Design". In Bennett, N., Glatter, R. and Levacic, R. (eds.), *Improving Educational Management through Research Consultancy*, London: The Open University, pp. 76-93.
- Eaton, J. (2001). "Distance Learning: Academic and Political Challenges for Higher Education Accreditation", *Council for Higher Education Accreditation CHEA Monograph Series 2001*, No. 1, Available online at http://www.chea.org/pdf/mono_1_dist_learning_2001.pdf, Retrieved December 17, 2008.
- Ebben, J. (2005). "Developing Effective Vision and Mission Statements". Available online at <http://www.inc.com/resources/startup/articles/20050201.html>, Retrieved May 1, 2010.
- Eckel, P., Couturier, L. and Luu, D. (2005). "US Privatization, Accountability, and Market-Based State Policy". *International Higher Education*, No. 41, Fall 2005, pp. 12-14.
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2003). *Responding to Globalization: Skill Formation and Unemployment Reduction Policies*. New York: ESCWA.

- Eggins, H. (2003). *Globalization and Reform in Higher Education*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Ehrenberg, R. (2007). "The Economics of Tuition and Fees in American Higher Education". *Working Papers*. Available online at <http://digitalcommons.ilr.comell.edu/workingpapers>, Retrieved 8 February, 2010.
- El-Khawas, E. (2006). "Accountability and Quality Assurance: New Issues for Academic Inquiry". In Forest, J. & Altbach, P. (eds.), *International Handbook of Higher Education*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 23-37.
- El-Khawas, E., DePietro-Jurand, R. and Holm-Nielen, L. (1998). "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent progress; challenges ahead". *Paper presented at the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education*, October 5-9, Paris.
- El-Khawas, M. and El-Khawas, E. (1998). "Mexico's Approach to Quality Assurance". *International Higher Education*, No. 21, Summer 1998, pp. 19-21.
- Federkeil, G. (2003). "The Lack of a National Policy Regime of Quality Assurance in Germany: Implications and Alternatives", *Higher Education Management and Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 2, PP. 63-71.
- Fielden, J. and Cheng, K. (2009). "Financial Consideration". In Bjarnason, S., Cheng, K., Fielden, J., Lemaitre, M., Levy, D. and Varghese, N. (eds.), *A New Dynamic: Private Higher Education*, World Conference on Higher Education 2009, pp. 29-49.
- Fielden, J. and Varghese, N. (2009). "Regulatory Issues in Private Higher Education". *Paper prepared for the World Conference on Higher Education*, July 5-8, 2009, UNESCO, Paris.
- Fong, P. and Lim, L. (2005). "Manpower Planning and University Enrollments: The Debate in Singapore". *International Higher Education*, No. 41, Fall 2005, pp. 11-12.
- Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2003). "Socio-economic Disadvantage and Experience in Higher Education". *JR Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, Available online at <http://www.jrf.org.uk>, Retrieved June 7, 2010.
- Fulbright, J. (1976). "Quotes from Senator James William Fulbright on the Occasion of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Fulbright Programmes, 1976". Available online at <http://www.fulbright.org/ifad/manual/quotes.pdf>, Retrieved January 15, 2010.
- Gay, R. and Airasian, P. (2003). *Educational Research*. New York: Longman.
- Geiger, R. (1986). *Private Sector in Higher Education: Structure, Function, and Change in Eight Countries*. Ann Arbor, USA: The University of Michigan Press.
- Geiger, R. (1987). "Conference Report: Privatisation of Higher Education". *International Council for Educational Development*, June 15-18, 1987, USA.
- Gibbons, M. (1998). "Higher Education Relevance in the 21st Century". *Paper presented at the World Conference on Higher Education*, October 5-9, 1998, UNESCO, Paris.
- Goedegebuure, L. and Meek, L. (1994). "A Resource Dependence Perspective on Mergers: Comparing institutional amalgamations in Australia and the Netherlands". In Goedegebuure, L. & van Vught, F. (eds.), *Comparative Policy Studies in Higher Education*, Utrecht, the Netherlands: Lemma. pp. 127-162.

- Guardian* (2001). "International Student Funding Comparisons: Holland and Sweden". Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk>, Retrieved April 17, 2008.
- Gulf News* (2002). "Interview with the Minister of Higher Education of Oman". *Gulf News*, August 4, 2002.
- Gupta, A. (2004). "Divided Government and Private Higher Education Growth in India". *International Higher Education*, No. 35, Spring 2004, pp. 13-14.
- Habakuk, M. and Alas, R. (2007). "Estonia", In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, pp. 101-130.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography; principles in practice*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Harvard University Gazette* (2007). "Harvard Endowment Posts Strong Positive Return". Available online at <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2007/08.23-endowment.htm>, Retrieved May 19, 2008.
- Hauptman, A. (2006a). "Higher Education Finance: Trends and Issues". In Forest, J. & Altbach, P. (eds.), *International Handbook of Higher Education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 83-106.
- Hauptman, A. (2006b). "Institutional Tuition Fee Discounts: Cost Sharing Without Loans". *International Higher Education*, No. 45, Fall 2006, pp. 8-9.
- Hauptman, A. (2009). "US Financial Crisis and How Students Pay". *International Higher Education*, No. 54, Winter 2009, pp. 22-23.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2008). "Rankings, Diversity, and Excellence: A European Policy Challenge?" *International Higher Education*, No. 51, Spring 2008, pp. 19-21.
- Helms, R. (2009). "University Admissions: Practices and Procedures Worldwide". *International Higher Education*, No. 54, Winter 2009, pp. 5-7.
- Heusser, R. (2006). "Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Decisions". Available online at <http://www.nva0-event.net/inqaah/proceedings.php>, Retrieved 17 September, 2008.
- Hills, J., Robertson, G., Walker, R., Adey, M. and Nixon, I. (2003). "Bridging the Gap between Degree Programme Curricula and Employability through Implementation of Work-Related Learning", *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 211-231.
- Hodson, P. and Thomas, H. (2003). "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Fit for the new millennium or simply year 2000 compliant?" *Higher Education*, Vol. 45, pp. 375-387.
- Hopper, R. (1998). "Emerging Private Universities in Bangladesh: Public Enemy or Ally?" *International Higher Education*, No. 10, pp. 5-6.
- Howe, K. and Eisenhart, M. (1990). "Standards for Qualitative (and Quantitative) Research: A Prolegomenon". *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 2-9.
- Huisman, J. (2003). *Higher Education in Germany*. Country Report, The Netherlands: Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS).

- Human Development Report 2003 (2003). "Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty". *United Nations Development Programme*, United Nations, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Human Development Report 2007/2008 (2007). "Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world". *United Nations Development Programmes*, United Nations, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- INQAAHE (2006). "Policy Statement". Available online at <http://inqaahe.org/docs/policy%20.doc>, Retrieved March 20, 2010.
- International Standards Organisation (ISO) (2006). "ISO 9000 Definitions". Available online at <http://www.praxiom.com/iso-definition.html>. Retrieved October 17, 2008.
- Ishida, H. (2007). "Japan: Educational Expansion and Inequality of Opportunity for Higher Education". In Shavit, Y., Arum, R., and Gamoran, A. (eds.), *Stratification in Higher Education: a Comparative Study*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, pp. 63-86.
- Ismail, S. and Serguieva, A. (2009). "Investigating possible benefits of student loan-backed securitization in the context of the Malaysian higher education". Available online at <http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/09306.pdf>, Retrieved 3 January, 2010.
- Jablecka, J. (2007). "Poland", In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*, Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, pp. 257-312.
- James, E. (1986). "The Private Non-profit Provision of Education: A Theoretical Model and Application to Japan". *Journal of Comparative Economics*, Vol. 10, pp. 255-276.
- James, E. (1991). "Private Higher Education: The Philippines as a prototype". *Higher Education*, Vol. 21, pp. 189-206.
- James, E. (1993). "Why Do Different Countries Choose a Different Public-Private Mix of Educational Services?" *Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 571-592.
- James, E. and Benjamin, G. (1988). *Public Policy and Private Education in Japan*. London: Macmillan.
- Jennings, J. (2007). The Role of an Independent Quality Assurance Body in a Climate of Accountability: New Zealand at the Crossroads. *Paper presented at the 2007 Asia-Pacific Quality Network Conference*, Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, February 6, 2007.
- Johnston, B. (1996). "Student Loans in the Russian Federation: Policy options". Available online http://www.gse.buffalo.ed/publications/student_loan.pdf, Retrieved December 21, 2009.
- Johnstone, B., Arora, A. and Experton, W. (1998). "The Financing and Management of Higher Education: A Status Report on Worldwide Reforms". *Paper presented at the World Conference on Higher Education*, October 5-9, UNESCO, Paris.
- Kanaan, T., Al-Salamat, M. and Hanania, M. (2009). "Higher Education in Jordan: Access and Equity in its Financing". *Jordan Centre for Policy Research and Dialogue*. Available online at <http://www.scibd.com/doc/financing-higher-education-in-Jordan>, Retrieved June 12, 2010.
- Kapiszewski, A. (2006). "Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC countries". *Paper prepared for the United Nations expert group meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region*, Beirut, May 15-17, 2006.

-
- Khaleej Times* (2008). "Tourism Sector to Create More Jobs for Omani Nationals". October 30, 2008, Available on line at <http://khaleejtimes.com>, Retrieved May 20, 2010.
- King, J., Douglass, A. and Feller, I. (2007). "The Crisis of the Publics: An International Comparative Discussion on Higher Education Reforms and Possible Implications for US Public Universities". *Results of a Symposium Organised by the Centre for Studies in Higher Education*, University of California, USA.
- Kinsler, K. and Levy, D. (2006). "For-Profit Higher Education: U.S. Tendencies, International Echoes". In Forest, J. & Altbach, P. (eds.), *International Handbook of Higher Education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 107-119.
- Kumar, R. (1999). *Research Methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kuwait Pocket Guide* (2010). "Business in Kuwait". Kuwait Pocket Guide. Available online at <http://www.kuwaitpocketguide.com/businesskwat.asp>, Retrieved May 17, 2010.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage Publications.
- Labi, A. (2005). "Agencies Announce Quality Controls". *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 52, No. 17, pp. 41-42.
- Larrián, C. and Zurita, S. (2008). "The New Student Loan System in Chile's Higher Education". *Higher Education*, Vol. 55, pp. 683-702.
- Laroui, A. (1991). "University, Research, Development". *Prospects*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 240-247.
- Lawrence, L. (2007). "Integrating fitness for purpose and fitness for purpose auditing models: An integrated quality audit and re-accreditation process", *Paper presented at the 2007 Asia-Pacific Quality Network Conference*, Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, February 6, 2007.
- Lee, M. (2003). "Malaysian Private Higher Education and International Linkages". *International Higher Education*, No. 30, Winter 2003, pp. 17-18.
- Lee, N. and Ashwill, M. (2004). "A Look at Non-public Higher Education in Vietnam". *International Higher Education*, No. 36, pp. 16-17.
- Lee, S. (1998). "Korean Private Higher Education Faces Economic Crisis". *International Higher Education*, No. 13, Fall 1998, pp. 19-20.
- Leedy, P. (1997). *Practical research: Planning and design*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Levy, D. (1986). *The State of Private Higher Education in Latin America*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press.
- Levy, D. (1993). "Recent Trends in the Privatization of Latin American Higher Education: Solidification, Breadth, and Vigour". *Higher Education Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 12-19.
- Levy, D. (2002). "Unanticipated Development: Perspectives on Private Higher Education's Emerging Roles". *PROPHE Working Paper, No. 1*, University at Albany. Available online at <http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/publication/paper.html>, Retrieved April 27, 2009.

- Levy, D. (2005a). "South Africa and the For-Profits/Public Institutional Interface". In Altbach, P. & Levy, D. (eds.), *Private Higher Education: A Global Revolution*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, pp. 79-82.
- Levy, D. (2005b). "Analyzing a Private Revolution: The Work of PROPHE", *International Higher Education*, No. 39, Spring 2005, pp. 13-14.
- Levy, D. (2006). "Private-Public Interfaces in Higher Education Development: Tow Sectors in Sync?" *Paper Prepared for Conference on Higher Education and Development, The 2007 World Bank Regional Seminar on Development Economics, January 16-17, 2006, Beijing*.
- Levy, D. (2007). "A Recent Echo: African Private Higher Education in International Perspective". *JHEA/RESA*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2&3, pp. 197-220.
- Levy, D. (2008a). "The Relative Strength of Israel's Private Colleges". *International Higher Education*, No. 51, Spring 2008, pp. 18-19.
- Levy, D. (2008b). "Access through Private Higher Education: Global Patterns and Indian Illustrations". *PROPHE Working Paper Series*, No. 11, University at Albany, USA.
- Levy, D. (2009). "For-Profit versus Non-Profit Private Higher Education". *International Higher Education*, No. 54, Winter 2009, pp. 12-13.
- Libyan Open University (2009). "About Libyan Open University". Available online at <http://www.lipopenuniv.edu.org>, Retrieved April 30, 2009.
- Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lockheed, M. and Hanushek, E. (1988). "Improving Educational Efficiency in Developing Countries: What do we know?" *Compare*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 21-38.
- Longanecker, D. (1998). "Speech of United States of America to the World Conference on Higher Education". *Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action*, 5-9 October, 1998, UNESCO, Paris.
- Machin, S. and McNally, S. (2007). "Tertiary Education System and Labour Market". *A report paper prepared for the OECD*, Available online at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/55/31.pdf>, Retrieved June 20, 2009.
- Mahmoud, A. (2001). "Trends and Challenges Facing Privatization of Higher Education in the Arab World". *Paper Presented at the International Conference on the University of the 21st Century*, 17-19 March, Muscat, Oman.
- Malakul, P. (1985). "Prospects and Problems in Higher Education Expansion in Thailand". *Higher Education Expansion in Asia, Hiroshima University, Japan: RIHE*, pp. 52-62.
- Marginson, S. (1997). "Imagining Ivy: Pitfalls in the Privatization of Higher Education in Australia". *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 460-480.
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, B. (1995). *Designing Qualitative Research*, Second edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Mayakut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning Qualitative Research: A philosophic and practical guide*, Bristol: Falmer Press.

- Mayer, K., Müller, W. and Pollak, R. (2007). "Germany: Institutional Change and Inequalities of Access in Higher Education", In Shavit, Y., Arum, R. and Gamoran, A. (eds.), *Stratification in Higher Education: a Comparative Study*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, pp. 240-265.
- McKernan, J. (1996). *Curriculum Action Research: A handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner*. London: Kogan.
- Menon, K. (2001). "Private Colleges-Virtual Universities: A Malaysian Experience in increasing capacity in higher education", *Paper presented at the International Conference on the University of the 21st Century*, March 17-19, Muscat, Oman.
- Merriam, S. (1988). *Case Study Research in Education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ministry of Development (1995). *Vision for Oman's Economy*. Oman: Ministry of Development.
- Ministry of Education (1995). *Reform and Development of General Education*. Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education (2000). *The 2001-2005 Development Plan*. Department of Planning and Educational Requirements. Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education (2002). *Secondary Education for Better Future: Trends, Challenges and Priorities*. Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education (2009). *Educational Statistics Year Book*. Issue No. 39, May 2009. Oman: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Higher Education (2002). *A Guide to Private Higher Education Institutions in Oman*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Ministry of Higher Education (2005). *Regulations and Guidelines for Establishing Private Universities and Colleges*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Ministry of Higher Education (2008). *Private Higher Education in Oman: Facts and Figures*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Ministry of Higher Education (2009a). *The General Statistical Book for Higher Education Institutions in Oman*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Ministry of Higher Education (2009b). *Higher Education Admission Statistics for the Academic Year 2008/2009*, Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Ministry of Higher Education (2009c). *Private Higher Education Statistics*. Oman: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Ministry of Information (2003). *Oman: Years of Achievements*. Oman: Ministry of Information.
- Ministry of Information (2009). *Oman 2008-2009*. Oman: Ministry of Information.
- Ministry of National Economy (2003). *Human Resource Development- Oman 2003*. Oman: Ministry of National Economy.
- Ministry of National Economy (2007). *The Results of the Household Expenditure and Income Survey*. Oman: Ministry of National Economy.

- Ministry of National Economy (2008). *Long-Term Development Strategy (1996-2020)*. Oman: Ministry of National Economy.
- Ministry of National Economy (2009a). *Statistical Year Book*. Oman: Ministry of National Economy.
- Ministry of National Economy (2009b). *The Seventh Five-Year Development Plan 2006-2010*. Oman: Ministry of National Economy.
- Mizikaci, F. (2007). "Turkey". In Slantcheva, S., Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*, Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, pp. 483-518.
- Mizikaci, F. and Baumgartl, B. (2007). "Demographic Trends and Risks for European Higher Education". *International Higher Education*, No. 47, Spring 2007, pp. 15-16.
- Mohammed, A. (2009). "Future of Higher Education at the GCC States: Public versus Private". *Paper presented at the Symposium of Non-State Higher Education at the GCC States: Challenges and Opportunities*, 1-2 March, 2009, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Mok, K. (2005). "The Quest for World Class Universities: Quality assurance and international benchmarking in Honk Kong". *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 277-304
- Morley, L. (2003). *Quality and Power in Higher Education*. Buckingham, UK: SRHE & Open University Press.
- Muzammil, M. (1989). *Financing of Education*. New Delhi, India: Ashish Pub. House.
- Myers, M. (2000). "Qualitative Research and the Generalizability of Question: Standing Firm with Proteus". Available online at <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR4-3/myers.html>, Retrieved June 7, 2009.
- Nafi, I. (2005). "The Role of Education in National Development". *Ahram Newspaper*, June 3, 2005, Egypt.
- Nagasawa, M. (2005). "Gender Stratification in Japanese Private Higher Education". *International Higher Education*, No. 40, Summer 2005, pp. 10-12.
- Ngome, C. (2003). "Kenya". In Teferra, D. and Altbach, P. (eds.), *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 359-371.
- Oba, J. (2005). "Higher education in Japan: Incorporated of National Universities and the Development of Private Universities", *Paper presented for seminars on higher education*, February, 2005, Turkey.
- Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (2002). "The Rise of Private Universities and Colleges in the Middle East -in Partnership with foreign Universities". Breaking News Article, 5th December 2002, Available online at <http://www.obhe.ac.uk/cgi-bin/news/article.pl>, Retrieved December 24, 2007.
- Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (2007). "*A Fifth Transnational Hub for the Gulf: Bahrain announcement plans to create a 'Higher Education City'*". Available online at <http://www.obhe.ac.uk/cgi-bin/news/article.pl>, Retrieved May 30, 2008.
- OECD (1990). *Financing Higher Education: Current Patterns*. Paris: OECD.

- OECD (2004). *Internationalization and Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD (2007). *Education at a Glance 2007: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD (2008). *Higher Education to 2030: Demography*, Vol. 1, Paris: OECD.
- Official Gazette (1999). "Royal Decree No. 41/99, Issuing Private Universities Ordinance". *Official Gazette*, No. 648, Oman: Ministry of Legal Affairs.
- Official Gazette (2000). "Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000, Issuing the Regularity Ordinance for Private Higher Education Institutions". *Official Gazette*, No. 673, Oman: Ministry of Legal Affairs.
- Olayiwola, S. (2010). "Alternative Model of Funding for Academic Research in Nigerian Universities". *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 149-160.
- Oman Accreditation Council (2007). *Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes*, Oman: Oman Accreditation Council.
- Oman Accreditation Council (2008). *Quality Audit Manual*, Oman: Oman Accreditation Council.
- Omani Cultural Attaché (2008). *List of Universities and Colleges in United Arab Emirates*. Available online: www.omanca.ae, Retrieved May 26, 2008.
- Oman Daily Observer* (2008). "Oman National Quality Conference 28-29". *Oman Daily Observer*, Edition No. 10,173, October 27, Muscat, Oman.
- Oman Newspaper* (2007). "An Interview with the Minister of Higher Education about the private higher education sector in Oman", *Special Edition on Private Universities and Colleges in Oman*. January 8, 2007, Oman.
- Oman Newspaper* (2004). Accreditation Council "Announcement". *Oman Newspaper*, No. 8365, April 27, Muscat, Oman.
- Patrinos, H. (1990). "The Privatisation of Higher Education in Columbia, Effects on Quality and Equity". *Higher Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 161-173.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Third edition. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.
- Pechar, H., Fiorioli, E. and Thomas, J. (2007). "Austria". In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, pp. 33-62.
- Punch, K. (2005). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Second edition, London: Sage Publications.
- Randall, J. (2002). "Defining Standards-Developing a Global Currency for Higher Education Qualifications". *Paper presented at the Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*, Bangalore, India, March 2001.
- Reeves, A. and Bednar, A. (1994). "Defining Quality: Alternatives and implications". *Academy of Management Review*, No. 19, pp. 419-445.

- Reisz, R. (1997). "Private Higher Education in Romania: A second look". *Tertiary Education and Management*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 36-43.
- Reisz, R. (2003). "Public Policy for Private Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe: Conceptual Clarifications, Statistical Evidence, Open Questions". *Hof Wittenberg –Institute für Hochschulforschung an der Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg* (Institute for Higher Education Research at the Martin Luther University Halle Wittenberge), Available online at <http://ids.hof.uni-halle.de/documents/t530.pdf>, Retrieved September 27, 2008.
- Rena, R. (2008). "Higher Education Trends in Eritrea". *International Higher Education*, No. 51, Spring 2008, pp. 12-13.
- Robson, C. (1996). *Real World Research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rogers, D. (1971). "Financing Higher Education in Less Developed Countries". *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 15, February 1971, pp. 20-27.
- Rosier, M. (1998). "Survey Research Methods". In Keeves, J. (ed.), *Education Research, Methodology and Measurement: An International Handbook*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 107-112.
- Salmi, J. and Verspoor, A. (1994). *Revitalizing Higher Education*. London: Pergamon Press.
- Sanyal, B. (1998). "Diversification of Sources and the Role of Privatisation in Financing Higher Education in the Arab Region". *Paper presented at the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education*, Beirut 2-5 March, 1998.
- Schomburg, H. and Teichler, U. (2006). *Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe: Results from Graduate Surveys from Twelve Countries*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Schultz, T. (1993). "The Economic Importance of Human Capital in Modernization". *Education Economics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 13-19.
- Schwarz, S. and Westerheijden, D. (2004). *Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Scientific Research Council (2007). "National Research Framework". *Workshop 3, 2-3 June, 2007*, Sultanate of Oman, (Unpublished document).
- Seale, C. (1999). "Quality in Qualitative Research". *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 465-478.
- Shapan, M. (1998). *Scientific Research and Future Challenges*. Egypt: University of Ain Shams Publishing.
- Shen, H. (2010). "Advantages and Disadvantages of Student Loans Repayment Patterns". *International Education Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 45-50.
- Singh, J. (1991). "Higher Education and Development: The Experience of Four Newly Industrialising Countries in Asia". *Prospects*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 386-400.

- Slantcheva, S. (2007a). "Legitimizing the Deference: Private Higher Education Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe". In Slantcheva, S. & Levy, D. (eds.), *Private Higher Education in Post-Communist Europe: In Search of Legitimacy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 55-73.
- Slantcheva, S. (2007b). "Bulgaria". In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, pp. 63-100.
- Smith, H. (1991). *Strategies of Social Research*. New York: Rinehart and Winson.
- Stannek, A. and Ziegele, F. (2005). *Private Higher Education in Europe: A National Report on Germany*. Germany: Centre for Higher Education.
- Stannek, A. & Ziegele, F. (2007). "Germany". In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES. pp. 131-212.
- Starr, P. (1988). "The Meaning of Privatization". *Yale Law and Policy Review*, No. 6, pp. 6-41. Available online at <http://www.princeton.edu/starr/meaning.html>, Retrieved March 7, 2008.
- Steier, F. (2003). "The Changing Nexus: Tertiary Education Institutions, the Marketplace and the State". *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vo. 57, No. 2, pp. 157-180.
- Stenbacka, C. (2001). "Qualitative Research Requires Quality Concepts of its Own". *Management Decision*, Vol. 39, No. 7, pp. 551-555.
- Stensaker, B. (2004). *The Transformation of Organisational Identities: Interpretations of policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning in Norwegian higher education*. AE Enschede: CHEPS/UT.
- Stensaker, B. and Kehm, B. (2009). "Introduction: Why a Book about Ranking?" In Kehm, B. and Stensaker, B. (eds.), *University Rankings, Diversity, and the New Landscape of Higher Education*, Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers, pp. VII-XIX.
- Suchman, M. (1995). "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches". *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 571-610.
- Suspitsin, D. (2007). "The Russian Federation". In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. & Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*, Paris: UNESCO-CPES, pp. 399-492.
- Swan, J. (2001). "Transparency- an Essential Characteristic of the Evaluation of Higher Education?" *Paper presented at the Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*, Bangalore, India, March 2001.
- Syrian Virtual University (2009). "About Syrian Virtual University". Available online at <http://www.svuonline.com>, Retrieved April 30, 2009.
- Talloires Network (2005). "The Talloires Declaration on the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education". Available online at <http://www.tufts.edu/talloires>, Retrieved June 1, 2010.
- Taylor, S., Rizvi, B. and Henry, M. (1997). *Education Policy and Politics of Change*. London & New York: Routledge.

- Teferra, D. (2008). "African Higher Education: Projecting the Future". *International Higher Education*, No. 51, Spring 2008, pp. 9-10.
- Teichler, U. (1999). "Higher Education Policy and the World of Work: Changing Conditions and Challenges". *Higher Education Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 258-312.
- Teichler, U. (2003a). "German Higher Education in the European Context". *International Higher Education*, No. 30, Winter 2003, pp. 22-23.
- Teichler, U. (2003b). "Mutual Recognition and Credit Transfer in Europe: Experiences and Problems". *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 312-341.
- Teichler, U. (2007). *Higher Education Systems: Conceptual Frameworks, Comparative Perspectives, Empirical Findings*. Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers.
- Teichler, U. (2008). "Diversification? Trends and Explanations of the Shape and Size of Higher Education". *Higher Education*, Vol. 56, PP. 349-379.
- Teixeira, P. and Amaral, A. (2002). "Private Higher Education and Diversity: An Exploratory Survey". *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 359-395.
- Tilak, J. (1991). "Privatization of Higher Education", *Prospects*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 227-239.
- Tilak, J. (2006). "Global Trends in Funding Higher Education". *International Higher Education*, No. 42, Winter 2006, pp. 5-6.
- Trivellato, P. (2007). "Italy". In Wells, P., Sadlak, J. and Vlasceanu, L. (eds.), *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*, Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, pp. 213-256.
- Tsai, S. and Shavit, Y. (2007). "Taiwan: Higher Education-Expansion and Equality of Educational Opportunity". In Shavit, Y., Arum, R. and Gamoran, A. (eds.), *Stratification in Higher Education: a Comparative Study*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, pp. 140-164.
- Turner, D., Mama Masateru., and Shimada, K. (2000). "Setting Tuition fees in Institutions of Higher Education: Supporting a public service, or charging what the market will pay?" *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 397-408.
- UNESCO (1998). "World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action". *World Conference on Higher Education*, October 9, 1998. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2000). "Basic Texts". Paris: UNESCO. Available online at <http://www.unesco.org>. Retrieved September 7, 2008.
- UNESCO (2001). "Education". Paris: UNESCO. Available online at <http://www.unesco.org/search>, Retrieved October 10, 2008.
- UNESCO (2002). *Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy considerations*. Division of Higher Education. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2003). "Higher Education in the Arab Region 1998-2003: Meeting of Higher Education Partners". *A document prepared by UNESCO regional bureau for education in the Arab States*, June 23-25, 2003, Paris: UNESCO.

- UNESCO (2009). "The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development". *World Conference on Higher Education*, July 5-8, 2009, Paris: UNESCO.
- Uribe, C. (2006). "New Development in Colombia's Higher Education". *International Higher Education*, Winter 2006, No. 42, pp. 20-22.
- Van Damme, D. (2002). "Quality Assurance in an International Environment: National and International Interests and Tensions". *Paper presented to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Seminar III*, June 24, 2002, San Francisco, USA. Available online at http://chea.org/pdf/CHEA_OP_june02.pdf, Retrieved May 9, 2010.
- Varghese, N. (2004a). "Institutional Restructuring in Higher Education in Asia: Trends and Patterns". *Theme paper for the Policy Forum on Institutional Restructuring in Higher Education in Asia*, August 23-24, 2004, Hue City, Vietnam.
- Varghese, N. (2004b). "Private Higher Education in Africa". *International Institute for Educational Planning*, Paris: UNESCO, Available online at <http://www.unesco.org/iiep>, Retrieved October 17, 2008.
- Varghese, N. (2004c). "Private Higher Education". *Report of a policy forum held in Tbilisi, Georgia*, April 25-26, 2002, Paris: IIEP-UNESCO.
- Verma, G. & Mallick, K. (1999). *Researching Education: Perspectives and Techniques*. London: Falmer Press.
- Vincent-Lancrin, S. (2004). "Building Futures Scenarios for Universities and Higher Education: An International Approach". *Policy Futures in Education*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 245-262.
- Wagner, A. (1999). "Financing Higher Education: New approaches, new issues". *Higher Education Management*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 101-112.
- Walford, G. (1990). *Privatization and Privilege in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Westerheijden, D., Brennan, J. and Maassen, P. (1994). *Changing Contexts of Quality Assessment: Recent Trends in West European Higher Education*. Utrecht: Uitgeverij Lemma B.V.
- Wikipedia Free Encyclopaedia (2009). "College and University Rankings", Available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/college_and_university_rankings, Retrieved January 11, 2009.
- Williams, D. (2008). Business school accreditation: Pros and cons. Available online at http://www.mba.hobsons.com/advice/mbachoosing_accreditation, Retrieved September 17, 2008.
- Williams, G. (1992). *Changing Patterns of Finance in Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE & Open University Press.
- Williams, G. (1996). "The Many Faces of Privatisation". *Higher Education Management*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 39-57.
- Winston, G. (1999). "Subsidies, Hierarchy and Peers: The Awkward Economics of Higher Education". *The Journal of Economic Perspective*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 13-36.
- Winter, G. (2000). "A comparative Discussion of the Notion of Validity in Qualitative and Quantitative Research". *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 4, No 3&4, Available online at <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR4-3/winter.html>, Retrieved March 27, 2009.

- Woodhall, M. (1991). "Sharing the Costs of Higher Education: An International Analysis". *Educational Record*, Vol. 72, No. 4, Fall 1991, pp. 27-31.
- Woodhall, M. (1992). "Student Loans in Developing Countries: Feasibility, Experience and Prospects for Reform". *Higher Education*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 347-356.
- Woodhall, M. (1995). "Student Loans". In Carnoy, M. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Economics of Education*, Second edition. Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 426-429.
- Woodhall, M. (2004). "Student Loans: Potential, Problems, and Lessons from International Experience". *JHEA/RESA*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 37-51.
- Woodhall, M. (2007). *Funding Higher Education: The Contribution of Economic Thinking to Debate and Policy Development*. Education Working Paper Series No. 8, December 2009, World Bank.
- Woodhouse, D. (2007). "Crossing Boundaries in Transnational Education". *Paper presented at the 2007 Asia-Pacific Quality Network Conference*, Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, February 6, 2007.
- World Bank (1994). *Higher Education: The Lesson of Experience*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Bank (1995). *Priorities and Strategies in Education: A World Bank Review*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Bank (2000). *Cost Effectiveness Study for the Education Sector in the Sultanate of Oman*. Aide-Memoir, June 7, 2000, Muscat, Oman.
- World Bank (2002). *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Bank (2007). *Malaysia and the Knowledge Economy: Building a World-Class Higher Education System*. Human Development Sector Reports, East Asia and the Pacific Region, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Bank (2008). "The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa". *MENA Development Report 2008*, World Bank, Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Wragg, E. (1994). "Conducting and analysing interviews". In Bennett, N., Glatter, R. & Levacic, R. (eds.), *Improving Educational Management through Research and Consultancy*, London: The Open University, pp. 267-282.
- Yusoff, I. (2001). *An Evaluation of the Contributions of Private Sector Provision to the Development of Higher Education in Malaysia*. Ph.D. thesis, The University of Sheffield, UK.
- Zumeta, W. (1997). "State Policy and Private Higher Education: Past, Present and Future". In Smart, J. (ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Vol. 12. New York: Agathon Press, pp. 43-106.

Zusammenfassung

Masoud A. M. Al Harthy

Private Hochschulbildung im Sultanat Oman: Ursachen, Entwicklung und Herausforderungen

**(Englischer Original-Titel: Private Higher Education in the Sultanate of
Oman: Rationales, Development and Challenges)**

In vielen Ländern gab es in den letzten drei Jahrzehnten eine beträchtliche Expansion der privaten Hochschulbildung. Die starke Nachfrage nach Absolventen mit Hochschulbildung und die häufig unzureichenden Ressourcen der Regierungen führten in vielen Ländern zur Gründung privater Hochschulen.

Die in der Literatur am häufigsten genannten Argumente für die Etablierung eines privaten Hochschulbereichs sind die (a) Möglichkeit, auf Veränderungen in der Nachfrage des Arbeitsmarkts und auf wachsende Studierendenzahlen schnell reagieren zu können, und (b) die mit der Etablierung verbundene Chance, die Kostenlast für die Regierungen zu reduzieren sowie in Zugang und Selektion differenziert reagieren können; dies ermöglicht obendrein, dass die Anbieter der Hochschulbildung ihre Angebote für ihre Klienten (Studenten) transparenter und berechenbarer machen und die Effizienz der Bildung steigern. Private Hochschulbildung wird aber keineswegs nur als Chance gesehen, sondern einige problematische Bereiche werden häufig genannt, so z.B. die folgenden Punkte: (a) Der Zugang zum Studium ist restriktiv, d.h. oft auf diejenigen begrenzt, die hohe Studiengebühren auch zahlen können; (b) die Struktur ist unausgeglichen; (c) die Qualität von Lehre und Forschung ist oft gefährdet..

Private Hochschulen sind im Sultanat Oman erst in jüngster Zeit entstanden: Seit dem Jahr 1996. Bei der verhältnismäßig späten Etablierung eines privaten Hochschulbereichs im Oman ist zu bedenken, dass die erste staatliche Universität im Jahr 1986 – im Vergleich zur Etablierung der Universitäten in den Golfstaaten sehr spät – gegründet worden ist. Nach der Gründung der staatlichen Universitäten gab es zunächst keinen Druck zur Gründung weiterer Hochschulen, da es nur eine sehr kleine Anzahl an erfolgreichen Schulabgängern mit Studiumsvoraussetzungen gab und daneben an den Colleges für die Lehrerbildung und für Berufe im Gesundheitssektor ausreichend Plätze zur Verfügung standen.

Erst im Laufe der 1990er Jahre stieg die Zahl der Absolventen von Sekundarschulen und damit die Nachfrage nach Studienplätzen so stark, dass die Lücke zwischen der Nachfrage nach Studienplätzen und dem Angebot der staatlichen Institutionen groß wurde. Nunmehr ermutigte die Regierung eine Bereitstellung von Studienplätzen an privaten Hochschulen.

Die omanische Regierung legalisierte die privaten Institutionen und unterstützte ihre Entwicklung mit großzügigen Anreizen für diejenigen, die in diesen Bereich investieren wollten. Sie stellte Land zur Verfügung, gab Steuererleichterungen, vergab hunderte von Stipendien für Studierende aus Familien mit geringem Einkommen und vergab an jede der privaten Universitäten ein Kapital von bis zu 20 Millionen RO (US \$ 52 Millionen). Dies hatte einen positiven Einfluss auf private Colleges, die zum Teil schon gegründet worden waren und um die Weiterführung ihrer Aktivitäten kämpften.

Bei den Anreizen und Regelungen zur Etablierung von privaten Hochschulen spielten seitens der Regierung von Oman Überlegungen eine große Rolle, die Qualität der von den privaten Institutionen angebotenen Studienprogramme zu sichern. Dabei war es ein wichtiges Ziel, die Studenten vor skrupellosen Angeboten und Institutionen zu schützen.

Um die Qualität zu sichern, müssen die privaten Institutionen anerkannten ausländischen Universitäten angegliedert sein. Zusätzlich muss die Zustimmung der Regierung zur Eröffnung einer privaten Institution der Hochschulbildung eingeholt werden.

Auch wenn die Zustimmung der Regierung zu den Studienprogrammen und Institutionen nicht als Instrument der Qualitätssicherung im engeren Sinne betrachtet werden kann, ergibt sich dadurch zumindest eine gewisse Qualitätssicherheit. Zusätzlich wurde 2001 der omanische Akkreditierungsrat (Oman Accreditation Council) gegründet, der die Institutionen und die von ihnen angebotenen Programme evaluiert und akkreditiert.

Während der ersten 13 Jahre seit dem Start der privaten Hochschulbildung im Oman (1995/1996 – 2008/2009) wurden 19 private Colleges und 5 private Universitäten offiziell eröffnet, die meisten davon in Muscat und Umgebung.

Die Zahl der Immatrikulationen an den privaten Universitäten und Colleges stieg zwischen 1995/1996 und 2008/2009 stark an: von 1.2% der Gesamtzahl aller Einschreibungen 1995/1996 auf 37% der Gesamtzahl aller Immatrikulationen in 2008/2009.

Diese Studie macht deutlich, was aufgrund dieser Politik vom privaten Hochschulbereich im Oman erwartet wurde: (a) Alle diejenigen sollten aufgenommen werden, die keine Möglichkeit hatten, einen Studienplatz an den öffentlichen Universitäten zu bekommen. (b) Der private Hochschulbereich soll effektiv zur Politik der 'Omanisierung' beitragen, d.h. zum allmählichen Ersatz von ausländischen Berufstätigen in den hochqualifizierten Berufen – vor allem im privaten Wirtschaftsbereich – durch omanische Berufstätige beitragen. (c) Die privaten Universitäten in Oman sollen zum Aufbau von Forschung beitragen – einer Funktion, die auch im öffentlichen Sektor in der Vergangenheit nur geringes Gewicht gehabt hatte (d) Die privaten Universitäten sollten insgesamt dazu beitragen, dass die öffentlichen Ausgaben für Hochschulpolitik sich in Grenzen halten.

Der Situation der privaten Hochschulbildung, die potenzielle Rolle dieses Bereichs in Bildung und Gesellschaft sowie das Ausmaß der Erfüllung der in diesem Bereich gesetzten Erwartung, sind bisher kaum Gegenstand von Forschung gewesen.

Diese Studie stellt die Entwicklung des privaten Hochschulbereichs dar und analysiert sie auf die damit verbundenen Erwartungen. Sie untersucht die wesentlichen Herausforderungen, denen sich dieser Sektor zu stellen hat, und formuliert einige Empfehlungen, um die Rolle der privaten Hochschulbildung im Oman zu fördern. Um die Situation in Oman einordnen zu können, wurde die Literatur zu Systemen der privaten Hochschulbildung in verschiedenen Ländern vergleichend aufgearbeitet. Der Autor dieser Dissertation hat zudem zahlreiche offizielle Dokumente, Statistiken der Regierung, Berichte, Korrespondenzen und auch unveröffentlichtes Material zum Thema Bildung, Wirtschaft und zur Personalentwicklung geprüft und analysiert. Halb-strukturierte Interviews wurden mit Präsidenten und Dekanen privater Hochschulen sowie mit einigen externen Akteuren durchgeführt, um die Stärken und Schwächen, Herausforderungen und Ziele des privaten Hochschulsektors in Oman zu analysieren.

Als Ergebnisse lassen sich nennen, dass der private Hochschulbereich eine bedeutende Rolle spielt bei der Absorption der wachsenden Zahlen von Sekundarschulabsolventen. Die Studie zeigt auch, dass die Ungleichheit beim Zugang zum Studium nach sozial-ökonomischen Hintergrund größer ist als erwartet – obwohl die Regierung private Institutionen indirekt durch die Vergabe von Stipendien an Studierende aus Familien mit niedrigem Einkommen subventioniert. Ein geographisches Ungleichgewicht ist entstanden, weil sich die meisten privaten Universitäten und Colleges im Gouvernement Muscat befinden; das bedeutet für die Studierenden, besonders für die aus ärmeren Familien, eine zusätzliche finanzielle Belastung, da viele von ihnen aus entfernten Regionen des Landes kommen.

Die Studie zeigt ferner, dass der Forschung seitens der privaten Institutionen wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt wird. Dazu trägt bei, dass nur wenige Angehörige des Lehrpersonals Forschungserfahrung haben, dass die angebotenen Studienprogramme mit wenigen Ausnahmen höchstens zu einem Bachelor-Abschluss führen und dass es nur wenige Ansätze gibt, die Studierenden selbst mit Forschung in Berührung zu bringen. Darüber hinaus ist erkennbar, dass weder die Industrie noch die Professionen an die Gestaltung der Curricula der privaten Institutionen und in die Ausrichtung der angewandten Wissenschaften beteiligt werden.

Es gibt darüber hinaus in Oman eine permanente Diskussion darüber, inwieweit die privaten Hochschulen in der Lage sind, eine adäquate Qualität der Hochschulbildung zu gewährleisten. Das scheint insbesondere dann ein Problem zu sein, wenn die privaten Hochschulen auf Profitbasis arbeiten und zumeist nur Studiengänge anbieten, die nicht sehr kostenintensiv sind, wie volks- und betriebswirtschaftliche Fächer, und keine kostenintensive Studiengänge, die teure Labore und Ausstattung benötigen, wie z.B. Medizin oder Ingenieurwissenschaften; auch scheint es Qualitätsprobleme zu geben, wenn die privaten Hochschulen selbst den einfachsten Weg wählen und sich fast ausschließlich über Studiengebühren finanzieren, statt sich um eine Diversifizierung von Einkommensquellen zu bemühen.

Als weiteres Ergebnis ist zu nennen, dass die privaten Hochschulen zwar in gewissem Ausmaß der Nachfrage des Omanischen Arbeitsmarkts nachgekommen sind und die Politik der „Omanisierung“ unterstützt haben, aber nicht zu einer deutlichen Steigerung der Beschäftigung in den angewandten Wissenschaften und den Ingenieurwissenschaften beigetragen haben – beides Bereiche der Wirtschaft, in denen es einen Mangel an Absolventen gibt.

Schließlich kann auch die geringe Anzahl omanischer Wissenschaftler unter den Wissenschaftlern an den privaten Hochschulen als Problem angesehen werden: es sind nur 13%, inklusive der Teilzeit-Lehrenden.

Der Autor der Dissertation benennt eine Anzahl an Empfehlungen zur Förderung des Beitrags der privaten Hochschulbildung im Oman, vor allem:

- Der private Sektor muss weiter konzentrierte Anstrengungen unternehmen, um die Forschungskapazität zu fördern, vor allem durch die Bereitstellung einer adäquaten Forschungs-Infrastruktur bei gleichzeitiger Entwicklung enger Beziehungen zur Wirtschaft im Bereich von Forschung und Beratung.
- Die Fördermittel der Regierung für die private Hochschulbildung sollten auf der Basis einer ergebnisorientierten Finanzierung erfolgen.
- Um die Qualität der Hochschulausbildung zu sichern, sollte die Rolle des omanischen Akkreditierungsrats gestärkt werden, indem mehr Experten in seine Komitees berufen werden und ein Experten-Austausch mit internationalen Akkreditierungsagenturen der Qualitätssicherung angestrebt wird.
- Die Anforderungen des omanischen Arbeitsmarkts sollten sorgfältig untersucht werden, um den Output der Hochschulen entsprechend den Notwendigkeiten des Arbeitsmarktes genauer bestimmen zu können.
- Der Geist der sozialen Verantwortung im privaten Sektor sollte gefördert werden, z.B. durch Stipendien, völlige oder teilweise Befreiung von Studiengebühren für sozio-ökonomisch benachteiligte Studierende, etc.
- Die Anzahl der Stipendien und Zuschüsse, die die Regierung gewährt, sollte für Studierende aus Familien mit niedrigem Einkommen erhöht werden, zusammen mit der Einführung von zinslosen Darlehen.

- Um die Chancen aller Studenten zu verbessern und die finanzielle Belastung der Studierenden und ihrer Familien zu verringern, sollte die örtliche Ansiedlung der privaten Institutionen dezentralisiert werden.

In der Studie finden sich zum Schluss einige Vorschläge zur weiteren Erforschung, damit die Bedürfnisse aller am Hochschulsystem Beteiligten besser erfüllt werden können: (a) Regelmäßige Absolventen-Befragungen sollten erfolgen, um die Politik mit Informationen über Verzahnung der Hochschulausbildung mit den Anforderungen des Arbeitsmarkts zu versorgen; (b) weitere Untersuchungen sollten durchgeführt werden, um die Faktoren zu identifizieren, die die omanischen Studierenden dazu motivieren, an privaten Hochschulen zu studieren.

Appendices

Appendix 1a

**Royal Decree No. 67/2000
(As amended by Royal decrees 25/2001 and 97/2001)
On Some Provisions Related to Higher Education Institutions**

We, Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman

After perusal of the State's basic Statute promulgated by Royal Decree No. 101/96, Royal Decree No. 65/98 establishing the Council of Higher Education, Royal Decree No. 42/99 on establishing of Private Higher Institutes and Colleges, And pursuant to the exigency of public interest, Have decreed the following;

Article (1): Public and private higher education institutions may benefit from post graduate cadres in employ of governmental units or public and private sectors subject to the prior consent of the competent authorities.

Article (2): Sultan Qaboos University shall be accredited as consultancy agency for governmental units, private and public sectors on social and developmental projects.

Article (3): The government shall provide lands for private higher education institutions. The institutions may be exempted from paying land fees while they are owned, utilized and rented. This should be subjected to the conditions and rules drawn up by the Council of Higher Education in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transport and Housing.

Article (4): The government shall grant private universities the equivalent of 50% of the institution's paid up capital subject to a maximum three million Omani Rials in accordance with the conditions and rules drawn up the competent authority.

Article (5): Private higher education institutions shall be exempted from all taxes levied on establishments and companies for five years from the date of commencement of activities. The exemption may be renewed for another five years by a decision from the Council of Financial Affairs and Energy Sources.

Article (6): Private higher education institutions shall be exempted from payment of fees due to the following agencies:

- *Muscat Municipality/Regional Municipalities*
 - a. Commercial signs of private educational establishments (once only)
 - b. Direction signs in two locations free of charge
 - c. Fees for issuing brochures
 - d. Renewal fees of building permits of the institution's campus

- *Ministry of Transport and Housing*
 - a. Lands registration fees
 - b. Lands mortgage fees
 - c. Title deeds and boundary designation

- *Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training*

Fees of labour permits for academic staff

- *Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)*
Fees of issue and renewal of OCCI membership
- *Royal Oman Police*
 - a. Fees for visas for academic staff
 - b. Fees for gaining and renewing motor vehicle, means of transport and equipment licenses
 - c. Custom duties on laboratory equipment imported by the educational establishment

Article (7): All that contradict this Decree shall be abolished.

Article (8): This Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall become effective from the date of its publication.

Qaboos bin Said
Sultan of Oman

Promulgated on 17th July, 2000

(Amended by Royal Decree No. 25/2005 on 2nd April, and by Royal Decree No. 97/2001 on 27th August, 2001)

Appendix 1b

**Diwan of Royal Court
Ministerial Decision No. 1/2002**

**Issuing Conditions and Regulations for Granting Lands to Private Higher Education
Institutions**

In accordance with Royal Decree No. 65/89 establishing the Council of Higher Education, and Royal Decree No. 67/2000 regarding special provisions for higher education institutions and amendments therein, and
The Regulatory Ordinance of Private Colleges and Higher Institutes issued by Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000, and
The Decision by the council of Higher Education, No 4, issued in its third session on 9th December, 2001, approving the conditions and regulations for granting lands to private higher education institutions, and
In accordance with the public interest,
It has been decreed;

Article (1): The attached conditions and regulations for granting lands to private higher education institutions shall be applicable.

Article (2): This decision shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be effective from the date of its publication.

Ali bin Hamoud Al-Busaidi

Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court,
Chairman of the Council of Higher Education

Promulgated on 30th June, 2002

Appendix 1b (Continued)**Conditions and Regulations for
Granting Lands to Private Higher Education Institutions**

- Article (1):** A private higher education institution, having obtained a final approval for its establishments in accordance with the provisions of the Regulatory Ordinance for Private Higher Education Institutions referred to above, shall submit its application for acquiring land to the Ministry of Higher Education, which in turn, shall study the application and evaluate it in terms of its feasibility and the projected volume of its activities, therefore referring the application along with the institution's feasibility study to the Ministry of Housing, Electricity and Water.
- Article (2):** The Ministry of Housing, Electricity and Water in consultation with the Ministry of Higher Education shall specify the location and area of the lands to be granted to the private higher education institution, in accordance with the actual needs of the institution and the lands available through the Ministry of Housing, Electricity and Water.
- Article (3):** The lands granted shall not be used for any purpose other than those specified; and for which the lands were originally intended; and, in accordance with Royal Decree No. 5/85, regulating the use of the Sultanate's lands, and its Executive Regulations issued via Royal Decree No. 88/82 and amendments therein.
- Article (4):** The allocation of the land shall be through offering the institution concerned the right of utilisation, allowing the institution to benefit from the land until the responsible authorities issue a construction completion certificate, thereupon transferring the title of the land to the institution.
- Article (5):** Construction on the lands shall begin within three years of allocation of the lands. The Ministry of Housing, Electricity and Water shall, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Higher Education, be entitled to terminate the use of the land if the construction does not begin during the specified period.
- Article (6):** Without prejudice to the provisions of Article '30' of the Regulatory Ordinance of Private Higher Education Institutions referred to above, the property shall not be sold and the right of using it shall not be assigned to any other party without the prior approval of the Council of Higher Education. Sale of the land shall be possible only after ownership of the land has been granted. In case of waiver or exemption from payment of the value of land, or compensation for its use, sale or assignment shall take place only after the lapse of five years from the date of completion of the buildings or construction on the land.
- Article (7):** Private higher education institutions may take loans against the right of using the land, for construction purposes and for completing the project, subject to the condition that the loan is used to execute the project for which the land was allocated and does not contradict the provisions of Royal Decree No. 5/81 and its Executive Regulations, referred to above, and amendments therein.
- Article (8):** The Council of Higher Education may exempt private higher education institutions from paying the value of the lands after ownership of these lands has been granted and after issuance of the completion of construction certificate, or against use due to the Ministry of Housing, Electricity and Water, on recommendation from the Ministry of Higher Education and subject to the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

Appendix 1c

**Diwan of Royal Court
Ministerial Decision No. 2/2002**

Issuing Conditions and Regulations for Offering Financial Grants to Private Universities

In accordance with Royal Decree No. 65/98, establishing the Council of Higher Education and amendments therein, and
The Private Universities Ordinance issued by Royal Decree No. 41/99, and
The Royal approval by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said of the recommendations submitted by the Council of Higher Education regarding the establishment of private universities, and
The executive Regulations of the Private Universities Ordinance issued through Ministerial Decision No. 39/99, and
The Decision of the Council of Higher Education No. 4, issued in its third session on 9th December, 2001, approving the conditions and regulations for offering financial grants to private universities, and
In accordance with the public interest,
It has been decreed;

Article (1): The attached conditions and regulations for offering financial grants lands to private higher education establishments shall be applicable.

Article (2): This decision shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be effective of the date of its publication.

Ali bin Hamood Al-Busaidi
Minister of the Royal Court,
Chairman of the Council of Higher Education

Promulgated on 30th June, 2002

Appendix 1c (Continued)**Conditions and Regulations for
Offering Financial Grants to Private Universities**

Article (1): To receive financial grants, private universities must be duly registered in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations, and must satisfy the conditions and requirements stipulated in the Private Universities Law and its Executive Regulations referred to above.

Article (2): A private university, wishing to receive a financial grant shall submit its application, accompanied by the documents stipulated in Article (1), to the Ministry of Higher Education to be studied and referred to the Council of Higher Education to issue a decision regarding approval of the grant before submitting the application to the Ministry of Finance.

Article (3): The maximum amount of the grant shall be 50% of the paid capital of the university (original capital or including an increase), but it shall not exceed RO 3 million. The grant may be made in instalments according to the paid capital of the university.

Article (4): The grant shall be allocated to pay for the costs of construction of buildings and other installations and equipment necessary for the establishment of the university. The grant shall not, however, be allocated to pay current operating expenses.

Article (5): Grants shall be paid in accordance with the following requirements:

1. Payment of the grant shall commence only after full payment of the capital of the university.
2. Payment of the grant shall be made in accordance with the ratios of financing specified in the financing structure of the project for the establishment of the university, and after being approved by the Ministry of Higher Education.
3. Payment shall be made within four (4) years from the date of signing of the contract stipulated in Article (6) of these conditions and regulations.
4. Payment shall be made in accordance with a certificate duly approved by the consultant of the project for the establishment of the university and by an application duly signed by the authorised signatory.

Article (6): The Ministry of Finance shall, on behalf of the Government, sign the grant contract with the founders or owners of the university or their legal representative. The Development Bank of Oman shall undertake to manage and execute the grant in accordance with the provisions of Royal Decree No. 99/91 regulating capital grants and support of pre-investment studies. The founders or owners shall bear the remunerations specified for the management and execution of the grant.

Article (7): Founders or owners shall undertake to offer the necessary financial guarantees or real and material insurance required to guarantee the execution of the commitments specified in accordance with these conditions and regulations and the contracts signed with them. These guarantees shall be registered in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations. These guarantees and the assurances stipulated in this Article shall be valid for five (5) years from the date of the payment of the last instalment of the grant.

Article (8): Founders or owners shall not dispose of the assets of the project financed by the grant, or any part of it, without the approval of the Council of Higher Education.

Article (9): Founders or owners shall undertake to repay or reimburse the grant paid to them in full in the instance of violation of any of the provisions of Article (4) or Article (8) of these conditions and regulations; or, any of the conditions and regulations stipulated in the grant contract mentioned in Article (6) of these conditions and regulations.

Appendix 2

Royal Decree No.65/98 Establishing the Council of Higher Education

We, Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman

After perusal of the State's Basic Statute promulgated by Royal Decree No. 101/96, Sultan Qaboos University Act issued by Royal Decree No. 9/86, the amendments thereto, Royal Decree No. 2/94 establishing the Ministry of Higher Education, Royal Decree No. 15/94 defining the responsibilities of the Ministry of Higher Education, And pursuant to the exigency of public interest, Have decreed the following;

Article (1): A Council of Higher Education shall be established and shall be formed as follows:

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| • The Minister of Diwan of Royal Court | Chairman |
| • The Minister of Higher Education | Deputy Chairman |
| • The Minister of National Economy | Member |
| • The Minister of Education | Member |
| • The Minister of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training | Member |
| • Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University | Member |
| • Secretary General of the Council of Higher Education | Member and Reporter |
| • Seven members to be selected from the intelligentsia, scholars and the private sector to be appointed by Royal Decree. | |

Article (2): The Council of Higher Education shall assume the following responsibilities:

- a) Formulate public policy on higher education and scientific research at universities and higher institutes in line with the requirements of the country and the state's cultural, social, economic and scientific objectives.
- b) Coordinate admission to universities and higher institutes and determine number of entrants in coordination with the competent bodies.
- c) Coordinate functions of corresponding units in various higher education institutions.
- d) Review and propose amendments to the rules and regulations of higher education in the light of developments in government policies.
- e) Examine the difficulties facing higher education and propose solutions to deal with them.
- f) Review higher education bills drafted by the competent authorities.
- g) Study and comment on matters related to higher education referred by HM the Sultan or the Council of Ministers.
- h) Consider higher education issues reported by universities and competent government bodies.
- i) Consider issues related to various educational standards and quality.
- j) Review annual reports prepared by universities and competent government bodies on the performance of higher education institutions and make appropriate recommendations to appraise and enhance such performance.
- k) Prepare annual reports on the status of higher education and make appropriate recommendations for the consideration of the Council of Ministers.
- l) Periodically follow-up implementation of the Council's policies and decisions.

Article (3): The Council shall convene once every four months. It may be called for extraordinary sessions as and when required. The Council shall meet at the invitation of its chairman. In the absence of the chairman, the deputy chairman shall convene the Council and preside over its sessions when necessary.

Article (4): A quorum shall be achieved by the attendance of a majority of members including the chairman or the deputy chairman. Resolutions shall be adopted by the consent of a majority of members and in case of a tie the chairman shall have the casting vote.

Article (5): The Council may form ad hoc committees to address specific issues and may seek experts' advice at its meetings or at the sessions of its committees. The competent parties in the private and public sectors shall furnish the Council with the data, statistics and information it deems necessary for carrying out its tasks.

Article (6): The Council shall lay down internal regulations to organise its operational functions. The regulations shall be issued by a decision from the chairman.

Article (7): The Secretary General to the Council of Higher Education shall assume the tasks of the Council Secretariat and shall be responsible for taking the minutes, collecting data and preparing studies pertaining to the Council agenda in addition to any other tasks assigned by the Council.

Article (8): This Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall take effect from the date of its promulgation.

Qaboos bin Said
Sultan of Oman

Promulgated on 27th September, 1998

Appendix 3

Application for Establishment of Private Higher Education Institution

A. Administrative data

1. Name of applicant.....

2. Nationality.....

Gender *Male* () *Female* ()

3. Current employment (if applicable).....

4. Place of employment.....

5. Contact information of applicant

- a. Postal address of applicant
- b. Work Phone No..... Mobile No.....
- c. Fax No.....
- d. E-mail address.....

5. Official trading name and abbreviation (if applicable).....

6. Company registration number (if applicable).....

7. Particulars of authorized contact person/s if different from above

- a. Name.....
- b. Postal address.....
- c. Work phone No..... Mobile No.....
- d. Fax No..... E-mail address.....

B. Institutional data

1. Objectives of the establishment of the institution

.....

2. Proposed vision and mission statements of the institution

.....

3. Proposed name/names of the institution (at least three)

- a).....
- b).....
- c).....

4. Proposed location/s of the institution

.....

5. Approach to be used to attract students locally and abroad

.....

C. The academic partner institution/s

1. Name of partner institution/s

.....

2. Type of academic partnership (affiliation, franchise, cooperation, etc.)

3. Brief summary of the partner institution/s (location, foundation date, ranking, number of students, offered majors, details of accreditation)

4. Intended role of the partner institution/s in the establishment of institution

5. Physical address of the partner institution/s

6. Contact person/s of partner institution

- a) Name.....
- b) Job title.....
- c) Address.....
- d) E-mail address.....

D. Proposed academic programmes including the foundation year

Name of programme/s*	Duration of programme	System of study	Admission requirements	Type of degree/s	Medium of instruction	Degree awarding institution	Tuition fees

* Proposed name of colleges and the departments to be mentioned if the institution is a university

E. Proposed number of students and staff

Programme	Projected number of students and academic staff				
	Foundation year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Total					
Academic/Administrative/Technical staff					
Academic staff					
Technical staff					
Administrative staff					
Total					

F. Founders' data*

Name	Current profession	Academic qualification	Nationality	Place of residence	Percentage of share

G. The expected financial cost of the project

- 1. Project capital.....
- 2. Sources of funding and percentage of each source.....

Attachments

- 1. A letter of intent between the institution to be established in the Sultanate of Oman and the partner/s institution, including in particular: academic partnership agreement, programmes to be offered, the purpose of partnership -the faculty role- the authority for conferring degrees -the titles of the awards; opportunities for the completion of programmes of study abroad, and possibilities for academic exchange, and proposed quality assurance measures.
- 2. The academic manual of academic partner institution/s
- 3. Curriculum Vitae for all founders
- 4. A statement by the investors regarding their desire to implement the project, to guarantee it and to assume responsibility for follow-up
- 5. Clarifies the founders' names, their investment percentages and their signings and pledges non withdrawal from the project without the approval of the Council of Higher Education.

For the use of the Department of Institutional & Programmes Licensing only
<i>Date of receipt of application</i>
<i>Name of employee</i>
<i>Signature</i>

Appendix 4**Royal Decree No. 74/2001
Establishing the Oman Accreditation Council**

We, Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman

After perusal of the State's Basic Statute, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 101/96,
Royal Decree No. 65/98 establishing the Council of Higher Education,
Royal Decree No. 70/2000, establishing the Directorate General of Private Universities and
Colleges,
And pursuant to the exigency of public interest,
Have decreed the following;

Article (1): By virtue of the Decree, a board by the name "The Accreditation Council" shall be set up and shall be assigned the following responsibilities:

1. Prepare necessary studies and research on the requirements and standards of accreditation of higher education institutions and the programmes taught at them and review the basic for their accreditation in the light of the policies made by the Council of Higher Education
2. Accredite higher education institutions
3. Accredite programmes of study offered by higher education institutions
4. Evaluate competency requirements demanded for the practice of professions and ensure that the academic programmes of higher education institutions meet these requirements
5. Gather information and data on programmes offered by higher education institutions and report on their quality to the Council of Higher Education
6. Lay down the procedures for performance appraisal and quality improvement of higher education institutions
7. Review amendments pertaining to the national framework of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions

Article (2): The Accreditation Council shall be formed from ten members to be selected from the following:

1. Teaching staff members at higher education institutions who hold a minimum title of associate professor
2. Competent and experienced professionals who hold postgraduate qualifications. No number shall have any financial stake in any private higher education institutions for the duration of membership

Article (3): The Accreditation Council shall be formed by a Royal Decree and the membership shall be for five years renewable by a decision from the chair of the Council of Higher Education. The Council of Higher Education may recommend changes to the membership of the Accreditation Council before the expiry of its period when necessary.

Article (4): The Accreditation Council shall convene every four months but may be called for extraordinary meeting whenever necessary. The Council shall meet at the invitation of its

chairman. In the absence of the chairman, the deputy chair shall convene the Council and preside over its sessions.

Article (5): A quorum shall be achieved by the attendance of a majority of members including the chair or the deputy chair. Resolutions shall be adopted by the consent of a majority of members and in case of a tie, the chairman shall have the casting vote.

Article (6): The higher education institutions and other related parties shall provide the Council with data, statistics and information it requires and deems imperative for the accomplishment of its tasks.

Article (7): Three specialised committees shall be established by the Council and make recommendations on accreditation of higher education institutions, accreditation of study programmes, follow-up and quality control. Formation of these committees, determination of their terms of reference and internal regulations shall be made by a decision from the chair of the Accreditation Council. The committees shall present their recommendations to the Accreditation Council.

Article (8): The Accreditation Council may seek advice from any experts and specialists at its meetings or at the sessions of its committees. Such experts and specialists shall not be entitled to a vote on deliberations of the Council.

Article (9): The Accreditation Council shall lay down internal regulations to organise its operational functions. Such regulations shall be issued by a decision from the chairman after the approval of the Council of Higher Education.

Article (10): The Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges shall assume the tasks of the Technical Secretariat of the Accreditation Council and shall be responsible for making arrangements for its meetings, preparing the minutes of its sessions, taking the action required for the implementation of its decisions and carrying out or following up any other tasks allotted by the Council.

Article (11): This Decree shall be published in the official gazette and shall take effect from the date of its promulgation.

Qaboos bin Said
Sultan of Oman

Promulgated on 27th June, 2001

Appendix 5

A sample of the letters sent to vice-chancellors of the private universities and deans of the private colleges in Oman related to conducting interviews.

Dr.
Vice-Chancellor
University of...
Sultanate of Oman

Re.: Interview on Private Higher Education in Oman

Dear Dr. ...,

First of all, I would like to express my best greetings.

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Kassel, Germany, and currently I am carrying out research on private higher education in the Sultanate of Oman and the challenges it faces. The elements that will be focused on in the interview are attached to this letter.

I would be very grateful if you would give me an opportunity to conduct an interview with you at a time that suits you. I am sure that your ideas and thoughts would be of great value to this study.

I also would be grateful if you would permit me to tape-record this interview, which will facilitate the process of transcribing.

I assure you that all the information you provide will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will be used only for the research purpose.

Thank you very much for your kind support and cooperation.

Masoud Al Harthy
Ph.D Student

Appendix 6a**Guide for semi-structured interviews with top management of private institutions**

Item	Question
Rationales and objectives of private higher education	<p>1. What are the rationales behind establishing your institution?</p> <p>2. In the light of the rationales you have addressed, how would you assess the current contribution of your institution towards them?</p> <p>3. Are key functions of higher education (teaching, scientific research, and community service) currently performed in your institution? How?</p> <p>4. How would assess the degree of cooperation between your institution and the labour market sector, in terms of the nature and relevance of academic programmes offered by your institution?</p>
Admission criterion	<p>1. What is the admission criterion adopted in your institution? What are the reasons behind this?</p> <p>2. Is there any intervention from the government in determining or setting specific admission criteria for your institution? If yes, what is the reflection of intervention on your institution?</p>
Factors attracting students to study in private institutions	<p>1. What are the most important factors that attract students to study in your institutions? Why?</p>
Access and equity	<p>1. Is there any particular policy or scheme applied at your institution to ensure both accessibility and equity, especially for students from low-income families? What are these schemes?</p> <p>2. Many countries have introduced loan schemes for students wishing to study in higher education institutions, whereby they repay the cost of their education during their working life. To what extent do you think such a scheme can be implemented in Oman? How?</p> <p>3. In your opinion, what are the mechanisms or options to increase access into Omani private higher education institutions?</p>
Funding sources	<p>1. What are the key sources of funding for your institution in the current stage?</p> <p>2. Is scientific research activity considered as an additional resource of revenue to your institution? Why?</p> <p>3. How would you assess the contribution of wealthy individuals and businessmen in financing higher education in the country? What is the situation in terms of your institution?</p>

<p>Quality aspects</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What efforts are being made by your institution to ensure a relatively high quality? How? 2. Does the foreign university you are affiliated with play any particular role in assessing or evaluating the educational process in your institution? How? 3. Does your institution contain a unit/office of quality assurance? What are the main tasks of this unit/office? 4. What is/are the mechanism/s adopted in your institution to evaluate the performance of your graduates in the world of work? 5. Literature on higher education argues that merger of higher education institutions helps to promote their quality and financial status. In your opinion, does this idea suit the situation of Omani private institutions? How?
-------------------------------	--

Appendix 6b**Interview guide with officials in the Ministry of Higher Education**

Item	Question
Rationales and objectives of private higher education	<p>1. What are the rationales behind allowing the private sector to establish higher education institutions in Oman?</p> <p>2. In the light of the rationales you have addressed, how would assess the current contribution of these institutions towards them?</p> <p>3. To what extent do you think that programmes offered by private institutions match demands of the labour market? How?</p>
Access and equity	<p>1. The growth of private higher education in many countries has created concern about access and equity. How do you see the situation in the Omani context? In your opinion, what are the most appropriate scenarios to meet this concern?</p>
Funding challenges	<p>1. In your judgment, what are the key sources of funding of private higher education institutions in Oman?</p> <p>2. How would you assess the contribution of wealthy individuals and businessmen in financing higher education?</p> <p>3. Private institutions may argue that affiliation with international universities represents an additional financial burden to them compared to the services offered by foreign universities. To what extent do you think this is the case? Why?</p>
Quality aspects	<p>1. What are the mechanisms currently adopted by the government to maintain quality in private higher education?</p> <p>2. How would assess the role that the Oman Accreditation Council, as an authorised and responsible body, currently plays in evaluating and accrediting Oman's private higher education institutions?</p> <p>3. Merger of some higher education institutions has been practised in some countries to strengthen their efficiency and financial status. In your opinion, does this idea suit the situation of Omani private institutions? Why?</p> <p>4. How would you rate the current efforts of private institutions in promoting their academic staff with Omani citizens? Why?</p> <p>5. Up to now, about ten cohorts have graduated from the private institutions in Oman. How would you assess their performance in the world of work? Why?</p>

Appendix 7a

**U N I K A S S E L
V E R S I T Ä T**

Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung Kassel
INCHER-Kassel - 34109 Kassel

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler

Postanschrift Mönchebergstr. 17
D-34109 Kassel

Lieferanschrift Mönchebergstr. 17
D-34109 Kassel

Telefon (49) (0) 5 61 804-2415

Durchwahl (49) (0) 5 61 804-2415

Telefax (49) (0) 5 61 804-7415

Aktenzeichen INCHER/tei/ma

Datum 15.12.2008

E-mail: teichler@incher.uni-kassel.de

To Whom It May Concern

Re.: Survey on Private Higher Education, Mr. Masoud Ali Al-Harthy

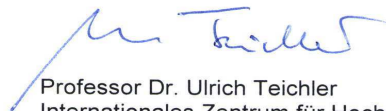
We would like to inform you that Mr. Masoud Ali Al-Harthy is a PhD student at the International Centre for Higher Education Research, University of Kassel, Germany.

Mr. Al-Harthy currently conducts research on the "Private Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman", and he is in the process of carrying out interviews with decision-makers in some governmental organizations related to the higher education sector, particularly private higher education, as well as Vice-Chancellors and Deans in private higher education institutions.

This study will provide information for Mr. Al-Harthy's dissertation; it is a purely academic exercise.

Your kind cooperation in facilitating the researcher's task will be highly appreciated.

Kassel, December 15, 2008



Professor Dr. Ulrich Teichler
Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung Kassel
(INCHER-Kassel)
Universität Kassel
Teichler@incher.uni-kassel.de

Appendix 7b

**U N I K A S S E L
V E R S I T Ä T**

International Centre for Higher Education Research
INCHER-Kassel

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler

Postanschrift Mönchebergstr. 17
D-34109 Kassel

Lieferanschrift Mönchebergstr. 17
D-34127 Kassel

Telefon (49) (0) 5 61 804-2415

Durchwahl (49) (0) 5 61 804-2415

Telefax (49) (0) 5 61 804-7415

Aktenzeichen INCHER/tei/ma

Datum 08.11.2007

E-mail: teichler@incher.uni-kassel.de

To Whom It May Concern

Mr. Masoud Ali Al-Harthy

We would like to inform you that Mr. Masoud Ali Al-Harthy is a Ph. D. Student at the University of Kassel, Germany.
Mr. Al-Harthy is in the process of preparing of his thesis regarding "Private Higher Education in Oman".

Your kind cooperation in providing him with relevant information and data for his research study will be highly appreciated.



Professor Ulrich Teichler
Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung
INCHER-Kassel
Universität Kassel

Appendix 8a

Letter from the Ministry of Higher Education authorising the researcher to conduct interviews with officials and decision-makers in the Ministry of Higher Education (written in Arabic)

سلطنة عُمان

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Higher Education
Directorate General of Scholarships
Department of Postgraduate Studies



سلطنة عُمان
 وزارة التعليم العالي
 المديرية العامة للبعثات
 دائرة الدراسات العليا

الرقم : د.د.ع. / : ٢٦٢

التاريخ : ١١/١٢/٢٠١٩

الموافق : ١١/١٢/٢٠١٩

شهادة لمن يهمله الأمر

تشهد دائرة الدراسات العليا بوزارة التعليم العالي بأن الفاضل / مسعود بن علي بن ماجد الحارثي مقيد بجامعة University of Kassel لنيل درجة الدكتوراة في مجال " التخطيط واقتصاديات التعليم العالي " وهو حالياً في مرحلة إجراء المقابلات حول بحثه (التعليم العالي الخاص في سلطنة عمان : واقعة وتحديات) .

نرجو التكرم بمساعدة المذكور في تسهيل مهمة حول إجراء تلك المقابلات المتعلقة بدراسته.


 علي بن عبدالله الحارثي
 مدير الدراسات العليا



ص.ب : ٨٢ روي، الرمز البريدي : ١١٢، سلطنة عمان، مباشر : ٢٤٧٥٥٧١٢، فاكس : ٢٤٧٥٥٧١٤
 P.O. Box : 82 Ruwi, Postal Code : 112, Sultanate of Oman, Dir. : 24755712, Fax : 24755714
 E-mail : DG_scholarship@mohe.gov.om

Appendix 8b

Letter from the Ministry of Higher Education authorising the researcher to conduct interviews with vice chancellors and deans of private universities and colleges (written in Arabic)

سلطنة عُمان

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Higher Education
Directorate General of Scholarships
Department of Postgraduate Studies



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التعليم العالي
الدراسات العليا والبحوث
إدارة الدراسات العليا

الرقم : د.د.ع / ٢٦٤
التاريخ :
الموافق : ٢٠١٤ / ١١ / ٢٤

No. :
Date :

الأفاضل / رؤساء و عمداء الجامعات والكليات الخاصة المحترمين

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ... وبعد ،،،

الموضوع : تسهيل مهمة باحث الدراسات العليا الفاضل / مسعود بن علي بن ماجد الحارثي

تشهد دائرة الدراسات العليا بوزارة التعليم العالي بأن المذكور أعلاه مقيد بجامعة University of Kassel لنيل درجة الدكتوراة في مجال " التخطيط واقتصاديات التعليم العالي " وهو حالياً في مرحلة إجراء المقابلات حول بحثه (التعليم العالي الخاص في سلطنة عمان : واقعه وتحدياته) .

نرجو التكرم بمساعدة المذكور في تسهيل مهمة حول إجراء تلك المقابلات المتعلقة بدراسته.

شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم .

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير ،،،


علي بن عبدالله الحارثي
مدير الدراسات العليا



ص.ب : ٨٢ روي، الرمز البريدي : ١١٢، سلطنة عمان، مباشر : ٢٤٧٥٥٧١٢، فاكس : ٢٤٧٥٥٧١٤
P.O. Box : 82 Ruwi, Postal Code : 112, Sultanate of Oman, Dir. : 24755712, Fax : 24755714
E-mail : DG_scholarship@mohe.gov.om