

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**Civic Participation and Current Educational Reform in the
Sultanate of Oman**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

June 2011

DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Date:

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the Basic Education system in relation to students' civic participation in the Sultanate of Oman. The research explores the role of formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curriculum activities in developing students' civic participation. The study also examines students' disposition towards civic participation and the influence of some demographic factors in the development of students' civic participation. The data were collected from four schools implementing Basic Education system introduced in Oman in 1998. Using case study methodology, three instruments were used for data collection: semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers, focus groups with students and classroom observation in Grade 10 classes.

The results suggest that the new formal curriculum aims and the suggested content creates further spaces in the Basic Education schools to support learners' civic knowledge and commitment towards participation in public life. The findings also show that the investigated schools do experience some challenges in relation to successfully implementing the new formal curriculum. The findings related to classroom climate identify some positive practices that might develop civic participation in the students along the aspirations of the Basic Education policies. However, the data points out that various challenges remain before classes become more collaborative in their processes and more open to issues and concerns in the wider society. The findings also investigated a set of co-curricular activities as important spaces to develop participatory citizens. Nevertheless, the findings also show that various difficulties remain before the implemented co-curricular activities achieve their expectations as contributors to civic participation development. Finally, the findings show that students in general have a favourable disposition towards community participation. Female students were more knowledgeable about civic issues and were less interested in political participation than were male students. Socioeconomic background and school location were important factors in students' access and participation in meaningful and varied civic learning opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Almighty Allah who gives me the strength to accomplish this journey. His blessings can never be counted.

This dissertation would not be possible without the hard work, dedication, and commitment of many people. First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my committee. My sincere gratitude goes to my Supervisor, Associate Professor Bill Atweh, for his outstanding support, kindness, and commitment to help me throughout my doctoral journey. I thank him for being an excellent academic advisor, and for being an inspiring mentor: he went above and beyond the call of duty to guide and help me. I am grateful for the interesting and informed discussions we engaged in about the civic life in Oman which was always reflected his intimate knowledge about the context where this research took place. Also, gratitude and appreciation goes to my two committee members, Professor David Treagust and Associate Professor, Christine Howitt, both of whom assisted me with professional advice and encouragement along my doctoral journey. I will be indebted forever for the wonderful and inspiring environment they provided to me.

Secondly, I would like to thank the administration, teachers, and students of the schools that participated in this course of research. The time they took and outstanding assistance given to me along path of this endeavour is highly appreciated. Though the informed consent does not allow me to state their names, I would nonetheless like to acknowledge their remarkable effort through which this research journey has been made possible. Despite the challenges the participating students experience, I concluded that their enthusiasm and the love they demonstrated for their home country are significant and positive indicators for the ongoing development and modernization in Oman.

To the memory of my father, who always believed in education and inspired me to share the love of beauty with others, especially those who experience harsh and cruel lives. My love and appreciation goes to my mother who always motivated me to do my best in life. Her heartfelt prayers and encouragement are very rewarding, I love

her very much. My thanks is also extended to my brothers Yasir, Adnan, Tariq, Abdulaziz, and my lovely sister, Zahra, for their ongoing support and encouragement. Thanks also go to relatives and friends who all overwhelmed me with love and support. To all of them, thank you for supporting me all the way and encouraging me to do my best in this journey.

I am grateful to my children, Amjad and Reaam. I know that leaving Oman to another country wasn't an easy change. I am indebted for the love, support and motivation with which they surrounded me. I am extremely grateful for the countless experiences and personal development they have derived from being in a different culture. I acknowledge the great bounty of the birth of my daughter, Maryam, who was born at the end of this journey. Despite the unexpected interruption she cause, her beautiful smile and company while I am writing the last chapter of this thesis has been exceptionally rewarding. May God bless all of my children.

Finally, my gratitude and appreciation goes to my wonderful wife, Aziza. I thank her for sharing with me all the details of this unforgettable journey. I am indebted for her never-ending inspiration and love. I am proud that she has learned English and has completed her Master of Education while she was looking after each member of the family. Words are not sufficient to express my gratitude to her. I love her from the bottom of my heart.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all Omanis who are committed to develop civic society in the country.

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Chapter One: Background and Overview of the Study

Education is and will remain a significant factor in the development of active citizens. For a long time, scholars have emphasised the important function of the educational system in empowering individuals to play an active role in public life. Since 1916, Dewey's philosophy has confirmed the importance of educational institutions to formulate participatory citizens. His valuable work *Democracy and Education* stressed the significant role of school in involving students in their surrounding community, helping them play an important role in reshaping its future. He emphasised the critical role of school in the community by developing students' commitment to public life beyond the usual learning outcomes (Dewey, 1916).

The concern here is not whether education is important, but how schools can advance strategies to support the desirable practices in any civic society, and what approaches maybe used to improve schools' ability to enrich civic life of society. The development and strength of civic society is dependent on citizens' ability to participate actively for the common good. Informed and thoughtful citizens are the key element to maintain and support a healthy civic life in any modern society.

Putnam (2000), in his work *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, stressed the critical role of education for civic participation in saying:

Education is one of the most important predictors – usually, in fact, the most important predictor – of many forms of social participation—from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee, to hosting a dinner party, to giving blood....education is an especially powerful predictor of participation in public, formally organized activities...College graduates are more than twice as likely to attend a public meeting, to write to Congress, or to attend a political rally. The same basic pattern applies to both men and women and to all races and generations. Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement.(p. 186)

Despite some strong evidence about the positive role of education in developing participation in the public life, concerns still remain regarding the relationship between education and civic participation. Whiteley (2005) stated that this concern was driven by the fact that despite an increase in education quality and education

enrolment rate, many well established democracies experienced a decline in the participation rate in public life. However, the writer explained that such observation had nothing to do with education. It may be due to other factors such as lack of citizens' trust in their governments' commitments and promises. Whiteley concluded this argument in saying:

This is not of course an argument for reducing educational investment in society, since a decline in such investment may well accelerate the decline in participation. However, it does draw attention to the need to be more specific about what types of education have an impact on participation and what types do not.(p.18)

However, there are various challenges that confront the mission of the educational systems to meet civic responsibility. Kerr (1999) identified eight factors complicating the education mission for citizenry development:

- the rapid movement of people within and across national boundaries;
- a growing recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities;
- the collapse of political structures and the birth of new ones;
- the changing role of women in society;
- the impact of the global economy and changing patterns of work;
- the effect of a revolution in information and communications technologies;
- an increasing global population, and;
- the creation of new forms of community.(p. 11)

Arthur, Davies and Hahn (2008) added that a noticeable decrease of voter numbers, decline of participants in the civic society organisations, and an increase of youth crimes in some regions of the world are ongoing challenges and a threat to civic life.

All of these challenges demonstrate the importance of education to empower individuals for active participation not only at national level but also from a global perspective. In the last 20 years, the increasingly interconnected and globalised world leads to the emergence of what is called a 'global citizen' (Edwards, 2001; Falk, 1993; Lynch, 1992; Turner, 1990). Global citizenship, as an increasingly evolving phenomena, is driven by an increased attention to shared values between all human beings as suggested in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the increased awareness about problems threatening the global community such as global warming, poverty, and terrorism (Banks, 2008; Lynch, 1992; Noddings, 2005).

In addition, the increased concern about the steady growth of disengagement among young adults is also considered an ongoing challenge to civic life. In many countries, disengagement becomes a dangerous phenomenon especially among young adults. Many studies confirm that an unwillingness to participate in public life is common among this age group (Fjeldstad & Mikkelsen, 2003; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Planty, Bozick & Regnier, 2006).

In response for such challenges, considerable efforts on the local and global level were taken to increase schools' ability in developing learners' commitments and participation in the public life (CIRCLE, 2003; Kerr, 1999; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) emphasized the importance of international commitment to enhance schools' role for civic participation. The UNESCO Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy published in 1995 stated:

We, the Ministers of Education (of the world) strive resolutely to pay special attention to improving curricula, the content of textbooks, and other education materials including new technologies with a view to educating caring and responsible citizens committed to peace, human rights, democracy and sustainable development, open to other cultures, able to appreciate the value of freedom, respectful of human dignity and differences, and able to prevent conflicts or resolve them by non-violent means.

(UNESCO, 1995)

As can be seen from the above statement, schools are being called upon to educate participatory citizens. The learning experience throughout formal curriculum should draw intensive focus on the required civic knowledge, skills, and disposition necessary for active citizenship (Glaston, 2007; Huddleston & Kerr, 2006; Schulz et al., 2010; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004). Similarly, classroom climate and co-curricular activities should all plan to work in an integration manner for developing students' civic participation (Lynch, 1992; Narvaez, 2010; Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995).

In 1998, Oman started an ambitious educational reform plan to improve the quality of education – the Basic Education system. Initially, this plan took place in only 17 schools; however, in 2009, more than 80% of Omani public schools implemented the new form of education (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2010). Civic participation is a core issue in the recent education reform plan. According to the Philosophy and Objectives of Education in the Sultanate of Oman document (MoE, 2004b), educational institutions in Oman should aim to, on the one hand, develop a positive attitude among students towards active participation in public life and , on the other, to participate actively in global issues, such as protecting the environment and maintaining a peaceful life in the global community. Similarly, the Theoretical Framework of Basic Education (MoE, 2001) document stated clearly that enhancing students’ participation in public life is one of major aims of educational reform in Oman.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The civic life in Oman has undergone remarkable change in the last four decades. These changes include establishing the first elected Parliament, Majlis Alshura, in 1991 where Omani citizens, for the first time, obtained the right to vote and elect their representatives in an elected council. Furthermore, the country developed its legal system to introduce Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and to allow workers’ unions to be introduced in the society (Ministry of Manpower, n.d). Also, statistics show an ongoing increase in Omani women’s participation public life (Ministry of National Economy, 2010b). Demographic factors are also an important aspect in the development of civic society in Oman. Statistics from the National Census in 2003 showed that more than 54% of the Omani population is less than 20 years old (Ministry of National Economy, 2005). This situation demonstrates the critical role of youth in improving different forms of civic life. The development in this country depends on the ability of the new generation to maintain and support the development of civic society.

Taking into account such factors pertaining to Omani society, examining the effectiveness of current education reform, the Basic Education system, is an

important and timely issue. After more than ten years of implementing the Basic Education system, there is an imperative to examine the outcomes of this plan. Civic participation, as one of the important goals in the recent reform initiative, should be examined in order to ensure that the educational system is on the correct track to achieve its ambition to prepare students for an active role in different aspects of civic life. It is very important to ensure that students in Oman maintain a positive disposition towards civic participation and that they have the ability to contribute effectively to the development of a modern and productive civic society.

1.2 Objectives and Research Questions

There are four main aims of this study.

Aim 1: Determine the major changes supported by the Basic Education system to improve civic participation among students. In particular,

- i. The changes related to formal curriculum, classroom climate and co-curricular activities; and,
- ii. The school's administrators' and teachers' knowledge and views about these policies.

Aim 2: Investigate the students' experiences in and views about their participation in their school's life. In particular,

- i. The factors that enhance or inhibit students' participation at the formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities;
- ii. The students' dispositions and expectations about their participation in the school, and
- iii. The triangulation of students' views and experiences with those of their teachers and school administrators.

Aim 3: Investigate the students' dispositions and expectations of their civic participation (e.g. social and political). In particular,

- i. The school practices that enhance knowledge about, and disposition for, civic participation;

- ii. The students' dispositions and expectations about civic participation; and,
- iii. The triangulation of the students' views and experiences with those of their teachers and school administrators.

Aim 4: Investigate the role of the students' backgrounds on the findings of the above two Aims. In particular,

- i. The role of gender difference on students' dispositions and experiences;
- ii. The role of socioeconomic background differences on students' dispositions and experiences; and,
- iii. The role of school locality (urban versus rural) differences on students' dispositions and experiences.

In an attempt to achieve the abovementioned aims, five research questions will guide this study:

1. What spaces are available in the formal curriculum for developing Omani students' civic participation?
2. How does classroom climate develop Omani students' civic participation?
3. How do the co-curricular activities develop Omani students' civic participation?
4. What are Omani students' dispositions towards civic participation?
5. In what ways do gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality factors influence Omani students' opportunities to develop civic participation?

1.3 Significance

This research is significance for four main reasons.

First, the Basic Education system, since implemented in 1998, was planned to improve education quality and support the modernization process in Oman. Developing students' participation in public life was one of the main intended aims in the current educational reform. This study represents the first attempt to examine the

outcomes of the Basic Education system with regard to civic participation development. Outcomes of this study can help policy makers and practitioners to introduce the necessary changes in order to enhance students' participation in public life.

Second, the modernization process in Oman leads to a remarkable development in the Omani civic life. The last few decades were significant in the development of civic society in Oman; the increase in the number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the development of political participation are noticeable changes in the Omani society (Al hashmei, 2009; Al khanjari, 2006, Jones & Ridout, 2005; Valeri, 2007). As mentioned previously, the educational system plays a significant role in supporting development of any civic society. For this reason, investigating the role of the Omani educational system regarding the development of civic participation is an important issue to ensure that Omani students experience a civically rich learning environment. Findings from this research should help to support the ongoing change and development of civic life in Oman.

Third, there is a lack of research about educational practices in terms of civic participation in the Middle East. In the last four decades, the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) conducted three rounds of international surveys regarding civic and citizenship education to assess students' achievement in different aspects of citizenship and civic education. The number of countries participating in this international study increase from 9 in 1971 to 38 in the latest round which took place in 2009 (Schulz et al., 2010). However, none of Middle East countries participated in any of the rounds. Such observation demonstrates considerable lack of research regarding civic participation a significant area in the world especially from political and economic perspectives. This research will try to provide a better understanding regarding the educational role in developing civic participation in a Middle Eastern country. While the current study will contribute to the address of the considerable lack of research regarding civic participation in this part of the world, it can also be an important reference for the development of future research. It is hoped that this study will be useful in raising the awareness of the need for education to promote civic participation so that other

similar studies will be conducted in Oman and in the surrounding Middle Eastern countries.

Finally, in terms of personal reasons, this inquiry provided me with a great opportunity to increase my knowledge and experience in citizenship education in general and, in particular, civic participation. Observing different perspectives and experiences from throughout the world in my doctoral journey will help me to contribute effectively in the development of the civic mission of the Omani educational system. Before I started my doctoral journey, developing citizenship education was part of my responsibilities as Deputy Director of the Technical Office for Studies and Development in the Ministry of Education in Oman. While I am looking to continue this role after completion of the doctorate, the countless experiences I gained throughout this journey will help me to contribute in supporting Omani educators' commitment to fulfilling schools' civic responsibility.

1.4 Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of current research, the definitions of some major terms used are:

Basic Education: "A unified ten-year education provided by the Sultanate for all children of school age. It meets their basic education needs in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, enabling them to continue their education or training based on their interests, aptitudes, and dispositions, and enabling them to face the challenges of their present circumstances and future development, in the context of comprehensive development".(MoE, 2001, p.6)

Civic participation: this term has many definitions as explained in Chapter Three. However, the current study uses the definition suggested by Adler and Goggin (2005) where the civic participation "Describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future". (p. 241)

Formal curriculum: a set of courses including aims, contents, and learning activities offered to Basic Education students as compulsory subjects. These timetabled courses are with or without formal assessment.

Classroom climate: a set of combined factors in which the learning climate becomes interactive, engaging, comfortable and positive, including interactions between students and teachers and students themselves, management style, and teaching styles.

Co-curricular activities: wide range of voluntary learning activities organised outside the regular scheduled class time including academic clubs, sport, and community service.

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the issues of the current research focus: civic participation and educational reform in Oman. It also states the research questions, significance of the research, and thesis organisation.

The context where this research took place is described in Chapter Two. This chapter provides basic information regarding the Sultanate of Oman such as its location, population, history, and the political system. Chapter Two also provides detailed information about the educational system in Oman, including the current educational reform plan, Basic Education system, and civic participation.

Chapter Three reviews the literature in relation to civic participation. This chapter provides the conceptual framework used in this study. The chapter also examines the concept of civic participation and identifies the role of school in developing civic participation. In particular, special attention is drawn to identifying the role of formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities in developing students' civic participation. Similarly, the chapter casts light on some demographic factors which are investigated in the current research.

The methodology used in this research is explained in Chapter Four. This chapter provides an explanation about the interpretive paradigm and case study methodology utilised. In addition, since this research utilises more than one instrument in an attempt to achieve triangulation of the data, each method and its sample and implementation are detailed. The chapter also discusses the data analysis and interpretation process. Finally, the chapter addresses the issues of research quality and ethical considerations.

The findings of this research are presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five presents the findings of the interplay between formal curriculum and civic participation, classroom climate and civic participation, and the findings of the importance of co-curricular activities to civic participation. Chapter Six presents the findings related to students' dispositions towards civic participation and demographic factors investigated in this study.

Lastly, Chapter Seven provides a detailed discussion regarding the research findings and draws conclusions about this research. In this chapter, key findings are discussed in relation to the current research questions. It discusses, in turn, the relationships between current research findings and previous studies, and draws links between the findings and some characteristics of Omani society. Finally, the chapter presents contributions, limitations and directions for further research.

The following chapter provides a picture of the context where this research took place.

Chapter Two: The Context of the Study

The main concern of this study is educational reform and civic participation in the Sultanate of Oman. The aim of this chapter is to provide a focused view on the main characteristics of the Omani context. This chapter will provide a brief description of Oman in relation to its location, population, history, economy, political system, women participation, and civic society. The chapter will also draw attention to the development of the educational system in Oman. The current educational reform, Basic Education, and its role in developing civic participation will be discussed in detail. Information included in this chapter provides an overview of the context where the current research took place.

2.1 Oman- Background

2.1.1 Location

The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the south-east of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by the United Arab Emirates in the north-west, Saudi Arabia to the west and the Republic of Yemen in the south (Figure 1). The country covers an area of about 309,500 square kilometres with remarkable diversity in landscape including desert, mountains and plains. The coastline extends 3,165 km and overlooks three seas; the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea. Most of Oman's geography includes desert and mountains. The climate is extremely hot and humid during the summer season. However, it becomes more moderate during winter. Rain is very rare and irregular and Oman is classified as a semi-arid country (Ministry of National Economy, 2010a). Throughout history, the geographic location of Oman has played an critical role in shaping its culture, economy, and interactions with a wide range of cultures based all over the world.



Figure 2.1: Geographic location of the Sultanate of Oman

2.1.2 Population

According to the latest published statistics, the population of Oman in 2009 is more than three million (Ministry of National Economy, 2010a). The number of citizens is more than two million with an additional one million who are immigrants mainly from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. According to the 2003 census, more than 66% of the population lives in the urban cities such as Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah (Ministry of National Economy, 2005).

The majority of Omanis are Arabs who have immigrated to Oman from Yemen and the Middle of the Arabian Peninsula. Nonetheless, there are other minor groups who immigrated to Oman during the last few centuries such as the Balushies, from Pakistan, and the Zanzibaries from Zanzibar, east Africa. Arabic is the principal language in the country with an increasing number of people speaking English which is officially recognized as the second language of Oman. The Omani culture is mainly rooted from Islamic tradition. Omanis embraced Islam voluntarily in 630 AD.

However, since the early age of Islam, Omanis developed the branch of Islam called Ibadism. Oman is the only country among the Islamic countries with a majority of Ibadi Muslims. While the majority of Omanis follow this sect, other Omanis are divided between Sunni and Shi'a. Nevertheless, unlike some other Arabian and Muslim countries, all Muslim sects enjoy life in a very cohesive society. Furthermore, Hindu and Christians mainly present in Oman as immigrant workers, are exercising their religious faith in freedom and harmony (Ministry of Information, n.d-b). Alhinai (2004) stated that the moderate Ibadism approach to Islam has a significant impact on enhancing tolerance, cohesion, and equality in the Omani society and to building good and friendly relationships between Oman and its surrounding neighbourhood.

2.1.3 History

The foundation of Oman goes back to the era before Christ (B.C). Archaeological discoveries show that civilization developed in Oman at least 5000 years ago. In the B.C period, the country was known by different names such as Majan and Mazzon. Also, the country was one of the ports used for exporting copper and frankincense. These two items allowed the country to establish relationships with the old Egyptian civilizations, Rome, and Sumerians, in Mesopotamia (MoE, 2004c). After the Omanis converted to Islam in the 7th century, they maintained their country's independence under a special system derived from an Ibadism tradition called Imamah. The tradition of Imamah, and political history of Oman in general, are examples that Islam can play a significant role in developing individual's commitment for political participation. According to Ibadism, the leader "should be elected on the basis of merit." (International Republican Institute, 1995, p. 7)

However, Omanis' strong commitment to maintaining their country's independence was the key reason for ongoing tension in the relationship between Oman and the central Islamic authorities in Damascus (661-750 AD) and Baghdad (750-1258). This situation motivated Omanis to strengthen their relationship with other nations in the Indian Ocean and beyond. During the 9th century, Oman developed an active relationship with China and the Malaya Peninsula. The Omanis seafaring tradition allowed them to play a significant role in the history of the Indian Ocean. In 1498,

the Omani sailor, Ahmed bin Majid, guided the well-known Portuguese navigator, Vasco de Gama around the Cape of Good Hope (MoE, 2004c). This discovery paved the way for the Portuguese colonial phase and later the international competition in the Indian Ocean.

In the 17th Century, Omanis ended the Portuguese colonization in the Arabian Gulf and East Africa. In the 19th century, Oman reached its highest power with the establishment of the Oman Empire on the mother land, Oman, and East Africa. Zanzibar Island was the capital of the African part of Oman Empire. As a result of the international conflict and competition, Oman lost its position as a key player in the Indian Ocean by the start of the 20th century. The era from 1900 until 1970 is often recognized as the time of darkness and isolation in the Omani history mainly because of internal conflicts and external pressure. The movement towards moderation and urbanization started in Oman after Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970 (Frayha, 2006).

2.1.4 Economy

The Oman economy has grown rapidly in the last four decades. In 1976, the country started a series of comprehensive 5-year Development Plans. In 1995, the vision of the Oman economy “Oman 2020” was developed to guide future plans. This vision aimed to place Oman as one of the developed countries by 2020. Statistics indicate that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from 7,478 million Rial Omani (R.O) in 2000 to 17,731 million R.O in 2009. This remarkable increase had a favourable impact on the standard of living of people in Oman (Ministry of National Economy, 2010a).

While oil and natural gas play an important role in the development of the economy, proven oil reserves are expected to be depleted in less than two decades. In response to such challenge, the Omani government has encouraged other sectors such as agriculture, services and industry to replace oil and gas incomes. The latest five-year Development Plan (2006-2010) is designed to establish tourism as one of the most sustainable development industries for Oman (Ministry of Information, 2007).

2.1.5 Political system

Oman political system is a monarchy. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has ruled the country since 1970. The foundation of the current ruler's family, Al Said, in Oman goes back to 1743 when Imam Ahmed bin Said was elected according to the ideological view of Ibadism. Since then, the Al Said dynasty has been continually ruling Oman. The current ruler, Sultan Qaboos, came to the throne announcing the end of his father's harsh methods of running the country. Under this governor, Oman has witnessed considerable development and significant movement towards liberalization.

In 1996, the Basic Law of the State, which has a similar role to a constitution in western countries, was established to affirm the principles that have guided different aspects of public life in Oman. The Basic Law of State ensures the freedom and protection for all individuals and provides the legal framework for citizens' participation in public life. Some articles comprising the Basic Law in relation to citizens' participation include:

Article 9: Rule in the Sultanate shall be based on justice, Alshura¹ Consultation and equality. Citizens shall have the right to take part in public affairs - in accordance with this Basic Law and the conditions and circumstances defined in the Law.

Article 10: Establishing a sound administrative system that guarantees justice, tranquillity and equality for citizens, ensures respect for public order and safeguards the higher interests of the country.

(Ministry of Information, n d-a)

Similarly, Article 58 of the Basic Law provides a basis for the establishment of the Council of Oman (Majlis Oman). This council is comprised of two different bodies: The State Council (Majlis A'Dawla), and The Consultation Council (Majlis Alshura). The members of the State Council are appointed by the government, however, while the members of Majlis Alshura are elected in a general election. These two representative bodies work independently and collectively under the regulation of Majlis Oman (Ministry of Information, 2007).

¹The term Alshura in Arabic means advisory council which in the Omani context has some of the parliamentary functions.

It is, however, through Majlis Alshura that Omani citizens generally engage politically in Oman. The Majlis Alshura was first established in 1991 when citizens, for the first time in the Omani modern history, experienced going to the election polls. This council replaced an old, totally appointed council established in 1981 and marked the development of democratic practices in Oman. The main role of Majlis Alshura is to provide the government with advice and suggestion in relation to social affairs, economy and legislation. It is also concerned with raising individuals' awareness in regard to their civil rights. Both women and men have equal rights in participation at Majlis Alshura as voters and candidates.

Nonetheless, the advisory role of an elected body as compared to the responsibilities and jurisdiction of a parliament in modern democracies is a major point of debate in Oman. Yet some observers argued that giving Majlis Alshura further involvement and jurisdiction in running the country's affairs is expected when looking to the ongoing democratic reform in Oman (Al khanjari, 2006, Valeri, 2007). Jones and Ridout (2005, p. 384) in their review of democratic development in Oman stated "The gradual development of [Majlis Alshura] is one of important institutional in Oman's evolving political ecology, and there is a dynamic interaction between tradition of [Al]shura , and the requirement of modern government". This last argument was supported in late 2008 when the government established an independent human rights commission. Members of this commission were chosen from public and civic society. This latest modification in Oman's public life should support ongoing political reform and strengthen human rights norms in the country (Ministry of Legal Affairs, 2008). Furthermore, consistent with more recent democratic demands, referred to in the press as the 'Arabic Spring', started from Tunisia in January 2011, many Omanis demonstrated asking for further political reform in the country. In response, a Royal decree published in 12 of March 2011 granted Majlis Alshural and Majlis A'Dawla legislative and audit jurisdictions (Ministry of Legal Affairs, 2011). This latest political reform is considered as vital step to develop political participation in the Omani society.

2.1.6 Women's participation

Women's participation in public life in the era before 1970 was very limited. Lack of education opportunities and poverty were factors that contributed to the marginalization of women participation in the Omani society. However, the modernization process in Oman aimed to develop Omani women's involvement in public life. The Basic Law of the state, constitution, in the Article 12 confirmed that "Justice, equality and equality of opportunity between Omanis are the pillars of society, guaranteed by the State" (Ministry of Information, n.d-a). The government's commitment to increase women participation in public life made Oman one of the leading countries in the Arabian Gulf region for publicizing women's rights and providing women equal opportunities with men to play an active role in public life (Rabi, 2002; Ulrichsen, 2009).

Published statistics indicate that Omani women's participation in social, economic, and political life developed remarkably. In the education sector, the gap between female and male student enrolment has gradually narrowed in the last four decades. In 1970, the three public schools that existed across the country did not offer any places for female students (MoE, 2008a). Since then, and with the government's commitment to provide education for both female and male students on equal basis, the enrolment gap has narrowed gradually. The latest published statistics indicated that in some sectors, such as higher education, there are more female students than male students. Also, girls comprise 49% of students' enrolment for Grades 1 to 12 (Ministry of National Economy, 2010b).

From a social and economic perspective, statistics show that women's participation is increasing remarkably. For example, female workers in the public sector increased from 7.4% in 1990 to 36.8 % in 2009. Similarly, in the private sector, the percentage of women increased from 10% in 2000 to 18.5% in 2009. Omani women have also become members in labour unions across the country (Ministry of National Economy, 2010b). Also, women's associations are playing an important role in developing women's participation in Omani society. The number of female driven Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) increased from 27 in 2000 to 52 in 2009. The members of these associations increased from 2599 in 2000 to 5263 (Ministry of

National Economy, 2010a). All of these figures indicate an increasing role of Omani women in public life.

In terms of political participation, women comprise 20% of the State Council (appointed council). However, women's participation in Majlis Alshura (elected council) is not promising. Since first participation in 1994, only a few women have succeeded in gaining electors' votes. Furthermore, none of the 21 female candidates won in the latest election of Majlis Alshura (a period six years from 2008 to 2011). This situation explains that political participation of Omani women remains in its early stages. Worth mentioning here is that only 5.1 % of decision making positions in government sectors are occupied by women (Ministry of National Economy, 2010b).

2.1.7 Civic society

Civic society in Oman has enjoyed noticeable development over the last two decades. The Basic Law of the State provides a solid base for the establishment of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). While Article 32 in this law ensures all citizens have the right of assembly, Article 33 confirms citizens' rights to establish Non-Government Organisations:

The freedom to form associations on a national basis for legitimate objectives and in a proper manner, in a way that does not conflict with the stipulations and aims of this Basic Law, is guaranteed under the conditions and in the circumstances defined by the Law.

(Ministry of Information, n.d-a)

After the emergence of Basic Law and the detailed legalization of NGOs in Oman issued by Royal Decree in 2000, considerable growth in the civil society along with an increase of participation has been noticed. This is evident from the remarkable increase in the number of NGOs and its involvement in the public life of Omani society. Vocational associations, women's associations, charitable organisations, sports and cultural clubs, and the Union of Oman' Workers are examples of NGOs which have developed in Oman (Ministry of National Economy, 2003). These organisations open the door for all citizens to become involved in public life

according to their interest and, more importantly, experience the value of participation by voting or electing representatives of these independent bodies.

Although there has been remarkable development of NGOs in Oman, this key component of any well-built civil society is facing challenges. In his critical review of the recent status of NGOs in Oman, Al hashmei, (2009) identified a set of obstacles limiting effectiveness of NGOs in the Omani society. He stated that the current legislation system, lack of participation of informed citizens, lack of financial and technical support, limited prevalence and spread of voluntary work culture, and lack of media support are major challenges that need to be addressed in order to support ongoing development of NGOs in Oman. However, the government in Oman has an ongoing commitment to strengthen and expand the role of NGOs to ensure that they become vital partners in governing Omani society. This support is critical if the government is willing to deepen citizens' participation in the public life in Oman and address concerns stated in the National Report of Human Development in Oman. This government report, published by Ministry of National Economy (2003), examined the status of civic society in Oman and concluded:

The future of civil society in Oman is need of further investigation in order to detect ways to convert it into an active partner in the comprehensive development process. It needs more financial and administrative independence to be more effective in dealing with the power of the government and the influence of the private sector. (p. 181)

While this statement explains the government's desire for stronger civic society, it also indicates the importance of further steps required to strengthen civic society in Oman and the urgent need to accelerate the participation of the NGOs involvement in the governance process of the country.

2.2 Education in Oman

Education is one of the interesting stories in the modern history of Oman. When Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne on 23rd July 1970, education became his priority to develop a modern state. On 9th August 1970, he spoke to the Omani people saying:

Our country has been deprived for a very long period of time from education, which is considered as the base for administrative and technical efficiency, starting from this fact, educating and training our people should start as soon as possible.

(MoE, 2006b, p. 23)

Since that time, education in Oman began to change dramatically, both quantitatively and qualitatively. As part of the five-year national development plan started in 1976, education enjoys intensive consideration. The report published by MoE (2008a), summarized the education priorities in the 7 Five-Year Development plans as follows:

- First Five-Year Development Plan (1976-1980): to continue the expansion of education services throughout the country; replace temporary schools (e.g. tents) with permanent concrete schools, and to establish teacher training institutes.
- Second Five-Year Development Plan (1981-1985): to continue to expand the education services, to provide schools with a library, laboratory and workshop facilities and to develop teacher training institutes to become intermediate colleges which admit secondary school graduates for two-years of study.
- Third Five-Year Development Plan (1986-1990): while continuing the expansion program, give more emphasis to improving the quality of the services provided and planning for the implementation of the Omanisation program.
- Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1991-1995): to continue improving the quality of services and promotion of the Omanisation of the teaching staff.
- Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1996-2000): to develop appropriate quality programs to prepare citizens for the 21st century, including the introduction of Basic Education system (discussed in pages 24- 32).
- Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2001-2005): to continue the expansion of education to make it available to all, expand the implementation of the Basic Education program, and develop quality education services.
- Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (2006-2010): to continue increasing the enrolment and literacy rate, enhancing the participation of the private sector in education and improving the quality of education.

(MoE, 2008a, p. 14)

The following sections will provide further details about education development in Oman from both a quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

2.2.1 Education scene before 1970

By 1970, Oman was classified as one of the most poor, isolated countries in the Arabian region. The political system was without any interest in teaching people or even providing them with basic needs to survive. Hence, the majority of Omanis were travelling abroad seeking security, schooling and a better future for their children. The report, published by the MoE in Oman, summarizes the educational conditions in Oman in 1970 by stating, “Oman had only 3 schools with 30 teachers educating 909 students. Nearly 66% of Oman’s adults were illiterate” (MoE, 2006b, p. 19). These three schools were providing only primary education. Two of them were in the capital city Muscat and the other one was in Salalah in the south. Only a few citizens had the ability to offer their children learning opportunities at these schools. At that time, the majority of Omani territories banned any form of modern education. However, some villages were providing religious schooling to equip children with basic Islamic practices (MoE, 2002). The era after 1970, Oman began to overcome such discouraging circumstances.

2.2.2 Education: Quantitative development

Since 1970, the priority of the modern government in Oman has been to set-up schools in all parts of the state and to make education equally accessible to all Omani children. In the 1970’s, the majority of schools were under the shade of trees or built from tents and temporary materials (MoE, 2002).

Table 2.1 shows the increase in student, school and teacher numbers from 1970 to 2010. Student numbers increased from 909 in 1970 to 531,393 in 2010. Furthermore, the number of schools increased remarkably from 3 in 1970 to 1040 by 2010. Linked to this, teacher numbers jumped from 30 in 1970 to 44,506 by 2010 (MoE, 2008a; 2011).

Table 2.1 Number of schools, students and teachers in Oman from 1970 to 2010

Year	Schools	Students	Teachers
1970	3	909	30
1980	373	106,032	5,150
1995	953	488,797	22,292
2005	1,046	568,074	37,500
2010	1,040	531,393	44,506

2.2.3 Education: Qualitative development

Planning to improve the quality of education in Oman started before the end of Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1991-1995). In May 1995, the Future Visions Conference for the Oman Economy – Oman 2020 took place. This conference emphasized the urgent need to improve the education system in order to prepare Omani human resources for dealing with different challenges locally and internationally (Ministry of National Economy, 1995). Following this conference, the government invited an international team to evaluate the educational system in Oman and prepare comprehensive documents to improve the quality of education. In September 1995, the expert team submitted a detailed plan to improve the education quality in Oman (MoE, 1995). Although economic reasons were major drivers for educational reform, the low efficiency of the existing educational system was presenting more motivation to improve the education quality in Oman (Al hinaei, 2006, Al-Riyami, 1996; Rassekh, 2004). In 1996, the government announced its commitment to improve education quality by implementing a new system of education called the Basic Education system. In 1998, 17 schools in different territories announced the implementation of the Basic Education system.

The Basic Education system was designed to reflect the government’s obligation to provide a high standard of education and to replace the old system gradually. By 2009, around 80% of Omani public schools were implementing the new system. The government showed continuous commitment by providing the necessary sources for Basic Education (MoE, 2010). In 2009, the government devoted more than 25% of the state budget to the education sector. Table 2.2 presents the MoE (2006b; 2011) budget as a percentage of state budgets, 1998-2005.

Table 2.2: Ministry of Education budget as percentage of state budget, 1998-2009 (In Omani Rials).

Financial Year	State Budget In millions R.O	Education budget In millions R.O	Education budget as % of state budget
1998	1,214	239	19.7
2000	1,321	278	21.1
2003	1,525	343	22.6
2005	1,735	448	25.9
2009	2,970	747	25.1

2.2.4 Education philosophy in Oman

Since 1978, the educational system has been guided by a document called The Philosophy and Objective of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. Since then, this document has been regularly updated to address challenges and ambitions of the Omani society (MoE, 2006b). The latest published version of this document stated that educational objectives in Oman are rooted from the ambitions of the Omani people, development needs of the Omani society, and challenges facing the international community. This document was planned to provide educators in Oman:

[A] set of principles, beliefs, concepts and obligations' which are stated in an integrated, coherent and harmonious manner to serve as a guide and a mention for the educational process. It is the first source on which construction and writing of curricula depend.

(MoE, 2004b, p.19)

The document suggested many principles guided educational system in Oman. Some of these include:

- Developing the individual in an integrated manner with regard to physical, intellectual, spiritual, societal and emotional aspects.
- Developing Omani originality and identity derived from Islam, the Arabic language and the country's rich culture.
- Modernising society and dealing with modern technology.
- Adopting a scientific approach by developing the mental abilities of individuals and providing them with scientific and critical thinking capabilities to enable them to employ these skills in their daily lives and, in addition, to master the basic skills in more than one language.
- Encouraging self-learning skills in order to make education sustainable throughout an individual's life.
- Encouraging national unity.

- Promoting social liberation by encouraging a spirit of cooperation and collective activity in the public interest.
- Protecting the environment.
- Encouraging international peace and understanding through the development of the values of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect.

(MoE, 2004b)

In a critical reading of The Philosophy and Objectives of Education in the Sultanate of Oman document, Al kharusi and Atweh (2008) stated that the set of principal mentioned in the document provide a strong basis for civic participation development.

2.3 Basic Education system

Details about the Basic Education system will now be presented, including a definition, characteristics, main changes, and the implementation progress. Finally, a focused view about civic participation and the Basic Education system will be given.

2.3.1 Definition and characteristics

The Theoretical Framework of Basic Education document defined this form of education as:

A unified ten-year education provided by the Sultanate for all children of school age. It meets their basic education needs in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, enabling them to continue their education or training based on their interests, aptitudes, and dispositions, and enabling them to face the challenges of their present circumstances and future development, in the context of comprehensive development.

(MoE, 2001, p.6)

This definition shows the general features of the recent educational reform plan, the Basic Education system, by confirming the government's obligation to provide both girls and boys a high standard of education on an equal basis. This highlights the government's commitment to provide both female and male students equal learning opportunity and reduce any gender differences in relation to education enrolment. Also, it emphasizes the importance of providing a comprehensive approach to educational reform in order to ensure quality of education.

The national report regarding inclusive education in Oman published in 2008 summarized the main characteristics of the Basic Education as follows:

- The creation of a new system that remains firmly rooted in Islamic principles and Omani cultural identity, and follows international best practice.
- The strengthening of key subjects, such as Science, Mathematics, Arabic and English.
- The introduction of new subjects such as IT (information technology) and Life Skills, into the curriculum.
- The development of teaching and learning materials that adopt a student-centred approach.
- The revision of courses, school textbooks and teacher guides in order to reduce theoretical content and increase real-life application that are meaningful to students.
- The replacement of traditional textbooks libraries with Learning Resource Centres (LRCs), which provide students with access to a wide range of resources, including the internet.
- The use of a wide range of assessment and evaluation instruments, with greater emphasis given to continuous assessment.
- The reduction of the class size in order to allow teachers to employ new teaching and learning strategies.
- The lengthening of the school year and school day, both to accommodate new subjects and strengthen existing subjects in the curriculum, and to allow more time for new teaching and learning approaches.
- The organisation of co-educational classes in grades 1-4.
- The ‘feminization’ of the teaching force and school administration in grades 1-4.

(MoE, 2008a, p. 21)

As can be seen from the above mentioned features, the Basic Education system has been designed to provide a better learning environment and to overcome traditional educational system practices dominating the first three decades of modern education in Oman.

2.3.2 Changes introduced by the Basic Education system

Basic Education was designed to introduce a comprehensive path for development of education in Oman. The reform plan was designed to improve different elements of the educational system such as restructuring the educational system, the formal curriculum, classroom climate, co-curricular activities, and professional development. The following sections discuss each of these aspects.

Basic Education structure. The Basic Education system is divided into two cycles: Cycle One includes Grades 1-4 and Cycle Two includes Grades 5-10. Grade 11 and 12 are known as Post Basic Education. In contrast, the old educational system, General Education, was divided into three stages: elementary, preparatory, and secondary. Figure 2.2 shows the structure of both the Basic Education and the General Education system. With the new structure, male and female students learn in mix-gender classes during Cycle One with completely female staff. In Cycle Two, male and female students are separated into different schools. Similarly the teachers become single gender.

Grade level	Basic Education	Grade level	General Education
12	Post Basic Education	12	Secondary
11		11	
10	Cycle Two	10	
9		9	Preparatory
8		8	
7		7	
6		6	
5	Cycle One	5	Elementary
4		4	
3		3	
2		2	
1		1	

Figure 2.2: Structure of the Basic Education system and its relationship with the old system (General Education).

Formal Curriculum. The Basic Education system draws special attention to the review and redesign of the formal curriculum. All formal curriculums were developed according to the new aims of education in Oman. Two new subjects were introduced: Life Skills and Information Technology. English Language became a compulsory subject from Grade 1, whereas it was only from Grade 4 in the previous

system. Although most subjects have increase in the allocated teaching time, Science and Mathematics have been given more attention by increasing the number of periods and improving their content according to international trends. In his address before Majlis Alshura in 2003a, the Minister of Education reported the intended goals of these changes by saying:

This reform in school program and curricula aims to improve the educational outcome in accordance with the contemporary educational trends which call for development of cooperation, communication, research and investigation capacities , and which focus on self-learning skills, instilling critical scientific thinking abilities, creativeness, innovation and on developing an aesthetic sense, a good knowledge of Mathematics, Science and computer literacy, and concretely linking school subjects to the student's life and local environment through practical and realistic applications based on the student's life".

(MoE, 2003a, p. 7)

According to the MoE (2010), the Basic Education curriculum was developed to promote students' ability to seek and employ knowledge instead of only memorizing it. The intended curriculum was also structured to enhance interactive relationships between the learner and the surrounding environment. Such modifications and aims led to expanding the school year and school day. Compared to General Education, the teaching plan of Basic Education for the first 10 years (Grades 1 to 10) adds more than 3,600 teaching hours. The teaching hours of some subjects such as Arabic Language, English Language, Science, Mathematics, and Social Science increased by more than 40% in comparison to teaching hours of old educational system, General Education. Furthermore, the expansion of the school year and school day aimed to provide more teaching hours for new subjects such as Life Skills and Information Technology (MoE, 2006b).

Classroom climate. One of major aims of the Basic Education system was to improve the classroom learning climate. The old educational system was characterized by traditional teaching style and low level of student interaction (Al hinaei, 2006; Al-Riyami, 1996). To overcome these problems, teachers in the Basic Education schools were encouraged to employ more interactive and engaging teaching methods. Collaborative learning, peer work, field work, inquiry, critical thinking, simulations, active dialogue and discussions are examples of teaching strategies suggested to be utilized to improve classroom climate. In order to support a

more interactive classroom climate, the number of teachers employed by MoE increased dramatically in the first half of the last decade. This was crucial to improving the quality of learning in classrooms and to help teachers make the changes from teacher-centred approaches to student-centred approaches (Al-aghbari, 2007).

Table 2.3 provides a summary of student-teacher ratios development in the Basic Education schools in the first half of last decade (MoE, 2008a). The ratios decrease from 1:20 in 2001 to 1:10 in 2005. This development should help teachers to improve learning quality in the classroom.

Table: 2.3: Development of student-teacher ratios in Basic Education schools

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Teachers	15,307	18,179	19,977	22,155	25,424	26,434
Students	303,512	301,402	293,081	283,331	272,037	261,316
Teachers/Students Ratios	1:20	1:17	1:15	1:13	1:11	1:10

Similarly, assessment strategies have been developed to improve classroom climate. The old educational system, General Education, depended heavily on examinations to assess students' performance. In 1996, the Scottish Qualifications Authority advised educators in Oman to employ formative assessment in order to overcome traditional assessment practices in Omani schools in tune with international trends. As a result of ongoing reform, schools utilized various forms of assessment to evaluate students' achievement. This include portfolio work, project, oral or written test and student self-assessment (MoE, 2006b, 2008a).

Furthermore, the educational reform plan emphasised the importance of the Classroom Council in developing a culture of collaboration between students and teachers. This Council is referred to group of elected students in each classroom. One of the main aims of this Council is teaching students values of democracy and giving them a role in the process of classroom management (MoE, 2003b).

Co-curricular activities. This was an area of focus in the Basic Education system. Clubs were established to encourage students to participate actively in different school activities. For example, schools setup academic clubs for subjects such as Arabic, English, Social Studies and Life Skills. In addition, groups were formed to create spaces for students to practice their particular pursuits. These included Journalism, Students' Government, Health, Theatre, Community Service and Environmental Friend, Scouts and Girl Guides. The operational work guide of Basic Education schools explained that co-curricular activities should aim to:

- emphasize students' sense of belonging to their home country;
- help students to discover and develop their hobbies;
- provide opportunities to the learner to interact and engage with the surrounding society;
- encourage students to learn by doing and develop their ability for creativity and innovation;
- help students to work collectively for the welfare of society;
- develop a spirit of cooperation, teamwork, and self-confidence;
- develop higher order thinking skills such as problem solving and creative thinking;
- inculcate the skills of dialogue and discussion and the ability to communicate and learn about other cultures.

(MoE, 2003b, p. 17)

In his address at Majlis Alshura in February 2005, the Minister of Education emphasized the important role of co-curricular activities in educational reform. He also announced that the MoE was planning to support co-curricular activities in coordination with government and Non-Governmental Organisations (MoE, 2005).

Professional development. Since the early stages of the education reform, training facilities were established in all educational regions to deliver intensive training courses for teachers. Trainers from different territories were identified to transfer professional development programs to teachers, headmasters and supervisors. These programs were essential to introduce the features of the new education philosophy and to work in a new teaching environment. The MoE statistics indicated that training programs increased remarkably since the beginning of the implementation of Basic Education, as can be seen from Table 2.4 (MoE, 2006b; 2008a; 2011). Some long-term training programs were also established to upgrade educators' ability to deal with the special requirement of the new education philosophy. For example,

upgrading English teachers' qualifications from a diploma to a Bachelor's degree. This program started in 1998 in collaboration with Leeds University in the United Kingdom. Similar programs took place internally with some faculties of education providing training for other subjects such as Social Studies, Mathematics, Science and Arabic Language. Higher diplomas in education were another form of long-term professional development. Supervision, administration, learning difficulties, and career guidance diplomas were established in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University to address the ongoing implementation of educational reform.

Table 2.4: Number of training programs and trainees, 1997 -2009

Year	Programs	Trainees
1997	46	614
1998	96	2,316
2000	145	4,328
2003	192	5,799
2005	230	8,333
2009	271	9,026

School buildings. School buildings have been redesigned to fulfil the requirements of the learning environment required in the Basic Education system. Laboratories for computers, Science and Learning Resource Centre (LRCs) have been established at all Basic Education schools. These facilities were essential to improve the learning climate quality and put into practice the intended aims of Basic Education system.

2.3.3 Implementation progress

The number of Basic Education schools has increased remarkably since they were first established in 1998. In 2009, more than 80% of Omani public schools were implementing this new form of education. According to the latest published report, the Ministry of Education will complete the generalization of Basic Education system in all public schools by 2014 (MoE, 2010). In accordance with the action implementation plan, in 2010 all Omani students at Grade 1 level were enrolled at Basic Education schools. Materials for Basic Education schools such as curriculum, textbooks and teachers' guides have also developed progressively. By the academic year 2006/2007 all materials needed for the Cycle One (Grades 1 - 4) and two (Grades 5-10) were completed. In 2007, the first cohort of Basic Education schools graduated from Grade 10 and joined the Post Basic Education system (MoE, 2008a, 2010).

2.3.4 Basic Education and civic mission

Civic participation emerged to be one of the focal issues in educational reform in Oman. The Philosophy of Objectives of Education in Oman document emphasized the important role of schools in developing citizens' participation in the public life (MoE, 2004b). The Theoretical Framework of Basic Education in the Sultanate of Oman document states that the educational reform plan aims to provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to develop a students' character. This document stated that Basic Education places a high value on enhancing learners' ability and aims to develop:

- Life skills through communication.
- Self-learning.
- Scientific and critical thinking.
- The ability to understand contemporary science and technology, as well the ability to adapt to innovation.
- The ability to deal rationally with problems of the present era: conservation and wise use of the environment.
- The ability to internalize the values and ethics of mastery of work, production, sensible use of leisure time, and participation in civil life.

(MoE, 2001, p. 9)

These aims explain clearly that, since the early stage of educational reform in Oman, civic participation was one of the ultimate aims of education. The last aim also emphasises that enhancing students' participation in public life is one of main intended aims of the Basic Education system. Similarly, the action plan of Basic Education schools showed that interest in civic participation required some practical steps. For this reason, the teaching plan of Basic Education includes the introduction of a new compulsory subject titled Life Skills. The aims and content of this compulsory subject are closely linked to civic life (MoE, 2008b). This reform could be considered to be one of the major steps to support civic learning within the educational reform plan. This new course created 240 teaching hours within the first ten years of Basic Education schooling in favour of civic development. Similarly, the Social Studies subject has also gained another 284 hours when compared to the previous educational system (MoE, 2006b). These two subjects are considered as key for civic participation development. It is worth mentioning here that both subjects, Life Skills and Social Studies, are also compulsory units in Post Basic Education schools (Grade 11 and 12).

A further step to strengthen civic education in Oman started in 2004. The MoE has conducted a series of workshops and activities concerned with civic education. These activities were organized in collaboration with local and international experts (MoE, 2004d, MoE, 2006a). These workshops aimed to develop awareness among curriculum experts, supervisors, and teachers regarding civic education. In March 2006, the Minister of Education formed a special team to identify and suggest best practices for developing civic education in the Omani educational system. In 2007, the MoE introduced the citizenship program to Grade 10 students. This program was part project citizen administrated by Center for Civic Education in USA. The program aimed to improve students' commitment to their society and to develop their skills to carry positive changes in their surrounding community (MoE, 2008c; MoE, 2009a; MoE, 2010).

2.4 Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter provided the context in which this study has taken place. The main characteristics of Oman which include its geography, economy, people, history, political system, women's participation, and civic society were discussed. This chapter also presented the quantitative and qualitative development of the educational system in Oman. In particular, the Basic Education system was presented to highlight recent educational reform in Oman. The chapter discussed the Basic Education definitions, goals, characteristics, and changes introduced for civic participation. The following chapter will explore the literature in relation to schooling and civic participation.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to examine the relevant literature in relation to schooling and civic participation. This chapter provides the conceptual framework used in this study. The chapter examines the ongoing argument in the literature about the definition of civic participation and other related concepts. It investigates the competencies associated with the concept of civic participation. The chapter also examines the areas where schools introduce and develop learning activities relating to civic participation. The chapter reports on some studies related to civic education conducted in the Omani context. Finally, this part of the thesis sheds light on some demographic factors affecting the development of civic participation. In particular, factors of gender, socioeconomic background and school locality will be examined as they constitute factors related to the current investigation focus.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Enhancing students' participation in public affairs is recognised as one of the main goals for the schooling system (Dewey, 1916; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Putnam, 2000). Schools have an important responsibility to provide a constructive learning environment to enable students to develop positive experiences and dispositions towards participating in different aspects of civic life. The literature showed that there is no single understanding of how schools can develop students' civic participation. Similarly, the understanding of the concept of civic participation itself is subject to ongoing debate in the academic community. However, the literature provides a strong base to identify certain competencies that schools can promote for the development of civic participation in their students. According to the literature, these general competencies are *knowledge*, *skills* and *dispositions*. Similarly, many researchers have identified different school settings in which action can be designed to develop these competencies. These include the *formal curriculum*, *classroom climate* and *co-curricular activities*. However, schools do not operate in a vacuum. The literature identifies several social factors that impact on students' civic participation. These include the gender of the student, their socioeconomic background and the school locality. These dimensions form the basis of a conceptual

model used in this study of civic participation in Omani schools. This model is summarized in Figure 3.1 below.

The competencies of knowledge, skills, and disposition are recognized to be the “building blocks for engaged citizens” (Kirlin, 2010, p. 6). Civic knowledge is a prerequisite for enabling informed, engaged and active citizens (Rubin, 2007; Saltmarsh, 2005; Torney-Purta, 2002). For example, students need to learn about government structures and the characteristics of civic life in the society. Learners should be informed about the nature of political and social institutions in their society. They need to be aware about their home country’s history, constitution, legal system, and their rights and responsibilities. Also they need to learn about Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and to be aware of the different current affairs in their communities (Patric, 2002; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004). Civic skills are the second set of competencies required for developing participatory citizens. They relate to the individual’s ability to take action in order to enhance the welfare of the community. Skills such as communication, organization, collective decision making, critical thinking, and ability to work individually or with others are examples of skills required for active participation in public life (Kirlin, 2007; Patrick, 2002). Finally, civic disposition is a vital competency for civic participation. For effective civic participation, students should develop values such as social justice and equality, respect for the opinions and rights of others, a commitment to participating in public events, and an interest in helping to solve community problems (Branson & Quigley, 1998; Vontz, Metcalf & Patrick, 2000).

Similarly, there are various school settings that contribute to the development of civic competencies. From a wide review of literature, the formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities are three main areas in school life in which students can develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The formal curriculum plays an important role to promote civic participation among learners (Delli Carpini, 2000; Dobozy, 2004; Walker, 2002; Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997). Kerr (2003) emphasised the importance of formal curriculum in the United Kingdom for ensuring that schools serve this essential purpose in a reliable way. In the same way, McConnell (2007) suggested that American schools should introduce civic education as a core subject in order to overcome the ongoing decline in civic

participation among young adults. This view is also supported by Print (2007), who confirmed that Australian schools need to place more attention on the formal curriculum to deal with negative attitudes amongst students towards engagement in different aspects of civic life. In Oman, the educational reform plan, the Basic Education system, introduced a new compulsory subject, Life Skills, and added more teaching hours to school subjects that support the development of civic participation (MoE, 2006b; MoE, 2008b). Classroom climate is another key approach to developing civic participation within a learners' community. Educators should encourage openness in the classroom environment so that students can express their ideas, opinions and dispositions in a free atmosphere. Through civically supportive classroom climates, students learn about controversial issues and play an active role in group work, discussion, and the classroom management (Campbell, 2005; Homana, Barber & Torney-Purta, 2005; Torney-Purta, Amadeo & Pilotti, 2004). Finally, co-curricular activities in school can provide students with a positive environment and better opportunities for encouraging their involvement in schools and surrounding community. This vision is in harmony with many studies that identify the vital role of co-curricular activities in providing a positive context for teaching civic education and enhancing civic participation practices (Handle, 2002; Perliger, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2006; Pitiyanuwat & Sujiva, 2001; Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta & Richardson, 2002).

Lastly, civic participation is influenced by many contextual factors such as gender socioeconomic background, media, peers, and participation in religious activities (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999; Lay, 2006; Print, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001). Considering findings of previous studies, this study will focus on three particular factors of gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality that are of particular relevance to the Omni context.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Omani women's participation in public life has developed remarkably in the past two decades (Ministry of National Economy, 2010a; Rabi, 2002; Ulrichen, 2009). In this context, it is highly relevant to investigate the civic development of young female students in Omani schools. Similarly, Oman's economy developed significantly in the last four decades (Ministry of National Economy, 2010a) and this impact of this development has directly improved the standard of living of Omani citizens. However, not all

segments of society have benefited from this development to the same degree. As many researchers reported, socioeconomic background is an important factor in developing individuals' civic participation (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999; Burr, Caro & Moorhead, 2002; Hempel & Howell, 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002). Lastly, more than 33% of the population in Oman live in rural regions (Ministry of National Economy, 2005). As some research suggested, geographic location is considered to be an important factor in the development of civic participation (Feinberg & Dopen, 2010; Lay, 2006; Levinson, 2007). Figure 3.1, below is a Summary of the conceptual framework utilised in this research. The following sections will provide further elaboration on each component of this framework.

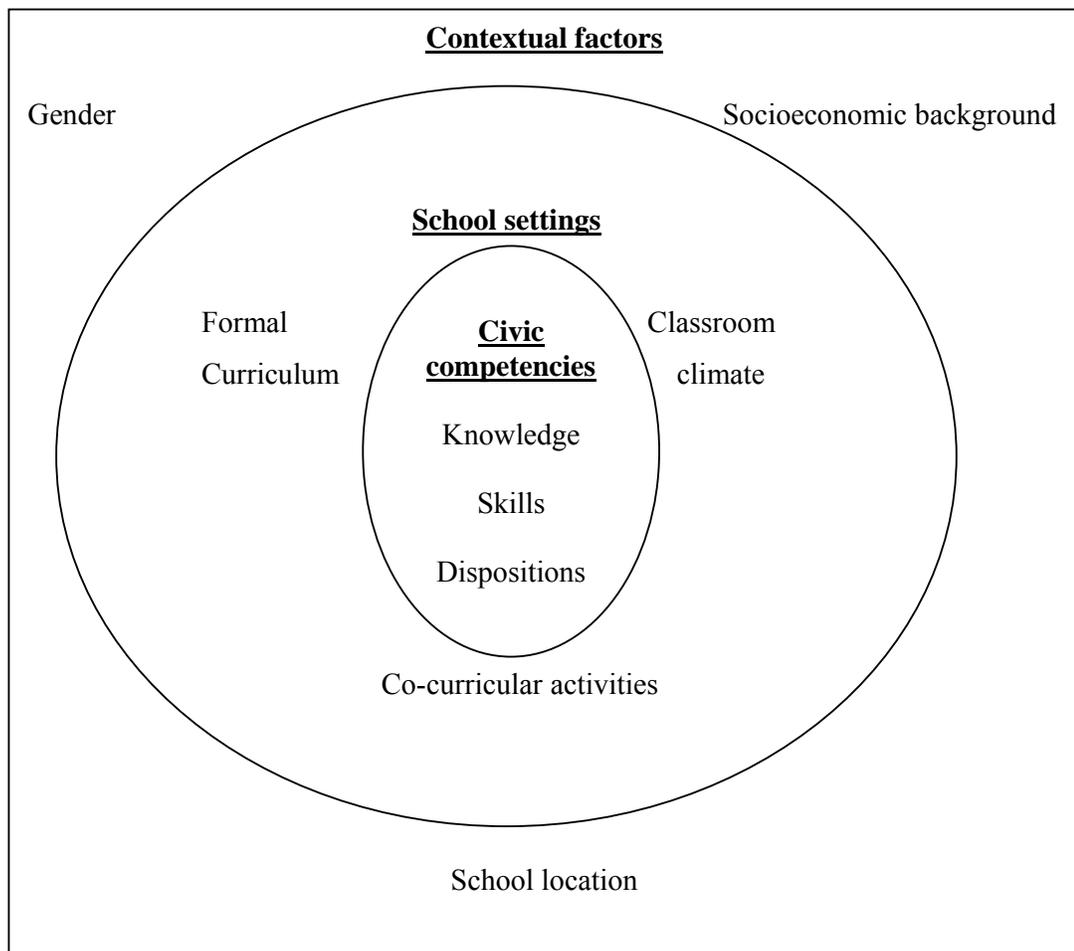


Figure 3.1 Conceptual framework of the school role in civic participation development

3.2 Civic Participation Definition

Understanding the complexity of a concept such as civic participation is critical in order to provide a base for later elaboration and discussion of present research. Many writers acknowledge that civic participation is a very difficult concept to define. Words such as ‘vague’ and ‘elusive’ are often used to refer this complicated and multidimensional construct (Gonzalez, 2005; Morimoto, 2008; Park, 2007). Investigators from different disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, and education have examined the construct from different perspectives. Yet, there is no agreed upon or unified definition across disciplines or even within the same discipline (Mondak & Gearing, 1998; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995; Wagle, 2006; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Youniss et al. 2002).

In political science, much emphasis is drawn to political activities as indicators for civic participation. Here researchers focus on activities such as voting behaviour, donation of money to a candidate or a political party, or participation in rallies and protests. For example, Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) suggested that political participation refers to an “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (p. 38).

The political approach to civic participation was criticized by Weissberg (2005). After examining the literature of political participation studies, he argued that definitions of political participation are usually unclear and not sufficient to describe the full use of the term in the everyday life-world of participants. He identified serious problems where researchers exclude or only include certain behaviour to be measured as an indicator for political participation without giving reasons for such selectivity. For Weissberg, indicators used by many investigators researching political participation were not theoretically defensible. Further, the writer called for a broader understanding of political participation and real consideration of behaviours or activities outside election based theory.

In comparison, definitions suggested by investigators in psychology and education are more comprehensive and encompass both political and non-political activities. Nonetheless, the complicated constructs of civic participation lead to lengthy and detailed definitions such as the one suggested by the American Psychological Association:

Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organisational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighbourhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting.

(American Psychological Association, n.d.)

This definition highlights that participation in the public life could be collective or individual in nature. Also, this definition acknowledges that civic participation is extended to include political and non-political activities.

In the education field, some researchers have developed concise, meaningful and comprehensive descriptions for civic participation. Ehrlich (2000) suggested that civic participation means:

Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. (p. vi)

Although the previous definition is widely used in the literature, other researchers' definitions emphasised some other aspects of civic participation or choose to underscore certain dimensions. For example, Delli Carpini's (2004) definition for civic participation highlighted the importance of the role of resources such as information and skills such as reasoning and argumentation for active participation in public life. Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins and Delli Carpini's (2006) definition of civic participation underlined citizens' ability for collective community problem solving and willingness to help others.

In an attempt to develop a meaningful definition for civic participation, Adler and Goggin (2005) examined various definitions of civic participation in the literature and suggested that the term “depends on the perspective and interests of the definer” (p. 238). After studying a wide range of definitions for civic participation, they suggested that civic participation “describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (p. 241).

The present study uses this last definition because it is concise and accommodates the major aspects of civic participation. In particular, the definition is open to include both political and non-political participation. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of active not passive citizenry in which members of society develop a willingness and capacity to help others which in turn involves both local and global community. More importantly, this definition emphasises the fact that active involvement in public affairs has the potential to improve the community.

Furthermore, the term ‘active citizenship’ is used intensively in the literature as synonymous with civic participation (Campbell, 2006; Cunningham & Lavalette, 2004; Kennedy, 2007). Similar to civic participation, this concept also appears to be complicated and problematic (Dalton, 2008; Hollister, Wilson & Levine, 2008; Marinetto, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 2007). The Active Citizenship Centre (cited in Nelson & Kerr, 2005) emphasised the importance of involving citizens in different forms of activities pertaining to civic life. The capacity and commitment of any citizen to develop civic society are critical aspects of any active citizen. The Centre suggested that:

Active citizenship can be defined as citizens taking opportunities to become actively involved in defining and tackling the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life... Citizenship can be more than putting a cross in elections every few years. Individuals are capable of creating a better society through a direct and positive contribution to their communities. (p. 13)

Hadenius (2001) described a set of skills and values required for active citizenry. The writer suggested that active citizen should develop:

[P]olitical interest, a desire to become involved, and a wish to exert influence. The persons in question should also have a firm faith in their ability to make their voices heard.....they should be open, tolerant, and open-minded, and they should apply a rationalist and deliberative method....they should be interested in seeking out facts and respectful of rational analysis. (p. 18)

Further, the understanding of the terms civic participation and active citizenship differ from one society to another. Sears (2009) stressed that the context is important to fully understand the meaning of citizenship. He asserts that “although democratic citizenship shares common features across the world it is not generic but always located in a particular context which shapes both the institutional and social forms it takes” (p. 2). Omoto, Snyder and Hackett (2010) noted that different cultures and ideologies in the world lead to various understanding regarding what citizen participation means. Nelson and Kerr (2006) studied the concept of active citizenship in 14 countries in North America, Europe, and Asia and stated that “active citizenship is a mixture of active and passive components dependent on the culture and historical context of countries and their approach to citizenship education” (p. 11). They suggested that different countries have various drivers for promoting active citizenship including: “citizenship as a legal ‘status’ (USA), citizenship as a lever for social cohesion or civic engagement (the Netherlands, Republic of Ireland, Hungary and England), [and] citizenship reinforcing a sense of national identity or patriotism (Singapore and Japan)” (p. v).

In summary, there is no unified view about definitions for civic participation or active citizenship. Context and the perspective in which researchers approach these two concepts play an important role in constructing an understanding of them. In fact, a formal definition of a concept like civic participation is not the best way to proceed. Instead, we need to look at the competencies that are needed to be more involved in the society. The following section will present these competencies in detail.

3.3 Civic Participation Competencies

For a long time, scholars have tried to identify the elements of civic participation. Although there is no united understanding about what constitutes civic participation,

knowledge, skills, and disposition are recognized to be the competencies for participatory citizens (Kirlin, 2010). A review of the literature found that only a few writers have tried to elaborate on these three competencies in detail (Kennedy (cited in Nelson and Kerr, 2006); Kirlin, 2010; Patrick, 2002; Saltmarsh, 2005; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004). Table 3.1 and the following sections elaborate on civic participation competencies, knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Table 3.1: Examples of knowledge, skills, and disposition required for participatory citizens

Civic participation competencies		
Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
Students need to learn about:	Students need to develop :	Students need to:
Democratic principals	Enquiry	Demonstrate support for justice and equality
Public policy	Discussion	Demonstrate sense of personal responsibility
Constitution	Evaluation	Demonstrate respect to others and human rights
Institutions of democracy	Interpretation	Demonstrate commitment to others well-being
History of the country	Critical thinking	
Nation's symbols	Decisions making	
Rights and duties	Communication	
Economy	Debate	
Environment	Teamwork	
Role of law	Organisation	
Local and global community interests and concerns	Conflict resolution	
	Management	
	Leadership	
	Group mobilization	
	Envision a plan for action	

Developed from (Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Patrick, 2002; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004)

3.3.1 Civic knowledge

Civic knowledge is important to support students' involvement in public life (Rubin, 2007; Saltmarsh, 2005; Torney-Purta, 2002). Civic knowledge is crucial to promote informed, engaged and active citizens. It enables individuals to make civil decisions

based on valid information. For example, students need to learn about government structures and the characteristics of civic life in the society. They should be informed about the nature and organisation of political, economic, and social institutions in society, developing an awareness of their home country's history, constitution, legal system and their rights and responsibilities (Patrick, 2002; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004).

Beside civic knowledge in the neighbourhood context, scholars increasingly emphasize the global dimension of civic knowledge. In this regard, schools should present issues and concerns which affect the welfare of all human beings. Learning about international organisations such as the United Nation and its affiliated organisations is an important means by which to introduce students to global efforts for more convergence and cooperation. Basically, the global aspect of civic knowledge parallels the global perspective of citizenship education (Banks, 2008; Edwards, 2001).

The importance of civic knowledge is a regularly researched factor in the literature of civic participation. For example, the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic and Citizenship Education longitudinal study examined civic knowledge of school students in all of its three waves of cross-national data collection (1971, 1999, 2009) (Schulz et al., 2010). The findings of this international study, and many other studies conducted on a national scale, confirmed the importance of civic knowledge in increasing learners' participation in public life (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill & Gallay, 2007; Hart, Atkins, Markey & Youniss, 2004; Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Torney-Purta, 2002; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). In a review of the findings of previous studies, Galston (2001) summarised relations between civic knowledge and civic development as follows:

- civic knowledge helps citizens understand their interests as individuals and as members of group;
- civic knowledge increases the consistency of views across issues and across time;
- unless citizens possess a basic level of civic knowledge especially concerning political institutions and processes, it is difficult for them to understand political events or to integrate new information into an existing framework;

- general civic knowledge can alter our views on specific public issues. For example, the more knowledge citizens have about civic matters, the less likely they are to fear new immigrants;
- the more knowledge citizens have of civic affairs, the less likely they are to experience a generalized mistrust of, or alienation from, public life;
- civic knowledge promotes support for democratic values; and
- civic knowledge promotes political participation.

(Galston, 2001, pp. 223-224)

Civic knowledge is a cornerstone in the development of students' participation in public life. Many educational systems around the world introduce civic knowledge through compulsory or elective civic subjects. However, some educational systems are integrating civic knowledge across different subjects of formal curriculum (Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Schulz et al., 2010).

3.3.2 Civic skills

Civic skills explain an individual's ability to take action in relation to different aspects of civic life. Kirlin (2007, p. 5) defined civic skills as a set of capacities "required to act politically and participate in one's community". She categorized civic skills into four themes: communication, organisational, collective decision making and critical thinking. In one of her recent works on civic skills, Kirlin (2010) reviewed the literature of different but related disciplines to develop a comprehensive and detailed proposal in relation to civic development. She explained that civic skills should be developed starting from early childhood. Patrick (2002) identified some civic skills to be core issues in public education in the United States of America (USA). He stated that cognitive skills and participatory skills are the two main categories required to raise good citizens. For cognitive skills, students need to learn how to "identify, describe, organize, interpret, explain and evaluate information and ideas in order to make sense of their political and civic experiences" (p. 8). He argued that these skills are essential to enable students to defend positions, and think critically and constructively regarding different aspects of civic life. Also, Patrick suggested that students need to develop skills for:

- interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interest;
- monitoring public events and issues;
- deliberating and making decisions about public policy issues;

- influencing policy decisions on public issues;
- implementing policy decisions on public issues; and
- taking action to improve political/civic life. (p. 8)

However, many writers highlight the importance of critical thinking skills to support students' ability for meaningful participation in the society (Field, 1997; Hoskins & Crick, 2010). Critical thinking is the skill that helps students learn how to analyse social or political affairs in order to distinguish between opinions and facts; evaluate others' opinions; express, defend and justify their opinion about public affairs; and make decisions based on valid information. Further, ten Dam and Volman (2004) emphasized the important role of critical thinking in regard to civic maturity. They argued that educators should place more attention on critical thinking to create participatory citizens.

Previous studies have highlighted the important role of schools in developing civic skills. Liou (2004) emphasised that curriculum plays an important role in developing students' civic skills. Comber (2005) suggested that civic subjects are vital to develop students' political interpretation skills such as interpretation of political leaflets and political cartoons. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) emphasized the importance of participation in voluntary associations and co-curricular activities for civic skills development. They suggested that civic skills such as running meetings, speaking publicly, and contacting officials were important for active political participation.

3.3.3 Civic disposition

In addition to acquiring knowledge and skills, the development of civic disposition is a fundamental factor in building active and participatory citizens. Branson and Quigley (1998) explained that civic disposition refers to the citizens' commitment to "maintenance and improvement of constitutional democracy" (p. 11). Similarly, Vontz, Metcalf and Patrick (2000, p. 11) identified civic disposition as "traits of public and private characters that enable one to exercise rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy and to promote the common good of the society" According to these researchers, civic education should be organized to develop values such as independence, respecting others' opinions and rights, commitment to

participate in public events and being thoughtful regarding public issues. Patrick (2002) suggested that civic disposition include:

- affirming the common and equal humanity and dignity of each person;
- respecting, protecting, and exercising rights possessed equally by each person;
- participating responsibly in the political/civic life of the community;
- practicing self-government and supporting government by consent of the governed;
- exemplifying the moral traits of democratic citizenship; and
- promoting the common good. (p. 8)

For this set of civic values to be utilised, schools should develop civic models in which students enjoy rich spaces for civic development and regular opportunities for interaction with each other and in the wider context. Kirilin (2010) acknowledged this by saying:

If values are learned through experience, and the benefits of working collaboratively can be learned through experience, then it is a logical step to argue that civic education models should include consequential opportunities requiring young people to work together to solve a collective dilemma. (p. 23)

Little research directly examines civic disposition in the educational context. Benton et al. (2008) analysed data collected from a longitudinal study of a cohort of young adults in the United Kingdom. The study was designed to examine various factors affecting students' participation in public life. The findings showed that the disposition that high school students in the United Kingdom required to be engaged in civic and political life depended on their belief of whether they could make a difference or not. This study confirmed that students' sense of personal efficacy is very important in developing positive dispositions towards involvement in public life. The importance of school based learning experiences in developing positive civic dispositions among young adults is also evident in other research (Dee, 2004; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Saha & Print, 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002).

3.4 Schools and Civic Participation

Participation in different aspects of civic life is an important aim of any educational system. Thus, promoting schools' ability to enhance civic participation becomes a core issue for both policy makers and practitioners. For instance, enhancing participation at the national and international level was one of the main goals of the United Nation's decade (1995-2004) for Human Rights Education (United Nation, 1997). Further, the European Union introduced a special program, Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC). The program focused on young people and adults and aimed to "create responsible and informed citizens in the context of European integration" (Weerd, Gemmeke, Rigter & Rij, 2005, p. 11). A similar program was developed by the Australian government in 1997, called Discovering Democracy. This program aimed to help Australian students to participate actively in public life and to appreciate democracy in Australian society (Department of Education, n.d). Similarly, educational reform in many nations has drawn attention to the important role of schools in enhancing civic participation among students (CIRCLE, 2003; Hyman, 2002; Johnson, Johnson-Pynn & Pynn, 2007; Kerr, 1999; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2002). This global trend to renew and advance schools' civic responsibilities is partly driven by the steady growth of lack of interest regarding participation in public life among students. In many countries, disengagement has become a noticeable phenomenon, especially among young adults (Fjeldstad, Mikkelsen, 2003; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Planty, Bozick & Regnier, 2006).

Various researchers have advocated the schools' role to prepare participatory citizens. Apple and Beane (2007), in their work *Democratic Schools*, stressed that one of the most important moral obligations of schools is to create a learning environment where students are introduced regularly and practically to different aspects of democratic values. As Huddleston and Kerr (2006, p. 83) suggested, developing active citizens should become an "ethos" and culture, utilizing various available learning spaces in the school. Torney-Purta and Vermeer (2004) emphasised the critical role of schools in developing students' civic participation.

They suggested that schools work with community agents to assist students to:

- gain meaningful historical and contemporary civic knowledge;
- link knowledge gained in an abstract form to more concrete everyday situations in which knowledge might be used;
- gain knowledge and skills in working with others toward political goals;
- gain skills in interpreting political information such as that from mass media;
- learn how to participate in respectful discourse about social and political issues;
- learn about effective leadership in groups of peers and how to mitigate the influence of negative experiences such as bullying;
- respect the rule of law and civil liberties;
- understand arguments concerned with the rights of groups subject to discrimination;
- join other students and adults to address a community need;
- learn about the root causes of community problems and assess opportunities to solve them;
- acquire a view of their community and nation based on appropriate levels of trust;
- develop a sense of identity that incorporates civic and political dimensions;
- demonstrate the willingness to spend time in bettering their communities;
- respect diverse adult role models who are politically active;
- link experiences in their families and communities with school-based civic education;
- express their views in media forms that are attractive and familiar to them.

(Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004, p. 4)

In fact, any attempt to fulfil these goals should take into account a holistic approach by using all spaces available in the school for civic development. As shown in the conceptual framework, formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curriculum activities should all be utilized to ensure that schools are powerful places for civic development (CIRCLE, 2003; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Schulz et al., 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002). The present study explores the role of these three areas in the Basic Education schools in Oman in order to understand their role in developing Omani students' civic participation. The following sections examine the role of formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities as major spaces in the school for developing active citizenry.

3.4.1 Formal curriculum

A formal curriculum is an important vehicle for developing students' civic participation. As students have the chance to be involved in citizenship and civic education subjects, they become civically knowledgeable and more able to participate in their society (Galston, 2007). Civic subjects could provide appropriate room for gradual and sustainable civic development. Selecting the content carefully and developing teachers' aptitude to implement suggested formal curriculums are core issues that need to be considered in order to achieve the schools' civic responsibilities. Similarly, providing enough time to teach civics subjects is essential to achieve this goal. The following section will cast light on arguments and some findings related to formal curriculum and civic participation.

Civic education differs from one nation to another and even from one territory to another, especially in decentralized educational systems. Subjects such as Social Studies, History, Life Skills and Government courses are the main venues for teaching civic participation. However, there is compelling evidence from many countries confirming that civic education subjects are the key element to preparing students for an active role in civic life. Torney-Purta (2002) analysed data from the second cross-national civic study administrated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 1999. The second round of this study collected data from 14-year old students from 28 countries. Findings showed that civic subjects were essential to increase civic knowledge and participation. Schulz et al. (2010) reported the initial findings of the third round of this international study conducted in 2009. This last round collected data from 38 countries. More than 140,000 students and 62,000 teachers in more than 5,300 schools provided data regarding ways in which participating countries prepare young adults to play an active role in the public life. Similar to the second round, the findings suggested that civic subjects are the cornerstone in developing students' civic knowledge.

In South Africa, Finkel and Ernst (2005) found that students at high schools who were exposed to civic education experiences were more politically knowledgeable compared with their counterparts who were not exposed to formal curriculum of

civic education. Lay (2006) investigated civic experiences in 29 high school in Maryland, USA. The findings showed that civics courses improved civic knowledge, and students who enjoyed civics courses were more knowledgeable than those who dislike civics courses. Galston (2001; 2004; 2007), in a regular review of civic education in the USA, concluded that civics education courses are fundamental to promoting participatory citizens. Black, Stokes, Turnbull and Levy (2009) examined the effect of an increasingly popular civics program in Australian schools. The ruMAD (are you Making a Difference?) program aimed to empower young adults for active participation and to be part of the decision process within school and the wider community. Findings from primary and secondary schools showed that the ruMAD program was successful in empowering students to be active participants and more interested in public concerns. Further, the program was found to be useful in providing rich learning experiences for students coming from lower economic backgrounds.

Some studies employed experimental design to examine the role of civic courses in developing civic participation. Feldman, Pasek, Romer and Jamieson (2007) used a quasi-experimental design to examine the Student Voices curriculum implemented in 26 Philadelphia high schools, USA. The program was offered as a supplement to existing civics courses in high schools. Findings showed that students in the program were found to be more interested in and discussed political issues, and have higher level of political knowledge, than students who did not take the program. Rogers (2009) examined a local history course in helping students at rural high school in the USA to be more civically involved. Using pre-test and post-test surveys, results showed that the course had a positive impact in developing students' civic knowledge, skills, and disposition.

The Project Citizen introduced by the Center for Civic Education in the USA is becoming increasingly one of the most popular civic education programs. This curricular program is designed to empower young adults for active participation in public life. The program materials are translated into more than 40 languages. The high reputation of this global program encouraged 55 countries around the world to participate (Center for Civic Education, n.d). This international curricular program is an example of effectiveness of civic education in developing civic participation. The

program aims to instruct students on how to be involved actively in public affairs by teaching them the process of developing systematic action plans. From different countries, investigators examined the effect of this program. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Soule (2000) examined this program in elementary and secondary schools. They found this program supported students' civic knowledge, civic skills, and dispositions. The findings showed that boys reported having a greater knowledge than girls and were more likely to communicate with public officials than girls. However, girls were more likely to undertake research when compared with boys. This study also found that socioeconomic background had no effect on students' civic knowledge and skills. Vontz, Metcalf and Patrick (2000) examined the program in Indiana (USA), Latvia, and Lithuania. Across these three researched contexts, the program was significant in developing young adults' civic knowledge, self-preservation skills, and civic disposition. Liou (2004) examined this program in Taiwanese schools. Using a quasi-experimental design, findings showed that adolescent students participating in Project Citizen significantly outperformed students in the control group in terms of civic skills, interest about politics, and disposition towards rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The study also revealed that factors like time restraints and pressure related to the examination system are major challenges for effective program implementation. In Ukraine, Craddock (2006) reported that this program helped to improve Ukrainian students' knowledge about democracy. However, the study indicated that male students benefited more than female students.

Other subjects are also increasingly recognized as potential spaces to expand students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for active citizenship. Learning about citizenry values such as social justice, rights and responsibilities, equality, community interest, and local and global welfare should be recognized as part of all subjects taught at school. Crick (1998) emphasised the importance of integration of all subjects in the school to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for participatory citizens. He stated that religious education, mathematics, science, information technology, physical education, music, art and foreign languages could contribute significantly to serve students' civic development. Huddleston and Kerr (2006) suggested that different subjects should underline and support citizenship education aims in British schools. The third International Civic and Citizenship

Education Study (ICCS) reported that 32 out of 38 countries were integrating civic and citizenship education into several subjects. This cross-national study found that participating countries are employing different approaches to support the civic mission of schools. In particular, the findings suggested that the majority of countries are using three main approaches to fulfil schools' civic responsibilities:

- Civic and citizenship education as a specific, stand-alone subject (either compulsory or optional);
- Civic and citizenship education integrated into other subjects; and
- Civic and citizenship education as a cross-curricular theme.

(Schulz et al., 2010, p. 22)

The role of other subjects in supporting the civic mission of school has enjoyed considerable attention from researchers across different academic disciplines. Different subjects are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge, skills, and disposition required by informed and active citizens.

Science Education is recognised as an important space within the formal curriculum for the development of civic participation (Ramsey, 1993; Yadav, 2007). Avard (2006) argued that the science classroom should be designed to support the civic mission in the educational system. The examples she provided explained the ability of science to increase students' awareness regarding public issues and to increase civic engagement. McClure and Lucius (2010) developed a chemistry course concerned with ethics and chemical innovations in society. The findings showed that this course, when offered to undergraduate chemistry students, had a positive influence in developing students' disposition towards civic engagement. The Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities (SENCER) program was developed to underline the importance of Science Education in developing civic engagement. This program was introduced at high schools and university levels in the USA and was used increasingly by other educational institutions worldwide (Sheardy, Maguire & DaRosa, 2009).

Similarly, Mathematics Education is increasingly identified as an important space for developing social and citizenry values (Atweh & Brady, 2009; Gutstein, 2003; Malvern, 2000). Vatter (1994) confirmed the civic dimension of mathematics. His

work explained how skills developed by mathematics can be linked to civic issues in society such as race, gender, poverty, wealth and environment. Similarly, Hendrix (2010) argued that mathematics could play a significant role in developing participating citizens. She explained how teaching Euclidean geometry could develop enquiry, reasoning and writing skills which are considered important for active citizenship.

Religious Education is another possible space for civic participation development. Unlike many western educational systems, in Oman, Religious Education is a compulsory subject in the Basic Education schools from Grade 1 to Grade 10 (MoE, 2006b). Although there is limited literature regarding the investigation of specific religious courses in relation to civic participation, many studies confirmed that religion related activities and experiences provide opportunities for higher civic participation (Caputo, 2009; Greeley, 1997; Jamal, 2005; Lam, 2002; Smidt, 1999; Wilson & Janoski, 1995). Crystal and DeBell (2002) found that religious values among American students in 6th, 8th, and 10th Grade predicted students' effective community service experience and support of the community activities. Metz and Youniss (2003) examined students from public high schools in a middle-class suburban town in the USA. The findings suggest that students who described themselves as religious tended to volunteer and participate more in school organisations than those students who did not describe themselves as religious. Gonzalez (2010) analysed data collected from more than 3,000 participants in the National Study on Youth and Religion (NSYR) in the USA. The findings showed adolescent religious attendance was positively associated to adolescent volunteering.

Furthermore, the literature shows that Technology subjects could play a positive role to enable students to communicate and respond actively towards various public affairs. The increasing role of information technology in today's life is associated with an increased interest in its effect on an individual's participation in the public life. Although Putnam (2000) showed concern that the increasing use of the internet among American young adults will cause social isolation and reduce participation in public life, a number of studies have found that information technology provides better opportunities for individuals to establish wider social networks and to express opinions with regards to society's concerns (Delli Carpini, 2000; Gardner & Walsh,

2000; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). The Internet, for example, is a powerful means of sharing information, expression of views and ideas, access to information, and creating virtual societies with mutual interest. Many studies reported that the internet is becoming an important means to mobilize young adults for civic participation (Gibson, Lusoli & Ward, 2005; Leppaniemi, Karjaluoto, Lehto & Goman, 2010; Quintelier & Vissers, 2007). Lin, Cheong, Kim, and Jung (2010) examined young adults' use of information technology in five different Asian cities: Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, and Tokyo. The finding showed that the Internet was identified as being an important space for youth participation in public life. Kahne, Middaugh and Evans (2008) investigated the relationship between video games and civic participation. By analysing data collected from more than 1,000 participants, aged between 12 and 17, they found no differences between teens who played video games frequently and those who did not, in relation to their civic and political dispositions. These findings highlighted that information technology could play a supportive role in empowering young adults for active involvement in public life. As part of educational reform in Oman, Information Technology is a compulsory subject in the Basic Education schools (MoE, 2006b).

3.4.2 Classroom climate

The learning environment in the classroom is an essential space for civic development. Students should enjoy an open and civically supportive learning climate to construct a positive civic experience. A supportive civic classroom is where students experience openness towards community issues, feel free and safe to express ideas, enjoy engagement in a meaningful discussion, experience the opportunity to argue and comment on various public affairs, learn to listen and respect others opinions, discuss controversial issues and current affairs from both local and global perspectives, learn constructive and critical thinking, and take an active part in group work and classroom discussions (Akhtar, 2008; Branson, 1998; CIRCLE, 2003; Lynch, 1992; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Whiteley, 2005). Homana Barber and Torney-Purta (2005, p. 1) argued that classroom climate is an “often neglected dimension of civic learning”. They suggested that the classroom should be constructed in a way where teachers and students work collectively for a supportive civic environment. Narvaez (2010) stressed the importance of classroom climate for

developing good citizens. The writer explained the sensitive role teachers play in creating a positive civic classroom. The writer stated that teachers should:

promote peer interaction within a context that emphasizes cooperation and equality. They allow conflict to be openly and effectively resolved. They give students a meaningful voice in controlling their environment. They enlarge young people's perspectives by inviting them to consider the perspectives of others and the good of the group. (p. 669)

Lynch (1992) emphasised the important role of the classroom in developing active citizenship. The author suggested that civically supported classrooms need to enhance:

- a democratic classroom ethos, engendering feelings of trust among pupils and between teachers and pupils;
- maximal use of collaborative and cooperative approaches;
- activity methods, including simulation, role-play and varied group composition;
- utilization of rational methods, appealing to the judgment of the learners;
- support and assistance for pupils to evolve and clarify their own values systems;
- inclusion of situations involving value dilemmas;
- emphasis on open rather than closed questions;
- multiple approaches, including different media and locations and reinforcement regimes;
- inclusion of social responsibility and auctioning;
- high intellectual expectation in both cognitive and effective domains;
- explicit commitment to human rights as the basis for all interactions in the classroom; and
- linked, supportive assessment methods, oriented to students success.

(Lynch, 1992,pp.80-81)

Huddleston and Kerr (2006) suggested that the most effective learning environment for active citizenship should be active, interactive, relevant, critical, collaborative, and participative. They explained active as learning by doing, interactive by using discussion and debate, relevant by focusing on real life experience and issues facing young adults and the wider community, collaborative by using more attractive and engaging teaching styles such as group work and co-operative learning, and participative by giving young people a real role and a say in their own learning.

The role of the classroom climate in developing active citizenry was also one of the investigated factors in the international civic and citizenship study administrated by

IDA in all of its three rounds (1971, 1999, 2009). In the analysis of the first and second round, data showed a positive association between an open classroom climate and civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2010). Torney-Purta et al. (2001) in presenting the second cycle findings explained that students with an open learning environment in their classroom showed a higher interest in civic issues than their counterparts who reported a less open classroom climate. Also, the findings suggested that “countries that recently experienced political transitions appear to have a less open climate for discussions” in their classrooms (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 133). The initial report of the third round study (Schulz et al., 2010) used a similar set of items as used in the second cycle to measure the students’ perception of the openness in the classroom climate. Students were asked to identify the regularity of six events occurring in their regular classes using a frequency scale of never, rarely, sometimes, or often. These events aimed to identify the students’ perception as to whether teachers encouraged them to make decisions, express opinions, discuss current political affairs, express opinions different from the majority in the class, discuss issues with people holding a different opinion, open the door for different students to express their point of view, and give a comprehensive presentation of the different opinions expressed while discussing issues in class. The findings of all 38 participating countries in the third round showed that on average these events happened at least ‘sometimes’ in classes. In all countries, there were gender differences between male and female students in relation to their perception of the classroom climate with female students reporting a higher positive view than males.

The 1999 IEA Civic Education study was also used to conduct a secondary analysis at the national level to determine the role of the classroom climate in relation to civic development. Campbell (2005) analysed the data collected from the USA and found that the classroom climate had a significant impact on the civic development of American adolescents. Data revealed that students with a higher level of political and social awareness were affected positively where they enjoyed an open climate in the classroom. Torney-Purta, Barber and Wilkenfeld (2007) analysed the data of the Latino and non-Latino adolescents in the USA. The study reported that an open classroom climate correlated positively with a higher civic knowledge. They found that the gap between the two investigated groups, regarding their expectation to vote, could be reduced by a more open classroom climate and more political discussion.

Similarly, the data collected from the United Kingdom as part of the second IDA study showed that 14 years old students do not consider their classroom climate to be open for discussion. Only 10% of students reported that their teachers usually encouraged them to talk about political issues (Kerr, Lines, Blenkinshop & Schagen, 2002).

Also, Hahn (1998) studied the role of classroom climate in developing young adults' civic participation in five countries: United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Nederland, and United State. The study reported some difference in the classroom climate among participating countries. For example, Dutch students had fewer opportunities than their counterparts in other countries to explore different views and to express their opinions on controversial issues. The findings reported that across the nations an open classroom was positively associated with young adults' interest to participate in political life.

Studies conducted on national basis also indicated that the classroom climate was a core component in developing a supportive civic environment. Gniewosz and Noack (2008) analysed the classroom climate using data collected from more than 1,300 German students aged 12 to 16 years. Data showed that fairness in the classroom was positively associated with tolerance towards foreigners.

Finkel and Ernst (2005) studied the impact of democratic civic education in South Africa, on 600 high school students. The findings revealed that open classrooms in South African high schools had a positive influence on attitudes towards democracy and civic obligations. The study found that when students learned in open classrooms and enjoyed learning through interactive and participatory teaching methods such as group projects and classroom discussions, they developed trust, civic skills, and became more politically tolerant.

In the USA many studies investigated the role of classroom climate in developing civic participation. Roberts (2009) examined the use of discussion in Social Studies classes. The study revealed that despite the teachers' belief as to whether discussion is as important approach for citizenship skills development, they were poorly utilizing this approach to teaching. Lack of teaching skills, culture of teaching in

school, and tension caused by state's curricular standards were problems identified by this study as reasons for the gap between the teachers' belief and the reality of practice in the classrooms. Flanagan et al., (2007) examined the civic experience of more than 1,000 American students aged between 11 and 18 years. The data showed that when students felt that their teachers were fair and respectful, students were more likely to believe that America was a just society. Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin and Keeter (2003) employed a large multi-phase design to examine young adults' civic participation in the USA. The respondents included 2,000 participants aged between 15 to 25 years. The findings showed that students who reported open discussion in their classroom were more than twice as likely to carry out voluntary work as compared to respondents who reported a lack of discussion in their classroom.

Many other studies have indicated that an open and democratic classroom is important to increase political knowledge, commitment to political participation, tolerance, trust and development of democratic skills (Ehman, 1980; Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Flanagan et al., 2007; Galston, 2001; McDevitt, Kioussis, Wu, Losch, & Ripley, 2003; Niemi and Junn, 1998).

Constructing a democratic and supportive civic culture in the classroom requires teaching styles in which students are encouraged to engage actively in the classroom community. Teachers need to give more attention to developing students' capacities to communicate and express their opinions. They need to develop skills such as active listening, confident speaking, verbal and nonverbal communication, sharing thoughts and feelings, accepting feedback, being open minded and acknowledging differences (CIRCLE, 2003; Hahn, 1998). Huddleston and Kerr (2006) stated that group discussions, project work, and written activities about controversial issues were important approaches to enhancing good citizenry.

The examination of the literature indicated that there is an increasing focus on developing civic efficiency of the classroom climate through teaching styles of service-learning, teaching of controversial issues, and current affairs (Bridgeland, DiIulio & Wulsin, 2008; Crick, 1998; Hess, 2009; Hoskins & Crick, 2010). Each of these teaching techniques is discussed below.

There is wide agreement that service-learning is one of the most successful approaches in developing learners' interest and commitment to the common good. The term service-learning is defined as a:

method of experiential education in which students apply what they learn in class to a real-world situation by performing needed community service. Its purpose is to promote civic education and citizenship as well as to provide a concrete learning experience for the topic studied in class. Service-learning can be incorporated into many courses.

(Morgan & Streb, 2001, p. 158)

An extensive body of literature examined the value of service-learning in relation to civic development. The finding showed that using service-learning promotes learners' civic knowledge, skills, and increases commitment towards solving community problems (Astin & Sax, 1998; Bridgeland, DiIulio & Wulsin, 2008; Kahne & sport, 2008; Duckenfield & Swanson, 1992; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Service-learning has also been found to be a useful approach for developing political participation. Billig, Root and Jesse (2005) compared 1,000 American high school students who participated in service-learning programs with those who only participated in the traditional teaching methods. The findings revealed that service-learning students were more likely to vote and reported enjoyment in their experience in their schools. Walker (2002) conducted an intensive review on research based only on pre- and post-test, including a control group, which examined the relationship between service-learning and political engagement. This review found that the majority of investigations reported that service-learning had a positive impact on developing young peoples' political participation.

Furthermore, studies investigating personal development found that service-learning was supportive in developing critical thinking, awareness about stereotypes, self-esteem, respect and tolerance for other cultures, and academic achievement (Astin & sax, 1998; Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005; Duckenfield & Swanson, 1992; Einfeld, & Collins, 2008;Eyler & Giles, 1999). Overall, service-learning was found to be an important teaching style for civic participation development.

Teaching controversial issues is also one of the teaching approaches considered supportive of civic development. Crick (1998, p. 56) suggested that controversial issues refers to issues where “there is no one fixed or universally held point of view”. This teaching approach provides a base for all teachers, regardless of the discipline they teach, to contribute to the civic responsibility of the school. Many researchers linked this approach to the development of good and participatory citizenry (Crick, 1998, Hess & Avery, 2008; McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2006). This approach allows students to learn debate, respect other opinions, understand and appreciate diversity, express opinions, and develop knowledge about public concerns and interest (Campbell, 2007; Crick, 1998; Hess & Avery, 2008). Hess (2009), in her valuable book *Controversy in the Classroom*, reviewed the literature of using controversial issues in the classroom and concluded:

there is evidence that participation in controversial issues discussions can build pro-democratic values (such as tolerance), enhance content understanding, and cause students to engage more in the political world. (p. 32)

However, previous studies indicated that teachers often faced a lack of expertise in using controversial issues in class. Hess (2008) reviewed the literature regarding the use of controversial issues in Social Studies classes in the USA. This review suggested inconsistent findings with teachers and students reporting a rich presentation of controversial issues in their classes. In contrast, other researchers conducting observations of Social Studies classes reported little attention paid to controversial issues. Oulton, Day, Dillon and Grace (2004) reported that teachers in the United Kingdom were under-prepared to handle implementation of controversial issues in their classrooms. The authors suggested that both in-service and pre-service development programs be reformed to address such challenges for overall citizenship education. In Turkey, Ersoy (2009) found that pre-service Social Studies teachers were not well-prepared for teaching controversial issues. The study indicated that this teaching approach is poorly presented in pre-service programs.

Another challenge of using controversial issues in the classroom is related to the teachers’ beliefs and culture. Torney-Purta and Schwille (1986) reported that teachers in Finland and Ireland considered discussing issues like: the censoring of

literature, explaining weakness and strength of political parties, and giving atheists an opportunity to express their views, less receptive compared with their counterparts in countries like New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the USA. In Hungary, the citizenship education programs faced serious problems because the practices did not match the teachers' belief systems. While the stakeholders asked teachers to introduce controversial issues in the classroom, teachers have extreme beliefs that sensitive topics should not be discussed in the classroom. Similarly, in Japan and Korea, people viewed the official strategies to renew citizenship education as an approach to implement western culture and undermine the belief system of citizens in these two countries (Kerr, 1999). Kerr stated that "the power and durability of teacher culture should not be underestimated in attempts to review and renew citizenship education" (1999, p.17). Kerr (2000) further reported that officials' attempts to bring more discussion and an attractive classroom climate to Hungary, Korea, and Japan were being challenged by the teachers' belief that controversial or sensitive issues should be avoided in the classroom. Kerr suggested that attempts to reform citizenship education should always take into account the teachers' culture and readiness for change.

Similar to controversial issues, current affairs are also recognised as an important approach to enrich civic experience in the classroom. Using debate to connect students to current affairs is considered to be an important approach for civic development (Torney-Purta & Richardson, 2002). The Civic Mission of Schools (CIRCLE, 2003) document in the USA suggested that civic discourse at American schools should be linked regularly to current issues. The document explained that linking students to current issues helped to improve their interest about public life and contributed to their civic knowledge development. Khane and Sport (2008) found discussions of current affairs in the classroom an important learning opportunity helping to foster students' commitment towards civic involvement. Such findings are also reported in the second cycle of international study of civic and citizenship education (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

In summary, the classroom climate provides an important space for the enhancement of students' civic development. While the classroom climate presents the place where most learning experiences are accrued in the schooling system, a good

structure of civic experiences also contributes considerably to the learners' civic development. Teaching approaches such as service-learning, controversial issues and current affairs are important to enhance civic development and create a more engaging and interactive classroom climate.

3.4.3 Co-curricular activities

Co-curricular activities are another key approach to support a schools' mission of promoting a constructive environment for civic participation development. Co-curricular refers to a wide range of voluntary learning activities organised outside the regular scheduled class time including academic clubs, sport, and community service. There is wide agreement among scholars that the more students are involved in the co-curricular activities, the more they become able and interested in engaging in public life. Many inquiries highlighted the important role of co-curricular activities such as self government, academic clubs, sports, and cleaning, in enhancing students' participation and interest about public life (Billig, 2000; Meisel, 2007; Morgan & Streb, 2001; Niemi, Hepburn & Chapman, 2000; Nolin, Chaney, Chapman & Chandler, 1997; Smith, 1999; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995; Walker, 2002; Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997).

The importance of co-curricular activities for civic participation development was also found significant in international and national longitudinal studies. The second international civic and citizenship education study found that participation in co-curricular activities had a significant positive effect on civic development (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). A longitudinal study, lasting for eight years from 2001 to 2009, of Grade 7 students in the United Kingdom reported that students who participated overall in co-curricular activities were more likely to be active participants within and outside school. The study also indicated that students who participated in debating clubs were also members of the students' unions (Whiteley, 2005). Identifying the role of co-curricular activities in developing civic participation was also part of the second cycle of the National Assessment of Civics and Citizenship program conducted in Australia in 2007. The results were published by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in 2009. The participants were more than 12,000 students in Grade 6

and 10 selected randomly from more than 600 schools. The findings showed that schools offering additional opportunities for participation in decision making in school presented higher than average achievement on the Civics and Citizenship Literacy Scale when compared with schools offering fewer participation opportunities. Also, students who reported participation in a greater number of civics-related activities such as being elected a class representative, becoming a member of a student council, and participating in peer support programs showed higher civic knowledge.

Some studies draw a link between participation in co-curricular activities as young adults and later civic participation. Andolina et al. (2003), using a large multi-phase design, examined young adult civic participation in the USA. The findings indicated that students who participated in co-curricular activities in high school continue to be civically active after graduation. Zaff, Moore, Papillo and Williams (2003) found that consistent participation in co-curricular activities from 8th through to 12th Grade increased activities such as voting and volunteering. Similar findings were also confirmed in the National Longitudinal study conducted by Hart et al. (2007). The study collected data from high schools in America and showed that participation in co-curricular activities is predictive of a higher rate of voluntary work and voting in early adulthood. Recently, Thomas and McFarland (2010), using a national representative sample in the USA, found that participation in co-curricular activities, especially art, increased young adult political participation. In order to identify the level of civic participation between two groups, Jennings and Stoker (2004) compared participation in co-curricular activities in high school between the second generation (in 1965) and the third generation (in 1997). The findings showed the third generation was less engaged in co-curricular activities compare with the previous generation. Researchers indicated that such findings explain a lessening of civic engagement among young adults. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) examined American high school students' participation in co-curricular activities. The findings showed that involvement in 11th Grade co-curricular activities predicted a higher level of civic engagement one year after high school. Kirlin (2002) examined data collected from high school graduates in the USA. The findings showed that participation in the co-curricular activities was associated with a positive adult civic

engagement. The findings remained the same when the level of education and income were controlled.

Other studies drew a link between particular forms of co-curricular activities and civic participation. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) found that participation in co-curricular activities such as Student Government and academic clubs in high school was associated with civic engagement. They also explained that participation in co-curricular activities provided students the opportunities to learn important civic skills such as communication and organisation. Nolin et al., (1997) found that students who participated in Student Government were more likely to participate in community service programs. Similarly, the role of Student Government in developing civic participation was also examined by Saha and Print (2010). Their data was collected from high schools in Australia. The results showed that voting in school elections was positively associated with voting at the age of 18, political knowledge, and engagement in peaceful actions. Wilson, Dasho and Martin (2007) examined the role of activities related to school-based journalism activities in California, USA. The findings demonstrated a significant effect of a Photovoice program in improving learners understanding with regard to their school and surrounding community. They examined the power of this program to enhance young adolescents participating in critical thinking and developing their ability to take social action. They found that this approach provided a unique opportunity for participating students to be actively involved in the social environment, to develop critical thinking, and to take action regarding issues they are concerned about. Lopez and Moore (2006) examined the relationship between sport participation and civic engagement. The data was collected from participants at American high schools and colleges (aged 18-25). The findings showed the youth who participated in sports activities while in high school were more civically active compared with non-participants. However, this finding is not consistent with findings reported by Kahne and Sport (2008). In their large scale study involving more than 4,000 students from 52 high schools in Chicago, USA. Their findings showed that participation in co-curricular activities, other than sports, was an important factor in developing learners' commitment to civic engagement.

Finally, community service is one of the important spaces within co-curricular activities for civic participation development. Community service is defined as a form of voluntary activity, which is not related to classroom based curricular, that links students to a practical real life experience (CIRCLE, 2003; Kirlin, 2002). With this understanding, community service differs from service-learning in a sense that this activity is totally voluntary and not part of the school formal curriculum (Campbell, 2006). Community service activities are identified as an important approach for civic development because they provide direct experience instead of abstract thinking, helping participants expand their social network with people of shared interest, and enhancing students' awareness of social problems in their societies (Hart et al., 2007). Studies examining community service at high schools emphasized the value of community service in increasing political participation, volunteering during adulthood, working with and helping strangers, self-awareness development, commitment to carry social change, and civic skills development (Hart et al., 2007; Niem, Hepburn & Chapman, 2000; Reinders and Youniss, 2006; Schmidt, Shumow & Kackar, 2007).

Overall, co-curricular activities are important space for advancing students' awareness regarding a wide range of social problems. They are also a valuable space for developing knowledge, participatory skills, and a positive disposition towards civic life.

3.5 Related Civic Studies in the Omani Context

This part of the literature review discusses the small amount of research which relates to civic participation development in Oman. Most studies tried to identify the role of Social Studies in supporting students' civic development. Other studies investigated teachers' perceptions and experience with regard to Social Studies formal curriculum.

Al-aghbrai (2007) investigated the Social Studies teachers' implementation of a student-centred teaching approach in the Basic Education schools. This approach is strongly emphasized in the Basic Education schools to move students from the

passive role of the learner in the old schooling system to active participants. The findings showed that Social Studies teachers experience significant difficulties in using this approach effectively in their teaching. The results showed that teachers lacked skills in employing a student-centred teaching approach effectively. The study concluded that Social Studies teachers at the Basic Education schools were ineffectively employing this approach to teaching. The researcher suggested that, for good implementation of student-centred teaching, immediate intervention is needed to strengthen teachers' capacity in using this approach.

Alamerei (2007) conducted document analysis to investigate the concept of tolerance education in the Social Studies subject. The researcher analysed the formal curriculum for Grades 5 to 10 (second cycle of Basic Education). The findings showed that the textbooks that were reviewed included tolerance education concepts and values in a random and disorganised manner. Further, the study found that values of tolerance education were not presented in a balanced and integrated fashion across the investigated formal curriculum of Grades from 5 to 10.

Al-Gharibi (2008) investigated students' perception regarding the Social Studies formal curriculum. The data was collected from 618 students in Grade 8, 9, and 10 Basic Education schools. The findings showed that students considered Social Studies to be interesting, easy and enjoyable. In comparison with girls, boys tended to think that Social Studies lessons were somewhat more boring than the girls found them to be. However, students of both genders were not keen to study more Social Studies because they did not find the subject important for their career.

Al-nofli (2010) reported similar findings when investigating students' perceptions regarding the Social Studies curriculum in general and Geography topics in particular. Using semi-structured interviews, the study focused on students in Grade 6 and Grade 10. Results showed that students had positive attitudes regarding the curriculum content. Students described Social Studies as an important subject because it taught them about other cultures and raised their awareness about the world around them. The students also expressed a willingness to learn more about world geography and culture. Students in Grade 10 stated that some topics in the

Social Studies curriculum were repeated and sometimes similar topics were presented in different grades.

In an effort to examine the role of Arabic language curriculum for civic knowledge development, Al Habsi (2005) conducted a study about the content of children's rights in the Arabic formal curriculum of Grades 3 and 4 of Basic Education schools. Using the International Declaration of Child Rights norms, the study found that only family and social rights were presented in the analysed curriculum. Rights such as education, civil, political, and economic were either absent or rarely mentioned.

Al-nofli (2009) examined Social Studies teachers' perceptions regarding goals and content of Social Studies curricular in Grade 5 to 10 of the Basic Education system. More than 400 Social Studies teachers participated in this study. The findings suggested that teachers were supporting social studies goals of citizenship, global education, and civic participation. However, the degree of actual implementation of these goals was lower than teachers' beliefs of their importance. The teachers also identified low society support as one of the challenges facing the implementation of the suggested formal curriculum. They also mentioned that they have little control with regard to the standardised curriculum suggested by the Ministry of Education. The study also reported gender differences between female and male teachers in their implementation of some content areas in the Social Studies curriculum. Female teachers at Basic Education schools were more likely to teach current events, environmental education, and public issues than male teachers.

Finally, Almaamari (2009) explored the perceptions and practices relating to civic education within the initial teacher education programs for Social Studies in the seven Colleges of Education in Oman. The study showed a gap between the intentions of the implemented educational policy regarding the requirements of teaching citizenship education in the schools and the actual practices of teacher education preparation programs. The study reported that policy makers at the MoE were dissatisfied with inadequate initial teacher education programs.

Overall, research in Oman has examined some aspects of the current educational reform, Basic Education, in relation to civic development. Most of these studies

focused on the role of the newly implemented formal curriculum in supporting the Basic Education school civic mission. Other studies investigated teachers' attitudes and implications of the new curriculum. In general, the findings indicated that the new, formal curriculum, mainly Social Studies, provides a good space for supporting students' civic development. However, some other findings suggested poor implication of newly suggested curriculum.

3.6 Demographic Factors and Civic Participation

Identifying the role of demographic factors in relation to civic participation is an intensely researched issue in the literature. The present study focuses on gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality (urban versus rural) factors because the literature suggested that these factors are important in order to develop a better understanding with regard to people's participation in public life. In relation to Oman, many researchers and government reports suggested a noticeable increase of women's participation in public life in the last few decades (Ministry of National Economy, 2010b; Rabi, 2002; Ulrichsen, 2009). Nonetheless, it is crucial to determine challenges, opportunities, and dispositions related to both female and male students regarding their participation in public life. Also, socioeconomic background has a significant effect on civic participation. Low income levels could play a negative role in the quest to enhance individuals participating actively in different aspects of civic life (McBride, Sherraden & Pritzker, 2006; Tolbert, Lyson & Irwin, 1998). Living standards have improved considerably for the majority of Omani families in the last few decades, yet, the latest report published by Ministry of National Economy (2010b) showed that number of Omani citizens who benefited from social security was increasing considerably. Geographical location of residence is another important factor in Oman. According to the 2003 census, more than 33% of the population lived in the rural regions (Ministry of National Economy, 2005). For this reason, exploring the role of school locality in enhancing or inhibiting students' civic development is important to provide a better understanding of the factors affecting Basic Education schools' commitment for civic participation development.

The following sections will discuss findings of previous studies related to the factors of gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality (urban versus rural) as these three factors are the focus in the present research.

3.6.1 Gender

Gender is a commonly researched factor in the various investigations concerned with civic participation. All three rounds of the international study on civic and citizenship education administrated by IDA investigated gender differences in relation to civic knowledge. The first study (conducted in 1971) indicated that male students exhibited significantly higher civic knowledge than female students (Cited in Schulz et al., 2010). However, the second round, (conducted in 1999) found “minimal gender differences with regard to civic knowledge”, but in most countries, female students demonstrated less interest in political issues compared with male students (Torney-Purta, et al., 2001, p.16). Interestingly, the initial published finding of the third round (Schulz et al., 2010) showed that female students performed significantly higher than male students on the civic knowledge scale in 31 out of 38 participating countries. There were small differences between students in relation to their interest in politics and social issues. The study also reported the gender gap has significantly narrowed over years among participating nations.

Other national longitudinal studies also studied gender differences and civic development among young adults. In Australia, the second survey of National Assessment Program about Civics and Citizenship examined more than 12,000 students in Grades 6 and 10. The findings revealed that female students scored higher than their male counterparts in the Civic and Citizenship Literature Scale. However, both genders showed a slight but not significant increase in the civic scale when compared with data from the first survey conducted in 2004 (MCEETYA, 2009). In England, the sixth annual report of Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) stated that girls in Grade 11 tended to hold the most positive attitude for civic and political participation compared with boys (Benton et al., 2008).

Many other inquiries also found differences between men and women with regard to the form of civic participation. Some researchers reported that females are more

interested than males in social civic activities such as volunteer work (Flanagan et al, 1998; Nolin et al., 1997; Torney-Purta, 2002). Marcelo, Lopez and Kirby (2006) analysed the data gathered from the Civic and Political Health of the National Survey in the USA (15-25 year olds). They found women are more engaged than men in civic activities including raising money for charity, volunteering, and regular volunteering for non-political groups. However, some researchers reported that women are increasingly becoming more interested in political participation. For example, Martinez and Cumsille (2010) examined the gender difference in civic participation among high school students in Chile. The data showed that girls were significantly more interested in various forms of civic participation including sense of political efficacy, decision making, and belief in their ability to make change. Increased interest in political participation among women is becoming a noticeable trend in many developed and developing countries (Bernard-Powers, 2008; Goetz, 2009; Jones, 2008).

3.6.2 Socioeconomic background

The effect of socioeconomic background is another often researched factor in terms of civic participation. Socioeconomic background can inhibit or enhance students' participation in public life. Individuals who grow up in poverty have limited opportunities to be involved in public life compared with those raised in a comfortable economic status. Many investigations found that people with a higher income are more likely to participate in civic life and they are more knowledgeable about political and public affairs (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999; Burr, Caro & Moorhead, 2002; Tolbert, Lyson & Irwin, 1998). McBride, Sherraden and Pritzker (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with 84 low income families in the USA to examine their civic engagement. They identified several difficulties limiting the sample's capacity to engage in community affairs. These challenges comprised of lack of time, work commitments, family responsibilities and reliability of transportation. Pritzker (2009) studied American adolescents, who came from low-income families from either, black or Hispanic backgrounds. The findings indicate that this group were more likely to hold a negative perception about political participation. In her report about the school's role in developing civic involvement in the second round of the IDA study, Torney-Purta (2002, p. 207) stated "students

from homes with few literacy or educational resources and who have low educational aspirations have relatively low levels of civic knowledge and expressed willingness to vote”. Similarly, the findings of the third round of this study found that socioeconomic background was positively associated with students’ civic knowledge and to a lesser extent to an interest in politics (Schulz et al., 2010). Many other researchers reported a positive association between socioeconomic factors and civic participation (Flanagan et al., 1998; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Matthews, Hempel & Howell, 2010).

Political and current affairs discussions at home play a positive role in enhancing students' participation in political life. Andolina et al. (2003) found that young people who were involved in political discussions at home were more likely to vote compared with their counterparts who do not have a similar home life. The findings of the second round of the Australian National Assessment Program-Civic and Citizenship Grade 6 and 10 showed that students in Grade 10 who reported participation in family discussions of current issues performed higher in the Civic and Citizenship Literature Scale utilized in this national study than those who reported rare involvement in such family discussions (MCEETYA, 2009).

Related to the socioeconomic background, some researchers examined students’ civic participation in relation to their education sector, public or private. Nolin et al., (1997), using a national representative sample of students from Grade 6 through 12 in the USA, examined students’ participation in community service. The result suggested that students in private schools were more likely to participate in community service compared with their counterparts in public schools. The study reported that curriculum in the private schools drew more attention to community service activities. Martinez and Cumsille (2010) reported a similar conclusion. They noted that adolescents studying in private schools have a higher commitment to civic participation compared with their counterparts in public schools in Chile. The findings indicated that students in the investigated private schools enjoyed more opportunities for engagement in decision-making and participation in the school activities than those students in the public schools.

3.6.3 School locality

School locality could be significant for civic participation. Schools in cities have better opportunities to benefit from a wider range of civic activities. However, schools in rural regions may not enjoy equal opportunities for the creation of a rich civic learning environment. Rural areas are often affected by factors such as high unemployment rates, educational dropout, poverty, and geographic isolation (Lay, 2006). Levinson (2007) reported that the shortage of resources in Mexican rural areas negatively affected the quality of civic education reform. Similarly in the United Kingdom, Keating, Kerr, Lopes, Featherstone and Benton (2009) reported that rural schools encountered challenges in offering students a diverse and rich civic experience. The second round of the Australian National Assessment Program-Civic and Citizenship Grade 6 and 10 showed that students in urban schools performed higher on the Civic and Citizenship Literature Scale than did students who attended schools in rural areas (MCEETYA, 2009).

However, not all urban areas can provide effective civic learning environment. Hart and Atkins (2002, p. 235) found that youth in urban schools were less likely to vote compared with students in suburban schools. They explained that this finding mirrored the demographic characteristics of urban America. The researchers described urban America as “disproportionately impoverished, poorly educated, foreign-born, and minority”. Oliver (2000) examined civic participation in light of the city size. He found that people in large cities were less interested in becoming involved in civic life compared with inhabitants of small cities. Lay (2006) found that rural schools could present a better environment for civic knowledge development than their counterparts of low-income, living in urban communities. The writer explained that these findings were likely to be due to more active social interactions and networks in rural communities compared with urban ones. Feinberg and Doppen (2010) examined the civic knowledge of urban and rural high schools students in the USA. The findings showed that rural schools performed better than urban students with regard to some basic civic knowledge of the American society. However, the majority of participants poorly demonstrated the values of good citizenship and the importance of leadership in society.

Overall, demographic factors such as gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality are issues of importance in civic development research. However, the findings are inconsistent across nations and within same societies. Such observations highlight the reality of complexity of human behaviour and the importance of understanding the characteristic of the context where the research takes place.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature in order to draw a better understanding of the various arguments and findings related to the development of civic participation. The chapter discussed the conceptual framework utilised in this research. The chapter also highlighted the ongoing difficulty in defining civic participation, outlined the competencies required for active civic participation and identified the areas where civic knowledge, skills, and disposition are mainly developed within the school. Also, the chapter reported on some accessible civic education studies conducted in the Omani context. Finally, the chapter discussed some demographic factors suggested to be issues of focus in the current research.

As argued in this chapter, schools have a crucial role to play in developing participatory citizens. A large amount of research has been conducted to identify, explore, and examine the role of the school in the development of civic participation. Like any social phenomena, researchers tried to examine various factors affecting the schooling system in developing civic participation. The complexity of such civic participation as a construct was a noticeable challenge for researchers in this area. However, intensive research has been conducted in the last three decades, in particular, to help identify major factors and areas of focus for which schools should pay attention in order to create desirable civic learning environments.

Nonetheless, many questions remain unanswered. For example, since Galston (2001, p. 2) asked “what degree of civic and political knowledge is required to be a competent democratic citizen?”, the last 10 years shows a lack of research attempting to address this difficult question. Similar observations could be made in relation to civic skills and disposition. A similar problem is also noticed in relation to the

identification of more powerful educational practices for civic participation development. To illustrate this, the literature does explain that some teaching approaches like service-learning, controversial issues, and current affairs are more likely to support the schools' mission for civic development. However, there is a need to examine which of these pedagogies are more efficient for developing active citizenry. There is also a need to determine areas in which students could develop meaningful and effective civic experiences. Is it civic courses, the classroom climate, or co-curricular activities, or a combination of these? Providing answers for such questions will contribute to advancing the educators' ability to introduce more effective civic experiences. Finally, the literature shows an increasing interest in comparative and cross-national civic studies. However, more work is still needed in this regard as different contexts develop different understandings and practices in relation to civic participation. Additionally, a considerable gap was noticed with civic and citizenship education studies in certain global districts such as the Middle East, North and central Africa. The IEA Civic and Citizenship Education study is an example of such observations. In all three rounds of this international study none of the Middle East countries participated (Schulz et al., 2010). To this end, this current exploratory study will help to fill a gap in the literature about the schools' role in developing civic participation in a Middle Eastern country.

This chapter has presented the some findings and arguments of the literature in the area of civic participation and education. The following chapter will deal with the methodology utilized in the present research.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

This study was fundamentally concerned with exploring how the newly adopted reform plan, the Basic Education system, enhances civic participation among Omani students. Consistent with the study objectives, this investigation employed an interpretive paradigm to its design and data collection. This approach was appropriate due to the lack of previous research about civic participation in Oman. Also, it gave the researcher the opportunity to be immersed in the research context and to explore and identify the main characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation. The design of this research was multiple case studies of four schools which were implementing the Basic Education system. These schools differed according to gender, socioeconomic background and locality (urban versus rural). To this end, the study was guided by the following Research Questions:

1. What spaces are available in the formal curriculum for developing Omani students' civic participation?
2. How does classroom climate develop Omani students' civic participation?
3. How do the co-curricular activities develop Omani students' civic participation?
4. What are Omani students' dispositions towards civic participation?
5. In what ways do gender, socioeconomic background , and school locality factors influence Omani students' opportunities to develop civic participation?

This chapter describes the methodology used in this research and provides a detailed description of the research design. The chapter provides a detailed description of the contexts where the investigations took place and the instruments used for data collection. Explanation of the processes used for data analysis, management, and issues of research quality are also discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with the ethical issues addressed in this research. A summary of the aspect and approaches of the research process are provided in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Aspects and approaches of the research process

Aspects of the research process	Approach taken in this study
Research paradigm	Interpretive
Methodology	Case study
Research design	Multiple case study
Data collection	Semi-structured interviews Focus group interviews Observation
Data analysis/interpretation	Identification of themes Cross case analysis
Research Quality	Creditability Transferability Dependability and confirmability
Ethical issues	Informed consent Confidentiality

4.1 Interpretive Paradigm

This research is positioned within the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm is appropriate as the researcher aimed to understand the social behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of the study participants (Creswell, 2009). In the interpretive paradigm, the researcher “study[s] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.5). In this research paradigm, social reality is not constructed as objective and unitary, rather there are multiple realities which need to be understood and explored deeply. Researchers within this paradigm believe that different individuals or groups of human beings develop different realities over various social settings. People are actively involved in constructing their social world and creating various forms of realities. Thus, the interpretation of these realities provides the best approach to experience, understand, and describe any social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Usher & Bryant, 1989; Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007).

Merriam (1998) stated five main characteristics of the interpretive paradigm:

- It is interested in the meaning people have constructed about their world.
- The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
- It usually involves fieldwork.
- It primarily employs an inductive research strategy.
- The final report is richly descriptive. (p. 6-8)

Using the interpretive paradigm, researchers need to be open to different sources of data which may enrich the findings and help to draw deeper understandings of the researched problem. As Maxwell (2005, p. 79) noted, data “can include virtually anything that you see, hear, or that is otherwise communicated to you while conducting the study”. Visiting the natural setting of the phenomena is a unique experience which allows for better opportunities to capture details related to the aims of the study. The researcher within the interpretive paradigm has a unique opportunity to “speak a language of cases and context” (Neuman, 2003, p.139), be an insider, creative, and open to different sources of data that help to provide holistic and accurate understandings about the investigated phenomena.

As explained in the first chapter, this research aimed to investigate how four schools work to support learners’ civic participation. It planned to collect data from the real world of the investigated schools. Four Basic Education Schools were examined to explore how reform initiatives in Oman enhanced civic participation. For this reason, the interpretive paradigm was selected to explore and find interpretations of realities affecting civic participation in the researched context as perceived by the participants. The nature of the interpretive paradigm allowed for the inductive process (Merriam, 1998) in which exploration and understanding of civic participation could be clearly and carefully identified. Further, the interpretive paradigm is highly recommended when little is known about the phenomena. This study is the first conducted in the Omani educational context focusing on civic participation. It hoped that the findings will draw a better understanding about civic participation within the educational system in Oman and opens the door for any future research towards improving civic participation in Oman. Similarly, the study will help to explore young adults’ dispositions towards civic participation in Oman.

4.2 Case Study Methodology

Case study is a powerful approach to investigate complex issues and to provide holistic view about phenomena. A case study methodology is very effective when the researcher examines contemporary events where context and the environment are important parts of the investigated phenomena (Yin, 2009). Across disciplines and professions, case study methodology has been utilized for research. In the field of education, case studies have been widely used for the last 30 years to investigate cases of students, teachers, programs, innovations, and policies (Merriam, 1998). For Yin (2009, p. 4), case study “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organisational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries”. Case study research, as defined by Merriam (1998, p. 27) is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit”. This methodology “provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 253). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007) the advantages of case studies include:

- The results are more easily understood by a wide audience (including non-academics) as they are frequently written in everyday, non-professional language.
- They are immediately intelligible; they speak for themselves.
- They catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data (e.g. surveys); these unique features might hold the key to understanding the situation.
- They are strong on reality.
- They provide insights into other similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases.
- They can be undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team.
- They can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables. (p. 256)

According to Yin (2009, pp. 19-20), applications of case studies include: Exploratory, Explanatory, and Descriptive. Exploratory case studies are used by

researchers when an investigated intervention has no clear or certain set of outcomes. Explanatory case studies are used to explain what is expected as causal links in real-life interventions. Descriptive case studies are used for two reasons: to describe the real-life context where interventions have taken place, and to illustrate specific issues in relation to interventions. The current research uses exploratory case studies to discover how Basic Education Schools in Oman develop the required practices for civic participation and to explore students' dispositions towards civic participation. A multiple-case study design was selected to examine the role of gender, socio-economic background and school locality in civic participation development.

4.3 Multiple Methods of Data Collection

This course of research employed multiple methods of data collection. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989, p. 256) suggested that triangulation “refer[s] to the designed use of multiple methods, with offsetting or counteracting biases, in investigations of the same phenomenon in order to strengthen the validity of inquiry results”. Owens (1989) acknowledged that triangulation is difficult but insisted that such a technique is important to obtain rich and creditable findings. Using different methods for data collection helps the researcher to obtain multiple evidences to support the findings, to examine the phenomena from different points of view, and to ensure research quality and credibility. As Golafshani (2003) suggested, the use of triangulation will “lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities”. In case studies, multiple data sources are highly recommended to enhance the validity of data, to overcome personal bias, and increase the researcher’s confidence about the findings (p. 604).

This study achieved triangulation through, firstly, the use of multiple data sources. Data were collected from students, teachers, and principals. Secondly, data were collected from multiple sites. Data used in this research were collected from four Basic Education schools. Yin (2009, p. 53) stated “The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust”. These schools differed in terms of gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality. The use of multiple data collection instruments was

the last factor to ensure triangulation. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and observation were utilized to provide a thick set of data.

The use of multiple methods of data collection was significant in widening the researcher's knowledge and understanding about issues related to the investigated phenomena in the researched context. Also, it provided an opportunity to examine in-depth views and opinions of respondents' regarding the different aspects or issues associated with students' civic participation.

4.4 Selection of Schools

This research employed purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2005). This sampling strategy provided the researcher with detailed descriptions of each case study school and identified shared themes across the cases. Throughout purposeful sampling, schools were selected to be the case studies based on gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality. This study took place in four schools which taught students in Grade 10. According to Basic Education regulations, Grade 10 is the last year of second cycle (Grades 5-10).

A summary of the four schools' characteristics can be found in Table 4.2. Three of the investigated schools were chosen from public schools to highlight factors such as locality and gender. To study the effect of socioeconomic background, a fourth private school was chosen where the majority of students' families have high incomes. Two of the public schools and the private schools were chosen from Muscat, the capital city of Oman, where students have regular access and more chances to practice different aspects of modern life. A rural school was chosen from Albatina North, the biggest educational region in Oman with remarkable geographical diversity. This rural school is mixed gender; it therefore gave the researcher the ability to ascertain if there were any gender differences between participating schools in rural and urban areas and provided the opportunity to examine the effect of school location. A brief description of all four schools is presented below.

Table 4.2: Description of the four schools participating in the study

Name	Urban/Rural	Public/private	Grade level	Number of students	Gender of Students
Alwatan	Urban	Public	5-10	1072	Male
Alsalam	Urban	Public	5-10	1147	Female
Alnoor	Urban	Private	1-12	406	Co-educational
Algalal	Rural	Public	1-12	275	Co-educational

Alwatan

Alwatan is a public school located in one of the newest suburbs of the capital Muscat. According to the school principal, most students are of middle to high socioeconomic background.

The school buildings were constructed in 1999. In 2001, the school was chosen by MoE to implement the second cycle of Basic Education which involved students in Grades 5-10. Unlike the first cycle schools, the second cycle is only single gender schools in urban areas. Therefore, all 1072 students in this school are male. Similarly, the 73 administrative and teaching staffs are male. There are 32 classrooms in the school. The school has a Learning Resource Centre, computer rooms, and science laboratories. The school follows the technical and administrative system implemented and supervised by MoE. In Oman, all public schools follow the same system of administration. Similar to the majority of public school buildings in Oman, the school classrooms and other learning facilities are divided into two floors. Most learning support services such as the library, the Learning Resource Centre, the sick room, administrative and teachers' rooms are located in the ground floor. Classrooms occur mainly on the first floor. The school is placed to service surrounding suburbs in an area of about five kilometres. As part of the public school system, the government provides the school the necessary funds in terms of textbooks, materials, free transportation, ongoing costs and human resources.

Alsalam School

Alsalam is a public school located at the western side of capital Muscat. According to the school principal, most students are of middle to high socioeconomic background.

In 2002, the school started implementing the second cycle of Basic Education for students in Grades 5-10. All 1147 students are female studying in 34 classrooms. All 70 teachers and administrative staff are female. Similar to the previous school, most of the learning support services are located on the ground floor and classes took place mainly on the first floor. The school is placed to service surrounding suburbs in an area of about five kilometres.

Alnoor

This private school was chosen to in order to investigate the socioeconomic factor in this study. The school is located in one of the most prestigious suburbs at the middle of the capital Muscat. The school offers a very high standard of teaching facilities. Only families of high economic background can afford to send their children to this school. Unlike the situation in the public schools, most students use their own transport to travel to and from school.

Most of students at this school are Omani, however, there was a small percentage of students who came from different Arabian countries. The 32 teachers and staff also came from a wide range of countries including Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt and India. According to the school principal, most students were of middle to high socioeconomic background.

In 1987, a group of investors established this school in a temporary rented villa. In 1999, the school moved to a permanent building due to increased demand. The school has 486 female and male students studying in Grades from 1-12. Students study in a mix-gender class for Grades 1-4. From Grade 5-12 students are separated into different classrooms by their gender. The school follows the Basic Education system. However, as a bilingual school, Science and Mathematics were taught using

the International Baccalaureate (IB) for Grade 11 and 12. English language was used in teaching these two subjects to facilitate students' transition in studying at overseas universities or at foreign colleges in Oman.

Algalal

Algalal is a public school located between the Sierras in north Oman. It is about 170 km from the capital Muscat. According to the school principal, the economic background of families in this area is mainly low with some growth of the middle class in the last few years. The main economic activities in this geographic zone are agriculture and grazing. In the last three decades, many residents have migrated to urban regions looking for better jobs and access to more modern life facilities.

The school was first established in 1978. The first building was a temporary structure. In 1995, the students moved to a permanent new and modern building. The student population was 275, mainly coming from the biggest village which is about 500 metres from the school. However, around 10% of students came from six small villages or Bedouin families who stay close to the school as temporary residents. The school building has two floors. The second floor accommodates students of Grade 6-12. However, the ground floor is exclusively for Grade 1-5 students and other learning facilities. The 26 teachers and staff were mix-gender.

In 1998, the MoE selected this school to be one of early rural schools implementing the Basic Education system in Oman. Algalal School is one of a few public schools in Oman providing mixed-gender educational opportunities. Female and male students start their learning in mixed-gender classes from Grade 1 and continue studying together until Grade 10, when male students are transferred to another neighbouring school. However, female students complete Grades 11 and 12 at the same school.

4.5 Selection of Participants

Data was collected from principals, teachers, and students. The principals of the four investigated schools were interviewed. Also, interviews took place with selected teachers. In each school, Social Studies teachers and Life Skills teachers were interviewed as these teachers are more likely to be responsible and aware about factors and activities promoting civic participation. Further, one additional teacher was also interviewed in each school to find out if the multidisciplinary approach supports Basic Education schools' missions in enhancing civic participation amongst learners.

Additionally, at the first investigated school, Alwatan, the principal suggested another interview be conducted with the co-curricular activities coordinator in the school. It was suggested that the teacher looking after co-curricular activities could enrich the study's findings in terms of the role of co-curricular activities in developing civic participation. Thus, data collection procedures were restructured to include the co-curricular coordinator as an additional source of data at Alwatan School and whenever such position exists in the remaining schools. This extra source of data highlighted the importance of interviews as an effective source of data in case study methodology. Yin noted (2009, p. 108), that the interview is very helpful "to identify other relevant sources of evidence". Group interviews were used to collect data from students in Grade 10, the final Grade at second cycle of Basic Education. From each school, one focus group interview was conducted at single sex schools; however, two focus group interviews were conducted at mixed-gender schools, one for each gender. For observation purposes, a Grade 10 class was selected from each school. The researcher was always flexible and open to any form of data collection that might add richness and robustness to the study.

4.6 Research Methods

This research used three basic forms of data collection: semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and observation. The following section provides an overview of data collection, and then describes how data were collected for each method.

4.6.1 Overview of data collection

The researcher spent five days in each school. All interviews, observation and focus group interviews took place in October and November 2008. Each interview and focus group session lasted between 40 to 80 minutes. Interviews with principals took place on the first day except Alsalam School where the interview took place on the second day. Classroom observations, teacher interviews and focus group interviews occurred throughout the five days of data collection in each school. The arrangement for all interviews was finalized before the beginning of the data collection in each school. All four schools were visited before the start of data collection in order to meet with the principal and show him/her the authorization letter issued by MoE (Appendix 1). Similarly, in this initial visit, the researcher explained the study aims and established a timetable for the interviews, focus group interviews and classroom observations. This process ensured best use of time at the schools and avoided any interruption to the timetable of the participants.

Using a digital recorder, the researcher interviewed all respondents in places that ensured the confidentiality. Throughout the data collection process, field notes were used to document any observations, conversations and interactions that appeared significant to the study's main focus. A total of 18 interviews, six focus group interviews, and 34 classroom observations were completed throughout the course of the research. An overview of the data collection methods at each school is presented in Table 4.3. The following sections provide further details regarding the three methods used for data collection.

Table: 4.3: Summary of data collection and respondents for each school

School Name	Date of interview	Respondents	Interview	Focus group	Number of classroom observation
Alwatan	11-10-2008	Principal	1	-	-
	12-10-2008	Life Skills' teacher	1	-	1
	13-10-2008	Social Studies' teacher	1	-	3
	13-10-2008	Science teacher	1	-	4
	14-10-2008	Co-curricular coordinator	1	-	-
	14-10-2008	Male students	-	1	
Alsalam	19-10-2008	Principal	1	-	-
	18-10-2008	Life Skills' teacher	1	-	2
	20-10-2008	Social Studies teacher	1	-	3
	18-10-2008	English teacher	1	-	4
	18-10-2008	Co-curricular coordinator	1	-	-
	21-10-2008	Female students	-	1	
Alnoor	01-11-2008	Principal	1	-	-
	03-11-2008	Life Skills' teacher	1	-	2
	01-11-2008	Social Studies' teacher	1	-	3
	04-11-2008	Mathematics teacher	1	-	4
	03-11-2008	Male students		1	
	04-11-2008	Female students		1	
Algatal	08-11-2008	Principal	1	-	-
	12-11-2008	Life Skills' teacher	1	-	1
	10-11-2008	Social Studies' teacher	1	-	3
	11-11-2008	Islamic Education teacher	1	-	4
	08-11-2008	Male students	-	1	
	10-11-2008	Female Students	-	1	
Total			18	6	34

4.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

The interview is one of the most popular tools in qualitative research. Gillham (2000, p. 65) stated that the interview is very important in case study research and considered the "richest single source of data". Yin (2009) suggested that this method

of data collection helps researchers to focus directly on researched topics and provides a rich source of data. In the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers of each school. The questions that guided the interviews were open and flexible to encourage interactive conversation and to explore in-depth issues raised during the interviews.

The interviews with the principals took place after obtaining their signed consent (Appendix 2). The interviews took place at the beginning of the investigation at most schools to provide an overview of the schools' program, and other details such as the school size, activities and history. The interview concentrated on the principals' knowledge of and views about the school's role in enhancing civic participation among learners. The interview protocol, which was developed, consisted of four main parts as listed below:

<p>Background Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me about your schools' history?• How did you become principal for this school?• Are you getting professional training? <p>Views on Basic Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your opinions of the Basic education system?• What do you think is the most significant change in the Basic Education system?• What does Basic Education do to enhance civic participation among students? <p>Views on schools' responsibility towards developing civic participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you improve students' involvement in the school community?• Are there any school programs designed to link students with their surrounding community?• How often does the school provide opportunities for students to participate in the community?• Do you think that the learning environment prepares students to participate in different aspects of civic life?• Do you think that students' backgrounds affect their dispositions about civic participation? <p>Challenges and recommendations to improve schools' mission for raising active citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the challenges facing you to improve the civic mission of your school?• If you were involved in the educational reform plan, what changes would you suggest?
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Interviews with teachers were arranged after gaining their signed consent (Appendix 3) and according to their setting in the semester timetable to avoid any disruption to their daily program. Dialogue with teachers focused on their knowledge and views about their school practices in promoting a higher level of civic participation amongst students. The interviews also determined their understanding of policies to promote civic participation in the researched schools. An interview protocol was developed that consisted of four main sections as listed below:

<p>Background Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about yourself. • How did you become a teacher in this school? • Are you getting professional training? <p>Views on Basic Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your opinions of the Basic Education system? • What does Basic Education do to enhance civic participation among students? • Do you believe that the formal curriculum you teach prepares students for civic participation? • How do co-curricular activities enhance civic participation? <p>Views on the schools' responsibility towards civic participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you improve students' involvement in the school community? • Do you think that the learning environment provides students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to prepare them for civic participation? • Do you think that students' backgrounds affect their perceptions about civic participation? <p>Challenges and recommendations to improve the school's mission for raising active citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the challenges facing you to improve civic participation among students? • If you were involved in the educational reform plan, what changes would you suggest?

4.6.3 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews have become a popular way of obtaining information in social science research in the last few years. Israel and Galindo-Gonzalez (2008, p. 2) identified a focus group as a “planned, relaxed naturalistic dialogue among a small group of people on a specific topic”. Morgan (1997) explained that interaction between participants may encourage them to produce original ideas and generate

evidence and examples. Wilkinson (2004, p. 180) stated that focus group interviews are well suited to exploring sensitive topics, especially among young adults because “solidarity among friends seems to decrease their discomfort with the topic”.

In this research, a total of six focus group interviews were conducted (Table 4.3). In each focus group, there were either five or six participants. All focus group interviews took place within the normal school day and each session lasted between 60 to 80 minutes. All focus groups were audio recorded after obtaining students’ and parents’ consent (Appendices 4 & 5). The same questions were asked in all four schools. Nevertheless, the open-ended questions were designed to be open and flexible in order to encourage students to discuss any related issues that might enrich the data and provide depth of understanding. In order to gain insight into respondents’ perceptions, the researcher encouraged them to talk profusely and spontaneously.

Students who participated in the focus group were selected with cooperation of both school principal and the homeroom teacher to ensure that each group represented a range of achievement levels. Similarly, session times were selected with the cooperation of the school principal and the Grade 10 homeroom teacher to ensure that students did not miss essential learning experiences. All focus group interviews took place in a quiet setting.

An interview protocol was developed to stimulate discussions with the students. This guide facilitated discussions regarding students’ experiences and expectations about different issues of civic participation, such as raising donations, volunteering and voting. It also planned to explore student dispositions about the school learning environment in order to develop their civic participation. A further purpose for the focus group was to identify factors which could encourage or inhibit students’ civic participation at present or in the future. The interview protocol consisted of six questions, as listed below:

- If I ask you about your civic participation...What might you include?
- Why do you think civic participation is important?
- How does school encourage you to develop your civic participation?
- What other things outside school encourage you to participate?
- What group of people might participate more or less in civic life?
- What helps you to participate in civic life? What inhibits your participation?

4.6.4 Observations

Observations were utilized to collect direct data from the real world of the researched context. In this part of the study, the researcher was a non-participant observer, with a role that focused on “record[ing] notes without becoming involved in the activities of participants” (Creswell, 2005, p. 212).

In this research, 34 classroom sessions were observed (Table 4.3). While researcher was mainly taking note at all observed sessions, all observations were also audio taped. This tactic was used as back-up mechanism. This help the researcher to re-listen to the conversations in the observed classes whenever necessary.

In this research, observation was employed to gather data about the learning environment in a natural setting and to develop a better understanding about the organisational culture at classroom level. One classroom of Grade 10 students was chosen from each participating school. In this class, three teachers from three different subjects were observed for one study week. Social Studies and Life Skills were the main subjects observed, as these are core subjects in the promotion of civic participation. However, an additional subject was also observed to investigate if a multidisciplinary approach supported the schools’ mission in enhancing civic participation amongst learners. Observed teachers in this study were the same set of teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Observations were used to develop a better understanding of the classroom climate with regard to civic participation development. Classroom climate plays a vital role in supporting the schools’ civic missions (Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005). A supportive civic classroom is one wherein students: experience openness towards

community issues, feel free and safe to express ideas, enjoy engagement in meaningful discussions, are given the opportunity to argue and comment on various public affairs, learn to listen and respect others' opinions, discuss controversial issues and current affairs from both local and global perspectives, learn constructive and critical thinking, take an active part in group work and classroom discussions, and are exposed to active and engaging teaching methods (Akhtar, 2008, Campbell, 2005; Whiteley, 2005). To investigate these characteristics in the observed classes, a systematic process of recording field notes was developed to assist the researcher in recording different actions (Appendix 7). The researcher also opportunistically made notes of students' work, available documentation, and wall charts considered to be relevant to the current study.

4.7 Pilot Study

Yin (2009) stated that a pilot case study is helpful in identifying new sources of data and refine the data collection plan. A pilot case study was used to trial the procedures of interviews, focus groups and observations to ensure accuracy and clarity. The pilot was also used to clarify the questions and to estimate the time needed for each method of data collection. The pilot study took place at a school located in a small city in north Oman between 5th and 8th October 2008. Similar to the final set of investigated sites, this school was employing the Basic Education system (Grades 5-10). All 1197 students were females studying in 36 classrooms and all 68 teachers and administrative staff were all female. Interviews took place with the principal, Social Studies teacher, Life Skills teacher, and English teacher. A focus group interview was conducted with a group of six female students. A total of seven classroom observations were conducted at this school.

This step was very important, not only to pre-trial the instruments of data collection, but also to identify any difficulties in the data collection process. The researcher found this crucial and very beneficial for the final course of data collection. A well planned timetable was necessary in order for the researcher to conduct interviews and attend classroom observation without interrupting the normal schooling day of the principal, teachers and students.

The results of the pilot study indicated that no changes were required in the data collection process. However, the pilot study assisted in estimating the time required for various forms of data collection. Similarly, the focus group interview conducted with female students highlighted the need to use daily language with students. For example, using the term ‘non classroom activities’ was much easier for students to understand and respond compared to the term ‘co-curricular activities’. Further, while conducting observations, the researcher noticed that wall charts and drawings could be used as additional sources of data. Thus, visual displays in classrooms were included in the observational notes. The pilot study was an essential step towards the main research as it prepared the researcher for data collection and made the data collection process more smooth and predictable.

4.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis started at the data collection stage. This was very important to handle the extensive amounts of data collected and enable the researcher to “focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (Glesne, 2006, p. 148). Creswell (2009) suggested six main steps that should be taken into account when analysing qualitative data: organising and preparing data for analysis, reading through all the data to obtain a general sense, the coding process, generating descriptions of the context, advancing the way of representing themes, and making sense of the data. Taking into account these steps, the following sections will highlight the process of data analysis.

All the data collected throughout the course of this study were organized, saved, and prepared for analysis in a systematic way. The researcher listened and re-listened to each session from the first day of data collection. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher in Arabic. As part of analysis process, writing the transcription in Arabic was driven by the fact that vast majority of participants were only speaking Arabic. As Yin (2009) suggested, after completing transcriptions of all interviews, original data were sent back to participants in order to get their approval, make any modification and comments on the transcriptions. This action was important to ensure that transcript content accurately expressed the respondents’ views and

opinions about the phenomena under investigation. This was important to ensure the reliability of the collected data before moving to examine it in greater depth.

Reading through all the data to get a general sense about the data at this early stage of data analysis was an important step in identifying key points, focusing on certain issues in the interviews, and trying to link observation notes to what other sources revealed in a continuous manner. Taking the responsibility for audio transcription allowed the researcher to not only organize the data systematically but more importantly obtain additional understanding about views and opinions expressed. Similarly, reading and organizing the field notes as the research progressed, and later after finishing the data collection, were crucial in exploring the investigated phenomena in depth.

The third step was to start deeper analysis with the coding process. QSR NVivo 8 software was utilized to conduct detailed analysis of the collected data. This software is designed to organize, analyse, and store different forms of qualitative data (Bazeley, 2007). In this research, all data were saved in a word processing format. Each file name was labelled as: source of data site, instrument used, and participant identity. All files were then uploaded to the NVivo program. This software allowed the researcher to manage and organize the massive amount of data in a very systematic way. In analysing qualitative data, Strauss (1987, p. 27) emphasized the importance of the coding process, noting that “the excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding”. NVivo software is useful for the three types of coding: open, axial, and selective. As Creswell explained (1998), open coding helps to identify the initial nodes² or themes about the phenomena under investigation, axial coding is the stage where the researcher links the data in a logical manner, and selective coding is where the researcher decides on the style of presenting all categories in a systematic, cohesive and comprehensive manner. Worth mentioning here that while the raw data were written in Arabic, coding process, identification of themes, and supported quotations were accomplished in English. This was important to facilitate writing of the final report.

² The language used by NVivo for a category

This research employed a cross-case analysis in order to develop a better and deeper understanding about the investigated phenomena. Cross-case analysis provides opportunity to compare finding and examine the quality of collected evidence from different sites. Patton (2002, p. 440) stated, “Cross-case analysis means grouping together answers from different people to common questions or analysing different perspectives on central issues”. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested, the researcher should approach the investigated phenomena for multiple exemplars and evidence. NVivo software was a powerful tool that enabled connections to be made of passages, ideas and field notes collected from different sites and from different sources of data. This qualitative analytical software gives the researcher the ability to develop deeper understandings about the data and to identify themes and related evidence without “losing access to the source data or context from where the data have come” (Bazeley, 2007, p. 2). Such functions are very powerful in allowing the researcher to dig deeply in the data, examine and re-examine themes, and visit and re-visit sources of emerging themes quickly and reliably. This was also important to generate descriptions of the settings and individuals as an important step in the data analysis process. NVivo helps the researcher to link the identified themes to the context easily and select the most supportive evidence in a very reliable way.

The last two steps of the data analysis process were about advancing the means through which themes were represented and making sense of the data. Here, the researcher developed better understandings about the data. These steps involved visiting findings in terms of the research questions, synthesizing themes and deciding what finding should be presented in order to draw the most accurate picture about the investigated phenomena. It also included the interpretation of data and lessons that could be learned from the findings. These stages are essential to ensure that findings are presented in a coherent manner and reflect the reality of the investigated phenomena.

4.9 Research Trustworthiness

As an employee of the Ministry of Education in Oman, the researcher made every possible effort to ensure that his affiliations and personal views have no influence on

data analysis and interpretation. With such awareness in mind, and to ensure research quality, this inquiry implemented tactics and criteria suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989). These criteria are crucial to establish internal and external validity and to “illuminate[s] the ethic of respect for truth in case study research” (Bassey, 1999, p. 75). The following sections will discuss the quality criteria of creditability, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.9.1 Credibility

The term credibility is used in the literature of qualitative research to describe ways used by the researcher to ensure that research findings reflect reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this research, triangulation, peer checking, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observations, and negative case analysis were used to enhance the creditability of this inquiry.

Triangulation is an important method to improve research creditability. As mentioned previously, this research employed three means of triangulation. The first was through multiple data sources; data were gathered from students, teachers, and principals. Second, through multiple sites; data used were collected from four schools. These schools differed in terms of gender, socioeconomic background of students, and school location. The last mean of triangulation was achieved by using multiple data collection instruments. Interview, focus group, and observation were utilized to provide a thick set of data. Triangulation was significant in widening the researcher’s knowledge and understanding of issues of interest in the researched context. In addition, it gave the researcher the opportunity to examine in-depth and triangulate respondents’ views and opinions regarding the different aspects and issues associated with students’ civic participation.

Peer checking was another tactic employed to enhance credibility. After transcribing all interviews and focus groups, the researcher asked two of his colleagues to identify themes as an early stage of analysis. Both of them had educational experience and held Masters Degrees in Education. The comparative analysis was consistent between themes identified by peers and those that the researcher had identified. Further, all transcriptions were sent to the participants. In the covering letter, they

were asked to comment on both the initially identified themes and the contents of the transcription. They were also asked to check if the content expressed what they wanted to say and gave them the opportunity explanation or modify any part of the contents. All respondents sent back their feedback except one female teacher from Alsalam School. The majority of respondents signed the cover sheet without suggesting any changes. One principal corrected comments from the interview about the total number of teachers at his school. A second principal sent extra information about additional activities that occurred in his school.

Peer debriefing was another approach used to enhance the credibility of the current study. In the early stages of the study the researcher engaged in informal discussions with peers and interested educators about civic participation in Omani schools. This included: teachers, supervisors, postgraduate students, and university lecturers. Also, the researcher was involved in discussions regarding the current study focus with friends and relatives in Oman. These discussions were always powerful helped the researcher to re-explore data from different angles and find alternative interpretation of the findings.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observations were other strategies used to enhance the credibility of this inquiry. Prearranging the details of visits to each school in advance ensured the best use of time at each site. Using phone, email, and face to face meetings to finalize all details of visits to each school established close and very positive relations with the respondents. Sometimes this closeness and cooperation were extended to other staff in the school such as the assistant principal at Alwatan School and the social worker at Algalal School. In many cases, the principals invited the researcher to watch specific school activities or programs they believed might add value to the research. On one occasion, the principal of Alnoor School asked the researcher to go with her to the place where gifts and certificates of appreciation received from a wide range of government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were displayed. Her intent was to demonstrate how her school was participating actively in the surrounding society. The researcher spent a total of five days in each school. On the first day of data collection, the principals would introduce the researcher to the participants and showed the researcher the Grade 10 class, where observations were conducted.

Effort was taken to ensure that respondents understood all the details in the Information Sheet and consent form before conducting any interviews. This arrangement helped to establish positive relations with respondents and gain their cooperation throughout data collection. Flexibility when collecting data for qualitative research is an important issue that enhances the research validity and avoids any premature conclusions. In the context of the current research, the researcher realized that the daily morning assembly was an arena which might enrich the study findings. Therefore, the researcher made arrangements to attend this part of the school day. Similarly, when the principal of one school suggested that interviewing the co-curricular activities coordinator may enrich the collected data, modifications were made.

Finally, negative case analysis was used to support the current research credibility. The researcher looked to evidence and cases that challenge the identified themes and ideas. This was important to ensure that different realities of investigated phenomena were presented and discussed adequately.

4.9.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings could be applied to similar settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To fulfil this criterion, thick descriptions are provided to make transferring the research findings to similar conditions possible. This includes detailed descriptions of the investigated phenomena and the context where the data collection took place. Furthermore, quoting the voice of respondents is another method used to enable readers to transfer findings to similar settings. Moreover, purposeful sampling was used to provide wide, relevant and a broad range of data. In this regard, the schools chosen from the Basic Education system differ in gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality. In addition, different sources of data were recorded systematically in an electronic file to develop an audit trail.

4.9.3 Dependability and confirmability

Dependability refers to the tactics used to ensure that the research findings have arisen from a systematic process. To fulfil this criteria, a detailed report is provided, so the reader can “explore process, judge the decisions that were made and understand what salient factors in the context led the researcher to the decisions and interpretation made” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242). Confirmability is used to overcome objectivity and to ensure that “data interpretation, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and a person apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluators imaginations” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p 243). In this research, confirmability was achieved by involving participants in reviewing the transcripts to check the accuracy of the data and interpretations (Sarantakos, 2005). Further, audit trails were also employed. Raw data and different stages of analysis were documented in a systematic way.

4.10 Ethical Issues

Following Curtin University ethical guidelines, this research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee on 11 February 2008 under the record number: SMEC 20080004. The ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and minimum disruptions were addressed in this research.

Written permission was obtained from the MoE in Oman and the administration of each researched school. The informed consent forms were translated to Arabic for all participants (see the example of the principal consent form in Arabic, Appendix 6). Similarly, taking into account that students were around 16 years old, focus groups with students took place after obtaining the students’ and their parents’ approval. The informed consent provided details about the nature of the study and its purposes (Appendices 2-5). Respondents were given the choice as to whether they would like to participate or not. Observations inside classrooms took place after obtaining the agreement of both students and teachers. In all instances, all participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time with no penalty. Prior to all interviews, the researcher ensured that the respondents read the informed consent and

understood his/her role in the study. All participant and parents' signed the informed consent form which was filed as part of research procedures.

To address the issue of confidentiality, assurance was provided to all participants that their responses would be treated confidentiality and would only be used for the purposes of the current study. Pseudonyms were used in the final report for schools and participants. Obtaining the participants approval of the transcriptions was also achieved confidentially. Each interviewee was given the interview transcript in a sealed envelope and was asked to return her/his feedback in another sealed envelope. All original data collected by interview, observation and focus group is to be stored electronically and in paper format for five years in a secure place at Curtin University. Access to this data will be limited only to the researcher and his supervisors.

Finally, effort was taken to reduce any disruption while collecting data at schools. In each school, the researcher had a detailed timetable for interviews and classroom observation. This step was arranged with the cooperation of each school's administration before starting the process of data collection. This was very important to minimize any disruption at the schools, or students missing out on essential learning experiences.

4.11 Summary

This research aimed to explore how four Basic Education schools in Oman worked to develop civic participation among students. This research was situated within the interpretive paradigm as case study methodology was utilized to gain in-depth views regarding the investigated phenomena. This chapter discussed the context of the research, and discussed the three instruments that were used in this course of research: interview, focus group, observation. The different steps of data analysis and interpretation were also discussed. The chapter explained the criteria employed to enhance research trustworthiness. Finally, the chapter highlighted the ethical issues addressed in the research.

According to the five questions which guided this research, Chapters Five and Six will present the findings of this research.

Chapter Five: Findings

The main purpose of this study was to examine four Basic Education schools in Oman in relation to the development civic participation. This chapter presents findings that were revealed through the analysis of data collected using case study methodology. Analyses of the data collected throughout this course of research helped to answer the research questions:

- What spaces are available in the formal curriculum for developing Omani students' civic participation?
- How does classroom climate develop Omani students' civic participation?
- How do the co-curricular activities develop Omani students' civic participation?
- What are Omani students' dispositions towards civic participation?
- In what ways do gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality factors influence Omani students' opportunities to develop civic participation?

Three main instruments were utilized to collect the data in this research:

- Semi-structured interview with principals and teachers.
- Focus group interviews with Grade 10 students.
- Classroom observation in Grade 10 classes.

This chapter presents the finding of the first three questions. These three questions aimed to explore the role of formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities in developing students' civic participation. The findings related to students' dispositions towards civic participation and the role of three demographic factors in relation to students' civic participation will be presented in Chapter Six.

5.1 Research Question One: Civic Participation and the Formal Curriculum

What spaces are available in the formal curriculum for developing Omani students' civic participation?

Reforming the curriculum was one of major recommendations to stakeholders in Oman during and after the 1995 conference, Vision for Oman's Economy 2020 (Ministry of National Economy, 1995). The subsequent redesign of the formal curriculum from Grade 1 to 12 has been an ongoing process of national educational reform initiated by Oman's MoE. This commenced in 1997 and was finalized in 2008 when the final curriculum set was introduced to students in Grade 12 (MoE, 2008a). This has been a major achievement of the MoE, and has helped the new philosophy of education for Oman to be implemented in all Basic Education schools across the country.

This first research question focuses on identifying the role of the new set of curriculums in developing civic participation. The focus of this question is the exploration of some of the core units implemented at Basic Education schools in developing students' civic participation. All of these units have specified teaching time in the weekly teaching plan. Principal interviews, teacher interviews, student focus group interviews, and classroom observations were all utilized in the analysis. As a result of the analysis process, three main themes emerged from the data: positive change for civic participation, curriculum and civic participation, and challenges surrounding curriculum implementation. The following sections will present findings of each theme in detail.

5.1.1 Positive change for civic participation

The data showed that the new curriculums helped to provide better opportunities to develop students' civic participation. Principals and teachers who had experience in working with both the old and new curriculums expressed satisfaction about the new curriculums in relation to the development of civic participation. They stressed that

preparing students to be active members in society was one obvious dimension emphasized by the newly adopted curriculums. Further, they believed that, overall, the Basic Education curriculum was an effective means for developing students' civic knowledge and creating learning opportunities for active citizenry.

Principals and teachers reported that civic issues were gaining attention in the area of content knowledge. They agreed that curriculum designers drew attention to issues related to public life on a regular basis. They also reported that the new curriculums created spaces for both teachers and students to develop a more supportive civic learning environment. The principal of Alsalam's School stated:

The curriculums in the Basic Education schools are well designed to improve students' ability to engage actively in public life. I can ensure you that curriculums draw intensive attention to the content related to the civic life.

(Interview- 19-10-2008)

This view is also supported by the Social Studies teacher at Alnoor School who commented:

I have experience in teaching the old curriculum and the new one. The new curriculum is far better. It pays attention on a regular base to strengthening the relationships between the learner and the surrounding society. I mean, the new curriculums are more related to daily lives issues.

(Interview- 01-11-2008)

This positive sentiment amongst principals and teachers in the researched schools reflects the importance of the role curriculums could play to construct a supportive learning environment for civic development. In the context of Oman, well designed curriculums appear to be critical because teachers are asked to follow closely the standardized curriculum designed by MoE. The next section will elaborate in more detail regarding educationalist perceptions and Basic Education curriculum.

5.2.2 Curriculums and civic participation

This section presents findings regarding the curriculum and its role in developing students' civic participation. Some respondents articulated their opinion about the effectiveness of the new curriculum in developing civic participation. Others

identified subjects and topics across the formal curriculum in which students learn about different aspects of civic life. In presenting finding related to this theme, the analysis is presented in three sub-themes: Life Skills subject, Social Studies subject, civic topics across other subjects.

Life Skills subject

This subject was introduced in the educational system in Oman in 1998. This new core subject was one of the major changes associated with curriculum reform. According to Ministry of Education regulation (MOE, 2001), this subject is mandatory for all students from Grade 1 until Grade 12. For one period each week, students learn the suggested content knowledge and participate in other related activities. Aims and suggested topics of this new adopted curriculum were designed to discuss the daily life experience, concerns, and interest of citizens. The subject's role in developing civic participation is clearly mentioned in the subject's aims. Some of these aims include a direct and explicit focus on civic participation development such as to:

- Develop students' awareness towards different aspects of public life and encourage them to take the initiative for any needed reform.
- Improve students' communication skills.
- Encourage students to acquire a positive attitude towards family and society values to ensure cohesion.
- Improve students' skills for individual and life-long learning.
- Teach students necessary skills for efficient use of time.
- Teach students scientific methods of problem solving and judging things.
- Teach students how to discover their capacities.

(MoE, 2008b, pp 1- 3)

Interviews with principals, teachers and students combined with field notes exposed that this subject is the core area for civic education in general and civic participation in particular. Interviewed educators stated that this subject becomes the cornerstone in enhancing students' civic knowledge and skills. Algalal's principal summarized his opinion about the Life Skills subject by saying:

[Life Skills] is supporting so many social skills because it always draws a direct link between learning the environment and the surrounding society.

Actually, Life Skills is the most important subject in terms of putting into practice the MoE aims of strengthening the relationship between students and their society.

(Interview- 08-11-2008)

Similarly, the principal of Alnoor School showed clearly that she welcomed introducing this new subject as part of the educational reform plan because it:

Helps student to gain the necessary skills needed for active citizenship.

(Interview- 01-11-2008)

From their perspective, Life Skills teachers emphasized the importance of the suggested goals and objectives of this subject in developing informed citizens. They argued that the subject aims are directly related to developing the knowledge and skills needed by any individual to be active in the society. The Life Skills teacher from Alsalam School noted in this regard:

It is [Life Skills] mainly about the society, students learn about parliamentary life in the country, and how they can participate in such aspects of civic life, they learn about voluntary work, and how they can become members at NGOs.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

Linked to this, Life Skills teachers also valued the suggested content knowledge of this subject in developing learners' interest and capacity for societal involvement. They stated that knowledge and skills suggested in the curriculum are directly linked to the improvement of students' relationships with their surrounding society. Further, they identified some examples of topics, skills, and dispositions, they believed essential for healthy civic development. Table 5.1 summarizes some of these examples offered to students in Grade 10 throughout this subject, as mentioned by teachers from the four investigated schools.

Further, in terms of subject content knowledge, teachers reported that topics are chosen carefully to provide the basic knowledge needed for active citizenry. They stressed that this subject created space necessary to develop students' abilities to express their opinions with regard to different issues of interest in society. They also

argued that suggested topics give students the opportunity to learn about the nature of the political and administrative system of their society.

Table 5.1: Topics, skills and dispositions presented in the Grade 10 Life Skills subject

Topics	Related skills and dispositions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in the advisory council elections • Successes in work places • Traffic laws and regulations • Non-government Organisations • Home care for elderly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty • Patience • Respecting the law • Choosing right representatives • Loyalty • Altruism • Exploration • Teamwork

The Life Skills teacher at Alnoor School indicated that this subject is important because it provides students with civic knowledge and the necessary skills for active membership in the society. In a similar manner, the Life Skills teacher at Alsalam School indicated that this subject allows students to develop innovative methods to express their opinions about various phenomena in society. In the following quotation, she reported how a group of her students in Grade 10 expressed their opinions about the excessive and wasteful use of mobile phones among youth:

Some of them wrote letters for parents explaining the negative impacts of the mobile misuse, but other group decided to use cartoons to convey what they would like to say about this social problem. They draw the mobile phone like a demon and young adults like slaves; I found girls very creative in using different means to address such social problems.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

From their perspective, students expressed interest about the topics presented throughout the Life Skills subject. They explained that they had become more aware of different societal issues, and had therefore become confident when they approached issues of interest within or outside the school. When asked for examples of issues they had come across in this subject, four out of six groups interviewed in this research reported the experience of simulating the process of election in Majlis Alshura. This may be due to the fact that students were studying about this topic when interviews took place. However, students explained that they enjoyed the suggested topics in the Life Skills subject. When female students at Alsalam School

were asked to give their opinions about the content of Life Skills subject, they replied:

FS1³: We like it because it directly touches daily life issues. We learn how to overcome problems we may experience using logic and scientific ways.

FS2: I remember once that our teachers asked us to explore reasons why some good students experience a decline in their academic achievement when they move to higher classes. I like such an assignment because it helps me to reflect on myself.

FS3: We enjoy it because we learn about skills we need in our private or even public life.

FS4: Look, all girls are happy about this subject because it is easy and not theoretical and more importantly it speaks about daily life issues.

(Focus group interview- 21-10-2008)

The above quotations also explain why the Life Skills subject attracts students' interest. Here, students were happy about their learning experience throughout this subject because it is connected to their daily life experience and it motivated them to engage practically and, sometimes, in a systematic process to overcome problems related to their daily life experience. This may also explain how learners appreciate learning experiences in which they are exposed to real life issues and learn how to deal with or overcome challenges they might experience in their daily lives.

Overall, the Life Skills subject appears to be a new and important platform for civic participation in the Basic Education system. Introducing this mandatory subject for the first time in the educational system could help to enhance students' civic experience. Developing students' knowledge about issues such as state constitution, parliamentary life, voluntary work, and NGOs is essential for any citizen to be informed and to be an active member of society. Presenting such spaces for learning for students could be acknowledged as positive educational reform for raising active citizens.

³ In the whole findings chapters, the following abbreviations will be used in the quotations:

FS: will refer to Female Student

MS: will refer to Male Student

FT: will refer to Female Teacher

MT: will refer to Male Teacher

Social Studies subject

Social Studies has long been a compulsory unit in the educational system in Oman. Based on this tradition, the new educational reform plan emphasizes the importance of this subject in developing learners' interest about the local and global community. According to the regulation of the Basic Education system, students have three teaching periods of Social Studies each week. The aims of Social Studies subject in the Basic Education system include:

- Understand the political system of Oman and roles of various community institutions.
- Recognize the characteristic of Oman's society and its traditions.
- Understand some contemporary challenges in relation to pollution, immigration, and globalization.
- Recognize the importance of international cooperation and peaceful living among nations.
- Understand the importance of family and its effective role in improving ties between individuals.
- Appreciate local and international roles of Oman government.
- Develop positive attitudes toward the environment.
- Acquire the skills of applying technology tools that develop creative thinking skills.
- Acquire skills of planning and participating in cooperative projects.

(Al-nofli, 2009, pp 8-9)

Consistent with these suggested roles of the Social Studies subject, respondents in this research agreed that the newly adopted curriculum emphasizes the customary role of this subject. They drew a direct link between issues discussed in the Social Studies curriculum and what learners' need in order to be active members in public life. However, respondents indicated that this subject plays a secondary role in developing students' knowledge about civic life when compared with the Life Skills subject.

Social Studies teachers identified this subject as another important space at the Basic Education schools in developing students' knowledge about civic life. They explained that issues such as the nature of parliamentary life in Oman, the role of the United Nations and its affiliated organizations, and environmental topics such as desertification, global warming, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes and population

explosion are topics discussed regularly in this subject. The Social Studies teacher at Algalal School was responsible for teaching this subject from Grade 3 to 12. All of her working experience since she graduated in 2004 was at this school. She indicated that the Social Studies subject deals with mixed topics of geography and history. These topics are always linked to local or global current affairs, and therefore, provide an opportunity to widen students' knowledge about different life issues. When she was asked how this subject enhances civic participation, she stated:

[Because] the main concern of this subject is society's matters, the nature of the topics motivates me to apply different sorts of current affairs in my class, I always link topics such as desertification, flooding, global warming, earthquake, volcanoes and the population boom to students' daily life. When I teach a problem like salinization I talk about what is going on here in Albatinah [plate area in north Oman], so each student can experience the problem and predict its negative impacts.

(Interview- 10-11-2008)

The Social Studies teacher at Alnoor School had experience in teaching Social Studies in both the old schooling system and Basic Education schools. She emphasized that the Social Studies curriculum in the Basic Education is much better in terms of content and integrated social skills. She noted in this regard:

It changed completely [Social Studies curricular], while the old curriculum was designed to enhance memorizing, the ones utilized in the Basic Education focus more on enhancing students' skills such as analysis, problem solving, evaluation and critical thinking. Also, it focuses on community issues at local and global levels.

(Interview- 01-11-2008)

Students also appeared to be enjoying issues they studied in this subject. They attributed many learning experiences related to the local and global society to the space provided by Social Studies. Many students recognized the subject as an important component to enlighten them about issues affecting life in their society. A male student from Alnoor School summarized his colleagues' opinion in this regard by saying:

Look, lately we studied [in Social Studies classes] about poverty in the world. Students were trying to analyse this problem from different approaches. Some students argued that this problem comes as a result of global rising prices;

others were analysing the negative impact of this problem in Oman and other Arab countries.

(Focus group interview-03-11-2008)

Global aspects of civic life received regular attention throughout the Social Studies curriculum. Taking into account some previous mentioned examples, the global focus of this subject was also noticed when looking to the suggested topics in the Social Studies curriculum. Table 5.2 summarizes some related topics to the global area of the Social Studies curriculum from Grade 5 to 10.(MoE, 2008e)

Table: 5.2: Examples of themes and topics of global issues in Social Studies subject (Years 5 to 10)

Year	Theme	Sub-topics
5	Ancient Civilizations in the Arabian Peninsula	Ancient civilizations in Oman Political, religious and economic relationship between Oman and old world civilizations Delmon Civilization Yemen Civilization
6	Arabic World	Position and countries Natural landscape Environment
7	Arabic World in recent age	Arab countries and its relationship with Europe United Arab Nation Arabian Israeli controversial Peaceful agreements between Arab and Israel
8	The modern history of Europe	Start of European renaissance Geographic discovery and its results Industrial revolution
9	Oman and its Islamic and global surroundings	Relationship between Oman and Islamic countries Oman's relationship with Organisation of Islamic Conference Cooperation between Oman and the United Nation Oman's role in supporting world peace Oman's role in protecting the world's environment
10	Global economic forces	United States of America Japan China Major economic unions in the world

Focusing on global issues such as the environment, diseases, poverty and the urgent need for peace in the world is very important to improve students' commitment towards various global issues. In our increasingly inter-related world, schools need to draw special attention to global affairs to ensure that students are well prepared to

engage actively in global initiatives aimed to address challenges negatively affecting human life on earth. Similarly, introducing students to the way in which formal and informal institutions work at local and global levels is a vital issue. Such approaches, provide these future citizens with the ability to work effectively to create the necessary changes and to participate actively in any proposed reform processes.

In summary, the Social Studies subject appeared to be one in which civic knowledge is developed at the Basic Education schools. The subject was planned to expand civic knowledge by focusing on a wide range of civic topics. However, the content knowledge of the subject was designed to introduce learners to some global aspects of civic life.

Civic topics across other subjects

This research was designed to explore if related knowledge of civic participation is also integrated across different curriculums utilized at the Basic Education schools. For this reason, interviews and classroom observations included: a Science education teacher at Alwatan School, an English language teacher at Alsalam School, a Mathematics teacher at the Alnoor School, and an Islamic Education teacher at Algalal School. Also, the researcher explored principals' and students' points of view regarding the role of an interdisciplinary approach in developing civic participation.

Data showed that most respondents acknowledged the important role of all units in supporting civic participation as one of the main outcomes of any educational system. However, analysis showed that subjects including Islamic Education, Career Guidance, and Research Methodology were playing an obvious role in supporting learners' civic participation. Also, the data revealed that other subjects are also contributing in learners' civic development. The following sections will elaborate these findings in details.

Islamic Education: This core unit is offered for students at Basic Education schools from Grade 1 until 12. Depending on Grade level, students have between four to six periods each week. The subject aims to focus mainly on developing students' awareness about Islamic traditions and practices. The formal curriculum of Islamic

Education is planned to link students to current affairs related to Muslim life from a local and global perspective. The MoE mentioned in this regard that one of the aims of Basic Education curriculum is “to provide students with a learning experience that remains firmly rooted in Islamic principles and Omani Cultural identity, while, in addition, follows international best practices and is relevant to the rapidly changing world of the 21st century” (MoE, 2004a, p. 15). In Grade 11 and 12 the subject name is changed to Islamic Culture. In these two Grades, the content becomes more focused on current affairs of Muslims’ lives. Topics such as tolerance, women’s and children’s rights in Islam, and respecting and recognizing the roots of faiths are examples of issues discussed in the subject curriculum (MoE, 2009b).

Some participating principals argued that the formal curriculum of Islamic Education does contribute to the development of students’ civic participation. The principal of Alsalam School indicated that the Islamic teachers in her school were regularly inviting people of interest from outside the school to talk with female students about different social and civic issues. She explained that some models included in the Islamic Education curriculum are focusing on topics such as helping elderly people, problems of drugs use, and the importance of helping poor people in the society. She believed that such learning experiences within Islamic Education are supporting the school’s responsibility to prepare students for responsible roles in civic life.

This opinion was also supported by the principal of Algalal School who noted that Islamic Education does help develop students’ civic participation. He was more specific in suggesting that the Islamic Education curriculum implemented in Grade 11 and 12 is directly linked to improving students’ commitment towards active involvement in society. When was asked to give an example in this regard, he replied:

This subject [Islamic Education] focuses on a wide range of selective civic issues from a religious point of view. Take, for example ‘Zakaat Al-fiter⁴’; this topic is a very powerful approach to encourage students to give donations and to encourage individuals’ initiative to help needy families.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

⁴Small amount given to the poor at the end of fasting in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Dialogue with the Islamic Education teacher showed that this subject focuses on many civic issues. He explained that the new curriculum drew attention to the development of a civic disposition among students from a religious perspective. According to him, content knowledge sheds light on some important civic topics and skills like behavioural dialogues, dealing with people from other cultures, social cohesion, and environmental issues. As he noted:

The curriculum [Islamic Education] emphasises issues such as social solidarity, honesty and cooperation as a key factor of interactions with others, environmental protection, global issues such as peace and value of respect between culture.

Researcher: What about tolerance?

Surely, this is a centre aim in the curriculum, for example, in year 11 students learns about tolerance and social justice.

(Interview-11-11-2008)

Such a special position of Islamic Education as noted in the researched context needs to be investigated in depth to explore its role in shaping students' dispositions towards different aspects of civic life. Because the majority of existing literature related to civic participation comes from a western context where religion studies sometimes have restricted role at public schools, research in some other educational systems such as the one in Oman appears to be crucial to draw an in-depth picture about factors affecting students' civic behaviour in this part of the world.

Career Guidance Subject: In 2007, MoE decided that all Omani schools will have Career Guidance as a core unit. According to MoE regulation (2008a), every 500 students will have one Career Guidance specialist assigned to the school. This specialist is responsible for teaching the suggested topics in this subject and providing students with advice related to their career lives. All of the visited schools employ Career Guidance specialists. Students from Grade one to twelve have a meeting of one period with the Career Guidance specialist every fortnight. However, each student may ask for additional individual consultation. This modification of the formal curriculum at Basic Education schools aimed to improve the education quality and to improve students' ability to select their specialization in higher education based on their interest, capacity, and available work opportunities in the labour market (MoE, 2009c).

Some schools' principals argue that this new unit will help them to establish a strong relationship with the surrounding society and will create more opportunities to introduce their students to different forms of work environment challenges. The principal of Alwatan School noted:

This year [2008] I have two Career Guidance teachers because I have 1075[students], this will allow us to establish a strong relationship with the surrounding society. Actually, I can see that our relationship with government and NGOs is getting better.

(Interview-11-10-2008)

The co-curricular coordinator at Alsalam School suggested that co-curricular activities would benefit from the two Career Guidance specialists in her school because they have the time and skills to establish a strong relationship with the private sector and to seek extra funding for various school activities including extracurricular. The informal meeting with Career Guidance specialist at Algalal School showed that issues such as the labour law in Oman, workers' rights, and the necessary skills of successful career life are some issues suggested in the Career Guidance subject. (Field note-12-11-2008)

The Career Guidance subject's role in developing civic participation could be also noticed when looking to the suggested themes in the Career Guidance curriculum of Grade 10. Table 5.3 summarizes some content knowledge of the Career Guidance curriculum of Grade 10 which is titled 'Your Career Path' (MoE, 2009c).

Although the Career Guidance subject is aimed mostly at supporting learners' knowledge about the labour market and their choices at higher education, some respondents recognized this reform at the Basic Education formal curriculum as further space for students' community engagement. Giving learners the opportunities to speak directly with employers and be familiar with workers' needs or challenges should be a beneficial approach in enhancing students' confidence and involvement in such aspects of public life. As a new approach to the development of students' connection to the public life, the Career Guidance subject could be a promising reform initiative for furthering the development of civic participation. Career life is a key area where members of society can play an active role to address issues such as

corruption, injustice and, sometimes, ignorance of workers' rights. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this new subject in relation to civic participation requires in-depth investigation.

Table 5.3: Summary of the content knowledge of the Career Guidance curricular for Grade 10

Activity No	Topic
1	What is career guidance?
2	Professional tastes and personality traits
3	Your career guidance
4	Your education future
5	My academic preference
6	My career plan
7	Volunteer work
8	Problems and solutions
9	Communication skills
10	Time management

Research Methodology subject: This subject was introduced in the educational system in Oman as part of the Basic Education curriculum in 2008. Students in Grade 11 and 12 have one period of Research Methodology every fortnight. In Grade 11 they learn about basic tactics of scientific research such as problem selection, data collection and analysis. In Grade 12, students are required to develop their own research project under the supervision of one teacher (MoE, 2008d).

From the collected data, there were only five passages related to this sub-theme. This may be due to the fact that not all visited schools were offering this new subject. Alnoor and Algalal schools started to offer this subject to students in Grade 11. These two schools were the only ones in the investigated contexts which included Grade 11.

Principals at Alnoor and Algalal agreed that this last new reform in the curriculum structure of Basic Education is very important to improve students' engagement in public life. The principal of Algalal emphasized that this subject is very important to enhance students' research skills and their ability to make decisions based on valid information. Although Research Methodology was not offered at Alwatan School, the principal and the Science Education teacher mentioned that this new subject

would encourage students to investigate issues of daily life and to develop their knowledge about matters of interest in their community.

In early 2010 the researcher visited Algalal School to share some of the research findings with the principal and other teachers in the school. This provided the opportunity to ask further about Research Methodology in relation to civic participation. The principal noted:

As I expected, this is a very welcome change to both students and teachers. Most of the students' research projects focus on local society problems such as lack of water and pollution.

(Field note-11-01-2010)

The curriculum of the Research Methodology subject, published by MoE (2008d), stipulates that students are free to choose their research topics. While they work under the supervision of one of the school teachers, they are also free to nominate another specialist, who has interest and experience, from the school or the surrounding society. Skills listed in the introduction of this curriculum identify the importance of research experience students can gain just before attending higher education institutions or even in their later participation in the labour market. Encouraging students to work individually or collectively to address a problem of their choice is powerful means through which schools can ensure active participation in public life. Similarly, opening the door to learners to work with people from the surrounding society by taking part in their research projects is another good practice to improve learners' communication skills, team building and group work. This reform initiative could also be vital to elevate students' ability to think critically and to evaluate different arguments related to civic life based on convincing evidence.

One of the challenges that young people are facing in contemporary times are different opinions espouse by different parties. Today more than ever before, educational systems need to pay close attention to improving young adults' abilities regarding various challenges facing society, both locally and globally. Students need to learn problem solving methods in order to carry out real change in their society. In this sense, the recently offered Research Methodology subject in the Basic Education schools could be a valuable space in which students can link to community's interest

and real life challenges. This reform could also help students to express opinions based on facts and to take informed actions to carry change in society.

However, teachers' capacity to implement this new subject could be an area which requires research. Questions could be asked about the extent to which students' research projects are linked to real life problems. This is very important to ensure that students are applying skills developed in their Research Methodology classes to the development of their civic knowledge and, furthermore, if these skills are being utilized to address real life challenges.

Other subjects: Data also showed that interest about civic life was part of some other investigated subjects in the researched context. The Science Education teacher at Alwatan School stated that the new Science Education curriculum is, on a regular basis, drawing attention to support learners' civic knowledge. He explained that the content of Science Education had become more related to community issues, especially those related to the environment and the increasing threat to natural resources.

The English Language teacher at Alsalam School showed that this subject is also supporting some important skills for active citizenship. She indicated that her subject improves important skills such as conducting interviews. She explained that her students are introduced to such skills from Grade 9 and, when they move into Grade 10, she allowed them to use interviews as a valuable source of data. Linked to this practice, she stated:

'Community outside' is one of the units presented in the English curriculum in Grade 10. Here students learn about community institutions and ways to engage with a wide range of activities in society. As part of my teaching activities, I ask students to visit some surrounding restaurants to interview customers in English regarding the level of cleanliness. As you can, see this also helps them to be confident in using English as second language in public life.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

The Mathematics teacher at Alnoor, the private school, indicated that she didn't think that Mathematics had anything to do with civic participation. She argued that topics

related to civic participation may only be presented in Social Studies. This conclusion about Mathematics was not in agreement with the coordinator of co-curricular activities at Alwatan School. Although he was interviewed because of his role as coordinator of co-curricular activities, the researcher found that he was also a Mathematics teacher. According to him, linking Mathematics to the different aspects of social life is an effective way to help students' enjoys the subject. When asked if Mathematics can support students' awareness' about civic issues, he replied:

Definitely, look I always ask my students to employ Mathematics concepts to their daily lives. For example, once I asked them to think about the necessary requirements of building a permanent place for a charity project. Here they need to account for the final cost of the project in terms of suggested space and needed equipment.

(Interview-14-10-2008)

Although this last comment does not clearly explain if the Mathematics curriculum includes a direct link to civic education, it does, however, indicate that this teacher utilized some mathematics activities to develop students' interest about aspects of civic participation such as charity in the above quotation.

From their perspectives, most students agreed that different subjects do focus on topics of public interest. Although they associated the majority of their civic learning experience to Life Skills and Social Studies classes, they also gave examples from other subjects. They indicated that topics in English Language, Science Education, Arabic Language and Islamic Education are related sometimes to real life problems.

Overall, the findings showed that the formal curriculum at Basic Education schools does provide a wider arena for devolving civic participation. While Life Skills and Social Studies subjects appeared to be the core subjects at Basic Education schools where active citizenry can be developed and encouraged, the data showed that other subjects emerged as being supportive in providing students with civic experiences. Interestingly, the results showed that the most recently introduced subjects at the Basic Education schools, Career Guidance and Research Methodology, were important contributors for civic development. More importantly most teachers showed interest and awareness about the civic dimension of different subjects. Providing spaces for healthy and stable civic development across disciplines is an

effective mechanism through which to expand allocated time and experience for this educational outcome. However, while there is some indication that the curriculum of different disciplines are working to enhance students' involvement in society, further research is needed in this regard. There is a need to ensure that civic knowledge, skills and dispositions are consistently, and in an integrated manner, presented across the curriculums and at different Grade levels.

5.1.3 Challenges surrounding curriculum implementation

One theme that evolved from analysing the data was that of challenges related to the implementation of civic topics throughout the curriculum. Although these challenges are mainly contextual in nature, respondents identified them as obstacles for developing civic participation as one of the focused outcomes within the Basic Education curriculums. Data related to this theme are presented through the following sub-themes: overloading of topics, insufficient pre-service preparation, lack of efficient and quality professional development, unsupportive relationships with supervisors, and lack of resources.

Overloading of topics

Some respondents suggested that they faced some problems in the positioning of civic topics in the curriculum. There was a concern by two Social Studies teachers that the subject was overloaded by some unnecessary topics. As the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam School mentioned:

Instead of filling their minds [students] with needless knowledge, we need the time to give them the possibility to apply the knowledge in real life.
(Interview- 20-10-2008)

Because teachers in Oman follow closely the standardized curriculum, such a point of view as expressed here indicates the need to provide teachers with a more flexible framework to achieve the subjects' objectives. While standardized curriculums can provide a useful source of ideas and activities, teachers need to use their creativity to enrich these sources and choose what suits the diverse learning needs of their

students. The Life Skills teacher at Alsalam explained her dilemma with teaching Life Skills subject by saying:

Sometimes in Cycle Two [Grade 5 to 10], the dedicated time to teach all topics is not enough.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

In the same way, some respondents suggested that they experience a lack of time in offering all proposed topics. Among interviewed teachers, three mentioned that lack of time is limiting their ability to discuss in depth some suggested civic topics in the curriculum. Two Social Studies teachers were uneasy about the allocated time for some topics in the curriculum. They argued that because of time shortages they could not provide students with depth of knowledge or expanded dialogue about issues of their own concern. Further, they argued that the use of some supportive teaching methods such as group work, inquiry and the introduction of controversial issues in classrooms as suggested in the teaching guidance document was challenging because of lack of time. This challenge was clear in the words of Social Studies teacher at Algalal School:

You know we should finish all suggested topics in a certain time and closely follow the teaching plan suggested by MoE. You saw this week I was talking about rivers and waterfalls. It was a good opportunity if I talk to them [students] about pollution in the rivers across the world but the time constraint was not helpful at all.

(Interview-10-11-2008)

The Science Education teacher at Alwatan School stated that many of the suggested topics in the Science subject can be very supportive in developing students' civic knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, he argued that limited time made it difficult to plan activities in which students are linked, on a regular basis, to public concern and interest. In his words:

Using group work and discovery are very important approaches to teach students' the value of team work. Also giving them further assignments to work on as groups outside school where they could collect data and meet new people, I believe to be a good way to build confidence but in the end, lack of time doesn't allow for the fulfilment of such suggested activities in the curriculum.

(Interview-13-10-2008)

The principals of Alwatan and Algalal acknowledged such challenges at their schools. However, they had different explanations for why teachers experience lack of time in their teaching. For the Alwatan principal, timing of some professional development programs caused loss of teaching hours. He argued that some teachers left the school for two continuous weeks for professional development and therefore students lost a considerable amount of learning time. He called for a reconsideration of timing for professional development programs offered by both Regional Educational Administration (REA) and Ministry of Education (MoE):

You know that sometimes between seven to nine teachers left the school to attend professional development programs. Definitely this situation will cause a shortage of teaching time and also confuse the normal schooling day. I don't understand why they [Educational authorities] don't carry out these workshops at evening or at school holidays.

(Interview-11-10-2008)

From the Algalal principal's point of view, lack of teaching time is due to two different reasons. First, students stop coming to school before the final exams. He explained that, in his school experience, such a phenomenon was especially prevalent among students of higher Grades by the end of each semester. He stated that students stop coming to school for about two weeks before the actual final exams started. The second reason was the overwhelming number of public holidays⁵. In his view, these two reasons lead to considerable loss of teaching hours and, as a result, teachers are forced to move through the curriculum quickly in order to cover all suggested topics.

Insufficient pre-service preparation

There were concerns about some teachers' ability and interest in dealing with civic topics in the curriculum. For example, the Life Skills subject does not exist as an independent professional major at any of the teacher education colleges in Oman. Hence there are no specially trained teachers to teach this subject. Schools usually nominate teachers from different disciplines to teach Life Skills. Although some Life Skills teachers acknowledged that their own previous life and professional experience helped them to teach this subject, this was not the case with the Life

⁵ In the first semester there are three public holidays: The Eid Alfiter, National Day, and Eid Aladha. Sometimes these public holidays take around three weeks out of the first semester.

Skills teacher at Alwatan School. He graduated from the Faculty of Education as an Islamic Education teacher, and after two years of waiting for a school placement he was offered a position to teach the Life Skills subject. Before starting teaching this subject, he was offered two weeks of training about the aims and teaching methods in the subject. Nevertheless, he explained his experience in teaching this subject by saying:

It is an interesting subject[Life Skills], but all knowledge and teaching skills I came across in my first-degree was about teaching Islamic Education.....I should say that teaching this subject is challenging and difficult sometimes.

(Interview-12-10-2008)

Such findings raise questions about the cooperation policy between policy makers at MoE and institutions of pre-service preparation. Introducing core units such as Life Skills at the Basic Education schools should be a consideration of stakeholders of pre-service programs. The case of the previous teacher implies that any reform initiative should be supported by all stakeholders to ensure its effectiveness.

Lack of efficient and quality professional development

Most teachers mentioned that they attended at least one training course about the Basic Education goals and updates related to the content of the new curriculum. Nevertheless, they identified several difficulties related to professional development programs offered by MoE or Regional Educational Administration (REA) as elaborated in the following sections.

It is not sufficient. Most teachers stressed that in-service training courses are very limited. They argued that changes in curriculum and teaching methods required intensive professional programs. The co-curricular activities coordinator at Alwatan School emphasized the importance of teachers' training courses to accomplish curriculum outcomes. He described his experience in working at the Basic Education School as follows:

When we started [as teachers in Basic Education] I felt like I had been thrown into the sea for the first time and asked to learn to swim.

(Interview-14-10-2008)

Similarly, the Social Studies teacher in this school argued that in the last five years of his teaching he only attended one training course. He argued that lack of training courses limited his capacity to teach some suggested topics in the curriculum optimally. The Algalal principal reported that his teachers need intensive professional development for the Research Methodology as a newly introduced subject. He stressed that teachers need training courses to achieve the stated goals of this subject and to handle students' research projects properly.

Some teachers stated that training courses have timing problems. They explained that sometimes they waited for years until they were called to attend a training course related to the new curriculum. The English teacher at Alsalam School stated in this regard:

I waited two years until they [educational authorities] introduced me to the new content and teaching methods of the new English curriculum but I am aware about other teachers in this school who started before me and did not attend any training course until today.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

More theory, less practical. The majority of teachers reported that training courses they attended were too theoretical. The principal of Alwatan School reported that, from his own experience and his teachers' feedback, professional development programs do not focus on practical training. This view was also in harmony with the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam School. She stressed that suggested topics and related learning activities in the curriculum required special teaching skills such as critical thinking and group work. In her opinion, the offered training programs do not address such practical needs among teachers of Social Studies in her school.

Effectiveness of the trainers. Two of the interviewed teachers argued that some trainers chosen by MoE were not qualified enough to deliver suggested training courses. The Science Education teacher stated that he found some trainers suffered from lack of communication skills and didn't have enough experience in running training courses. For the co-curricular coordinator at Alsalam School, some training courses were boring because of the trainers' styles.

These challenges highlight the lack of support teachers may experience when any new initiative of educational reform is introduced. Although some published reports by MoE (2006b; 2008a; 2010) indicated a significant increase of in-service training programs, data showed that issues such as quality and methods of delivering training are real challenges in the researched context.

Unsupportive relationship with supervisors

A supervisor is an expert who visits teachers over the academic year to provide technical support and advice. Some teachers argued that their supervisors' style of supervision does not allow them to focus on topics of interest to students. The Social Studies teachers at Alwatan and Algalal argued that they always experience pressure from their supervisors to get through the curriculum to cover all suggested topics. They explained that the supervision department at REA sends the teaching plan of all subjects to all schools in the educational region at the beginning of each academic year. While all teachers are expected to follow closely this plan, the subject supervisor takes the responsibility to ensure that teachers do adhere to this plan. The Social Studies teacher at Alwatan School noted:

What supervisors are concerned about is sticking to the teaching plan suggested by MoE. Students' performance or interest is a secondary issue.

(Interview-13-10-2008)

This view was also supported by the Algalal's principal. He criticized the supervision system because it is always strained and top-down. In his view, such a style puts pressure on teachers and ignores that students at different schools have different needs and interests. Further, he argued that schools may have different circumstances and therefore the current system of supervision should be modified to acknowledge such circumstances. Such comments raised concerns about the extent to which the Basic Education schools can succeed in getting rid of the old style of educational administration in Oman. Prior to the Basic Education system, supervisors were known as inspectors. In an attempt to change the authoritarian culture between teachers and inspectors, and to align with educational trends in the rest of the world, the job title was replaced with supervisors. Nonetheless, it is evident from the researched context that such reform has not had the intended outcome.

Lack of resources

Many respondents acknowledged that Basic Education schools enjoy better resources when compared to the old educational system. However, the data showed that some visited public schools experienced a lack of necessary resources to effectively implement the new curriculum and support the quality of civic experience.

Some teachers indicated that they experienced a shortage of supporting teaching materials which were essential to facilitate students' involvement and interaction with the proposed topic. Other teachers explained that the curriculum included many activities from which students would learn new skills and develop a better understanding about the surrounding society. However, they argued that putting such activities in the practice required resources such as the Internet, newspapers, and time. The Life Skills teacher at the rural Algalal School commented:

If you [researcher] look to the Life Skills curriculum, especially those of higher grades, you will find plenty of activities concerning what is going on in society. Yet sometimes I remove some activities because of time and sometimes these activities require collecting data using the Internet or searching in the local newspapers which things we don't have here. Even the available resources at the Learning Resource Centre are not sufficient and not up-to-date.

(Interview-12-11-2008)

The Alwatan principal mentioned that the lack of resources and maintenance of schools' facilities affected teachers' capacity to teach and the successful implementation of curriculums. When asked to give further detail in this regard, he stated:

It is important to provide students with both theoretical and practical experience if we really want to accomplish a high standard of teaching. Lack of periodic maintenance is a real challenge not only in this school but many others I know. Do you know that computers at Learning Resource Centre should have been replaced long time ago? The life of this equipment is about four years and you know, since this school opened in 2001 until today these computers have been not replaced.

(Interview-11-10-2008)

All interviewed teachers at Alwatan School also mentioned that teaching in summer time was very challenging and affected their ability to work interactively and implement the curriculum properly. They stated that most air conditioners at the school had not been working for a long time and the temperature became unbearable sometimes. The two air conditioners in the Grade 10 classroom, where the observation sessions took place in this school, were both damaged. Further, the two ceiling fans were also broken. Although observation sessions at this school were conducted in October 2008 when the weather starts to cool in Oman, humidity and high temperatures were obviously affecting teachers' performance in the classroom.

Some other teachers drew a link between the lack of resources and the teaching activities they might have conducted in the surrounded society as part of curriculum requirement. The English teacher mentioned that she would have liked to take her students outside the classroom, as suggested in some curriculum activities. However, transportation and other support material costs forced her to avoid such activities. A similar argument was also mentioned by a female student at Algalal School. In her words:

We learned about the Omani charitable organisation and other NGOs but when we asked to visit places like Centre for the Care and Rehabilitation of Disabled our teachers immediately replied that school's administration will not agree because of the cost and the long distance to the facility.

(Focus group-10-11-2008)

Overall, the findings indicated that visited schools experienced challenges in implementing the new formal curriculum. Overloading of topics, insufficient pre-service preparation, lack of efficient and quality professional development, unsupportive relationships with supervisors, and lack of resources were reported by participants as challenges which inhibit the successful implementation of the new curriculum.

5.1.4 Summary of research question one

Exploring the newly implemented curriculum was important to identify its position and role in developing participatory citizens. Results showed that the new curriculum implemented at the four investigated schools presented a positive change for the development of civic participation. Informants explained that the curriculum aims and the suggested content knowledge created further spaces in the schooling system in Oman to support learners' interest and commitment towards public life. Expanding the allocated time for civic education by introducing a new core unit, Life Skills, appeared to be significant in developing interest about civic values in the Basic Education system. Emphasizing the importance of civic participation in the newly implemented curriculums is an important approach to enhance learners' civic efficiency.

Results also revealed that civic topics were presented in many subjects. While the Life Skills subject was identified as key in developing students' civic knowledge and skills, findings also revealed other spaces in Social Studies, Career Guidance and Research Methodology. Similarly, data showed that teachers of other subject were aware about the civic dimension of their subjects. They acknowledged that the newly adopted curriculum pays attention to some aspect of civic life.

Finally, the results showed that the investigated schools experienced some challenges in relation to successfully implementing the curriculums. These included: overloading of topics, insufficient pre-service preparation, lack of efficient and quality professional development, unsupportive relationship with supervisors, and lack of resources. This set of contextual difficulties reduced the schools' ability to properly implement the civic learning experience as intended in the curriculum.

Having presented the findings of Research Question One, the following section will report the findings related to classroom climate and civic participation.

5.2 Research Question Two: Civic Participation and Classroom Climate

How do classroom climates develop Omani students' civic participation?

As can be seen from the literature on civic participation, classroom climate is another key factor to enhancing civic participation. To explore this dimension, observation, and individual and focus group interviews provided data regarding learning practices in the investigated classrooms. Across all schools, 34 lessons were observed to explore the main characteristics of the learning environment at a classroom level. Further, interviews with students and their teachers were also conducted. Conversations with teachers aimed to find out if they were introducing controversial issues and what sort of civic knowledge or skills they aimed to develop in their teaching. Similarly, conversation with students aimed to find out whether they regularly discussed current affairs and if they enjoyed a democratic environment in their classroom. In coding the data about the nature of learning environment inside the classroom, four themes regarding civic participation were identified: A climate of collaboration, a climate of mutual respect, a climate of openness, and teaching approaches. The following sections will elaborate the findings related to each of these sub-themes, respectively.

5.2.1 A climate of collaboration

Giving students real and active roles in organizing the learning environment is an important approach for healthy civic development. Allowing students to express their opinions about different aspects of the classroom environment allows them to develop a sense of partnership and self confidence. Likewise, consulting students on their learning process is a good practice to enhance interactions in the classroom environment. It is also an important teaching practice to ensure active engagement from students and to give learners a sense of confidence to express their needs and challenges. This research investigated the nature of the classroom climate in terms of collaboration and democratic climate in all observed classes. Data linked to this theme revealed that there was a considerable lack of student involvement and

partnership in organizing the learning environment. Some teachers appeared to be employing a mainly top-down management style where others were attempting to display some democratic values in their classrooms.

Across the contexts, there was an absence of students' opinions or partnership in the organisation of the learning experience in the classroom. For example, none of the teachers reported that they provided a choice to students in selecting topics. In all observed classes, teachers started the lesson with a short introduction about the topic under discussion and then wrote it on the top middle part of the board. This was clearly a well established tradition in these classes, as none of the students suggested that they may like to focus on a different topic or postpone the present topic to a later time. While teachers in Oman should follow the standardized curriculum suggested by MoE, they have the space to share with their students the procedure of other aspects such as the order of topics studied, teaching approaches and forms of assessment. However, negotiation with the students on forms of assessment, homework, classroom activities, and teaching methods were hardly noticed. Even when students were trying to express their opinions with regard to some suggested activities, teachers' reactions reflected unease about such attempts. On one occasion, the Social Studies teacher at Algalal School was uncomfortable when one of the students tried to negotiate about the homework she had suggested. The teacher was dismissive of the students' request and was not willing to enter into negotiation with the students. In this class, the following conversation occurred between the teacher and a female student at the end of the observed lesson:

FT: The homework include: First, draw the process which leads to the formulation of a waterfall. Second, write all necessary data to explain this process in detail.

FS: Please teacher, we have many assignments in other subjects and this assignment is going to take a long time.

T. You should be more serious. You have enough time to finish your homework.

[Teacher's body language showed that the conversation was over as she moved immediately to talk about another issue].

(Field note-10-11-2008)

The top-down style of managing the learning environment was employed by the Social Studies teacher and, to a lesser extent, by the Science teacher at Alwatan

School. In particular, there was a notable absence of collaboration between the teacher and students in the Social Studies classes. This class was dominated by the teacher's explanations and elaboration on the topic with just a few occasions in which students were engaged in answering questions. Students' disengagement was obvious in this classroom. There were only a few students in this class who were actually paying any real attention to the teacher's instructions and explanations. The rest of the class were reading from the textbook, talking to other students or they seemed to be daydreaming. Students were uncomfortable about the strict learning environment used by this teacher. When the bell rang announcing the end of one lesson, a student at the back was heard mumbling "Thank God" to express his relief.

In comparison, the classroom environment at the other three schools was, to some extent, more flexible and friendly. For example, at Alsalam School, it was noticed that all three teachers observed were flexible and welcoming of students' suggestions. Also, teachers' showed some ability to employ various teaching methods, encouraging cooperation and collaboration.

In certain cases where organisational structures allow for students' input to the classroom management, such participation was somewhat curtailed. In many Omani schools, each class has an elected Classroom Council designed to allow students to share their ideas, concerns and suggestions to the homeroom teacher of school administration. Some respondents indicated that this Council had helped to enhance a democratic climate in the classes. However, most expressed a concern that this representative body was practically useless. Some teachers acknowledged the potential of such a structure to encourage students' participation; however, at times the school administration support was lacking.

Interviews with the students identified the role of the Classroom Council in creating a sense of partnership and whether it gave students some power in expressing the opinions and managing the learning environment at the classroom level. While some students' indicated that this Council helped them to address problems they experienced inside the classroom, most interviewed students agreed that this representative body was useless. For example, a female student at Alsalam agreed

that their Classroom Council helped them express opinions and address problems they faced in the classroom. Two of female students at Alsalam School said:

FS1: This Council is very helpful. Last year I was the vice-president and whenever any problem happened in the class, we cooperated with students in the class and our teachers to solve it. You know, I wish president's election would take place every semester⁶ because it is a useful experience and many students at my class would like to take part so they can learn how to take responsibility.

Researcher: Do you remember any examples when Classroom Council helped to address issues of concern in the class?

FS2: Yes, last year we had a teacher that we could not like or cope with her way of teaching. So, the Classroom Council spoke to the school administration which in turn told the teacher about our concerns. We immediately noticed that her way of dealing with us started to change for the better.

(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

In contrast, students at Algalal, Alwatan and Alnoor schools gave mixed opinions about the importance of this Council in their class. In particular, Alwatan's students were very clear that this body was useless and did not enjoy their teachers' support. When they were asked about their Classroom Council, they replied:

MS1: Look, this year we didn't elect this Council until now.

Researcher: What is the reason?

MS1: Because until today the school administration did not nominate the room teacher who should organise and supervise the election process.

Researcher: But why didn't you take the initiative?

MS2: If we do this, teachers will not approve the elected list.

MS3: You know, once we nominated a student, just to ensure quietness in the class in case a teacher did not arrive to class on time. Even so, none of our teachers appreciated what we did or even show respect for that student.

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

This last comment appeared to be in agreement with the school principal's point of view with regard to students' opportunities to express their opinions and taking role in the school. Although he stated that students were free to choose their representatives through the Classroom Council, he concluded:

⁶ According to Basic Education regulation, Classrooms Council elections take place once at the beginning of each academic year.

But if teachers felt that students' choices in the Classroom Council went to unqualified or untrustworthy students, I authorized them to change the list. You know students' decisions are not mature sometimes.

(Interview-11-10-2008)

Similarly, all three teachers interviewed in Alwatan School acknowledged the educational importance of the Classroom Council, but also admitted that managing this issue in their school required better attention. This lack of trust in students' qualifications and ability to make the right decision at Alwatan School was also expressed by the Algalal principal. Such attitudes raise serious concern about educators' commitment to developing a democratic environment in the classroom. The lack of trust with regard to students' ability to make the right decision among some educators questions their commitment and level of awareness about the importance of developing a healthy civic climate at the classroom level. Appropriate implementation of opportunities, such as Classroom Council, should play a vital role in developing values of belonging, partnership and harmony. Undoubtedly, such space could develop students' democratic ways of expressing their concerns, needs, skills of negotiation, and sense of partnership. Nonetheless, the finding showed that the commitment to enhance such a culture was almost absent in the schools visited.

Overall, despite some good examples, classroom management at the observed classrooms was dominated by a top-down style of management. Students did not have a real role in decision making. The available space for partnership in constructing democratic and cooperative learning environments was at a surface level. Some finding also raised concern about educators' belief in the importance of constructing democratic environments and allowing students to be active participants in the classroom. Such classroom climate was more likely to develop passive citizens instead of active ones.

5.2.2 A climate of mutual respect

Mutual respect is a crucial element to enhance the sense of community, affiliation and unity in the classroom environment. This section aimed to establish a more focused picture about the culture of respect in the observed classes. Results showed that some teachers were keen and skilful in developing a culture of respect in their

class; however, others were not paying attention to such aspects of the classroom learning environment.

In some observed classes, there were elements of positive interactions and a sense of respect between teachers and students. Some teachers were exercising teaching practices which exemplified closeness and supported positive relationships with learners. For example, some had a habit of calling students by their names and rewarding them verbally. Also, some teachers were giving regular opportunities for students to answer questions or to take part in facilitating the learning situation. In turn, students in some classes appeared to be positive and reliable in supporting teachers' effort to build a sense of respect in their classroom. Their interactions with teachers or peers were generally supportive. The learning environment at Alsalam School emerged to be outstanding when compared with the other three schools in this regard. Teachers at this school showed good levels of interest and were proficient in building an attractive civic learning environment. In contrast, for example, the situation at Alwatan School was far different where disorder was dominating the observed classes. The following examples will illustrate the two opposite learning environments.

At Alsalam School, all three teachers observed in the nine sessions showed that they were employing teaching skills in which a culture of respect and sense of community was developed and was noticeable in their class. The Social Studies teacher was clearly having skills to develop and maintain a positive learning environment in the class. Her teaching behaviour showed respect and a sense of community. She was calling students by names and rewarding engagement in the class with terms such as *excellent*, *well done*, and *good contribution*. Her smile and jokes were creating sense of harmony and comfort in the class. Her excellent means of running group work resulted in a significant level of enjoyment and involvement. Cooperation in the classroom was supported by giving students roles in the presentation of learning experiences. On one occasion, she asked one of the female students to stand out the front of the class to explain what that student had found in her research about the problem of desertification in east Oman. When the student started this task, the teacher sat in the student's chair and listened carefully like other students in the class. Closeness and support between teacher and students was also obvious in this learning

environment. One of this teacher's habits, when students started any group work, was to move from one group to another to provide support, advice and sometimes engagement through individual conversations with students in an informal manner. Similarly, by the end of a third observed lesson, female students approached the teacher and asked her to support them in regard to their wish to postpone the Science exam as they required more preparation time. In a friendly manner, the teacher promised them that she would raise their concern with both the school principal and the Science teacher coordinator. Such a culture of respect is more likely to enhance learners' willingness to participate in their classroom community. Not surprisingly, female students at Alsalam School reported that they enjoyed coming to school, and they felt that all their teachers were supportive and caring about their future.

The classroom learning environment at Alwatan School presented the opposite situation. Eight lessons were observed in Alwatan School. In all these lessons, there were disorder problems; however, disorder was most noted in the Social Studies classes. The Social Studies teacher's way of running the class was very traditional and from top-down, mainly using a transference lecture style. When he asked questions, he did not show that he was actively listening to students' answers, and he did not give them the opportunity to clarify questions he raised. Instead he quickly moved to ask other students in the class or become busy reading his note or writing on the board while the student gave the answer. Also, there appeared to be a disregard for the allocated time for the lesson. In the first observed lesson, five students arrived after the class started. Further, disruption to the class was happening not only from students themselves, but also from outsider factors. In the second session of observation with the Social Studies teacher, his class was disrupted three times. The first time from a student who was coming to announce a meeting for the Scout Club. The second time was when one of the school staff came to remind students about the Mathematics exam in the coming week. The final time was when two maintenance workers came to inspect required work on damaged windows in the class. Although these forms of disruption were taking only a short time, it noticeably affected teacher's capacity to handle the class and maintain focus on the topic. Also, lack of care was a noticeable issue in this class. The teacher did not pay attention to the need to engage the students who appeared to be busy with writing or reading

something other than what was being taught or, in some instances, were talking to each other.

From the students' side, only a few of them appeared interested in interacting or listening to the topic under discussion. There were also some students who were unwilling to interact with peers when the teacher tried to use group work. In the focus group interview, students from Alwatan School were asked if they enjoyed the classroom learning climate. They replied:

MS1: Look I am not sure, you know some teachers are very tough and do not show respect to students. We feel bored because teachers only have one way of teaching and believe me students sometimes went to sleep in class.

MS2: Some teachers are quite good but most teachers who teach us are harsh.

MS3: Sometimes we need to object about things we don't like, but we know no one will listen to us.

MS4: That's right, we want to find why other schools have fun more than us. Why they have a shorter study day than us, and why break time here is shorter?

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

These notes explained that students experience difficulties in this learning environment. They complained about harsh treatment by some teachers at school. More importantly, they stated that they feel powerless and the school does not provide them with an enjoyable and attractive experience. In this particular class, the rate of absenteeism was an observable issue. In all five observed days in this class, there were five to seven absent students.

While the classroom learning environment at Alwatan School was discouraging, disorder behaviour and disruptions were also noticed across the other schools. For example, when their Social Studies teacher asked them to work in a group, the male students at Algalal School showed an unwillingness to perform the proposed task as group. The same teacher tried to encourage three male students who sat at the back of the class, to become involved. Similarly, the Mathematics teacher at Alnoor School warned two male students who were talking to each other while she was speaking. These examples highlighted the importance of establishing a culture of respect at the researched learning environment. The situation at Alwatan School, in particular, appeared to be unsupportive when it came to the development of respect

for positive civic development. Classrooms need to be considered as mini-societies where learners practice respect, discipline, rights and responsibilities.

Interactions between students at Alsalam, Alnoor and Algalal Schools were fairly supportive. This was observed from students working in the same group or between different work groups in the class. Students were mostly helping each other to achieve the displayed objectives. When teachers asked them to work as groups, they moved their tables gently and started to divide responsibilities related to the suggested activity. Some students also showed respect towards each other when they didn't agree about what their colleagues suggested. For example, when the Life Skills teacher at Algalal School asked her students to express their opinion about the higher education opportunities in the state, students' suggestions and comments reflected a sense of respect. They were using terms such as 'agree' or 'disagree' when they were commenting on their colleagues' opinions. Such language was also evident when looking at students discourse in the focus group interviews.

Over all, regardless of the situation in the Alwatan class, other schools were trying to develop a culture of respect in the classroom. Teaching students the importance of paying respect to different forms of classroom rules, points of view raised in class, and respect for class time, are important in establishing a positive space to develop civic efficacy among learners. Worth mentioning here, female teachers were more committed and interested in creating supportive civic learning in the classroom compared with male teachers. Female teachers demonstrated high levels of classroom management skills and were more able to maintain and create a supportive civic culture in their classes.

5.2.3 A climate of openness

Opening classroom discussions to different aspects of current affairs and interest in the local or global community is an important practice for civic participation development. Classroom observations, interviews and focus groups provided many elements, which reflect that students in these four schools were enjoying a level of openness towards public affairs. Some teachers were paying attention to local and global current events. It was also evident that students had the chance to talk about

different social and political issues. Findings related to openness at classroom will be presented as two sub-themes: openness towards current issues, and openness towards political issues.

Openness towards current issues

Results demonstrated that classrooms enjoyed some openness to local current affairs. Life Skills teachers at Alnoor, Alwatan and Algalal schools discussed with students issues such as the urgent need to address fatal car accidents, inflation, and the limited number of government scholarships at higher educational institutions. The linking of the learning environment to local community current issues also was observed at some schools. Social Studies teachers at Alsalam and Algalal schools provided a space to talk about environmental issues such as the effect of global warming on Oman and ongoing desertification problem in east Oman.

Further, openness towards current issues was also supported by some notes related to short reports written by students at Alsalam and Alnoor schools. At Alsalam School, female students in Grade 10 conducted reports on a range of current issues. Their work was displayed on a table in the Life Skills' teaching room. Among their work were topics such as volunteering to support needy families and addressing smoking problems. Some of these projects were conducted by a group of students, however; the majority were individual projects. Encouraging students to research current issues was also observable at Alnoor School. At the Learning Resource Centre, there was a special shelf for excellent reports conducted by students of the school. Issues such as the protection of coral reef in Oman, safety on the road, and protection of water sources in Oman were among 32 students' reports displayed. In the focus group interviews, some students reported an attitude of openness towards ongoing community interest. Female Students from Algalal School stated:

FS1: Issues such as life expenses, traffic accidents, and limited access to the higher education are samples of issues discussed regularly in our class.

FS2: Sometimes we are discussing things related to life outside the classroom, last year we focused on the global warming problem.

FS3: We were also talking about common diseases in our society such as anaemia and malnutrition.

FS4: Also, inflation and share market clubs.

(Focus group interview- 10-11-2008)

Moreover, openness towards global current affairs was also noticed at the researched context. Global warming, natural disasters, shrinking of the forest, desertification, poverty, childhood problems, the global financial crisis, and health problems such as AIDS and obesity are examples of issues discussed in classrooms. When female students at Alsalam's School were asked whether they discussed global issues in the classroom, two of them responded:

FS1: We studied about peace in the world, the United Nations and its affiliated organisations, the importance of promoting tolerance and love among all people.

FS2: Also, we studied environment problems in the world like, global warming, desertification, cyclones and also about poverty and early childhood problems. I remember that sometime last year the school organized a trip to Sultan Qaboos University where we saw a presentation about poverty in the world, especially in Somalia, and the problem of nutrition.

(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

Interestingly, some teachers were linking students to global issues through local topics. For example, the Social Studies teacher at Alnoor School, talked about Oman's geographic position and the major earthquake areas of the world. While the main focus was Oman, the teacher suggested three activities relating to the global aspect of this topic. First, she asked students to point out on the world map the major earthquake belt of the world. Second, she encouraged students to compare the earthquake preparation of countries, such as Japan, in dealing with earthquakes with the preparations in developing nations. Third, at the end of class, the homework involved writing a short essay about major earthquakes that happened around the world during the last century. Likewise, the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam School taught about wind erosion in Oman. She asked one female student, who had prepared a short article, to read about what she had found, from the global perspective, regarding such natural phenomena. The student stood in front of the class and read from her notes about soil erosion in China.

Openness towards political issues

There was some evidence that the researched classrooms were open to political issues. Government bodies, legislation system and Basic Law⁷ of the state, Majlis Alshura, war in Iraq, conflict in the Middle East and the role of United Nations in promoting peace in the world were noted examples in the data. However, the structure of the political system in Oman was the most frequent topic observed. The Social Studies and Life Skills subjects were the main two platforms for such learning experiences. Some teachers offered interesting and powerful strategies to teach issues related to the political system in Oman. In one session, the Life Skills teacher at Alsalam School was teaching about Majlis Alshura in Oman. Significantly, her method of teaching this topic was to model the functioning of the Majlis election process. She started her class by simulating elections to this body. She encouraged the girls to nominate themselves as candidates and to seek election as members of Majlis Alshura from the whole class. Then girls were asked to talk to the whole class about their qualifications for the position, and what they planned to achieve if they were elected. Later, the teacher asked for volunteers to handle the election process which included counting the votes and announcing the results. Each girl in the class chose her preferred candidate in a secret ballot. They left their desks, one at a time, and placed their voting form in the election box. When the result was announced, the girl who lost the election congratulated the winner. Similar observations were also reported by female and male students' across the visited schools. Some students gave details on how they were simulating election processes in the classroom in order to expand their knowledge about the Majlis Alshura in Oman. A male student from Algalal School noted in this regard:

All students were divided to three groups: some of us represent electors, others represent candidates, and there was a committee for counting votes and announcing the results. Also, we learned about important characteristics required of any candidate who nominates her/himself to serve the people, such as loyalty, commitment and an acceptable level of education.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

⁷Similar to a constitution.

5.2.4 Teaching approaches

This course of research aimed to explore the teaching styles used in the observed classes in order to develop better understandings of key factors affecting civic development. Teaching methods used are crucial to construct supportive learning environments for civic participation. Using different teaching methods is important to promote students' learning and to develop a supportive and enjoyable learning environment. Teachers' methods of engaging students and involving them actively in the classroom are important in developing characteristics such as cooperation, partnership, respect, and openness. Further, teaching style is vital to improve learners' ability to think critically, take decisions based on valid information, and to link learners to different interests of their community.

The results showed that the observed teachers were trying to utilize various interactive teaching styles. Five sub-themes relating to teaching approaches were identified: group work, quality of classroom discussion, the use of service-learning, the use of controversial issues, and critical thinking. Each of these is described below in more details.

Group work

Group work was one teaching method frequently used in most observed classes. In 18 out of 34 periods observed in these schools, teachers used this approach. Students at Alsalam and Alnoor showed familiarity and good engagement in this teaching method. When their teachers give them any task requiring group work, they immediately formed groups. Each group included between three to five students. Some teachers provided clear aims for the tasks and what each group was expected to do in order to meet these aims. Also, the work in most observed contexts was structured. For example, students were facing each other, there was a student, who is responsible for getting sheets or receiving teachers' instructions, which generally included aims and the time needed to finalise the task. In most cases, students were working together as one team; the leader of each group ensuring that all students in the group had a chance to contribute to and enrich the group discussion. Some teachers moved from one group to another to ensure that discussion was being shared

and to redirect students to stay on the task and keep track of the time. At the end of the task, reporters from each group presented the results or opinions of his/her group or handed a summary of paper to the teacher.

Among all observed teachers, the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam seemed to use group work most effectively in her classes. When she asked students to find out the negative impact of urbanization, her way of running this group task was well planned and clearly encouraged cooperation between students. First she asked the students to think about the question individually. Then the students shared their thoughts within their groups. Finally, she gave each group representative the opportunity to share the group's ideas with other students in the class. Using group work was an effective approach employed by this teacher to create intimacy and partnership in the classroom community. Such a teaching approach develops students' engagement in their classroom community, teaching them the importance of listening to each other and taking part in the ongoing conversation. Raising learners with such values and skills help to create a necessary environment for civic development.

However, not all teachers showed this level of organisation in running group work, as reflected in Alwatan's teachers. In all periods of Social Studies, the teacher only made two attempts to use group work. In one session, he asked the students to group in fives. However, he didn't provide them with any group work activity for the whole of the lesson. When asked about his opinion on group work, he replied:

I don't like this way of teaching because it encourages chaos in the classroom.

(Interview-13-10-2008)

Similarly, the Islamic teacher at Algalal School showed a lack of experience in handling group work in his classes. On one occasion, he nominated a student in one group to report the group answer. This nomination was not welcome by rest of group members. Their objection was that chosen student was not the one responsible for reporting the group answers. The teacher accepted the group objection and then the group independently selected another speaker who presented the answer to the rest of class. It is worth mentioning here, that teachers at Alwatan School were mainly using lecture style teaching. Similarly, lecturing is the dominate teaching style of the Social

Studies teacher At Alnoor School and the Islamic Education teacher at Algalal School.

Problems associated with group work could be identified from students' comments. Some complained about the teachers' overuse of group work in the classroom. Also, some of them argued that this approach was the main reason for chaos and disorder in the classroom. Others mentioned that sometimes, when doing group work, students were not serious and relied on students of good academic achievement to fulfil the tasks given to the group. A female student at Algalal School was very critical in her comment regarding group work. She argued that this teaching approach was the reason for disorder in her class, but more importantly she claimed that teachers frequently use this approach if they notice visitors from educational authorities. In her words:

We don't like this approach of teaching because it gives less serious students the opportunity to encourage chaos in the class...and to be honest with you, our teachers overuse this approach when there is a visitor from the Ministry [MoE].

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Encouraging teachers to replace traditional teaching methods such as lecturing with collaborative group work was one of major reforms in the Basic Education system. These last set of observations raise questions about teachers' ability to fulfil educational policy makers' demands to develop learning environments suggested by the Basic Education teaching plan.

Quality of classroom discussion

While it was very interesting to see some teachers employ examples from real and surrounding life to make learning experience more relevant to students' everyday life, the discussion often lacked depth. Some teachers were not prepared to engage in detailed discussions and avoided discourse relating to real life experience or concerns. For example, the Social Studies teacher at Alwatan showed no interest in expanding his explanation about types of rocks to give examples from Oman's diverse geology. Further, when one male student commented that he was visiting the

internal region on the weekend, and he was able to identify igneous rocks, the teacher's response was unenthusiastic. The teacher asked the student to focus on the suggested task, rather than telling the rest of class about activities he would be doing on the weekend.

Nevertheless, some students suggested that they would enjoy more discussions about what is happening in society. When female students at Alnoor School were asked whether teachers were bringing current issues into the classroom, they replied:

FS1: It is only sometimes that teachers ask us to comment about some of society's issues.

FS2: They only ask one or two students to tell what they know and then move again to the main topics.

FS3: Some issues are not even interesting to us.

Researcher: What kind of issues might you be interested in?

FS3: We want to talk deeply about Majlis Alshura. Is it really doing well? We also want to talk about Palestine and war in Iraq.

FS4: Yes, also the corruption and why many of basic services in Muscat have still not been restored.[Oman's capital, Muscat was devastated by Hurricane Gono in June 2007].

(Focus group interview-04-11-2008)

The opinions shared by the female students in the above quotation show that there are limited opportunities to discuss real life experiences in the observed classes. It was also noticeable that teachers who occasionally offered opportunities to discuss current or political issues did so in an abstract manner and did not allow in-depth discussions. In one instance, female students from Alsalam School were interested in expanding the discussion started by one of their colleagues. The Life Skills' teacher, however, didn't encourage any further comments or even questions from the other three students. The following conversation occurred after the female students finished the activity of simulating the election of the Majlis Alshura:

FS1: Please teacher, we know that participation in Majlis Alshura elections is not compulsory, so why would we take part in such a process?

FT: Because participation indicated our love to our country and our commitment to carry change in the future.

(Field note-19-10-2008)

After the teacher finished this last comment, some students were saying the Council is powerless. Further, three students raised hands to engage in further discussion; nevertheless the teacher closed the discourse by saying:

We have limited time, and we should move to another task.

(Field note-19-10-2008)

This response from the teacher may well be due to the fact that curriculum is overloaded and she felt under pressure to complete the planned lesson. However, such opportunities for learning are vital not only to increase students' involvement in the public discourse but more importantly to develop learners' ability to think critically as one underscored aims in educational reform in Oman (MoE, 2001; MoE, 2004b).

A similar situation was noticed with the Life Skills teacher at Algalal School. Her way of raising issues related to community issues was abstract and shallow. She didn't allow the students to continue discussion on raised topics. The teacher tended to take two or three brief responses and then move to another task.

The use of service-learning

Service-learning is an effective teaching approach to connect planned formal curriculum to real life. Across the data, there were only three passages where service-learning was used as a teaching tactic. While teachers of Social Studies and Life Skills subject are expected to employ service-learning, only the Science teacher at Alwatan School indicated that the curriculum encouraged him to conduct some work in the surrounding society. He explained that, recently, students had learned about the importance of immunization. Therefore, he asked them to collect data from parents to find out why some families do not complete children's immunization plan as suggested by the Ministry of Health. Similarly, a female student at Algalal School also suggested:

In the Science subject we studied about the greenhouse gas emissions...also, we learned about the most common diseases in our society and how we could protect ourselves and families...linked to this issue we had a project about the

most common sickness in our village. We decided to focus on asthma as a most common health problem in our village. So, we selected some cases, and we interviewed people to identify problems and habits, which could lead to this illness.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Scarcity of service-learning activities in the researched schools appears to be an area of needed development. Most of the interviewed teachers in this study confirmed that the formal curriculum draws regular links to community issues. The findings, however, indicated that teachers, in practice, were not employing service-learning to establish a strong and practical link between topics proposed in the formal curriculum and what is happening in the wider community.

The use of controversial issues

Controversial issues are an important approach of teaching for civic participation. Taking into account the topics under discussion when observation took place, teachers were expected to offer learners reflective dialogue on a wide range of issues. In the Omani context, for example, issues such as the government's policies on education, health, the economy, reducing car accidents, and dealing with inflation were examples of debatable issues. Furthermore, the ongoing change of Omani women's role in public life and the effectiveness of Majlis Alshura were issues attracting ongoing debate in Omani society. On a global level, climate change, peace in the Middle East, effectiveness of the United Nations in restoring peace in the world, supporting human rights, and fighting poverty and diseases are all examples which represent potential opportunities to present different points of view.

The results showed, however, that the presentation of controversial issues was absent in all observed classes. Despite students' demands and ample opportunities for such a teaching approach, none of observed teachers offered any such experiences. The Life Skills teacher at Alnoor School indicated that she did offer her students the opportunity to debate about community issues occasionally. The Science teacher at Alwatan School stated that he sometimes used this approach when he wanted to raise students' awareness about such things as environmental issues, and dealing with behaviour problems among young adults such as smoking and drug use. Students

reported that the use of controversial issues was limited in their classrooms, and that they would like to see more such practices in their classes. When female students at Alsalam School were asked if they enjoyed debating about controversial issues, one replied:

Controversial issues are very limited in the classroom, and really we wish we could enjoy such experiences more in the future. Most things our teachers are care about are memorizing stuff.

(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

The Alnoor and Algalal principals acknowledged that controversial issues are not presented adequately in classrooms. However, they had different reasons for such observations. The Alnoor principal argued that the intensive and overloaded amount of knowledge included in textbooks forces teachers to avoid using such teaching approach. Nevertheless, the Algalal principal explained that this issue is more likely related to a lack of teaching skills among teachers. This last suggestion was clearly supported by the coordinator of Social Studies at Alsalam School . When she has been asked whether she or other Social Studies teachers were using this teaching method, she replied:

I think teachers need to be trained more in order to introduce controversial issues at classes' properly. You know it is not an easy teaching skill if teachers are to use it as it should be used.

(Interview-20-10-2008)

The lack of opportunities to discuss controversial issues in the investigated classes may well be due to teachers beliefs that sensitive issues should not be discussed in the classroom. Such beliefs among teachers are also reported in other countries (Kerr, 2000; Torney-Purta and Schwille, 1986). Similarly, offering students meaningful discussions regarding controversial issues needs special skills and well trained teachers.

Critical thinking

By looking to teaching styles and approaches, this research also identified if teachers were offering students critical thinking experiences. Such learning experiences appeared to be significant in developing students' civic skills. Enhancing students'

ability to express their opinions and to reflect critically are important tactics for civic development.

The data revealed that there is limited attention given to the development of critical thinking in the four researched schools. While a few teachers mentioned that they used this way of scientific investigation from time to time, the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam acknowledged that teachers do not drawing enough attention to critical thinking because:

There is a lack of experience among teachers in employing such a skill in their daily teaching.

(Interview-20-10-2008)

All Life Skills' teachers confirmed that students were learning how to be critical thinkers. They explained that, as part of suggested topics in the formal curriculum, students in Grade 9 were offered a full unit about critical thinking skills. At Alsalam School, there were two students who wrote a short report about critical thinking. This report was placed among other students' work in the Life Skills teaching room. Three groups of interviewed students in this research reported that their teachers had given them opportunities and tasks for critical thinking. Two of these groups indicated that they would like to enjoy such experiences regularly. A male student at Alnoor School explained that students learn theoretically about critical thinking, but regular and real opportunities for such learning experiences were missing. The following quotation explains his opinion in this regard:

We studied about this skill [critical thinking] last year at Life Skills subject but usually our teachers do not offer us any opportunities to use this skill.

(Focus group interview-03-11-2008)

5.2.5 Summary of research question two

This part of the thesis aimed to explore some characteristic of the classroom climate in relation to civic participation. The findings showed that learning environments in the investigated classrooms were developing students' knowledge and skills for civic participation. These practices included the development of a sense of community in the class and an openness to current affairs and political issues. Nevertheless, the

results demonstrated that the learning environment still needs to be more democratic and centred around learners' needs. In most classrooms, there was limited student input regarding classroom management or learning experience organisation. The culture of top-down management dominated the relationship between teachers and students. The Classroom Council appeared to be ineffective in supporting a sense of partnership or contribution to the decision making process. There were considerable differences among teachers in their abilities to employ open, diverse and enjoyable learning environments. Some teachers, especially female teachers, were trying to introduce students to current issues at both the local and global level. Classes were offering students political knowledge and the experience of simulation of the Majlis Alshural. However, discussion of current affairs or political discourse was either shallow or an avoidable issue. A limitation in the use of controversial issues was also identified. Although some teachers were employing a variety of engaging teaching methods, such as group work, the traditional culture of teaching, such as lecture and an intensive focus on drill and memorization, still dominated teachers' practices. Other teachers were experiencing difficulties in moving forward from the old schooling system to the new Basic Education system. As a powerful approach for civic participation, critical thinking was not enjoying enough consideration. Linking students to real life experiences by using service-learning was hardly noticed. In general, when compared to male teachers, female teachers were more able to support a culture of respect, openness, and they employed more engaging teaching methods. The culture dominating the observed classes required restructuring in order to be effective spaces for active participatory citizenship.

Having presented findings of research Question Two, the following section will present findings of research Question Three: Co-curricular activities and civic participation.

5.3 Research Question Three: Civic Participation and Co-curricular Activities

How do the co-curricular activities develop Omani students' civic participation?

Co-curricular activities are considered to be an important component in the Basic Education system for civic participation development. Increasingly, researchers are emphasizing the importance of co-curricular activities to support school's civic responsibility (Handle, 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). To this end, this research planned to explore if co-curricular activities at the investigated four Basic Education schools do develop students' civic participation. Observations and interviews were used to collect the necessary data. Interviews took place with principals, teachers and students. Further, when Alwatan's School principal suggested that the co-curricular coordinator would be another valuable source in exploring the role of co-curricular activities in developing civic participation, additional interviews were conducted with co-curricular coordinators whenever such positions existed at the remaining sites. Following the framework suggested by MoE in Oman, all investigated schools introduce a wide range of co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities aims in the educational system in Oman planned to provide an opportunity for students to use leisure; develop engagement in the surrounding society, and developing skills such as teamwork, problem solving, and creative thinking(MoE, 2003b).

Principals in the instigated government schools stated that Basic Education schools should offer students all suggested co-curricular activities by MoE. They stated that by end of each semester, representatives from Regional Educational Administration (REA) visit each school to evaluate and ensure the implementation of co-curricular activities. In analysing the data related to this question, respondents in the visited schools considered a wide range of co-curricular activities to be areas for the development of civic participation. However, the most frequently mentioned clubs in this regard were Public Service and Environmental Friends, Students' Government, Sport, School Radio, Health, Theatre, Scout and Guide, Tours, and Journalism and Photography. Similarly, the data showed that some schools were developing their

own co-curricular activities to support some aspects of civic participation. Most students who participated in the focus group interviews were members of at least two co-curricular clubs, and they were in a position to report about activities they conducted in clubs they participated in. As result of the coding process, two main themes emerged from the data: The contribution of co-curricular activities to the development of civic participation, and difficulties challenging the implementation of co-curricular activities. These two broad themes were utilised to present finding as related sub-themes emerged. The following sections will present the findings of each theme.

5.3.1 Co-curricular activities contribution to the development of civic participation

One theme that evolved from the coding of interviews and observations is related to the benefits of co-curricular activities in developing civic participation. This theme could be identified as a critical component to understanding opportunities, experiences, and dispositions related to the role of co-curricular activities in developing civic participation across the researched context. Findings related to this theme are presented thorough the following sub-themes: developing civic knowledge, building bridges with the surrounding society, learning about others cultures, developing a disposition towards good citizenry, and developing civic skills.

Developing civic knowledge

The data showed that co-curricular activities provide further learning space for developing civic knowledge. According to several respondents, co-curricular clubs do contribute to the development of students' knowledge of some aspects of civic life. In analysing issues of interest and forms of activities conducted through different co-curricular activities, three general areas were identified: environment, health, and social and politics issues.

Environment: Data showed that developing students' knowledge about the environment was an issue of focus through co-curricular activities. Public Service

and Environmental Friends was the main club which focused on such issues. All visited schools were organizing this club. Three students who were interviewed at Algalal School had experience in this club. All of them reported that it was a good experience to be members in this club. They explained that this club is mainly focused on promoting awareness among students about environmental issues. The quotation below explains a male student's experience in this learning space:

I chose this club because it matches my interest and capacities...lately we completed a project of covering the open area in the school, also we helped the people in the nearby village to clean the Falaj canal and to clean the palm farms, also last year we planted some trees for shade in the school and, besides, the street leads to the neighbouring village.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

At Algalal School, the Public Service and Environmental Friends Club appeared to be more active when compared with other clubs. In this school, the club was running an environmental competition and organizing workshops to develop students' environmental knowledge. On the school's announcement board, there were three messages from club's administration. The first one was about arranging a weekly competition focusing on various environmental issues like global warming, air pollution and the rising sea level. The second was about a campaign which had been planned to repair some broken school furniture. The final note was about organizing a workshop to teach students ways in which the environment can be protected from desertification. Furthermore, many wall charts around the school were created by the club's members. These wall charts were mainly about environment protection and were to remind students to keep their school tidy and clean.

Further, the data showed that developing students' knowledge about the environment was also the focus of other clubs. For example, the Theatre Club at Algalal School organized a play about the importance of keeping the water resource at the nearby villages clean. The Radio Club at Alwatan School secured a special session at morning assembly to introduce an environmental competition organized by the school administration. The competition aimed to develop students' awareness about various environmental issues. Finally, the Tour Club also was used to expand students' awareness of the environment. For example, at one of Social Studies classes at Alsalam School, a female student suggested that all classes would like to

arrange a visit to sand dunes in east Oman. When all the class showed support for this idea, the teacher promised to discuss this issue with the administration of the Tour Club.

Health: Health topics benefitted from a focus within co-curricular activities across the context. Some respondents made direct connections between health issues and the schools' efforts to enhance civic participation. They argued that learning about good healthy habits and some major health problems is important for any informed citizen. However, the Health Club was the major area where such issues were focused on at all the visited schools.

Respondents explained that the aims and activities of this club helped to develop students' knowledge about health issues. Alnoor and Algalal principals suggested that this club provides an opportunity for students to be more aware about major health problems affecting their society and also to experience voluntary work. They explained that this club develops philanthropy among learners; because their focus is on diseases which threaten their society, this motivates them to address such challenges. Some respondents stated that activities of the club which are associated with the context of the research included:

- Creating health awareness across the community about dangerous diseases such as AIDS, diabetes and high blood pressure.
- Lectures and talks about health arranged for residents around the schools.
- Celebrating some important days related to health issues such as World AIDS Day, World Health Day, and World Nutrition Day.
- Organising some short courses about how to prepare a healthy meal and basic First Aid.

These activities occurred within the school and the surrounding community. Some students reported that they participated in more than one health campaign in the surrounding community. Sometimes these activities entailed visiting families at homes to raise awareness of some common health problems with parents such as junk food and encouraging good health habits like eating fresh fruit and vegetables.

In other cases, students explained that they helped the local council or nearby health centre in celebrating health days or delivering a speech about a health problem. Some schools reported regular participation through this club at different community activities. In the quotation below, a female student from Alsalam School reported her experience as a member in this club in the previous academic year:

I enjoyed being member in this activity [Health Club]. It was very beneficial; I remember that we had regular visits to the community around the school. Sometimes we gave families some leaflets about some common health problems and sometimes health advice related to issues like smoking among young adults and diseases which might occur due to lack of cleanness at home.

(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

The award display unit at Alsalam School displayed a letter of appreciation from the Ministry of Health commending the school's active participation in the celebration of World Health Day under the slogan 'Make Every Mother and Child Account'. At Alwatan School, the principal and coordinator of co-curricular activities explained that this club is in the centre of the school's plan to address the increase of drug use among students in the school. According to them, some students were using a kind of drug which is not yet prohibited by law in the country. Health Club members were responsible to broaden awareness in the school community about the negative impacts of this drug. At Alnoor School, the Health Club's members were working on shift basis to help the visiting nurse. They were also involved in doing short reports about some health problems. One of these reports, as mentioned by a male student, was about identifying common health problems which stopped students from coming school. For the principal, such activities increased club members' awareness about various health problems and gave them basic skills needed for informed involvement in society.

Social and Politics issues: There was some evidence in that data that indicated that co-curricular clubs were used to develop learners' social and political knowledge. The data showed that Journalism and Photography, Radio, and Theatre Clubs were used to introduce students to some forms of political knowledge.

The English teacher at Alsalam was the coordinator of Journalism and Photography Club. She focused on the club's role for civic development. For her, this club encourages students following public affairs. She also explained that the club's members are encouraged to write reports and take photos of activities which took place at school or within the surrounding society. She believed that such activities played an enormous role in building learners' knowledge about local or global affairs. Two of the interviewed students at Alnoor School were members at this club. They expressed positive sentiments about their involvement in such clubs. They explained that this club develops their hobby of taking photographs. They also mentioned that their club publishes on monthly basis a magazine named 'Alnoor'⁸ which focuses on current affairs and some political issues. They explain that the club coordinator encourages them to report on some political events covered in the media. Some of these reports are selected to be published in the club's magazine. On the second floor of this school there were two issues of this journal on display. Each issue focused on a separate topic. The first issue was centred on the rights of the child as suggested by the United Nations Convention. The issue also had articles on subjects such as the violation of rights of the child; children's right to education; the child's right to life, and children's rights in Islam. The second issue focused on the family. Topics in this issue included: the family's role in raising children; risks facing families in today's world, and the family's role in building values and positive behaviours. All articles were appended with the writer's name and his/her class. This activity was significant for two reasons. First, the selected topics drew direct links to some important issues for civil society. Second, encouraging young adults to write and report about political and current affairs appeared to be effective tactic to elevate their civic knowledge and to draw their attention, at this early stage of their lives, to focus on various social issues.

The political knowledge was also evident through the Radio Club. At Alwatan School, this club allocated a section on the morning assembly related to the Omani foreign policy principles. A student presented short talk to the entire school community which focused on the principle of supporting peace in the world, ensuring justice between nations and supporting the global effort to solve political

⁸ This word means light in Arabic

problems in the Middle East. Using morning assembly to engage in some form of political discourse appears to be a good means through which students' interest about political aspects of civic life can be enhanced.

Further, the Theatre Club was another venue for supporting political discourse. Students within this club often present short plays for students at school or even to the wider community (MoE, 2003b). At Alsalam School, female students reported using the Theatre Club to shed light on the Palestinian problem. A female student from Theatre Club noted in this regard:

‘My mother Palestine’ is one show I still remember which was performed at both school and the University [Sultan Qaboos University]. It was welcomed by the audience because, you know, this issue related to people's daily lives.
(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

As a further space in the co-curricular activities, the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam mentioned that her school developed a special program in 2007 called ‘Students Consultation Council’. She explained that this school based program at her school was designed to teach students about the election process and encourage them to elect a students’ representative board in the school. This board has the right to discuss students’ problems in the school and also other issues of interest in the wider community. While she was disappointed that this program lasted only for one year because of interventions and comments from ERA, she noted:

I am not sure why this program did not continue, you can't imagine how wonderful it was when female students were candidates and they were running their campaign to be elected using their unique tactics and propaganda to attract more votes.
(Interview-20-10-2008)

Undoubtedly such activities are very useful for the development of civic participation among students. Nonetheless, questions remain as to why such a program only lasted for one year. The answer may be partly related to problems with of a top-down educational administration style. Basic Education schools need to be more flexible in planning their co-curricular activities and to decide what fits their students’ needs and interests.

Building bridges with the surrounding society

Co-curricular activities appeared to be an important venue through which to introduce students to different community institutions and to strengthen the relationship between the school and the outside society. Creating real life opportunities to introduce learners to different community institutions is an important means to elevate their awareness about these institutions' functions and to develop dispositions towards community involvement. The latest educational trend in USA 'Leave No Child Inside' was developed to address increased disengagement of students from public activities. Although this trend focuses intensively on environmental challenges facing the entire world, it also acknowledges that such approach in the schools is crucial to ensure the overall development of students' well-being (Louv, 2007).

In this research finding, respondents' reported on a wide range of activities, volunteer work, and cooperation programs organized with various community institutions. Findings related to this theme will be presented into two sub-themes: government agencies, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Government agencies: Some respondents suggested that co-curricular activities provide a platform for interaction with some government bodies. Health institutions, Municipals and educational institutions were frequently mentioned government agencies cooperating with schools to carry out activities such as voluntary work, donations, participating at competitions and campaigns for raising awareness among society's members.

Some schools reported that its community programs were usually organised with the cooperation of some government institutions. Sometimes, initiatives of cooperation came from government bodies seeking schools' support in delivering different forms of activities to the wider society. The principal at Alsalam explained that her school was always keen to cooperate with different government agencies. She also pointed out that clubs in her school take into account the agenda of other government agencies when it sets its yearly program. Notably, the gift display case at Alsalam School included many honours certificates and gifts awarded to school from

government institutions such as Sultan Qaboos University, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Water Resources and Ministry of Health.

The data also revealed that activities conducted with government bodies were mainly focused on health, environmental and safety issues. For example, most schools reported that students participated in raising public awareness about diseases such as AIDS and diabetes. The Alwatan principal mentioned that he invited the safety and rescue department from the Oman Royal Police to the school to give a talk and to show students how to behave when confronted with emergency incidents such as drowning and injuries. He argued that such activities help students to acquire necessary skills to help themselves and people around them when any accidents happen.

Many co-curricular clubs appeared to have a level of cooperation with government bodies. Nevertheless, Public Service and Environmental Friends Club emerged to be more active in this regard. The coordinator of co-curricular activities at Alsalam argued that this club was leading all other clubs when it comes to improving students' involvement at public life. She believes that this club provides a unique opportunity to learn about various community institutions. The Social Studies teacher and principal at Algalal School also supported this conclusion. The Algalal principal commented on this club's role by saying:

This club is a key factor because it helps us to build a strong relationship with what I call the three circles: students, home and official institutions...camping, organized by this club helps us to interact actively with the other partners in society.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

Teachers at urban schools acknowledged that various government bodies in the capital, Muscat, help them to widen students' knowledge about functions and the jurisdiction of different government agencies. Using government agencies to enrich the learning experience is very important in order to raise informed citizens. Developing awareness about each government body's responsibilities is a desirable practice to teach students about how the government functions.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): As mentioned in the presentation of Question One findings, all visited schools do introduce students to some NGOs in Omani society as part of formal curriculum. While Alnoor, a private school, appeared to be developing active relationship with NGOs, the data revealed that interaction between government schools and NGOs was limited.

Alnoor School appeared to be more active in planning regular activities with NGOs. According to the school principal, the school had an agreement with ‘Dar Alata’⁹ to provide students with an ongoing experience of community service. Also the school organised some activities with other organisation such as women’s associations, the Cancer Patient Society, and the Disabled Children and Autism Society. Also, some other evidence showed that the school does interact with some international organisations such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The special corner developed by this school about child’s rights displayed some drawings done by students which expressed their rights as they related to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This work was a sample of activities within a broad training program organized by the UNICEF Muscat¹⁰ aimed to train teachers and students to focus on the rights of the child. Students’ work throughout this activity was named ‘Oman’s Children Drawing Their Rights’.

On the other hand, across the government schools, the most notable example of interaction with NGOs was from the rural school. Educators in this school reported their school’s participation at an international program called ‘Peer Education’. This program is supported by some United Nations agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF. According to the Islamic teacher, this program is designed to involve learners in addressing the HIV problem. The program started at school in 2007 and planned to continue until 2010. It included selecting group of students from the school under the supervision of one teacher. The selected group participated in training programs delivered by specialist from UNICEF and UNESCO. Later, this group of students became responsible for raising awareness among peers about different issues related to the HIV. Two male students interviewed at this school were members in this program. One of them reported:

⁹One of the most active NGO charities in Oman.

¹⁰The capital city.

Saeed [a student who participated in the focus group interview] and I are members in the Peer Education program. We deliver lectures to our colleagues about AIDS and also we prepare some wall charts. We got trained about this program in Sohar [Capital Region City] for three days. We have the freedom to communicate with people at school, in the playground or in villages. Now we are preparing ourselves to give talks about the program at one nearby village as part of cooperative arrangement with other schools in the region.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

Introducing learners to different NGOs in society through real life experiences is an important approach for civic participation. Such experience is significant to let students experience working and cooperating with these forms of organisations. Also it helps to develop a positive appreciation of the important role NGOs play at any developed society.

In sum, despite the efforts of some of the visited schools, there is a need, especially within government schools, for greater efforts to strength the relationship between the schools and the NGOs. In particular, such relationships would increase students' involvement with real world problems and practices. Providing students with the opportunity to learn about and work with NGOs would help them to appreciate diversity of opinions and more importantly to develop their ability to challenge the voice of government agencies in society.

Learning about others cultures

This theme emerged by analysing school based programs developed by Alnoor School. These programs are an additional space in the co-curricular arena to expand students' knowledge and awareness about other cultures. Such programs included: *sisterhood with overseas schools and tourism week*. The following sections will elaborate on these two programs respectively.

Sisterhoods with overseas schools: This program was designed to provide a platform for interaction between the schools' students and counterparts from other cultures. The school principal clarified that her school has an agreement with two overseas schools. The first one was from the United States of America and the second one was from The Netherlands. She explained that this project aimed to open students' minds

about other cultures and customs in the world, also, to enhance students' skill in employing technology for good use. When students were asked about the benefits of this program, a male student replied:

Well, this program helps us to find new friends from USA and The Netherlands. Each student is responsible to contact one student from the other school.

Researcher: What issues do you talk about?

We talk about many issues like learning activities they do, they ask us about Oman and life here and our tourist attractions and, you know, the Dutch students sent to us an entire box containing information about tourism in their country...it is really an interesting experience. We now know people from other countries and we learn about their customs and culture.

(Focus group interview-03-11-2008)

An international exchange program was another part of sisterhoods with overseas schools. This part aimed to provide an opportunity for face-to-face interaction between students and their counterpart in other countries. Through this activity, students were introduced to different learning environments, and attended classes about the culture, history and geography of the host country.

Students at Alnoor School reported that a group of their colleagues went to visit their counterparts in the United States of America and The Netherlands. In turn, they also hosted group of American students. A female student described her experience in this program by saying:

We hosted sixteen students from the United State of America and they stayed with us for quite long time. We were talking about various issues and they attended Arabic language classes. Actually, this was great experience which allowed us to know about other country's culture.

(Focus group interview-04-11-2008)

Clearly, such a program has a positive effect on students' interaction with counterparts from other cultures. Giving young adults the opportunity to explore different cultures is an effective approach to establish a platform for well-informed conversation regarding increasing global challenges. Such a learning initiative allowed the students to develop a common understanding about challenges that may threaten life on earth or difficulties facing them in the future as the new generation.

Tourism week: This program at Alnoor private school was designed to focus on one or two of the world's countries to explore the country's location, political system, culture and main tourist attractions over the course of the academic year. By the beginning of each academic year, the school selected the targeted countries. At the school principal explained, this arrangement aimed to ensure that all students and teachers had sufficient time to work collectively to explore the selected country in a comprehensive fashion.

Two school locations were chosen to post some activities related to tourism weeks' celebrations. At the first zone were displayed objects including photographs; newssheets and wall charts documenting the celebration of tourism week in Jordan. At the second zone, similar materials were displayed to illustrate tourism week in Tunisia. Interestingly, the celebrations of these two countries were arranged with the cooperation of the embassies of these two countries in Muscat. Some activities of Jordanian week were presented under the auspices of Jordanian's ambassador in Oman.

Students reported considerable involvement in the tourism week program. Some stated that they took part in the organisation of activities included in the celebration programs. Also, they explained that such programs helped them to identify another nation's culture and available tourism potential. A female student described the program in saying:

It is a great idea. Students bring in much information regarding traditions and culture at the Jordanian tourism week and they used different ways to display their contributions.

(Focus group interview-04-11-2008)

Overall, such programs at Alnoor School showed that this private school endeavours to provide students with opportunities to learn and interact with other cultures. In fact, interaction between learners across cultures is an effective means through which students can learn to overcome barriers between cultures and nations. Opening students' eyes to the diverse nature of the world today is an essential mechanism to establish closeness, respect and cohesion among nations. Encouraging learners to carry out activities such as the one developed by Alnoor School will help them to

appreciate other cultures' traditions which, in turn, an essential aspect for global perspective of civic participation.

However, while Alnoor School did develop these interesting cross-cultural programs, none of the investigated government schools had similar initiatives. The development of multicultural life in Omani society, especially in a city like Muscat, should be a motivating factor for such learning experiences in public schools. Schools have the responsibility to develop learners' knowledge, respect, and willingness to interact with others.

Developing a disposition towards good citizenry

This theme emerged through the analysis of the aims of two different co-curricular activities developed by Alsalam and Algalal schools. These co-curricular activities were designed to develop students' dispositions towards good citizenry. According to the schools' principals, these activities were initiatives developed to support students' civic development. The activity at Alsalam's School was titled '*Good Citizenship*', the activity at Algalal School was called '*Keep an Eye on Your Country*'. The following sections will present detailed explanations about these two activities.

Good Citizenship: This co-curricular activity was developed by Alsalam School and aimed to develop female students' commitment towards the school's rules and regulations and to highlight behaviours which characterize good citizenship. At the right side of the main school's entrance, there was drawing of a female student. The drawing showed her wearing an elegant uniform, smiling and holding a sign with the words "my name is Muthlaa¹¹. I am a diligent, decent and committed student. Please be like me". Later, the researcher found that this drawing was used as an introduction to an activity called 'Good Citizenship'.

The school principal revealed that this initiative was a core component in developing a sense of citizenry among learners. She explained that they chose the name

¹¹ This word in Arabic means an exemplary person

‘Muthlaa’ to label this anthropomorphic characteristic because the meaning attached to this name are reflecting the importance of being good at school, family and public life. She added:

Let me say that this program plays a significant role in the interpretation of the school’s philosophy to develop good deeds among learners and more importantly to create an informed generation.

(Interview-19-10-2008)

The Social Studies teacher was the activity coordinator. She explained that the activity was constructed to focus on various values or behaviours based on a quarterly calendar. She argued that this activity is very successful in helping students pay attention to desirable values and behaviours that good citizens should practice. In the coming excerpt she explained the organisations and anticipated outcomes of Good Citizenship activity:

Throughout this activity we chose good citizenship values like honesty or commitment and then we focused on this issue at the morning assembly, at other co-curricular activities, and sometimes in the classrooms. Also, through wall charts, theatre, and open discussion, we try to identify mistakes that ‘Muthalaa’ may fall into and also those good attributes that she might develop like high academic achievement; respect for teachers, classmates and other colleagues in the school; respect for parents; caring for people with special needs; and keeping the school and surrounding environment clean and tidy.

(Interview-20-10-2008)

From their point of view, female students at Alsalam School also pointed to the good citizenship activity as another space for engagement in the school. A female student who was one of the activity organisers stated that the Good Citizenship activity was welcomed because it allowed girls to develop skills and values needed to be successful members in the society.

Actually, this co-curricular activity was a good indicator that civic issues receive Alsalam School’s consideration. Using creative ideas to attract learners’ attention to the values of citizenry in an innovative format and is an effective tactic which helps students to engage in an educated dialogue about citizenship values and issues.

Keep an Eye on Your Country: This is a co-curricular activity developed at Algalal School to enhance students' commitment towards their community. A special corner at the right side of school's main entrance was reserved to display different information about this program. The school's principal identified this activity as an extra effort from teachers in his school to link students with ongoing activities in public life. He explained that this activity encourages students to develop ongoing interest about different cultural and social activities in the Omani context. Participating students use wall charts and the school radio to inform the school community about what they believe are significant issues in the community. Further, according to the Social Studies teacher, this activity has also an important role to play in expanding students' awareness regarding issues presented in the formal curriculum. Here, students selected an issue suggested in the formal curriculum for further investigation. She also stated that one practice developed by this activity was linking students to various community agencies. Depending on the issues being focused on, students would communicate with the organisations which have input or direct responsibility for a chosen issue. In the following excerpt, Algalal School principal explained how students achieve this aspect of program:

Usually students are choosing different local topics which they come across. According to their interest, they start collecting further details about the chosen topic from different sources. Then, they get involved in group discussion about their findings and sometimes they discuss their suggestions with competent authorities.

Researcher: Any examples in this regard?

Yes. Lately students developed a proposal about overcoming the water shortage in the area and we helped them to arrange a meeting with the relevant authority.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

In fact, the *Keep an Eye on Your Country* activity at Algalal School was good initiative for enhancing students' civic participation. One of powerful part of this activity was when students were involved in developing proposals to overcome certain challenges in their society. While such activities develop students' knowledge and interest about local affairs, it also built up their capacity to develop dialogue skills, create ideas to solve problems in their community and, more importantly, to develop confidence to communicate with responsible parties in society to discuss their proposals.

Overall, these two activities indicated that some investigated schools were working to create further spaces for civic participation. Introducing further activities to enhance learners' commitment to the common good is important to ensure that students are linked to the interests of society.

Developing civic skills

One theme that evolved from the data related to co-curricular activities is the development of some civic skills. Although it is evident that the development of these skills could be noticed across other themes, this theme will draw further details and underline some of the civic skills developed within co-curricular activities. Findings related to this theme are presented through the following sub-themes: Leadership, Teamwork, Public Speaking, and Taking Responsibility.

Leadership: The data showed that developing leadership was one focus of co-curricular activities. Although findings showed that leadership is developed throughout many co-curricular activities, most evidence pointed to Scout and Guide Club as major venue for leadership development.

Educators from different schools indicated that this club played a role in developing students' civic participation. They explained that one major aim for this club was to develop leadership and students' commitment to serve their community. They identified this club as an approach to teach students how to be a responsible and leaders in the community. The Alwatan principal emphasised some benefits of this club by saying:

This is a very important club to prepare good citizens in the future. You know, skills like organisation, guidance and leadership are major aims in this club.

(Interview-11-10-2008)

Similarly, the Science teacher at Alwatan described this club as an important venue to expand students' leadership skills and social network. As a previous coordinator for this Scout and Guide Club, he also argued that students learnt responsibility and became more sociable as they work with students from different grades in the school.

On one occasion, students participated under his supervision at a national camping event in south Oman. He stated that such an activity allowed students get to know new friends and learn how to become leaders and be self-reliant in tough conditions. Such views were confirmed by the co-curricular coordinators at Alsalam and the Life Skills teacher at Algalal School who were also involved in supervising similar clubs at their schools. For the Life Skills teacher at Algalal School, Scout and Guide Club is important because:

They learn how to behave when they experience problems or difficulties. If you observed their activities and programs they carry out, especially when camping, you will see how this club is useful for developing a sense of leadership and caring about other people as well.

(Interview-12-11-2008)

Further, this club was playing an active role at the morning assembly of all visited schools. In their special Scout uniform, and with the cooperation of Student Government Club Scouts and Guide members, they helped to make all students ready for different aspects of the morning's assembly. This comprised of ensuring that each classroom was lined up properly under the covered area, and that all the school's students did attend the assembly. They were also responsible for the raising of and salute to the flag. Before the School Radio section started, a group of Scouts headed towards the flagstaff in the middle of the open area. When the group leader started to hoist the flag, all students became silent. After the flag was hoisted, the scout group leader greeted the flag loudly three times. Then, all students unitedly and loudly repeated the greeting behind him/her.

Teamwork: The data showed that most organised activities within clubs were collective in nature. However, some respondents specified that activities carried through the Sport and Theatre Clubs were useful and more frequently associated with developing teamwork skills.

Some respondents identified the Sport Club as a useful learning space for training students to value teamwork. All schools reported active participation among their students at sporting activities. Most schools reported that students were encouraged

to participate in different forms of sports. Football was the most popular game, especially among male students.

The Life Skills teacher at Alsalam explained the importance of sports with regard to civic participation because of the need for students to play together as one team. She argued that popular games in her school such as volleyball, gymnastics and basketball develop students' ability to work with different partners. She stated that many female students were enjoying different forms of sports, either as players or spectators. In the same school, a group of female students were practicing under the supervision of the gymnastics teacher. As noted in the field notes, this group of students was preparing to take part in the school's celebration program of Oman's National Day which is held on 18th November each year.

Students explained that they were regularly following sports activities. Male students in particular were keen to give examples about sport activities they were involved in and how they enjoyed such space in their schools. From the field notes, Alwatan, Alnoor and Alsalam gift cabinets were filled with appreciation certificates and souvenir cups which indicated active engagement with a wide range of sporting organisations.

Further, some respondents focused on the role of sports in developing students' team work and social networks. They drew a direct link between students' engagement in sporting activities and becoming more sociable. For the co-curricular coordinator at Alwatan School, the popularity of sports among students creates a good space for involvement in the school community and gives students the opportunity to interact with friends from different classes. The Life Skills teacher in the same school argued that football motivated students to engage in discussions about local or global competitions. For him, this behaviour is supportive of civic participation where students follow sports' news in the media to engage in conversation with their peers.

Similarly, teaching teamwork skills was also mentioned as one of the benefits of the Theatre Club. The data revealed that theatre activities were beneficial in terms of teamwork and communication skills development. The co-curricular coordinator at Alwatan School stated:

They learn how to be confident when speaking to an audience and I think teaching them how to work together as one team is an important issue as well.
(Interview-14-10-2008)

Public speaking: The data showed that co-curricular clubs provide a venue for developing students' public speaking abilities. Creating a learning environment in which learners can develop skills to address the public is a critical practice for preparing students to be active citizens. The Radio Club was mentioned as an important space for training students to speak publicly. The coordinator of co-curricular activities at Alsalam School emphasised the importance of this club in developing students' skill of speaking publicly. She explained in this regard:

When students get used to speaking in front of a huge number of people, they become motivated and confident and more likely to keep up such skills in their coming life.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

Similarly, the data showed that the Theatre Club develops students' ability to perform publicly about issues of community interest. The co-curricular coordinator at Alwatan School agreed that theatre has powerful impact on developing students' ability of addressing community interest publicly. Linked to this, the data showed that students enjoyed opportunities to communicate with the public by performing plays outside their schools. For example, Alwatan's students suggested that they perform a show about AIDS disease at Alolo, a major shopping centre at Muscat. They explained that this activity was part of wider program to celebrate the World AIDS Day. Likewise, male students at Algalal School organised for the Theatre Club to perform a show about how students should work to keep the surrounding environment tidy and clean. According to him, this show was very interesting and therefore, students have been asked to perform this show at one of public events in Sohar, the capital of Regional Educational Administration (REA) to the area to which the school belongs.

Taking Responsibility: The findings showed that the Students' Government Club is an area which has the ability to develop some important civic skills among learners. Developing self-confidence and taking responsibility were mentioned as core aims of

this club. While all government schools were running this club, the private school did not. Alnoor principal explained this by saying:

We use to have this club in previous years but we don't have such a Club this year because, in the end, all clubs are formulated upon students interest and, personally, I find other clubs such as Public Service could meet the suggested objectives of this club [Students Government].

(Interview-01-11-2008)

Club members were chosen from elected classrooms councils. The president of each classroom in the school automatically becomes a member of the Students' Government Club. In the coming quotation, Algalal's principal described the process of choosing members in this club:

Well, Presidents of Classrooms Councils become automatically members of this club. Also, other students may apply to take part in this club. After that this group of students elected the administration board of this club.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

Principals and teachers at public schools acknowledged the valuable role of this club in developing different aspects of students' personalities. More specifically, they argued that such a club allowed students to take a role in helping school staff in some administration duties. Some teachers indicated that this club was powerful in developing a sense of responsibility and getting students used to obeying and apply the school rules on the grounds of self-conviction. The school principals at Alsalam and Algalal emphasised the critical role of this club in empowering student to participate and give them a sense of partnership in running their schools. When asked about examples of activities carried by this club in her school, Alsalam principal replied:

Well usually, this team of students are enjoying a high level of academic achievement and good moral behaviour. I think this is core issue so other students in the school listen and cooperate with them ...some of these girls' duties are to welcome the school's guests. They are also required to follow-up female students' obligations with regard to school regulations. Also, we give this club some administrative work and supervisory responsibilities on some occasions. I am happy about this club's work in the school because they are very helpful in administrating the school and sometimes they hand over to me wonderful suggestions.

(Interview-19-10-2008)

Further, the Social Studies' teacher at Algalal School was the coordinator of this Club. She explained that this Club had 30 members and plays a significant role in strengthening students' personality and providing them the opportunity to experience taking responsibility. In the quotation below, she reported on how one of her students have benefited from this Club.

One student in this club was always below the normal academic achievement and always a careless student; actually, he can't even read or write well. I asked him to take some responsibilities like ensuring the quietness in the open area at break time and also, I gave him some administrative work. After a while, his behaviour changed dramatically, he became a good listener and is showing good effort in the class.

(Interview-10-11-2008)

At the morning assembly in Alsalam and Alwatan schools this Club was well represented. Club members at these schools were wearing a sash indicating that they are members in the Students' Government Club. Their roles were mainly about helping teachers to organise different activities included in the morning assembly program. At the end of assembly, Club members supervised students' departure to classrooms. Further, at Alsalam School, some wall charts were produced by Students' Government Club. The contents of these drawings were about the importance of good behaviour at school. Also, some work aimed to enlighten students about some environmental disasters, like the Gono hurricane and Tsunami, and also to motivate female students taking action to help people who were affected by such natural disasters. This was indicated that Club members were taking responsibility to ensure good manners inside the school and interacting with issues of community interest.

Five students participated in the focus group interviews were either members in the Students' Government Club or had previously been members of the club. They explained that this club gave them the feeling that they are partners in running their school. Others articulated that they feel confident and could rely on themselves. When they have been asked to give examples of tasks they carried in this club, most students focused on welcoming school visitors and showing them learning facilities and activities. A female student from Algalal School described her duties and experience of being member in this Club by saying:

We are helping our teachers in running the school. We do some work for the school administration, advising students when they break the rules, organizing students in the morning assembly. I really find this Club useful, it gives us the opportunity to be a responsible person, but the problem is that some students are not listening to our instructions and, honestly, some Club members sometimes are not serious enough.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

In summary, the findings showed that co-curricular activities are an important venue for the development of civic participation. The findings showed that, through co-curricular activities, students have the opportunity to develop civic knowledge and skills. Similarly, some co-curricular activities were aimed to establish a bridge between the school and the surrounding society. The results also showed that co-curricular activities are an important space to teach students about other cultures and to develop students' disposition towards good citizenship.

5.3.2 Difficulties challenging the implementation of co-curricular activities

The data revealed that this set of schools was experiencing some challenges in the successful implementation of co-curricular activities. Lack of time, lack of expertise, lack of interest, poor implementation, and top-down administration were obstacles reported by informants in this course of research. They believed that these difficulties do limit the valuable role that could be accomplished through co-curricular activities to developing learners' civic participation. The following sections will discuss the finding related to these challenges.

Lack of time

Lack of time regarding the implementation of co-curricular activities was raised as an issue at all government Basic Education schools. According to the regulation of MoE, students have only one weekly period for meeting and activities of different kinds in co-curricular clubs. Two of the visited government schools were offering the first period on Monday, however; the third chose the first period on Wednesday. Some respondents commented that the dedicated time to conduct these activities was not sufficient. For the Life Skills' teacher at Alsalam, these activities could not achieve their purposes precisely because there is:

Only one period in a week [devoted to these activities] and the time of this period is taken by cutting five minutes from other periods in the school day; surely this is not enough time.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

She also argued that such organisation negatively affected the rest of school day as all other periods became shorter. The Life Skills teacher at Alwatan also was critical about such organisation. He mentioned that, because of the high number of students in his school, considerable time was wasted due to students' movements to the place of meeting. Instead of having specific time for all clubs, he suggested different meeting times for each club. The principal of Alsalam's was more concerned about the issue. She explained that families do not usually welcome the idea of bringing girls to school on the weekend or even having them stay after school for co-curricular activities. Therefore, most of co-curricular activities in her school are conducted within the school day. Some respondents indicated that they are trying to overcome such obstacles by using times devoted to breaks and morning assembly for club meetings.

However, the situation at the private school was more flexible. Each co-curricular club carried its meetings at break time, or before or after the school hours. Further, the principal stated that students were encouraged to carry on their co-curricular activities at weekends. With prior arrangements with the school's administration, each club could meet at school on the weekends or holidays and carry its activities. This showed how independent schools such as Alnoor has a more flexible framework in providing learners with a rich learning environment when compared with government schools. The heavy involvement of the centralized educational administration in Oman in organizing issues, such as the time of conducting co-curricular activities, appeared to be a potential obstacle in the research context.

Lack of expertise

Co-curricular coordinators emphasised the importance for setting special professional development programs for club coordinators. They argued that some teachers lacked expertise and skills through which the anticipated aims of co-curricular activities could be achieved properly. Co-curricular coordinators also

agreed that clubs performances are below the expectation because some teachers experience the required knowledge and skills for effective supervision.

Similarly teachers mentioned that they do not participate at any form of in-service training related to co-curricular activities. The principal of Alwatan acknowledged that professional development programs do not pay attention to this form of learning experience. When he has been asked about the reason, he replied:

The reason in my understanding is that policy makers do not pay enough attention to such forms of learning experiences. There is a special department in the Ministry [MoE] responsible for co-curricular activities; however co-curricular activities still need better commitment to play the expected role in the Basic Education schools.

(Interview-11-10-2008)

For the Social Studies teacher in Alwatan School, expertise is an important issue to fulfil co-curricular activities goals. He wasn't satisfied with the way of managing these activities in the school:

I am a Social Studies teacher. Is it reasonable to be asked to supervise the health committee? I believe that self-interest and expertise of the teacher are very important to run these activities effectively.

(Interview-13-10-2008).

On the other hand, the co-curricular coordinator at Alsalam argued that even pre-service programs do not pay attention to co-curricular activities. She mentioned that teachers experience difficulties in running these activities because they are not trained well at the college level. This suggestion was in harmony with a comment by the Life Skills' teacher at Alwatan. He was at the first year of his career life; however, he didn't supervise any co-curricular activities. When he has been asked about the reason, he replied:

I think because I am a new teacher and also I have quite high teaching load and also, don't forget, that these issues [co-curricular activities] do not enjoy attention in the college so I need time until I become familiar about running these activities.

(Interview-12-10-2008)

These findings emphasise the vital role of professional development in preparing teachers to support the intended aims of co-curricular activities. Teachers should participate in in-service training programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice the planning and conduct of co-curricular activities.

Lack of interest

The data demonstrated that a lack of interest in co-curricular activities was one potential difficulty. Some students showed lack of interest in participating in co-curricular activities. They indicated different reasons for their disengagement. Some explained that they were in Grade 10 and they would like to focus more on the formal curriculum. They argued that the evaluation system does not allocate any weight to their involvement in the co-curricular activities. Therefore, they would prefer to focus on the formal curriculum to secure higher grades by the end of Grade 12. Others reported that they are forced to participate in activities they do not like. Some articulated that they lost interest because they don't like the way these activities are run. A male student from Alwatan School mentioned that he withdrew from Scout Club because the coordinator ran the activity in a compulsory fashion.

Surprisingly, some educators indicated that sometimes students were assigned to different clubs regardless of their interest. They gave two main reasons for such administrative practice. First, the limited numbers of seats in some meeting rooms did not match the high demand. Secondly, they stated that the regulation system forced them to ensure that all the suggested list of co-curricular activities should be carried out in the school. For this reason, they worked to ensure that students were evenly distributed to all activities regardless of their interest. At Algalal School, this was a real problem especially with limited number of students. When the principal of Algalal was asked to provide further explanation about this issue, he replied:

At the end of each semester we are visited by an evaluation team from the REA. One of their aims is to ensure that we do offer all suggested co-curricular clubs to students.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

Further, some respondents agreed that some clubs do not function well because coordinators had no interest in their activities. Because schools have a long list of suggested clubs, principals are obliged to ask teachers to run some clubs regardless of their interest. The co-curricular coordinators at Alwatan and Algalal explained that teachers consider these activities as an extra load. They accepted that such a situation negatively impacted on the successful implementation of co-curricular activities in their schools. The Life Skills' teacher at Alsalam School emphasised this argument by saying:

Look, if really we want to get the benefits of co-curricular activities, we need a full-time teacher looking after it. Asking overloaded teachers to supervise clubs is surely a big obstacle.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

Poor implementation

Some evidence showed that implementation of co-curricular activities was at a superficial level. Some teachers accepted that, because of teaching load, their way of running co-curricular activities lacked depth. Some clubs were mainly handled by high academically achieving students. The principal of Alsalam principal mentioned that Students' Government Council was made up mainly of students who enjoy a "high level of academic achievement and good moral behaviour". The English teacher at Alsalam acknowledged that she occasionally did not accept new members in the English Club to avoid extra administration and supervision. She also added that some teachers only focused on a small number of skilled students to actualise the club's activities. When she was asked about the reasons behind such practice, she replied:

Because of the teaching load, and honestly the important thing that evaluators [she referred to the outsider committee which visits school for evaluation reasons] focus on, is the files and other administrative stuff which has nothing to do with the real situation of implementation during the whole semester.

(Interview-18-10-2008)

This argument was also supported when looking at some students' notes. For two students at Alwatan School, clubs were always dominated by small numbers of students and rarely new students were noticed doing the clubs' activities. One of

them reported that he tried repeatedly to participate in the School Radio Club at morning assembly, but club's coordinator did not allow him.

Such comments showed that only limited numbers of students at the researched context receive benefits from co-curricular clubs. Further, there is some evidence to indicate that only selective groups get involved in these clubs. Those students with high academic achievement appeared to be more involved and the preferred option of club coordinator. This situation raises serious concerns about the extent to which students enjoy real freedom to choose their favourite clubs and more importantly their ability to experience respect and appreciation for their talents and abilities. If the school aims to create civic environment in which respect of choice is highly appreciated and encouraged, then all students, regardless of their academic achievement, should enjoy equal access to different forms of activities offered by the schools. Focusing on already motivated and highly academically achieving students could simply deprive the students who are in real need of valuable learning experiences that could be gained from co-curricular activities.

Top-down administration

The findings show that a centralized system of running education in Oman affected negatively the implementation of co-curricular activities. The top-down relationship between government schools and educational authorities is identified as an obstacle restricting schools' attempts to create strong relationships with the surrounding society or developing a rich learning environment to enhance civic participation among learners. Further, the data showed that sometimes schools offered some co-curricular activities only for the sake of accountability.

For example, the schools' principals at Alwatan and Algalal argued that some initiatives to establish strong and active relationships with the surrounding institutions were thwarted because of a bureaucratic and centralised administration system. For example, the Algalal principal's effort to provide his school some financial support from one nearby company to his school failed because:

There is lack of trust between us and people in charge in the REA. Let me give you this example. As part of our internal program to support needy students, I convinced one company to fund this program. Surprisingly, I got a reprimand letter from the REA because I exceeded authorities granted to me. The letter claimed that seeking financial support from any institution is only authorised for REA. Let me tell you that we are often trapped between the hammer and the anvil, between the unjustified inflexibility of some officials and our conviction of our absolute right to communicate with all institutions in society without restriction.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

Also, some teachers argued that schools should enjoy more freedom in running co-curricular activities. Co-curricular coordinators were uneasy about the way the Tour Club annual program was organised. They explained that the mandated program by MoE does not always match students' needs. They argued that some tours did not interest students because they were often duplicated. They suggested that all allocated resources should be given to the schools. Likewise, all tours should only be organized by schools to ensure that their educational value does relate to students' needs and interests. Also, the conversations with teachers revealed that they experience a gap between them and educational policy makers. They called for a real and full partnership which allows teachers to take part in educational decisions. The Social Studies teacher at Algalal brought up that:

There is lack of communication between teachers and decision makers. Although teachers in rural schools are suffering from many problems such as the multiple grades they teach, the long schooling day, pressure of administrative work, and co-curricular activity requirements, responses designed to address these problems are always below our expectations.

(Interview-10-11-2008)

This top-down relationship between some school and educational authorities leads sometimes to unsupportive practices. For example, the findings showed that election results of clubs' councils could be disregarded in some investigated schools. The principals of Algalal and Alwatan admitted the existence of such practice. They argued that such behaviour was aimed to ensure that clubs work well and only skilled and serious students took the responsibility for running the clubs. Further, a female student from Algalal School reported how she had been asked to be the head of the Art Club in the school despite the fact that she was not one of the club's members. She explained her experience in this regard:

FS1: Last week I was told that I will be the president of Art Club because an evaluation team from the REA is going to visit the school and therefore, the school decided to nominate me because they need good speakers to introduce the work achieved by this club.

Researcher: But why did you agree to do this job, since you have nothing to do with this club?

FS1: We don't have a choice.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Actually, this last administrative practice was also mentioned by the same school's principal. He mentioned that, on a few occasions, he did not consider students' interest especially when these interests were in conflict with the possibility of ensuring a good position for his school in the co-curricular activities competitions in the Educational Region. One can imagine how students' dispositions about an election principle like respect of elector choices could be negatively affected when they experience the dismissal of their interest or ignorance of choices such as the findings demonstrated in some visited schools.

5.3.3 Summary of research question three

This part of thesis explored the potential opportunities for civic participation in the co-curricular activities. The findings showed that co-curricular activities provide an opportunity for civic participation development. A set of co-curricular clubs have been identified as spaces offering students opportunities to develop a range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to civic participation. Knowledge related to the environment and community health concerns were one of the focus issues in the visited schools. To a lesser extent, raising social and political issues were also noticed within some clubs' activities. Some clubs were creating opportunities for real life learning experiences to interact with the government and NGOs in Omani society. Learning about other cultures received some attention in the private school. Such trends were absent within the co-curricular activities operating at the investigated government Basic Education schools. Developing learners' dispositions towards behaviours of good citizens were also noticed in some investigated schools. This was an indication that some of the researched contexts were trying to develop further opportunities for civic development. Sets of civic skills were reported to be supported by co-curricular activities. These include: leadership, teamwork, public

speech and taking responsibility. Most respondents conveyed conviction about the important role of co-curricular activities in developing students' engagement in public life.

Nevertheless, a set of difficulties that limit the effectiveness of co-curricular activities were also identified. Lack of time was recognized as a barrier limiting students' active engagement in co-curricular activities. For some teachers, lack of expertise was a real challenge undermining their ability to running clubs properly. Lack of interest was also an identified problem among students. A similar problem was also expressed by some teachers. The finding also showed that implementation of co-curricular activities was sometimes at the surface level. Sometimes students of good academic achievement or with good behaviour were allowed or encouraged to participate at co-curricular activities. Finally, a top-down style of administration was playing a negative role by restricting schools' efforts in constructing interactive relationships with the surrounding society. Similarly, this problem was affecting the quality and richness of some co-curricular activities because it was sometimes only offered to avoid accountability to higher authorities. Obviously, this set of challenges limited the benefits of co-curricular activities on developing learners' civic experiences.

5.4 Summary of Chapter Five

Chapter five presented the findings of the three research questions which guided this course of research. The findings were derived from the coding of data collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals, and student focus group interviews. One of the goals of coding the data was to obtain an understanding of educators' dispositions about the Basic Education system as well as the ways in which this new system supports the development of civic participation. Formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curriculum were investigated to explore the researched context approach in developing civic participation.

As a result of data analysis, the findings exposed that although the researched context creates opportunities for civic participation, some challenges still need to be addressed to ensure the successful implementation and richness of civic experience. While the formal curriculum was identified to be important space for civic participation development in the Basic Education schools, implementation of the formal curriculum is faced with a variety of difficulties. Similarly, classroom climate and co-curricular activities appeared to areas where further consideration should be made to ensure that investigated Basic Education schools are effectively working to support students' civic development.

Having presented the finding of questions from one to three, Chapter Six presents the remaining findings related to students' disposition towards civic participation and the role of some demographic factors in students' civic participation development.

Chapter Six: Findings

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this part of thesis will presents the findings of Question Four and Five of this research. Question Four aimed to explore students' dispositions towards civic participation. Question Five aimed to explore the influence of some demographic factors on students' civic participation. The results of these two questions will be presented respectively in the following sections.

6.1 Research Question Four: Students' Dispositions Towards Civic Participation

What are Omani students' dispositions towards civic participation?

This question focuses on exploring students' disposition towards civic participation. At focus group interviews, all students were asked specific questions about their disposition towards civic participation and whether they would like to participate in public life in future. As a result of data coding and the process of analysis, three themes were identified; importance of civic participation, disposition towards local civic life, and disposition towards global issues. The following sections will present findings according to these themes.

6.1.1 Importance of civic participation

Students at different sites explained that they believe that civic participation is an important issue for the society welfare. Their explanations about civic participation reflected a good level of understanding about the importance of such issues in the society. In looking into their responses, students gave various reasons to justify why they believe that civic participation is important: ensuring community welfare; personal development; and a sense of happiness and enjoyment were the reasons mentioned by students in their explanation of the importance of civic participation. These reasons are detailed in the following sections.

Ensuring community welfare

Students look to civic participation as an essential component necessary to ensure the wellbeing and development of society. For some of them, civic participation is an indication of good citizenry. They argued that a good citizen will engage responsibly by helping other people in the society. Some students indicated that civic participation allows individuals to effect change in their society. Further, they explained that civic participation is important in order to achieve social integration, as well as opening opportunities for members of society to develop their society. In their words, male students from Algalal School explained their understanding of civic participation in saying:

MS1: Because it enhances social cohesion and also, each citizen should have positive input towards his home country.

MS2: I see civic participation as a form of individual commitment towards the community. Also, volunteer work helps to spread the culture of volunteerism in society at large.

MS3: I consider civic participation important because it reflects the desire of the rich people to help the poor and the sick.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

Further, the data showed that students were willing to participate in different forms of activities arranged within their surrounding society. Examples they mentioned about their engagement in public life were stated as involvement in various forms of activities such as collecting donations, voluntary work, raising awareness in the local community and doing some environmental activities. Some of them expressed willingness to spend more time in doing social work for the common good. A male student from Alwatan School suggested that such activities were important to:

Show individuals contribution in building and developing their country.....in constructing a spirit of interdependence and cooperation among members of the community.

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

Nevertheless, a male student at Alwatan School expressed a different opinion. He argued that it is not necessary for individuals to do voluntary work in the community because there are government bodies which are responsible for providing different

forms of services to society. After one of his colleagues finished talking about his own voluntary work in cleaning the beach, he commented:

I don't think I should go to clean the beach; there are employees who are responsible for such things.

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

Personal development

Students indicated that participating in public life is important for self-development. They mentioned that engagement in public life gives them confidence, social skills and self-esteem. In clarifying reasons which motivate students for civic participation, a female student from Algalal School mentioned:

It is an important tool for breaking the barrier of introversion, encourage individual interacting with the community, it helps to develop the society economically and socially, and most importantly, it is self-development of the participant.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Linked to this, another female student at Alsalam School explained that going to the local community helped her to be more knowledgeable about issues related to her community and made her more confident when speaking with the public. She referred to one activity that was designed in her school to raise families' awareness about the importance of children eating breakfast prior to coming to school. She explained that such an activity motivated her to read widely about the issue to expand her knowledge. Also, she indicated that she felt more confident about her abilities in communicating with people who she had never met or known before.

Sense of happiness and enjoyment

Several students reported the exciting experience of doing volunteer work. For some of them, doing social work was an opportunity to break the school's daily routine. Others were in favour of doing social work because they wanted to employ theoretical knowledge from the classroom into reality. In the following quotation, a

female student at Alsalam School explained why she thinks community's participation is an interesting thing to do:

Many times we studied about the importance of healthy food but I really enjoyed the time when our teacher asked us last year to visit some families just here, around the school, to talk with housewives about some healthy food habits. That was great experience and I wish to do it again and again.

(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

Students also reported that doing voluntary work would make their holidays and spare time more interesting. Female students at Algalal School reported that they became more active in doing voluntary work during the summer holiday. They explained that, at school holiday time, they help in teaching women in the villages' literacy and organising some learning activities for children to have fun and learn new skills. Here, two female students from Algalal School reported about what they did in their last summer holiday:

FS1: You know, we are far away from much entertainment stuff, so each year we have what we called summer camp. Many girls in the village come together to teach elderly women reading and writing and also we help young children to memorise some verses from Quran.

FS2: And also allowing them to have fun by drawing or reading stories, I mean, help them to use spare time well and getting some excitement.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Similarly, students in an urban region agreed that they would like to be involved in doing voluntary work or learning new skills during the school holidays. They suggested that such activities will make their holiday more enjoyable. However, some of them complained that opportunities for social work at summer time are very limited. Here a male student from Alwatan School explained his experience in this regard:

Personally I would like to do voluntary work in the summer because you know schools are closed and I have plenty of spare time but did not know how to use it. Most friends go for sport but I do not like doing sport all the time and you know how hot the weather in Muscat is in the summer.

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

These last comments showed that students at the capital city were experiencing a lack of voluntary or social work programs. During the long summer school holiday such as the one in Oman¹², different social organisations could take advantage of this break to and help young adult use their spare time in a useful manner.

Overall, students gave various reasons for why they believe that civic participation is desirable. Their responses and justifications regarding the importance of civic participation reflected a promising disposition about engagement in the activities in the public sphere. However, further discussion with students showed that they do have different interests and dispositions about different forms of civic participation. The following sections will demonstrate students' disposition towards some local and global civic issues.

6.1.2 Disposition towards local civic life

Conversation with students exposed that students pay attention to various civic issues in their society. They also demonstrated the ability to comment on issues related to government performance and express opinions about opportunities to participate in the community. The findings related to this theme will be presented into two sub-themes: government policies, and voting in Majlis Alshura.

Government policies

Students showed interest in the performance of the government with regard to its ability to address some of society's problems. A female student at Alsalam School was arguing that, in comparison with neighbouring countries, the government does not provide enough support to clubs and youth organisations. She stated that she became aware of this difference when she spent her last summer holiday overseas. Students at Alnoor School criticized local authorities' methods of dealing with local issues such as the way water frequently disconnects in some suburbs in the city, the slowdown in the rehabilitation process of many public facilities in the aftermath of cyclone Gono, and lack of government initiative to address the high rate of fatal car

¹² The summer holiday in Oman started in June until mid of September

accidents. One female student at Alnoor School also argued that, because of the government routine, the country misses some economic development opportunities. When has been asked to detail this opinion, she replied:

I noticed that one investor was planning to build skyscraper here in Muscat but the government's routine hampered the project and therefore the investor decided to build his project in another country. We really should overcome such red-tape if we are really wanted to develop our country.

(Focus group interview-04-11-2008)

Students at Algalal School also complained about some government policies which are affecting the environment and people's health in their villages. They were unhappy about lack of response from government officials to the repeated correspondence from residents to move the landfill away from one village. They also critiqued government approval to a quarrying company that wanted to start its business close to one of the villages. From the students' understanding, a potential increase of respiratory diseases among villagers issue compelling people to work against this project. Further, a male student expressed his disappointment with government's lack of cooperation to help to solve this problem by saying:

I don't expect anything is going to change because this is a very big company and it has a wide influence in the community.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

However, other students' concerns about government performance were related to their direct self-interest. They conveyed their uneasiness about some challenges facing their generation like the lack of job opportunities, and limited spaces at higher education institutions. They argued that government policies need to address these issues because these problems affected their future wellbeing.

Overall, the findings indicated that young adults are connected to some public interests in society. They were also developing personal viewpoint in relation to government performance and policies.

Voting in Majlis Alshura

In order to identify students' disposition regarding their political participation, dialogue with students focused on Majlis Alshura. Focus group interviews tried to ascertain whether students are interested in taking part in the election process of this parliamentary institution when they become qualified to do so. Focused discourse with students about this form of political participation was driven by two reasons. First, it is the most prominent practice of political participation in Oman. Second, political education in the Omani curriculum draws considerable attention to this form of political participation. Students' responses articulated awareness about the role of this political body in Omani public life. They also showed an awareness of the electoral process, for example, the percentage of their region's representation in the parliament, and the political campaigning carried out by some candidates before the actual election. When this group of students was asked if they intend to participate in voting at Majlis Alshura, three different dispositions were noticed.

First: Keen to vote: Some students stated clearly that they will participate in the election process. They clarified that they would like to participate when they reach the age of voting. They viewed voting part of their rights as members in society. However, a male student at Alwatan School gave an interesting reason when asked about his disposition about voting at Majlis Alshura. He stated that he will vote because he would like to support his tribal candidate. Perhaps this disposition is in harmony with the behaviour of some voters in Oman. Some people are motivated to vote mainly because they want the candidate of their tribe to win the election. Although this disposition does not enjoy support from the rest of group who participated in the interview, it indicated that some new voters in Omani society are still driven by self-interest rather than national interest.

Second: Voting critically: A group of students appeared to be more critical about their participation in the election process. While they showed interest in taking place in the election process, they argued that their vote will only go for the qualified candidate. Some of them were critical about the behaviour of some voters who choose their candidate based on 'tribe logic'. They argued that some members at Majlis Alshura are not qualified to be elected in this representative body. Some

expressed disappointed about the performance of some representatives when discussing electors' concerns. The following quotation sheds light on the disposition of a group of male students' at Algalal School towards this form of political participation in Omani society:

MS1: Sure we will participate in the election processes, but we will elect only qualified candidates who have the ability to afford this kind of responsibility. Personally, I will only choose the efficient candidate even if the candidate's is my father or my brother.

MS2: I agree with Ahmed. These days' people nominate their candidate based on the logic of the tribe. If the candidate belongs to their tribe you will find them choosing him/her regardless of qualifications' aspects.

MS3: This exactly what happened in our village last year. The candidate was chief of the tribe and therefore, all the people here have chosen him. For two years, we are learning in this school how important choosing the right candidate. I am sure that when we become eligible to participate in the elections, we will only choose our representatives in Majlis Alshura according to his/her qualification.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

Third: Not willing to vote: Some students demonstrated a lack of interest in voting at Majlis Alshura. They stated that their interest is more aligned with doing voluntary work or collecting donation for people in need. Nevertheless, others stated that their lack of interest is due to the uselessness of such a political body. They argued that while Majlis Alshura has been established for long time, they did not notice its effectiveness in addressing public problems. Further, a male student at Alwatan School reported that he was not interested in voting at Majlis Alshura because candidates cannot be trusted. He argued:

You can't trust them [candidates]. Once a candidate promised the sport club to improve the football field if he got elected. Because of this promise, all the members in that club gave their votes to him. But he did not fulfil his promise; it is all propaganda.

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

Students' responses regarding the Majlis Alshura, was reflective of the ongoing debate in Omani society about the effectiveness of this parliamentary institution which was developed in Oman late 1990. Some individuals in Omani society argue that this council does not have the broad powers necessary to influence government decisions, and that its primary role is only advisory to various government agencies.

On the other hand, students' realisations of such arguments and criticism of the inadequate role played by this Council is a good sign regarding their potential involvement in the public sphere. Further, they showed a clear stance about some inappropriate practices associated with the electoral process wherein voters succumb to the influence of the tribe or propaganda promises when they choose their representatives. The assertion of some respondents that their choice in the future will be built on the efficiency of the candidate is another positive indication that learners are aware about the negative impact of such behaviour among voters.

6.1.3 Disposition towards global issues

Dialogue with students reveals that they do develop disposition related to some global issues. Data showed that their dispositions were mainly associated with two main concerns. The first one was about peace and conflict in the world. The second was disposition for the environment. The following two sub-themes will demonstrate findings of this regards.

Peace and conflict in the world

Students explained that they learned about the role played by the United Nations to secure peace in the world. They expressed a wish to see peace and harmony between all nations in the world. Some demonstrated disappointment about the global effort to address issues like poverty, ongoing conflicts in Somalia, and war in Iraq.

However, the data showed that students were quite interested in the conflict in the Middle East in relation to the Palestinian problem. Female students at Alnoor revealed their sympathy with the suffering of Palestine's children. They pointed out that they would like to give them some donations and see them enjoying a peaceful life. At the Learning Resource Centre of this school there were two short reports written by students about Palestine. The first one was about the history of Palestinian territory and the second one was titled 'when Philistine problem would be solved'. Similarly, at Alsalam School, students organised a play about Palestine which was performed for all the girls in the school and was also presented for an audience outside the school. For them, this play was welcomed by the audience because it

dealt with an issue of public interest. Further, a female student at Alnoor School mentioned that she and her family were worried about the ongoing conflict between Israel and some Arabic countries. Such observations indicated that this political problem in the Middle East is place of students' interest. Also, the level of interest among this group of learners about such a complicated political problem could be driven by the fact that such conflict is one of longest in modern history. Other factors could also be related to characteristics of Oman's geographic location and culture. Oman is classified geographically as a Middle Eastern country. Its geographic position leads for continuous interaction with the Palestinian situation. Similarly, cultural characteristic such as language and religion are other factors making people in Oman interested in this political issue. However, the formal discourse in Oman is always supportive of the urgent need to overcome this problem by negotiations between Israel and Palestinian representatives to avoid any further threat to the fragile stability and peace in this part of world.

Disposition for the environment

Across the context of this research, there was evidence indicating that students have favourable disposition towards environmental issues. They showed an interest to learn about environmental issues such as global warming, desertification, pollution and the ongoing shrinking of green areas around the world. They also reported their involvement in celebrating global and regional environmental occasions such as World Environment Day, World Water Day, and Tree Day. While students across sites showed an interest in environmental issues, students at Alnoor School, the private school, were more eager to express their interest in this issue. In one of observed classes at this school, the Social Studies teacher raised a question about factors which are negatively impacting life on earth. Students' comments reflected interest about wide range of human activities which threaten live on Earth. A female student concluded the dialogue in that issue by saying:

I think it's everyone responsibility to stop these dangers.

(Field note-0211-2008)

Similarly, a male student from the same school reported that he cooperated with other students in his class to design a PowerPoint program called “Virtual Zoo”. This work was part of their academic projects. The program aimed to inform other students in the school about different animals in the world and how they can help to protect them.

6.1.4 Summary of research question four

This part of thesis aimed to explore students’ dispositions towards civic participation. In summarizing the findings of research Question Four, the findings showed that students, in general, have a favourable disposition towards community participation. The findings showed that participating students do value the importance of engagement in public life. For some students, civic participation is important because it reflects a commitment towards community well-being; others find civic participation a source of personal development, while other respondents explained that they gain enjoyment and a sense of happiness from participating in the public activities. The finding also showed that some students were in a position to criticize some government policies. Mixed responses were noticed about their anticipated political participation in the future. Data revealed that while some students are interested in political participation, others were either willing to participate with a critical view, or not willing to participate at all. The findings also explained that students were interested in some abroad political issues. In this regard, the conflict in the Middle East was one area of concern among this group of learners. Environmental issues were matter of interest among some participants. Some students demonstrated an interest in and a desire to contribute to environment protection initiatives.

Having presented findings of research Question Four, the following sections will present the findings of research Question Five.

6.2 Research Question Five: Civic Participation and Demographic Factors

In what ways do gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality factors influence Omani students' opportunities to develop civic participation?

This study drew attention to whether factors such as gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality have any impact on programs and activities concerning civic participation at Basic Education schools. Similarly, it attempted to find out if these factors have any effect on students' dispositions and opportunities towards civic participation. Focusing on these three factors in this research was for two main reasons: First, the literature on civic participation revealed that gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality were important factors helped to derive better understandings of civic participation as a social phenomenon (Flanagan et al., 1998; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Lay, 2006; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001; Schulz et al., 2010). Second, such factors appeared critical in Omani society. In the last four decades, Oman experienced changes in terms of women's rights and their role in public life, and in social and economic development initiatives. Nevertheless, geographic factors are still an ongoing challenge for the development story in Oman. The 2003 census showed that more than 33% of Omanis live in rural regions (Ministry of National Economy, 2005). The following sections will present findings related to gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality respectively.

6.2.1 Gender

The multi-case study design utilized in this investigation helped to explore gender roles in relation to civic participation by purposely including a girl-only school in the study. Dialogue with respondents was initiated to find out whether gender issues affected schools' missions in developing learners' civic participation and if there was any difference between female and male students related to their understanding and disposition of civic participation. In analysing data related to this issue four themes were identified: equality of learning experience, opportunities for community

engagement, civic knowledge, and disposition towards political participation. The following sections will present finding of these themes respectively.

Equality of learning experience

The data demonstrated that respondents acknowledged equality between men and women as a core principle in the law of the modern state in Oman. They reported that women enjoy equal opportunities in terms of education, employment, and political participation. Principals and teachers stated that male and female students do enjoy similar facilities and support regardless of gender. When asked about gender issues in the Omani society, the Social Studies teacher at Alsalam School stated:

From the perspective of law and regulation, both men and women enjoy equal rights. And you can see by yourself what is going on in Oman today. Women become more active and have increasing influential voice in the public sphere, they become members in Majlis Alshura and, in the last few years, a number of women attained the rank of Minister. This wasn't the case in the past where women were denied participation in public life because custom and tradition. In this school, we offered all girls equal learning opportunities. But let me say that some families don't like girls to participate in public life frequently but you know what, the situation is getting better because of education. I remember that my uncle was resisting the idea of sending girls to higher education but when his own daughter attained high grades in secondary school he changed his mind and allowed her to go to university. Also, because of customs, families were more frequently refusing girls participation in the organized tours outside school; today such cases are hardly noticed.

(Interview-20-10-2008)

The above quotation of a female teacher in Oman explains the move in Omani society in last few decades to recognize the status of women and open the door for them to play an equal role to men in public life. But what is more interesting is that the movement towards women's rights in Oman was mainly driven by the government's new laws and regulation instead of pressure exerted by women themselves or the demands of the grassroots. In the modern history of Oman, there has never been any protest movement by women to secure or demand equal rights with men. Nevertheless, as can also be observed from a previous quotation, traditions and customs of a conservative society such as Oman have played a significant role in shaping the level and nature of participation by women in public life. However, such

social norms appeared to be changing dramatically as the Social Studies teacher demonstrated thought her uncle's view about girls attending higher education institutions.

However, the data also showed that there were some gender challenges affecting the researched contexts in terms of presenting equal access and similar opportunities to some learning experiences which were seen to be important for healthy civic development. Algalal School gave the researcher a unique opportunity to discover whether gender differences have any effect on school activities linked to civic participation. Unlike other sites, students at Algalal School were studying in mix-gender classes from Grade 1-10. While educators at Algalal confirmed that both boys and girls were enjoying an equal learning environment, they accepted that social culture is affecting the way they of some learning experiences are organised. The principal explained that school's trips were organized separately for boys and girls because some families don't like girls to return home after the sun has set. This gives male students the advantage of being able to travel to Muscat and visit some social, government, and NGOs. However, the school trips planned for girls were always targeting the nearby areas to ensure that they got home at an acceptable time for their families. A female student put this issue like this:

There is inequality in organizing school trips. Last month boys went to visit the Army museum in Muscat. When our turn came, they took us to visit the textile factory because it is not far away from the school.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Avoiding remote tours for female students was also mentioned by female students at Alsalam School. They explained that their families are more likely not to allow them to participate in any tour outside Muscat. Consistent with this note, the principal of Alsalam indicated that parents do not like any learning activities organised for girls at weekend and therefore the majority of co-curricular activities took place during normal working days. Further, she demonstrated that three girls from her school had chosen to visit the United State of America as part of MoE international cooperation programs, but their families refused to give girls permission to go.

Moreover, the data demonstrated that female students do not have equal opportunities to exercise activities related to the Scout and Guide Club. At Algalal School, the Life Skills teacher was the coordinator of the Scout and Guide Club. She explained that most parents do not find clubs' activities appropriate for girls and therefore girls rarely chose to become members of the Scouts and Guide Club. Weekend camping organised as part of Scout and Guide Club activities was another issue mentioned with regard gender unequal learning experiences. Male students explained that female students do not attend club's camping because families do not give permission to girls to attending school activities at the weekend. This limitation of girls' engagement at Algalal School was reported by a male student when he stated:

Look, there is equality between men and women in terms of government law, but in reality, still some are parents controlling girls' choices. You know some families do not like to see their daughters' photos in the television or magazines, even on school activities. For example, last Thursday¹³, the school organised a camp, but not one female student participated.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

Another gender issue at Algalal School was observed at morning assembly. Only male students salute the flag on a daily basis. From field note, flag salutation was a male activity every day of observation. On the other hand, in all morning assemblies, female students were the ones who were running the School Radio Club. This observation was also confirmed by the Social Studies teacher who coordinates this co-curricular activity. She confirmed that girls monopolized this activity because they showed more initiative and had the confidence to speak publicly. When asked if she tried to encourage male students to take active part in morning Radio Club, she replied:

Yes I do. Once, the principal asked me to give male students the responsibility to run School Radio for a complete week. I trained group of them and I encourage them to take their roles seriously, but unfortunately their performance, when compared with the girls, caused me frustration and disappointment.

(Interview-10-11-2008)

¹³First day of the weekend in Oman.

From another perspective, male students at Algalal School argued that studying with girls in the same class does not allow them to discuss some issues of community concern. When they were asked to give an example of these issues, they talked about their experience in learning about HIV. They demonstrated that girls' presence at class stopped them from asking in-depth questions about this disease because it leads to the discussion of sexual relationships. They stated that this form of conversation was always avoided in their class. This was an interesting comment because this school, in particular, was participating in a program supported by UNESCO and UNICEF called 'Peer Education' which aimed to increase awareness among young adults about HIV disease. Nevertheless, male students considered mix-gender classrooms to be an obstacle to the discussion such issues openly at their classroom.

Opportunities for community engagement

The data showed that there were differences between female and male students in terms of volunteer and social work opportunities. Male students were enjoying more freedom to conduct volunteer work outside the school in comparison with female students. Respondents mentioned that because of cultural norms, female students were not participating intensively in volunteer or social work. They stated that some people find women going for some forms of volunteer work in public places as inappropriate social behaviour. In the coming excerpt, male students at Alwatan School explained their observations about female students' opportunities for doing volunteer work:

MS1: Female students do enjoy equal opportunities for volunteer work. But this is not always the case; some people consider some activities to be inappropriate for girls.

Researcher: Like what?

MS2: Like going out to clean the beach because girls can be subjected to the harassment of some careless people and this unacceptable for families.

Researcher: In your case, do you expect that your family might give permission to your sister to participate in such activity?

MS2: Impossible.

MS3: Look it is all about culture, if the activity can be carried without mixing between the sexes and preserving the privacy of women, then families will have no problem. But also I noticed these days that many families do not have a problem with mixed sexes participating in activities.

MS4: Look, in the end, male students are carrying out volunteer activities more than females because of society's values and culture.

(Focus group interview-14-10-2008)

Such a comment was also mentioned by female students at Alnoor School. They stated that because of the stereotype of girls' role in public life they do not participate in some community events. Three girls at this school mentioned:

FS1: I believe boys opportunities to participate in public life are much better. You saw recently the celebration of the arrival of the Olympic torch. Because the celebration took place in the streets and public squares, girls' participation was very limited in comparison to boys. This was because; most families do not give permission to girls to participate at such public events.

FS2: Yes I agree. I was interested in learning Equestrian, but my family does not like the idea. They said this sport does not suit me because I am girl.

FS3: You know once the Women's Association in Muscat was arranging an interview with girls to be broadcasting in the one of the television programs. Some girls did not participate because their families believed that girls should not participate in such programs. It is all about customs and community traditions.

(Focus group interview-04-11-2008)

Lack of opportunities due to customs and society culture was also noticed when students at Algalal School reported about their role in helping needy people after the Gono hurricane. At that time, some male students went to the capital Muscat to do some volunteers work. The female students, however, remained in villages to collect donations and cook charity dishes. Further, female students were very clear in this regard when they reported that male students are enjoying better opportunities in communicating with all residents and getting benefits from the only sport team in the main village. In the coming quotation, two female students explaining their experience in relation to gender equality:

FS1: Look they [male students] go to pray at the mosque where they can meet friends and other people in a daily basis but, as you know, women rarely go to the mosque because it is not a compulsory task for women.

FS2: Also, activities organised by sport team in the village are only for males. They enjoy playing football and sometimes the team organises cultural activities which are only for men and sometimes the club's members go to other villages to do some volunteer activities.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

These examples show that female students enjoy fewer opportunities for civic participation. Community culture and family's expectations about women's role in public life appear to be the reason behind such unequal opportunities.

Civic knowledge

Exchanging conversations with female and male students about wide range of issues related to civic participation such as government structures, civic life, and community interest throughout focus group provided the researcher with the opportunity to compare the level of civic knowledge of the two groups. Data showed that female students had a much better understanding of political structures in society, government institutions, and NGOs, as well as being familiar with the State Law. Further, female students showed greater awareness about global issues such as environmental challenges and forms of conflict that threaten peace in the world. They were also able to detail the role of United Nation and some of its affiliated organisations which protect the environment, health and promote peace in the world. In comparison, male students' responses were partial and sometimes very abstract.

Similar observations were made with regard to the level of engagement and participation in the classroom. Female students were more active in all observed classes when compare to male students. Their interactions and cooperation with teachers and each other was much more advanced than the male students. An observed classroom at Algalal School provided a closer opportunity to examine this conclusion. In all the observed sessions, girls demonstrated active involvement in different learning activities. Also, their responses to teachers' questions and instructions reflected self-confidence and deep understanding. In comparison, male students were less active and their participation was mainly driven by teachers' encouragement more than self-initiative. Agreeing with this observation, all educators at Algalal School acknowledged that female students were more active, cooperative and positive in terms of their involvement in all forms of school activities. They also indicated that there were obvious differences between female and male students with regard to their personality. For them, female students were more active and showed initiative compare with male students. Some explained that girls were much better than boys in their academic achievement. This conclusion was

emphasised by the Islamic teacher at Algalal School who worked in two different schools before he was placed at the investigated school. When he was asked if there are any gender differences related to civic participation, he replied:

In my first year I was placed in a mix-gender rural school in south Oman. This school was in the middle of mountains. After that I transferred to work in a male students' school in north Oman before I was placed again in this mix-gender school and commenced this journey. I am in a position to tell you [researcher] that there is always a difference between female and male students' regarding academic achievement and attitudes towards civic participation. Female students are more confident, thoughtful and work in a systematic way. Male students have the desire to conduct community service but their ability to work systematically and logically is poor.

(Interview-11-11-2008)

Such an observation from this teacher further explains the reasons behind female students' better understanding of some aspects of civic knowledge compared to male students. When students showed an interest and active participation in the learning environment, they are more likely to acquire deeper understandings for what is meant to be active citizen.

Disposition towards political participation

Students' responses related to political participation was mainly identified through their dispositions towards participation at Majlis Alshura. This form of political participation was the most obvious example mentioned by respondents in this course of research. The majority of male students stated that they will take part in the election process of Majlis Alshura and will have a say about their preferred candidates. In turn, the majority of female students were either not willing to take part in this form of community participation or not sure about their decision in the future. In the coming quotation, female students at Alsalam School demonstrated their position in relation to their future participation of Majlis Alshura election:

FS1: I am not sure; I think if someone encourages me I may participate.

FS2: Until now, I am not convinced about the effectiveness of Majlis Alshura. When I get older, I would like to do more charity and volunteer work.

FS3: Look, we are more likely not going to participate. I don't think anyone had convinced us about importance of Majlis Alshura. Actually, even the

conversations at home about Majlis Alshura don't really encouraging us to go for elections.

(Focus group interview-21-10-2008)

Link to the last comment, there were two female students from Alnoor School who reported that they were more interesting in doing volunteer work and charity work instead of following elections of Majlis Alshura or what is representatives propaganda. Although similar dispositions related to Majlis Alshura by some male students was also mentioned, the majority reported interest in taking part in the elections process. When male students at Alnoor School were asked about their participation in the election of Majlis Alshura in future, they replied:

MS1: Personally I intend to participate.

MS2: Me too

MS3: I am not sure yet, I mean have not decided.

MS4: Definitely I will participate, we should become like role models for others in the society.

(Focus group interview-03-11-2008)

The negative attitude among female students towards political participation seems to be an area for further investigations. Identifying the reasons behind such negative dispositions would be very interesting especially given the findings that female students in the researched context are more aware about civic issues at both local and global perspectives.

Overall, the findings showed that women's participation in public life is increasing remarkably. However, the results suggest that sometimes female students do not enjoy civic learning opportunities to the same extent as boys. Similarly, girls' participation in public life appears to be limited compared to boys. The findings demonstrated that culture and traditions in society have an impact on shaping the level and nature of female participation in public life. Finally, the findings suggest that female students demonstrated higher levels of civic knowledge and less interest for political participation.

6.2.2 Socioeconomic background

Socioeconomic factors were investigated to identify their role in learners' civic participation. To examine this factor in this study, a private school was chosen where the majority of students' families have high incomes. As a result of the coding process, three sub-themes were identified: income and civic participation, family level of education, and civic discourse at home. The following sections will elaborate on the findings related to each section in detail.

Income and civic participation

Respondents demonstrated two different opinions regarding the relationship between families' level of income and students' civic participation.

Level of income is not important. Some respondents stated that economic status of students has nothing to do with students' involvement in the activities within the school or in the surrounding society. School principals at the public schools explained that students were participating on an equal basis in all activities regardless of their economic background. They reported that their schools were part of a national program designed to ensure that students who came from needy families were getting the necessary financial support. Also, all three investigated public schools were getting benefits from another charity programs designed to provide students with financial support to purchase some school supplies such as bags and stationery. From their point of view, these programs ensure that students from low income families get the support necessary to ensure that they engage in learning experiences on equal basis with other students.

Some teachers also agreed that the level of income is not related to civic participation. They explained that at times students who come from affluent families were indifferent when it comes to participating in the activities of public benefit or community service. In the same regard, some students' opinions indicated that both poor and rich students were participating equally in social work and working as group in conduction volunteer work. They suggested that all students, regardless of economic background, were in a position to participate in areas of public interest or

community service. One male student from Algalal School expressed his opinion in this regard by saying:

There is no difference between poor and rich students. Each student has something to do because money is not everything, time is also important. When we go to clean the mosque, all students, whether they belong to rich or poor family, take part in this volunteer work... and even when we collect donations in the school, the way we do it takes into account students' situations, avoiding the embarrassment of some students who might be in difficult financial situation.

(Focus group interview-08-11-2008)

Level of income is crucial for civic participation. Some other evidence showed that low income has negative impacts on students' level of civic participation. At one of informal discussion with the principal of Alwatan School, the researcher raised the issue of considerable level of absenteeism in the observed class. The principal stated that the rate of absenteeism among students is from poor families. He also added:

This group of students does miss important opportunities, not only for their civic participation development, but also the opportunity for overall good life in the future.

(Field note-14-10-2008)

The English teacher at Alsalam and Science teacher at Alwatan also agreed that the level of income affecting students' opportunities for a rich and equal civic experience. In the words of the Science teacher:

I think poor students do experience a lack of community engagement. You know, last year I had group of students who came from needy families. I noticed that they were disengaged from most activities at class or school. When we investigated their individual cases, we realized that they spent all night fishing to support their families' income.

(Interview-13-10-2008)

From another perspective, the richness of the environment for civic participation could be seen when looking to some aspects of the learning environment at Alnoor School which were available to students coming from families with a higher economic background. This private school runs programs such as sisterhoods with international schools including an international exchange program and tourism week

which allowed students to develop further civic knowledge and skills. The school was also demonstrating stronger and ongoing involvement with a wide range of NGOs when compared to its counterpart in the public sector. For this reason, it is more likely that students who were enjoying learning in such an environment may develop a better understanding of civic participation and greater engagement at public life.

Family level of education

All educators value the importance of the family's level of education in enhancing students' engagement in school activities and different forms of community participation. However, some argued that this dimension is not always a key factor. Some teachers confirmed that throughout their experience, they realised that even students whose parents were not educated could improve themselves and take an active role in the school and surrounding society. The principal of Algalal stated:

Parents' level of education is not always essential in enhancing students' involvement, at least from my own experience. I always come across students coming from poor and uneducated parents, yet they have an excellent academic record, and they are very active members in the school and the surrounding society. More let me support this conclusion by telling you about my daughter. She studied in this school, and I am providing her all the support she might need, and yet her academic achievement and involvement in the school's activities are less in comparison to other students in the same class who come from families do not enjoy any level of education.

(Interview-08-11-2008)

Civic discourse at home

Home discussions are an important way of developing students' involvement and interest about the common good. Nevertheless, the findings showed that most students did not experience rich civic discourse at home. Although some students reported that parents are talking about issues of public concern such as increase in the cost of living, drought, and traffic congestion, students' involvement in such conversation at home seems to be limited and sometimes passive. When female students from Algalal School were asked about their involvement in discussing public issues at home, they replied:

FS1: Speaking at the house about society's issues rarely happens, but sometimes I hear them [family members] talking about the ongoing increase of prices.

FS2: Most conversations at home are about drought and possible solutions.

FS3: They speak about some public issues, but I only a listening person.

FS4: Sometimes they talk about these issues, but I am not involved in these conversations.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

These comments could be understood as part of cultural norms, especially in rural areas. As part of people's customs, children should not be involved in adult discourse. Although such beliefs are starting to change in Omani society, it appears that some families still carry out such social behaviours. In contrast, students at Alnoor School reported a richness of civic discourse at home. For most of them, parents do talk about issues related to public life like ongoing arguments at Majlis Alshura, needed services in the regions where they live, the collapse of share market, and government performance. A male student at Alnoor School indicated that his father is always keen to listen to his opinion and share with him issues of public interest. These examples of civic discourse within high income families explain the significant role of home in widening students' interest about all various forms of civic participation including; political discourse, economic challenges, and developing students' ability to engage in an informative civic dialogue.

Overall, respondents demonstrated mixed opinions regarding the relationships between the level of income and students' civic participation. In general, the findings also suggested that students do not enjoy rich civic experiences at home.

6.2.3 Geographic location

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, identifying the school's geographic location in developing civic participation could enhance or inhibit the investigated context with regard to developing learners' civic participation. Throughout interviews with all participants, attention was focused on finding out how school location could affect programs or learning experiences concerning civic participation. This was given special attention when visiting Algalal School. As

mentioned methodology chapter, this school is classified as one of the rural schools in north Oman.

The data showed that participant from urban schools acknowledged that their school does enjoy a rich environment supportive of civic participation. In turn, evidence collected from Algalal School indicated that school location does negatively affect schools' efforts in providing a rich environment for developing positive trends among students towards different aspects of civic participation. In coding the data related to schools' location, two sub-themes were identified: Limited opportunities for civic experience and limited access to some civic experience. The following sections will elaborate on the findings of these sub-themes in detail.

Limited opportunities for civic experience

School's principal at Algalal suggested that the school's geographic location creates some obstacles affecting the school's capacity to offer rich civic experiences. He argued that being a rural school leads to a higher teaching load. Because of limited number of staff, the same teacher may be responsible for teaching students from year five to twelve. According to him, this situation causes mental and physical fatigue for teachers and negatively affects their performance quality. Further, the long distance between the school and REA represents another real challenge in terms of attending training programs and involvement in cultural, social and national activities organized by REA or its affiliated schools.

In the same manner, teachers identified the geographical location of their school as a big obstacle in enriching students' civic participation experience. They argued that the teaching load they experience in such rural schools is limiting their capacity to introduce further civic experience to students. This situation was summarized clearly in the comment of an Islamic Education teacher when he said:

[Location]is a real challenge...don't forget that our school is located between mountains ... if we were a coastal school or close to city centres like Sohar for example, it will be much easier for us to communicate with a wide range of government departments or the private sector... when we organise a day

trip for students as part of their learning program, they come back to school exhausted physically and mentally because of long distances.

(Interview-11-11-2008)

From another perspective, the limitation of civic experience could also be examined by looking to the nature of volunteering and community service demonstrated by participant from this rural school. The most cited examples of voluntary work mentioned by male students were related to agriculture as the core economic activity in the village. Ensuring that the watercourse of the village is clear and helping village residents to clean up palm farms were the major areas of voluntary work in this remote village. Female students were mainly helping families or organizing some teaching courses for adults. Clearly, scarcity of social work or community activities organized by government agencies or other NGO institutions in such remote areas does not support a richness of learning experience needed for active civic participation. In turn, examples of voluntary work mentioned by students in city schools reflected greater richness and a diverse civic experience. They expressed more frequent engagement in working with both government and NGOs. Their social work appears to be more diverse, including working on health issues, environment, and social problems. They also demonstrated better opportunities to learn about other culture and were exposed to various forms of public activities.

Limited access to some civic experience

Data showed that respondents at the rural school, Algalal, found the remoteness of their school to be an obstacle to the creation of an interactive civic learning context. In the opinion of the school principal, geographic location reduced the schools' participation at events and activities conducted by governmental and other NGOs, which are often based in the capital Muscat or other larger cities. Similarly, students had the feeling that their school's location minimised their opportunity to participate in some public activities or to identify some NGO activities and functions. They argued that the school's geographic location is the first reason stated by their teachers when they expressed willingness to visit charity organisation or take part at its activities. To support this argument, they indicated that, because of the school's geographic location, they didn't participate in the rally organized in Muscat to increase awareness regarding cancer. In the following citation, two female students

commenting on their school's location and access for some civic activities and association:

FS1: We wish to visit some charity organisation like the Omani Charitable Organisations, and the Alwafa Volunteer Centre and Rehabilitation Centre for persons with disabilities. We studied about these organisations theoretically in the class but we don't have the chance to see them on the ground.

Researcher: Why don't you ask your school's administration to arrange such visits?

FS2: We keep asking but the answer is always ready, the school location is far away from these institutions and the arrangement process will take long time.

(Focus group interview-10-11-2008)

Clearly, the above quotations demonstrate that students at this rural school are willing to be involved in further civic experience by learning more about some NGOs in Oman. However, the remoteness of their school appeared to be a stumbling block for such interest. Furthermore, students appeared not to be convinced about their school's commitment to overcome such challenges and to provide them better connections to real life experiences.

Overall, the geographic location is an important factor for supporting students' civic development. The findings suggest that students in the investigated rural school experience a lack of richness and limited access to some civic experience.

6.2.4 Summary of research question five

This question aimed to find out whether factors of gender, socioeconomic background and school locality effects students' civic participation. In terms of gender, the findings showed that boys enjoyed further opportunities for civic participation. The data showed that culture and traditions of Omani society give male students more freedom and space for public engagement. In turn, girls demonstrated a higher level of civic knowledge and less interest in political participation. Their awareness of the political institutions in Oman, NGOs, and recent local and global challenges was much better than male students. They also demonstrated that they were more interested in doing charity and social work than in political forms of

participation. Socioeconomic background appeared to be critically important when it comes to the enrichment of learning environment. The data showed that students of a higher economic status enjoy greater civic experiences. They enjoy well structured and comprehensive civic experiences at both the local and the global level. The family's role in developing learners' interest and commitment towards public life was more evident amongst students who belong to families with higher income. Students belonging to a higher socioeconomic environment enjoyed opportunities to exchange conversation with parents about issues of public interest. Regarding the location factor, participants from rural schools acknowledged that remoteness lessened a school's ability to enrich learners' civic participation. Having the opportunity to approach and interact with a wide range of government and NGOs was a challenging issue for the students in the remote regions.

6.3 Summary of Chapter Six

Chapter Six presented finding of Question Four and Five. Question Four aimed to explore students' dispositions towards civic participation. Question Five aimed to explore the influence of some demographic factors on students' civic participation. As a result of the analysis process, the data exposed that students value the role of civic participation in developing their society. The findings demonstrated that students are interested in local civic issues such government performance and they are interested in issues related to the global community such as the environment and peaceful life on earth. Similarly, some students showed interest in political participation. However, others were more interested in doing non-political forms of civic participation. Finally, factors such as gender, locality and socioeconomic status were revealed to be important issues in the researched context attempting to introduce students to a richer civic participation experience.

Having presented the findings of current research in Chapter Five and Six, Chapter Seven discusses the ways in which the findings relate to other literature in the field and make suggestions for further studies.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

The study is an attempt to explore the role of the educational reform plan, Basic Education system, in developing civic participation among young adults in the Sultanate of Oman. In particular, the research investigated in-depth the role of the formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities in promoting the learning environment in which required knowledge, skills and dispositions for civic participation are developed. The study also examined students' disposition towards civic participation. In addition, the study investigated some demographic factors in relation to young adults' participation in civic life. As this study aimed to explore the schooling system's role in developing students' civic participation in Oman, it contributed to the literature and the widening understanding of educational trends and practices in relation to civic participation development in the Middle East.

This final chapter has four main sections. The first section will provide a discussion of key findings in relation to the literature. Themes will be presented and discussed in relations to each of the five research questions. The second and third sections will discuss contributions and limitations of the research. The final two sections will suggest the direction for needed research in Oman for the future and finish with a concluding note.

7.1 Key Findings and Links to the Literature

This section presents the key findings of this thesis in relation to suggestions from some previous studies. The findings and discussion of this section will be presented sequentially through the five research questions.

Q1: What spaces are available in the formal curriculum for developing Omani students' civic participation?

This question aimed to explore the role of curriculum in developing civic participation in the participating Basic Education schools. Analysis of the data revealed three main themes along with some sub-themes (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Summary of themes and sub-themes of Research Question One: formal curriculum and civic participation development

Positive change for civic participation
<p>Curriculum and civic participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Life Skills subject</i> • <i>Social Studies subject</i> • <i>Civic topics across other subjects</i>
<p>Challenges surrounding curriculum implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Overloading of topics</i> • <i>Insufficient pre-service preparation</i> • <i>Lack of efficient and quality professional development</i> • <i>Unsupportive relationship with supervisors</i> • <i>Lack of resources</i>

The formal curriculum is an important area in the school to enhance students' civic participation. Through the formal curriculum, students learn about their society history, culture, government structure, and various civic organizations. They also learn about global issues which affect peace and development in the world. The formal curriculum is a vital component to empower students for critical thinking and engagement in different aspects of civic life (Galston, 2007; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Print, 2007; Schulz et al., 2010).

The first theme of 'Positive change for civic participation' highlights that respondents valued the changes introduced by the Basic Education system in relation to curriculum reform and its focus on the development of civic participation. There was wide agreement among respondents that the newly introduced formal curriculum implemented in the participating Basic Education schools helps to expand learning opportunities for students to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The data showed that the Basic Education schools expanded the allocated time for civic education subjects compared to the previous educational system, General Education. Most educators in this study agreed that the aims and content knowledge of the new curriculum in the participating Basic Education schools was relevant to students' civic life and had a greater focus on topics in which students could be involved in

and committed to participation in the public life. This positive disposition towards the role of the new formal curriculum in developing civic participation is consistent with the aims stated in the Theoretical Framework of Basic Education (MoE, 2001). This document explains clearly that improving students' engagement in public life is one of the educational reforms anticipated aims. This trend in the Basic Education system is consistent with many educational researchers who emphasise the significant role of education in developing learners' participation in public life and preparing new generations to be informed citizens (Dewey, 1916; Kerr, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

This focus on civic and citizenship education throughout the formal curriculum in the Basic Education schools appeared as an important approach utilized in the Basic Education system to support Omani schools' civic missions. Strengthening the school's role in developing young adults' participation in public life is consistent with many educational reform initiatives around the world. In the last decades, many countries started to develop the civic and citizenship education curriculum to empower young adults for civic participation (Schulz et al., 2010). In Oman, the suggested teaching plan in the Basic Education system comprised expansion of teaching hours for subjects related to civic education side by side with other subjects such as Science, Mathematics, and Languages (MoE, 2006b).

Interestingly, the Basic Education schools are offering civic courses core units from Grade 1 until Grade 12. For example, the Life Skills subject is offered from Grade 1 and Social Studies subject is offered from Grade 3. Such trend in the Basic Education schools is in tune with research and experts recommendations for better representation of civic courses in the educational system (CIRCLE, 2003; Crick, 1998; Galston, 2007; Lay, 2006; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Rosen, 1999). Compared with many countries where civic courses are offered sometimes as an elective course or only in specific grades (Schulz et.al, 2010), the Basic Education schools in Oman appeared to have higher commitment to civic education. As findings revealed, respondents regarded the prominence of civic education in the Basic Education system's new curriculum as a promising step for developing learners' interest and participation in public life and thus contributing towards the achievement of the aims of the educational philosophy in the country.

The positive disposition towards the civic role of the new formal curriculum in the participating Basic Education schools was examined further throughout the findings of the second theme 'curriculum and civic participation'. This theme revealed that the Life Skills subject, Social Studies, and other subjects were utilized to develop the needed civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. These findings showed that the participating Basic Education schools adopted two approaches to develop civic participation throughout the curriculum: first, by introducing two compulsory subjects focusing mainly on civic education and, second, by integrating civic topics and related civic values across other subjects. Using these two approaches in the curriculum can be considered as an indication that citizenship education is one of the underscored aims in the Basic Education schools. Such an approach for citizenship education is consistent with many previous studies which emphasize the important role of both approaches in developing learners' commitment to civic life and to expand the available spaces for civic education throughout the formal curriculum (Crick, 1998; Huddleston & Kerr, 2006; Rosen, 1999; Schulz et al., 2010).

The Life Skills and Social Studies subjects were the two core units identified by respondents as cornerstones in developing civic values among participating Basic Education students. The Life Skills subject was described by respondents as a major venue for developing knowledge and skills needed for active citizenry. As the data showed, this subject provides a space for elevating students' awareness about some aspects of civic life such as the political system in the country, voluntary work, and NGOs. This new core subject appeared to be a vital approach to civic education in the Omani educational system. Indeed, Life Skills subject explains that the formal curriculum of the Basic Education system is planned to draw more attention to civic education. Similarly, the Social Studies subject was identified as another cornerstone in developing civically engaged citizens. This subject worked to expand students' civic experiences by focusing on both local and global aspects of civic life. Although the Social Studies subject is also part of a previous traditional educational system in Oman, General Education, respondents agreed that new formal curriculum is more developed in terms of content and other related social skills. The data also showed that this subject is planned to focus on the global aspect of civic participation. As many researchers suggested, global issues are an important component for students' civic development (Banks, 2008; Edwards, 2001; Falk, 1993; Noddings, 2005).

Overall, the two compulsory civic units in the participating Basic Education schools are consistent with many studies which indicate that offering civic courses plays a significant role in providing students with knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for civic participation (Feldman et al., 2007; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Rogers, 2009; Torney-Purta, 2002).

Furthermore, presentation of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout other subjects was also noticed in the current research findings. The consideration of subjects like Islamic Education, English Language, and Science Education in this study revealed that the formal curriculum of these subjects does provide a basis for civic development. Most teachers valued the role of these subjects in developing civic participation. They also demonstrated an awareness regarding the civic dimension of their subjects. This approach of civic education in the Basic Education schools is consistent with many studies and confirms the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in developing civic participation (Atweh & Brady, 2009; Avard, 2006; Crick, 1998; Gutstein, 2003; Huddleston & Kerr, 2006; Lin et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2010; Yadav, 2007).

While the findings indicated that considerable attention to civic education is given throughout the Basic Education system curriculum, the last theme of research Question One ‘challenges surrounding curriculum implementation’ shows some challenges remain related to the implementation of the Basic Education system new formal curriculum. As shown from the data, some participants suggested that the curriculum is overloaded by topics. Other respondents raised issues related to lack of pre-service teachers preparation, lack of professional development, unsupportive relationships with supervisors, and lack of resources as hindrances they face in their attempts to develop civic participation in their subjects. These challenges were described by participants as real obstacles negatively affecting the desired achievement of civic outcomes.

Furthermore, some participants expressed concern that the formal curriculum is overloaded with unnecessary topics. More research would be needed to determine if the major two subjects of civic education, Life Skills and Social Studies, are working in an integrated manner to serve the needed civic experience. In fact, some previous

studies on the Basic Education system's formal curriculum conducted in Oman reported similar observations (Alamerei, 2007; Al-nofli, 2010). Taking into account the wide space available to civic education in the Basic Education teaching plan (two core units), there is a need to ensure that this space is not overloaded with unnecessary topics and the two civic units are working in an integrated manner to introduce students to new and effective civic experiences. Furthermore, this issue also returns to some extent to Galston's (2001, p. 2) question: "what degree of civic and political knowledge is required to be a competent democratic citizen". Taking into account Galston's question, the evaluation of the civic units implemented in the Basic Education schools should help to ensure that aims and content knowledge of the formal curriculum is supporting effectively the Basic Education schools' civic mission.

Some others identified challenges in this course of research which are consistent with other research which investigated the educational system in Oman. For example, the lack of pre-service preparation was reported by Almamarei (2009). The study showed a gap in the intentions of the implemented educational policy regarding the requirements of teaching citizenship education in the schools and the actual practices of teacher education preparation programmes. Also, the study showed that policy makers at MoE were dissatisfied about inadequate preparation of teachers at the initial teacher education programmes. Such findings provide an explanation why some teachers show a lack of expertise in implementing the newly suggested formal curriculum and why some teachers find teaching the curriculum of the newly implemented subject, Life Skills, challenging and difficult. Well prepared teachers at both pre-service and in-service levels is important to ensure the effective implementation of the aims of educational reform in Oman.

Similarly, the often strained and top-down relationship between teachers and their supervisors appeared to be an issue which needed consideration in the Omani educational system. The centralized educational system in Oman needs to be examined as findings indicated that teachers are in need of more autonomy in their teaching of the new curriculum. Al-riyami (2004) studied educational management in some Omani schools and found that teachers in Oman need more autonomy "[T]o find their own way of pursuing their situations, rather than getting 'ready-made' full

guidance from the central authority” (p.65). Overcoming these challenges are important steps to strengthen the effectiveness of formal curriculum in developing students’ civic participation.

Overall, civic participation is one of focal aims of the new formal curriculum of the participating Basic Education schools. Respondents agreed that the formal curriculum throughout the Life Skills and Social Studies subjects and some other remaining subjects are drawing attention to support students’ civic development. Nonetheless, the findings demonstrate a set of difficulties which limit the role of the formal curriculum in developing students’ civic participation.

Q2: How does classroom climate develop Omani students’ civic participation?

This question planned to explore classroom climate in the participating Basic Education schools regarding civic participation development. In analysing the data of this part of this research, four themes and sub-themes were identified (Table 7.2).

Classroom climate is an important place to enhance students’ civic participation. A civically supportive civic participation environment is where students: enjoy openness towards society’s issues, are given the opportunity to express opinions, and to argue and comment on various public affairs. A supportive classroom climate is where students learn and practice leadership, decision making, teamwork and critical thinking (Campbell, 2005; Huddleston & Kerr, 2006; Lynch 1992; Narvaez, 2010; Whiteley, 2005).

The findings showed that some positive classroom practices that might develop civic participation in the students along the aspirations of the Basic Education policies exist in the participating schools. However, the data pointed out that various challenges remain before classes become more collaborative in their processes and more open to issues and concerns in the wider society. Despite a few examples of good practice, teachers demonstrated a general lack of experience in employing more engaging teaching methods. Similarly, issues and events outside the classroom were either dealt with at a surface level or totally avoided.

Table 7.2: Summary of themes and sub-themes of Research Question Two: classroom climate and civic participation development

A climate of collaboration
A climate of mutual respect
<p>A climate of openness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Openness towards current issues</i> • <i>Openness towards political issues</i>
<p>Teaching approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Group work</i> • <i>Quality of classroom discussion</i> • <i>The use of service-learning</i> • <i>The use of controversial issues</i> • <i>Critical thinking</i>

The classroom management in the participating schools was dominated by a top-down style. Students do not have a real role in decision making processes and the available space of partnership in constructing democratic and cooperative learning environment was at a surface level. Some findings also raised concerns about educators who believe in the importance of constructing a democratic environment and opening the door for students to be active participants at classroom.

While this observation is consistent with the centralized system of management utilized in the educational system in Oman, it is very important to bring to light that such an approach of management has a negative impact in creating democratic classrooms in the participating Basic Education schools. The expressed discomfort among teachers regarding the top-down style of their supervisors, for example, should provide some explanation for the lack of democratic practices in the observed classes. Ignoring students' choices and dismissing opportunities of developing students' engagement at their classroom were, also, examples for limited democratic practices and lack of a culture of partnership in the classroom. Surprisingly, some spaces such as Classroom Council was an example of a missed opportunity to support a sense of cooperation in the classroom community. A representative student group would be an important opportunity in the researched context in which teachers

can create supporting environment for shared decision making; however, the data revealed that some educators were dismissing such opportunities of classroom management. Democratic classrooms should be considered as starting point to develop students' civic participation. If classroom climates in the participating Basic Education schools are to truly become democratic and collaborative, then teachers should consider this aspect as a genuine part of everyday classroom practice. While investigated Basic Education schools appeared to demonstrate considerable attention to the academic formal curriculum in order to develop students' civic participation, it is also very important to ensure that classroom climates have a collaborative culture and active engagement of all students, and students are honoured and appreciated. This finding in the participating schools is consistent with Homana, Barber and Torney-Purta (2005) who suggests that classroom climate is one of 'neglected' aspects of civic learning.

The lack of democratic and collaborative practices in classrooms in the participating Basic Education schools also challenged teachers' ability to create a sense of respect in their classes as demonstrated in the second theme. While the data revealed that the value of respect has enjoying the attention of most of the observed teachers, still significant problems were identified among some other teachers. In fact, civically supported classroom climates require teachers to develop a sense of closeness and community. Students need to feel that they are valuable members in the classroom where their voices and opinions are considered and appreciated. One noticeable observation throughout this course of research was that when teachers tried to develop a sense of community, affiliation and unity at their classes, students were more active and engaged in the classroom activities. Indeed, it was not surprising to notice that students who enjoyed a fairly respectful and democratic environment in the research context to reported that they enjoyed coming to school and enjoyed the learning climate at their classes. This finding is consistent with other studies which confirm the importance of open and respected classroom climates in developing students' civic participation (Flanagan et al., 2007; Gniewosz & Noack, 2008).

The third theme of Question Two discussed level of openness in the classroom. Openness towards current and political issues in the classroom is a good practice to develop students' civic participation. The data showed that students enjoy openness

to some local and global current affairs. Offering students the opportunity to learn about real life issues is an effective approach to enhance learners' commitment to civic participation (Andolina et al., 2003; Campbell, 2005; CIRCLE, 2003; Torney-Purta, et al, 2001; Torney-Purta & Richardson, 2002). The findings showed that participating students had opportunities to discuss issues of concern in Omani society such as fatal car accidents, inflation, and the limited number of government scholarships at higher educational institutions. Similarly, the findings showed that classroom climate was open to discussing some global issues such as global warming, natural disasters, desertification, poverty, and global financial crisis. Political issues such as war in Iraq and conflict in the Middle East was also matter of discussion in the visited classes. Such observation should help students to be more open and knowledgeable with regard to civic life in Omani society and the wider world.

The final theme of Question Two provides a view regarding teaching approaches utilized in the visited classes. Teaching styles are an important method to create a more attractive and engaging learning culture. Although the data demonstrated that the observed teachers are trying to employ some attractive teaching approaches such as group work, noticeable differences were observed between the observed teachers in their ability stop teaching in traditional ways. It is worth mentioning here that one of the intended aims of the Basic Education system in Oman, since it was first implemented in 1998, was to employ more attractive and engaging teaching methods (Al-aghbari, 2007; MoE, 2001). This trend is more likely to help in developing the learning environment in the Omani classroom and provide a constructive civic environment. However, the findings of this research showed that participating Basic Education schools still have a long way to go in order to provide students with more engaging and attractive teaching methods. For instance, the findings showed that there is an absence of some important teaching techniques in which students' civic competencies can be developed gradually. This includes an obvious lack of the use of service-learning and discussion of controversial issues in the investigated classes. These two teaching approaches are widely recognized as being influential in developing learners' interest to participate in public life (Bridgeland, DiIulio & Wulsin, 2008; Campbell, 2007; Hess & Avery, 2008; Simons & Cleary, 2006). Similar observation is also applicable when it comes to teachers' commitment to

developing students' aptitude for critical thinking. Developing critical thinking is a regularly mentioned aim in the literature of Basic Education in Oman (MoE, 2001; MoE, 2004; MoE, 2006). Yet, the data showed that little effort is given to it in many classrooms in the real world of the investigated schools.

The lack of teachers' capacity in applying attractive and engaging teaching methods was one of identified problems in the literature (Hess, 2009; Oulton et.al, 2004; Roberts, 2009). Indeed, a lack of using attractive and more engaging teaching methods was also reported by Al-aghbrai (2007). His investigation of the Social Studies teachers' implementation of student-centred teaching approaches in the Omani Basic Education schools showed that the Social Studies teachers experience intense difficulties in using this approach properly in their teaching. Similarly, findings of this current study indicate that female teachers, when compare to male teachers were more able to support civic culture at their teaching which was also a noticed issue in the current study. Similarly, Al-nofli (2009) reported that female teachers at Basic Education schools were more likely to teach current events, environmental education, and public issues than male teachers.

Lack of depth and more meaningful connections between classroom practice and issues of community interest was another noticeable problem in the observed classes. Although, the data demonstrated that teachers were offering students opportunities to talk about some community interest, most noticeable examples in promoting interactive relations between classroom discourse and issues of community focus were abstracted and in most cases done at a surface level. Students need to enjoy regular and well-structured civic discourse regarding current affairs to be more interested and more involved in the public interest. The majority of participating teachers were not able to meaningfully provide students with informative and sufficient discussion on what is happening in the real world. To this end, there is a need to further investigate the exact reasons behind such difficulties in the participating schools: Is it related to teachers belief that sensitive and controversial issues should be avoided in the classroom as some researchers have reported (Kerr, 1999; Torney-Purta & Schwille, 1986), or is it more likely due to teachers' lack of ability and experience in running meaningful and informed discussion in the classroom (Hess, 2009; Oulton et.al., 2004; Ersoy, 2009)?

These findings raise questions about the gap between the intended aims of educational reform and real world of practice. While one of the Basic Education system's intended aims in Oman is to get rid of traditional and less attractive teaching methods through a movement from a teacher-centred teaching to a student-centred teaching style (Al-aghbrai, 2007), the findings of the current research demonstrate that relatively small developments are happening in the actual practice. Many participating teachers either were poorly applying some attractive teaching methods or are still caged in the teacher-centred teaching styles. What these results might say for educational policy makers is that introducing the new formal curriculum focused on civic participation without taking into account teachers' aptitude in delivering these curriculums properly. This would be a real concern regarding the way of educational reform plan is implemented. Teachers' interest and commitment to carry out change at their classrooms and to build more supportive civic environment requires real cooperation between all partners in the educational system. Teachers should become the focal point of any successful educational reform because, simply, they are the practitioners who actually can turn educational theory into practice. Although published reports of the Basic Education system do indicated that professional development is considered to be a major component to facilitate the transition from traditional pedagogy of schooling to attractive and more effective one (MoE, 2006b; MoE, 2008a; MoE, 2010), the results showed that more work should be done in this regard to ensure that all teachers at Basic Education schools are enjoying sufficient support to build attractive and civically supporting classroom climates. In particular, re-evaluation of the Basic Education schools needs to provide answers for some challenges identified within the scope of current research focus such as: why teachers, after more than ten years of Basic Education system implementation, still experience difficulties in running group work, discussing in-depth and meaningful issues of community interest, applying service-learning and raising controversial issues in their classes.

In summary, the data demonstrates that there are various challenges which limit the ability for classroom climate to change in order to be more collaborative and more open to the wider society's interest. Despite a few good practices, the findings revealed that many teachers experience lack of ability in employing more interactive and engaging teaching methods.

Q3: How do the co-curricular activities develop Omani students' civic participation?

This question is aimed to explore the role of co-curricular activities in developing students' civic participation in the participating Basic Education schools. Table 7.3 summaries the main themes and some sub-themes that were identified during the analysis process.

Table 7.3: Summary of themes and sub-themes of Research Question Three: co-curricular and civic participation development

Co-curricular activities contribution to the development of civic participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Developing civic knowledge</i>• <i>Building bridges with the surrounding society</i>• <i>Learning about others cultures</i>• <i>Developing a dispositions towards good citizenry</i>• <i>Developing civic skills</i>
Difficulties challenging the implementation of co-curricular activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Lack of time</i>• <i>Lack of expertise</i>• <i>Lack of interest</i>• <i>Poor implementation</i>• <i>Top-down administration</i>

The literature indicated that students' participation in the co-curricular activities is a crucial approach in developing civic participation (Hart et al., 2007; Torney-Purta et.al, 2001; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). Through co-curricular activities students get the opportunity to: expand knowledge regarding the society (Saha & Print, 2010), develop essential civic skills (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Reinders & Youniss, 2006), developing positive dispositions towards the value of participation in the public life, and encourage young adult to participate in public life in the adulthood (Andolina et al., 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Thomas & McFarland, 2010).

The findings of this current research showed that co-curricular activities are identified as an important component for the development of civic participation. The data showed that through such activities, students learn about some important civic

topics such as the environment, health, and the political system. Similarly, co-curricular activities help to establish a bridge between the school and the wider institutions in society. Research evidence demonstrated that co-curricular activities were used to create a sense of cooperation and partnership with both government and NGOs. At the private school, for example, learning about other cultures and creating spaces for interaction with others were issues of focus within co-curricular activities. The data revealed that some of the visited schools tried to create special programs within co-curricular activities to develop students' dispositions towards good citizenship.

Finally, the data indicated that the respondents identified a set of civic skills developed through co-curricular activities. These skills include leadership, teamwork, public speaking, and taking responsibility. These findings show that respondents do value the dynamic role of co-curricular activities in developing young adults' civic participation as many of previous findings concluded (Hart et al., 2007; Kahne & Sport, 2008; Lopez & Moore, 2006; Saha & Print, 2010; Thomas & McFarland, 2010; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). They also demonstrate that most educators were aware of the value of co-curricular activities in supporting a rich civic learning environment.

However, despite all of the previously mentioned benefits of co-curricular activities in developing learners' civic participation, the data showed that implementation of co-curricular activities in the participating schools was negatively affected by a set of difficulties. The lack of time, lack of teachers' expertise, lack of interest on the part of the students, poor implementation, and top-down administration were major problems associated with the implementation of the co-curricular activities in the participating Basic Education schools. As demonstrated in previous sections, some of these difficulties, such as a lack of teachers' expertise in running some activities and top-down style of administration, were also identified as challenging problems within the implementation of either the formal curriculum or the classroom climate. These identified difficulties demonstrate that co-curricular activities still play only a marginal role in the participating schools when it comes to the development of civic participation.

The lack of allocated time for co-curricular activities is clearly one difficulty in the participating Basic Education schools. The only weekly period dedicated for co-curricular activities is not enough to fulfil the anticipated aims of such important space for civic development. Asking schools to only have one period each week by the deduction of five minutes from the normal time allocated for other periods in the school day could send a hidden message for both teachers and students that co-curricular activities are not an important part of schooling system. Actually, this situation raised a question regarding the importance of co-curricular activities in the accomplishment of the intended civic aims and, in general, the overall performance of the educational reform plan. If co-curricular activities are to play a supportive role in developing civic participation, Basic Education schools need to expand the allocated time for co-curricular activities within the weekly teaching plan and encourage teachers to integrate co-curricular activities into the formal curriculum. Such integration will help to support the role of co-curricular activities in developing students' civic participation.

Linked to the problem of allocated time, some findings indicated that female students' participation in the co-curricular activities at weekends or after school hours is another challenge in some of the participating schools. Some respondents argued that families are not supporting female students to attend co-curricular activities after the school hours or weekends. The findings also indicated that families are not keen to give permission for female students to participate in out-of-school activities even during school hours. These findings point to some social norms in the Omani context. In spite of considerable movement in the last few decades in relation to women's participation in the public life, still families are applying traditional social rules on girls' participation in some public activities. For example, activities related to sport or camping at the weekend are the kind of activities which widely recognized as being related to the social world of males more than females. Generally speaking, separation between males and females in some public activities is a notable social behaviour in Omani public life. As part of the education systems' commitment to equality, it is very important that Basic Education schools work closely with families to overcome any concerns surrounding female students' participation in the co-curricular activities.

Other difficulties such as lack of expertise, lack of interest, and poor implementation of suggested co-curricular activities also helps to better understand the gap between the suggested civic outcomes of these activities and real world of practice in the participating schools. To enhance teachers' ability to run co-curricular activities effectively, they need special training and preparation. This preparation should start from pre-service institutions and continue throughout in-service training programs. One outstanding finding related to the poor implementation of co-curricular activities was that they were mainly offered for the benefit of a few students, especially students with a high academic achievement. Participating Basic Education schools in this course of research need to re-evaluate their method of implementation of co-curricular activities to ensure that all students enjoy constructive civic experiences throughout co-curricular activities on an equal basis which avoids such selectivity. Actually, with teachers' lack of expertise and sometimes lack of interest in doing co-curricular activities, it wasn't surprising to see some students reporting discouraging civic experiences through their participation in the co-curricular activities. Once again, teacher development should be a point of focus to support the civic mission of the Basic Education schools in Oman (Almaamari 2009; Al-nofli, 2009).

The findings also showed that some problems of the implementation of co-curricular activities are due to the top-down administrative style utilized in the government schools. To support this argument, the administrative autonomy in the private school was a vital factor in advancing the school's way in creating some outstanding civic experiences through co-curricular activities. This autonomy was evinced throughout the expansion of the time allocated for co-curricular activities. Also, this independence was evident when looking to the creation of some programs such as learning about other cultures in which valuable civic experiences were developed. Similarly, the private school's self-government was crucial in deepening and strengthening the interaction with the surrounding society. Arguably, such flexibility may be due to other factors as well, as this school serves mainly economically advantaged students and where families are often more educated. Yet, the top-down administration style utilized in the government schools has negative impacts on schools' ways of implementing co-curricular activities. Some problems which were noticed in government schools that may be linked to top-down style of administration include: disregard of students' interests about clubs of their choice,

ignorance of students' right to elect the administration board of clubs, and focusing only on students with high academic achievement to ensure the satisfaction of the principal or representatives of upper educational stakeholders.. In short, as was also evident in the findings of the first two questions, the top-down administration style is limiting the richness of civic experience that may be gained through co-curricular activities. After Al-riyami's (2004) and Alhinaei's (2006) invitations to give Omani schools more autonomy, this study confirms the urgent need for such reform in the Omani educational system.

On the whole, this part of thesis demonstrates that most educators do value and acknowledge the importance of co-curricular activities in developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for civic participation. The identified benefits of co-curricular activities in this research demonstrate the many opportunities for civic development. Nonetheless, the findings also showed that the researched schools do experience ample challenges and limitations that indicate that the implementation of co-curricular activities appeared to be largely on the surface level.

Q4: What are Omani students' dispositions towards civic participation?

This part of thesis aimed to explore students' dispositions in relation to civic participation. Table 7.4 summarises the main themes and related sub-themes.

The finding demonstrated that in general, through the formal curriculum, co-curricular activities and the classroom environment, students in the researched schools have developed positive dispositions towards civic participation. They expressed in clear terms that they consider civic participation to be an important issue for their own development and societies' wellbeing. The reasons they stated regarding their civic participation showed that what motivated young adults to value civic participation differ considerably from one student to another. Some students consider civic participation as important because it ensures community welfare; others placed more value in its opportunity to provide basis for personal development; while some have talked about the sense of happiness and enjoyment that such opportunities provide.

Table 7.4: Summary of main themes and sub-themes of Research Question Four: Students' dispositions towards civic participation

<p>Importance of civic participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ensuring community welfare</i> • <i>Personal development</i> • <i>Sense of happiness and enjoyment</i>
<p>Disposition towards local civic life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Government policies</i> • <i>Voting in Majlis Alshura</i>
<p>Disposition towards global issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Peace and conflicts in the world</i> • <i>Disposition for the environment</i>

These findings have implications on how schools can develop students' interest in the common good. Teachers need to underscore, on a regular basis, the link between civic learning experience and the overall welfare of the society. Linking civic discourse and practical experience to the benefit of the society should increase young adults' motivation for community involvement. Also the findings showed that young adults consider community participation as an opportunity for personal development and enjoyment. Thus, civic activities such as voluntary work should always be introduced to students in a friendly and encouraging environment. Educators need to highlight the benefits students may gain through engagement in civic activities. Informing young adults about the aims and benefits of civic activities for both participants and wider society can help to attract learners' attention and to motivate them for more involvement in society. Ignorance of students' interests, limiting their right to choose activities they like, and the top-down administration style are some identified issues in the researched context which are not consistent with the creation of fully supportive civic environments in schools. Investigated Basic Education schools need to address these challenges to create civic learning experiences in which students feel motivated, entertained and benefited from participation in civic activities.

Furthermore, one of the potential problems students mentioned in relation to their civic experience is the lack of voluntary activities in the summer holiday. While such observation might be expected in remote regions where not many activities are available to students outside school, surprisingly, students in urban areas stated that they would like to use their spare time in the summer school holiday for conducting voluntary and social work. There is a considerable lack of activities organized for young adults during the lengthy summer school holiday period. Such a challenge should be considered as one for the government and other NGOs to prioritise the advancement and expansion of civic experiences not only for the benefit of civic learning but also to avoid young adults' involvement in unhealthy activities during the lengthy summer holiday.

The data also show that Omani young adults do pay attention to some public life affairs. Their comments reflected a level of engagement with issues of common good. The evidence showed that the participating students were keen to give their opinion on the government's performance in relation to some challenges facing the Omani community. Their comments on lack of job opportunities and lack of higher education opportunities demonstrated that students do acknowledge that there is a direct link between good government and progress in their society. This awareness can be considered to be another indicator of the young people's involvement in discussing community issues and concerns. When young adults are offered the opportunity to learn about and to critically reflect on the performance of government bodies or NGOs in their society, they are more likely to develop interest and civic engagement at later stages of their lives (Huddleston & Kerr, 2006; Kirilin, 2010; Patrick, 2002).

Disposition towards political participation was particularly demonstrated in this course of research through the students' dispositions and opinion towards the Majlis Alshura. The findings indicated that participating students were aware of the public debate in the country in relation to the effectiveness of Majlis Alshura as a political body in Omani society. Many students point to the ongoing concern in Omani society with regard to the development of the role of Majlis Alshura in the management of public life in Oman. However, participating students expressed different opinions with regard to their participation in the Majlis Alshura elections.

Some students stated clearly that they will participate in the election to reflect their commitment as good citizens. Other students demonstrated unwillingness to participate in the election. The reason of some students for such disengagement from the political life is that Majlis Alshura is powerless; for other students, social work not politics is their focus and area of interest. In general, participating students demonstrated an awareness regarding Majlis Alshura as a political body in Oman and were able to express different opinions and assessment towards the quality and effectiveness of this political institution.

Also, in relation to students' participation in Majlis Alshura elections, the majority of students stated that their participation will take into account the national interest and they will only select those candidates who are qualified to serve the society. However, a few other students stated that they will consider the welfare of the tribe they belong to when they elected their representative in Majlis Alshura. The mentality of supporting the candidate based on 'tribe logic' is one of real challenges of the development of political participation in Omani society. Although the findings demonstrated that participating Basic Education schools worked to address such a challenge, further considerations and efforts are needed to ensure that young adults are able to free themselves from such an unsupportive culture surrounding political participation in Oman. Furthermore, the group of students who expressed an unwillingness to participate in Majlis Alshura is another challenge for the process of raising active citizens in the Omani society. Although lack of interest in political participation is an increasingly noticeable trend among young adults (Fjeldstad, Mikkelsen, 2003; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Planty, Bozick & Regnier, 2006), unwillingness of participation as expressed by some participants was, interestingly, associated with a kind of advanced political position. This group of students explained that their disengagement is due to lack of power of the Majlis Alshura as representative political body in Oman. This disposition is consistent with many Omanis who believe that this elected and representative political body should move from its mainly advisory role to enjoy more power and further authority. Such a position expressed by some young adults in this study reflects that there is a need to reassess the quality of political participation in Omani society. Developing the status of political participation in Oman may motivate young adults to engage with and play an active role in public life.

Finally, the findings of this question provide some explanation regarding students' disposition towards some civic issues from a global perspectives. Students concerns about environmental issues and awareness about the increasing threat to the planet because of climate change, for example, was perhaps something to be expected especially since that new formal Basic Education curriculum does pay attention to global environmental issues. These findings are consistent with the importance of the global dimension of citizenship education (Banks, 2008; Edwards, 2001). Further, students' dispositions towards peace and some conflicts in the world reflected a level of engagement and awareness about some lengthy conflicts in the world such as the one between Israel and Palestine and the war in Iraq. These examples of conflicts demonstrate the role of context in shaping young adult interest. Interestingly, students were stressing that peace and respect should be taken seriously in the region as a way to deal with these conflicts. Such understandings and dispositions among this group of students highlight the vital role of schools in areas such as Middle East in inserting the culture of peace and tolerance in the learners' community. In Oman, education for peace is recognized as one of the major principles for educational system as is stated clearly in the Philosophy of Education document (MoE, 2004b). Similarly, Basic Education's commitment to the importance of respect and mutual cooperation between cultures and to enhance students' commitment towards peace on local and global levels were demonstrated in a detailed report published by MoE in 2008c. Young adult's positions in relation to peace in the world as identified in this current research demonstrates the critical role of schools to raise a future generation that will support peaceful approach to life and reject extreme views.

Overall, the findings of this question demonstrate that students value the importance of civic participation. They stated that civic participation is an important driver for community development and personal entertainment and development. Also, students demonstrated interest about local and global issues and reflect promising trends in relation to the protection of the earth's environment and peace in the world. However, some demonstrated a lack of interest in political participation. Some students emphasised the need to provide more civic activities and further participation opportunities in the Omani society.

Q5: In what ways do gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality factors influence Omani students' opportunities to develop civic participation?

This final research question aimed to explore some demographic factors in relation to civic participation. Table 7.5 summaries finding of themes related to researched demographic factors.

Table 7.5: Summary of Research Question Five themes and sub-themes on social factors influencing students' civic participation

Gender
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Equality of learning experience</i> • <i>Opportunities for community engagement</i> • <i>Civic knowledge</i> • <i>Disposition towards political participation</i>
Socioeconomic background
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Income and civic participation</i> • <i>Family level of education</i> • <i>Civic discourse at home</i>
Geographic location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Limited opportunities for civic experience</i> • <i>Limited access to some civic experience</i>

Gender

Some participants acknowledged that Omani society is in a period of transition from a male dominated society to becoming more equal in terms of gender. They suggested that such change in Oman is one of the critically important dimensions of development necessary for the establishment of the modern state in the last four decades. It was very interesting to note that educators and students in the researched context consider and value the importance of equality between men and women as an important part of the modernization process in Oman. Such observation is important in the Omani society where women's participation in the public life is still less than that of men. The findings are consistent with other researches that reported a

noticeable development of Omani women rights and participation in public life in the last few decades (Rabi, 2002; Ulrichsen, 2009).

Nonetheless, the findings also showed that social changes are not an easy process, nor is this change complete in Oman. Despite the government's commitment to ensure equity between men and women, social customs and norms appeared to be significant factors limiting the process of social development in this area. In this research, gender differences were noticeable, suggesting that female students enjoy fewer opportunities for community participation compared with their male counterparts. While male students reported more frequent participation in some public activities, female students' involvement was limited. As the data showed, families have a significant role to play in what civic experiences are suitable for female students and which are not. Generally, families are more tolerant when it comes to boys' participation in some civic experiences and are more selective, cautious, and less open to girls' participation in some of the available activities. Obviously, some findings in this current research indicated that such decisions are driven by cultural norms and families' expectations about the women's role and level of participation in public life. Like any other society, the power of custom and traditions in Oman has an impact on how people act in public life. Nonetheless, some evidence from this research indicated that families' restrictions on females' participation is also due to concerns about the girls' safety. However, the question remains why the issue of safety is a concern for girls more than boys. Surely, more sociological studies are needed to understand such social behaviour in-depth. Identifying the role and level of the influence of different social assumptions and practices is important to assist schools in their attempts to deliver educational reform effectively. In the scope of the current research, participating schools should work closely with families to address concerns and to ensure that both female and male students are exposed to same civic learning experiences. Education is and will remain an important social agent to carry forward and accelerate social change and to promote justice and equality.

The other noticeable difference was the level of civic knowledge between female and male students. Female students were more capable of demonstrating a mature civic knowledge and to provide detailed discussions about various issues of civic life. In

particular, knowledge related to the political system structure in Oman, and global issues in relation to the environment and peace in the world, were elaborated in more depth by female students. This finding is consistent with the findings of other studies in which female students were reported to have more civic knowledge compared to boys (MCEETYA, 2009; Schulz et.al, 2010). Indeed, differences between participating female and male students in relation to their civic knowledge are interesting observations in the research context because all students were exposed to the same curriculum in the Basic Education system. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to identify the actual drivers for such differences, positive and supporting classroom climates in female classes when compare with male classes may provide some explanation. As this research findings showed, more desirable civic practices were noticeable in the female classes compared to male classes. Actually, even in the mix-gender class females students were more engaged and active. As mentioned previously, classroom climate is an important space for civic participation development (Campbell, 2005; Huddleston & Kerr, 2006; Lynch 1992).

Dispositions towards political participation is the last noticeable gender difference in the research context. Female students were less interested to participate in the election of Majlis Alshura. Instead, some female students indicated that they would prefer to do voluntary or charity activities rather than being involved in political activities. This finding is consistent with some other research where females are, in general, more interested in doing social civic activities rather than political forms of civic participation (Flanagan et al., 1998; Nolin et al., 1997; Torney-Purta, 2002).

Socioeconomic background

Socioeconomic background is identified as an important factor in developing learners' commitment towards public life. As the data showed, students who come from relatively high economic backgrounds enjoyed richer civic experience at school and better opportunities for informative civic discussions at home. This observation is consistent with the body of research which indicates that students of higher economic status are more likely to be active citizens and develop positive dispositions regarding participation in public life (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999;

Burr, Caro & Moorhead, 2002; Matthews, Hempel & Howell, 2010; Pritzker, 2009; Schulz, et al., 2010; Tolbert, Lyson and Irwin, 1998).

Although it was interesting to notice that some investigated schools do run some programs in which needy students got some financial support, concerns remain when it was found that some students' absenteeism was because of the need to provide financial support for their families. Absenteeism from school may result in denying students some important lessons and civic experiences in which they learn and develop to be active participatory citizens. There is a need to ensure that provided financial support in the investigated schools is working effectively to minimize the negative impact of the socioeconomic factor in developing students as active members in society's civic life.

Moreover, findings showed that some students experience lack of home support for the development of civic participation. Students of middle and low economic status, mainly at government schools, were less likely to be involved in deep or active conversations with their parents of issues of public interest. Such observations may be due to a lack of education of some Omani parents. Considering the high rate of illiteracy at the beginning of the modernization process in Oman four decades ago (MoE, 2006b), it is to be expected that this current generation will not have the benefit of educated parental involvement including informative civic discourse. Such a reality in the Omani context needs to be addressed by introducing national community service programs in which all family members can participate in public life. These programs should help families, especially those of low economic status, to enrich young adults' civic experience. Similarly, families need to overcome some unsupportive social traditions among some Omani families in which young adults are not encouraged to engage in adults' conversations. Families need to learn that opening the door and encouraging interactive conversations to discuss society's issues is an important approach for child's civic development. Educational programs through the media, and religious institutions, for example, should become part of a comprehensive community plan to help parents have greater involvement in developing young adults' civic life.

Geographic location

Schools' geographic location, as another investigated demographic factor in this research, was identified to have an effect on the students' civic participation experience. Data collected from the rural school indicated that school location is a limitation to the school's capacity to implement varied civic experiences. This finding is consistent with other research which investigated school locality and the development of civic participation (Hart & Atkins, 2002; Lay, 2006). Urban schools are more likely to provide students with a wide range of civic experiences. The diversity of civic experience, as noticed in the urban schools, especially the private school, should help learners to expand and strength their civic competencies. When students get more direct opportunities for civic experiences in a constant manner, they are more likely to develop a higher commitment towards engagement in public life. The findings demonstrated that respondents in the rural school experience feelings of isolation and found location to reduce schools' participation at events and activities conducted by governmental and other NGOs, which are often organized in the capital, Muscat, or other larger cities. The findings showed that the remoteness of the investigated rural school denied students of direct learning experiences about some civic organizations and from participating in some civic activities organized in the cities such as rallies or social work programs. Also, for some educators, geographic location of rural schools created a greater teaching load which in turn limited educators' capacities in creating more opportunities for civic development. These challenges demonstrated that this rural school needs further support to ensure that students enjoy a rich and diverse civic learning environment. Basic Education system is called to acknowledge the need for further support in rural schools to ensure that students enjoy rich civic experience. Teachers should have a similar teaching load as their counterparts in the city schools and provide them with all the recourses needed to create civically supportive learning environments. More importantly, teachers need special professional development programs to help them overcome the lack of civic life diversity in the remote regions.

In summary, the findings of this study indicated that, in comparisons with male students, female students are more knowledgeable about civic issue, have less civic participation experiences, and are less interested in political participation.

Socioeconomic status and school geographic location are important factors in providing learners better and richer civic learning opportunities.

7.2 Contributions of the Study

As a researcher involved in a major research project that would be widely disseminated in Oman and internationally, it is my hope that this research would make a difference somehow to the practices of developing civic participation through/in the education system in Oman and beyond. This section will draw the attention to some specific areas in the practices of the Omani schools and the education systems as a whole that may benefit from findings of this research. I will refer to these as the potential *practical* contributions of the study. However, the benefits from a research project can go beyond practical contribution to, perhaps less discernible but equally important outcomes that are wider than the identified aims of the research. I will refer to these potential as the *strategic* contributions of the study. Finally, I argue that research should also be able to demonstrate its contribution to the overall knowledge about the very theories it uses to construct its tools and design. I will refer to these as the potential *theoretical* contributions of this study. The following three subsections will deal in turn with each of these contributions.

Practical Contributions

The findings of this study point to specific areas of need for supporting and enriching civic learning in the investigated Basic Education schools. These areas of need should prompt further reflection and discussion by policy makers, educators, parents, and researchers in Oman. The following sections will highlight some implications of present study.

Educators and policy makers need to continue to monitor how the intended educational reform is implemented in the real world of practice, in particular in the area of civic participation. As this research demonstrates, the Basic Education system represents important changes in relation to the development of civic education experiences compared with the previous school system, General Education. This was

evident when looking to the aims of Basic Education, the new formal curriculum, and the increase of the time allocated for civic subjects. Despite the importance of such a focus on civic education, its actual implementation in the investigated Basic Education schools is still, in general, surrounded with significant challenges. The findings of this research point to challenges particularly in the areas of classroom climate that supports the development of civic participation, and of the co-curriculum activities designed to supplement the curriculum in developing civic knowledge, skills and dispositions in students. There is a real and urgent need to further investigate these challenges and dedicate the resources necessary to bridge the current gap between the intended civic learning as suggested in the reform plan and the reality of practice.

Special attention should be paid to the development of teachers' capacity to support students' civic development. The findings underscore the need for more work to elevate teachers' competencies in the creation of healthy and rich civic classroom experiences in the investigated Basic Education schools. Teachers are important drivers for the successful actualization of any educational reform. For this reason, pre-service programs and in-service professional development should be planned to address the actual need of Omani teachers in order to support the civic mission of Basic Education system.

The findings of this study indicated that co-curricular activities in the researched schools still play a somewhat limited role in developing students' civic participation. As one of important spaces in developing civic participation, participating Basic Education schools need to re-examine current way that co-curricular activities are implemented in relation to civic participation. The implementation of co-curricular activities should be examined in relation to: the timing issue, the activity's availability, students' freedom of choice, and the overall quality of implementation. All of these issues, as detailed in the findings of this research, are areas where steps should be taken to ensure that co-curricular activities are utilised to support civic participation as intended in the Basic Education system.

If policy makers in Oman wish to ensure that Basic Education schools are effectively supporting learners' civic development, they need to introduce more freedom and

flexibility than is afforded by the traditional management style. The top-down style was noted to be creating an unsupportive culture in the researched context. As the findings of this research show, the top-down style of administration utilized in the public education sector results in students missing out on some valuable civic experiences. Some schools were denying some basic values of civic participation such as ignorance of students' choices due to the centralized administration system. The school principals and teachers need to feel that they are being encouraged to be creative without fear of retaliation from education authorities. Moving towards a less centralized educational system should be promising step to help educators make more informed choices and more supportive decisions regarding students' civic school experience.

One of the important implications this study has is related to the characteristic of the classroom climate in relation to civic participation. This was the first study that examined the appropriateness of the classroom climate in the Basic Education system in Oman in relation to the development of civic participation. Some effective behaviours and classroom practices identified in some observed classes, such as a culture of respect, collaboration and openness should be encouraged and emphasized in the Basic Education schools. However, the challenges surrounding appropriate and varied pedagogies should be a point of consideration by policy makers. To achieve a supportive civic culture in the classroom, educators in the investigated Basic Education schools need to promote real spaces for democratic and collaborative classroom management, spaces to enhance a culture of partnerships and respect, and more importantly, the need to employ more interactive and engaging teaching methods.

The findings showed that students are missing valuable opportunities of learning by doing. As Huddleston and Kerr (2006) emphasized that learning by doing is an important approach to support students' civic experience. Students need to participate in community service programs working with people and organization outside school borders for the benefit of social welfare. The findings of this study suggest many examples where such forms of learning were mainly at the surface level. If the aim of Basic Education system is to have young adults participate in the common good in a confident and effective manner, then giving them the opportunity

to serve their communities directly is a vital issue. While the formal curriculum is important space for civic participation, learning by doing both in and beyond school is another important approach (Schulz et.al, 2010). Educators in the investigated Basic Education schools need to ensure that students enjoy substantial opportunities for community service and are given the opportunity to make more links between theory and practice. Teachers need to use teaching approaches such as service-learning in which students are linked to the real world of practice.

This study draws attention to some gender issues in the researched context. Some findings showed that female students do not always enjoy similar and equal civic experience compared with their male counterparts. Although this study points out some of the challenges related to inequality in the researched context, further work should be conducted to better understand this phenomenon. Nonetheless, Basic Education schools need to work to ensure that both female and male students enjoy equitable civic experience opportunities. Schools should work closely with families to understand their concerns with regard to female students' participation. For example, increasing the level of supervision and parents' involvement in outside school activities may help to address the families' concerns regarding the female students' safety and welfare. Giving female students full and equitable civic experiences, which are equal to the experiences given to male students, is very important to ensure the increased participation of Omani women in society is supported as it should be throughout the educational system.

This study highlights the role of socioeconomic background in developing students' civic participation. It was clear that students from comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds, as the case of students in the private school in this study, were enjoying more and sometimes higher quality opportunities for civic participation both in and beyond school. These findings draw attention to the importance of resources in developing students' civic capacity. While further work should be conducted in this regard, educators in the investigated Basic Education schools need to ensure that economically disadvantage students are getting adequate support for healthy civic development. Such effort is important to ensure that all individuals in Omani society are capable and prepared to participate in public life.

Strategic Contributions

It is expected that this study will also have strategic contributions. As discussed in the Chapter two above, the Sultanate of Oman is endeavouring to improve education quality based on research findings conducted internationally and locally. Research conducted in the country is steadily developing. Hence, in general, this study contributes to diversification of such research into important areas that are based on contribution of the education for the public good in society. In particular, Basic education in Oman has identified the development of civic participation as a key element of its reform endeavour. As discussed in the Significance section in the introduction, this study helps to highlight the importance of civic participation in the Omani education context. Considering the lack of research in Oman in the area of civic and citizenship education in particular and civic society in general, this research contributes to bridging the gap in the literature. This study provides a platform to understand approaches taken in Oman to support the development of civic society. This research is important to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of Omani society and to underscore some challenges facing this developing country in its journey to build a stronger and well developed civic society.

Similarly, this research comes at an important junction in the development of civic participation in the whole Arabian region. Oman's society has similar characteristics to some neighbouring Arabian societies. These similarities include issues such as language, religion, and political system. Like many other Arabian countries, Oman experienced strong social unrest which sped up its political and social reform. This research is consistent with the social factors beyond the recent revolutions which started in the Arabian regions in early 2011, and which is referred to in the media as the 'Arabian Spring'. As this research reported the new generation of citizens express a desire for civic participation and they are clearly dissatisfied regarding the limited opportunities for political participation. Such expectations point to the need for wider political reform in society.

Furthermore, approaches and challenges facing the teaching of civic education, as reported in the literature, differ from one society to another (Omoto, Snyder & Hackett, 2010; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Sears, 2009). Considering a lack of civic

participation studies in the Middle East, the findings of this research provide an introduction to the development of a deeper understanding regarding the state of civic participation in at least one country in this part of the world. It is my hope that it will also highlight the interest in this particular line of research in the region.

In particular, this study highlights the importance of schools as crucial locations in any society to develop civic values among its citizens. Schools are important sites to support democratic development in any society. It is hoped that this study will encourage educators in the region to engage in informed dialogue, to conduct research, and to implement reform programs to address challenges facing the role of schools to develop civic participation in the different locations.

Another strategic contribution of this study is to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship between Islam and civic participation as an important democratic principle. In the last few decades, the media and some writers, especially in the western countries, have increasingly argued that Islam presents a hindrance to democratic values (Mishra, 2008; Nicholson, 2011). This concern was expressed by Huntington's (1996), *The Clash of the Civilisation and the Remaking of World Order*. In this work, Huntington argued that Islam is intrinsically against democracy and western societies' way of life. Similarly, for some commentators, the war against terrorism launched by the United States of America following the September 11, 2001 attacks promoted the view that Islam and democracy are incompatible (Sheridan,2006).

This study took place in a context where Islam plays a major role in the culture and people's daily practices. The Basic Law of the State, which plays the role of a Constitution in the country, states that Oman is a Muslim country and Islam is the basis of its legislation (Ministry of Information, n.d-b). This study demonstrated that, not only a commitment to Islam and a commitment to civic participation are compatible, but also the findings of this study showed that Islam is an important component in the development of participation in public life in the context of Oman. For example, the Islamic Education subject, introduced as a compulsory subject in the investigated Basic Education schools, provides opportunities in the formal curriculum to develop students' civic knowledge and commitment to public life.

Similarly, religious practices and celebrations are integrated into the formal curriculum in ways to encourage participation in the surrounding society. Indeed, these findings are consistent with other researchers' conclusions rejecting Huntington's theory regarding Islam and democracy (Esposito, 1991; Hofmann, 2004). To this end, this research argued that Islam, at least in the Omani context, is a supportive factor in the development of the civic society and in the development of students' civic participation.

Theoretical contributions

Finally, this study has some important contribution on the theory level. First, the theoretical model developed in this research provides a comprehensive approach to understand and investigate the schools' role in developing students' civic participation. The theoretical model utilized in this study, demonstrates that competencies of knowledge, skills, and dispositions are all important, interrelated and complementary to enhance students' participation in the public life. Similarly, the model underscores the importance of formal curriculum, classroom climate, and co-curricular activities in developing the students' civic participation. Hence, the theoretical model highlight important competencies and settings in which schools should work through to develop students' civic participation. Thus, the theoretical framework developed in this study could be a useful reference for researchers in their effort to investigate civic participation in future research.

Lastly, as explained in literature chapter, the construct “civic participation” should be extended to accommodate both social and political aspects of civic life. This study brings to attention the need for both the social and political aspects of civic participation to be considered on equal basis when studying civic participation in any society. Furthermore, this study argued that the development focus and rate of political and social aspects of civic participation differs from one society to another. Arguably, in western democracies, for example, the political aspects of civic participation are the most observable form of engagement in the public life. In contrast, in some eastern societies, the involvement in social aspects of civic life is the most observable aspect (Sears, 2009; Nelson & Kerr, 2006). In the context of this study, the findings demonstrated that the social aspects of civic life are well

developed and represented the most obvious forms of involvement in the public life in Oman. These social activities include collecting donations for poor people, supporting disadvantaged groups, supporting environmental issues and activities. In contrast, the political dimension of civic participation is a developing practice in the Omani civic society when compared to well-established democracies in the world. To illustrate, political participation activities such as joining a political party, attending political party events, donation of money to a candidate or political party are still not part of the political participation culture in Oman. In short, the development of civic participation in each society as learnt from this research is unique, dynamic, and an ongoing process. However, a limited understanding of civic participation to political engagement possibly would eclipse other forms of civic participation.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

Although research of civic participation is an expanding area of research in many countries around the world, a considerable lack of research was noted in the Sultanate of Oman. This study has investigated the influence of the educational reform plan, the Basic Education system, in relation to civic participation development. The findings showed that participating Basic Education schools do pay attention in developing schools' commitment regarding civic participation development. However, this research also identified a set of difficulties restricting the effective implementation of civic experiences in the researched context. Although there were some important findings made throughout this course of research, working with human subjects can never be completely free of biases and limitations. Despite every effort which has been taken to address and acknowledge limitation and biases, it is very important to highlight them in this section.

Although every effort has been taken to investigate different aspects of the learning and teaching culture in the research context, this research does not claim that all possible factors were investigated. For example, relevant factors such as the years of teachers' experience, their interest and awareness about civic responsibility, and the nature of training in pre-service and in-service are factors that can affect the quality

of the civic experience in the researched context. Similar limitations are applicable when it comes to the level and quality of educators' commitments to introduce civic experiences in each site investigated in this course of research. These factors can be the focus of further research.

The limitation of this study to investigate the nature and depth of relationships between schools and the community is another important limitation. As any social behaviour, civic participation is influenced by a wide range of factors. Students in their civic experience are influenced by factors such as media, family, peers, and a wide range of other social activities which took place beyond school's boundaries. Although this research draws some attention to the identification of the role of the home in the development of civic participation, quality and frequency of civic discourse, for example, at home are other important factors which, in turn, were not within the scope of this study.

This is not a random sample because only schools where principals, teachers and students were willing to take part in this research were examined. Although this study did not aim to generalize the findings, it is always important to acknowledge the importance of random selection of participants whenever this is possible. However, the purposeful sampling strategy utilized in this study was meant to investigate factors such as gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality. Also, the small size of the sample helped the researcher to investigate the phenomena in-depth.

This research relied on the collection of a large amount of qualitative data. One critique of qualitative data is the possibility of researcher bias. All effort has been taken to address such concerns along the process of data analysis and interpretation as detailed in the trustworthiness section in the methodology chapter. However, limitation and bias is still an ongoing concern in such a line of inquiry. As researcher of this study, there is also a concern that researcher's background as an employee of Ministry of Education in Oman could influence the way of reading the data and the conclusions that were made throughout the data analysis. Conscious of such danger, the researcher made every possible effort to free his personal views and affiliations from the beginning of this course of research. From another perspective, the

researcher's affiliation and familiarity with topic being researched and the context of the research could be considered a strength in this course of research. It has helped the researcher to better understand and acknowledge policies, opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of civic participation as part of the intended aims in the educational reform plan.

This multi-case study is limited to the examination of the four schools which are implementing the Basic Education system. Also, it is worth mentioning here that this study did not examine the old educational system, General Education, which still exists in some few Omani schools.

The term civic participation is a matter of various understandings and interpretations. Therefore, it is very important that it be understood in relation to the characteristics of political traditions, values and aspirations of the researched context.

Lastly, this study examined some young adults' intentions for civic participation in the future, such as their expectation whether or not they would vote in the elections of Majlis Alshura. The findings reported here only reflect their present anticipation for future action, rather than their actual behaviour when they become adult. Although some studies showed that civic experiences in the period of young adult are a good predictor about political participation in adulthood (Hart et al., 2007; Zaff et al., 2003), the current study should acknowledge that these dispositions may change due to various civic experiences that might occur in their adult life.

However, some of abovementioned limitations can be considered to be areas for further research. Indeed, one of the most important results of research conducted within the interpretive paradigm is the determination of directions for further investigations. It is hoped that this current research would open the door for other researchers to focus their studies on other factors to draw a more detailed map about the status of civic participation in Omani society. The following section will make specific suggestions for further research.

7.4 Directions for Further Research

Research regarding the development of civic participation in Oman could be expanded based upon the finding of this research. In particular, the following suggestions and directions for future research may help to advance our understanding about civic participation in the Omani context:

For the sake of generalisation, a national representative sample of young adults is needed to identify their civic participation capacities and to examine the effect of various demographic and contextual factors. While this research comes with some findings in relation to students' civic participation, it would be useful to utilize these findings to construct an instrument in which students' civic capacities are examined more generally using a larger, national representative sample. Such research will help to determine the needed steps on a national level to support schools' civic mission in Oman.

To fully understand the school's role and effect in developing civic participation, it is necessary to follow young adult development over time. For this reason, longitudinal studies will provide inside and valuable data to study the progress of civic participation during the citizens' life.

In relation to the previous recommendation, it is highly recommended that educational policy makers in Oman take the initiative to participate in the International Educational Association (IEA) longitudinal study about Civic and Citizenship Education. This international study would provide rich data and a holistic description of educational system efficiency in civic and citizenship education in general and civic participation in particular. The flexible design of this international study, especially in its latest rounds, acknowledges differences between participating countries in relation to the features and characteristics of civic life. Also, this participation will make Oman the first country in the Middle East to participate in such international work and will open the door to carry out comparisons and cross national studies when possible in which lessons could be learned from all over the world.

There is need to analyse in-depth the new formal curriculum of civic education in the Basic Education schools (Life Skills and Social Studies subject) to identify their efficiency in developing the intended aims of participatory citizenship. Documented analysis should plan to find whether civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions of civic participation are presented throughout the curriculum in an integrated and comprehensive manner. Similarly, investigating the civic values and experience of other subjects should help to draw a systematic and coherent picture about civic learning opportunities in the formal curriculum.

While the data showed that civic experiences are enjoying considerable attention throughout new formal curriculum, the finding in this study showed that the implementation of this curriculum at the investigated Basic Education schools is associated with a set of difficulties. Overloading of topics, insufficient pre-service preparation, lack of efficient and quality professional development, and a lack of resources are some of the challenges identified which surround the implementation of the formal curriculum. It would be worth investigating these difficulties in-depth to understand its effect in developing a rich civic learning environment.

In this study, the female students appeared to be more knowledgeable about civic issues compared with male students. Yet, they showed a lack of interest in political participation. Identifying in-depth such trends among female students in the Omani society will contribute to the ongoing effort to increase Omani women's involvement in public life. More importantly, investigating the efficacy of interventions to deal with the phenomenon is crucial.

As the findings indicated, the family has an important role in supporting students' civic development. Identifying parents' dispositions about the Basic Education system's effectiveness in developing civic participation, activities and learning activities are place for future research focus.

In this study, civic participation was examined in relation to the educational system. There is need to identify the role of other important factors such as media, home, technology, and peer influences in the development of young adult civic experience.

As this research finding identified some critical challenges which limited the role of co-curricular activities in developing civic participation, further study is needed to identify these difficulties in-depth, to suggest practical action plans to address these problems, and to ensure that young adults at Basic Education schools do grow civically throughout their participation in the co-curricular activities.

Focused study on classroom climate at the Basic Education schools is one of most needed studies. As the findings showed, classroom climates at investigated schools experience a considerable lack of democratic and collaborative management and a lack of interactive teaching methods. A study in which these findings examine deeply in different grades would help to determine necessary reform and redirection in the future.

Lastly, assessment of educational management in Oman is an area of needed research. On many occasions, the findings of this research indicated that the top-down style utilized is inhibiting intended educational reforms. Further investigation can help to better understand this problem and to suggest systematic steps to move for a more reliable and open style of management.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings of the current research. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature and some characteristic of Omani society. The chapter also highlights some main implications, limitations and directions for future research.

One of the main lessons that can be learned from this research is that educational reform is not an easy task; it needs commitment and passion side by side with the provision of resources. With this in mind, if Basic Education schools are to provide students with a meaningful civic experience and young adults to be active participatory citizens, then there is a need to respond to the challenges encountered in civic learning as identified in this study. Educational policy makers are called upon to reassess some dominant practices to ensure that the educational reform plan in

Oman is working as anticipated to enable the development of informed and engaged citizens.

In relation to the researcher journey, I should say that I personally gained countless experiences and increased knowledge which, I hope, will help me to contribute in the development of civic education in my home country, Oman. This journey helped me to learn from an international experience and to exchange ideas and views with experts and people of interest in a very supportive academic community. This helped me to become more capable and more committed to contribute to the ongoing development journey in Omani society I strongly believe that each individual can make, though tiny, positive change in his/her society.

In relation to maximize the benefits of my doctoral journey, I will work to provide its findings to both the policy makers and members of the education community in Oman. Being an employee of MoE will help me to engage in an ongoing discussion about my research findings with people in charge of civic and citizenship education at policy and practice levels. Also, in an effort to present and offer the findings of this research to researchers and educators in Oman and internationally, some of these findings have already been presented in well recognized international conferences and papers have been published, some of which are accessible online. These might be small steps but it is a good start for the benefit of civic participation's development in Oman.

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Appendices

Appendix (1)

Authorisation letter from Ministry of Education (Oman)



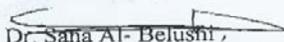
Ministry of Education

Minister's Office

To whom it may concern

Mr. Badar Al Kharusi, an employee of the Ministry of Education, is undertaking a research project on civic education as part of his Doctorate of Education at the Curtin University of Technology in Australia. His inquiry about the effect of the Educational Reform Plan of 1998 on students' participation inside school and their society will be very useful to evaluate the success of the reform and to support civic education in Oman. Therefore, the Ministry of Education is willing to give him the permission to access have to some Omani schools in order to gather the necessary data to achieve his study objectives.

Yours Sincerely,


Dr. Sana Al-Belushi,
Director of Technical Office for Studies and Development
Ministry of Education
Sultanate of Oman



Civic Participation and Current Educational Reform in the Sultanate of Oman

Participant Information Sheet (principals)

Chief Investigators:

Badar Al kharusi, Curtin University of Technology, Phone: 92663792, Email: b.alkharusi@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Description:

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the major changes supported by the Basic Education schools to improve civic participation among students.
2. Determine the principals' and teachers' view about these changes.
3. Investigate the students' experiences in and views about their participation in the school's life.
4. Investigate the students' perceptions and expectation of their civic participation (e.g. social and political).

To achieve these objectives, four schools will be selected from two educational regions. These schools will be differed according to three main factors: gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality.

What is required of the participants:

Principals are required to:

- Give the researcher permission to gather the necessary data to achieve the study objectives.
- Agree to participate in an interview.

Expected benefits

Civic participation is one of the main goals in educational systems. Schools are a main factor to create higher level of civic participation. This study will examine the efficiency of Basic Education schools to establish creative learning environment. The study will explore schools' ability to generate positive attitudes among learner towards different aspect of civic life. Also, the results of this inquiry could benefit policy makers, principals and teachers to strength recent practices or establish new tactics in order to enhance civic participation amongst students.

Anticipated risks

There are no risks associated with your participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the study without reason or penalty. The decision to participate will in no way impact your current or future relationship with Regional Education Administration.

Questions / further information

Please contact the researcher if you require further information about the study, or to have any questions answered.

Concerns / complaints

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the study.

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information sheet about this study;
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team;
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- understand that you contact the researcher if there any questions about the study, or the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the study; and
- agree to participate in the study.

Name

Signature

Date

Please, Return by Mail, Email or Fax to
Badar Al kharusi
Science and Mathematics Education Centre
Curtin University of Technology
PO Box U1987
Perth WA 6845

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Fax: +61 (0)8 9266 2503

Email: b.alkharusi@curtin.edu.au

Civic Participation and Current Educational Reform in the Sultanate of Oman

Participant Information Sheet (Teachers)

Chief Investigators:

Badar Al kharusi, Curtin University of Technology, Phone: 92663792, Email:
b.alkharusi@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Description:

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the major changes supported by the Basic Education schools to improve civic participation among students.
2. Determine the principals' and teachers' view about these changes.
3. Investigate the students' experiences in and views about their participation in the school's life.
4. Investigate the students' perceptions and expectation of their civic participation (e.g. social and political).

To achieve these objectives, four schools will be selected from two educational regions. These schools will be differed according to three main factors: gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality.

What is required of the participants:

Teachers are required to:

- Give the researcher permission to observe learning environment inside classroom.
- Agree to participate in an interview.

Expected benefits

Civic participation is one of the main goals in the educational systems. Schools are a main factor to create higher level of civic participation. This study will examine the efficiency of the Basic Education schools to establish creative learning environment. The study will explore schools' ability to generate positive attitudes among learner towards different aspect of civic participation. Also, the result of recent inquiry could benefit policy makers, principals and teachers to strengthen current practices or establish new tactics in order to enhance civic participation amongst students.

Anticipated risks

There are no risks associated with your participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw

from participation at any time during the study without reason or penalty. The decision to participate will in no way impact your current or future relationship with school administration.

Questions / further information

Please contact the researcher if you require further information about the study, or to have any questions answered.

Concerns / complaints

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the study.

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

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- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
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Civic Participation and Current Educational Reform in Sultanate of Oman

Participant Information Sheet (Students)

Chief Investigators:

Badar Al kharusi, Curtin University of Technology, Phone: 92663792, Email:
b.alkharusi@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Description:

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the major changes supported by the Basic Education system to improve civic participation among students.
2. Investigate the students' experiences in and views about their participation in the school's life.
3. Investigate the students' perceptions and expectation of their civic participation (e.g. social and political).

To achieve these objectives, four schools will be selected from tow educational regions. These schools will be differed according to three main factors: gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality.

What is required of the participants:

Student is required to:

- Give the researcher permission to observe learning environment inside classroom.
- Agree to participate in the discussion section.

Expected benefits

This study will examine the efficiency of the Basic Education system to establish rich learning environment. The result of recent inquiry could benefit policy makers, principals and teachers to emphasis or modify recent practices to enhance civic participation amongst students.

Anticipated risks

There are no risks associated with your participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from participation at any time during the study without reason or penalty. The decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with your teachers.

Questions / further information

Please contact the researcher if you require further information about the study, or to have any questions answered.

Concerns / complaints

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the study.

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information sheet about this study;
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- understand that you contact the researcher if there any questions about the study, or the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if they have concerns about the ethical conduct of the study; and
- agree to participate in the study.

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Civic Participation and Current Educational Reform in Sultanate of Oman

Participant Information Sheet (Parents)

Chief Investigators:

Badar Al kharusi, Curtin University of Technology, Phone: 92663792, Email:
b.alkharusi@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Description:

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the major changes supported by the Basic Education plan to improve civic participation among students.
2. Investigate the students' experiences in and views about their participation in the school's life.
3. Investigate the students' perceptions and expectation of their civic participation (e.g. social and political).

To achieve these objectives, four schools will be selected from two educational regions. These schools will be differed according to three main factors: gender, socioeconomic background, and school locality.

What is required of the participants:

Parent is required to:

- Give the researcher permission to observe your child activities inside classroom.
- Approve your child participation in a discussion section.

Expected benefits

This study will examine the efficiency of the Basic Education schools to establish rich learning environment. The result of this inquiry could benefit policy makers, principals and teachers to emphases or modify current practices to enhance civic participation amongst students.

Anticipated risks

There are no risks associated with your child participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Voluntary participation

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you do agree for your child to participate, he or she can withdraw from participation at any time during the study without reason or penalty. The decision to participate will in no way impact upon your child current or future school work.

Questions / further information

Please contact the researcher if you require further information about the study, or to have any questions answered.

Concerns / complaints

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the study.

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information sheet about this study;
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
- understand that your child is free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- understand that you contact the researcher if there any questions about the study, or the Research Ethics Officer on 92662784 or hrec@curtin.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the study; and
- agree to participate in the study.

Name

Signature

Date

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**المشاركة المجتمعية على ضوء خطة إصلاح وتطوير التعليم في سلطنة عمان
استمارة موافقة مدير المدرسة على إجراء الدراسة**

بيانات الدراسة

الباحث:

بدر الخروصي. جامعة كيرتن. الهاتف (0406105238)

البريد الإلكتروني b.alkharusi@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

أهداف الدراسة

- التعرف الى أبرز عناصر التطوير التي تهدف الى تعزيز الشراكة المجتمعية بين الطلاب.
- استطلاع وجهات نظر مدراء المدارس والمعلمين حول هذه العناصر.
- استطلاع خبرات الطلاب ووجهات نظرهم بشأن مشاركتهم في مختلف جوانب الحياة المدرسية.
- تقصى اتجاهات الطلاب حول أهمية المشاركة في مختلف جوانب الحياة المجتمعية.

لتحقيق هذه الأهداف سوف يقوم الباحث باختيار عينة من مدارس التعليم الأساسي بناء على عدد من المتغيرات التي تعنى بها الدراسة الحالية كالجنس والموقع الجغرافي للمدرسة.

ما دور مدير المدرسة في الدراسة الحالية؟

- التصريح للباحث لجمع البيانات اللازمة لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة.
- الموافقة على تنفيذ المقابلة.
- التصريح للباحث دخول بعض الغرف الدراسية لغرض الملاحظة.
- التصريح للباحث لتنفيذ بعض المقابلات مع بعض معلمي وطلاب الصف العاشر الأساسي.

الفوائد المرجوة من الدراسة

تعزيز قدرات الطلاب في مجال المشاركة المجتمعية يعد من الأهداف الرئيسة لأي نظام تعليمي حيث ينظر للمدرسة على انها من أهم مؤسسات إعداد المواطن المشارك بفعالية في الحياة العامة. الدراسة الحالية تسعى الى تقصي الأساليب والبرامج التي تعتمد عليها مدارس التعليم الأساسي في السلطنة لتعزيز وإثراء بيئة التعلم. بالإضافة الى ذلك فإن الدراسة سوف تسعى الى تحديد قدرات هذه المدارس في تحفيز المتعلمين نحو المشاركة الفاعلة في قضايا المجتمع الذي ينتمون اليه. من المؤمل أن تسهم نتائج هذه الدراسة في توفير تغذية راجعة الى واضعي السياسات التربوية في سلطنة عمان

والى مدراء المدارس والمعلمين حول كفاية وفاعلية الممارسات المطبقة حالياً فضلاً عن اقتراح بعض البرامج الأثرانية التي قد تعزز فاعلية البرامج المعمول بها حالياً.

سرية البيانات وحفظ خصوصية المشاركين في الدراسة

اشترك في هذه الدراسة إلى جانب المعلمين والطلاب لا ينطوي على أية مخاطر. علماً بأن ملاحظات وتعليقات المشاركين سوف تعالج بسرية تامة ولن تستخدم إلا لأغراض البحث العلمي. كما أن الاطلاع على بيانات الدراسة سوف يقتصر على الباحث والفريق الأكاديمي المشرف على سيرها.

طوعية المشاركة

مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة تطوعية ويمكنك الانسحاب في أي وقت دون الحاجة إلى تبرير قرارك ودون تعرضك لأي شكل من أشكال المساءلة الإدارية. كما أن قرارك بالمشاركة ليس له أي أثر حول طبيعة علاقتك الحالية أو المستقبلية بالإدارة التعليمية التي تتبع لها.

الاستفسار بشأن الدراسة

يمكنك الاتصال بالباحث في أي وقت في حال وجدت لديك أية استفسارات تتعلق بمضامين وإجراءات الدراسة.

المحاذير والشكاوى

تم إجازة واعتماد الدراسة الحالية بواسطة لجنة أخلاقيات البحث العلمي في جامعة كيرتن تحت رقم (SMEC20080004). ويمكنك الاتصال بالباحث أو لجنة أخلاقيات البحث العلمي على هاتف +61492662784 أو البريد الإلكتروني hrec@curtin.edu.au في حال وجدت لديك أية استفسارات بشأن الجوانب الأخلاقية لهذه الدراسة.

صيغة الموافقة:

من خلال توقيعك أدناه تؤكد بأنك:

- قرأت واستوعبت البيانات الخاصة بطبيعة هذه الدراسة.
- كافة استفساراتك تم الإجابة عليها بالشكل والمستوى المرضي.
- تدرك أن لك الحق في الاتصال بالباحث متى ما وجدت لديك أية استفسارات.
- لك الحق في الانسحاب من هذه الدراسة في أي وقت دون الحاجة إلى أبداء أسباب أو الوقوع تحت طائلة المساءلة الإدارية.
- تدرك أن لك الحق في الاتصال بالباحث في حال وجدت لديك أية استفسارات بشأن هذه الدراسة أو لجنة أخلاقيات البحث العلمي على هاتف رقم (92662784) ، بريد الكتروني hrec@curtin.edu.au
- توافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

الاسم: _____

التوقيع: _____

التاريخ: ____ / ____ / ____

Appendix (7)
Field Note Observation Form

Date of Observation: _____ Grade: _____
School: _____ Observation No: _____
Subject: _____

Teaching methods used by teacher (Lecture, Role play, problem solving, cooperative learning, Inquiry...).

The interactive features between teacher and students and between students themselves (Active, warm, respectful, positive, manage conflict).

Teacher making a link between classroom experience and real life issues related to both local and global society.

Students enjoy open environment to express their opinions about issues related to different areas such as learning process, school community, surrounding society and global affairs.

Students have equal opportunities to participate and exchange ideas with their peers

Teacher encourages open discussions in the lesson.

Learning practices planned to strength variety of learning skills (describe, analyse, organize, interpret, explains, evaluate).

Students are encouraged to carry further investigation to expand their knowledge about the lesson's objectives.

Physical environment inside classroom climate (class size, capacity, walls notes , availability and condition of electrical outlets)

Other ideas or behaviours in the classroom environment that could be significant for civic participation.
