

Original Article

# Looking at Oman and Global Higher Education in terms of Quality, Assessment, and Employability

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**Abstract:** The primary goal of this study was to further the theory of higher Education (PPT) by examining quality, assessment, and employability difficulties and their relevance in Oman. In this case, the research examined knowledge gaps related to this theory as a contribution to knowledge. The higher education sector in Oman and around the world served as the epicentre of the study and was anticipated to address the needs of learners as well as society in terms of understanding and creativity, followed by the needs of industry and government as employers of graduates. This study was conceptual in nature and only included a review of the literature. Anything that keeps the system from accomplishing its objective is a limitation, such as inadequate funding, a heavy teaching load, unappealing incentives and awards for research, low salaries that deter talented academics and others from entering the field, and, lastly, inadequate resources. The primary impetus for this study was the realization that certain colleges and universities worldwide encountered difficulties with evaluation, caliber, employability of graduates, and industry fit. This study's primary goal was to uncover crucial success criteria for effective service delivery excellence to students, industry, and society in accordance with the market orientation philosophy. It also aimed towards contributing to the theory development in the Theory of Higher Education. The ultimate goal of the secondary purpose was to maximize innovation and knowledge development while making graduates employable. This study employed conceptual research, a type of qualitative research methodology. The primary conclusions were that inadequate pay was pushing academics to non-industrialized countries (NICs) and other developed countries; there were also issues with practicals and diverse teaching methods; there was no mandatory internship; there was unfair assessment; students had to balance their studies with their free time; faculty diversity was needed; students were not committed to their studies; the syllabus was out of date; graduates did not meet industry standards; internet service was inadequate; in certain countries, there was no apprenticeship program; and there was no funding for research.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Assessment, Examinations, Accreditation, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Quality Assurance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Oman HEIs have done a lot to develop Oman, provide required strategic human resources and help systems function for national development. However, there were many teething issues regarding assessment, quality and employability of graduates. Oman was no exception to this.

My research paper looks at Oman's higher education as a driver for knowledge creation and innovation, sustainability and industrialization, learning from best practices and experiences in assessment, feedback, quality and employability issues globally. This is theory building in the Theory of Higher Education Management (THEM) and tries to find the place for Oman in its knowledge development and innovation. This theory proffers that good well, well-managed higher education institutions produced employable graduates who had a strategic fit with the labour market and had highly innovative faculty who taught well and were highly productive in research, innovation and industrialization as well as community service. The area of quality, assessment and employability has seen a lot of controversies. The gap in knowledge here is why these three issues continued in Oman and elsewhere when they were known. That is what this critical literature-based research will unravel. Society is keen to know these issues fully and take corrective measures for the well-being of the national economy and society.

In any case the market (the employers, the labour market) buys your finished product, the graduate, through employment, and is the only reason for existence and should dictate what you do and how you do it. Employers knew what kind of product they wanted, the graduate, for viability, efficiency and competitiveness of their businesses and organizations. That was the economic game which Oman HEI had to play according to the laws of supply and demand and competition, based on higher education principles and practices which were globally benchmarked. Bok (2017:1) had no kind words, saying USA colleges cared more about their profits rather than students and staff and that the quality of graduates had deteriorated badly.



Was this not an unqualified generalization, surely? The USA was still producing the best graduates in the world by any standards. This could be referring to a minority of pockets of lower-level colleges.

To be a world-class HEI required more than teaching and note taking, argued former USA Secretary of Treasury under President Obama, Paulson (2015:106); it required world-class professors, and many instructors knew little about markets or modern business practices, and students needed a balance between theory and practice just like the way medical students were trained. Experiential learning like internships and industrial placements, proffered (Tiessen, 2018: **Online**), provided a great deal of potential for improving post-secondary students' access to education so they could learn about the workplace and acquire skills that would help them find employment in the future. There was unquestionable literature consensus on the value of internships as well as by practitioners in this research.

The lack of practical experience by business graduates was of great concern to employers, and many were raising complaints about the credibility and quality of university business education, including academics themselves (Bok, 2013:308). Compulsory internship came in handy to plug this shortfall and was well entrenched in Oman now.

Strategies aimed at attracting accomplished students can be costly for colleges:- i.e. building admissions offices, launching popular undergraduate majors, adding or augmenting graduate programmes, encouraging faculty research, emphasizing honours programmes and study abroad programmes. Campus enhancement could be done through infrastructure like student residences, dining halls, fitness centres, and even shopping districts, as well as pursuing prestige programmes Bastedo (2012:145). He said imitating market leaders and having information on prestigious benchmarked institutions presented pressure for conformity and catching up, Bastedjo (2012:149-151). Oman institutions were always looking to the USA and Europe for leadership and benchmarking. However, cultural, economic, regional and national stages of development sometimes impede benchmarking.

Europe and the USA have ruthless student disciplinary rules regarding examination malpractice, where summary dismissal was the norm. This was done to protect the sanctity and integrity of examinations. The same applies to plagiarism. In Europe, Australia, New Zealand, leading Asian countries and the USA, proven plagiarism may lead to expulsion depending on the severity or percentage of plagiarism. Oman and the GCC have their own disciplinary measures, too as a deterrence and to protect the integrity of the system.

Managing successful academic departments was no easy task at all, as advanced by Goldstein and Thorp. It was stated that due to the laborious hiring procedures, the nearly ritualistic tenure policies of universities, committees, lengthy professional meetings, seminars, conferences, publications, and certification procedures for academics, conventional academic divisions offered a professional and administrative home for faculty that was hard to duplicate elsewhere. (Goldstein & Thorp, 2010). A career in academics was a proper academic apprenticeship. Smart universities in Europe, the USA and Asia recruit teaching assistants with a first-class first honours degree and induct them in the system, anchoring senior academics and teaching a few hours as they are sponsored to do a master's degree and then a PhD in the same skills area. By the time they complete PhD degrees, they are familiar with the entire university system and ready to go to the frontline of academia and teach and do research – the two most important jobs in academics. By doing this, Europe, Asia and the USA produce the best and finest academics. It was a smart way of skills localization as these teaching assistants can understudy senior expatriate academics and eventually take over in the long term. Why are Oman and some of the GCC countries not doing this, long overdue? Some GCC countries do it. There is no substitute for this academic apprenticeship.

They concluded by saying those departments needed to be compensated for all their contributions (Goldstein & Thorp, 2010:72-73). One had to explore Oman colleges and universities and compare them with GCC and global best players and see whether salaries and other conditions were matching best practices to retain top level academics as well as new recruits.

Attainment rates were a product of two factors and were measured by the number of students enrolled in higher education and a fraction of those who completed their studies (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:21). The main obstacles to higher education as well as degree completion were money, those who find themselves in universities but universities are not for them, poor financial and academic guidance for families and students, especially first-generation students and tight exhausting work schedules which are not compatible with focus and completing degree programmes in a timely way, (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:24). Overworking naturally affect part-time students who may not have the energy to sustain the rigours of higher education. That is indulged in as subsistence and to raise funds for fees, etc.

The factors that favoured degree completion were passing foundation courses, peer effects, higher social class, ingrained expectations at selective institutions and rich teaching resources (Bowen and McPherson, 2016:29-30). They argued that poorly resourced institutions affected degree completion as well as repeating failed courses, like Mathematics, which is a challenge for most students. Poor students also faced financing challenges, they said. English had become the main language of higher

education global communication in the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century globalization, Altbach, (2016:8). The level of English competence amongst Oman students was still a bit low in the GCC, and this was compromised getting maximum value from lectures and other university activities as English was the official language of instruction in Oman HEI, and about 60% of the faculty were foreigners who spoke English only with some few speaking Arabic (especially those from the Middle East Arabic world). Even networking with other students globally in other universities becomes difficult, and the same applies to benefiting from internet sources and scholarly publications and conferences.

Antony, Cauce and Shalala (2017:133) worried that college completion had become a hot topic in the USA and institutions like NSU are working hard to get better degree completion rates. Social class has a significant impact on degree completion; students from low-income families are more likely to drop out than those from wealthy families (Bowen and McPherson, 2016:38–40). Rejecting less competent applicants and lowering graduation requirements while still making sure that graduates completely fulfilled the demands of the industry were the two simplest strategies to boost graduation rates (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:137). Assessment required being fearless and honest; it mostly looked at what was not working and focused on change, and assessment was also driven by accreditation requirements and threats of losing accreditation (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:23).

Teachers' views about teaching and assessment might shift toward conceptual change-focused instruction and assessment for and as learning when they receive training in authentic assessment. Additionally, it encourages the modification of evaluation tools to make them more feedback-focused, demanding, and realistic.

#### **A) *Training of teaching and support staff, salaries and benefits***

A shift in the teacher's perspective regarding teaching and assessment toward conceptually changing instruction and assessment for and as learning is facilitated by training in authentic assessment. Additionally, it encouraged the modification of evaluation tools to make them more feedback-focused, demanding, and realistic. (Villarroel, et al, 2024). It is in this area that institutions are partly differentiated. Those with the best staff training and staff retention rates tend to have higher student satisfaction rates, better teaching and learning, assessment and quality. Training alone without good conditions of service for staff is self-defeating as you become a training ground where other HEIs poach from. We see this competition live amongst GCC countries, Europe, USA and Asia. Saudi Arabia was the magnet of the GCC as it offered unparalleled salaries and conditions of service, a real heaven on earth. The fight for high-grade academics is typical of the diamond and gold rush in South Africa. With the decline in population growth in the Western world it is only going to get worse. A look at the new Saudi Arabia Neom City project tells you the whole story of the ridiculously attractive salaries and conditions of service (Middle East Eye, 2024), a real paradise (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/foreign-executives-chalk-million-dollar-salaries-neom-report>).

But how could one push up salaries and job security when there was a crisis in HEI in the UK? Some UK HEI were patients in intensive care in hospitals due to funding shortfalls (The Week, 2024). (<https://theweek.com/education/uk-universities-why-higher-education-is-in-crisis>).

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

#### **A) *The objectives were:***

- a. Exploring global historical perspectives of Oman HEI regarding assessment, quality and employability.
- b. Identify challenges faced in Oman on the same issues.
- c. Scientifically find out the magnitude of quality, assessment and employability issues in Oman and globally.
- d. Advance research-driven solutions for a progressive Oman HEI system that addresses assessment, quality, and employability issues fully.

## **III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**These are:**

- a. What are the global historical perspectives of Oman HEI regarding assessment, quality and employability?
- b. What are the challenges faced in Oman on the same issues?
- c. What is the magnitude of quality, assessment and employability issues in Oman and globally?
- d. What are the feasible research-driven solutions for a progressive Oman HEI system that addresses assessment, quality and employability issues fully?

## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

An empirical research project's study design is the detailed plan for gathering data, and the accuracy of the design is evaluated by examining its construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and, if relevant, statistical finding validity (Bhattacharjee, 2012:35-37). The research method used in this research was conceptual research. The paper is conceptual in

nature and is based on the review of existing literature on global and Oman higher education management focusing on quality, assessment and employability issues. Conceptual research is a methodology that involves monitoring and analyzing information that has already been published about a certain subject. Practical experimentation is not a part of conceptual research. It has to do with ideas and notions that are abstract. For a very long time, philosophers have employed conceptual inquiry to create new theories or to reinterpret old ones. Books, journals, government reports, conference papers, industry reports, reports from professional associations, reports from academic institutions, and research papers from other sources have all been consulted. From these papers, a conceptual framework for higher education service delivery has been developed.

The higher education theory was first developed to drive the production of high-quality graduates for the national economy and industry.

Watertight reliability and validity measures were employed as expected by academic conventions in this kind of research. Thematic analysis has been used here to group related issues and do justice.

Quoting Bodil Johnsson, (Berg and Seeber, 2016:26) explained that academics knew that intellectual work, such as research (the creation of new knowledge) and learning (the creation of new knowledge in oneself), had to be measured in a way totally different from the way we measure the work of industrialization and that what was needed was what she called thinkology rather than technology. Research showed that periods of escape from time were actually essential to deep thought (Berg and Seeber, 2016:63), creativity, and problem-solving. The question now was where would academics get the necessary escape time for deep and serious reflection on big issues when their schedule was so overloaded? Moreover, how much had speed and overload in academics negatively compromised research output and with what consequences for innovation and best practice nationally and on GDP? The neoliberal agenda, among many others, stood at odds with ideals of discovery, enquiry and intellectual advancement that academics needed to promote the research endeavour, and academics became isolated from each other and became compliant as resistance to the corporatization of the academy seemed futile, said (Berg & Seeber, 2016:70) quoting Fanghanel. It was quite clear low research output was affecting teaching quality as testified in this research. Thorp & Goldstein (2010:97) argued that in higher education, it was a given that effective teaching was reinforced by sound research. How much research funding was available in Oman compared to other countries?

#### ***A) Industry Perspectives and Findings***

The lack of practical experience by business graduates was of great concern to employers (Bok, 2013:308), and many were raising complaints about the credibility and quality of university business education, including academics themselves. The compulsory internship could come in handy to plug that shortfall. Managing successful academic departments was no easy task at all, as advanced by Goldstein & Thorp(2010:72-73). Colleges were not only graduating a generation of students less prepared for the rigours of the world (Selingo, 2013:34) but like the institutions themselves, they would be saddled with debt taken to finance tuition fees. Students who completed degrees have demonstrated a capacity to do jobs and personal qualities like perseverance (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:22), which were likely to contribute to success in job markets and other facets of life.

### **V. GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### ***A) Meetings Between Industry and HEI, Funding and Other Issues***

Bok (2017:78) argued for regular meetings between HEI CEOs and private sector CEOs, saying they were necessary to discuss and close the gap between graduates' skills and industry requirements as that benefited both parties. USA universities shifted to think globally and gained prominence globally after World War I (Cole, 2009:59), and started scouring for talent looking for the best scholars, scientists and students from wherever in the world they might be found. If state funding continued to dwindle the way it is doing now, state institutions would have no alternative in future but to scour the globe looking for a shrinking share of full-paying students (Selingo, 2013:64). Oman was still very much inward-looking and had not started serious recruitment of students globally, although it did recruit faculty globally. Oman was still grappling with entrenched traditional methods of education which were incapable of meeting diverse learning needs or producing young people equipped to readily take their places in the workforce (Al-Ani, 2016:322-336: Online). This had improved gradually and was much better now, though still being work in progress.

#### ***B) Strategic Value of Skills, Strategic Fit and Access to HEI***

The world was now in a transition period where intellectual capital and brainpower were replacing financial and physical capital as the key to national strength, prosperity, and well-being, said Crow and Dabars (2015:5), quoting James Duderstadt. They went on to say that Duderstadt had predicted that the world was truly entering a new era of knowledge, one in which knowledge itself—that is, educated people and their ideas—would become the most important strategic resource required for prosperity. However, the universities that produced these highly skilled individuals were under attack from forces such as market forces, reductions in public funding, and policy changes that could cause them to disappear. In Oman, the

government had already slashed public expenditure for all ministries in line with austerity measures sweeping the GCC due to low oil prices (as it relied on oil income for 65% of its budget). To what extent this was affecting local higher education would be partly revealed in the literature review.

The more difficult it has gotten for students and their families to afford a college degree, the more crucial higher education has become to an individual's prospects for achievement and to their society's ability to compete globally said Clawson & Page (2011:50). They went further and said the result was millions of students that have left college with massive debt that has limited their life chances, and millions more were simply unable to afford higher education. That wasn't a tragedy for the individual but for society. Was Oman immune to these tragedies regarding student loans for higher education, which were afflicting students and families the world over? The good thing in Oman was that there was generally government funding for almost all HEI students with a few self-paying students in private colleges. And if so, what could be the long-term solution to unshackle society from this bondage of debt and lifelong painful debt trap? Infact, the debt overhang started right from kindergarten, which was sometimes even more expensive than college, right through primary to secondary/high school education. It was the single biggest nightmare for parents nowadays, alongside decent house ownership in the USA, Asia and Europe. The authors said we were now living in a world where to suggest that public higher education should be free was regarded as lunacy. The reason was simple – higher education was now a huge multi-billion industry, with some colleges/universities trading their shares on Wall Street, USA, just like any other business. That technically meant private universities were answerable to investors just like other business entities and that profit, ROI and market share mattered like other aspects of corporate management. Davidson lamented the financial devastation and underfunding of higher education (2017:11) when he said that the war on higher education in some states in the USA had devastating effects on students' lives and student debt as it had resulted in higher tuition, fewer course options, and advising services and exploited faculty, with nearly half of all courses taught by adjunct faculty (temporary faculty), referred to as part-time labourers, some of whom effectively made less than the minimum wage for a decent life. He was mourning the death of job security, quality jobs in HEI, and quality HEI in the USA. Overproduction of PhDs made their dilemma even worse with market saturation now the game globally. It is much more difficult to get an academic job nowadays than it is to reach the stars in the sky. What made the academic labour market even worse was cronyism and networks of friends and cronies, which effectively made the labour market a closed market manned by unshakeable gatekeepers. The whole system to destroy the academic labour market started in the USA by terribly overproducing PhDs, and then it spread to the rest of the world, and now they talk of the academic dilemma and academic sweatshops (Cheeky Scientist, 2024) (<https://cheekyscientist.com/how-the-academic-phd-job-market-was-destroyed/>). In academics, academic sweatshops were institutions that overworked their faculty and underpaid them, and these were lower-rank colleges in the USA, but the same pattern can be found in other leading economies and the developing world, too. It was the lucky and blessed faculty who worked in top-tier research universities in any country who enjoyed the cream and the honey of the academic industry. The author has been lucky to have been associated with such prestigious institutions for his twenty-year academic career. In top-level institutions was where one found the highest academic standards, the highest research output, prestige, and status. In the USA, the lower-ranked HEIs employed adjuncts paid much less, and overworked faculty. Oman does not have academic sweatshops as the Government of Oman has very tough accreditation regulations and oversight, and has worked very well for the country.

Korzynski (2013:975-994) argued that Online social networking environments were becoming more and more important. Additionally, his research showed that the directive leadership style was less effective on social networking sites than participative and consultative leadership styles on online social networks. Leaders who used more channels for business had a favorable correlation with those who engaged in more activities on social media. It was the desire and goal of any college to give a good service to society, especially students hence this research. The feel-good factor was a result of good service, employability of graduates and their advancement in their careers. Why graduates continued to graduate half-baked in some USA HEI despite five years of university education was an unanswered question.

Bastedo (2013:290) shed light on some of the causes of these problems which colleges could address, describing it as the academic ratchet and administrative lattice. He quoted (James, 1990; Massy and Wilger, 1992; Massy & Zemsky, 1994), who said academic ratchet was explained by the tendency and preference of academics to move away from tasks such as teaching, student advising and committee work to spend more time on research and other endeavors that are more personally or financially rewarding. Quoting (Ortmann and Other, 2000:20-50) he proffered that administrative lattice was the growing administrative structures, usually with the number of administrative posts growing faster than the number of faculty. Does that exist, and to what extent did it affect service delivery in colleges in Oman, literature review would answer that.

## **VI. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS**

Trowler was for the idea that appropriate theoretical/conceptual frameworks should always be researched and tested for their validity. He went further and said as research proceeded, the implied theoretical synthesis would need to be flexible to accommodate emerging issues (Trowler, 2015:44). The researcher was guided by this axiom.

### **A) Theoretical Framework**

In higher education workflow was the progression of students from first year right up to graduation. A barrier was anything that prevented the system from achieving its goal. Managing barriers maximized value to the HEI as well as its customers and other stakeholders and was a major survival and competitive factor. The thrust of this research was to identify critical success factors for service excellence in academic departments of colleges/universities (teaching, regulatory framework, students' expectations/perceptions, student advisory services, staff, IT systems, Library, support departments, research, assessment, feedback, evaluation and fighting industry competition). This research must identify barriers facing Oman colleges and universities and possible solutions. The focus of this research was mainly on Oman colleges/universities learning from global HEI. It was part of this research to investigate and see how Oman HEI were affected by the Theory of Higher Education Management with a focus on quality, assessment and employability issues and to test the relevance and shortcomings of this theory, if any, and contribute to theory building. This theory has generally been tested in manufacturing, industry, mining, NGOs and government operations but not much in academia (colleges and universities). The findings from this research would be quite a breakthrough and would make an important contribution to the management of colleges and higher education institutions.

### **B) Conceptual Framework**

The Theory of Higher Education Management (THEM) is a general management theory designed to support businesses in consistently achieving their objectives. Its measurements are given by throughput (rate of production), inventory flow, and operating expenses (effect on sales and competitiveness). A barrier is anything that prevents the system from achieving its goal, like poor funding, quality of new students or freshmen into the system, excessive workloads, unappealing research awards and incentives, low pay that deters bright academics and others from entering the field, and inadequate resources are the last factors. Managing THEM maximized value to the HEI as well as its customers and other stakeholders and was a major survival and competitive factor. The thrust of this research was to identify critical success factors for service excellence in knowledge development and innovation with a focus on teaching, assessment and employability issues. This research must identify all barriers facing HEI in Oman and possible solutions.

The underlying theory in this research was the Theory of Higher Education Management which was centred on reducing barriers for service excellence, viability and competitiveness. Investigations in this research would centre on how the multiple variables can be managed to contribute to success and service excellence in Oman HEI. Marketing and operations theory, under which services theory falls, puts the customer at the centre of everything and says that the customer is the king of any organization. Customer satisfaction was seen as central to everything and the students were the customers of HEI. Some American books referred to students as the Kings and Queens of HEI. The thrust of this research was to see whether Oman higher education institutions were achieving customer satisfaction all the time, creating knowledge and having good teaching, assessment and employability of graduates and the barriers that they faced in achieving that, if any.

## **VII. STUDENT ISSUES**

Diversity of life experiences and opinions enriched the educational experience, while confronting differences can be uncomfortable, but can contribute significantly to learning and a future working life (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:77). Higher education attainment was associated with better health and higher employment rates, and higher relative earnings, besides higher proficiency on skills such as literacy and numeracy, (Bowen and McPherson, 2016:12). The USA system of higher education did not arise from a plan and no agency governed it, it just happened, and the USA made the top ten universities in rankings except Oxford and Cambridge, 146 of the top 500, 52 of the top 100, and 32 of the top 50, (Labaree, 2017: 2;5). Nearly everyone saw college as a turning point in their life, where they learned how to better fit into society and find meaning in their lives (Selingo, 2013:168). All things considered, college graduates lived more productive lives, had better working environments, had healthier kids who did better in school, showed more interest when reading and the arts, spoke and produced with greater clarity, were more accepting of people's differences, were more involved in the community, and these qualities were passed on to subsequent generations (Selingo, 2013:169). The University of Phoenix was the largest in the USA, the University of California Berkeley was the USA and world's best research university while Harvard was rated best in the world, and the University of Wisconsin was the best entrepreneurial university in the world (Clawson & Page, 2011:8-13).

The learning college would demonstrate how important it was for the college's mission, philosophy, values, and institutional identity that students' learning be evaluated (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:20), quoting Blaich and Wise, 2010; Cistone and Bashford, 2002; Dwyer, Millet and Payne, 2006. The assessment was a toxic exercise which decided the fate of

students, their future and their families and had too many interest groups like students, their parents/families, society, employers, government, and the college administration who are naturally concerned about pass rates and backlash from students as customers for future uptake. It was not as easy as talked about and was the most sensitive and controversial academic aspect at any university.

Former Harvard University President Charles Elliot discovered three critical factors for the success of universities and nations (Christensen and Eyring, 2011:48) which were:-

- a. In Europe at the time (19<sup>th</sup> Century), there was a broad range and high degree of specialization of European scholarship, and France and Germany excelled in a number of disciplines;
- b. The second discovery was the apparent connection between scholarship and national economic productivity. He saw that the increase in imported European goods he had seen at home was the result of scientific discoveries being translated into commercial practice lastly.
- c. Despite all the superiority in scholarship and industry, the individual citizens of France and Germany suffered at the hands of undemocratic governments, rigid class structures, and exclusionary school systems. He gained an increased appreciation of democratic liberty in America and beyond. His own rise to academic prominence, as well as that of his family politically, financially and scholarly in the USA, would not have been possible back in Europe.

The foundational education of the knowledge economy is now higher education. However, higher education resources, as well as higher education systems themselves, continued to be insufficient in emerging, developing, and transitioning nations (Alon & McIntyre, 2013: 5-27). To meet the rapidly increasing demand, immediate action was required to broaden and increase the availability of educational opportunities. Based on the author's ongoing research, that review study defined business education as the set of competencies provided by the business disciplines that facilitate the growth of an entrepreneurial society. They argued that the biggest challenge facing business and management education in the coming generation may be the institutionalization of top-notch management programs to generate an ongoing and self-renewing flow of intellectual property and its retention in emerging economies around the globe. Crow and Dabars (2015:160-161), contributing to this debate, argued that discovery, learning and societal engagement were mutually supportive core functions of universities. They went further to say knowledge transfer occurred through publications, training and education of students, employment of graduates, conferences, consultations/consultancy, collaborations with industry, government and society, as well as obtaining rights to inventions and discoveries that qualify for patent protection (intellectual property, or IP) and licensing them to private enterprises.

Competition for attention was so crude universities had to adopt cutting-edge marketing techniques to attract students, funds for research, business partnerships, graduate jobs, and the attention of investors and the government. Lowell of Harvard University, after World War 1, explored the freedom of professors to speak according to conscience in two realms:- the classroom and the world beyond it, but said they had to do that responsibly and carefully to protect their institutions and themselves (Christensen & Eyring, 2011:94). Oman professors had achieved quite a number of accolades globally, although research funding continued to be an issue of concern. In the GCC, Oman was partly behind its peers in research.

The challenge in American Education was that the public expected universities to successfully graduate all students who entered universities, yet the public school systems found it difficult to produce college-ready graduates, which complicates this conflict. Any university that gives these high-risk students an opportunity to study then encounters criticism because not enough of them graduate (Lombardi, 2013:26). In some countries, especially in the USA, private colleges try to get as many students into the system as a fundraising measure, including low-performance students with poor grades. These struggled to master the challenging syllabus and pass assessments.

The only ways to improve education are to have more computers in classrooms, longer school years, better teacher compensation, and smaller class sizes, allowing students and their parents to choose their schools and better facilities (Best, 2011:42-43). He argued further that children raised from upper-income families always did better than those from poor families because they had better-educated parents who viewed school as especially important and who could give their children a host of experiences, encouragement and opportunities that improved their chances of doing well in school. He said the opposite was the case for poor parents who have less or no books, computers, less money and no special experiences. This all worked against good school performance and results.

These days, students must deal with a number of difficulties, including expensive tuition, significant debt from student loans, inability to repay educational loans, and poor job prospects for graduates. Mettler (2014:189) criticized class sizes, saying they had swelled, classes were being taught by adjunct or temporary faculty, and there was less support for students, which was now affecting graduation rates downwards. Where was the solution for all the myriad of problems facing students and society?

## VIII. TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDER DYNAMICS

### A) Introduction

The two biggest challenges facing Arabic Higher Education across the board were the poor quality of higher education programmes and graduates and the low and poor research output (Abedalhakeem & Ahmed, 2012:148-150). They went further and said higher education and research received less money, and there were issues with high classroom loads, low graduate compliance with industry standards for abilities, expertise, and mindset, and low graduate compliance overall.

In fields such as architecture, engineering, nursing or physiology, a student's failure to master the discipline's core elements and techniques could yield serious errors in performance with disastrous consequences: collapsed buildings, defective machines, injury, illness, or even death; therefore society must not mistake competence for narrowness, (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:7). The cheating student could be harmed by missing the skill or knowledge (Robinson and Moulton, 2005:88), may harm their own self-worth when they realize that they were not really qualified for the credential they cheated to gain. Antony, Cauce and Shalala (2017:35) warned that starting with the improvement and then accreditation was much better than vice-versa. The over-expansion of PhDs could not be supported anymore, and there were not enough jobs, Cole (2009:483). Faculty felt that screening students and making some students fail was part of the faculty's responsibility to ensure the academic quality of their programmes and graduates (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:68).

### B) Fundamental Responsibilities

Your college has five fundamental responsibilities:-

- a. Meet stakeholder needs, especially its students;
- b. Keep its promises;
- c. Ensure its health and well-being and deploy resources effectively, prudently and efficiently, which is stewardship;
- d. Serve the public good, and finally.
- e. Demonstrate its quality and effectiveness in fulfilling those responsibilities, (Suskie, 2015:52).

As the researcher explores higher Education in Oman, he will see whether colleges are managing to fulfill all these quality parameters. It was doubtful with the many irregularities and concerns already raised by the government and stakeholders, including industry and the very employers.

Reviewing academic programmes took three dimensions:-

1. Quality, which was the quality of inputs (faculty credentials, student qualifications, facilities, library holdings, etc.); Processes: curriculum design, teaching methods, advisement, and so on; Outcomes: student learning outcomes, research and community impact, and so on.
2. Need and demand: the number of potential students interested in the programme and demand for graduates by employers, graduate programmes, and the like;
3. Cost and cost-effectiveness: how much the programme costs and how efficiently and effectively it uses its resources (Suskie, 2015:230).

All parameters were eluding many colleges in Oman, with 53% of graduates not getting jobs, as confirmed by the government. Corrections were definitely required across the education value chain. Robinson and Moulton, 2005:88 advised HEI and society that gaining higher grades was the main motivation for students to cheat; cheating was the infraction and was the gaining of something undeserved and the false representation of one's abilities or accomplishments and provided a large benefit to the cheater.

### C) Recruitment, Training and Innovation

Christensen & Eyring (2011:115-116) quoted Conant, former Harvard University President, saying, "At Harvard, we ask one traditional question: who is the most qualified person in the world to fill a particular vacancy, and we try to convince that scholar to join our ranks." That is how ambitious Harvard is to this day and what has earned them a global reputation and image as the number one university in the world. But superior skills also ask for superior benefits globally. That is what they dealt with first to attract and retain the best academics. Harvard also recruits the best students on the market. Students are the raw materials in academics, and if not of the right quality, everything else cannot correct product quality.

Suskie also had very unkind words for some students whom he accused of wanting a degree certificate but not necessarily the learning that goes with it. And he said there was a germ of truth in. The researcher has experienced this during the past twenty years of teaching in colleges and universities.

Thorp & Goldstein (2010:130-131) were of the opinion that students' oral presentation skills were not as well developed and could only be improved through practice. They argued that before a student graduated, they tried to create at least three opportunities for high-pressure verbal presentations that demanded a substantial amount of preparation and practice and that



pressure on students came from the public listening, fear of failure or the lure of prizes in public competitions. The researcher supports this view as students really do serious preparation before any presentation, and they learn public speaking, question and answer and public discourse. These are critical skills in any modern business enterprise or government office.

Lu, Betts, and Croom (2011) conducted a study on business excellence, examining the conceptual evolution and proposing a normative framework that enhances competitive performance assessment, management, and delivery at the “world-class” level. It emphasized how crucial it is to use situation-specific and firm-specific methods of evaluating excellence. Operational excellence, strategic fit, adaptability, and unique voice are the four dimensions of the suggested model that correlate to the classical school, strategic school, dynamic school, and individual school of business excellence. Crow and Dabars argued that for any country to excel, leadership had to come from universities when they said they believed that the academic sector should assume leadership in managing the USA’s accelerating impact on the earth and that universities were the most complex and heterogeneous knowledge enterprises that had ever evolved, (2015:13).

The problem with developing and 3rd world countries is always the use of research knowledge, which mostly gathers dust in universities with no one using it. One of the few ways it reaches society and industry is through teaching and graduates from the same institutions and through publications in journals and conference presentations.

## **IX. STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **A) Introduction and Degree Completion**

Benefits of degree completion were much more than for those who drop out, (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:5). There was evidence that some college graduates were better at raising their children, thinking civically, and managing their health than others. Aside from that, money was really important, and parents and kids should anticipate that attending college will enable them to have successful employment (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:9). What mattered most was starting and completing a degree as well as the skills one mastered and the knowledge they acquired which justified the social and private investment in higher education, (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:9). The effectiveness of colleges in educating the students who enrolled mattered a lot. The deliverables or end product were extremely important for students, families, society, government and industry. However, some of the same interest groups were working at cross purposes through their actions, as revealed in this literature survey. They were defeating the objectives of quality HEI just as they also made noise about their desire for quality graduates and employable graduates.

Individuals who acquired more education generally benefitted economically from doing so and were better off than their fellow citizens and should share in the cost of education. Education had strong network effects, and communities benefitted from having a more educated population. They went further to say relying on families to fund education when there was huge inequality in society would result in restrictions on education or eliminate college opportunities altogether, which was both unfair and wasteful of valuable human resources (Bowen & McPherson, 2016:75-76). Someone born in the bottom-income group could graduate to the high-income group if they got a college degree (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:74). Current research suggested that earning a BA degree increased your lifetime earnings by about 65% as opposed to high school diploma holders and the gap in earnings between college and high school graduates had doubled since the 1980s, (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:75) quoting Autor, (2014:843).

Bowen & McPherson, (2016:18) argued that it was well known that a recession induced more students to enrol in college and eventually to graduate as formal employment opportunities would be less and jobs were very difficult to find. Bowen and McPherson (2016:61-63) revealed that the biggest issues in higher education in the USA were low completion rates, time-to-degree, affordability, the need to strengthen academic leadership in institutions, difficult economic environment, reduced government funding, high spending levels, competition for students, political pressures, free speech, unavoidable changes in staffing structures causing tensions between faculty and administrators and the desire of private colleges to expand enrollments.

### **B) College Credentials, Employment and Job Security**

A college degree leads to more benefits than just earnings and leads to more interesting and satisfying jobs, more job security (or the ability to switch jobs because skills such as critical reasoning, problem-solving, and good writing do not become obsolete), better health, and other benefits; and there were other benefits to society like voting positively and volunteer work for organizations, social and economic mobilities, and moving up the income quintile to a higher one, (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:75), quoting College Board, 2013 and Lumina, 2014. The war effort of the 2nd World War resulted in the most astounding rapid leaps in scientific understanding and technology in human history (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:97). Private companies were partly unwilling to fund basic research because there was no guarantee that the company that funded the research was the only one to benefit from it, (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:98). Therefore, this was better funded by government than any other party as the government could recoup it through taxes.

### **C) Vocationalising Higher Education, Professions, Internship and Practicals**

Oman needed to move to options of alternative education, which focuses on vocational or technical training and is an option that created SMEs, promoted entrepreneurship and contributed much to economic development and GDP, as proven in countries like Germany and the UK, and he concluded that it was no longer knowledge only that was important, but what one could do with the knowledge that mattered, (Al-Ani, 2016:13: Online). It was common knowledge in Oman that polytechnics and apprenticeship education had not been embraced as yet and was a missing link contributing to unnecessary unemployment as well as overproduction in disciplines currently offered in the country, like IT and Business Administration. Internships were considered to be essential as students needed real-world experiences to try out the abilities they were learning on campus and were essential for the complete assessment of student learning at Alverno College, USA (Antony, Cauce & Shalala, 2017:32). Oman does have very good vocational training colleges and many engineering/technology colleges and universities.

James Bray, a director of technical education in the USA, said that society needed an expanded notion of what constituted an education after high school, which should include on-the-job training and apprenticeship as well as experiences before college that improve the difficult transition to college (Selingo, 2013:162). Unfortunately, Oman had not embraced apprenticeship training, which was a panacea to job creation, productivity, economic growth, SME creation, entrepreneurship and import substitution in many respects. This may need to be looked into long term as the population and industry grow.

Toner Carnerville, the Georgetown economist, was of the same view when he said that more attention needed to be given to what he called middle jobs, jobs that did not require a bachelor's degree, as he said half of the USA jobs that propelled people into the middle class were these jobs, the jobs dealing with high-end careers in engineering, design and technology, (Selingo, 2013:163). His assertion was supported by Thomas Bowler, a senior vice president at United Technology, who said, "We can secure all the graduates we need from elite schools, but that's not a challenge. It's the other half of the workforce that I worry about," referring to high-end careers in engineering, design and technology which create technicians, artisans, technologists, scientists and engineers. Without polytechnics, how was Oman going to produce those kinds of skilled workers who were the oxygen and arteries of modern economies?

Maybe encouraging the private sector to open these polytechnics could help speed up the process. The challenge is that private players were partly interested in high-yielding, attractive disciplines like business and other technology areas. What would happen to areas that were not attractive and profitable to private players but useful for the national economy like wood technology and nanotechnology? It remained a predicament for the government to solve.

In many parts of the world, the maturing experience is provided before college by mandatory military or national service and in Britain, students take a gap year to work or travel (Selingo, 2013:165). This was seen as part of citizenship education. Apprenticeship took some of the pressure off the community college systems in many USA states if it were to be introduced in the USA, reduced the loan burden for students, and helped employers who complained about the lack of skilled labour; for students, they provided a structured environment where they work alongside adults of all ages, see the results daily of their labours, and earn responsibility; due to their highly structured apprenticeship programs, many European nations reported fewer difficulties than the United States in assisting students in making the transition from education to the workforce. Prior to the global financial crisis that struck in 2008, over 80% of young Germans found employment within six months of finishing their education, while only roughly half of young Americans did the same (Selingo, 2013:165). The apprenticeship system must be looked into in Oman long term, as it has been a panacea for unemployment in many countries like the UK, Germany and others.

## **X. CONCLUSION**

Much has been done about higher education globally and in Oman, but more still needs to be done. Higher education has always been a work-in-progress industry, learning and relearning. MOHERI needed to have a real time system that fed them with students' feelings and satisfaction about teaching and learning, feelings and concerns of faculty on teaching and learning conditions and environment. They also needed a regular feedback system with industry for graduate performance and concerns about the relevance of syllabi. That could be done through regular surveys and meetings maybe once per year. If such a system was there, then there would be no concerns about graduate suitability for the labour market and syllabi-related issues. Higher education has always worked in progress, and improvements always happen as you operate, learning from other institutions and other countries.

## **XI. LIMITATIONS IN THIS RESEARCH**

There were some restrictions on this study. Access to some materials that were deemed sensitive and would be unavailable was one of those restrictions. Nonetheless, the majority of those deficiencies were made up for by the researcher's triangulation of sources. That made a lot of concerns more visible. The study was conducted impartially. During the teaching season, a working academic would always struggle with time. Spending more time on the ground might have allowed for the

discovery of more problems. However, as evidenced by the extensive literature evaluation and analysis in this study, the researcher used a variety of thorough sources to cover all topics that often affected HEI in any nation. Without a question, coverage was all-encompassing. The research remains relevant, and coverage was good, meeting academic standards of rigour, and checks and balances.

## XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The highly controversial debates reflected here point to the following recommendations across Oman HEI for better quality, assessment and employability of graduates:

- Oman HEI, government and industry need to have regular national dialogue and discourse about all teething issues affecting students, employers and government at HEI, like forced specializations on students by parents/majors and many other issues raised in this research paper and find consensus solutions long term.
- Regular compulsory structured training in HEI pedagogics, innovation and research by top HE experts for all faculty and support staff was necessary as an ongoing exercise (workshops covering teaching, learning, assessment, and research).
- The introduction or revamping of Programme Advisory Boards, which met every 3 months and with a minimum of six industrialists as members, who were experts in the given major/specialization for effective checks and balances and critique as well as updating syllabus, (Netherlands is a case in point).
- There was a real need for the Oman Government to establish more polytechnics and vocational training colleges offering apprenticeship training and vocational education, which produced much-needed technicians for industry and the country in their thousands and could absorb those not suitable for other HEIs but who were vocationally minded.
- Research prizes in Oman must be looked at and increased like in the USA, Europe and Asia where academics and researchers easily become millionaires through their research. Why were most Oman professors, not millionaires?

## XIII. FUTURE RESEARCH

Oman HEI had done a lot in Higher Education, which was acknowledged and respected by the whole world, but more still needed to be done for excellence. Issues differed across the Asia continent where some HEI could have the same, or different or bigger issues even of a different dimension. Other researchers could do countrywide and regional surveys and interviews involving many countries, observations with larger numbers of students, faculty, administrators and government and have a wider and bigger sample. Many issues still needed answers like why those challenges persisted when they were known, how they could be solved, by whom, and when and what was required institutionally and nationally to address those issues. Was it possible to solve some of the challenges or not? Crow & Dabars (2015:13) contented that for any country to excel, leadership had to come from universities when they said they believed that the academic sector should assume leadership in managing the USA's accelerating impact on the earth and that universities were the most complex and heterogeneous knowledge enterprises that had ever evolved. The Theory of Higher Education Management was an ongoing debate in Oman HEI, and barriers did affect HEIs in terms of quality, assessment and employability of graduates.

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