Chapter 2

Policies and Initiatives for the Internationalization of Higher Education in Oman

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ABSTRACT

This chapter studies the globalization of higher education in context of The Sultanate of Oman. It is a study on the understanding of internationalization of higher education which results in conclusions and recommendations on the enhancement of the future of internationalization of higher education in Oman. Internationalization of higher education is not new. In today's age of global knowledge and technology, an interconnected network and global awareness are increasingly viewed as major and sought-after assets. With the current labor market requiring graduates to have international, foreign language, and intercultural skills to be able to interact in a global setting, institutions such as World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) are placing more importance on internationalization. Complying with WTO and GATS agreements, Oman had to liberalize its HE, open the door for foreign universities to have campuses inside its borders, and encourage outbound and inflow of students.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, a key reality in the 21st century, has already profoundly influenced higher education. (…) We define globalization as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions (…). Internationalization is defined as the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization. (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009, 7).

No higher education (HE) system across the world nowadays is not experiencing some form of what is called 'internationalisation'. Oman Higher Education adopted an international dimension to demarcate a position in the global arena. Decision-makers generated policies and executives inculcated procedures and inspired initiatives.

BACKGROUND OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN OMAN

Prior to 1970, there was no formal Higher Education in Oman; it was the stage of establishment of the schooling system. Public colleges (with an emphasis on vocational education and training, particularly in teaching and health) and Sultan Qaboos University were established around 1970s-1980s. First HE experience launched in 1985 with education institutes that produced teachers for schools. HE system was intended to serve the needs of Oman socio-economic development by preparing Omani youth with appropriate knowledge and skills. Sultan Qaboos University, the only state university, was founded in 1986. This university started with five colleges (Education, Engineering, Science, Medicine, and Agriculture) and 500 students. (11)

In the 1990s-present foreign programs were imported and delivered in through private HEPs (colleges and universities). This was an attempt to rapidly grow the sector in response to an identified need. A comprehensive higher education system launched in the new phase to bring about a more dynamic and ever-growing educational system. Oman has developed an independent system of higher education consisting of 62 HEIs and providing post-secondary diploma or degree programmes. Out of 62 HEIs, two-third is public institutions, operating through various ministries and agencies. (10)

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