

Ismail Hussein Amzat · Nena P. Valdez Editors

Teacher Empowerment Toward Professional Development and Practices Perspectives Across Borders

This book gathers a range of contributions from researchers and practitioners across borders with an emphasis on theoretical arguments and empirical data concerning teacher empowerment. It propels readers to explore powerful teaching practices that further advance the profession as a continuing priority in the system when appropriately utilized.

Moreover, it strives to capture teachers' readiness to improve their professional skills and responsive practices as a form of accountability for their teaching and student learning, two aspects that are increasingly being judged by various stakeholders. The book argues that teachers' autonomous participation and engagement in relevant decision-making activities and equitable access to continuing professional development opportunities are and should remain major priorities.

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Chapter 9

Engaging Teachers in Lifelong Learning in Oman for Knowledge Growth and Development: Government Roles and Higher Institutions

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and Turkiya Al Omairi

Abstract Lifelong learning (LLL) remains widely discussed in today literature as a mechanism to keep updated with the latest information and knowledge. Engaging in LLL is a necessity for teachers to stay current, alerted with the changes in education, and remain on the cutting edge in the field of teaching. To keep up with new developments, it takes courage and self-determination to continue learning. Through teacher professional development (TPD), continuous learning and improvement can take place via professional training, workshops, conferences and personal reading to upgrade teaching skills, content knowledge and classroom teaching practices. Teachers are believed and empirically proven to influence student achievement. As far as student achievement is concerned, teachers' continuous learning and constant improvement are inevitable. Again, studies have evidenced that teacher engagement in continuous learning benefits both teaching and learning. Inasmuch as TPD is considered as a vehicle for teacher improvement, teacher engagement in lifelong learning (LLL) can be perceived as a driver that drives that particular vehicle where new knowledge and skills are obtained. Besides, when teachers involve in LLL, this helps them to develop continuous learning mind-set and habit which as a result will facilitate innovation and creativity among teachers. It prepares teachers with the assistance of continuous training to face the challenges,

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and keeps teachers up to date on new research and methods of teaching twenty-first-century learners using new technology to enrich teaching as well as facilitate learning in the classroom. With this scenario, this research sets out to explore the level of teacher engagement in lifelong learning activities in Sultanate of Oman. Besides, it aims of identifying government and educational institutions roles in Oman in empowering teachers towards lifelong learning for continuous professional development (CPD) for best practices. Some empirical data were collected from teachers' lived-experiences about LLL for TPD in Oman. The findings are expected to play a pivotal role in urging Omani government and educational institutions to create a learning environment in which teachers and students becoming lifelong learners as well as where developing cultural learning mind-sets can be nurtured. It is envisaged that the findings will emphasize the need of government and education institutions' roles in fostering lifelong learning among teachers throughout their lives.

9.1 Introduction: What Do We Know About Lifelong Learning?

Lifelong learning (LLL) is the process of acquiring and expanding knowledge, skills and dispositions throughout one's life to foster well-being. It is essential for the development of our societies in the future, as learning is considered as a necessity for every individual to acquire and it goes beyond adult education or training. Lifelong learning is a mind-set and habit or attitude that everyone has to have or develop, such as range of learning (formal and informal learning), the skills, knowledge and behaviour (Laal and Salamati 2012). Lifelong learning serves multiple purposes, as it is believed to increase individual creativity and innovation as well as organization and countries (Dohmen 1999; Fischer 1999). Inasmuch as knowledge is concerned, learning is inevitable as it improves performances and therefore, learning new knowledge and skills should not be confined to formal education as people learn within the context of their work and where they live.

Moreover, in the search for the further meaning of lifelong learning, some researchers have managed to define lifelong learning as self-directed learning, autonomous learning; motivation to learn and perceived competence (Kirby et al. 2010; Chen et al. 2012). Lifelong learning may be further seen as a continuous formal education of one's youth and the sense of continuity in self-directed formal or informal education. In that sense, lifelong learner is a learner that has passion for continuous learning for his/her own sake. Lifelong learners tend to participate voluntarily in learning activities and actively engage in self-education regardless of hardship and circumstances (Barth 2005). In addition, a lifelong learner is a learner that knows the value of lifelong learning in human lives. Hence, he or she recognizes the importance of lifelong learning and well motivated in involving in lifelong learning as well as eager to learn new skills.

Furthermore, lifelong learning takes place with the help or existence of formal education. As mentioned before, it happens when people themselves, take a plan and monitor their own learning as well as engaging into self-evaluation and reflection. Moreover, lifelong learning could be considered as a self-assessment tool to know if changes and improvement occur in human lives (Knapper 2006). In the context of education, however, despite the wide range of lifelong learning usage currently in education, the concept of lifelong learning is considered new in higher education and its definition remains vague and ambiguous (Kirby et al. 2010). With this ambiguity, the future of lifelong learning according to some researchers is still unknown and questionable (Jarvis 2010) as well as what will become (Preece 2011; UNESCO 2010; Barros et al. 2013).

In the context of Middle East, the effort of improving the quality of primary and second education has topped the government agenda across Middle East. Over last decade, the region has witnessed a high growth in students' enrolment into primary and secondary education. As a gateway, to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Middle East, huge emphasis has been placed on teacher quality and it is believed that teachers are an impetus to achieve this aim. Therefore, attractive incentives are provided to maintain teachers that are good academically and improve teachers' conditions of service (Chapman et al. 2012). In Oman, since the implementation of Omanisation, there are now 38,000 Omani teachers, and the number of teachers or graduate teachers has been increasing while student enrolment decreases. Furthermore, the formal training for teachers has become an issue as "formal training for teachers is still quit new in Oman" (Mammert 2010, p. 1). Besides, with the issue related to teachers in Oman, Muscat Daily online (2013) has reported teachers continuously demanding for better improvement in their working conditions such as reducing classroom teaching load, better provision and trainings. Although training on professional development is provided for new teachers at the Ministry and school level, further knowledge, skills and training on professional development, and adult learning are still needed to cope with the changes in curriculum and teaching methods in Oman, from teacher-centred approach to a student-centred one, as well as to improve practices. Potentially, these are reasons that strive this chapter to know the existence of lifelong learning among Omani teachers, teachers' interest in lifelong learning in Oman and the government and educational institutions' roles in inspiring teachers towards lifelong learning in Oman.

9.2 Education System and Teacher Training in Oman

The limelight of education and its development can be traced back to 1970 when his majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed took over the country leadership. His leadership brought modernization to education and deemed as Omani renaissance with help of oil discovery. Prior to that time, there were only three formal schools in the whole Sultanate and only 900 students. As taking over the power, he prioritized education and believed that, learning is enlightenment and light is the opposite of darkness

(Al-Jadidi 2009). From then, education in Oman has tended to develop rapidly and tremendously with the concept of making education accessible to everyone. As years go by, developing teacher's skills has come into picture for school development and Omani government has put into measurement and consideration by providing programs as well as training for teacher development (Amzat and Al-Neimi 2014). But the question is, what types of programs and training are provided? Do the programs and training include all teachers in the Sultanate? Many reports are mainly on training English and Science teachers. Any report on the effectiveness of the trainings and programs?

With the sense of preparing Omani teachers for the future, Oman Online Teacher Training (OOTT) project was introduced to provide continuing professional development opportunities for teachers and to make some changes to the content and methods. A pilot test was carried out to observe the effectiveness and implementation of this e-learning training. The outcomes of this platform are expected to assist Omani MOE in providing skills for teachers and possibility of using it for further teacher training. However, there are some difficulties in terms of implementation, as was revealed by the pilot test, such as time constraints and staff unavailability during summer holidays. Besides, the test was conducted during school time with 15 secondary school teachers. Unfortunately, only six teachers remained to complete the training online due to connectivity problems, computer illiteracy and others (Sales et al. 2008).

Nevertheless, as for recent, Omani Ministry of education has a great achievement in producing more teachers with qualifications, however, the process must continue in order to continuously improve the practices and teaching quality. Besides, it has also been reported that, MOE has expended their professional development programmes for teachers and huge budget was allocated. The programmes consist of selected courses based on teachers' professional needs. Some teachers were given opportunity to attend conferences abroad with the sense of sharing their knowledge with their colleagues to improve school performance while some funds were given to school to implement school professional development plan (MuscatDaily 2013). If this is the case, there should be a great deal of research and studies on the effectiveness of these programs. Thus, there should be findings and reports whether the plan and process of training teachers to improve the quality teaching in Oman have achieved the target and met the expectation. So far, based on researchers' knowledge and reading, there is a scarcity of studies and reports revealing the outcomes of these plans.

Again, if these investments and commitments are really putting in places and well executed and implemented, the education system in Oman, school, teachers and students performances by far should be advanced or at least by now on the to the peak. These incredible investments into teaching and learning should help in reducing student's dropout rate that reaches 6% out of student's enrolment 2013–2014, as reported by Mohammadi (2016) in the Times of Oman.

Relatively, the findings of Baporikar and Shah (2012) on quality of higher education in twenty-first century, a case study of Oman concluded that, the problem of low skills and knowledge of Omani graduates came from external factors which

means that, students are coming out of schools with weak performances before entering higher institutions. Therefore, it is recommended for MOE in Oman to focus on students' performance at school level by first equipping teachers with the latest teaching skills, methods and professional knowledge needed to help the process. Since good learning relies on quality teaching, if teachers are well trained, furnished with necessary professional development skills and exposed to self-learning, there is a tendency of teacher passing these skills and knowledge to their students. Again, from their recommendations, the Omani government should look at socio-culture factor as students joining higher institutions with low motivation mind-set. They tend to memorize lesson and lectures without knowing the meaning. Objectively, modern teaching should help students to move from spoon-feeding to self-feeding and exposing them to self-learning. As a matter of fact, this self-feeding and learning can only take place when teachers themselves are first self-learners.

Corresponding to the claim of MOE providing trainings and reformation of curriculum to improve teaching and learning according to Al-Jardani (2012) should be further investigated for effectiveness purposes. Besides, it is also reported by Al-Jardani in the conclusion that, the English teachers that participated in the training on the effectiveness of the Primary Teacher's Course (PRIT) in preparing English teachers to implement the new curriculum complained that, they have difficulty in applying the concept in a real life despite their understanding of learning by doing and learner-centred learning. It is also suggested that by applying this concept to meet the expectations and interest of various participants, there should be regular revision, flexibility in implementation and training for teachers prior to this approach, especially in instructional technology. Besides, teachers should be exposed to classroom research and continuous reading and learning to improve their practices.

9.3 Lifelong Learning in Oman and What About GCC Countries?

Since it is agreed that, innovation plays a big role in catching up with the twenty-first-century challenges, Middle Eastern countries are called to response innovatively to their population growth. It is considered as an awakening call for lifelong learning engagement among teachers which in return could facilitate or help in transferring knowledge from older to younger and produce more skilled personnel. It is expected from Arab nations to design strategies of dealing with workplace-related learning needs and systems as developed countries have just done. In responding to these calls, Arab nations have responded impressively by taking a positive step by spending a high percentage of their GDPs on education compared to non-Arab nations. But the question is, to what extent this spending and investment has created culture of learning and continuous education among

teachers and learners in Oman or the whole Arab region to benefit? (Andersson and Djeflat 2013).

Not to mention, GCC countries have made a great investment on education and improving their education as well as upgrading their curriculum but still, their education systems are reported to focus on the number of teachers rather than quality of teaching. GCC policy-makers have eventually realized the importance of having quality teachers and have called for reformation of education system that will constantly focus on quality rather than quantity (Barber et al. 2007). Coupled with the invasion of technology, with nation-states worldwide moving towards building knowledge societies and formation-based economies, educational policy-makers especially in GCC countries are considering revising their system on what types of knowledge necessary for teachers and students.

This movement has influenced curriculum development, teacher preparation, and education culture in GCC countries (Wiseman and Anderson 2012, 2013 cited in Wiseman and Anderson 2015). The application of ICT solely for TPD in GCC countries without looking at the impact of social and cultural context according to (Dore 2005) and borrowing East Asian policy on ICT and models has created some problems as it is hard to apply this model in other context (Mansour and Al-Shamrani 2015).

In the effort of popularizing the significance of lifelong learning in Oman, the global meeting on education held in Muscat, Oman 2014 called for global and international supports of researching goal to ensure equitable, inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for teachers all by 2030. In this meeting, the Director-general of UNESCO, Irina Bokova appealed to all educational community to unite on ensuring lifelong learning and quality education take place as it is included in UN's post-development agenda. She went on to emphasize the importance of education as she believed that "education is not a charity but a public good and a gamechanger that has an impact on all the development goals" (Kassem 2014, p. 1).

In a symposium on Education and the twenty-first century (2013) in Oman, Al-Busaidi, Al-Harthy and Al-Riyamia mentioned that developing twenty-first century skills in Oman and other countries around the world, it is very important for all educational systems around the world to upgrade their school curriculum that will pave ways for knowledge seekers and independent lifelong learners rather than learners that seek for grade, pass or fail (Beere 2005, cited by Oman Observer 2013). As an example, in the United Emirates, people and teachers have complained about the standard of teaching dropping, students not getting quality education they deserve, and boys and girls dropping out of schools due to poor teachers' salaries, training and curriculum not involving real-life examples. After then, many questions are asked on how would education and learning take place when the environment is not encouraging to learn? Meanwhile, some solutions were rendered saying that, there should be some cooperation of online modules as part of solutions, blended-learning, and technology usage for lifelong learning (King 2012) cited by (Ahmad 2012).

9.4 Teacher's Professional Development and Lifelong Learning in Oman

In looking for relationship between lifelong learning and TPD, research of Fenwick (2001) on fostering teachers' lifelong learning through professional growth plan in Canada shows that, when lifelong learning is well implemented, it helps teachers' profession to grow and fosters learning communities in schools. When teachers take responsibility for professional growth, through a continual learning approach, it does not only help old teachers, but those who are new as well, in taking responsibility for their own professional growth and in helping their schools as well as communities to expand professional learning (Helterbran 2005).

The influence of learning community on lifelong learning of teachers has been reported lately. Research conducted by Curriculum Innovation Project (CIP) on learning communities and teacher lifelong learning in New Zealand shows that, learning communities could absolutely help teachers to develop further interest towards lifelong learning and for their students. Furthermore, in promoting professional learning, school leaders are expected to play larger roles in promoting professional learning to upskill teachers' new pedagogies and curriculum as well as reflective staff culture that support lifelong learning for teachers (Boyd 2005).

With the aim to improve teacher knowledge and professional development in Oman, there have been some initiatives, and teacher performance evaluation (TPE) is one of them to promote TPD plus accountability (Al-Yahmadi 2012). According to Al-Yahmadi, despite the reformation of the entire education system, the evaluation of the teacher performance that is initiated to improve TPD faces many and different challenges which one of them is the implementation. The implementation of the TPE is expected to boost TPD but falls short in terms of time lacking, standard ambiguity and lack of incentives (Al-Yahmadi 2012). Consequently, lack of proper implementation of TPE in Oman which is considered as a driving force for TPD could lead to teacher lacking training on professional development.

Similarly, research conducted by Al-Busaidi and Tuzlukove (2014) on local perspectives on TPD in Oman shows that most teachers participating in the research still need to attend further seminars on leadership, management, workshops, inviting syllabus design specialists, more courses on educational technology and high-quality professional development for teachers. Their findings also emphasized that, the problem and challenges facing these requests are time, budget, resources for professional development events including cultural background and access to training and development to all faculties as well as making teacher and faculties' professional development high priority. Besides, motivating teachers increases engagement in lifelong learning programs and events.

Another scenario is on TPD in Oman through reflection. Al-Lamki (2009) stated that, teachers in Oman did not make proper use of reflection to improve their teaching and development; rather, they only use it simply as required by the system by the government. Besides, in the conclusion, Al-Lamki added that, teachers did

not consider reflection as a tool for professional development and good teaching practices. This may be due to lack of awareness about the importance of reflection. In contrast, Al-Riyami (2015), rejected Al-Lamki claims and conclusion about teachers' lack of awareness about the importance of reflection in improving teaching practices. Al-Riyami strongly argued that teachers in Oman are quite aware of reflection as a means for CPD and lifelong learning but the problems are: teachers are confronted with large class sizes; an unreasonable curriculum; lack of resources; and supports and external factors as these factors could make reflective practices impossible.

The infeasibility of teacher professional development in Oman and problems in its implementation were not only affecting teachers but also affecting school principals. A study on principal professional development by Hussin and Al-Khatib (2015) recommended further training on professional development for school principals in Muscat to improve especially instructional and transformational leadership practices. One wonders, if there is lack of trainings on principal instructional leadership capacity, which instructional leadership is the core duty and activity for every school principals, what will happen to teacher training and professional development to improve teaching and practices? Quality teaching is globally confirmed to be the first factor position to influence student's learning, while school leadership is second.

9.5 Lifelong Learning Policy in Oman

As new era demanding for changes and twenty-first century posing its challenges on education shoulder, paradigm shift is required in traditional teaching and changes is must in the way students are learning. This shifting of paradigm is believed to help in adopting of lifelong policy. Besides, a lifelong learning policy is required due to the fast changing of society, globalization, increasing economic growth, human capital, technology, labour and knowledge. These elements call for expanding of knowledge, training, acquiring more skills, re-learning for the career development and promotion across a life cycle (Coolahan 2002).

In European countries, the policy seems to take place since December 1996 by issuing the first education white paper in 1995 entitled "*Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*". Besides, 1996 has witnessed Europeans Union education ministers adopting the document "*Strategies for Lifelong Learning*" as a framework and policy. In 2001, a so-called "*Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*" was introduced stating "lifelong learning must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning context. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision" (p. 3, Coolahan, p. 7). In addition, EU's lifelong learning programme as reported by Reuter and Patecka (2011) is part of education and training policy and expected to sustain human capital development, endow European people with skills, knowledge and

competences. It is also expected to prepare them in order to face the changes and challenges of the market with an innovative mind-set.

Since lifelong learning is penetrating into educational sectors for continuous learning and its advocacy by UNESCO, it is expected for a proper policy to be established. Around the world, especially in South Asia countries, there is a lack of policy implementation and it remains to define the importance of lifelong learning. For example India, as the second most populous nation, we can say that there is an existence of lifelong learning as a culture but a lack of a policy and framework (Shah 2014). In Omani context, the policy on lifelong learning tends to focus solely on students engaging into lifelong learning rather than teachers. Although measures have been put into place to train teachers on how to upgrade their methods of teaching from teacher-centred to student-centred which it is believed to pave ways for LLL among students (MOE 2008; UNESCO 2010–2011). As it can be seen, this policy supports the notion of student lifelong learning rather the policy to engage teacher for continuous learning to improve their knowledge and teaching standard. With the sense of focusing on student lifelong learning, a basic education curriculum in Oman was reformed and under this reformation, it is expected from this new curriculum to equip Omani students with knowledge and skills to face global economic challenges and encourage them to engage in lifelong learning (Al-Balushi and Griffiths 2013). But the question is, to what extent this reformation has helped in engaging Omani students in lifelong learning activities. What is the employment rate and how will involvement in LLL help to improve government and private sectors?

Comparatively, a study of Al-Harthy et al. (2014) on improving interactive teaching strategies and action research with Life Skills teacher in Oman concluded that, for teachers to apply learner-centred approaches in Oman, they must first be equipped with IT skills as a modern tool for better practices. Thus, there should be continuous training for teachers in applying IT in their classrooms. Moreover, they recommended that the MOE in Oman should create learning environment that can accommodate learner-centred which as a result, will encourage self-learning among students and teachers. In a long run, this self-learning will allow teachers to reflect in their teaching for better improvement and advanced training should be provided to facilitate this process and activities. Last but not least, action research should always be in place in all-service training to check and balance teachers' performance as well as determine the effectiveness of the methods.

9.6 Methods

This study uses qualitative methods and the population of this study consists of teachers from different governorates and regions in Oman. Oman has four governorates (Muscat, Musandam, Dhofar and Al Buraymi) and five regions [Ad Dahiliyah, Al-Batinah, Al-Wusta, Al-Sharqiyah and Az Zahira (Ad Dhahirah)]. Phenomenological approach is used while semi-structured interview was conducted

with the application of purposeful sampling. Choosing semi-structured interviews is the best type of interview, as it helps to have an in-depth understanding the concept of lifelong learning among teachers in Oman and the government and educational institutions' roles. As the qualitative method is concerned with saturation according to Creswell (2005) rather than generalizing sample sizes to the population, 11 teachers were selected from different regions in Oman using face-to-face interviews and protocol. The interview questions consist of three dimensions, which are

1. Understanding the concept of lifelong learning
2. Interest towards lifelong learning
3. Government and educational institutions' roles in assisting teachers in Oman to engage into lifelong learning.

Basic Knowledge and Awareness: Exploring awareness of LLL among participants, all the participants were asked about whether they understand the concept of lifelong learning and they were asked to describe or explain what is LLL is all about if they have understood the concept. Surprisingly, majority of the participants defined LLL as follows:

P1: Lifelong learning is a personal effort of seeking for knowledge through modern network. He further explained life that: Through lifelong learning, a person can continue learning at any age. P2: Lifelong learning is a system of providing education for non-registered students for literacy and adult education. P3: Lifelong learning is a way of human continuing to study and training for rest of his or her life as long as he or she enables to study. P4: Lifelong learning is a continuous way of learning from the cradle or childhood till an old age. P5: Learning forever. P6: It is the continuous learning for the whole life. P7: Keep learning. P8: There is no stop for learning process. P9: The learning process is not controlled by time or place. P10: It is a process of studying everything until the last day of our life. P11: It is being in a state of learning driven by the intrinsic desire to attain proficiency in a desired field.

Source of Knowledge and Involvement: Participants were asked about the source of their knowledge about LLL. Some said that their awareness of LLL came from media, the Internet, college, Ministry programs, university (SQU), teaching experience, and parents, while only one participant (P7) tend lacked of knowledge about LLL

P1: Yes, I heard about lifelong learning when I was in University as a student and when I was in secondary school although, I didn't involve in it. P2: No, I didn't heard or involve in lifelong learning before. P3: Yes, I have heard about lifelong learning before and didn't involve in it. I heard about it in through Media and friends. P4: I didn't involve in lifelong learning as I only knew about it from the Center for Lifelong Learning at Nizwa University, Oman. P5: Yes, I knew about it in my last year at the college. P6: Yes I know it from my school and from the ministry programs.

In relation to LLL involvement, the participants were asked about their involvement in lifelong learning and how they got know LLL in the past.

P 1: I know about lifelong learning as I mentioned before at secondary school level by attending lectures on lifelong learning, listen to audio learning and the Youtube. P2: I just lately heard about lifelong learning from friends, Media and the latest technology.

P4: Although, I didn't involve or practice lifelong learning but I have attended some courses for languages and different lectures organized by experts. P8: Yes, since I joined SQU. P9: Yes, in my teaching experience. P11: since long time by taking diploma in education and IELTS trainer and CELTA.

Interest: In terms of interest in LLL, all participants were asked about their interest in engaging in lifelong learning activity or program as well as whether they are willing to become lifelong learners. Below are some of their answers and replies

P1: Yes, I have heard about it and of cause, love to engage in lifelong learning because seeking for knowledge never ends. P2: Yes, I would like to know about lifelong learning because it is about increment in science and knowledge which leads to life improvement. P3: No, I don't have further interest to study or continue learning. P4: Yes, I have interest and I would like to involve in lifelong learning for life's exposure. P5: Yes, I want. P7: Yes, I would like to. P8: Yes. P10: Sure, I have interest.

In terms of involvement and application in their daily lives, some responded that

P5: I just known it recently and I haven't applied it yet. P6: I'm trying hard to do so since I heard about it. P8: Eight years.

Participant 6 and 7 did not respond whether they would like to involve in LLL program or activity. However, some responses and answers from the participants are contradicting as some of them have confirmed their interest to involve in LLL while at the same time they claimed of practicing and involving in LLL since long time ago. With these results, it seems that participants are still vague about the application of LLL and what is meant by involving in lifelong learning.

Government Role and Support: Referring to the role that the Omani government play in the creation of platform, system and programs that support LLL among teachers, some participants stated that there is no significant support from the government due to some government officers lacking awareness of LLL.

P1: No, there are not helps or supports from the government because the government or people in charge did not know much about lifelong learning. She continued by saying that: Also, the people in the society are not aware or familiar with lifelong learning. I believed that, if there is a demand from individuals or people in the Omani society about lifelong learning, the government might pay attention or encourage people to involve and provide the service. P2: Yes, there are some plans from the Omani government to improve work in schools through lifelong learning. P3: No, there is no effort or plan from the Omani government for lifelong learning due to the government poor planning and lack of our leaders' awareness about lifelong learning and its implementation.

He further gave an example as follows:

The Omani government has paid much attention on ICT at the beginning and they have invested a lot on it but later, the usage of ICT was ignored by people in the society. P4: No, there is no support of the government to implement lifelong learning due to the lack of public corporation and attention as well as their interest. P5: I have no idea if there is any. P6: each major has its own workshops and program. For example the new teachers have a program for two weeks, and if there is anything new in the curriculum the ministry is applying new programs as they are needed. P7: I think it's they are some but I'm not sure. P9: When I joined the workplace, ministry of education gave me a training for two weeks

which is considered lifelong learning course. P10: I have no Idea about any governmental program. P11: I have no information on this.

Participants 8 and 10 seemed unaware about the roles that the government plays in facilitating and encouraging teachers to engage in LLL. Besides, from these responses received from the participants, it seemed that participants could not distinguish between lifelong learning and professional development training. Some attended some programs conducted by the government and perceived them as lifelong learning program or training. Although professional development could assist in becoming lifelong learner, both activities should be distinguished for teachers by the Omani MOE for better understanding.

Educational Institutions' Role and Support: With the reference to the role that educational institutions play in supporting lifelong learning and implementation, the participants said that

P1: No, educational institutions are not aware about lifelong learning in Oman. If there is an awareness of the government or Ministry of Education in Oman about lifelong learning, the government will equip schools with materials needed and provide training for teachers. P2: There is no plan when it comes to schools supporting lifelong learning engagement among teachers due to the schools themselves lacking the understanding of lifelong learning and its importance. P3: No, there is no attention and support from the schools in Oman on lifelong learning due to their lack of awareness about lifelong learning. P4: No, there is no support from the Omani educational institutions due to their lack of awareness of the importance of lifelong learning because the schools in Oman only focus on tradition teaching and learning. P5: We have just small workshop. P6: The headmaster reports our names to the ministry to have such courses in order to improve ourselves. P7: The schools have some workshops to improve our skills as teachers but don't know if they considered as lifelong learning. P8: In my school, it's obligatory to get higher salary to enrol in such programs and courses. P9: Yes, when a teacher is going to the ministry programs, she represents what she has learned for all the teachers in my school. P10: In our institute, we have continuous learning for all employees and it is a must to get a promotion. P11: Sometimes, Yes.

From these responses, it is clear that teachers in Oman or the participants did not understand or have comprehension of lifelong learning (LLL) and CPD. Perhaps they understand the meaning but its involvement, application and practicality seemed to be undistinguishable.

9.7 Discussion and Conclusion

From this interview report and themes generated, the lesson learnt was that Omani teachers seemed to know lifelong learning and its importance as well as the definition of lifelong learning. This is considered a good news for the Omani government as it is an indication of MOE hard working, dedication and commitment since 1970 to improve teachers' performance. But at the same time, there are rooms to improve especially when it comes to involvement in lifelong learning, the result shows that, there are significant numbers of participants not involved in lifelong

learning despite their understanding and basic knowledge of lifelong learning. Besides, from the results, media, friends and the latest technology played big roles towards teachers' awareness in Oman on lifelong learning as some of the participants tend to know lifelong learning through their friends and media such as YouTube, as well as technology and awareness during their college days. This also includes attending some courses which they perceived as lifelong learning. This is somehow considered as professional development or teaching training for new teachers.

In relation to personal interest towards lifelong learning, and involvement, the results indicate that, majority of the participants or interviewees were interested and eagerly to involve in lifelong long learning while few declined perhaps, due to the age or lack of motivation. For the government and educational institutions' role in assisting teachers in Oman to involve in lifelong learning and its implementation, the results show disappointing or mixed results. There are four to five participants that unanimously agreed there is no significant support or motivation from the government and educational institutions towards teachers participating or involving in lifelong learning while the rest confirmed government roles in the implementation of LLL through schools. Each school according to them has its own programs provided for teachers but the questions are, what types of program or training? What is the content of the training or program? To what extent the training and programs are up to date? Background or the qualification of the trainers? Any report on the effectiveness of the trainings and programs?

Besides, the participants also concurred that there is an initial plan from the Omani government and educational institutions in implementing lifelong learning, but the problem of the problem is that many government and educational institutions in Omani lack awareness and planning about lifelong learning. They eventually believed that if the Omani government has great awareness about lifelong learning and highly conscious of its importance, there might be some effort, help and support from the government on lifelong learning perhaps by building a system as well as providing materials for schools and higher institutions to extensively facilitate lifelong learning among teachers as well as students in Oman.

As a conclusion, this study explored the concept of lifelong learning among teachers in Oman and their understandings. It looked at the teachers' interest towards lifelong learning and their involvement. In addition, this study also examined the role of Omani government and educational institutions in Oman on engaging teachers into LLL program, supporting activities, motivating and creating a culture for lifelong learning as well as its implementation. This study looked into three areas as just mentioned and from the three areas, five themes emerged (1—basic knowledge and awareness; 2—source of knowledge and involvement; 3—interest; 4—government role and support; and 5—educational role and support).

From the result of the interview findings, this study concludes that, some credits go to Omani government and its higher institutions at least for familiarizing teachers with LLL through university program and schools. But yet again, there remains much work for Omani MOE and schools in Oman in terms of facilitating lifelong learning and motivating teachers and students in Oman in engaging into

LLL. Since the results have shown less involvement of teachers in lifelong learning and its practicality. Thus, it is now an obligation for Omani government and educational institutions to provide more training not only for students and teachers about LLL and acquaint teachers on how to become adult learners in order to improve their teaching and practices.

Moreover, they should create a learning environment and culture in which teachers will have a deep understanding of the importance of LLL and the roles that LLL play in their professional development. Teachers should understand that LLL is a self-empowerment towards self-learning and autonomy. They should be aware of LLL and its long run advantages plus benefits in improving educational system in Oman, human capital and socio-economics growth. Indeed, it helps in keeping teachers on track with the latest development in their areas of teaching and instructional materials. It assists further to improve the methods of teaching for better learning such as applying students-centred approach that has been reported widely in GCC countries as a major problem among teachers and students. Socially, personalizing learning helps people generally in society to know the value of knowledge through continuous learning.

9.8 Implication

This chapter drew some critical implications which should be considered by Omani MOE, universities lecturers, teachers and policy-makers. The first implication lies on the lack of empirical studies on the outcomes of government policy in Oman on teacher training and development. Thus, implication on lack of report on the government claims of providing teacher skills and school development programs. His report should be in form of evaluation whether these measures taken by the MOE achieved the purpose and objective. Examples of Omani Online Teacher Training (OOTT) that is initiated for online teaching training and development and (TPD) for teacher continuous professional development. These programs and trainings are good ones; therefore, there should be an evaluation whether they contribute significantly to the educational system in Oman and whether they constitute highly to TPD.

Additionally, the Omani government has hugely invested in education, building schools and producing more teachers to feel the gaps and some training for better improvement. In the same fashion, there should be scientific contribution from researchers and academicians in Oman on giving feedbacks on the effectiveness of this investment to advance the system without condemnation and destructive criticism of the Omani government works and efforts. With this in mind, research findings, report, evaluation and assessment could be mechanisms to know the functionality of the system, to upgrade the system, improve and instil quality services as well as practices. Lamentably, if there is scarcity of empirical studies and research on teacher lifelong learning (LLL) and teacher CPD in Oman, one wonders, how would the government know the outcomes of trainings and programs that

they initiated? How would people know where things stand for teachers and what should be the next agenda for further improvement? Again, if all the literature on teacher development and lifelong learning in Oman are only concentrating on English teachers' professional training and development, what will be the performances of students under non-English teachers?

The second implication is drawn on the problem of proper planning and implementation of government programs. This requests MOE in Oman to follow up the application and implementation of their programs at the school level. Planning and policy might fail if there is no follow-up and assessment of the outcomes. There should be a clear agenda and framework on how to involve teachers in Oman in lifelong learning activities for the sake of professional development. Clear understanding and definitions of LLL and CPD are needed from the government and institutions to teachers. Perhaps, there should be a policy to help LLL to grow at schools such as using LLL as an assessment for teacher promotion in Oman and allocating incentives for teachers that engaged in LLL.

As a result, the proper implementation and agenda of teacher's lifelong learning will not only improve teaching but improve learning as well. This will bridge a gap between MOE in Oman and teachers as well as students. Teacher professional development and self-learning could help to improve low levels of student performance and dropping out in Oman. If teachers are well trained and their learning environment is conducive for continuous learning, they will be empowered and autonomous to seek for greater knowledge and eventually, they will pass their knowledge and skills to their respective students. Idiomatically, teachers are like 'breastfeeding' mothers, passing foods and nutrition they have consumed to their beloved babies. Hence, the more healthy the mother is, the healthier the baby. When teachers are self-learners, the chances of students becoming self-learners as well are very high. The more training given or provided to teachers, the more productive students they will produce.

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