


Exploring Funding in Higher Education Sector in Oman

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ABSTRACT

Funding of higher education institutions is a major growing expense for the Oman government (13–14% of the total spending in 2016) and is at par with that of other governments (e.g., 11% in the UK and 15.5% in the US). However, there has been little investigation into the funding of quality higher education in Oman. The present research project aims to explore the sources of funding at Oman universities after it opened the private education sector in 1996. The research methodology includes conducting interviews with leaders in higher education to explore different types of funding (e.g., gifts, tuition fees, government support). This will enhance our understanding, as well as that of decision-makers, regarding universities' funding sources and of the higher education landscape.

KEYWORDS

Funding, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Oman, Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

Oman's dynamic system of higher education has several types of public and private universities that provide post-secondary diplomas or degrees. The system has grown rapidly over the past three decades. Oman has developed an independent system of higher education that consists of sixty-three higher education institutions (HEIs). Out of these, two-thirds are public institutions, operating through various ministries and agencies (see Table 1).

2. BACKGROUND OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN OMAN

Higher education in Oman has undergone several key developmental phases. Before 1970, there was no formal higher education sector in Oman, but the period from the 1970s to the 1980s saw the establishment of public colleges that emphasized vocational education and training, particularly in teaching and health. The Sultan Qaboos University was also established during this time. In 1990, foreign programs were introduced and delivered in Oman through private HEIs (i.e., colleges and universities). This was an attempt to rapidly grow the sector in response to an identified need. Currently, the new phase entails the establishment of a comprehensive higher education system. This is an

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Table 1. The governance of the higher education system in Oman (Al'Abri, 2019)

Responsible Authority	Institutions	Number of Institutions	Degrees Offered
Ministry of Higher Education	College of Education	1	Bachelor
	Colleges of Applied Sciences	5	Bachelor
	Private universities and colleges	29	Diploma, Bachelor, Master
The University Council (independent)	Sultan Qaboos University	1	Diploma, Bachelor, Master, PhD
Ministry of Health	Oman College of Health Sciences	1 (8 campuses around the governorates)	Diploma, Bachelor
	Higher Health Specializations Institute	1	
Ministry of Manpower	Colleges of Technology	7	Diploma, Bachelor
	Vocational College for Marine Sciences	1	
	Other vocational colleges	7	
Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs	College of Shariah Sciences	1	Diploma, Bachelor
Central Bank of Oman	The College of Banking and Financial Studies	1	Diploma, Bachelor, Master
Royal Oman Police	The Royal Oman Police Academy	1	Bachelor
	National Defense College	1	Diploma, Bachelor, Master
	Sultan Qaboos Military College	1	
	Royal Air Force Technical college	1	
	Military Technological College	1	
Total		60	

attempt to consolidate gains by implementing quality assurance and a quality enhancement process that is both effective and efficient (OAC, 2006).

The governance of the HEIs is divided among different authorities, and therefore the expenditure on the system is not transparent. However, it is established that the Omani government fully funds public institutions. There are no fees to enroll in these public institutions, and students get financial assistance in the form of allowances. This is because the government has been using oil revenues to finance the higher education system.

Although the government does not finance private institutions, it still supports them indirectly through land grants, tax exemptions, and scholarships (Al'Abri, 2015). Annually, the government financially supports around 8,000 students to attend these institutions. Furthermore, "The National Strategy for Education 2040" stated that one of the major challenges in funding higher education is that "Education depends on the government as its main source of finance and there is a lack of alternative sources and the private education institutions depend on study fees as the main source.

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