



**PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPs) IN EDUCATION IN
THE SULTANATE OF OMAN AT THE BASIC AND POST-BASIC
EDUCATION LEVELS: TOWARDS A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK**

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Author's declaration

I certify that, to best of my knowledge, all the material in this thesis represents my own work and that no material is included which has been submitted for any other award or qualification.

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the public–private partnership (PPP) phenomenon at the basic education and post-basic education levels in the Sultanate of Oman. Specifically, it identifies the types of existing PPPs and probes different stakeholders’ perspectives of PPPs. It also highlights the challenges that impede the effectiveness of PPPs in the Omani context and identifies approaches to alleviate them. Finally, it suggests a PPP framework for the Omani context.

This study employed a case study design with a mixed-strategy approach to elicit data from a range of sources: the public education sector, the private education sector and other sectors. The research used semi-structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis as key data collection instruments. The public education sector participants comprised government officials, school principals and supervisors. The private education participants included school owners, school principals and chief executive officers (CEOs). Other participants were drawn from other governmental and non-governmental sectors. A total of four focus groups with 29 participants (six to nine participants in each group) and 32 semi-structured interviews covering participants from the different sectors were conducted.

The research findings reveal that a range of PPPs exist in the Omani education context. These however, are predominantly informal and voluntary. They also seem to address financial aspects and rarely tackle key quality aspects such as curricula and learning outcomes. In this study, it transpires that in Oman, PPP is envisaged as a multi-stakeholder approach with reciprocal and long-term benefits rather than relating to privatisation or philanthropy. The research also concludes that PPPs in Oman seem to be challenged chiefly by political and regulatory impediments, as well as some practical

barriers related to capacity and evaluation mechanisms. It is hoped that these results, together with the suggested PPP framework, will serve as a guideline for the promotion of public–private collaboration in education, as well as the development of a PPP programme at the basic education and post-basic education levels in Oman.

Dedication

To the children of Oman, the nation's wealth and its prosperous future.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I praise and thank Almighty Allah for blessing me with the strength and perseverance to complete this work. And because ‘Those who do not thank people, do not thank Allah’ (Prophet Mohammed, in Al-Tirmidhi, 1878), I would like to express my appreciation to a number of people who have inspired me and contributed to this body of work. I wish to thank the government of the Sultanate of Oman for awarding me a scholarship to obtain this degree. Special thanks are also due to the participants of the study. Your perspectives, time and vision were invaluable and constituted the spirit of this work. To my supervisor, Professor James Tooley, I am forever indebted for your scholarly advice and professional guidance. Your time and consideration made my graduate experience a good one. To all my friends at Newcastle University, thank you for being there to share my small triumphs and listen to my trivial concerns.

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To my children, Al-Ozd, Faris, Munia, Yumn, Alia and Sana, who endured my constant work and long absence, you were remarkably understanding and loving. I undertook this work so that schools can be a better place for you. Finally, to my selfless and loving husband, Issa, it is your support, encouragement and care that has seen me through my most difficult moments and got me to this point.

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List of Abbreviations

AAS	Adopt-a-School
ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
BOT	Build-Operate-Transfer
EFA	Education for all
FG	Focus group
FyA	Fe y Alegría
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEI	Global Education Initiative
HE	Higher education
ICT	Information and communication technology
IT	Information technology
JEI	Jordan Education Initiative
KHDE	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSPEs	Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Education
NCPPP	The National Council for Public-Private Partnerships
OCCI	Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PiL	Partners in Learning
PIRLS	Progress in International Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP(s)	Public–Private Partnership(s)
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WEF	World Economic Forum

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1 Overview

Historically education was privately financed and provided (Draxler, 2012; NCPPP, 2003; Tooley, 2009; West, 1970). Largely from the 19th century onwards, governments increasingly took over responsibility for education (Vawda & Patrinos, 1999) for reasons of ‘nation building’, ‘social integration’ and ‘social cohesion’ (Sosale, 2000, p. ii). The intervention of governments in education is ostensibly driven by a regard for equity, quality, agency and economic and social concerns and the perception of education as a public good (World Bank, 2001). Intervention is usually implemented through up to three policy instruments: funding, provision and regulation (World Bank, 2001). However, in recent years, governments have faced challenges in financing and providing education, with shrinking resources, excess demand and the misallocation of public spending.

In the last two decades, private participation in education has increased dramatically across the world, particularly in developing countries. Although governments usually remain the main players in educational provision and finance in many countries, the private sector now delivers a considerable proportion of educational services (Fielden & LaRocque, 2008; Patrinos et al, 2009; Sosale, 2000). In many countries, low-cost private education is perceived to have helped achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of education for all (EFA) and gender parity with opportunities for low-income families (Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) Team, 2007; Casely-Hayford & Hartwell, 2010; Rose, 2006; Tooley & Dixon, 2006; UNESCO, 2009). Some evidence suggests that low-cost private schools are of comparable or better quality than public schools (AKF Team, 2007; Tooley & Dixon, 2006).

Some suggest that the unplanned growth in non-state educational provision has led to the fragmentation of service delivery (Rose, 2010) and variation in the quality of the education provided (Fennell, 2007). Public–private partnerships (PPPs) appear to present a viable approach to coordinate efforts and play a significant role in development. PPPs are predominantly undertaken for two key purposes: to increase access for the underserved in pursuit of the MDGs (DeStefano & Schuh Moore, 2010; Genevois, 2008) and to meet differentiated demand for education services and improve quality (Fennell, 2007; Patrinos & Sosale, 2007; Rose, 2010). Over the past two decades, governments have developed innovative collaborations with the private sector to finance and provide education. It is believed that PPPs improve both the supply and quality of human capital (Patrinos & Sosale, 2007), while assuming the state’s role in overall education regulation (Rose, 2010).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The phenomenon of PPPs in the Omani education context can be explored through the lenses of quality, access, equity and finance.

Quality

Of these, the most fundamental issue concerns quality of education. Despite the expansion of primary education and rise in literacy rates in Oman, the quality of primary and secondary education lags behind international standards, as suggested by the low levels of performance in internationally benchmarked student assessments and the low percentages of students in the critical fields of science, mathematics, engineering and technology. Oman’s participation in TIMMS in 2007 and 2011 and PIRLS in 2011, which provided a rigorous international comparison of standards in mathematics, science and reading, revealed that students’ learning outcomes are well below the international average in all three areas (PIRLS, 2012; TIMMS, 2008a, 2008b,

2012a, 2012b). Interestingly, the participating private and international schools outperformed their public counterparts in grade 8 by approximately 23% and 15% in mathematics and science respectively (MOE, 2013). According to Barrera-Osorio et al (2009), these results point towards inefficiencies in the public education system and public policies. At least for the present and in the immediate future, these inefficiencies in the Gulf region are not necessarily finance-related. Rather they are the result of ineffective policies. In Oman for example, the general expenditure on individual students in Oman is close to international standards (UNESCO, 2010). Hence, improving the quality of educational outcomes constitutes the greatest challenge for the Omani education sector.

Furthermore, the 2003 and 2009 Arab Human Development reports identified deficits in the education systems and workforce skills in most Arab countries, including Oman. The academic focus of education creates a mismatch between the schooling outputs and the professional/technical skills sought by employers, aggravating unemployment (Gonzalez et al, 2008). To overcome this challenge, the reports recommend expanding the private sector's role. In their study of the impact of reform at the post-basic education level in Oman, Issan and Gomaa (2010) concluded that establishing partnerships with the private sector and the expansion of technical and vocational education could help improve the relevance of educational outcomes to labour market needs.

Lack of vacancies in the public sector and the high unemployment rate in Oman have led to a national strategy to encourage private sector employment (World Bank, 2012). A 1995 conference which considered the direction of Oman's economic and social development recommended a number of strategies and goals to develop human capital. Goals include developing an efficient and competitive private sector and developing

human resources (MONE, 2007). A transition to private sector employment places new demands on the education system and enjoins deeper collaboration between the public education sector and the private sector. Such concerns about the quality of education in the Omani context mirror some access gaps particularly in areas where there is public under-supply such as technical education.

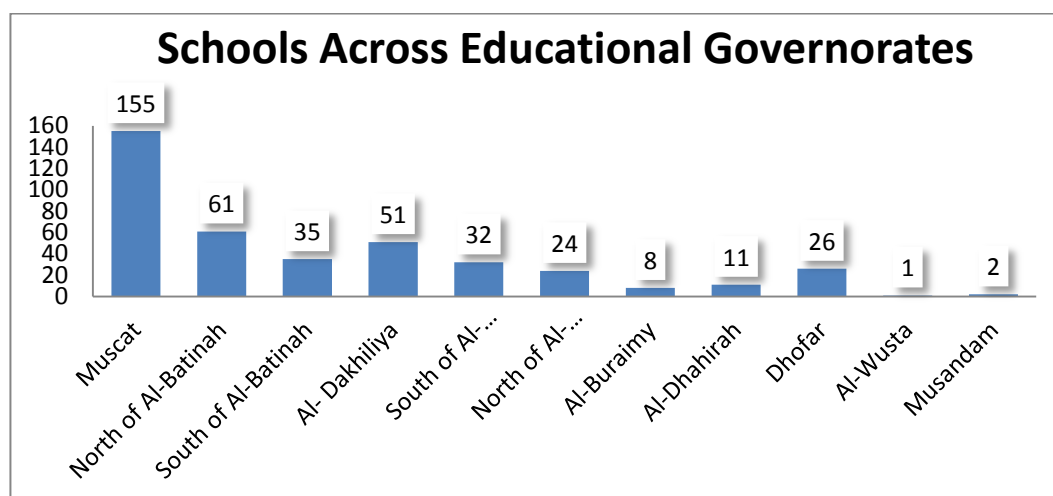
Access and equity

Access and equity issues are other forces that have led to this research on PPPs in education. These are linked together here as concerns about equity in practice often reflect lack of access to educational opportunities. Indeed, a strong link can be made to quality concerns as concerns over access in the Omani context are often related not to lack of access per se, but to lack of access to quality educational opportunities. Access can be linked to lack of access to pre-school education, quality private education and technical/vocational education.

Arab states have the second highest growth rate of private education in the world (c. 109% growth between 1991 and 2003, AKF Team, 2007). For instance, private provision in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain has doubled in the last decade. Focusing on Oman, private schools made up approximately 16% of total schools in 2008/2009; the number has increased threefold in 10 years (from 123 in 2000 to 343 in 2010) with an annual student growth rate of approximately 9% (MOE, 2010a). The demand for private education may be driven by people's differentiated demands or their need for services not met by government provision (Fielden & LaRocque, 2008; Sosale, 2000; Vawdan & Patrinos, 1999). Nevertheless, this expansion is geographically concentrated in Muscat and a few main cities, which creates disparities between different regions as Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1 reveal. It also targets predominantly pre-

school and basic education (World Bank, 2012). This signifies the demand for quality education and pre-school education which is not universally provided by MOE.

Figure 1.1: Distribution of private schools across governorates 2011/2012



Source: Adapted from MoE (2012b, p. 166)

Table 1.1: Distribution of private schools by level of education and governorate 2011/2012

Governorate	Basic Education	Kindergarten	Holy Quran Kindergarten	Total
Muscat	103	26	26	155
Al-Batinah North	37	13	11	61
Al-Batinah South	18	8	9	35
Al-Dakhiliyah	15	17	19	51
Al-Sharqiyah South	16	13	3	32
Al-Sharqiyah North	8	5	11	24
Al-Buraimi	7	1	-	8
Al-Dhahirah	6	-	5	11
Dhofar	14	12	-	26
Al-Wusta	1	-	-	1
Musandam	1	-	1	2
Total	226	95	85	406

Source: Adapted from MoE (2012b, p. 167)

This accelerating expansion has sparked calls for the forging of partnerships between public and private sectors to remedy inefficiencies, promote quality (Akyeampong, 2009) and provide equitable access. PPPs could provide a cost-effective and equitable approach of offering not only quality private education across the Sultanate, but meeting the high demand for pre-school education and technical education.

Finance

Finance of education is an additional factor that contributed to the study of PPPs in education. Finance stands as an issue because Oman faces economic challenges coupled with a high demographic growth rate (3.5% in 2005), which might constrain the sustainability of a large public sector, including education (Gonzalez et al, 2008). Increasing financial demands on the Omani government and the growth in demand for education coupled with a decline in oil revenues raises questions about the financial sustainability of public education in the long term (World Bank, 2012). Table 1.2 traces the growth in the MOE's budget between 2005 and 2011, anticipates its growth if trends continue in 2019 based on the current biennial growth rate of 17%. The chart also compares this with the budget of OECD countries.

Table 1.2: MOE budget from 2005-2011 and anticipated growth if trend continues in 2019 compared to OECD

	2005	2007	2009	2011	2019
MOE Budget (RO million)	451.8	649.4	747.6	804.4	*1,694.0
% of GDP	3.5	*3.9	4.3	*4.8	*7.2
Average OECD countries' expenditure on primary, secondary and post-secondary education (% of GDP)	5.3	5.4	5.8	6.1	*6.9

Source: MOE (2010c, p.142; 2011, p. 244), OECD (2012, p. 271; 2014, p. 230) and www.worldbank.org/all?qterm=+Oman+expenditure+education&title=&filetype=#

*Calculated based on the average growth rate

If expenditure on education continues to rise in this rate, this places the government under pressure and can lead to a future financing shortfall. PPP could serve to fill this financing gap due to its cost-effectiveness and risk-sharing benefits and thus constitutes a viable financing alternative in such circumstances. The World Bank recommends considering such ‘complementary financing modes’ as well as expanding private education to tackle financial deficits. This expansion will enhance the financial sustainability of public education, promote healthy competition with public schools and offer more parental choice (World Bank, 2012, p. 103).

On the radar in Oman there is already discussion of PPPs as a possible route to addressing these four areas of concern. Recently, there has been an official and social thrust towards PPPs in education. In his address on the fifth term of the Oman Council (October, 2011), the Sultan of Oman affirmed the need for public–private collaboration in areas such as education and human resource development. The Ministry of Education (MOE) echoed this in its mission statement which presents an increased role for the private sector in education as a key principle that contributes to economic and social prosperity.¹ However, this sentiment has not been reflected in practical measures. PPPs have also been a media focus in Oman, reflecting a general public inclination towards the involvement of the private sector in the country’s development. A report in AlWatan Daily, December 2010, pointed out that PPPs do not exist in education as much as other service sectors. Another release on 2 February 2011 reported the government’s endeavours to attract private sector investment and partnership by introducing potential investors to the education market in Oman. The International Conference on Secondary Education held in Oman in 2002 identified collaboration between public education sector and private sector as a priority (MOE, 2002). The Symposia of Investment in

¹ <http://home.moe.gov.om/arabic/showpage.php?CatID=8&ID=504> (Accessed 14 September, 2012).

Private School Education convened in 2003 and 2009 highlighted investment opportunities and incentives to encourage more private education participation (MOE, 2003, 2009). All this suggests the time is ripe to introduce features of PPP in education and to benefit from the experiences of similar initiatives in the region.

This thesis aims to establish through detailed qualitative research a suggested framework of PPP for education in Oman that builds on this interest in PPPs and addresses these four major concerns of quality, finance, access and equity.

1.3 Research Questions

The main foci of this research are twofold: it first explores the PPP phenomenon in education in Oman and second proposes a PPP framework that draws on the research input, the literature and current regional and international PPP practices.

The overarching research question is:

- What framework of public–private partnerships can be suggested to improve education services and learning outcomes at the basic and post-basic education levels in the Sultanate of Oman?

Five subsidiary research questions arise from this:

1. How are PPPs perceived by different stakeholders in the Omani education context (administrators, private sector participants and school principals/supervisors)?
2. What PPP patterns operate in the education system at the basic and post-basic education levels?
3. What potential private sector players are available to implement PPP programmes in Oman?

4. What are the challenges facing the implementation of these PPPs in education in Oman and how can they be overcome?
5. What are the attributes of an effective PPP model?

1.4 Research Context

In this study, a qualitative approach is adopted to facilitate consideration of contextual factors. In contrast to quantitative research, which views contextual factors as a threat to the integrity of research design, context is a central issue which is ‘stressed, not stripped’ in qualitative research (Miller et al, 2004, p. 332). It addresses elements of the social, cultural and structural contexts and highlights their links to the problem under investigation. Clarifying certain aspects in the context of this study not only aids the exploration of the PPP phenomenon, but also supports the interpretation of the research findings in the light of these contextual elements. Miller et al (2004) contend that the findings of qualitative research based on specific contexts can also stimulate policy makers and stakeholders to take action to address organisational dilemmas. This section sheds light on certain aspects of the research context of this study. In particular, it presents an overview of Oman’s geographical, demographic and economic features, addresses the development of the education system in Oman and its reform efforts and portrays the private education and PPP landscapes in the country.

1.4.1 Geographical, demographic and economic features

The Sultanate of Oman is considered one of the 15 states that constitute the famed ‘Cradle of Humanity’ (ESCWA, 2007, p. 1). Lying in the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, it is administrated as 11 governorates consisting of 61 Wilayats (towns). With a population of around 3.9 million, made up of 2.2 million Omanis and 1.7 million expatriates (NCSI, 2013c); 44.6% of the population are below the age of 20. Classified by the World Bank as a high-income country, Oman’s economy is largely

dependent on oil and gas exports, which contribute approximately 50% to its gross domestic product (GDP). Recently, the government has been pursuing diversification, industrialisation and privatisation to reduce the reliance on this sector's revenues. GDP per capita in 2012 was USD 21,560 (GBP 13,349).

1.4.2 Development of the education system

From the emergence of the Islamic civilisation in the seventh century until the early 20th century, education in Oman, as in other Islamic states, was mainly delivered through indigenous community-led and Quran schools teaching Islamic studies, Arabic and arithmetic (Kadi, 2006). The 1930s marked a shift from this system to public schooling with the establishment of three public schools offering primary education to 909 students, teaching science, geography and history in addition to the traditional subjects. These schools formed the nucleus of modern public education in Oman, which formally started in 1970. In the period 1970–1975, annual growth rates in the number of schools and students were 53% and 41% respectively, reflecting the priority of increasing access to education (MOE, 2010b). The population illiteracy rate for age 15 and over dropped from 41% in 1993 to 14% in 2010 (NCSI, 2013a). By 2013, the education system had expanded to include 1,043 schools serving 514,667 students (NCSI, 2013b). The 2011 Human Development report described Oman as one of the world's top 10 performers in some human development indicators, including access to education (UNDP, 2011).

This initial acceleration in educational expansion has been coupled with prioritising quality improvements since 1995. The most ambitious reforms began with phasing in the 'basic education' system in 1998/1999 to gradually replace the general education system. By basic education is meant a system consisting of two cycles covering grades 1–4 and 5–10. The major features of the reformed education system are curriculum development, inclusion of critical thinking, early introduction of English, formative

assessment and upgrading of teacher qualifications. The introduction of ‘post-basic’ education was a subsequent reform. This stage prepares students in grades 11 and 12 for higher education (HE), other further education and the labour market. The main features of this system are core and elective courses and a focus on information technology (IT). However, according to Issan and Gomaa (2010), this reform has not yet led to improving students’ competencies and skills for the labour market. Hence, they recommend strengthening collaboration and partnerships with the labour sectors to achieve this aim. Career guidance is another parallel reform, while other reforms targeted a reduction in drop-out and grade repetition rates, measuring students’ achievement, improving school effectiveness and introducing some structural/organisational changes at the MOE.

The education budget has grown as a result of these reforms and emerging demands. In the school year 2011/2012, the MOE’s annual budget was 804,428,516 Omani Rials (OMR) (USD 2,091,514,142; GBP 1,295,129,911) constituting 20.37% of total government expenditure. This is because education is a labour-intensive sector with MOE’s recurrent costs (salaries and wages) aggregating to more than 90% of total costs, which is high by international standards. The World Bank (2012) observes that this high salary bill is due to the sharp increase in the numbers of school teachers and administrators relative to students. Of the remaining 10% of non-salary ancillary expenditures, only 11% is allocated to learning materials. The average per-student cost has increased considerably: from OMR 465 (USD 1209; GBP 749) in 2001 to OMR 1,667 (USD 4,334; GBP 2,667) in 2012 in the first cycle; from OMR 398 (USD 1,035; GBP 641) to OMR 1,532 (USD 3,983; GBP 2,467) in the second cycle; from OMR 528 (USD 1,373; GBP 850) to OMR 2,054 (USD 5,340; GBP 3,307) in post-basic education. The unit cost of special education students in 2012 reached OMR 10,554 (USD 27,440; GBP 16,992) in the first cycle and OMR 7,195 (USD 18,707; GBP

11,584) in the second cycle (MOE, 2011). The World Bank (2012) partially attributes this increase in unit costs to the decrease in enrolments at a time when the education budget was increasing.

Expenditure on education has quadrupled in the last 10 years, showing the governmental emphasis on development of human resources. However, pure resource policies which maintain existing structures of school operations are not likely to produce the necessary improvements in student outcomes (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). The recent Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2008a, 2008b, 2012a, 2012b) and the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) results for 2011 reveal that Omani students perform well below international benchmarks (PIRLS, 2012). Despite this generous expenditure on education, the actual return on education does not exceed 37–40% in the most optimistic estimates, as highlighted by some evaluative reports. For example, the OHMSACA (2010) report attributes inefficiencies to the wastage of resources and inefficient implementation of policies. Similar conclusions were arrived at in the World Bank report, which suggests some wastage in resources due to ‘inefficient practices’ (World Bank, 2012, p. 100).

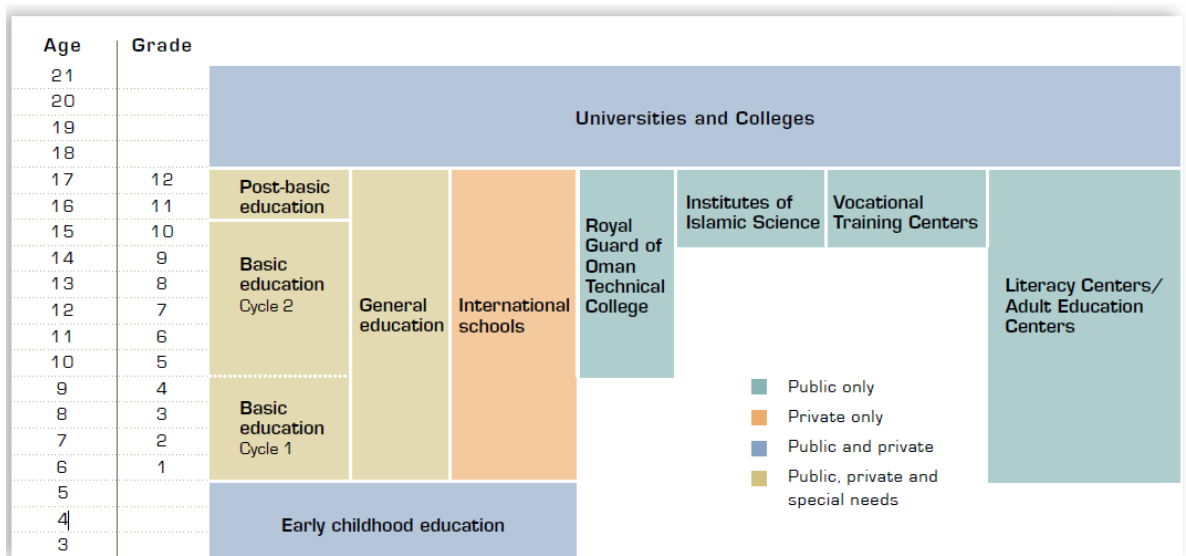
1.4.3 Management of education

Oman has adopted a centralised financial and administrative education system. Centralised education policies include a national curriculum and assessment system, distribution of financial resources and the administration of school staffing levels and teacher recruitment procedures (MOE, 2006a). Regional educational directorates in the 11 governorates follow up the enforcement of centralised policies (for the MOE hierarchical structure, see Appendix A). However, recently the MOE has devolved some authority to governorates regarding examinations and in-service teacher training. It has also gradually introduced some measures to promote school autonomy regarding self-

evaluation, financial decision making and school-based staff training. It recognises that building capacity and introducing a comprehensive accountability system are the logical corollaries of a decentralised education system, which the MOE is seriously considering. However, it maintains that ‘developing the overall vision, policy and priorities for education’ remain centralised (MOE, 2006a, p. 141).

The Basic Law of the State of the Sultanate of Oman states that education is a right for all citizens which should be provided free of charge. Hence, public education is provided free of charge to children between the ages of six and 17. Pre-school education is mostly offered by the private sector and other governmental departments. Figure 1.2 clarifies the different educational levels and type of provision (public, private or both).

Figure 1.2: Structure of the Omani education system



Source: World Bank (2012, p. 19)

1.4.4 Private education

Private education existed in Oman before formal public education; some schools date back to 1871. Private schools flourished in key commercial cities in the 1920s and 1930s. Mutrah, for instance, had eight private schools, more than the total public schools in Oman at the time (MOE, 2010b). These schools provided coeducation in the areas of Islamic studies, Arabic, English, geography and arithmetic. Private education

became more structured in 1977 under the Royal Decree (68/77) which also encouraged private investment in education. The number of modern private schools increased from 49 schools serving 7854 students (1989/1990) to 123 serving 2,3794 (1999/2000) and 343 serving 56,234 (2009/2010), offering education from kindergarten to grade 12 (MOE, 2010b). In 2013, the number had risen to 444 with a total student enrolment of 79,382, an 11% increase on the previous year (NCSI, 2013b). Table 1.3 below presents the increase in private schools between 1990 and 2013.

Table 1.3: Private education growth in Oman 1998-2012

School Year	No. of Schools	No. of students	No. of Admin. Staff	No. of Teaching staff
98/99	118	23560	306	1405
99/2000	123	23794	305	1624
2000/2001	132	23850	305	1801
2001/2002	131	22773	301	1792
2002/2003	132	23166	320	1836
2003/2004	129	23553	311	1916
2004/2005	143	25472	367	2040
2005/2006	158	28183	401	2250
2006/2007	170	21134	465	2486
2007/2008	174	37374	484	2797
2008/2009	200	43396	524	3190
2009/2010	343	56234	1089	4491
2010/2011	387	65326	1267	5241
2011/2012	406	71274	1293	5557

Source: Compiled by the researcher drawing on MOE (2010b); MOE (2010c); MOE (2011); MOE (2012a); MOE (2012b)

However, private education provision at secondary level is still ‘modest’ with total enrolment lagging behind other GCC countries (World Bank, 2012, p. 100).

Private education in Oman encompasses myriad school types, including Quran, kindergarten, monolingual, bilingual, international private schools and global/community private schools (MOE, 2006b). These schools are supervised by the MOE; the Directorate General of Private Schools monitors service quality and adherence to standards (MOE, 2006a). Although some adopt the national curriculum, others do not. These schools enjoy a level of autonomy related to their choice of curricular programmes and qualifications.

Private schools are perceived to increase parental choice, raise educational standards and reduce public expenditure. Although private schools and their enrolments have grown substantially over the years, the MOE discerns that expanding the role of private education is still a challenge (MOE, 2006a). The Basic Law of the State, article 13(3), explicitly recognises the role of the private sector as a partner in the provision of education (MOE, 2004). This recognition facilitates the building of support for private education and the expansion of its services (Fielden & LaRocque, 2008) and necessitates building an enabling regulatory environment (Patrinos et al, 2009; Sosale, 2000).

1.4.5 PPP policy landscape

Three consecutive five-year development plans, starting from the sixth five-year plan (2001–2005) to the current eighth five-year plan (2011–2015), have emphasised the role of the private sector in enhancing the Omani economy. This emphasis has produced a number of PPP ventures in water supply systems, transport, ports maintenance (Rondinelli, 2003), IT (ESCWA, 2007) and power distribution. Although a major objective of expanding private education was stated as a national policy priority in the

seventh and eighth five-year plans, formal PPP initiatives in the education sector are still very limited. Most of the existing PPPs in education in Oman can be classified as philanthropic, voluntary or informal cooperation (Rondinelli, 2003). Oman's current PPP activities can also be classified under the 'opportunity' model discussed by Davies and Hentschke (2006, p. 207) in which private resources are attracted to enhance aspects of educational performance.

The objective of enhancing the role of the private sector in education is addressed at two administrative levels: a broad governmental level and a focused MOE level. At the broader level, some joint committees between different ministries and the private sector have been formed. These committees have primarily sought to address the alleged gap between schooling outcomes and labour market needs and to foster liaison and cooperation between participating ministries. In addition, the services committee, which includes private investment in education, at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is another step in this direction.

At the MOE level, this objective is tackled on two different fronts: the private business sector and the private education sector. The MOE has adopted some practical strategies to address its relationship with these two types of private sector. Establishing the National Centre for Career Guidance (which seeks to improve relevance of educational outcomes to the workplace) and creating a PPP committee serve the former and upgrading the hierarchical structure of the private schools department (by making it a directorate general) at the MOE serves the latter. The establishment of the PPP committee by ministerial decree 58/2007 is regarded as the most formal manifestation of policy pertaining to enhancing the role of the corporate private sector in education. This committee, however, has limited authority which restricts its pursuit of long-term and quality PPP projects.

Despite these various measures, governmental PPP policy is more evident at the HE level than the school level. Although this policy has raised awareness of the potential benefits of PPP in education and encourages the expansion of private schools, its practical procedures have not yielded many significant or large-scale PPP projects at the school level.

1.5 Thesis Structure and Conclusion

The structure and composition of this case study report follows a linear-analytic structure. This structure, according to Yin (2003), is the most suitable for research theses or dissertation reports. This chapter has identified the problem of the study and reformulated it as research questions. It has also provided an overview of the phenomenon of PPP as well as set the context of the research. Chapter 2 reviews the previous relevant literature on the topic, devoting separate sections to the development of PPP, its merits and drawbacks, the ideological debate underlying the concept and the effective implementation of PPP programmes. Chapter 3 specifies the research design, research instruments and analytic procedures and describes the research participants. Research results are covered in chapters 4 to 6. Chapter 4 discusses the research findings and provides answers to the subsidiary research questions. Chapter 5 offers interpretations of these results in the light of the research context and the PPP literature, while Chapter 6 accumulates and distils input from the subsidiary questions to develop a PPP framework responsive to the Omani education context. The chapter concludes by providing some recommendations and policy implications. Chapter 7 is an executive summary of the suggested PPP framework which is intended as a ‘policy brief’, outlining the key regulatory requirements and specific PPP strategies to address education concerns in Oman.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Contreras et al (2009) contend that governments have three alternative policy options to improve educational outcomes. First to increase resources. However, Hanushek and Wößmann (2007), suggest that this does not necessarily translate into improved results, especially if not accompanied by institutional reforms. Given the failure potential for this first strategy, there are two alternatives. Second, to introduce incentives on the supply side, such as performance-related teacher pay and increasing school autonomy and accountability. Third, to introduce demand-side competition and incentive mechanisms. This final option has three important institutional features which, Hanushek and Wößmann (2007) believe, can create a quality education system: choice and competition; decentralisation and school autonomy; accountability for outcomes. These features, which comprise both supply-side and demand-side aspects, are the hallmarks of private education and public–private partnerships (PPPs).

The ‘twin challenge’ of providing access to education and improving educational outcomes faced by many developing countries (LaRocque, 2008, p. 6), coupled with shrinking education budgets in many countries around the world, have created some innovative partnerships between governments and the private sector. These PPPs have evolved predominantly to expand access, provide choice and improve learning outcomes. While some of these PPPs in high-income countries, for example Netherlands and Denmark, have been introduced by policy design to meet differentiated demand and improve outcomes, others have emerged by default. Those in many Asian and African countries, for example, have arisen as a means of expanding access to education through low-cost private schools (Patrinos et al, 2009); an approach which is

perceived by many observers to have contributed towards meeting the MDGs (AKF team, 2007; Casely-Hayford & Hartwell, 2010; Rose, 2006; UNECO, 2009).

This chapter is structured in five main sections. First, the development of PPPs is traced and its various definitions, typologies and existing models are explored. Second, theoretical debates on PPPs are presented, followed by discussion of the merits and challenges of PPPs. Finally, the prerequisites for effective implementation of PPPs are discussed.

2.2 Development of PPPs, Typologies and Models

2.2.1 Development of PPPs

The PPP model has evolved as an alternative to purely hierarchical and market-oriented forms of organisations (Davies & Hentschke, 2006), marrying the two global economic development trends of empowering the market and local communities that emerged following the end of the Cold War. When mediated by the government, this third trend offers a synergy that overcomes the shortcomings of the other two trends, producing a win-win situation (Miraftab, 2004).

PPPs tend to be misrepresented as a relatively new phenomenon, originating from the privatisation movement which emerged in the 1980s. However, PPPs are not new, nor do they comprise privatisation (Davies & Hentschke, 2005). Although the PPP model as a concept is relatively new, in reality it has a long history of practice in public policy in numerous countries around the world (Davies & Hentschke, 2005; Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004; Sadran, 2004). Furthermore, the two terms ‘PPP’ and ‘privatisation’ are not synonymous. PPPs retain a high level of public oversight and control, ostensibly to avoid the negative consequences associated with privatisation (NCPPP, 2012). The PPP model combines the strengths of the public sector, the private sector and other not-for-profit sectors. Above all, it is a viable alternative for governments to overcome

economic challenges without cutting spending, increasing taxes or increasing borrowing from other agencies (NCPMP, 2012).

PPPs have enjoyed a global resurgence; they are commonly employed in spheres as diverse as urban planning, transportation, health, telecommunications and education. Governments engage in PPPs for a number of reasons, ranging from philosophical issues to beliefs about managerial efficiency, or even certain political pressures to initiate structural adjustment programmes and empower civil society (Rosenbaum, 2006). A lack of state resources, government inefficiency in service provision and top-down strategies and rigid hierarchical structures are among the most prevalent arguments in the literature for the involvement of private and non-state providers in the delivery of public services (LaRocque, 2008; Rondinelli, 2003; Teamey, 2007). Although adopting a PPP policy has always been context-specific with several factors in play, the key two PPP drivers in many countries tend to be governments' fiscal problems, which necessitate the mobilisation of private funding, and increased interest in e-government and technology, compelling governments and the ICT private sector to exchange expertise for public capital (Bovaird, 2004; Robertson, 2002). PPPs have become a widely used economic tool due to their perceived positive impact on organisational capacity, their less hierarchical and more flexible structures, their cost-effectiveness and resource mobilisation, as well as the way in which they foster people's participation and ensure public accountability (Draxler, 2008; Shamsul-Haque, 2004; Teamey, 2007).

The term PPP has been described as 'plastic' due to the multiple and heterogeneous forms it can take (Sadran, 2004, p. 233). It encompasses numerous arrangements, ranging from voluntary collaborations to contractual agreements and formalised strategic coalitions. There is no consensus on the meaning of partnership (Shamsul-

Haque, 2004), its definition differs across sectors (Genevois, 2008) and according to the scope and formality of arrangements (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009). Also, the nature and roles of PPPs are interpreted differently from one context to another (Bovaird, 2004).

Nevertheless, the diversity of meanings of PPP does not necessarily mean that there is a need for standardisation. Rather, PPPs need to be explored and defined in their specific contexts (Bovaird, 2004). However, it is useful to review some common definitions to highlight their features and limitations. The definition of the term ranges between simple coordination to extremely formal contracting arrangements (Shamsul-Haque, 2004). Typical definitions of PPP capitalise on aspects of collaboration and mutuality between the public sector and the private sector in their joint pursuit of a public service. Some of these definitions distinguish between the private for-profit sector (businesses) and the private not-for-profit sector (non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society). Others highlight the benefits of partnering with either local or international partners (Hammons, 2010). However, any definition of PPP needs to consider some essential components: reciprocity in obligations, mutual accountability, the sharing of investment and risks, and joint responsibility in design and execution (Shamsul-Haque, 2004; WEF, 2005).

In their broadest sense, PPPs are defined as ‘co-operative institutional arrangements between public and private sector actors’ (Hodge & Greve, 2009, p. 33), conflating for-profit and not-for-profit actors. Other more narrow definitions, particularly those used by economists, represent PPPs as formal contracting: Taylor (2003, cited by Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009, pp. 3–4) defines a PPP as ‘a contracting mechanism used to acquire a specific service, of a defined quantity and quality, at an agreed-on price, from a specific provider, for a specific period’. This definition includes three key aspects of alliance between the public and the private sectors: an optimal level of risk sharing,

complementary roles of partners and an outcome-focused agreement between the public and private sectors (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009; LaRocque, 2008). However, it is limited in scope and does not address the dynamic nature of PPP processes (LaRocque, 2008), restricting the role of the public sector to that of financier and the role of the private sector to that of service provider (Robertson et al, 2012).

The definition of PPP should recognise both the voluntary and commercial private sectors as partners and reflect the long-term relationship between partners. A UK Commission (cited by LaRocque, 2008, p. 8) suggests that:

[A PPP is] a risk-sharing relationship based upon an agreed aspiration between the public and private (including voluntary) sectors to bring about a desired public policy outcome. More often than not this takes the form of a long-term and flexible relationship, usually underpinned by contract, for the delivery of a publicly funded service.

Despite their diverse and broad scope, PPPs share a number of features: they are formal, outcome-focused, develop long-term collaborations between partners who fulfil complementary roles, entail risk-sharing among partners and involve both voluntary and commercial sectors as partners (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009; Bennett et al, 2004; Latham, 2009; World Bank, 2001).

2.2.2 PPPs in education

A concise and comprehensive definition of PPPs in education is not readily available due to the great diversity within the partnership concept (World Bank, 2001). Genevois (2008, p. 7) suggests that a PPP in education is:

... a model of development cooperation in which actors from the private sector (private corporations, corporate foundations, groups or associations of business) and the public sector (Ministry of Education, local authorities and schools) pool together complementary expertise and resources to achieve development goals.

However, this definition, while it recognises a range of private sector actors, does not address not-for profit and civil society organisations and does not specify the nature of partnership (philanthropic or contractual).

PPPs in education are increasingly becoming an integral part of educational reform frameworks around the world. They have evolved as market-based solutions to ameliorate the challenges faced by public education (Poole & Mooney, 2006). Their emergence in education indicates its ‘evolution towards a multi-sector, alliance-oriented field’ (Davies & Hentschke, 2006, p. 205).

The continuum of PPP applications around the world ranges from solely publicly-run education systems to largely publicly-funded and privately-operated systems. Separating the provision and financing roles of the public and private sectors helps categorise PPP types (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: PPP types

		Provision	
		Private	Public
Finance	Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private schools • Private universities • Home schooling • Tutoring (e.g. Korea, Japan, France)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User fees • Student loans (e.g. Mexico, Italy, Brazil)
	Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vouchers • Contract schools • Charter schools • Contracting out (e.g. Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public schools • Public universities (e.g. Russia, Cuba, Finland, Germany)

Source: Adapted from Patrinos et al (2009) and Woessmann (2006), drawing on World Bank (2006)

As this table reveals, each of these categories include successful education systems. According to the AKF team (2007), the determinant of success is not the public or private formula, but rather government commitment to education. Governments do not need to fulfil all roles, but can meet their obligations through enabling other providers, providing the necessary finance and regulation and ensuring oversight and accountability.

In education, PPPs can follow one of two models: the ‘problem/deficit’ model, which entails a real and/or perceived public sector failure which can be remedied by PPP, and the ‘non-deficit/opportunity’ model, which operates when governments leverage and attract resources to enhance educational quality (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). Within these models, there are four viable uses of PPPs: improving school infrastructure and resources, promoting educational quality and innovation, enhancing the relevance of education to the economy and reaching excluded learners (Latham, 2009). These broad aims can be attained by facets such as ‘financial provision, pedagogical development, human resources development, service delivery, infrastructure, (and) facilities management’ Genevois (2008, p. 6).

The main rationale for developing PPPs is to improve financing for education through increasing cost-efficiency and mobilising additional resources, improving the provision of educational services through expanding equitable access to education to the marginalised, and improving service quality and outcomes through emphasising system efficiency, equity, choice and accountability (Genevois, 2008; Patrinos et al, 2009). Fennell (2007) identifies three key drivers that have paved the way for PPPs in education: the perception that public schools have failed to provide adequate education, leading parents to seek other alternatives, the variation in the quality of education offered by private providers which calls for regulation of the sector, and the increasing commercial interest in education. These issues have received considerable academic and political attention and are now at the heart of education provision reform.

In the wide range of PPPs, the scope of private partners’ involvement ranges from in-kind donations to contributions of knowledge, skills and attitudes to address complicated reform issues, including policy, practice and institutional reforms (Brady, 2012, in Ginsburg et al, 2012). In these PPPs, the public sector comprises the broad

government sector and the private sector is represented by a continuum of non-public bodies, ranging from for-profit business organisations to non-for-profit community groups and civil society. These myriad stakeholders include government agencies, international financial institutions, foreign corporations, consulting firms, academic and research institutions, local governments, pressure groups and NGOs (Fennell, 2007). Others also play prominent roles in these PPPs, such as major national and international companies which can intervene at the levels of curriculum and management, world ICT companies which can redesign teaching and learning systems and computerise information systems, and existing local education providers (Clarke, 1999, cited by Jones & Bird, 2000, p. 497).

The type of partnership and choice of partners depend on the task to be achieved, the sectors involved and the context of the partnership (Shamsul-Haque, 2004). These partners fulfil diverse but complementary roles based on their backgrounds and expertise. The perceived advantages of each sector when pooled together through PPPs can overcome the pitfalls of individual sectors, such as limited budgets, bureaucracy, lack of professional management and lack of equity in education.

2.2.3 Multi-stakeholder partnerships for education (MSPEs)

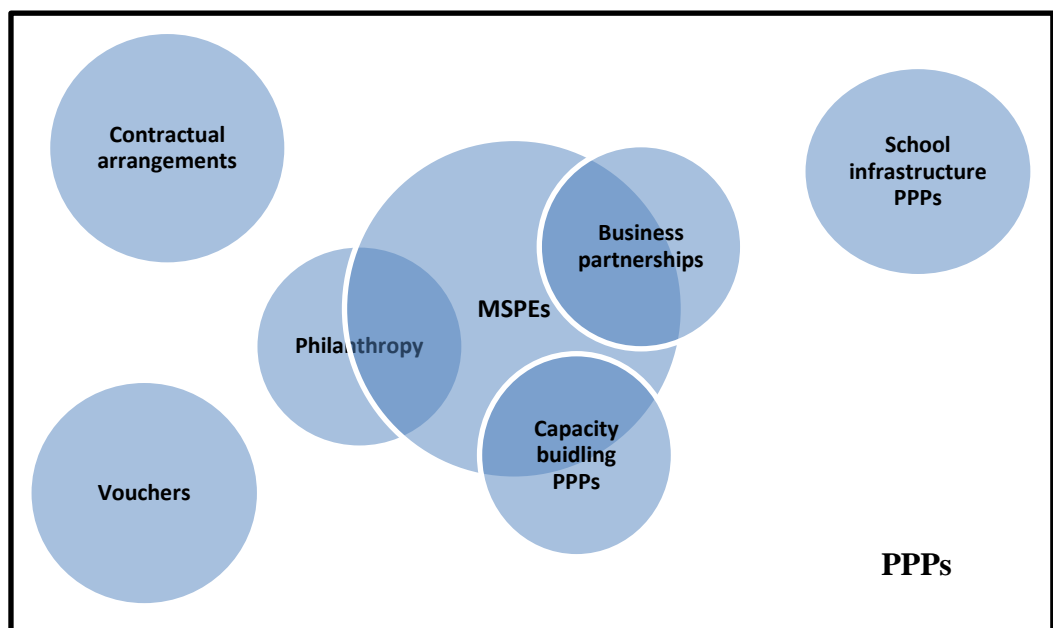
A limitation associated with definitions of PPP in education is that they assume a two-party relationship when in reality multiple stakeholders are involved (Hammons, 2010). Recently, a new category, MSPEs, has emerged explicitly to address PPPs in education and multi-sector and cross-sector collaborations. These acknowledge the role of civil society and other sectors (Fennell, 2010), bring together actors and stakeholders (Cathcart, 2008) and guarantee the synergy of efforts at the macro level (Draxler, 2008). Draxler (2008, p. 16) defines MSPEs as:

... the pooling and managing of resources as well as the mobilization of competencies and commitments by public, business and civil society partners to

contribute to expansion and quality of education. They are founded on the principles of international rights, ethical principles and organizational agreements underlying education sector development and management; on consultation with other stakeholders; and on shared decision-making, risk, benefit and accountability.

These are large-scale and strategic PPPs, promulgated by multilateral international intergovernmental organisations to promote sustainable educational quality in developing countries, the benefits of which are long term. MSPEs seem to intersect with and integrate some existing supply-oriented PPP models such as philanthropy, business partnerships and capacity building PPPs. Being predominantly based on the corporate social responsibility principle, they mainly target educational inputs such as resources, teacher training and educational programmes. Nevertheless, they exclude contractual PPPs, both inputs- and outputs-oriented, and voucher programmes which involve private education providers in the delivery of public education. Furthermore, whilst they recognise philanthropic infrastructure ventures, they do not subsume contractual infrastructure PPPs. Figure 2.1 below clarifies the boundaries of MSPEs.

Figure 2.1: The boundaries of MSPEs



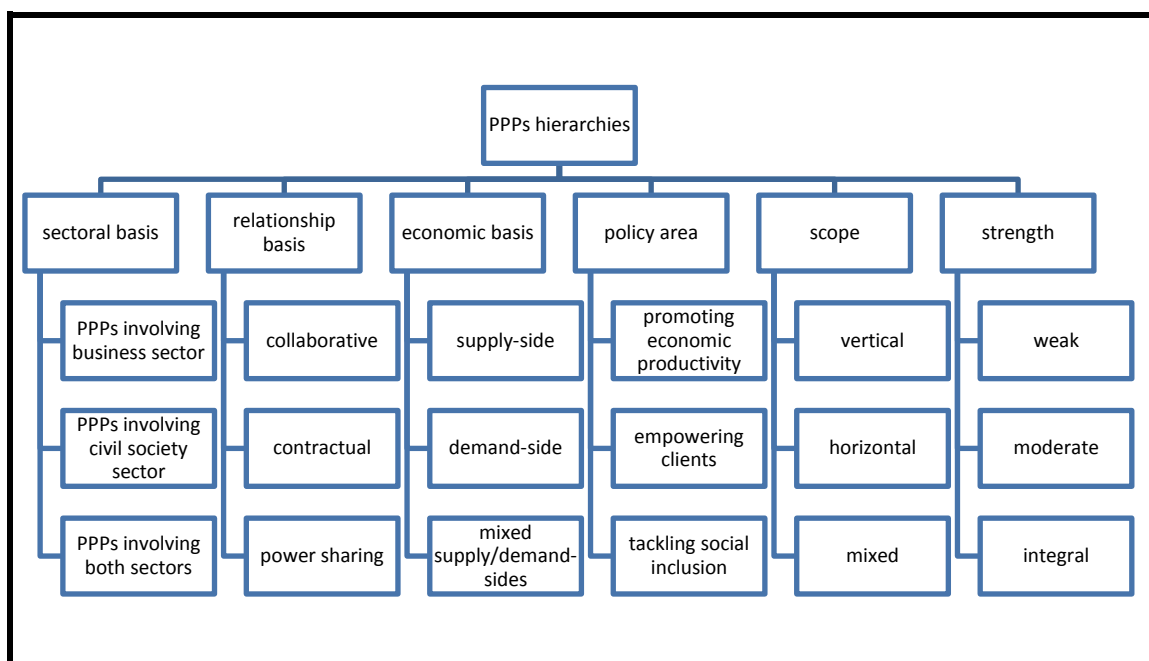
Source: Author's research

MSPEs assemble partners from diverse backgrounds for the benefit of education. However, some observe that, they are structurally, legally and functionally complex arrangements (Cathcart, 2008) and thus they are not easily amenable to rigorous impact evaluations (Ginsburg et al, 2012). MSPEs need to have very clear, measurable goals and rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be in place to determine their effectiveness, costs and impact on partners. Weak governance is another common criticism. This is countered by forming formal MSPEs based on added-value principles and national education goals, including clear partners' responsibilities, and implementing MSPEs under the oversight of public authorities (Draxler, 2012, in Ginsburg et al, 2012).

2.2.4 Typologies

The diversity of PPPs is reflected in different hierarchies and typologies that categorise the different types. PPPs are commonly classified on a sectoral basis, relationship basis, economic basis, policy area and scope (Bovaird, 2004). Each of these kinds of PPP has its own rationale based on government priorities. Figure 2.2 shows typical classifications of PPPs.

Figure 2.2: Typical PPP typologies



Source: Author's compilation based on the literature

Previous research has suggested normative hierarchies of PPP in which partnerships are placed along a continuum of weak or insubstantial to strong or meaningful partnerships (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006). A typical example of these is Patrinos et al's (2009) framework that describes the country's engagement in education PPPs. The framework depicts six levels of PPP environments: lacking, nascent, emerging, moderate, engaged and integral. In countries that lack a PPP environment, education is strictly publicly funded, provided and regulated. The 'nascent' PPP environment enables private schools to operate within a central regulatory framework and the 'emerging' level involves public subsidies to private school inputs. The 'moderate' and 'engaged' levels entail involving private schools in providing public education in varying degrees. The strongest PPP environment is at the 'integral' level, where governments devolve provision to private providers but retain regulatory and financial responsibilities. This typology is restricted to private providers of education and does not address other partners or aspects of PPPs.

Other classifications are based on the level of collaboration or depth of interaction between employees of different partner organisations. Austin (2000, cited by Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006) suggests three types of PPP based on the level of collaboration – philanthropic, transactional and integrative – with an increase in the strategic value of collaboration moving from philanthropic to integrative forms. Kanter (1994) proposes another hierarchy based on the level and depth of interaction between the PPP stakeholders, ranging from ‘strategic integration’, which entails interaction between leaders at the top of the organisations, to ‘cultural integration’, where the cultural and organisational differences between the partners are bridged. Similarly, Davies and Hentschke (2006) identify four ways of partnering based on the level of involvement with others, the action induced by partnering and the skills required. These can be placed along a continuum from networking (entailing informal arrangements involving minimal involvement, action and skills) to coordinating, cooperating and collaborating (denoting the highest levels of formality, involvement and skills).

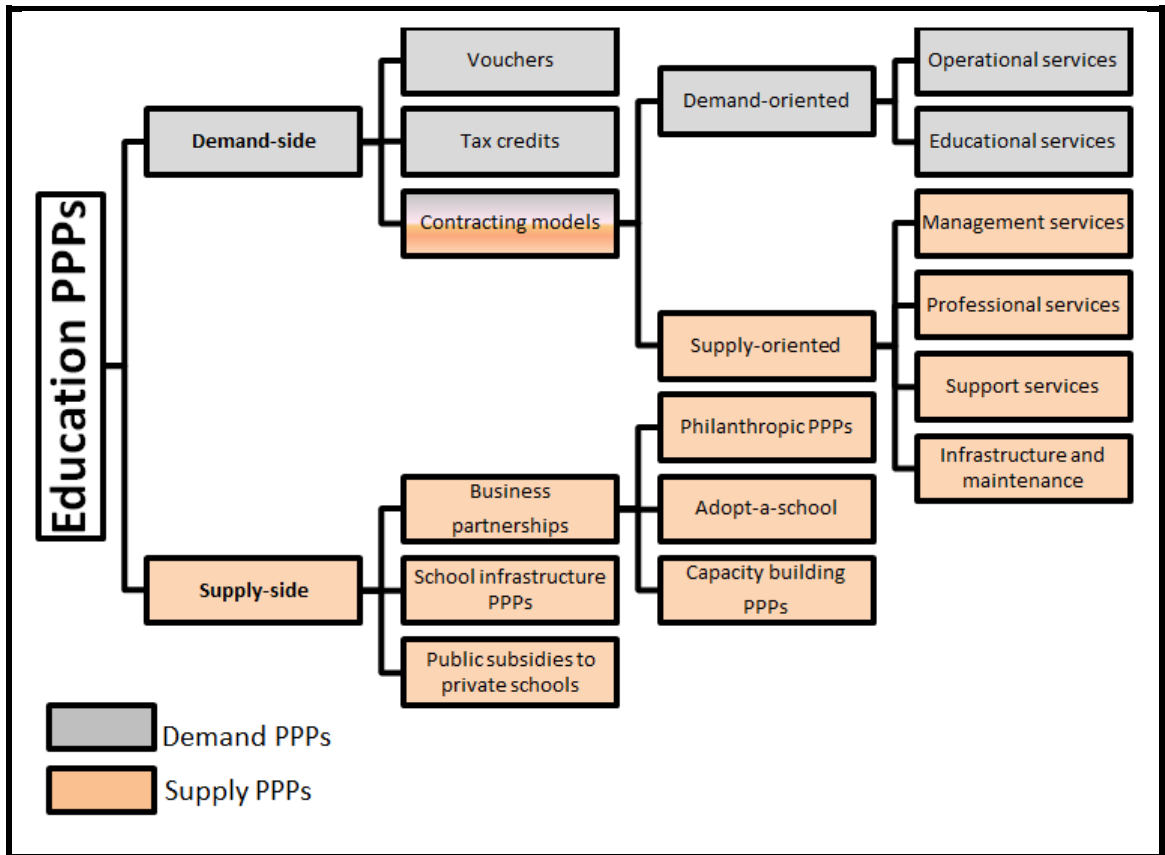
Smith and Wohlstetter (2006) are opposed to hierarchical structures of PPPs because of the assumption that the costs and challenges increase as PPPs progress to upper levels. They propose a flat typology of PPP in education which combines a range of PPP types and which is not based on the superiority of one type over others, but rather is context-specific in terms of the partners’ needs and assets. According to this typology, PPP types vary based on their origin (independent organisations or spin-offs), content (financial, human, physical or organisational resources), form (formal or informal agreements), and depth (one-level or multi-level involvement). What determines the suitability of a PPP type at a given time is the context, needs and individual circumstances. While the ‘origin’ dimension is linked more to charter schools in this typology, it can be applicable to other PPPs in education if expanded to include the diverse partners involved: public, for-profit, not-for-profit and civil society.

2.2.5 Models of PPPs in education

The literature reveals a wide range of PPP forms, models and types that are used in education to improve educational quality (Lewis & Patrinos, 2012) and efficiency in service delivery (Teicher et al, 2006). Each of these has its unique characteristics, design features and contexts. Whereas early models of PPP benefited from private corporate financing, recent models have tapped the social and political dimensions of educational provision through diffuse PPP forms that capitalise on beneficiaries' 'voice' (participation) and 'exit' (choice) (Fennell, 2010, p. 2), indicating a change in the role of the government in education.

PPPs in education are commonly discussed in relation to economic considerations: supply-side reforms and demand-side reforms. Supply-side PPPs link resourcing to schools and demand-side PPPs link resourcing to students. Thus, supply-side PPPs are more concerned with school inputs, management and educational resources, and demand-side PPPs are linked to educational processes and outputs and offering choice (Fennell, 2010). Supply-side reform includes PPP programmes such as private sector philanthropic initiatives, adopt-a-school programmes, school capacity-building initiatives, and school infrastructure initiatives. Demand-side PPP encompasses programmes such as school management initiatives, government purchase initiatives, voucher and voucher-like initiatives and contracting models. Certain categories of this classification may overlap as not all education PPPs fit neatly into this typology. The contracting model, for example, serves both supply and demand aspects. The main education PPPs are illustrated in Figure 2.3 below. Drawing on examples from around the world, some of these categories are discussed in detail due to their salience to the present study.

Figure 2.3: Common PPPs in education



Source: Author's research

Demand-side reforms

These types of programmes come under the ‘school choice’ reforms that are seen to bring some aspects of ‘markets’ into education (Tooley, 2008). Examples of these demand-oriented PPPs include vouchers, subsidies, capitation grants, tax credits and contracts (Patrinos et al, 2009; Tooley, 2008). These programmes are common throughout the world, in Europe, the United States of America (USA), Australia and Asia, with the oldest having been operating in the Netherlands and Denmark for the past 100 years, where private education provision constitutes approximately 70% and 21% respectively of total school enrolments (Tooley, 2008). These mechanisms promote parental choice as well as school competition and accountability (Patrinos et al, 2009). Some demand-oriented models are explored below.

Contracting model

Contracting models are considered the first type of formal PPP in the education sector and they are the most common in the PPP education literature (LaRocque, 2008; Patrinos, 2006). Evidence from around the world on contracting experiences reveals that this approach not only expands access to education, but also saves large sums of public capital (Patrinos & Sosale, 2007). The essence of this form of PPP is that education authorities contract with private providers to operate public schools fully or run certain aspects of school operations while maintaining the schools' public ownership and funding (LaRocque, 2008). The forms of the contracts and their scope of responsibilities vary depending on the type of services bought from the private sector and the type of arrangements. The literature reveals a number of merits in this PPP contracting model. It offers schools flexibility in management and service provision, creating a better fit between supply and demand. Furthermore, the contracting process, with its focus on quality, outcomes, competition and risk-sharing can result in improved educational quality and increase efficiency in service delivery (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2012).

Through contracting, governments can either procure educational inputs (management, curriculum design services or use of a school facility), processes (running a public school), or outputs (paying for the enrolment of specific students) (Patrinos, 2005, 2006; Patrinos et al, 2009). There are five types of education contracts, as illustrated in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Examples of contracting in the education sector

Type of contract	Services and outputs contracted	Countries
Management, professional, support services (input)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School management (financial and human resources management) Support services (meals and transportation) Professional services (teacher training, curriculum design, textbook delivery, quality assurance, and supplemental services) 	United States United Kingdom Latin America Middle East
Operational services (process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The education of students, financial and human resources management, professional services, and building maintenance 	United States United Kingdom Latin America
Education services (outputs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student places in private schools (by contracting with schools to enrol specific students) 	New Zealand Philippines Spain
Facility availability (inputs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure and building maintenance 	United Kingdom New Zealand
Facility availability and education services (both inputs and outputs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure combined with services (operational or educational outputs) 	United Kingdom

Source: Adapted from Patrinos et al (2009, p. 9)

Education contracts vary in their degree of complexity. Service contracts are the least complicated, whereas education operations contracts are the most complex due to the various parameters involved in measuring the effectiveness of the education process, some of which are difficult to quantify (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009). A variety of demand-oriented contracting arrangements are in existence around the world. The labels and features of these contracting PPPs differ to reflect the unique requirements of different contexts. Some of the most widely known examples of these PPPs include the charter movement, academies, concession programmes, the *Fe y Alegría* (FyA) and the independent schools.

Charter schools. Charter schools in the United States were the first schools to implement the private management/contracting model. These schools were established in the 1990s as a means of raising the standard of low-performing public schools and offering choice. They are public schools that are publicly owned and funded but are managed by for-profit or not-for-profit operators. They bear some public institution

features, such as providing the government-mandated curriculum, submitting to an accountability system, admitting students without discrimination and meeting specific benchmarks related to attendance, students' performance and community involvement (LaRocque, 2008; O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). They operate with freedom from many of the regulations followed by traditional public schools (Davis, 2013). However, in reality they face some regulation, especially in teacher certification, which some commentators argue are restrictive (Bistany, 2007).

Research on charter schools has focused on different aspects of their performance, such as their attainment effects, competition and innovation and their potential social stratification effects. Research focusing on impact has produced mixed and inconclusive results (Patrinos, 2005). Some have linked these inconsistent results to the varying research designs and analytic techniques used or the diverse charter contexts and policies (Zimmer et al, 2012). Most research has investigated single-state cases, which has sometimes led to flawed inferences by policymakers, either generalising the results to the whole charter school population or rejecting the results due to their irrelevance to individual cases (Davis & Raymond, 2012). In an attempt to exclude the influence of methodological differences across different locations, Zimmer et al (2012) examined the effects of charter schools in seven states in the USA using a consistent fixed effects approach. They found contradictory results; charter schools in some states outperformed traditional public schools in mathematics and reading while those in other states underperformed in relation to their public counterparts. In another attempt to overcome methodological and single-state case constraints, Davis and Raymond (2012) conducted an impact evaluation of charter schools across states using two quasi-experimental analytical methods – fixed effects and virtual control records – the latter of which not only rectifies limitations related to student and context characteristics, but also factors recent policy developments in the analysis. They confirmed that charter school quality

is demographically and geographically uneven, which requires an examination of individual charter policies and how they improve or harm quality. Despite the lack of consensus on effects, other research provides evidence of the cost efficiency of charter schools in producing educational outcomes vis-a-vis traditional public schools due to their lower regulations, as evident in Texas (Gronberg, 2012).

Research has also revealed a wide diversity of outcomes and quality in charter schools. Research has found evidence of added-value and overall gain in charter schools compared to traditional public schools. It has also been found that these schools improve their performance and mature over time (Finn & Vanourek, 2007). In particular, the maturation factors of faculty experience and retention over time has been found to be a factor in the effectiveness of charter middle schools, especially in mathematics achievement, as in the context of North Carolina (Carruthers, 2012). Nevertheless, Preston et al (2012) found that charter schools do not fully fulfil their promise of innovative practice except in the aspects of teacher tenure practices, parental involvement, staffing policies and student-grouping structures. However, these findings are based on self-report surveys which do not probe actual classroom curricula and practices where the most achievement-oriented innovation might occur. The charter experience in Alberta, Canada, demonstrates that charter schools have great potential in meeting differentiated demand through offering diversified programmes and innovative school governance while maintaining high student achievement (O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000). These diverse and inconclusive findings call for more rigorous impact evaluations (Lewis & Patrinos, 2012) to inform policymakers' decision making in relation to bolstering the benefits of charter schools and designing and implementing policies that remedy their drawbacks (Ni, 2012).

Academies. Under the initial academies programme in the UK the operation of failing public schools is contracted out to private education sponsors. Although private funding contributes 10% of the total capital investment, these schools remain publicly owned and financed (Green, 2005). Academies enjoy autonomy in curriculum, school day and term and teacher recruitment. Later, due to its benefits of promoting school autonomy, innovation and diversity in the school system, this programme became open to all other schools to convert to academies either independently or with a sponsor (Department of Education, 2013). In 2010, other variations of academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges, emerged in response to parental and employer demand. These offer technical and vocational qualifications alongside academic qualifications (Department of Education, 2013). Early research on academies has revealed that they produce improved results and are perceived by students to promote learning experiences, create positive relationships among people and improve the services and facilities available to students (Ellison, 2006).

Fe y Alegría (FyA). FyA, which began in 1955, is the oldest form of private management of public schools. It operates different types of public and private schools (the majority of which are public) in 15 Latin American countries and Spain. FyA has a mission to provide quality education to poor people and to ensure that the school contributes towards community development. The network of FyA schools is coordinated nationally through a national office in each country and overall coordination is provided by the headquarters in Venezuela. Jaimovich (2012) concluded that this central management provides support to build school capacity for autonomous decision making. FyA schools enjoy autonomy regarding personnel employment and central curricula, which are supplemented with locally developed materials to suit the context of each country (LaRocque, 2008). This autonomy, together with the

programme's unique organisational and cultural structures, has contributed to the success of these schools (Allcot & Ortega, 2009).

Very few econometric evaluations of this programme have been conducted to test its real impact. The literature summarises the superiority of quality in these schools over public schools in the aspects of reduced costs, teacher qualifications and improved performance in academic areas, such as mathematics and reading, and indicators, such as repetition and dropout rates (Mora, 2007; Patrinos, 2005). Allcot and Ortega (2009) conducted one of the few econometric analyses and concluded that graduating from FyA schools increases scores in Venezuelan college entrance exams compared with scores obtained by public school graduates. They attribute these performance increments mainly to these schools' autonomy, decentralised decision making and their 'family-like' culture.

Voucher schemes and voucher-like programmes

The voucher system is a PPP model that emerged to provide market choice in education (Levin, 1992). The government, private entities or organisations can participate in education through financing vouchers or scholarships for students to attend private schools. Vouchers are argued by some to promote choice and equity of access to private education by making it affordable for low-income and marginalised segments of society (World Bank, 2001). However, due to their promotion of the private benefits of education, vouchers are sometimes criticised as having adverse effects on equity and social cohesion (Levin, 1999). Levin suggests that these inequities could be countered by specific provisions that favour the poor.

LaRocque (2008, p. 22) defines a voucher as 'a certificate or entitlement that parents can use to pay for the education of their children at a public or private school of their choice'. The World Bank (2001) clarifies that vouchers can cover the full cost of tuition

or part of it with the student/parent paying the rest. They can also be universal (available to all students) or targeted towards specific groups, such as girls in rural areas or students from poor families. Commonly, vouchers are not paid directly to students. Rather, parents choose the school based on their educational requirements and the school receives funding in accordance with the number of enrolments (World Bank, 2001). This might have diverted the voucher away from its original purpose intended by Friedman (1955) and the voucher definition above of empowering and subsidising the recipient rather than the school. Thus, the psychological impact of vouchers may be undermined by the recent enrolment-based forms of vouchers.

There is an abundance of voucher programmes in both developed and developing countries. The design, rules and regulations of voucher programmes vary according to the context in which they are implemented. Table 2.3 below summarises the main features of a number of voucher schemes.

Table 2.3: A summary of some voucher programmes

Voucher Programme	Type	Cost	Purpose	Extent of regulation	Impact
Colombia voucher programme	Targeted (disadvantaged children)	Half the cost of private secondary school tuition fees with private schools charging top-up fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to secondary education for children from low-income families 	Minimal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced repetition rates and increased academic achievement (Bettinger et al, 2009). • Increased access to secondary education for disadvantaged children; • More cost effective than public education (23% lower) but of comparable quality (Patrinos, 2005).
New Zealand Targeted Individual Entitlement programme	Targeted (children from low-income families)	110% of average cost of public education & an allowance for non-tuition costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to private education for children from low-income families • Give these families more choice regarding their children's education; • Improve educational attainment for target group 	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access for children from low-income families to private education; • Beneficiaries satisfied (LaRocque, 2008)
Independent School Subsidies in New Zealand	Universal	25–35% of public schools' unit cost & private schools charge top-up fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidise private education 	Minimal	NA
School Funding System in Netherlands	Universal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full funding • Later, a weighted funding system was introduced allocating more resources to schools serving children from underprivileged backgrounds to combat educational disadvantage and foster equity of opportunities (Ritzen et al, 1997). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase parental choice of education • Improve quality of education 	Extensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed to high academic attainment in international assessments such as PISA and TIMMS (Patrinos, 2010)
Universal voucher scheme in Sweden	Universal	Public and private schools receive equal funding based on student enrolment with additional tuition fees are not allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase parental choice 	Extensive	NA

Voucher Programme	Type	Cost	Purpose	Extent of regulation	Impact
Voucher programme in Chile	Universal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per-pupil subsidy basis with no top-up charges. • ‘Shared financing’ law, allowing public and private subsidised schools to charge additional tuition fees, was introduced later accompanied by an aid system for poor children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase parental choice • Improve education quality 	Extensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voucher schools outperform traditional public schools (Barrera-Osorio, 2009) • They produce higher test scores in Spanish and mathematics (Elacqua et al, 2009) • They produce a positive impact on school retention (Patrinos & Sakellariou, 2009). • Screening mechanisms compromised the scheme’s equity (Contreras et al, 2009)
The Milwaukee Parental Choice programme and the Cleveland voucher programme in the USA	Targeted (poor children)	Full funding with no additional charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow children from low-income families access to private schools 	Extensive	NA
Voucher scheme in Florida, the USA	Targeted (children from failing schools)	Full funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcome school failure 	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scheme is perceived to improve school performance due to fear of closing down or losing students and funds (Tooley, 2008)
The Urban Girls’ Fellowship (UGF) Programme in Pakistan	Targeted (poor girls)	Full funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase girls’ enrolment in schools 	Moderate	NA
Voucher programme in Bangladesh	Targeted (girls from low-income families)	Full funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide girls from low-income families access to secondary education 	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five years after the scheme was introduced, girls’ enrolment in secondary education had increased by 50% (Tooley, 2008).

Source: Author’s compilation based on the literature

Empirical research on vouchers has usually analysed their impact on performance indicators such as test scores. Some have adopted very rigorous analysis techniques to control for background characteristics, such as school selectivity and peer and family attributes. One of the most significant international examples of nationwide PPP programmes, the Chilean experience has undergone extensive investigation of its universal voucher system and its impact on different educational indicators. This research has revealed inconclusive and sometimes contradictory results (LaRocque, 2008) due to a lack of random assignment (Patrinos & Sakellariou, 2009). While some research has found that voucher schools generally outperform traditional public schools (Barrera-Osorio, 2009), have higher test scores, especially in Spanish and mathematics (Elacqua et al, 2009), and produce a positive impact on school retention and school return (Patrinos & Sakellariou, 2009), other studies have found no impact on either test scores or repetition rates (Contreras et al, 2009). In fact, Contreras et al (2009) found that the public–private performance gap disappears when controlling for selection mechanisms. Still others have found that it has adverse equity consequences with its choice element, which has led to social and academic stratification.

The randomised natural experiment in the Colombian voucher programme, which awarded vouchers through lottery, revealed more quasi-experimental evidence and more consistent results. It was found that it reduced repetition rates and increased academic achievement (Bettinger et al, 2009). Through his investigation of voucher schemes in 20 different contexts, West (1994a, cited by Tooley, 2008) concluded that there are some positive findings on the benefits of vouchers as they serve the poor and they combat the creation of segregated and antisocial schools. Levin (1999) states that although vouchers produce some microefficiency gains at the school level, they have some macroefficiency costs related to

the infrastructure required to support a voucher programme. This is because a voucher scheme assumes the existence of a good quality education market (Contreras et al, 2009).

Supply-side reforms

Supply-side PPPs are closely linked to mobilising the private sector and community to promote resources available to education, as well as improving the quality of services, human resources and infrastructure. The major supply-side PPPs include philanthropic business partnerships, formal infrastructure PPPs and government subsidies to private schools. The main supply PPPs are briefly outlined below.

Business partnerships

The private business sector has had a long tradition of forging partnerships with the education sector. These partnerships emanate from both self-interest and community service through contributing to preparing a quality workforce and at the same time satisfying the business sector's social responsibilities (Levin, 1999). These PPPs range from philanthropic financial donations, to the provision of work experience to students, the provision of expertise to teaching and management staff and the formation of business associations to facilitate major school reform. This section provides a brief description of the most common of these PPPs.

Private sector philanthropic initiatives. These programmes are the most prevalent of educational PPPs, not only in developed countries but also in developing countries such as India and Pakistan (LaRocque, 2008). These entail the provision of funding to education by corporate and community foundations to improve the quality of public education and increase access to education in under-served areas. This philanthropy can be in cash or in kind, through contributing to teacher training, equipment, buildings and instructional

materials and providing applied work experience to students to support the training of the local workforce (Levin, 1999).

Philanthropic foundations in the Philippines, the learning trust programmes in the UK, the Philanthropic Venture Funds in the USA and the Aga Khan Education Services are examples of some well-recognised private philanthropy around the world (LaRocque, 2008). Research reveals that philanthropic PPPs positively impact education. For example, they have improved access and learning outcomes and addressed gender inequality in underserved rural areas in Ghana (Casely-Hayford & Hartwel, 2010) and have integrated children into formal education and used resources cost effectively (DeStefano and Schuh Moore, 2010).

An innovative philanthropic venture, aimed at supporting basic education in developing countries, is the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Education Initiative (GEI). The first of these, the Jordan Education Initiative (JEI), was launched in 2003 with two main foci: using ICT and e-content resources in education and building capacity in the IT industry in Jordan through partnerships with world-class firms to develop innovative learning solutions (Bannayan et al, 2012; LaRocque, 2008). Research has revealed that the JEI has a positive impact on student attainment (Bannayan et al, 2012). The researchers also found that JEI has substantially achieved its targets of building capacity in the local ICT sector through fostering partnerships with international IT firms. Similarly, a case study by Cathcart (2008) concluded that it engaged actors from various sectors, had flexible governance structures and utilised relatively reliable monitoring and evaluation procedures. Nevertheless, other independent evaluations have pointed out that building an evaluation procedure into the initiative's design could have produced better results (McKinsey & Company, 2005).

Adopt-a-School (AAS) programmes. Under AAS programmes, government schools are adopted by private sector organisations, companies or individuals. These programmes generally aim to improve different aspects of government schools such as quality, access, community involvement and infrastructure. The Sindh Education Foundation in Pakistan and the AAS programme in the Philippines are examples of this type of programme (Mahmood, 2013; LaRocque, 2008).

Capacity-building initiatives. Capacity-building initiatives primarily target human resources and other inputs in the education process. They involve the training of teaching and management staff, curriculum and pedagogical support and developing professional networks. They may even involve developing quality assurance certification programmes through the categorisation of public and private schools and providing tailored quality enhancement support (LaRocque, 2008).

A number of examples of these initiatives are available around the world. The Cluster-Based Training of Teachers in the Punjab and the Teaching in Clusters by Subject Specialists, both of which are in Pakistan, are PPP initiatives that provide professional development for public and private school teachers through training provided to clusters of schools. The Quality Advancement and Institutional Development, operated by the Aga Khan Education services in Pakistan, is a similar programme that seeks to strengthen the capacity of low-cost private schools and improve the quality of their services (LaRocque, 2008). Recent evaluations of the programme reveal that it has achieved its intended goals of increasing enrolment, improving gender parity and enhancing quality of education (Mahmood, 2013). Other PPPs that combine capacity building with the provision of ICT infrastructure is the ‘Schools On-line’ initiative in Switzerland (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004) and Microsoft’s Partners in Learning (PiL) initiative implemented in five Asian

countries. These initiatives involve the provision of ICT infrastructure, the development of multimedia content and teacher training. Such PPPs have produced a positive impact on the development of ICT content and the innovative use of ICT by teachers and students (Bhanji 2012; LaRocque, 2008).

School infrastructure partnerships

School infrastructure partnerships are increasingly used in the education sector. The most common type of these arrangements is the build-operate-transfer (BOT) form whereby the private sector is contracted to finance, build and operate a public educational facility (school, university or hostel). The government leases the facility from the private sector for a specified period at the end of which the facility is transferred to the government. While the private sector partner invests in infrastructure and delivers some non-core services, the government delivers core services such as teaching. The contracts are usually long term, lasting 25–30 years, and they specify the services to be provided and the standards to be met (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2012).

There is a plethora of examples of PPP infrastructure in developed and developing countries. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in the UK, School Private Finance Projects in Australia, PPP for New Schools in Egypt, Public–Private Partnerships in Educational Infrastructure and P3 New Schools Project in Canada, School Infrastructure PPPs in Germany and the Netherlands, and Leasing of Public School Buildings to Private Operators in Pakistan are only some of these infrastructure PPPs (LaRocque, 2008). These PPPs enable head teachers to focus on core educational aspects and free them from management of the business aspects of schooling (Mertkan, 2011). Similar conclusions were reached by Gibson and Davies (2008) in their case study of the UK’s first PFI PPP. They also found that this PPP had a positive impact on three educational aspects: attainment, attitude and

behaviour, and attendance, which they attributed to the high-quality buildings and facilities and extra learning experiences which had a positive impact on school performance. Another study by Hurst and Reeves (2004) of Ireland's first PFI PPP found that the initiative revealed a competitive market for PPPs in education and that risk allocation was done fairly. However, they found little evidence of innovation as a result of this initiative.

Government subsidies to private schools

Public funding of private schools is most commonly linked with non-profit providers, although there are also examples of government subsidies to for-profit providers. Governments engage in subsidy arrangements to: expand access more cost effectively than through setting up new public schools; provide parents with a choice of schools; improve access to excluded groups; increase efficiency through contracting with specialised organisations; improve quality through linking subsidies to quality standards (AKF team, 2007). Subsidies to private schools include either input-based areas (e.g. income tax levies/incentives, student transportation, textbooks, teachers' salaries and students' loans), or output-based mechanisms (e.g. the purchase of educational services for low-income students and special education programmes) (AKF team, 2007; Barrera-Osorio et al, 2012; Levin, 1999).

The diversity of models discussed above demonstrates that there is 'no standardised model available for wholesale mass replication' (WEF, 2005, p. 39). Chattopadhyay and Nogueira (2013, p.1) stress that the complex political, social, cultural and economic aspects of individual education systems make PPP 'a highly context-dependent phenomenon'. For this reason, any suggested innovation in education has to consider the social and cultural context in which the education system is situated. Hence, imported education models need to be adapted or – even better – homegrown local models should be nurtured and

encouraged (Al-Harr, 1999; Thorne, 2011) to meet the needs of specific communities (Lewis & Patrinos, 2012). Any PPP model, however, needs to be informed by the diverse PPP models in existence, those processes that are effective and the essential ingredients for effective governance and management.

The positive educational and economic impact of many PPP arrangements has led a number of authors such as Mora (2007, p. 60) to suggest making ‘public education private (managementwise) and ... private education public (accesswise)’. This impact provides a justification for suggesting a PPP framework that responds to the economic and educational needs in Oman; an overarching goal of this research addressed in Chapter 6.

2.3 Theoretical Debates on PPP

PPP has been a contested concept since its emergence approximately 20 years ago (Bovaird, 2004). Critics view PPPs as driven by political ideologies and agendas, whereas advocates consider they serve pragmatic and national goals (Poole & Mooney, 2006). For advocates, they represent value for money due to their increased efficiency, reduced costs and shared risks, but to sceptics they are no more than ‘a language game’ to disguise privatisation (Hodge & Greve, 2009, p. 33). This debate becomes even more intense when discussing PPPs in education because they have been ‘confused, mislabeled and politicized’ (Davies & Hentschke, 2006, p. 205). Partnerships in education are distinct from those in other sectors due to education’s role in identity formation, learners’ certification and qualifications and social equity (Rose, 2010). Exploring these debates helps to scrutinise and address them.

The debate over PPPs in education is primarily centred around ideological issues rather than empirical evidence. Recently, some arguments have moved beyond debating the

legitimacy of PPPs to focus on their economic and technical effectiveness (Kernaghan, 2004). Caldwell and Keating (2004, cited by Davies & Hentschke, 2006, p. 206) summarise the points of contention concerning PPPs in education as ideological, educational or pragmatic. At the ideological level, PPPs are accused of diluting public control over decision making and leading to privatisation. The educational objection is based on the notion that the nature and benefits of the private provision of education are inconsistent with public education; in particular, there are concerns about the quality of service provision that is driven by profit motives (Bovaird, 2004; Mora, 2007). The pragmatic debate relates to the failure of the expected benefits of the partnership to be realised by either partner, as manifested in fewer jobs and poorer conditions of employment.

2.3.1 Ideological debate

The ideological debate on PPPs in education essentially emanates from the public–private dichotomy. The proponents of public provision of education see education mainly as a public good while advocates of market provision view it mainly as a private good (Tooley, 2008; World Bank, 2001). The former perspective views education as a public or ‘merit’ good the benefits of which are not necessarily evident to the recipient (Colclough, 1996). According to LaRocque (2008), this perspective can limit the governments’ interest in exploring PPPs and their potential for improving educational outcomes.

The public–private debate revolves around two key concerns regarding PPPs, namely weakening public control over education and the privatisation of education.

Loss of public control over education

One of the earliest and most contentious ideological debates in relation to PPP is the role of the government in education versus the role of non-state providers (Rose, 2010). The

provision of education is commonly viewed as the state's responsibility and cannot be left to market forces for fear of undersupply and underinvestment (Rose, 2002). Authors such as Mehrotra and Panchamukhi (2006) assert that universalising schooling can only be achieved effectively when the government plays the dominant role in this process. Opponents of PPP argue that the involvement of non-state providers in the provision and funding of education can jeopardise the state's role in and commitment to education and weaken its control over the education process.

A number of justifications for the state's control of education are discussed in the literature. The World Bank's (2001) handbook on PPPs in education summarises these as concerns regarding access and equity, quality, agency, and social and economic issues. West (1994a, cited by Tooley, 2008) and Tooley (2008) discuss two major justifications: the 'protection of minors' principle (from unwise and incompetent family decisions) and the 'externalities' argument. The latter argument is that the benefits of education (the reduction of crime, promotion of democracy and promotion of economic growth) or drawbacks from the lack of it are not confined to the educated/uneducated person, but spread to society as a whole (Colclough, 1996; Tooley, 2008).

In West's view, most of the arguments for the intervention of the government in education can be rejected when a distinction between the two terms 'education' and 'schooling' is made because governments are primarily concerned with schooling rather than education, which has a broader definition and includes various sources of learning. He limits state intervention in schooling to regulation and providing a safety net to the poor. LaRocque (2008) argues that this gives the government a comparative advantage over the private sector due to its focus on the core functions of policy and planning, curriculum development and quality assurance.

This change in the role of the state facilitates the creation of the ‘enabling state’, where the state guides and monitors rather than operates (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004, p. 219), redefining it from that of funder and provider to that of funder and regulator of education services (LaRocque, 2008). PPPs enable governments to focus on their core function of policy and quality assurance while devolving the operational and management chores to the private sector. NCPMP (2003) maintains that well-structured PPPs offer sufficient public control and oversight over services while harnessing the private sector’s financial resources, management skills and technologies. In many PPP models in both developed and developing countries, private providers provide public education alongside public schools under a system of strong central governmental control over education through policy making, evaluation and information dissemination (Mora, 2007; Patrinos, 2011). This reveals the weakness of the loss of public control argument.

Privatisation

Critics argue that PPPs are being used as a Trojan horse to introduce a form of privatisation under the ‘neoliberal’ policies of decentralisation (Miraftab, 2004, p. 90), which needs to be avoided in education because it leads to the ‘commercialisation’ of education and reproduces a ‘capitalist culture’ (Fitz & Beers, 2002, p. 139). It is also argued that the involvement of the private sector in education carries the danger of the dominance of the private sector’s values and interests (Fitz & Beers, 2002; Genevois, 2008) leading some partners to become competitors due to inequalities in power and resources (Akyeampong, 2009; Jones & Bird, 2000).

PPPs are distinct from privatisation (Genevois, 2008; LaRocque, 2008); whereas the former are time-bound and possible in all sectors of society, the latter is a permanent arrangement and, it is argued, mostly applicable to industry and commercial sectors in which the

ownership and control of an asset is shifted from the public sector to the private sector (Davies & Hentschke, 2006; Harris, 2004). PPPs are risk-sharing relationships based on agreed performance criteria to attain specified policy outcomes (Teicher et al, 2006). The PPPs' output-based arrangements, which help governments to retain control over the standard and type of services, are the key feature distinguishing PPPs from privatisation (Harris, 2004).

Partnerships in education denote a collaborative venture in which the non-state sector undertakes activities either for or with public sector organisations (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). Interestingly, Mora (2007) argues that PPPs 'publicise' private education through extending access to education and offering more educational options. Education is an issue that cuts across public and private sectors and demands joint action through PPPs, allowing deeper understanding of the needs and contributions of each sector (Latham, 2009). The ambiguity of the two terms – PPP and privatisation – not only raises needless criticisms of PPPs but also undermines the merits of PPPs (Bidwell, 2005). The privatisation argument is misguided because the government can control the extent and nature of private sector's involvement in education. Such control can counteract common concerns about equity, dominance of the private sector and commercialisation of education.

2.3.2 Educational debate

Opponents of the PPP approach view it as inconsistent with the public provision of education. They assume that it is inappropriate to integrate the for-profit enterprise into the national goals of education. To them, the profit motive of the private sector seeks tangible gains and might compromise quality. Nonetheless, proponents of PPP capitalise on its potential to improve the public sector's knowledge and skills while supplementing its limited capacity through expanding access and improving service quality. Quality is

enhanced by the competition, increased choice and improved accountability inherent in PPP arrangements (Patrinos et al, 2009). While there may be some private providers who put profit before quality, it is suggested that these will be easily eliminated by market forces (Bistany, 2007). Profit in PPPs is sought not through a reduction in quality or jobs. Rather, the private sector invests in time, use of technologies, management and workplace efficiencies, personnel development and shared resources to attain both quality and profit. A case study by Woods and Woods (2004) found evidence contradicting the argument that educational PPPs undermine the public ethos. In fact, they found that PPPs follow an adaptive model which aims to modernise leadership while sustaining a traditional public ethos.

Added to this, the quality of service can be defined and controlled by the government through PPP contracts and effective monitoring. The outcomes-based contracts allow greater innovation and quality in educational delivery in a cost-effective way to attain the agreed performance standards (Mahmood, 2013; NCPPP, 2003). Lewis and Patrinos (2012) argue that the school choice that PPPs offer leads to improved learning outcomes and increased efficiency in both public and private schools. Drawing on the Netherlands' schooling system, one of the highest performing in Europe and globally, in which private provision constitutes 70% of education provision in the country, the argument of compromised education quality can be shown to be weak.

A relevant quality concern is related to equity in PPPs. Critics argue that because the benefits of choice and competition, promoted by PPP, are not evenly dispersed, this can widen inequalities between the rich and poor. However, this equity issue is not specific to PPPs as it can occur in publicly provided services (Rosenau, 1999), where universal provision of funding can be regressive and unfair to the poor (World Bank, 2001). This

dictates other income-redistributive mechanisms, such as enabling the private education option (Kingdon, 1996) through targeted funding or selecting between supply-side or demand-side financing.

PPPs enable the state to regulate and control provision to ensure that equity is not undermined through choice and competition. Levin (1999) suggests introducing specific provisions that favour the poor to address the equity issue. The choice-based Dutch experience demonstrates that a weighted funding system coupled with effective monitoring can combat inequity (Ritzen et al, 1997), as well as offering high-quality educational opportunities to all students and minimising the existence of an elite private education sector (Patrinos, 2010). The PPP experience in some Latin American countries demonstrates that PPPs can reduce the inequalities inherent in traditional public education systems and can improve educational quality (Mora, 2007). Through proper design and adequate control, PPPs can contribute to counteract equity issues through offering choice and extending access to educational opportunities that are otherwise inaccessible.

Critics also argue that PPPs blur the accountability of the private sector, which can breed corruption. In the absence of systemic studies on accountability performance, it is difficult to claim that the public sector, private sector or PPPs are more accountable (Rosenau, 1999). Rosenau (1999) stresses that accountability can be assured through structuring PPPs in such a way that specifies responsibilities and identifies incentives and resources. Assigning responsibilities, identifying objectives and outputs and monitoring progress can all enhance accountability in PPPs and improve service quality (Patrinos et al, 2009). In fact, effective PPPs entail multiple levels of accountability: to the government, regulators and the wider public, as well as the private firm's built-in accountability (Finn & Vanourek, 2007; NCPPP, 2003). Furthermore, PPPs in education, with their diverse range of partners,

enable the participation of all stakeholders in decision making and assuming responsibility for results (Latham, 2009). The above reveal the weakness of the accountability argument because accountability in PPPs can be achieved through a well-defined PPP structure and stringent monitoring procedures and through the involvement of different education stakeholders.

2.3.3 Practical debate

PPPs are criticised on several practical grounds related to employment and the design of PPP arrangements. Bovaird (2004) associates positions opposing PPP with a fear of their consequences. A major practical critique, usually publicised by labour unions, is the fear of job loss or worse work conditions under PPPs (Poole & Mooney, 2006). According to the NCPPP (2003), in reality, massive job losses have never happened. PPP case studies by Davies & Hentschke (2005) prove this. There is only a normal reduction in jobs through attrition. In fact, Rondinelli, (2003) argues that through meeting demand, PPPs can generate jobs, providing some solutions to unemployment. Supporters of PPPs present them as tools not only for increasing financial resources but also for innovation and promoting efficiency. PPPs allow governments to circumvent restrictive employment laws and pay scales. A case study by Woods and Woods (2004) found that PPPs benefit from public employees' institutional knowledge and expertise. In fact, these employees progress professionally under PPPs due to flexibility in job structures and pay scales. Added to this, governments have the power to protect public employees under PPPs. The involvement of labour unions in the planning process is reported by the NCPPP (2003) to lead to effective PPPs. The above reveals that this argument is not well-substantiated and is mainly raised by labour unions who fear losing their powers under PPPs.

In addition, it is often claimed that PPPs are resisted because they increase regulation. It is argued that the development of PPP policy, as well as the formulation of contracts, can be complex and time-consuming (Latham, 2009). Rosenau (1999) adds that the monitoring, assessment and transaction costs involved in PPPs increase their costs to society. However, some regulation is necessary to ensure and protect the public's interests, especially when the recipients lack adequate information. In education, it is argued that regulation is essential to level the playing field and ensure fair competition between public and private providers (Rosenau, 1999). A related debate is that poorly-designed PPP contracts in which appropriate incentives are missing might expose the government to substantial financial and performance risks such as increased costs and unmet objectives (Patrinos et al, 2009). However, any deficiencies in PPP contracts are not inherent and systemic, but rather are obstacles that can be solved with knowledge and education. Governments can seek expertise in the effective formulation of PPP contracts (NCPPP, 2003). It is true that setting up PPPs dictates the establishment of some necessary and inevitable regulations to guard the public's interest, ensure monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in place and develop quality assurance. Nevertheless, through decentralisation and autonomy practised in implementation stages, PPPs relieve institutions from many bureaucracies and red tape.

A common criticism of PPPs is that they are more expensive than traditional procurement. There are those who believe that PPPs increase user rates (Poole & Mooney, 2006) and that their contract negotiations are too complex and costly to yield a positive outcome. In fact, PPPs eliminate cost shifting in basic services through increasing risk-sharing between the partnering sectors and avoiding the shifting of costs to consumers. Although PPPs require high base financing costs, the immediate availability of private financing can result in time and cost savings and further cost savings are realised over the course of the contract

(NCPPP, 2012). Research on the advantages of private education over public education has concluded that private schools are twice as cost-effective as publicly-funded schools and that they are technically and academically superior (Kingdon, 1996). Furthermore, PPPs are perceived to provide the sustainability and stability of projects in the case of weak governments (Latham, 2009). Even in the case of PFI projects which are commonly criticised for being costly, this argument does not hold. In their internally-focused investigation of two infrastructure megaprojects, van Marrewijk et al (2008) found evidence that counter the normative perspective that PFI is costly and conspires against the public's interest. Pondering the above, it can be concluded that PPPs' costs are determined by the projects' design and organisational aspects which could be largely within the control of governments.

Benefiting from the wealth of resources and expertise that PPPs offer requires reaching a workable consensus in the debate concerning PPPs. The majority of the above-discussed debates reveal that they are founded on either misunderstandings of how PPPs operate or ideological grounds rather than rigorous empirical evidence (Parente, 2012). The few criticisms that have evolved from experience and sceptics' concerns should be addressed to guarantee successful PPP arrangements. To this end, Bidwell (2005) suggests that PPPs must ensure: the protection of labour and wage standards; effective accountability and oversight mechanisms; a philosophy to protect the beneficiaries' interests.

In education today, the public-private dichotomy is no longer relevant; what is more realistic is a public-private nexus in educational provision (Davies, 2006). Under increasing budgetary pressures, governments have few alternatives in relation to providing quality services, the most viable of which is PPP. PPPs offer creative solutions to developmental challenges in different venues through utilising technologies, employing

high-cost human expertise and injecting new resources. More PPP merits are discussed in the next section.

2.4 PPP Merits

The core value of PPP lies in the complementary competencies, capacities and resources that each sector in society (public, private and civil) possesses and which, if appropriately combined, can advance national goals (Genevois, 2008). In education, the catalyst for PPPs originates from increasing and competing demands placed on governments, constrained public resources and diverse and differentiated demand for education (Patrinós & Sosale, 2007). The main benefits of PPP in education can be summarised as comprising the provision of complementary resources and expertise, cost-effectiveness and risk-sharing, improving the relevance of education to the economy and community, and fostering good community relations.

2.4.1 Complementary resources and expertise and improved service quality

PPPs make the ‘distinct strengths’ of individual sectors accessible to partnering sectors (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006, p. 250); these strengths are manifested in skills, expertise and resources which may be otherwise inaccessible. PPPs can generate complementary financial, organisational and know-how benefits for partners. They also allow partners to employ multiple perspectives and strategies, leading to the effective realisation of goals (Shamsul-Haque, 2004).

Through the involvement of different sectors, PPPs constitute mechanisms that ‘can provide enhanced expertise, synergy, resources and response to needs’ (Draxler, 2008, p. 15). PPPs offer win-win situations for both the public and private sectors because they offer

high-quality services in a cost-effective manner utilising the private sector's resources and know-how and offering new markets to the private sector (NCPPP, 2003).

With its regulatory ability, sector-wide delivery, excellent human resource base and focus on public accountability and equity, the public sector contributes valuable resources to PPPs. The public sector benefits from the private sector's management innovation, access to technology and utilisation of local mobility and participation. In education, PPPs modernise leadership through introducing four principles: distributive transformation; organisational identity; technical excellence; performance accountability (Woods & Woods, 2004).

The private sector contributes organisational and technological competence, dynamism and access to markets. PPPs enable its economic growth, improve its image and risk management and contribute to the growth of its capacity through equipping it with skills and knowledge applicable to other PPPs (Draxler, 2008). In educational PPPs, it ensures education for employability and benefits from the public's 'insider approach', broadening its knowledge and skills in areas critical to educational development, such as teacher training and curriculum design.

Through PPPs, civil society organisations, with their grassroots affiliations and experiences and less hierarchical and flexible structures, can contribute to human development and social empowerment (Teamey, 2007; Shamsul-Haque, 2004). Their non-profit-seeking motives and deep community knowledge mean that they are committed to community service and public policy goals (Teamey, 2007). PPPs increase their legitimacy, improve their resources, reinforce their focus and increase their impact (Draxler, 2008). In MSPEs, international development organisations bring complementary expertise to areas such as

enhancing the efficiency of public institutions, facilitating government contacts and organising stakeholder dialogue (Draxler, 2008).

Employing PPPs in education makes educational reform projects more efficient and effective, enhancing the quality of educational services and increasing access to education. They promote choice, induce competition between public and private providers and offer flexibility in areas such as management and teacher hiring. Educational quality is enhanced by benchmarking performance against measurable quality outcomes (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009; Patrinos et al, 2009). The increased focus on core tasks, enhanced human capital, outcome-oriented performance and the proactive leadership in PPPs lead to improved service quality (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). In his cross-country analysis, based on student-level data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, Woessmann (2006) found evidence that PPPs are effective in enhancing students' cognitive skills. He concluded that school systems that adopt a PPP model in which education is publicly financed but privately operated is the most effective school system.

2.4.2 Cost effectiveness and risk sharing

PPPs enable partners to share the costs and risks of participating in educational development projects, which usually require huge financial resources. PPPs enable the private and public sectors to share costs through pooling resources and using them optimally, allowing governments to diversify and extend services without increasing the number of public employees and without making huge capital investments. This creates added value for governments due to increased financial flexibility and reduced project cycle times (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). It is also argued that PPPs in education increase efficiency and competition in service delivery and reduce delivery costs, as considerable research has found that private education in numerous countries around the world is more

efficient and cost-effective than public education due to its superior teaching and administrative practices (Jimenez et al, 1991) and because it capitalises on economies of scale (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004).

In addition, through competitive contracting, the true cost of service production is determined and hence waste is eliminated. Cost efficiency is attained through the PPP bidding process and greater flexibility in teacher hiring and pay processes, as well as school organisation (Patronis et al, 2009). In the venture to meet demand for public services and goods, public-private cooperation can generate jobs and provide some solutions to unemployment. While cost reductions are legitimate, they should not predominate in PPPs. Rather, periodical and systematic cost-benefit analysis should be adopted to maximise the optimal use of resources (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004).

The risk-sharing aspect makes PPPs a viable approach to educational reform. Here, the risk is spread between the partners to achieve the desired outcomes. This risk-sharing principle increases efficiency in service delivery and use of resources (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2009; Patrinos et al, 2009). However, in practice, risk burdens need to be allocated appropriately to the various partners to attain efficiency (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004).

2.4.3 Making education relevant to the economy and community

PPPs in education have the potential to improve the relevance of education outcomes to the economy and the unique needs of the local community. NGOs, with their expertise in offering programmes that target specific and disadvantaged groups in the community, are best suited for PPPs that address the needs of these groups (Hammons, 2010). To this end, many NGOs are involved in PPPs that target poor children and excluded groups, such as girls, minorities and rural groups.

Similarly, the private sector is finely tuned to the skill demands and gaps in its respective industries and can infuse this understanding into education (Bistany, 2007). Thus, its involvement in education through extending its industry sectoral expertise can produce higher curricular relevance for these industries (Chattopadhyay & Nogueira, 2013). In addition, it can invest in innovation in teaching materials, school infrastructure and the use of technology (Draxler, 2008). Luff (p. 171, in Ginsburg et al, 2012) argues that the private sector's contribution to the national economy and wealth necessitates that it is given 'a seat at the table and a voice in the debate' in education. Through PPPs, the government's role in having a comprehensive oversight of education and providing a vision of the future considering current givens and challenges can be supplemented by the private sector's ability to address short-term and focused tasks.

2.4.4 Good community relations

Critics of PPP portray private sector organisations as solely profit-oriented and self-interested at the expense of public good. Because corporate philanthropy converges the interests of benevolence and business (van Fleet, 2012), it is perceived as not being neutral and serving mainly business motives (Srivastava & Oh, 2012). However, it is argued that this does not reflect reality as many for-profit organisations are integral to their communities and contribute positively to the economy and the welfare of society (Hammons, 2010). The literature also reveals that PPPs driven by purely financial gains have encountered poor functioning or failure (Draxler, 2008). In fiscal and regulatory-conducive climates, the business sector establishes not-for-profit PPPs through its corporate social responsibility role to achieve long-term added value represented in market development, image promotion, community relations and workforce quality (Draxler, 2008). While these PPPs are sometimes seen to be driven partially by business performance

and profit motives, many such initiatives are grounded partially or completely in moral and ethical concerns (Ginsburg, 2012; Parente, 2012). Van Fleet (2012) acknowledges that achieving a mix between the public good and business interests, producing shared value, while challenging, is not impossible.

Participating in PPPs to support education creates a positive corporate image and increases the legitimacy of the private sector (Genevois, 2008; van Fleet, 2012). These PPPs enable the private sector to fulfil its social responsibility role, which earns it local trust and promotes its reputation. Corporate associations in different countries pool resources to support public education, reflecting an awareness of the importance of quality education outcomes and the significance of private corporations' investment in their future employees and human resources (Mora, 2007).

The merits of PPP discussed here are drawn primarily from practical PPP experiences in different settings. However, each PPP has its unique context which may incorporate other features and pose specific challenges. PPPs are challenged by a host of obstacles, the major of which are explored in the next section.

2.5 PPP Challenges

PPPs are challenged by a variety of barriers which can be classified and discussed in relation to two broad levels: ideological and practical. The ideological constraints include anti-privatisation sentiment, opposition from vested groups (trade unions, public sector institutions, etc.), and the balance between conflicting goals (e.g. access versus quality) (World Bank, 2001, p. 39). The practical constraints comprise legislation to support reform and certain management issues related to finance, autonomy and evaluation.

2.5.1 Ideological challenges

The ideological barriers are closely related to the debates concerning PPPs discussed above (cf. 2.3.1) and are primarily associated with fear of privatisation and loss of state control over public services and the dominance of the private sector. Besides these, other ideological obstacles include political and social defiance and conflicts of interests. These are explored below.

Political and social opposition

Achieving political and public support for the participation of the private sector in educational provision is a key obstacle to successful partnerships (Gibson & Davies, 2008). Experts rate lack of political support as the most serious obstacle to PPP (Harris, 2004; WEF, 2005). The perceived problems of public workers' displacement, high costs, poor design and analysis of projects, corruption and lack of competition between private providers can all lead to political opposition to PPPs and failure to achieve the planned goals (Rosenbaum, 2006).

Based on a case study of the UK's first PPP in education, Gibson and Davies (2008) found that attitudinal factors were most critical to PPP success. The reported attitudinal barriers included local political opposition, public sector culture and the negative image of PPPs as comprising privatisation.

Conflicts of interest

Although PPPs combine the strengths of the partnering sectors, the diverse aims, interests, constituencies and ways of working in each sector can constitute a source of conflict. Reconciling and harmonising these can sometimes be difficult. Such concerns and demands need to be openly addressed at the outset of each PPP venture.

Aligning public and private objectives and interests is a key determinant of PPP success (Gibson & Davies, 2008). Such alignment can considerably minimise conflicts between partners' interests (Rosenau, 1999). PPPs should emphasise the overlapping objectives of the different partnering sectors, such as economic growth, access to public services, the relevance of education and effective governance and institutions (Draxler, 2008). Balanced risk sharing and provision of competitive advantages to partnering private corporations can also prevent conflicts of interest (Draxler, 2012).

2.5.2 Practical challenges

Whereas the ideological challenges might have some shared or similar features across different contexts, the practical challenges are context-specific. The latter are linked to PPP regulation, management and evaluation. Discussing some examples of PPP challenges in various contexts can highlight some common issues and concerns.

Regulation

The successful implementation of PPPs in education requires that governments establish a PPP-conducive environment through creating policies that enable and regulate the involvement of non-state sectors in education. Although the United Nations Global Compact has recently strengthened regulation for PPPs, generally the voluntary and weak nature of current regulatory mechanisms makes it difficult to monitor and enforce the private sector's compliance with these regulations (Draxler, 2008). PPPs thrive in countries with strong and stable governance and legal systems but suffer in developing countries where adequate regulatory mechanisms are missing. This regulatory fragility hampers the private sector's contribution to or investment in education and raises the public sector's concerns about lack of transparency. There seems to be a paucity of regulations that control transparency in PPP operations and those that structure communication between partners

regarding goals and outcomes. This can lead to market distortions, project inefficiency and conflicts of interest. Hence, creating binding regulations, although it might seem bureaucratic in particular settings, is essential to ensure responsibilities and commitments are met. Yet, they need to be discharged correctly to guarantee PPP success, addressing basic transparency and accountability issues such as the formation and management of PPPs, financial structures and outcomes (Draxler, 2008).

Bureaucratic procedures and unnecessary formalities in the public sector are a major PPP challenge. Red tape can impede innovation in PPPs. Regulations which might seem neutral between public and private providers can be discriminatory because private providers face market forces from which public providers are insulated (World Bank, 2001). This requires governments to 'level the playing field for all partners' (Marafatab, 2004, p. 93). Another relevant PPP deterrent is the lack of transparent regulation and streamlined procedures for PPP contracting. Mahmood (2013) states that this issue has undermined the effectiveness of many PPP projects in Pakistan.

Management

Implementing PPPs has drastic consequences for management. Issues such as project planning, finance, governance, partners' accountability and autonomy and evaluation of PPP projects may constrain PPPs effectiveness (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). Planning impediments relate to a lack of clearly defined objectives and not basing PPPs on local needs, which may discourage local participation and limit project sustainability (Draxler, 2008; Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). Akyeampong (2009) singles out two major management drawbacks of three education PPP programmes in Ghana that made them fall short of achieving their planned targets for increasing access to education and jeopardised

their sustainability: the lack of a long-term public financial security and the absence of PPP management synchronised with the public sector.

Another managerial cost is the reduced autonomy resulting from working closely with another organisation and the heterogeneity of partners (Bovaird, 2004). However, Bennet et al (2004) perceive some surrender of individual autonomy as inevitable for effective partnerships. Power relations are a common concern in PPPs. The different PPP typologies and governance continua give authority to different partners proportional to their role in and contribution to PPPs. Ginsburg (2012, pp. 66–68) suggests a useful framework that tabulates the type and level of PPP partners, as well as the level of their involvement, to identify the different technical, financial, ideological and power issues. Addressing the issues internal to PPPs facilitates the management of PPP projects and minimises governance obstacles.

Evaluation

Insufficient monitoring and lack of evaluation can threaten the effectiveness of PPPs. Common PPP evaluation practices, such as self-reporting, scarce statistical details, the lack of impact evaluations and the absence of on-going and regular project evaluations, constitute major evaluation-related PPP challenges (Draxler, 2012). Consistent monitoring and regular evaluation are crucial to detect and rectify deficiencies and improve practice (Mahmood, 2013). Monitoring and evaluation procedures must also be agreed upon before implementing PPPs.

Furthermore, reliable impact measures for the intended objectives of PPPs are not always utilised. Evaluation mechanisms need to be focused on outcomes rather than inputs and to observe accountability and regulatory frameworks to accurately measure impact (Draxler,

2012). However, LaRocque (2008) warns that a rigid focus on measurable outcomes such as test scores and drop-out rates might lead to the neglect of other desirable but immeasurable outcomes. Instead, the evaluation of PPPs needs to be supplemented by qualitative approaches that consider the contextual factors (Robertson et al, 2012). Hence, existing models of PPP need to be evaluated more effectively to establish baseline data and determine whether individual PPPs achieve their intended targets (WEF, 2005).

2.6 Effective Implementation of PPPs

PPPs offer huge benefits to the partners. However, they are complex arrangements which, if not carefully designed and executed, can create potential problems for the partners (Rondinelli, 2003) and can ‘expose governments to significant financial and policy risks’ (LaRocque, 2008, p. 38). This section discusses the mechanisms and principles which are needed to guide the design and implementation of PPP programmes and which can eliminate impediments to their executions (cf. 2.5). The AKF team (2007) summarises the essential elements of PPPs as comprising: vision (goals and structure), intimacy (trust, communication, transparency, inclusiveness and accountability) and impact (result-oriented). Kanter’s (1994, p. 100) ‘eight Is’ of effective PPPs incorporate most of these elements, with a specific focus on the partners’ quality and relationships and PPP design, management and regulation. These include: individual excellence (partner quality); importance (strategic objectives); interdependence (complementarity); investment (human and financial); information (flow and communication); integration (multi-level collaboration); institutionalisation (formal status with clear responsibilities and decision process); and integrity (mutual trust).

Davies and Hentschke (2006, p. 213) describe the success features of PPPs reported in the literature as ‘normative recipes’, warning that these might undermine inquiry into the

causes and conditions of actual PPPs and therefore downplay the issues involved in considering them a viable governance alternative. Alternatively, based on PPP case studies, these authors offer a more in-depth and contextualised exploration of PPPs' success criteria. They suggest that the success of individual PPPs is determined by four interdependent factors that distinguish PPPs from other governance frameworks: preconditions for partnering, the change dimensions involved in PPPs, partnering mechanisms and success indicators of individual partnerships. While these factors reflect the broad PPP success conditions discussed in the literature, they extend their scope to include processes and outcomes and capitalise on the contexts and circumstances of PPPs. Acknowledging that PPP success is relative and context specific, one can argue that outlining factors underpinning success, as well as offering contextualised PPP experiences, can act as guidelines for new PPP contexts and ventures, particularly if they bear similarities in relation to goals and contexts. The increasing emergence of PPP formulation and governance toolkits and methodologies (WEF, 2005) as well as repositories of PPP cases serve this exact purpose leading to selecting PPPs as a governance mechanism based on informed decisions. This section summarises the major elements of successful PPPs identified in the literature, the main of which are: political and social support, quality partners, management capacity and regulations conducive to fostering a favourable environment.

2.6.1 Political will

PPP is more about a change of culture than a change of instruments. Hence, to create effective PPPs it is insufficient to transfer corporate governance rules from the business world to the public sector. Only the establishment of a new public–private governance framework and culture, emphasising the collaborative abilities of partners and the

sustainability of outcomes, together with systematic assessment of capabilities and projects (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004), can guarantee the effectiveness of PPPs. Teicher et al (2006, p. 98) argue that a macro-level ‘policy mindset’ needs to recognise the public value and establishment of the trust principles inherent in PPPs as essential in sustaining high-quality public services. According to Johnston and Gudergan (2007, p. 579), PPPs require an ‘institutionalized status’ to legitimise their practices and guarantee effective governance. PPPs initiated by political agendas result in greater public sector commitment and supply of resources (Bidwell, 2005).

According to Rosenau (1999), the structure of PPPs largely determines their success. But they also require ‘broad community and societal consensus’ in relation to goals. Hence, the success and survival of PPPs are enhanced by tools such as ‘political will, political feasibility, electoral support and political constituency agreement’ (p. 25). Sedjari (2004) contends that effective partnerships need to develop a culture of solidarity and citizenship around joint projects and shared values. This culture fosters innovation and efficiency in the management of the public sector. The government plays a significant role in this through its willingness and capacity to work with private providers, its ability to move from basic levels of engagement to dialogue and its political will to engage in open and constructive discussions (DeStefano & Schuh Moore, 2010).

2.6.2 Governance

The effective implementation of PPPs requires governance capacity to attain goals. Bovaird (2004) argues that if PPPs are to be more successful and combat the scepticism of some stakeholders, they need to take more account of public governance issues. Key governance principles include citizens’ engagement, transparency, accountability, equality and social inclusion, ethical behaviour, equity, willingness and ability to collaborate, ability to

compete, leadership and sustainability. It is worth mentioning that the emphasis placed on these governance criteria varies from partnership to partnership. In fact, an alternative school of thought calls for the careful adaptation of these governance principles, giving greater weight to certain criteria than others to ensure their appropriateness within the dynamic and complex environments of various PPPs (Bovaird, 2004).

Apart from basic governance issues, the design and oversight of PPPs is a key determinant of success. The deployment of PPPs in a particular context requires precise articulation of goals and the model to be adopted, as well as agreement concerning the structure and process of partnerships (Huxham & Vangen, 2000, cited by Bennett et al, 2004, p. 229). The formalisation of PPP through agreements or contracts is an essential mechanism to bind partnering organisations (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). A lack of specific goals and inadequate control and evaluation mechanisms can jeopardise PPP sustainability and increase political risks (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). Successful outcomes are also largely dependent on precisely-defined needs based on detailed needs assessment rather than on the wisdom of PPP initiators (Draxler, 2008). Risk assessment and management is another crucial determinant of PPP success.

Effective PPPs require governance of international standards of transparency and accountability. Devising monitoring and accountability mechanisms can assure public value (Bennett et al, 2004; DeStefano & Schuh Moore, 2010; Teicher et al, 2006). However, Bennett et al (2004) warn that the one-way formal hierarchical lines of accountability can be detrimental to the equality of partners in the partnership. Instead, they suggest mutual accountability. Mora (2007) highlights that the success of the FyA network of PPP schools is a direct result of their managerial capabilities; the aspects of accountability, clarity of

vision, ability to manage and account for funds and monitoring of performance to which these schools adhere have enabled them to provide quality services.

An outcomes-oriented evaluation of PPPs, as opposed to one based on processes, is an essential managerial requirement to determine their effectiveness (Shamsul-Haque, 2004). Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are essential to determine a programme's effectiveness, future directions and scalability. In establishing quality assurance and monitoring processes, this evaluation element should be conceived from the outset of a PPP, focus on impact rather than inputs, and balance thoroughness with feasibility (Draxler, 2008). Independent assessment and well-designed quality assurance mechanisms can provide valuable information on the progress and outcomes of PPP initiatives, which ultimately should lead to an improvement in the quality of education and raising education outcomes (LaRocque, 2008).

2.6.3 Quality partners

Effective PPPs are built on partners' strengths rather than their weaknesses. They require a strong public sector, a dynamic private sector and a vibrant civil society to facilitate effective cooperation (Rosenbaum, 2006) and bolster equity. However, this is not always the case in all PPPs: the public sector may lack capacity, the private sector may be underdeveloped and the civil society organisations may be scarce. Building capacity of the government body responsible for PPP programmes is mandatory for the effectiveness of projects. A significant amount of information and skills are required for the design, development and management of complex PPP programmes. The PPP agency requires efficient financial and administrative information systems related to outputs and quality benchmarks. The skill sets involve educational and pedagogical skills, and understanding of contract management, economics and finance (LaRocque, 2008).

Besides partners' quality, their various roles impact PPP effectiveness. Miraftab (2004) points out that the accurate definition of roles and responsibilities of partners is central to partnership equity. Focusing on education PPPs, the roles of partners need to be defined clearly in terms of education finance, provision and regulation (Srivastava, 2010) as any blurring of the lines of responsibility can create conflicting visions and threaten PPP effectiveness (Thorne, 2011). LaRocque (2008) goes a step further to suggest splitting the purchaser and provider roles within the educational administrative body in contracting PPP models to ensure neutrality and transparency. Reciprocal benefits, the complementary roles of partners and mutual trust are essential to make a partnership sustainable (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004; Miraftab, 2004). This enhances equality in pursuit of shared goals as the various parties will bring different, complementary kinds of expertise to the partnership (Bennett et al, 2004). High levels of coordination need to be maintained between the concerned parties (Bennett et al, 2004). According to Thorne (2011), this can best be achieved through managing and coordinating any PPP programme at a central level to avoid diverse micro agendas and to ensure a uniform approach to the reform.

2.6.4 Conducive regulation

PPP regulation is a key factor that can contribute to success or failure. Too stringent regulation can stifle creativity and lead to inefficiencies in service provision, whereas too lax regulation can undermine private providers' accountability (Rondinelli, 2003). Some regulations are essential to ensure minimum quality standards, but these need not be 'double-edged swords' (AKF team, 2007, p. 22) which inhibit innovation and flexibility (Bistany, 2007). In its basic form, any PPP legislative framework needs to discourage corrupt practices, facilitate public-private collaborative activities and guarantee a legal system that functions with reasonable levels of integrity (Rosenbaum, 2006).

In education, supportive regulatory frameworks are a central determinant of a positive and healthy partnership between public and private providers (DeStefano & Schuh Moore, 2010); the World Bank (2001) stresses that the introduction of PPPs in the education system requires regulatory reform, which does not comprise deregulation but rather better regulation. The key features of an enabling PPP regulatory framework in education include: defining the role of private providers in the national education strategy, setting clear and objective entry requirements for new providers, allowing both for-profit and not-for-profit providers to operate, instituting an independent quality assurance system that balances autonomy and accountability to ensure the desired quality levels, and applying mechanisms of intervention to tackle poor performance (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2012; LaRocque, 2008).

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review has traced the development of PPPs in education and identified a wide array of PPP initiatives in the education sector in both developing and developed countries. It has also discussed the debates surrounding PPPs in education. This review has also highlighted the merits and challenges of PPPs and outlined the prerequisites of effective PPP programmes.

Chapter 3 discusses the research's methodological procedures.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research is motivated by an interest in PPPs and the debate concerning their effectiveness in education. The scope, practices and challenges of PPPs in education at the basic and post-basic education levels in the Sultanate of Oman constitute the prime focus of the current research. As clarified in Chapter 1, this interest stems from research which has demonstrated that certain PPPs result in improved educational outcomes and the accelerating expansion of private education in Arab states. Because this research investigates different perceptions of PPP, its models, challenges and effectiveness, Chapter 2 presents a literature review which highlights the main debates around the concept of PPP, its different manifestations in education and the challenges that impede its effectiveness. This chapter considers the methodology adopted in this research, highlighting its design and the practical issues involved in conducting the research. It outlines the research gaps and the rationale for conducting this research. It justifies the use of case study methodology and multi-strategy research. It also discusses the validity and trustworthiness of the data collection methods employed. Ethical considerations and the limitations of this research are also explored in this chapter.

3.2 Research Rationale and Research Gaps

The justification for the current research derive from two different sources: gaps in the PPP research and certain factors related to the context of the study. This section identifies the research gaps that have motivated this study and illustrates how the challenges faced by the

educational context in Oman provide reasonable justifications to consider a more active role for PPP practices.

PPP in education has constituted a major focus of a significant amount of research in the past two decades. However, the PPP literature is sometimes described as thin and lacking depth and analysis (Teamey, 2007). Furthermore, although there is a growing body of research on PPPs in developed countries such as the USA and the UK, Patrinos (2005) points out the paucity of research that investigates PPPs in developing countries. He also stresses the importance of investigating PPP initiatives and experiments in developing countries to inform the selection of public policies. Hence, this research hopes to enrich the existing literature by addressing various aspects of the PPP phenomenon in the Omani educational context. It also tackles the debate surrounding PPPs in education, shedding some new light on how the concept is perceived in Oman.

There are also lacunae in the PPP literature and research that explores and documents actual PPP practices (Rose, 2010). Batley et al (2008) identify relations between the government and private providers as one of the research priorities in the PPP field. This research is set to explore this issue and fill this research gap as it seeks to identify the nature and types of PPPs that exist in the Omani educational context.

In addition, the literature reviewed on PPP models points towards a paucity of models that combine supply-side and demand-side features. This has shaped the overarching goal of this research, which is the development of a PPP framework that considers both the supply and demand dimensions of reform. This framework builds on existing models in the field and takes on board the insights and context-specific requirements drawn out from the input generated from the different data sources. In doing so, this research shifts away from the

normative and reactive perspectives to PPPs (where the former denotes criticism of government practices and the latter is the response to these criticisms) (Brinkerhoff, 2002, cited in Teamey, 2007, p. 7), to adopt a more instrumental perspective. This perspective views PPPs as a means of achieving other objectives and offers some suggestions on how this can be achieved.

This research is also motivated by a series of challenges and factors associated with the current Omani education context. Some of the documented challenges include the quality of learning outcomes and their relevance to the needs of HE and the workplace (World Bank, 2012). Other factors include the growth in private education, rapid demographic growth in the region and economic considerations, as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.2. Demographic growth has significant ramifications for the financing of education. Numerous educators in the Gulf region have raised the issue of financing education and the role the private sector can play in this regard. Al-Hurr (1999) points out that the increasing demand for education in this region can create a real challenge for governments in fulfilling their commitments to providing quality education. Being part of this region, Oman faces the same demographic and economic challenges. This suggests that the private sector is of great importance in the process of economic growth.

A more general but relevant area, the challenges of human development in the region, contributed to the selection of PPPs as a focus for the current study. As documented by the 2003 and 2009 Arab Human Development reports and discussed in Chapter 1, there is a mismatch between the education system and workforce skills in most countries in the Arab region, including Oman, failing to adequately prepare students for tertiary education, employment and the 21st century global economy. The World Bank (2012) report stresses that strengthening linkages between the education system, HE and employers can improve

relevance through information sharing, reviewing curricula and standards to include a mix of academic, practical and metacognitive skills, and incorporating work experience into school programmes.

These issues of relevance are closely connected to the quality of education. Internationally benchmarked student assessments reveal that Omani students underperform in the core areas of mathematics, science and reading as evidenced by the results of TIMMS 2007 and 2011 and PIRLS 2011 (discussed elaborately in Section 1.2).

These research-related gaps and context-related challenges in Omani education provide reasonable grounds for this study to explore the existing PPPs in the Omani education context and to suggest ways to improve them. The next section explores and justifies the research design selected for this study.

3.3 Research Design

In light of the specific objectives of this research project, the study adopts an exploratory and descriptive approach which rests on a case study design. The ontological position of this research is constructionism/constructivism, which considers that social phenomena and their meanings are constructed through daily interactions between individuals (Neuman, 2006) and these meanings are constantly changing (Bryman, 2012). The epistemological standpoint is interpretivism, which entails the understanding of the world through the examination of the interpretations of that world by its participants. These interpretations are later interpreted by the researcher, who in turn situates and interprets these initial interpretations in the light of theories and literature related to the discipline (Bryman, 2008, 2012). According to Neuman (2006), this interpretive perspective capitalises on context-specific knowledge and allows multiple interpretations of social realities. This inductive

approach resonates well with the study of people's perspectives on their social world due to its focus on human agency and subjective and personal experiences. I recognise the criticisms made of the interpretive approach as being too subjective, relativist and passive. Hence, the research adopts certain elements of the critical social perspective to address specific aspects of the PPP phenomenon. This approach emphasises the study of the social world to critique and change it (Neuman, 2006), which serves the purposes of the research's objectives of identifying mechanisms for overcoming the impediments of PPP and suggesting a context-specific PPP framework. Neuman (2006) points out that interpretive and critical social science approaches are widely applied in qualitative research. These ontological and epistemological standpoints feed into the methodological approach adopted and hence justify the use of the case study design and qualitative interviews and focus groups as primary data collection sources, which make it possible to delve deep into the participants' interpretations and understandings of the issue of PPPs.

3.3.1 Case study

The case study as a research method has traditionally been criticised for lacking objectivity, rigour and the generalisability of results; these are criticisms which, according to Yin (2003), are misdirected and can be avoided if the researcher follows a specific and clear logic of design and systematic data collection and analysis procedures. Cohen et al (2007) argue that the case study is a valuable research method because it specifically defines the boundaries of the research context and is effective in portraying reality.

The case study design allows an intensive investigation of the complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon of PPP. It also allows the use of multiple research strategies (Bryman, 2008). Hence, a number of qualitative data methods are employed in this research. The key data collection instruments include semi-structured interviews, focus

groups and some documentary analysis. While the interviews and focus groups provide primary qualitative data, the documents provide secondary qualitative and quantitative data on students' achievements in terms of results, the regulatory framework and demographic information.

Yin (2003, p. 21) enumerates five components of a case study research design: study questions, propositions, unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings. This study conforms to these components, each of which is addressed below.

Study questions

Owing to the descriptive and exploratory nature of this research, the research questions primarily target the investigation of current PPP practices in education in Oman, impediments to these and how they can be improved, how the PPP phenomenon is perceived by different stakeholders and what PPP framework is appropriate for the Omani context and why. This focus on the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of the phenomenon makes the case study strategy the most appropriate for the investigation, as Yin (2003) points out.

The research questions are divided into an overarching question and five subsidiary questions. These are detailed in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.

Study propositions

In light of the research questions, a number of propositions are formulated. Stating these propositions explicitly is perceived to guide the direction and sources of data collection (Yin, 2003). Thus, the scope of this research is shaped by the following propositions:

- A variety of PPP patterns operate in the education system at the basic and post-basic education levels in Oman.
- Different educational stakeholders (administrators, private sector participants and school supervisors/principals) perceive PPPs differently.
- The implementation of PPPs in education in Oman is faced by a number of challenges. Some essential measures can be taken to overcome these challenges.
- A number of potential stakeholders/private sector players can be identified to contribute to the implementation of PPP programmes in Oman.
- An effective PPP programme has a number of context-specific attributes.
- Drawing on the above, a context-specific PPP framework can be suggested to improve the education services and learning outcomes at the basic and post-basic education levels in Oman.

In addition to highlighting some relevant theoretical issues, these propositions also identify the potential research respondents and limit the scope of research.

Unit of analysis

As a ‘case’ in a case study can take many forms, such as an individual, an organisation, a community or an event, it is important to identify clearly the unit of analysis of the case study. This research adopts an embedded single-case study design involving multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2003). PPP practices in the educational context of Oman constitute the overall case under investigation, within which there are smaller embedded units. These units include government officials, private sector participants, school supervisors and principals. In other words, the research sample is the unit of analysis (Bryman, 2012).

Participants from other sectors, namely the State Council, the OCCI and international organisations (UNESCO and UNICEF), were added at a later stage as an additional unit of analysis. During data collection, it was found out that these parties have some PPP-related programmes and policies in partnership with the MOE. Yin (2003) notes that the case study design not only allows additional units of analysis to be accommodated but also the definition of the unit of analysis to be revisited as new discoveries are made during data collection. Table 3.1 below illustrates these different units and the themes and concepts being explored.

Table 3.1: Units of analysis and research themes

Units studied	Themes and concepts explored
MOE government officials	Perceptions of the PPP concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director generals • Directors • Section heads 	Eliciting examples of PPP programmes and initiatives that operate in the Omani education system
Private sector participants	Highlighting the challenges that impede the effective implementation of PPPs in Oman
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shareholders/owners • Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) • Business officers • School principals 	Identifying ways of overcoming these impediments and enhancing the effectiveness of PPPs
School supervisors and principals	Identifying the potential players able to contribute to PPP programmes in Oman
School supervisors and principals	Identifying the features of an effective PPP programme
Participants from other sectors	Discussing a selective number of PPP models to highlight their strengths and drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Council representative • UNESCO representative • UNICEF representative • Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) representative 	Identifying the PPP structural and regulatory landscape in Oman and eliciting suggestions for improvement

The logic linking data to propositions

After the data collection stage, the data were linked to the theoretical propositions using the ‘pattern-matching’ approach described by Yin (2003, p. 26). The data resulting from the 30

semi-structured interviews (in addition to two supplementary ones), the four focus groups and the documentary analysis were compared to establish the divergent and convergent features of the data (in terms of the policies and perceptions of the different stakeholders of PPP). Each proposition with its key themes and concepts constitutes a pattern to which evidence from the data is related. The information generated during data collection is expected to provide comprehensive and detailed responses to the research questions as well as test the above theoretical propositions. This pattern-matching procedure provides a way of relating data to established propositions while at the same time identifying ‘rival’ propositions (Yin, 2003).

Criteria for data analysis and interpretation

Because this research is qualitative, the study relies on the pattern-matching technique to establish the correspondence and consistency of the data with the research questions and propositions. Hence, the findings can be interpreted through comparing the propositions and the actual data. In this sense, links are established between the research questions and propositions and the research results to identify the PPP patterns that operate in the Omani contexts and how they can be improved, the challenges faced and the different perspectives held by stakeholders of PPP.

3.4 Research Instruments

The research adopts a qualitative approach in its investigation of the PPP phenomenon. It employs the triangulation of measures – semi-structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis – to explore the phenomenon from different perspectives and to improve the accuracy of the data obtained (Neuman, 2006). Using multiple data sources helps to establish the reliability and construct validity of case study evidence, as well as corroborate the same phenomenon through developing ‘converging lines of inquiry’ (Yin,

2003, p. 98). The following sub-sections briefly describe the research instruments employed in the research and provide justifications for the choice of these methods.

3.4.1 Focus groups

Neuman (2006, p. 412) defines a focus group as ‘a special qualitative research technique in which people are informally interviewed in a group-discussion setting’. They are a popular research tool in many social disciplines. They have some merits over ordinary one-to-one interviews because they are more flexible, more ‘naturalistic’, more economical in terms of time than one-to-one interviews and they reduce the researcher’s control (Burgess et al, 2006). They also lend themselves to different types of purpose and modes of analysis, whether content, ethnographic or quantitative (Wilkinson, 2004). However, running focus groups requires interviewing skills and some knowledge of group dynamics (Wilkinson, 2004). Prior research on PPPs reveals that focus groups have been used extensively to study participants’ perceptions of PPPs and their different aspects (Ellison, 2006) because they are a useful tool to investigate understandings and beliefs (Wilkinson, 2004). In this study focus groups are used partially for this purpose.

Focus groups were used as the primary data collection instrument in the education directorate in the Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate, one of 11 educational directorates in Oman, for a number of reasons. This directorate is my workplace, which renders me an insider researcher doing research in my own work environment. This facilitated the smooth organisation and conducting of the focus groups in this directorate. Access to the participants was relatively straightforward and saved considerable time. Furthermore, starting data collection using focus groups in a familiar setting not only helped build rapport with the participants, but also enabled necessary modifications to the foci of the

research instrument and questions. According to Morgan (2001), it is common to use focus groups as the basis for developing quantitative and qualitative research instruments.

Despite its merits, being an insider researcher has some disadvantages. It carries a risk of bias towards participants and might compromise the validity of the collected data (Burgess et al, 2006). However, the use of focus groups as the key data collection instrument in the directorate where a considerable number of the participants were familiar to me helped to explore the reality of PPPs as envisaged by all participants and balanced the researcher-participant relationship to avoid bias.

Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 29 participants. Each focus group ranged between 6–10 participants and lasted for 90–120 min. In addition, the group members were homogeneous, as recommended by Neuman (2006). For this reason, focus groups with school principals, supervisors and administrators were conducted separately (cf. 3.6). This facilitated the focusing of attention and discussion on the unique PPP-related experiences and perspectives of each group. The focus groups were conducted in Arabic due to the diverse backgrounds of the research participants whose first language was Arabic. This facilitated in-depth exploration of the topic. The focus groups were audio-recorded and later transcribed. During the data analysis stage, parts of these transcripts were translated into English, particularly if integrated as quotations or summarised to corroborate other input.

Participants were provided with visual stimulus materials in English and Arabic (figures representing a selective number of PPP models; see Appendix B). These aimed to provide a platform for discussion of PPP models and stimulate debate among focus group participants

concerning the advantages and drawbacks of each model. They also offered examples of the types of potential PPP programmes.

These focus groups helped to distil the issues involved in the topic and highlighted some of the major PPP-related trends and practices in the field of education in Oman. This aided in conducting the semi-structured interviews later, in which it was possible to use some points of reference identified in the focus groups. The focus groups involved rich discussions on the topic. As the moderator, I was not the only person asking questions, as the participants also posed questions and asked for clarification from each other. They extended the points raised by other members, disagreed with viewpoints and supplemented and elaborated on certain issues. These rich exchanges of talk presented a variety of conceptions and experiences concerning the topic, as well as uncovering the practitioners' real encounters with PPP practices. The non-formal discussion setting liberated the expression of personal opinions and triggered some insightful suggestions on how PPP can be implemented in the Omani context.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviews are a versatile data collection method that is useful at both academic and practical levels. Holstein and Gubrium (2004, p. 141) refer to the qualitative interview as a 'social encounter' in which meaning is socially constructed. It requires intense listening to grasp the meanings, understandings and interpretations conveyed in the words of the interviewee. A focus for the discussion needs to be provided through narrowing down the range of topics in the interview, thus obtaining deeper and more detailed accounts of the topics included. An active role on the part of the interviewer is essential here. The interviewer incorporates interpretive resources, perspectives, landmarks and points of reference to solicit respondents' experiences, making the research more productive

(Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) and giving it more depth, detail and richness (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

This type of interviewing capitalises on negotiated meaning and offers multiple recounts of events. The ideas of multiple realities and the creation of meaning through interaction that underlie qualitative interviewing are closely linked to the interpretive approach (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and the notion of constructionism (Warren, 2001). The interpretive perspective renders qualitative interviews as social interactions in which meaning is socially constructed. The involvement of the interviewer in this creation of meaning is seen as fundamental to shape the form and content of meaning, rather than being a source of distortion and bias. Thus both parties in the interview are active and need to work in collaboration to construct knowledge through interpretive practice (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Qualitative interviews are a suitable research tool for investigating complicated relationships and phenomena and for instances when a depth of understanding is required (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). They are a key source of information in case studies (Yin, 2003). Hence, they facilitate the investigation of the complex phenomenon of PPP in education. Most of the reviewed studies on PPP and its practices adopted a case study design due to its flexibility. The majority of this research utilised interviews as the main data collection tool (Acar & Robertson, 2004; Batley et al, 2008; Davies & Hentschke, 2006; Gibson & Davies, 2008; Hurst & Reeves, 2004; Lim et al, 2007; O'Reilly & Bosetti, 2000; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Woods & Woods, 2004). This inspired and informed the use of this tool in this research. Throughout the previous research reviewed it was also noted that interviews were used when in-depth and detailed responses were required. This data collection instrument was also used when the number of respondents was limited.

The interview schedule (Appendix C) employed in this study, is structured following the 'tree-and-branches' model. This model allows the exploration of various aspects of a broad topic while maintaining its coherence (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 159). The schedule underwent some modification in the number, formulation and focus of its questions as a result of the input generated by the focus groups and the initial interviews. Some questions were modified and others were eliminated. This is perfectly acceptable in qualitative research in which data collection and data analysis are two simultaneous processes. Ezzy (2002) suggests that preliminary data analysis during data collection results not only in sharpening the focus of the research and making informed decisions about sample selection, but also means that the data collection process is 'guided not only by the researcher's preexisting interpretations but also by the emerging interpretations of participants' (p. 78).

A total of 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These were undertaken at the MOE headquarters and the Directorate of Education in the Muscat Governorate. This decision stems from the fact that it was difficult to bring together the different MOE personnel for focus groups. In addition, the number of interview participants from both the public sector and the private sector in the governorate was limited. Some of the interviews were conducted in English and others were conducted in Arabic. These were audio-recorded and transcribed for systematic analysis and to create chains of evidence. Although during the data analysis stage, the research input was handled in both English and Arabic, parts of the transcripts in Arabic were translated verbatim to English when used as quotations or to supplement input from other respondents.

As in focus groups, the interviews participants were provided with visual prompts regarding the PPP models discussed (Appendix B). This approach facilitated discussion of the models and provided the participants with basic background information.

3.4.3 Documentary analysis

A considerable number of previous studies have employed documentary analysis in examining PPPs. These were either studies as a source in their own right (Woessmann, 2006) or studies that employed documentary analysis to provide some background information on the topic and supplement data derived from other sources (Hurst & Reeves, 2004; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006).

Documentary analysis is used in this research to supplement and corroborate the data collected through interviews and focus groups. In particular, it is used to establish the context and trace the history of PPPs in education in Oman. Although documentary materials present the official perspective, they do not always represent transparent manifestations of decision-making processes (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). However, they should not be ignored or regarded as secondary sources of data. Rather, these social facts need to be studied in their contexts and their purposes need to be identified. It should be borne in mind that these documents were written for purposes and audiences other than those of the research (Yin, 2003). Identifying the documents' original objectives promotes the critical analysis of their content and the evidence they provide.

In this research a wide range of documents was used to corroborate the data from other sources and provide some background information on the topic. These documents included royal and ministerial decrees, documents concerning the regulatory framework of private education, governmental policy documents regarding PPP, books/reports on the

development of education in Oman, symposia and conferences regarding educational reform and PPP, media reports, UNESCO reports, evaluation reports produced by the World Bank, the MOE and other parties, the national census and some policy documents (five-year development plans, Oman's Vision 2020).

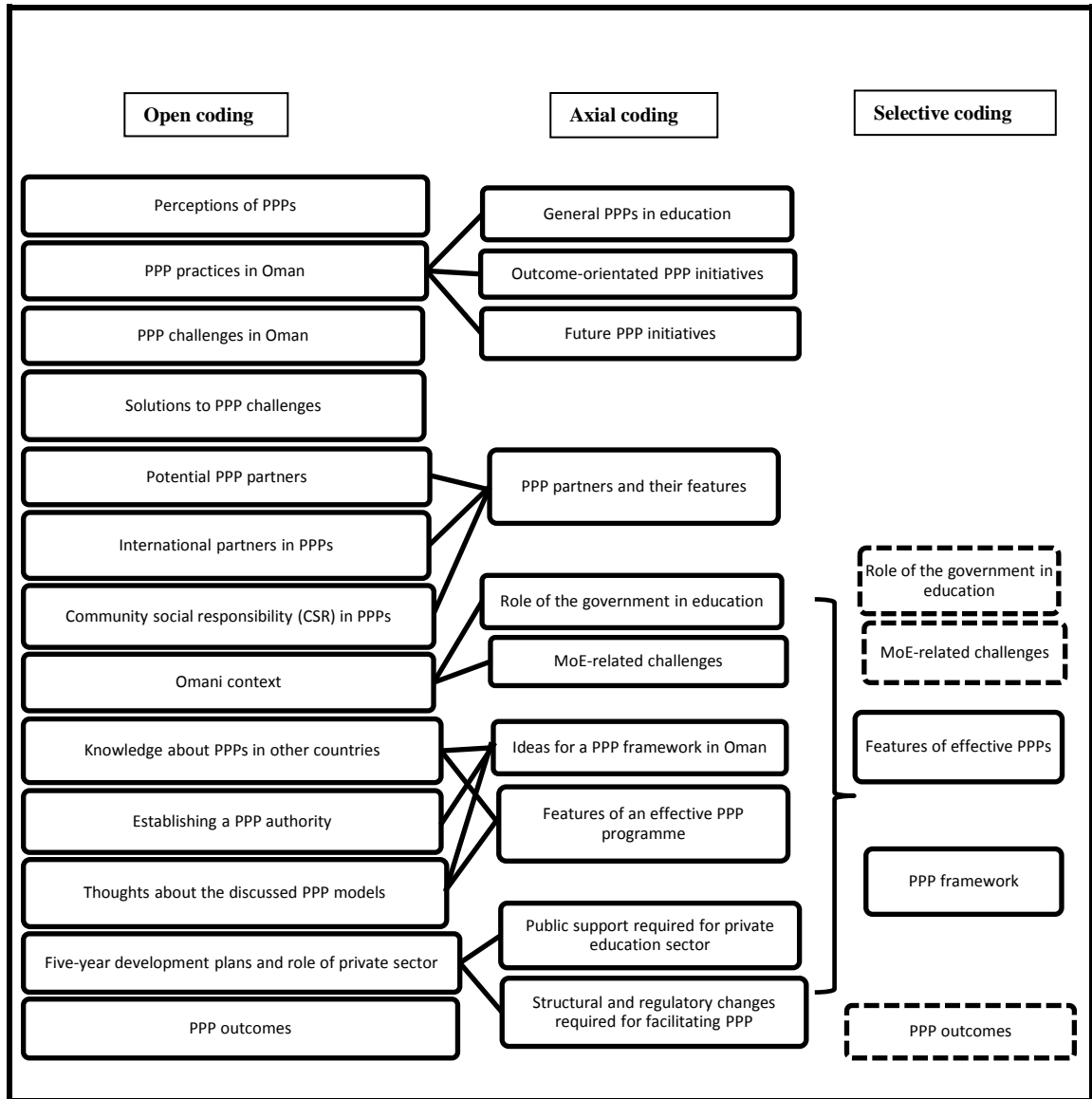
3.5 Data Analysis

Because data analysis in qualitative research involves identifying patterns in data (Neuman, 2006), analysis of the data resulting from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and document analysis followed a pattern-matching logic based on a general theoretical or conceptual proposition (Yin, 2003) through which empirical data were compared with and linked to the theoretical propositions developed based on the research questions (cf. 3.3.1.). The pattern-matching approach is consistent with methods of content analysis and thematic analysis. Thus, the data analysis procedure followed in this study amalgamates features from approaches to content analysis and thematic analysis. The predefined general categories and propositions which guided the conduct of the interviews and focus groups call for content analysis. However, this method requires the quantification of data, which was not undertaken in this study as it seeks theoretical generalisations rather than the statistical generalisation of findings. Furthermore, the purposive sample did not permit such quantification of data and statistical generalisation of results. Content analysis is also not responsive to new emergent categories (Ezzy, 2002). To supplement and overcome the shortcomings of content analysis, the inductive and qualitative approach of thematic analysis was employed. This method allows the exploration and emergence of new themes and categories and preserves the qualitative nature of the data. Wilkinson (2004) points out that this type of thematic analysis is usually supported with quotations from respondents' data.

Throughout the analysis, the data were manually organised into categories based on existing and emerging themes and concepts. The manual handling of data, involving the transcription of input from the interviews and focus groups and the coding of themes, enabled control of the data. Computer-assisted data analysis (CAQDAS), although considered, was not practical for this study despite its suggested benefits in data coding, retrieval and conceptual representation, as well as improving the speed and rigour of data analysis (Seale, 2010). The use of two languages (English and Arabic) in collecting and processing the data made it difficult to employ computerised software. NVivo (version 10), a software programme for collecting and organising qualitative data, does not support right to left languages such as Arabic. Data collection, organisation and analysis using software are also similar to conventional manual procedures. Hence, the time consumed in both approaches is comparable. Furthermore, such software predominantly serves content analysis through offering word counts and does not support either discourse or thematic analysis, both of which require in-depth consideration of meaning (Seale, 2010).

Data coding was applied to reduce the huge amounts of raw data. During the content analysis, the data for each unit of analysis were categorised under predetermined themes. Thematic analysis was undertaken in line with the procedure described by Ezzy (2002) and Neuman (2006), which involves three types of sequential coding to categorise the data analytically: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding involved the initial condensing of data into very preliminary categories. Axial coding involved the organisation of these codes, linking them and discovering analytic categories. Selective coding, the last stage coding, involved reexamining the data and codes to identify data that would illustrate and support the conceptual categories. Figure 3.1 illustrates these three stages of coding

Figure 3.1: Themes generated during the open, axial and selective coding stages



Source: Author's research

The initial open coding procedure resulted in the identification of 13 different themes in the data. The examination and analysis of further data yielded eight additional themes. For example, during the axial coding stage the broad theme of 'existing PPP practices' was further broken down into three sub-themes: 'broad PPP initiatives', 'outcome-oriented PPP initiatives' and 'future PPP initiatives'. Other divergent themes such as 'thoughts about discussed PPP models and knowledge of PPPs in other countries' converged into a single theme: 'features of effective PPPs'. The selective coding stage involved eliminating some

separate themes, such as ‘PPP outcomes’, ‘MOE-related challenges’ and ‘role of the government’, that did not support the research conceptions and only integrating their core content in the suggested PPP framework. Other themes were subsumed into the larger theme ‘PPP framework’.

The themes were analysed manually by creating a Word file for each theme comprising the respondents’ input regarding the concept or theme and highlighting any thoughts concerning this input and reference to any relevant documents. This coding took the form of a table containing the serial code of the participant, a brief note concerning the participant’s background, his/her input and my notes or remarks. This analytic approach partially adopts Silverman’s (2000) principle of ‘using appropriate tabulation’ to apply some structure to the data analysis rather than the quantification of data. Table 3.2 depicts a typical data analysis template. An example of these tables is provided in Appendix D.

Table 3.2: Typical data analysis template

Serial Code	Respondent’s background	Theme	Quotation	Researcher’s notes

A successive approximation approach, which is closely linked to the coding stages, was deployed during data analysis. This method involves repeated iterations through the data to refine theories and reach a comprehensive analysis (Neuman, 2006). This process leads to modifying research questions, adjusting concepts and creating new concepts. In this study, the process resulted in reformulating the research question pertaining to the potential private providers who are expected to play a role in the implementation of any future PPP model. The data resulting from the different sources pointed towards a wider range of

private sector players than those initially addressed in the question (private providers of education). As a result, the question and its relevant concept were adjusted to reflect this trend in the data. In addition, a new research question concerning the features of effective PPP programmes was added. The resulting rich research input in these areas which serves to answer the overarching research question warranted the inclusion of the additional research question. As a result, the 21 emergent themes were regrouped and recoded to reflect the revised research questions. Some themes were eliminated due to research time constraints and others were either integrated into relevant themes or incorporated into other research report sections (research context and the suggested PPP framework) leaving a total of six themes and six sub-themes on which to build the data analysis chapter. These are as follows:

- Perceptions of PPPs
- PPP practices in Oman
 - PPP initiatives in education in general
 - Outcome-orientated PPP initiatives
 - Possible future PPP initiatives
- Potential PPP partners
 - Scope of partners
 - International partners in PPPs
 - Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in PPPs
- PPP challenges
- Solutions to challenges
- Features of an effective PPP programme

The analytic strategy in this study strived to consider the principles underlying high-quality data analysis, as identified by Yin (2003, p. 137): attending to all the evidence embodied in the data through linking it to the conceptual propositions as well as identifying emerging concepts; addressing all possible rival interpretations; developing theoretical propositions. These principles are parallel to Silverman's (2000, pp. 178–184) key principles of qualitative data analysis to attain valid findings: the refutability principle, the constant comparative method, comprehensive data treatment and deviant-case analysis.

3.6 Setting and Sample of the Study

This research investigates PPPs in education in Oman and seeks to identify existing and potential PPPs, their impediments and highlight different stakeholders' perspectives of PPPs. The study culminates in a PPP framework which is responsive to the Omani educational and social context. Hence, it was essential to include participants from the public and private education sectors to consider these diverse perspectives and visions.

Research participants from the public and private education sectors were drawn from two educational directorates of the 11 educational directorates in the governorates of Oman, namely the educational directorates in the Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate and the Muscat Governorate. Participants from other sectors were drawn from the Muscat Governorate where their work is situated. The educational directorate in the Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate was selected as a research setting because I originally worked there. My familiarity with the research context aided in selecting participants who conformed to the participant selection criteria identified below. It also facilitated the smooth organisation and implementation of the focus groups in this directorate.

The educational directorate in the Muscat Governorate was chosen because it has the largest density of private education provision in Oman (Al-Sheethani, 2005; MOE, 2010a). Hence, this allowed me to select from different private school types which are not necessarily available in other governorates. The MOE headquarters, where the key research respondents work, are also based in Muscat. This close proximity between the MOE's different departments and the private schools sped up the process of obtaining the necessary clearance to access the target schools as well as permitting more interviews to be undertaken in the limited time available for field work than would otherwise have been possible.

The number of participants in qualitative research is not dictated by complicated statistical formulae, but by the 'completeness' of the research agenda and satisfaction with the understanding of the multi-faceted phenomenon studied (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 72). Therefore, the sample for this study followed a non-probability approach in which particular groups of participants are targeted even though they may not necessarily be representative of the population. This is because the study's main aim is not to generalise findings but rather to provide an in-depth exploration of the PPP phenomenon in the Omani context. Neuman (2006) asserts that in qualitative research sampling, the focus should be on how the sample illuminates the topic under investigation rather than on sample representativeness. Hence, in determining the research sample, a purposive and snowball sampling approach was adopted for the semi-structured interview respondents and focus groups participants. Snowball sampling was used in response to evolving and emerging research foci and the need to expand the range of research respondents. This enabled the identification of an inter-connected web of people who had experience of the topic. Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 74) describe this sample selection procedure as an ongoing

process in which designating a group of research participants is tentative, provisional, or even spontaneous. It also reflects the flexible and iterative nature of qualitative research which changes and develops in response to new discoveries during data collection and analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Sampling for this study finished when I felt that the study reached saturation (Ezzy, 2002), covering almost all directorates in the MOE that have links with PPP programmes and selecting interview respondents from each of them.

The purposive design is warranted in this type of exploratory field research which seeks cases for in-depth investigation (Neuman, 2006) and particular respondents to act as key informants who meet certain criteria (Ezzy, 2002). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), research participants in qualitative research need to be knowledgeable about the topic being explored, willing to talk about the topic and represent a range of perspectives to give the research balance and depth. To satisfy these criteria, the research participants included those who had some expertise of PPPs and involved a range of stakeholders to explore their varied perceptions of PPPs. The semi-structured interview respondents for this study were drawn from key public sector officials, either those involved in decision making concerning reform and well acquainted with PPP programmes or those whose work is related to the management of and coordination with private providers of education. The participants from the private education sector represented different managerial and school-practitioner levels. In addition, the study also targeted participants from other sectors whose job roles involved some links with PPPs in education. These were members of the education committees of the State Council and the OCCI, a representative from the UNICEF office in Oman and a member from the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science linked to UNESCO. Before data analysis, coding was applied to ensure the anonymity of participants. Codes include the letters G, P or O, to symbolise government, private and

other sectors, as well as the respondent's initials and interview date. For example, (GNL28/02/12) represents a government participant, whose initials are N. L. and who was interviewed on 28 February 2012.

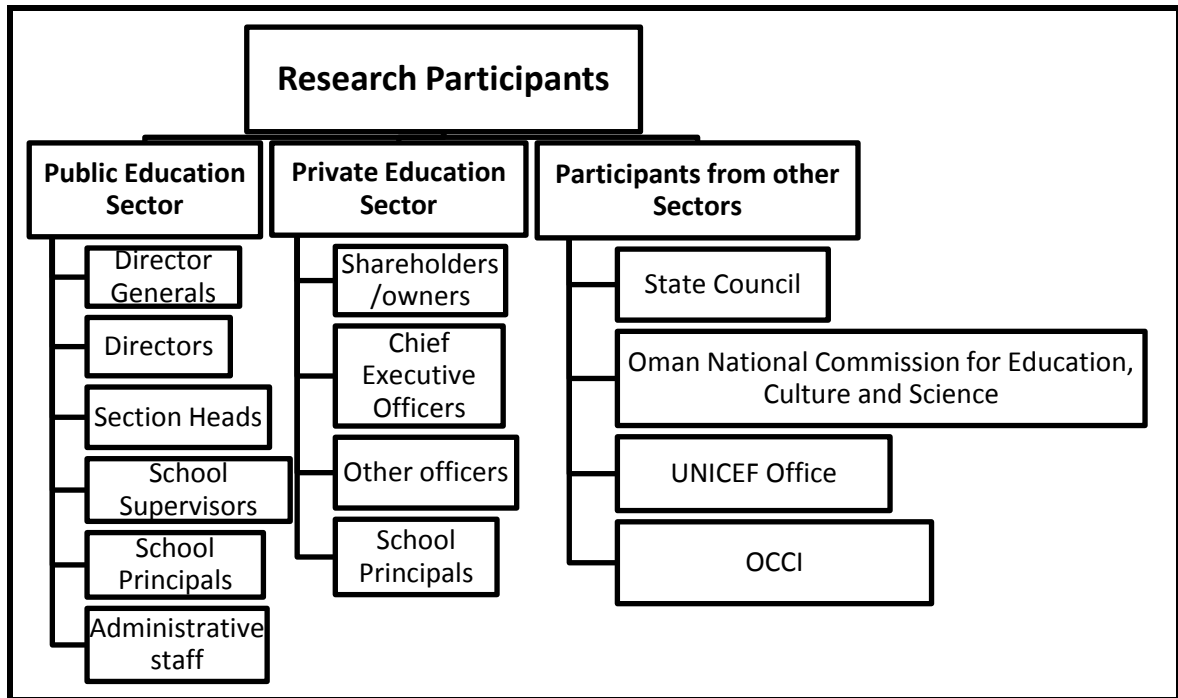
Similarly, the focus group sampling followed a purposive sampling method in which a number of government administrative staff, school principals and subject supervisors were selected to shed light on the topic. Quota sampling was also considered during the selection of the focus group participants to represent a variety of administrative staff and school-level practitioners. These were mainly personnel who have some knowledge of PPPs in the education context. The sample of school principals included participants from the basic and post-basic education levels and the supervisors' sample comprised representatives from all supervision departments (administrative, human sciences, applied sciences, individual skills and private school supervisors). The four focus groups conducted (identified as FG1 to FG4) were as follows:

- FG1: administrative and private school supervisors
- FG2: applied science supervisors
- FG3: public school principals
- FG4: human science supervisors

The sampling method aimed to ensure that the various hierarchical structures (high-level, medium-level and low-level officials) in both sectors were represented, as illustrated in Figure 3.2 below, to triangulate information from different sources and gain a realistic perspective of PPPs in the education system and their implementation. The public sector sample was drawn from directors general, directors, section heads and school-level

practitioners. The respondents from the private education sector included school owners, shareholders, chief executive officers (CEOs), other officers and school principals.

Figure 3.2: Levels of respondents from the public and private sectors



Source: Author's research

The research participants, with their diverse positions and professional backgrounds within the education system, possess practical experience of PPPs and their role in education. Their distinct, yet complementary, PPP expertise can thus aid in the design of the suggested PPP framework and shape its basic elements. Whereas the participating directors and researchers can provide broad visions and suggest PPP policies, school-level practitioners (principals, supervisors and various officers) can offer more detailed insights into the practical aspects of PPPs. The involvement of other participants (politicians, parents) was not feasible, but could have added some financial and social dimensions to the suggested PPP framework.

The participants in the current study numbered 61. In total, 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted and 29 participants took part in four focus groups. Table 3.3 below depicts the distribution and breakdown of the research sample and the research instruments used with each group.

Table 3.3: Breakdown of research sample and data collection instruments used

Educational Directorate	Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate	Muscat Governorate and MOE headquarters
Research Instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews • Documentary analysis
Research Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative staff • Supervisors • School principals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government officials • Private education providers • Participants from other sectors
Number of Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 (school principals) • 6 (administrative staff) • 17 (supervisors from different subject departments) • A total of 4 focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 (public sector interviewees & 2 supplementary interviews) • 8 (private sector interviewees) • 4 (interviewees from other sectors)

More information on the participating MOE directorates and their departments and sections can be found in Appendix E.

3.7 Validity and Trustworthiness

The issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research have been the topic of some debate. Whereas some qualitative researchers view the related indicators as completely distinct from the validity indicators applied in quantitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), others consider the validity measures used in quantitative research as applicable to any type of research but to varying degrees (Silverman, 2000). This research adopts a middle-ground perspective, which perceives the credibility of research as a continuum of reliability and

validity measures. Hence, in establishing the trustworthiness of the procedures, this study borrows relevant measures from both perspectives by observing the validity measures dedicated to qualitative research but, at the same time, being open to other relevant validity and reliability indicators.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that the credibility of qualitative research can be judged by its 'transparency, consistency-coherence, and communicability' (p. 85). These standards are incorporated in the design of this research. Transparency entails clarifying the process of data collection through maintaining careful records of the research process and progress. Consistency means that the researcher examines inconsistencies and demonstrates understanding of why they occur. Coherence indicates an ability to explain why inconsistencies in themes between individuals and across cases occur and what they mean (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The communicability of the research means that the research text vividly and convincingly communicates to readers how the research was conducted by providing rich details and abundant evidence and presenting a detailed, transparent, well-documented, coherent and consistent research process.

Although the term validity is a complex and contested one in the research methodology literature (Burgess et al, 2006), this research strived to attain a reasonable degree of rigour represented by consistency and comprehensiveness in terms of the content and design of the research. At the design level, the use of the multiple research measures of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis served a number of purposes to ensure validity. This triangulation not only helped to minimise the shortcomings of the individual methods, but also sought to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions. Neuman (2006) contends that considering a range of data sources and applying a mix of measures provides some reliability and dependability in qualitative research while

illuminating different dimensions of the phenomenon. These multiple data sources are perceived to promote the depth and richness of data while maintaining researcher objectivity during the research process. The wide range of participants these instruments target is perceived to increase the scope and validity of data. In terms of content, the research tried to maintain logical consistency between the literature reviewed, the research instruments and the findings discussed.

Based on her work on case study research, Yin (2003) offers an approximation between quantitative and qualitative validity and trustworthiness indicators. She identifies four tests to establish the research design quality and trustworthiness and illustrated how these can be achieved in case study research. These tests include construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. This study has aimed to meet these four tests. Construct validity is attained through the use of multiple sources of evidence as well as establishing chains of evidence through making explicit links between the research questions, the data collected and the conclusions drawn. The pattern-matching technique followed during the data analysis provides a reasonable level of internal validity and the analytical development of theory (framework) based on the results of this single case study offers some external validity. Silverman (2000) highlights that validity in qualitative research is largely established through data analysis; he contends that valid findings require the refutation of initial assumptions and easy conclusions through constant comparison and repeated inspection of datasets, the comprehensive treatment of data and the identification and analysis of deviant cases. The reliability of this case study is enhanced through documenting the procedures followed during the different stages of the research; a purpose which this chapter aims to fulfil. The processes of data collection and data analysis are thus thoroughly described and documented to allow any future replication of the case study.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

This research has some discernible limitations. Its main disadvantages concern the scope of application and some methodological issues. The scope of the study is only limited to a single case due to time and feasibility constraints. It devotes the investigation to a single holistic case (Yin, 2003), PPP practices in the MOE in Oman, with multiple imbedded units of analysis (different stakeholders). It also covers only PPPs at the basic and post-basic education levels. PPPs at the HE level are not addressed. Furthermore, covering all 11 directorates of education would not have been feasible given the time constraints and thus only two are covered.

The use of interviews and focus groups as research methods does not support the involvement of many participants in the way that survey research does, although here the trade-off is between the breadth of a survey and the depth of the approach adopted and this is a deliberate decision. Thus, the study also only addresses a limited number of stakeholders: administrators, private education providers, school principals and supervisors. Politicians, teachers, parents, students and the community are not included. The involvement of these stakeholders would require greater time and resources than available. However, their involvement could have informed the social, political and financial aspects of the suggested PPP framework, a goal which future research can address. A related scope limitation is that the suggested PPP framework does not address the costs of a PPP programme in Oman, the estimation of which demands a thorough financial analysis and economic expertise that is beyond the scope of this study.

A methodological limitation arises from the non-probability sampling, which impedes the generalisability of the research findings. However, qualitative research of this sort targets the generation of theory rather than statistical generalisation. This sampling approach may

also have minimal effects on the representativeness of the research sample, although this is justified in case study research (cf. 3.6).

As with all types of qualitative research methods, the subjectivity and bias of research participants might impinge on the interview-related findings of this case study. Although the triangulation of methods was applied to overcome this issue, subjectivity and the insider's perspectives are inherent in interview data.

The research might be affected by the limited understanding of the 'public-private partnership' concept on the part of some research participants as the term is not widely used in the Omani educational context. However measures were taken to address this. The participants needed to be briefed about the research prior to data collection. A participant information sheet was prepared for this purpose (Appendix F). In addition, the participants were provided with some visual representations of PPP models to facilitate overall understanding and to aid discussion concerning these models.

Finally, challenging my own pre-conceptions about the topic and avoiding research bias was another concern. The use of multiple data sources is essential here, as is transparency in reporting.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In the course of data collection, the research complied with and adhered to the ethical principles defined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004, 2012) and the ESRC (2012), as well as those identified by qualitative research authors. Rubin and Rubin (1995) point out that qualitative research incurs ethical obligations to its participants. Some of these obligations include clarifying the purpose of the research and avoiding

deception, asking permission to record, clarifying the intended use of the research and protecting the participants from any emotional, physical or financial harm.

Prior to conducting the field work, access to the participants was secured by approaching the Technical Office for Studies and Development at the MOE, which liaised with the target groups of participants on the conducting of interviews and focus groups and facilitated the collection of necessary documents. The permissions obtained are provided in Appendix G.

After permission was granted and before embarking on data collection, all participants were provided with a 'participant information sheet' which described the research objectives and the expected outcomes to provide them with an overview of the research (Appendix F). Informed consent forms (Appendix H) were completed by all members in the participating groups. As suggested by Neuman (2006), these forms stressed the voluntary nature of participation in the research, clearly spelled out the type of contribution to the research and clarified that the participants had the freedom to withdraw from the research at any stage. Furthermore, the prior consent of the participants was obtained to use the audio recording of data in research outcomes such as research reports or journal articles.

Because ethical considerations also include assuring the anonymity and confidentiality of data (BERA, 2004, 2012; Neuman, 2006), only the essential demographic details of the participants, which should aid in the comparison of results between the different groups, were obtained. Other information, such as names and e-mail addresses, were provided voluntarily by willing participants solely to aid future contact and receive updates on the research findings. In this regard, the researcher assured the participants that all the information provided would be made completely anonymous and used only for research

purposes. They were also assured that they would not be identifiable in the research report or any research-related published materials and that the information they provided would be kept in strict confidence and would not, in any case, be divulged to other people.

This research also addresses an ethical issue for which field researchers are sometimes criticised: ignoring the powerful (Neuman, 2006). Through sampling the different hierarchical structures in the research context, the research captures different viewpoints and looks at the PPP phenomenon from various perspectives. It gives a voice to both the powerful and less powerful in the educational context.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has described the design and conduct of this case study. It opened by providing the rationale for this research and discussing its significance. It also identified the ontological and epistemological underpinnings which determined the approach, design and methods. It then delineated the sampling techniques, the data collection methods used and the data analysis procedures. The validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research were discussed and the ways in which validity was enhanced were identified. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the research limitations and ethical considerations. The following chapters present the findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is one of three which present the research results. This chapter answers the subsidiary research questions, while Chapter 5 draws conclusions and interprets the findings in context. Chapter 6 addresses the overarching question and proposes a PPP framework for the Omani education context. Chapter 7 offers an executive briefing summary of this framework.

Input from semi-structured interviews and focus groups constituted the key evidence to explore the research questions. Documentary analysis extended these primary data, providing details on demographic characteristics, policies and PPP initiatives. Evidence from these three data sources was woven together to portray a diverse yet coherent exploration of the research foci, representing the diversity of visions and viewpoints of the wide range of research respondents from the public, private and other sectors (cf. 3.6).

As described in Chapter 3, the data analysis amalgamates the features of content analysis and thematic analysis to examine the research data and preserve its qualitative nature. Both pre-identified themes and emergent themes were analysed, linked together and regrouped to correspond to the research questions and answer them.

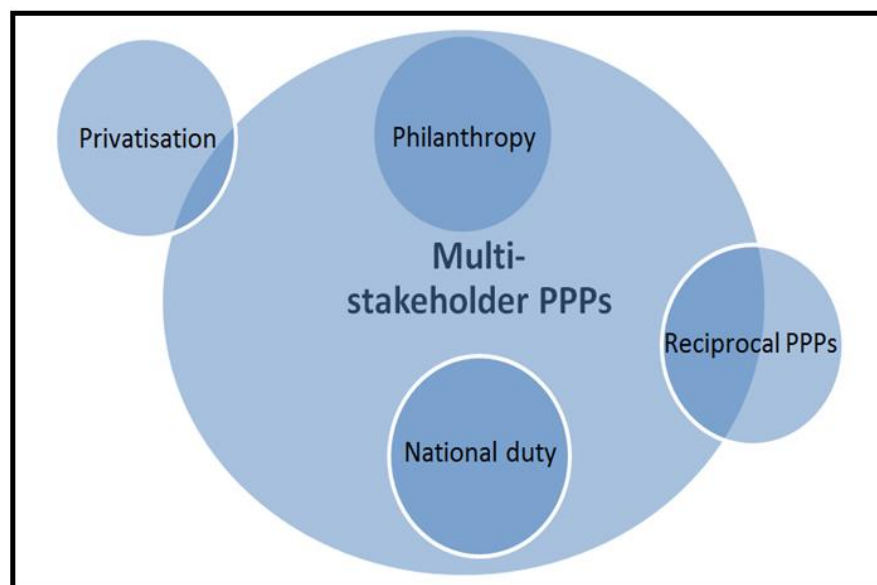
This chapter initially identifies different stakeholders' perceptions of PPP. Second, it documents and describes current PPP education initiatives, highlighting their types and purposes and paying particular attention to initiatives targeted at educational outcomes. It suggests possible future PPP ventures and identifies potential partners and stakeholders. Next, it analyses the PPP challenges in the Omani context and proposes ways to ameliorate

them. Finally, the chapter identifies the key features of an effective PPP programme as perceived by the research respondents.

4.2 Perceptions of PPP

Analysis of interviews and focus group outputs reveals five rich perceptions of PPP, reflecting the debate in the current literature concerning the nature and roles of PPPs in society. Perceptions range from viewing PPPs as a form of privatisation, through philanthropy, to reciprocal processes and an integral multi-stakeholder partnership. These are represented in Figure 4.1 below. The types of partners, the objectives and the nature of collaboration are perceived differently in each of these conceptions of PPPs. These perceptions coloured to a large extent the respondents' input on the different foci of this research. Whereas the majority of participants refer to the overall private sector and its relationship to education when discussing PPPs, others limit their discussion to links between the public and private education sectors.

Figure 4.1: Stakeholders' perceptions of PPPs



Source: Author's research

The perspectives of PPP as philanthropy and national duty are viewed by the participants as integral parts of the larger notion of multi-stakeholder PPP. Whilst reciprocal PPPs partially serve the functions of the multi-stakeholder perspective, privatisation is seen as more distinct. However, it has some features which may be beneficial to PPPs, particularly those related to management and efficiency.

4.2.1 Privatisation and profit

A few participants viewed PPP as equivalent to the privatisation of educational services or as a means of capitalising on the private sector's work ethics and efficiency. The former perception, expressed in FG1, appears to be a misunderstanding of PPPs and was challenged by other members who contended that the two concepts are different; whereas privatisation means handing over public services to the private sector, PPP denotes a collaboration and integration between the two sectors. A participant in FG4 also worried that 'assigning government schools to the private sector will have negative consequences [because] it will cost parents expenses not everybody can afford' reflecting a privatisation perspective. Another member intervened to clarify that 'there will not be any profit-making because students will not pay for their education. It is not privatisation. ... The government funds the education of students and the private sector is involved in the planning, provision and improvement of the education service'. Interestingly, a participant in this group admitted that she initially approached the discussion of PPP as equal to privatisation which according to her 'reveals a lack of awareness of the meaning of public-private partnership'. She considered that this lack of understanding might be pervasive among the general public in society.

Some private sector participants also discussed the benefits that the public education system could gain from adopting, through PPP, the private sector's ethos and expertise. An

international school principal (PAM26/02/12) justified this, saying that ‘private providers of education monitor their service provision very closely, which impacts productivity and accountability’. The business officer of this school (PTY26/02/12) added:

Partnering with the private sector increases productivity and competition due to the presence of the profit-making factor... Because the private sector offers greater productivity and higher quality, when there is PPP the service provision becomes much better compared to those services provided by the public sector.

According to a participant in FG4, this profit factor sparks innovation. Another member of this focus group believed that the private sector’s practices and work ethics lead to greater productivity and enhanced quality because it ‘cares about development and it attracts expertise more than the public sector. ... [It] invests in human resources and encourages creativity. ... It sets aside a certain amount of the budget for research and development’. This perspective, while it cautions against the negative impact of privatisation, also identifies its beneficial managerial aspects.

4.2.2 Philanthropy

A number of participants viewed PPP as the voluntary material contribution of the private sector to the development of education. This viewpoint projects PPP as a type of philanthropy represented in the support, whether in the form of finance, infrastructure, materials or expertise, provided to education by the private sector. This support is viewed as essential in achieving the goals of education and supporting large-scale educational projects. In fact, the financial contribution made by the private sector to education is seen as one of its key responsibilities. The funding of education is perceived as offering a wider scope for PPPs than expertise as any institution or person can offer financial support whereas only specialist parties can offer expertise. However, many respondents recognised the unsustainable and limited nature of philanthropic PPPs. A government official

(GNL28/02/12) pointed out that it can be regarded as ‘the simplest form of PPP’ and another (GBKh10/08/12) referred to it as PPP at a ‘superficial level’. A participant from FG2 warned that ‘financial funding alone is not the essence of PPP, which requires the deeper involvement of the private sector at the school and curricular levels’. Another key government official (GSR13/08/12) worried that the current relationship between the private sector and education is ‘a promotional relationship’ due to ‘the simple support given to education represented in sponsoring activities and funding prizes’. This reflects the dissatisfaction with the current goals of such benevolent PPPs.

4.2.3 Reciprocity

The third standpoint goes beyond philanthropic actions to portray a reciprocal and complementary process in which each sector does not function effectively in isolation from the other: both sectors achieve their planned objectives more fully and efficiently through working in collaboration. A participant in FG2 defined PPP as a complementary process, namely ‘the constructive interaction and collaboration between the two sectors in order to produce mutually beneficial outcomes’. Another participant in FG4 represented it as an ongoing process of collaboration that is not confined to a particular stage or level, but ‘a process of harmonising efforts, starting from planning, throughout implementation and ending up with evaluation’.

This perspective of PPP is characterised by tangible goals which primarily related to the partners. The shared benefits can be of a short- or long-term nature. The immediate goals include ‘the private sector meeting its social responsibilities and marketing goals on the one hand and the [MOE] reinforcing its financial resources on the other’, as outlined by a government official (GSA11/02/12). The long-term benefits comprise producing an education system that is responsive to the labour market and allowing the private sector to

achieve its social commitments and contribute to the preparation of a skilled and qualified workforce, as summarised by some participants in FG2 and FG3. According to these participants, PPP enables the private sector as a whole to negotiate its requirements in relation to educational outcomes. Thus, the private sector takes part in the preparation of a workforce that meets its requirements and qualifications. These participants affirmed the need for the private sector to contribute financially to education, but also pointed out other possible and beneficial modes of contribution.

This exchange of interests between the public and private sectors is accentuated when the inputs and outputs of the partnering institutions are similar, as in the case of public and private schools. As a member of FG1 put it:

PPP involves the achievement of common goals, particularly if there are similarities in inputs, outputs and in the type of performance of the two institutions. These institutions need to collaborate, using the resources available to each of them to achieve complementarity. Because this reciprocal process targets the students as outcomes, it becomes mandatory for these educational institutions to have an extensive form of partnership.

Another participant in FG4 suggested that PPP can address ‘the level of school leadership ... the curricular level and even the funding level where they have common funding’. To this end, this perspective indicates a reciprocal contractual relationship for the benefit of education.

4.2.4 Partnership and national duty

A fourth perspective on PPP, the ‘integral’ view transcends the attainment of the immediate goals of the two sectors to include benefits for the whole community and the pursuit of longer-term goals. It is a two-way process in which, as described by a government official (GAR31/01/12), ‘the two sectors revolve around a shared axis (goals) ... performing

different but complementary roles'. This view of PPP as the integration of the two sectors was described succinctly by a participant in FG2:

PPP integrates two parts to form a whole. When this integration is realised, the two parts become stronger. Each of these parts has its own aims, pursued separately, but when integrated in a whole, they pursue more laudable and noble aims.

This perspective maintains that PPP in education is a national duty, dictated by social and economic factors, because education is the joint responsibility of public and private sectors.

A participant from the OCCI (ORS29/02/12) identified the high demand for education, 'which compels the private sector to contribute in absorbing this demand', as one of the social drivers for PPP. An educational planning director (GSR13/08/12) highlighted that future financial challenges and depleting natural resources enjoin a deeper involvement of the private sector in education. He pointed out that 'long term-planning necessitates the existence of some partnership and contribution in terms of both investment and support'.

This partnership can have different facets, educational, cultural, or social, and goes beyond financial donations. It is also perceived as formal, well-structured, sustainable and manifested at the different levels of the educational system. One participant (GSG28/02/12) noted that sustainability is a crucial feature of this PPP, which requires that the two sectors plan together long-term and sustainable projects to promote the education process. Emphasising its formal structure and organised nature, a government official (GBKh13/08/2012) stated that this form of partnership addresses 'daily practices at the school level, at the classroom level and even at the decision-making level at the [MOE]'. Involving the private sector at the decision-making level facilitates 'knowing what their expectations are and understanding the needs of the private sector', as remarked by another key official (GJL11/2/2012).

4.2.5 Multi-stakeholder partnerships for education (MSPEs)

The fifth conception of PPP, the MSPE, subsumes the essence of ‘integral’ PPP, but transcends it to encompass a range of educational stakeholders in addition to the public and private sectors. It also integrates philanthropy and reciprocity in PPPs. The research respondents proposed that such a partnership should establish links between the school and the community with its different sectors and institutions, including private firms, different governmental departments, NGOs and the community as a whole. One participant (OLG29/02/12) suggested that PPPs in education demand that all educational stakeholders work collaboratively:

The concept of private-public partnerships is imbedded in an ocean of shared responsibility ... that of governmental partners, other non-governmental partners, civil society organisations, private corporations and even at the community level.

Many participants strongly believed that this partnership should initially emanate from and within the educational institution itself before encompassing other governmental, private and community-based partners. Highlighting a communication gap in the MOE, a government official (GSB08/02/12) would like to see a partnership established within the MOE involving all levels and including practitioners in schools, which was also an aspiration of a participant in FG4. A participant from the State Council (OSR 28/02/12) extended this premise and argued that there should be ‘a partnership within the different pillars of the education process, whether they are administrators, teachers, students or supervisors, as well as including the family and the community’. Only after ensuring uniformity in the orientation and direction at the heart of the educational institution can it start to collaborate effectively with other outside parties. Only then, as a government official (GNK22/02/12) expressed it, can ‘a multiple-partnered partnership ... be established between the [MOE] and other different governmental sectors and the private sector’.

An official involved in PPPs (GSA11/02/12) insisted that for an MSPE to achieve its goals, all partners should ‘come together and plan strategic projects for education’, signifying the importance of long-term goals.

This perspective of MSPE is expected to offer mutual benefits to all stakeholders, as well as attaining some national, laudable goals, because when education is the centre of focus, the whole of society reaps benefits. This vision also resonates well with an interesting perspective of PPP expressed by a key educator (GNK22/02/2012). He suggested that PPPs in education can be looked at from two levels: PPPs for the raising of children and PPPs for their education/schooling – two purposes fulfilled by education. The achievement of these two goals, which culminate in building the rounded characters of individuals, necessitates forging alliances with a wide range of partners. While some societal components, such as communities or families, are partners in raising children, PPPs in the schooling process are of a more formal and specialised nature and include all the institutions that enrol children as students (from pre-school education to HE) and then as employees in the labour market. The educator emphasised the significance of involving different stakeholders

I reiterate that if we need comprehensive education, then the community’s diverse institutions need to be involved. We cannot offer polar education in which each educational institution (pre-schooling, schooling and higher education institutions) works in isolation. This also applies to the nurturing aspect of education, which is a wider concept that subsumes schooling. (GNK22/02/2012)

This overlap in responsibilities makes it mandatory for all stakeholders of education to work in partnership to achieve the ultimate goal of preparing responsible and productive citizens.

4.3 PPP Practices in Oman

Data analysis reveals a range of PPP initiatives in Oman. While the majority of this public–private collaboration is of a ‘laissez-faire’ nature, based mainly on voluntary and spontaneous grounds, some initiatives are more structured. These PPPs address different aspects of education, such as finance, infrastructure, policy setting and social and cultural dimensions. Others, however limited, are found to be more orientated towards educational quality, targeting student outcomes, teacher training and curricula. The analysis also reveals some desired and potential PPP venues. This section first summarises the general PPP initiatives and discusses how the participants perceive them. Then, it sheds some light on quality-oriented PPPs and goes on to suggest potential future PPPs and collaborations in education as envisaged by the research respondents.

4.3.1 General PPP initiatives in education

The majority of PPP practices in Oman emanate from personal and voluntary action rather than from a structured, planned policy. Some participants describe these PPP initiatives as ‘very narrow’, ‘shallow’ and even ‘superficial’. An official (OSR28/02/12) perceives them to be ‘either non-existent or very limited’. When these exist, they ‘are confined to shy applications’, a participant in FG1 believed. A school principal in FG3 speculated that the paucity or invisibility of these PPPs is because ‘the ... concept is not clear to (MOE) practitioners and sometimes to officials’.

The MOE has forged various collaborations and partnerships with numerous partners. PPP in Oman is envisaged to encompass the general private sector institutions, business and industrial corporations, NGOs and the local community, rather than just the private education sector. Consequently, the resulting PPPs take different forms and fulfil different objectives. The PPPs garnered from the data are found to address different aspects of the

educational process, whether financial, infrastructural, social, cultural or related to policy setting. For the purposes of analysis, these initiatives are summarised below and roughly classified in accordance with their general goals.

Financial PPPs

The contribution of finance and infrastructure from the private sector to the MOE and schools is the most widely discussed type of PPP. These philanthropic contributions are given either in cash or in kind to individual projects or schools. Some common PPPs include:

- sponsoring activities (competitions, conferences) and funding prizes
- offering free meals for children from low-income families
- installing air conditioners in public schools

Such philanthropic ventures are criticised for their unsustainability and for their ‘promotional’ background. One participant from FG2 said such support ‘does not address the urgent needs of education’.

Infrastructural PPPs

Closely linked to philanthropic ventures are infrastructural PPPs, which seek to provide the education sector with physical infrastructure; the most prominent examples are:

- providing equipment such as interactive whiteboards and computers to public schools
- building multi-media and digital laboratories
- erecting sunshades/awnings
- establishing school buildings, as at Al-Zahia School in Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate

- contributing towards the establishment of teacher training centres
- installing IT equipment in public schools and IT-mobile laboratories for remote schools through the ‘Smart Classroom’ initiative
- establishing the MOE educational portal
- developing a digital school, i.e. Thuraya Al-Busaeediya Girls School in Muscat
- establishing the Omar bin Al-Khattab Institute for blind students

While some of these initiatives are described as worthwhile, others are described as ‘unintegrated’, failing to have an impact on students’ outcomes. Instead, the participants demand ‘major and comprehensive projects’, as expressed by an official (GSR13/08/12); another official (GSA11/02/12) added ‘strategic projects ... constitute the real investment in the community’.

Social PPPs

A considerable number of PPPs undertaken by the MOE have social dimensions, including:

- the Road Safety Award
- the ‘Learning Village’ (adult education)
- programmes targeting the inclusion of children with disabilities
- promoting the value of voluntary work among students

Many of these PPPs are limited in scope and do not address the education system in a comprehensive manner.

Cultural PPPs

Other existing PPPs address some cultural aspects of the students’ schooling experience.

Key initiatives include:

- Outward Bound Oman
- the Muscat Youth Forum
- UNESCO connected schools

According to the CEO of an education company (PASH27/02/12), these PPPs ‘build on students’ leadership skills, independence, self-confidence and decision-making abilities ... (and) open up wide horizons for students’. However, they only target a select number of students and schools, meaning their benefits are severely limited.

Policy-oriented PPPs

Policy-oriented PPPs are the scarcest type of partnerships. There is limited liaison between the private sector and the higher levels of the MOE to discuss policies or participate in planning educational reform. The only examples of these PPPs are the joint committees formed between the MOE and other governmental and private sectors, such as the Ministry of Higher Education, Sultan Qaboos University and private universities.

Generally, research participants from both public and private sectors, agreeing that most current PPPs in education in Oman are individual and fragmented initiatives, attribute this primarily to the absence of clear governmental policy on PPP. The absence of an agreed upon meaning of PPP is another deterrent to the expansion of PPP practices: the meaning of PPP may vary between public and private sectors. The research participants considered that raising awareness of the importance of PPPs in education and establishing a structured PPP framework could lead to more effective PPPs.

4.3.2 PPPs targeting educational outcomes

Improving the quality of education and student outcomes is the ultimate goal of any education system. Hence, it is envisaged as a key driver of any educational programme,

including PPP projects. Nevertheless, this goal is not always targeted by educational PPPs in Oman, even though some participants consider that other PPPs, whether financial, infrastructural, social or cultural, eventually contribute to improving educational outcomes. The data analysis discloses the participants' apparent dissatisfaction with the volume, magnitude and quality of PPPs that address educational quality. In particular, they deem these scarce and lacking in a long-term vision. The analysis also reveals that educational PPPs do not receive the same attention as financial and infrastructural projects. This is because 'it is much easier to monitor where your interventions are going if you are focused only on (material aspects) ... but at a higher level of intervention (students achievement) ... monitoring progress is more difficult', according to a research participant (OLG29/02/12).

Despite the fact that some private sector corporates realise that addressing educational outcomes is the most beneficial form of PPP, one in which 'all the projects are centred around the students' as a PPP committee representative at the MOE (GJL11/02/12) emphasised, practitioners and schools still complain about this sector's limited contribution to improving educational quality. A participant in FG1 remarked 'most of the existing initiatives tackle material aspects. What about the school curricula and using information technology in these curricula? These aspects are still untouched'. Another participant in FG4 stated '... When we speak about development of curricula or teacher training programmes, PPP ventures are almost non-existent'. This discrepancy between rhetoric and practice might indicate some mismanagement of the available resources and absence of prioritisation at the MOE. It might also point towards a lack of communication and joint planning between the MOE and the private sector regarding PPP projects. While the data reveal some emerging PPP efforts in the areas of teacher training and career guidance, PPPs

focusing on curricula are limited. Generally, two broad types of outcome-orientated PPPs can be identified: with the private education sector and with the broader private sector.

Outcome-orientated PPPs with the broad private sector

At the broader private sector level, PPPs that address educational quality and outcomes are predominantly implemented in collaboration with specialist private education centres, HE institutions and international NGOs. These PPPs mainly focus on teacher training, curricula, pre-school education, career guidance and evaluation of the efficiency of the Omani education system.

Teacher training

The participants considered that PPPs in teacher training can take the form of financial contributions or providing professional training services. However, a government official (GSG28/02/12) pointed out that this contribution ‘is not as desired. ... [It] is still confined to provision of training venues and preparing the training environment. Its role in providing actual teacher training is still below expectations’. The teacher training PPPs identified address either pedagogical and IT issues or specialised in-service courses leading to qualification. The main examples of these include the following:

- a prospective teacher academy in partnership with specialised education centres such as Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) and Cambridge International
- upgrading English language teachers’ qualifications in partnership with Leeds University (UK)
- introducing the Cambridge International Diploma for Teachers and Trainers (CIDTT) in partnership with the University of Cambridge International Examinations

- the ‘Intel Teach’ programme in partnership with Intel International
- collaboration with private teacher training centres to provide the MOE with professional teacher trainers and education experts
- partnership with public and private HE institutions such as Sultan Qaboos University and Nizwa University to offer in-service teacher training

These PPPs are seen by the participants as either developing teachers’ capacity or preparing them to function in IT-based classrooms.

Evaluation of the efficiency of the education system

The evaluation of the education system to promote its quality and improve its outcomes is another area for PPPs targeting educational outputs. The main PPPs in this area include:

- evaluation of the First Cycle of basic education by Canedcom International
- the World Bank comprehensive evaluation of the education system in Oman, its internal efficiency and its responsiveness to labour market needs
- partnership with the Tunisian Agency to establish and monitor quality assurance procedures in the MOE’s different departments
- the Observatory on Education, which addresses links between education, training and the labour market, in partnership with the UNICEF office in Oman
- a school retention study in partnership with the UNICEF office
- participation in TIMMS and PIRLS benchmarking studies conducted by Boston College and International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)

The respondents believed that such evaluative initiatives provide important information concerning education to policy makers, education leaders, employers and the general public. In particular, they offer valuable information on educational indicators such as resources, curricula and instruction, highlighting to policy makers, researchers and school-level practitioners performance realities and reform possibilities.

Curricula

The recent TIMMS in science and mathematics and PIRLS 2011 literacy results reveal that Omani students underperform in these areas. However, PPP programmes focusing on curricula, 'haven't taken place so far' (PPP planning official, GMN27/02/12) although they 'have submitted numerous proposals to seek partnerships with curricula and evaluation experts'. An FG3 participant also stated that 'the role of the private sector in formulating curricula ... isn't evident', with the exception of 'a slight role ... at the post-basic level where students take optional subjects and there is a need for career guidance'.

Although the research participants identified the need for some concerted efforts at the level of curricula, the data analysis reveals the existence of only a few curricula-related PPPs, most of which are of a limited nature. These initiatives largely target supplementing and extending existing curricula and few PPPs introduce fundamental changes to curricula.

The existing curriculum-related PPPs are primarily:

- piloting some international mathematics textbook series in limited schools
- participation in the GLOBE (The Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment) programme, a worldwide programme that provides practical environmental education for primary and secondary school children

- partnership with the Muscat Securities Market to supplement the content of the ‘applied mathematics’ school subject

Although some reports (Gonzalez et al, 2008; World Bank, 2012) have documented the gap between educational outcomes and HE and the capabilities and skills required in the workplace in Oman, recommending deeper collaborations with the private sector, PPP efforts to remedy curricular inefficiencies are very limited. The existing curricular-related PPPs are either implemented on a narrow scale or as non-core curriculum activities.

Pre-school education

Pre-school education could be a rich area for PPPs in the absence of universal public provision at this level. Nevertheless, practical PPPs are as yet limited; they include:

- introducing pre-school classes in public schools in the Governorate of Dhofar
- encouraging private schools to offer either free seats or reduced fees at pre-school level for children from low-income families
- organising a national campaign to raise awareness of pre-school education

While practitioners appreciate such collaboration, they view this effort as insufficient. They specify scaling out a national pre-school programme and improving teacher training at this level as two priorities. A member of FG1 suggested more structured and large-scale measures be taken through contracting with public or private universities to offer teacher training and certify practising teachers.

Career guidance

A large proportion of current PPPs are directed at career guidance and preparing students for the work environment. Examples include:

- job shadowing programme
- entrepreneurship programme
- the ‘Ghaitoh’ programme which provides training and experience in business planning in partnership with Oman Oil and Al-Nama Management Consultancy companies.

While the first two can be considered long-term and sustainable, planned to be integrated into the curriculum, the final PPP has short-term goals and is confined to a select number of schools.

Outcome-orientated PPPs with the private education sector

Data analysis also reveals a number of PPP programmes and collaborations that are specific to private education providers. These collaborations primarily target aspects of the teaching–learning process, covering teacher professional development, student assessment and curricula, primarily undertaken at the individual school level. The majority of these collaborations are spontaneous and voluntary and very few of them are structured and organised. Many participants hesitate even to label the liaison between the MOE and private schools as partnership; rather they view it as routine administrative liaison. A government official (GMGh21/02/12) noted that such liaisons ‘can be called cooperation rather than partnership’ and a private sector participant (PBM25/02/12) remarked that the major contributions are in areas such as ‘syllabus ... and student evaluation’. The CEO of an education company (PASH27/02/12) views this type of administrative arrangement as ‘concerned with the operational aspects of the school rather than coordination at strategic levels’, which PPP warrants. The main fields of collaboration between MOE and private schools can be summarised in relation to supply-side and demand-side provision:

Supply-side provision

- technical support/supervision provided by the MOE to private schools
- curricular matters
 - liaison regarding curricula in monolingual schools implementing the national curriculum
 - approval of syllabi in bilingual and international schools
 - building national curricular matrices based on international standards adopted by private schools
- extra-curricular activities
- teaching resources
- teacher professional development programmes
 - joint in-service training for public and private school teachers
 - professional development events organised by private schools attended by MOE and public school personnel
 - private schools' contributions towards teachers' forums organised by the MOE
 - conferences organised by either the MOE or international schools, attended by public and private school teachers
 - limited pre-service teacher training programmes run by some private schools

Demand-side provision

- A small-scale scholarship scheme run in a single private school

Some public sector participants consider the free-of-charge supervision services as a valued form of technical support for private schools. However, while some private schools

welcome this type of intervention and see its potential in improving work in private schools, others consider it as a disruption to their work. Added to this, curricular PPPs are regarded by school practitioners as insignificant, if existing at all. Although many private schools have expressed their willingness to participate in pre-service teacher training, their limited current involvement is ascribed by a private sector participant (PASH27/02/12) to the absence of a formal MOE policy in this direction.

Whereas the research data reveal the existence of a limited number of supply-side PPPs, demand-side PPPs are very scarce in Oman. The country's only initiative, the Sultan Private School scholarship programme, has not expanded either in terms of student numbers or in other private schools, despite running for a number of decades. (In this initiative, the MOE plays the role of liaison between partners without being involved in funding). In fact, as a participant in FG4 pointed out, 'the initiative has grown even more limited and confined to a very narrow segment of society. Students have to be outstanding academically while being from low-income families'. A government official (GAK29/01/12) attributed this restriction to the absence of a 'set policy for such programmes'. Another participant (GNL28/02/12) perceived the low capacity of the private education sector across the country, except in Muscat and some other major cities, as another deterrent to the expansion of this programme.

In their discussion of collaboration between public and private schools, participants identified two types of collaboration. The first involves a strong and high quality private education sector which public schools seek to emulate. The second pertains to small private schools which gain experience and share resources with public schools. Exchange visits are common, addressing mainly curricula and school management aspects in the former and teaching methods and student assessment in the latter.

Although exchange visits are commonplace in the Omani educational context, a research participant (GMNT30/01/12) described them as ‘insufficient because there needs to be a definite structure whereby this part of the programme could really have an impact on improvement in government schools’. For her, spending a day at a high-quality private school does not lead to improved quality in public schools because the basic issues concerning the structure and processes of education are not addressed in this exchange. This might suggest the need to introduce a more structured exchange programme between private and public schools whereby these schools share resources and expertise.

The participants’ dissatisfaction with current PPPs led to the identification of potential future PPPs discussed below.

4.3.3 Potential future PPPs

The data analysis revealed two different types of potential future PPPs. The first pertains to proposals discussed at high levels in the MOE. The second relates to prospective PPP ventures as visualised by the research respondents. For the purposes of this discussion, I call the first type ‘planned PPPs’ and the second ‘aspirational PPPs’.

Planned PPPs

The planned PPPs predominantly address educational quality issues, including policy setting, improving school ICT resources and school performance evaluation:

Policy setting

Because PPPs ideally function at planning, implementation and even evaluation levels, there seems to be an intention at a high level in the MOE to involve the private sector in decision making and policy setting. A government official (GSB08/02/12) discussed the

MOE's plan 'to create a committee ... to improve the ministry as a whole from the eyes of ... the private sector'. She believed such a step would improve education.

ICT school resources

Another planned PPP is the rolling out of the e-learning experience of Thuraya Al-Busaeediya Girls School based on the results of the pilot implementation. As a government official (GSA11/02/12) put it, 'one day digital learning will prevail in schools'. A similar PPP is the proposal put forward by some educational companies to introduce some scientific packages in public schools. Another official (GAsB18/02/12) described this project as 'a comprehensive scientific package of content, training and equipment'. Scaling up this initiative is dependent on its 'significant results in quality of materials, students' achievement and teacher professional development'.

School performance evaluation

The MOE has initiated a private schools classification project aiming to evaluate their performance and programmes and to motivate them to improve their services. However, it has been faced by challenges which have led the MOE to contemplate partnering with an international organisation in implementing this project. According to an MOE official (GBKh13/08/12), such an evaluative project is best handled by 'an independent body'. Another official (GAA31/01/12) argued that this would ensure 'objectivity in the evaluation'. He also considered that such a programme would be of greater benefit if it also targeted public schools. Another official (GAT29/01/12) stressed that the implementation of a demand-based PPP programme should be accompanied by an evaluation project encompassing all public and private schools to enable families to make informed choices about schools.

Aspirational PPPs

The aspirational PPPs suggested by different research respondents again revolve around educational quality. They cover both demand and supply aspects, including adopting vouchers and operational contracting models in the former and curricular matters and teacher training in the latter. Participants' proposals for these PPPs mirrored to a large extent their perceptions of what PPP is.

Special education

Provision of quality education to all students, including children with disabilities, is perceived by the participants as a major future locus for PPP. The UNICEF participant (OLG29/02/12) believed that 'this is an area that has extensive potential for private sector contribution because specialised centres require extensive resources'. A public sector participant (GSR13/08/12) views the contribution of the private sector to this group of students 'as part of its social responsibility' which enables them to 'contribute to different aspects of the education process'. This is a direct call for the private sector to be involved in improving the life of this segment of society not only financially, but through helping it to survive in the outside world. This vision reflects a perception of PPP as a national duty in that education of the community is a collective mission.

Demand-side PPPs (vouchers and operational contracting models)

Demand-side PPPs, including vouchers/scholarships and operational contracting programmes, were the aspirational PPPs most extensively discussed. Research participants considered that such PPPs would not only promote educational quality but also provide families with choice in their children's education. Some respondents proposed implementing such programmes on a large scale to involve all students, while others

suggested introducing them to serve a specific segment. A government official (GNK22/02/12) expressed support for a universal voucher scheme, which in his view would promote and develop private education in the country and empower parental choice.

His proposal was as follows:

The community would have a choice between our government schools and private schools. Those who chose private schools could get a voucher for 25%, 40% or 50% of the tuition fees, or according to the family income. Here, I would create two models (of funding): a full government model and a partially private model.

This capitalises on privatisation and profit perspectives of PPP, empowering private education and making it comparable to the MOE in education provision. Other proposed PPPs combine the reciprocity and privatisation perspectives, whereby the private education sector would be given an active role, supplementing that of the MOE. Here the two sectors would share the benefits: private providers would expand their business and the MOE would guarantee wider access to quality education. A considerable number of the participants believed that voucher programmes are not warranted on a large scale at the basic education level due to sufficient and free at the point delivery of public education. They argued, however, that it would be beneficial at the pre-school level, not offered at public schools. A government official (GMGh21/02/12) suggested targeting ‘children from low-income families’ at this level.

Other participants considered a voucher programme could cater to talented students. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) suggested ‘having model schools run by external organisations ... and identifying a school in each region that the top ranking students could attend and then take international examinations’. However, some participants raised concerns about equity in such programmes. A key government official (GNL28/02/12) perceived the voucher model as ‘limited to a small segment of students in the Muscat

Governorate'. He did not consider it feasible to implement such a scheme on a large scale due to the limited capacity and breadth of private education provision across the Sultanate.

Public sector respondents discussed these demand-based PPPs in general terms; private sector respondents on the other hand were more concerned with details and mechanisms. Their suggestions partly represent privatisation and profit perspectives, as well as the reciprocity aspect of PPP, particularly when they elaborated on expected benefits of these programmes. A private sector participant (PFL20/02/12) suggested adopting an operational contracting model whereby private education providers would operate public schools at the post-basic education level. He argued that this level (grades 11 and 12) could entirely be contracted to the private education sector to improve educational quality. He foresaw a great benefit for this model:

... [It] would absorb the future excess demand for education which levies burdens from the ministry. Also the (private) institution would prosper because there would be funding from the government to establish excellent academic institutions.

Due to private schools' use of English as a medium of instruction, he perceived additional benefits at the HE level, saving capital expenditure on foundation years. Furthermore, the business officer of an international school (PTY26/02/12) argued that this programme would result in 'increased competition and (school) productivity', as well as improving students' performance and conserving resources. This is due to 'the private sector's level of accountability and quality of service', as explained by a member of FG4. A member of FG2 highlighted that the practice of public funding and private operation of schools already exists on a very small scale in Oman as some reputable private schools are funded by governmental bodies. He noted that 'These schools produce excellent outcomes. ... So why can't we adopt similar systems in our government schools?'

A less radical implementation of this contracting model is the involvement of private providers in public education through teaching and teacher training of certain school subjects in public schooling. A private sector participant (PTY26/02/12) suggested ‘we can offer our services to teach mathematics and English (in government schools). ... [We] could customise certain issues pertaining to curricula to conform to the requirements of the public sector’. Another participant (PASH27/02/12) specifically related this proposed initiative to the implementation of international curricula in public schools where, besides the training of teachers, ‘private schools can play a role in the management and delivery of these curricula in government schools’.

A line of thought emerged which discussed implementing the contracting model in the private education sector by creating a form of private–private partnership through a franchising policy. A participant in FG1 suggested that ‘small private schools [could be] acquired by successful private schools to form stronger coalitions and improve quality’. A private sector participant (PASH27/02/12) considered that such a move would result in optimal use of resources, improve teacher quality and benefit from economies of scale. A member of FG1 saw great potential in this kind of partnership at the pre-school level. She suggested that ‘partnership can be between small enterprises like the ‘child development houses’ and ‘private schools at the foundation level’. She envisaged that such partnerships would ‘largely benefit the education sector’. This suggestion reflects a privatisation conception of PPP but within a multi-stakeholder approach. Here, different private schools would pursue a formal contracting approach while surrendering some authority to and working collaboratively with other community sectors for the ultimate goal of improving educational quality.

Whatever the nature and extent of these demand-based PPPs, most participants agreed that they need to be adopted and structured by the government to have a substantial impact. The CEO of an education company (PASH27/02/12) clarified that ‘it is difficult for private schools to establish such a programme because different private schools follow different programmes’. He suggested that ‘the government should establish (this) system’; a member of FG2 explained that it requires the ‘enactment of regulations and legislations’.

Curricula

Most participants believed change should start with curricula. This supply-side aspect offers huge potential for collaboration between public and private sectors. A respondent in FG1 envisaged that curricular PPPs would ‘lead to the harmonisation of these curricula with the requirements of the labour market’. This is especially true for ‘the fields of science and information technology’, the private sector’s most desired competencies, as noted by a member of FG3. He pointed out ‘we need to focus on those subjects in our curricula to meet the needs of the private sector lest it imports its workforce from abroad. If our curricula and outcomes are efficient enough, the private sector is more likely to employ these students’. Another member of this focus group believed that this would ‘raise the future productivity of the private sector due to the highly qualified workforce’. This clearly reflects a reciprocity vision of PPP.

The standardisation of curricula is another potential PPP focus. A member of FG4 argued that ‘the curricula in both government and private schools need to be standardised to avoid the current gap in curricula used in these schools’. To avoid ‘diminishing competitiveness’ in the private sector he suggested at least setting performance standards, if not adopting identical content. A government official (GAR31/01/12) believed that introducing

international programmes in public schools could address some problems in the education system, reducing the gap in performance between international and public schools, as ‘students’ performance is directly linked with the educational programmes they take’. Another official (GMA31/01/12) agreed, saying that the MOE should ‘develop the school curricula and borrow and benefit from the expertise of private schools, whether locally or internationally, in a way that suits the educational policies and improves educational outcomes’. To this end, a private sector participant (PASH27/02/12) suggested that the MOE ‘adopts international curricula as a substitute to the current national curricula and adapts them to suit the culture through adding subjects like Islamic studies, Arabic and the local history in the same way it requires international schools to do’.

Another curricula-related PPP proposed was the introduction of technical and vocational school subjects. A participant in FG3 suggested that a PPP of this kind ‘can be implemented at the post-basic education level ... (where) theoretical subjects can be replaced by some practical and vocational subjects’. She recommended that the MOE partner with the private sector and other governmental and community bodies for this purpose. This area is perceived as having great potential for collaboration between the MOE and the private corporate sector, particularly in terms of tackling employment problems. Some participants drew on Oman’s past experience of vocational education in the 1970s/80s, arguing that it should be revisited to suit current context and needs. A participant from the State Council (OSR28/02/12) perceived that introducing ‘optional school subjects, some of which provide technical and vocational education, (would) benefit those students who may not pursue their academic higher education’. Such a proposal not only highlights the reciprocal dimensions of PPP, but also capitalises on its multi-stakeholder nature.

Work experience programmes

Research participants proposed capitalising on the role of corporate private sector in enhancing practical curricula-related skills. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) considered that ‘private companies (need) to support ... schools in terms of equipment, (and) expertise’. Another participant (OSR28/02/12) envisaged the private sector playing a wider role, to offer students work experience in the actual work market. He suggested linking students to the job market and equipping them with the necessary skills. Commenting on some existing, unintegrated initiatives of this sort, a career guidance official (GBKh13/08/12) called for a more structured work experience programme. He asserted ‘we need it to be more organised and to be part of the curriculum. ... We need to structure their connection with the private sector and work environment’. This highlights the reciprocity aspects of PPP and the mutual benefits offered by such programmes.

Training of teachers and school principals

A member of FG1 viewed IT and other pedagogical issues as the aspects most required in training-related PPPs. A member of FG2 argued that ‘it is essential that ICT companies take part in training teachers in information technology aspects’ because, as noted by a participant in FG3, ‘technological infrastructure without trained teachers would be useless’. An official (GMNT30/01/12) also proposed a practical mentoring system between public and private school principals and teachers to exchange expertise through ‘participating in leadership development programs and in buddying support programmes for principals or vice principals’, exposing public school practitioners to new methodologies and resources used in private schools.

Respondents identified a hiatus in the way pre-service teacher training is currently handled; a considerable number of participants (the majority from the private education sector) suggested PPPs at this level. A member of FG1 asked ‘why are student teachers not sent to private schools for their training? Why are government and private schools not treated equally?’ The CEO of an education company (PASH27/02/12) stressed that they ‘are ready to receive student teachers in all different specialisations at (different school levels)’. He added that this practical pre-service experience would also give these student teachers access to quality resources and more exposure to extra-curricular activities.

This participant propounded a more extensive, long-term pre-service teacher training PPP programme ‘which grants teachers international qualifications’. The initiative would involve partnership between the MOE, private providers of education and HE institutions to train and accredit teachers to international standards. He perceived this programme would have long-term benefits not only for the education sector but also in contributing to improving the country’s economy and boosting the employability of teacher graduates. He rationalised that:

... if these graduates were prepared and certified to teach international programmes, they would compete for jobs not only in the local job market but in the international schools in the neighbouring job markets. ... [In] the long run, these people would constitute an important source of employment in private schools in Oman.

This suggestion echoes a multi-stakeholder vision of PPP, not only in terms of the multiple partners involved but also in relation to long-term outcomes beneficial to the whole community.

Financial and infrastructural PPPs

At a more general level, there are calls for the corporate sector to be involved more actively in education financially and technically, reflecting a philanthropic conception of PPP. A

government official (GMNT30/01/12) proposed an ‘adopt a school programme’, encouraging the business private sector ‘to sponsor a school or ... a room within a school like the library and get them to take responsibility for really improving the facilities in that particular school’. In this way, resources could be distributed to involve as many beneficiaries as possible and directed to the actual needs of schools as well as providing sustainability. Another official (GSR13/08/12) felt that school infrastructure and educational multi-media would be fertile areas for educational PPPs. Besides funding school buildings, the private sector could ‘participate in building auditoriums and multi-purpose halls in government schools’. IT infrastructure is an additional facet of PPP proposed to keep the MOE and its personnel abreast with technological advances. According to a participant in FG1, this would enable the country to ‘achieve its future vision of activating the electronic government’ which demands ‘transforming ... (educational curricula) from their conventional forms to an electronic form’.

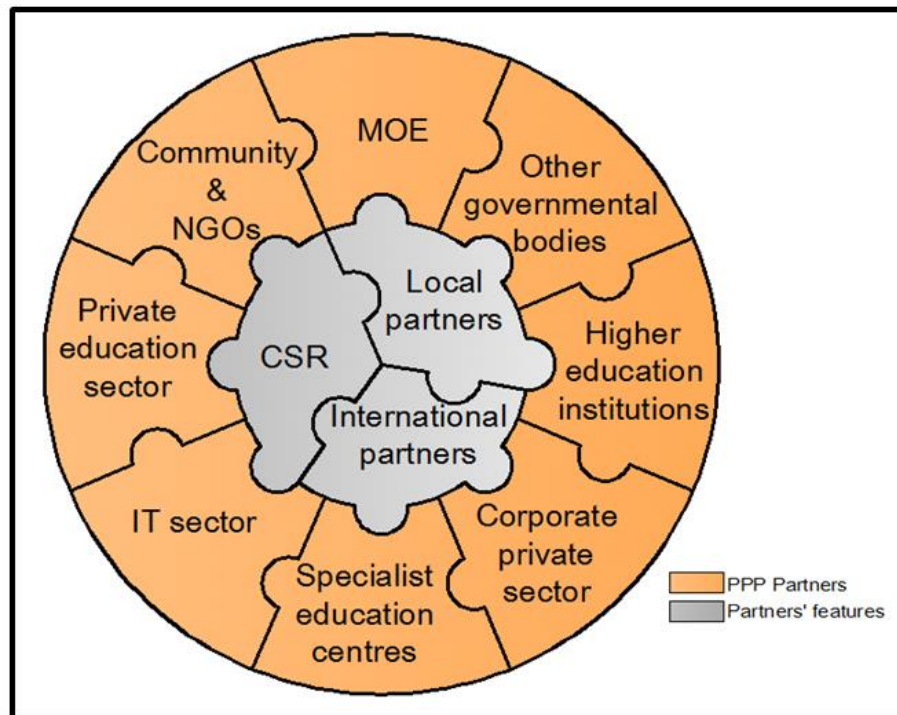
Other suggestions in this respect can represent either purely philanthropic or privatisation perspectives. The involvement of the broad private sector in the delivery of support educational services and inputs, such as student transportation, canteens and sport facilities, also provide scope for PPPs. Here, a government official (GSR13/08/12) suggested ‘the private sector handles the students’ transport system through a partnership agreement and the MOE shoulders its core responsibility (of education)’. A participant in FG1 identified ‘school meals and sports facilities’ as additional foci for this type of PPP. This suggestion recognises contractual PPP arrangements as essential in a broad PPP policy.

4.4 Potential PPP Partners

Data analysis revealed respondents’ preference for MSPEs over two-party collaborations. A wide range of partners were identified. In addition, a number of attributes of these partners

were envisaged as essential to an effective PPP programme. The involvement of international partners and the CSR principle in PPPs gave rise to in-depth discussion. This section discusses the range of potential partners, as well as the role international partners and CSR could play in a future PPP programme. Figure 4.2 highlights the key partners and their features.

Figure 4.2: PPP partners and their features



Source: Author's research

4.4.1 Scope of partners

Data analysis revealed a diverse array of partners deemed critical in educational PPP programmes. These partners, either local or international, for-profit or non-profit, range from other governmental bodies, NGOs, HE institutions, the corporate private sector, the private education sector and the community. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that the combined efforts of all of these partners would be essential for constructing effective partnerships. Here, the participants seem to call for multi-stakeholder

partnerships. A key government official (GNL28/02/12) condensed the discussion concerning these partners:

In a PPP programme, the partners can be more than one party. They can be governmental partners, ... the private sector, the community and even charitable institutions. ... These institutions can also be either local or international. The nature and extent of PPP differs according to the size and standard of these institutions.

He also identified two distinct types of PPPs involving the MOE, those with '(private) educational institutions, between which and the MOE are work agreements, or non-educational business corporates, whose links with the MOE are through their social commitment'. This clearly signifies both contractual and philanthropic PPPs.

Each of the wide spectrum of possible PPP partners would fulfil different objectives. Some would be concerned with material and infrastructural aspects, while others' contributions would be driven by educational quality issues, as outlined in the following sections.

Other governmental bodies

Because education in a community is not the sole responsibility of the education authorities, other governmental authorities and departments also need to be involved. A government official (GAR31/01/12) stressed that 'all governmental institutions have stakes in education'. One NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) identified '[The] Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Manpower, the State Council ... (and) the Council of Ministers' as some of the bodies that would need to be involved, viz., the ministries concerned with pre-school education, HE and managing the job market, as well as those involved in policy setting and decision making.

Specialist education centres

Specialist education institutions could also contribute significantly to an educational PPP programme, to improve educational quality through targeting different aspects of the education process, such as curricula, teacher training and school leadership. Some of these institutions are semi-governmental while others are purely private. A government official (GSB08/02/12) identified partners such as ‘... AMIDEAST (Organisation of America-Middle East for Education and Training Services), the British Council, [and] the Goethe Institut (the German Language Centre)’.

IT sector

The IT sector was viewed by some as complementing and enhancing the quality-orientated role of specialist education institutions. The UNICEF participant (OLG29/02/12) envisaged its involvement as being to ‘ensure that targeted groups are very much in tune with the global economy’. However, she stressed that pedagogical aspects should move in parallel with IT aspects in education. A private sector participant (PTY26/02/12) affirmed this perspective and stated that ‘This formula enables us to increase our productivity. ... Technological advances play an effective role, but do not substitute basic conventional methods’. A government participant (GJL11/02/12) pointed out that the involvement of this sector in teacher training would help ‘to train teachers for the 21st century and improve their knowledge’.

Private education sector

The private education sector is regarded as a key partner in any PPP programme because, as an FG2 participant reasoned, it ‘is an integral part of the general private sector and at the same time it is part of the education sector’. Quite a few participants considered that investment in the private provision of education could be regarded as a form of PPP. A

participant from the State Council (OSR28/02/12) said ‘the private sector is a partner in the education process through providing educational services to the public’. The operation of public schools or delivery of certain school subjects by quality private providers through contracting models or absorbing some public school students through vouchers are examples of aspirational PPPs with this sector.

HE institutions

HE institutions, public or private, local or international, are viewed as major partners in educational PPPs; they are recipients of schooling outcomes and also produce the teaching force. According to a private sector participant (PMN19/02/12), this form of PPP ‘brings both sides of education together’. A government official (GAK29/01/12) perceived these institutions as playing significant roles in teacher preparation and professional development. A participant from the OCCI (ORS29/02/12) believed that HE institutions ‘play an effective role in research’, suggesting that the MOE should partner with these institutions through research to address educational concerns, whereby MOE practitioners would be involved in the research and the schools would act as research test beds and innovation centres.

NGOs

NGOs, local and international, were perceived to play a crucial role in educational PPPs. These are predominantly involved in either socially-orientated educational issues, such as pre-school education and social inclusion of disabled students, or culturally-orientated educational programmes, such as exchange programmes and social skills-orientated programmes. Specifically, international and regional organisations, such as UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund), UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation), ALECSO (Arabic League Education, Culture and Science

Organisation) and ISESCO (Islamic Education, Science and Culture Organisation), are heavily involved at the level of pre-school education. The Oman Environment Society and the Oman Society for Fine Arts are local NGOs that have PPPs with the MOE, as identified by a research participant (GAmB13/02/12). International NGOs are highlighted by the participants as being more active than local ones in current PPPs.

Corporate private sector

The corporate private sector was viewed by all respondents as having an obligation to education. Some respondents considered that this obligation emanates from its social responsibility towards the community, whereas others viewed it as a necessity for its own prosperity and the development of its enterprise. A private sector participant (PDH15/02/12) demonstrated how both of these objectives could be achieved through investment in education. He believed ‘it (PPP) is suitable for people who ... are looking to put something back into society and the social responsibility flag goes up and it is good for them and even for their marketing in the future’. The involvement of this sector in education can be in the form of financial or material input, or indeed the provision of expertise. The most frequently mentioned partners in current PPPs are companies affiliated to the oil industry, namely gas, oil and petrochemical companies. Other business corporates, such as banks, the local aviation company and the National Ferries company are also cited as key financial contributors to education.

While the financial and material contribution of the private sector is represented in the funds, equipment and infrastructure provided to schools, PPPs comprising expertise are manifested in the services provided by the private sector to the MOE and schools. The main manifestations of such collaborations are internships and work experience programmes in which the private sector offers school students the opportunity to gain work experience.

The CEO of an education company (PASH27/02/12) stated that ‘the private sector is a fundamental partner not only because of its eventual role in the employment of these students, but also because it provides them with training and internships’.

Community

The local community, as a key PPP partner, was discussed at length by participants. A participant in FG4 suggested that ‘it has weight and opinion that need to be considered (and) ... its exclusion points towards neglect of the community’s vision, which can cause problems’. According to another FG4 participant, the involvement of the community in any PPP programme ‘ensures that the culture of the society is preserved’. Its involvement, according to some participants in FG4, guards the public interest, promotes accountability and preserves the national and cultural identity in any PPP model. If it is involved, a participant in the group asserted, ‘there are no concerns over religious and moral aspects’. A key MOE figure (GSR13/08/12) perceived community involvement in any PPP programme as fulfilling the vital function of holding educational institutions accountable. He envisaged this involvement as acting as ‘a focal point ... which imposes some discipline over the institution (school) and over the centre (MOE)’.

Multi-stakeholders

The vast majority of participants believed in a multi-stakeholder partnership in which partners are not limited to government and private sector, but also include NGOs, the local community and individuals, because each of these parties is an integral part of the community and its social system. This ‘wide partnership base that includes a varied range of institutions ... ensures the success of the partnership’ (an MOE respondent, GNK22/02/12). This vision was elegantly justified by the principal of a leading global school (PMN19/02/12) who remarked ‘[the] education of Omani children is everyone’s

business in this country because we eventually hire them to work for us (the private sector), so we should get involved in their education system’.

An FG2 member reinforced the notion that education needs not just a single partner ‘but multiple partners, which include individuals, the community, the government sector and the private sector’. An international school chairman (PFL20/02/12) regarded as partners in PPP in education ‘everyone who has a stake in the schooling outcomes’. Another participant (OLG29/02/12) looked at this notion of multi-stakeholder partnership even more holistically, describing it as ‘an approach that mixes together different stakeholders to bring about a desired result or outcome ... in education’. This vision clearly signifies a multi-stakeholder perspective of PPP, making all the partners described above key constituents of a PPP programme in Oman.

A government official (GMGh21/02/12) was in favour of diversity, being of the view that it yields benefits to education. She explained ‘the beauty of it is that it comprises the financial, technical and educational aspects simultaneously in the management process. ... Decisions are taken from a multi-dimensional perspective’. This diversity also calls for a division of roles and responsibilities. A member of FG2 provided an insightful illustration of how this multi-stakeholder partnership needs to be structured and how partners’ roles should be allocated. He envisaged PPP as requiring:

[A PPP] vision ... carried out by two key partners: a supervising partner and a contributing partner and each of these has its own objectives. ... The supervising partner is the ministry of education which formulates its curricula in coordination with the labour market. The other contributing partner is the private sector, part of which is the private education institutions which are involved through technical and education provision services.

An MOE participant (GNK22/02/12) highlighted that this division of roles is necessary ‘to avoid overlap in responsibilities’. Another MOE official (GJL11/2/2012) elaborated that

‘the challenge is to be able on both sides to be more dynamic; the public sector to involve the private sector and the private sector to work hard in that involvement’. This indicates the need to surrender some authority on the part of the government to the private sector in order for the partnership to be fruitful.

4.4.2 International partners in PPP

Besides the wide scope of potential partners, participants identified other crucial features in PPP partners. International partners were raised frequently in discussions. Data analysis highlighted a number of international partners who operate in Oman at the levels of consultancy, language teaching and teacher training. It also revealed enthusiasm as well as concerns about the role that these partners can play. Some respondents perceived them as trustworthy, of high quality and as remarked by a government official (GSB08/02/12), more responsive than local partners due to the established ‘culture of partnership between the government and private sector ... in their countries’. However, others considered them lacking in sensitivity to the native culture. Such perceptions portray two distinct perspectives of PPP: a multi-stakeholder vision and a concern in terms of privatisation. In general, international partners, whether education providers or otherwise, were considered key potential partners in any PPP programme.

Furthermore, apart from being keen to satisfy their CSR roles, these international partners were perceived to enforce quality standards in the initiatives in which they are involved. ‘Big companies ... require an evaluation as part of their best practice’, an NGO respondent (OLG29/02/12) explained. These international partners also provide ‘expertise outside the box, putting into practice projects, activities and initiatives that are beyond the scope of our practice’, according to a government official (GMN27/02/12). Quality of performance is a key determinant of forging PPPs with international partners. A member of FG2 stressed

that ‘they have to be pioneers in their field’ if they are contracted to operate public schools. A government respondent (GAR31/01/12) remarked on the need to capitalise on the ‘added value’ in the involvement of international education providers in any future PPP programme in Oman, stating:

We always seek added value. ... It is not an issue of investment, infrastructure and curricula as much as what benefit the society would acquire and how the outcomes would improve. ... If these international companies provide real added value at social, economic and educational levels, we have no reservations.

Another government official (GSA11/02/12) raised the issue of the limited capacity of the local private sector as another rationale for involving international parties. He stated, ‘we don’t have a vibrant private sector that can effectively contribute to education. At a consultancy level the local (private) companies are still crawling. However, international companies have the capability’. Another respondent (GAsB18/02/12) believed that the lack of expertise in the local private sector due to ‘its novelty’ necessitates resorting to ‘regional and international education providers’.

Some respondents however had reservations. A participant in FG2, although recognising the need to partner with international education providers due to capacity issues with local players, identified a potential area of conflict: ‘we can’t fully trust their intentions and policies. ... There needs to be controls to prevent any alien values filtering into the community’. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) highlighted a further concern, namely that these partners ‘don’t fully understand or appreciate all of the different factors that are at play here and the different sensitivities as well’.

Besides quality and sensitivity to local context and culture, the adaptability and flexibility of international partners are other crucial features. A government official (GAK29/01/12) affirmed that these partners ‘need to modify (their) system to suit the Omani culture. ...

Also, they need to consider the objectives and aims of education in Oman'. This 'openness to change', as another official (GMNT30/01/12) refers to it, is vital. Respondents from the private sector seem to be responsive to these demands. A participant from a private school working under an international school operator (PTY26/02/12) expressed flexibility and willingness 'to understand and preserve the culture of each country we work in and conduct customisation (of programmes) to suit this culture'.

A significant number of respondents believed that reputable international education providers are most suited to running extensive PPP programmes because their involvement 'leads to more sustainable PPP projects', as remarked by an FG4 member. However, others expressed concern about the involvement of these partners in the process of basic education. One reservation regarding the extensive involvement of international education providers is the threat to national identity. Highlighting that the schooling age involves 'critical physical, social, psychological and educational development', a participant from the State Council (OSR28/02/12) warned:

If there was intervention from international partners or the private sector and they had the largest quota of contribution, consultation and opinion, this would lead education to deviate away from its national objectives. That is a real danger. ... We can't procure everything if our aim is to preserve our identity and to hold the reins of the initiative as a government and a community.

This reservation echoes a privatisation perspective of PPP, particularly with the expressed concern of loss of public control over education. Such resistance, according to a key government official (GNK22/02/12), emanates from the community's suspicion of these partners' 'hidden agendas'. This compels the MOE to consider carefully the extent and nature of involvement of any international partner. International and global private schools recognise this risk and hence they hesitate to initiate PPP programmes due to cultural

sensitivities. Rather they ‘are really respectful of waiting to be invited’, a global school principal (PMN19/02/12) noted.

4.4.3 CSR in PPPs

A widespread view among respondents was that educational PPPs should be driven by CSR; one participant in FG2 perceived that ‘PPP and CSR move along parallel paths where achieving one leads to achieving the other’. This perspective relates to a collective view of PPPs, drawing on philanthropy, reciprocity and partnership as aspects of national duty. According to a government official (GSA11/02/12), CSR ‘enables the private sector to express its national and social roles’. Highlighting reciprocity in partnership, a member of FG3 contended that when the private sector takes part in education, ‘it serves its own investment interests as well as the community’s interests’ through fulfilling its CSR role.

When well established, this culture of social responsibility is seen to motivate and drive many PPP initiatives for the benefit of education, as a government official (GSB08/02/12) noted. However, the participants recognised some drawbacks associated with philanthropic CSR-driven PPPs. These PPPs are ‘one-off initiatives ... more often than not’, which, as an NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) commented, means they lack sustainability. They are also criticised for addressing mainly material aspects.

A government official (GBKh13/08/12) argued that the CSR role should go beyond financial contributions to address higher levels of PPP, stating ‘it is not only getting money ... but also taking this partnership to a better level ... [through] exchanging experience, opening our schools to the private sector ... and also providing work experience to our students’. Another official (GSA11/02/12) identified the fragmentation and scarcity in projects addressed as part of CSR and called for more strategic PPP projects:

Unfortunately, the projects provided through CSR are very narrow. ... They should move towards ... addressing more strategic projects in education ... because they have higher returns in the long run and they constitute a real investment for both the [MOE] and the CSR departments.

He considered that the wide distribution of CSR funds among different sectors leads to the ineffectiveness of these resources because they mainly fulfil 'publicity objectives'. Another MOE official (GAT29/01/12), while commending the current contributions of some large corporations through their CSR departments, urged these to address more sustainable aspects of education, such as personnel training based on needs analysis and liaison with the MOE. Yet another key official (GSR13/08/12) endorsed the need for wider scope, but proposed that CSR funds should address the areas of 'special education and learning difficulties'. These statements express dissatisfaction with the philanthropic nature of CSR-driven PPPs and demand more structured PPPs featuring reciprocity and partnership attributes.

The participants believed that the CSR aspect signifies pure community service without necessarily expecting any material returns. This stresses a partnership and national duty vision of PPP. A government official (GAD28/02/12) criticised the inclination of the private sector to tie up its contribution to education with immediately tangible yields. Another official (GSA11/02/12) disapproved of the preconditioning of CSR funds. He commented 'unfortunately, for some of these private institutions, the commercial dimension outweighs the national or human dimensions'.

The majority of respondents agreed that the role of CSR is not activated at optimal levels in terms of the scope and magnitude of contributions or the number of corporations fulfilling a CSR role. A public sector respondent (GAD28/02/12), although believing that 'big companies have the capability and resources' to support education, pointed out the limited

number of CSR-based PPPs in education. However, he partly attributed their lack of interest to a dearth of ‘faith in the importance of the private sector’s contribution to education. This principle is not extensively established within the private sector’. Hence, he considered ‘some awareness raising of the importance of this aspect’ necessary. A key government official (GSR13/08/12) diagnosed another reason behind this lack of involvement, stating ‘the way the CSR funds are utilised is not structured or organised in a way that compels the private sector institutions to donate part of their profits and yields to community service’; this points to mismanagement of such funds. Another official (GBKh13/08/12) disapproved of the voluntary way in which CSR is implemented and which may contribute to limiting the impetus of PPP. He argued that the nature of PPP ‘differs from one company to another, but it depends on the level they want to take it to if they need to fulfil their role of social responsibility’. This lack of organisation, according to the participants, impedes not only the effectiveness of CSR funds but can harm any future extensive PPP programme and begs the implementation of a mechanism to address the failing.

To enhance the effectiveness of CSR funds and to avoid the issues discussed above, a number of participants suggested imposing a form of structure on CSR funding. A government official (GSR13/08/12) perceived that such a structure would promote more PPPs. A participant in FG1 suggested that the MOE regulate and manage CSR funds to ensure a fair and balanced distribution of funds based on schools’ needs and requirements.

The challenges to PPP are not limited to these CSR-related obstacles, but include other diverse challenges, explored in the following section.

4.5 PPP Challenges in Oman

A considerable number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the level and depth of PPPs in the Omani educational context. This indicates a certain ineffectiveness of such PPPs, which can be ascribed to a number of factors. Data analysis revealed the existence of some impediments which restrict the effectiveness of PPPs in education, a few specific to the private education sector while the rest are shared with the broader private sector. These challenges can be classified as follows:

- political
- regulatory
- practical
- social
- ideological

4.5.1 Political impediments

The main political challenges identified include the absence of a formal PPP policy, lack of a PPP vision at the MOE and resistance to hierarchical change. As articulated by a member of FG2, the absence of ‘a political decision in the country (to establish PPP in education)’ was considered by the majority of respondents as the key impediment to an effective PPP programme in Oman. All other obstacles, especially regulatory and practical problems, can be resolved with the adoption of clear formal PPP policy. A government official (GSG28/02/12) agreed that ‘there isn’t a specific philosophy or a specific mechanism that directs the collaboration between the education system and the private sector institutions’. Here, he suggested the need for regulation at high levels in the country. Indeed, a member

of FG2 believed that a PPP ‘decision is needed at the country level, not at the [MOE] level because this decision is beyond the Ministry’s authority’.

The absence of a vision to garner support for education is also not appropriately addressed by the education field itself. A government participant (GSB08/02/12) highlighted that even at the MOE level efforts to address issues related to PPPs are inconsistent. Indeed, a private sector respondent (PFL20/02/12) expressed regret that ‘there is lack of vision at the [MOE] for the role of private education in contributing to the improvement of educational outcomes’. Another participant (GAT29/01/12) added that ‘currently, there isn’t an institution (in the education sector) that plays an active role in directing and coordinating the partnership process’. He identified a serious challenge to PPP in ‘the absence of an independent authority to supervise (PPP) programmes [and] the absence of a reference body for this partnership and its programmes’. However, another MOE respondent (GSG28/02/12) believed that ‘the educational institution goes beyond the MOE alone. It also includes the Ministry of Higher Education (and others). So any organising framework for PPP should unite efforts’. According to him, the absence of such framework discourages the private sector’s contribution to education due to lack of legislation, the duplication and fragmentation of efforts and the interruption of support solicited in the private sector’s budgetary arrangements due to the lack of long-term planning of projects at the MOE.

This lack of PPP policy and structure has an impact on the volume and quality of PPPs in education. An MOE participant (GSG28/02/12) pointed out that ‘the absence of a unified framework to guide and direct PPP leads to fragmented efforts due to the absence of a specific and unified vision for (PPP)’. A formal policy rather than individual initiatives is required to direct PPP in Oman because, as a private sector participant (PASH27/02/12)

pointed out, a change in posts or ‘any high-level employee turnover has negative effects on PPP initiatives’. The absence of a formal PPP policy and the fact that initiatives mainly emanate from individuals may explain how certain reform programmes are discontinued.

The lack of structure leads not only to fragmented and discontinued PPP efforts but also to ‘unbalanced’ funding. An NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) considered this a natural consequence of deficiency in ‘communication ... conducting needs assessments ... (and) systems for monitoring progress’. She also emphasised that ‘there is no shortage of resources, but there is a lack of information and knowledge about where the resources are really needed’. These measures can be attained only with the establishment of a well-structured PPP authority (cf. 6.4.2). A private sector participant (PFL20/02/12) confirmed that lack of communication and a shared vision between the MOE and the private education sector leads only to routine and superficial partnership. Instead, he called for ‘a complete set of regulations’ and ‘careful planning, with joint discussions’ between the two parties to attain more fruitful partnerships.

The drastic structural and hierarchical change required in PPP is another potential political challenge. A participant in FG4 doubted whether ‘the government would accept a major change in its policies or relinquish some of its authority’ as PPP demands. According to her, this requires huge hierarchical changes. This has consequences for the level and depth of collaboration between the two sectors.

It can be concluded that the challenges, whether structural or MOE-related, could be overcome were a PPP policy endorsed.

4.5.2 Regulatory impediments

Because political will is reflected in legislation, the noncommittal political climate concerning PPP creates numerous regulatory challenges. The participants identified several regulatory flaws in the enforcement of PPP regulation, the Civil Service system, private education regulations and the centralised education system, which can impede a PPP programme. While some of these regulations concern the structuring of financial resources, others are linked to the efficiency of the public and private education sectors which implement PPPs. An MOE official (GSR13/08/12) suggested that the absence of any regulation regarding PPP renders it ‘voluntary because it is not there in the agreements and regulations’. He stressed that a PPP scheme requires clear regulations in the area of structuring the corporate private sector’s financial contributions. Another government respondent (GNK22/02/12) pointed out that ‘the [CSR] contributions ... aren’t structured whereby the government obligates the private sector to allocate part of their profit to community service’.

The restrictive Civil Service system is another challenge because the education system requires administrative and financial autonomy in introducing a PPP programme. A key MOE respondent (GNK22/02/12) stressed that ‘current regulations are not sufficiently responsive and flexible’ to accommodate PPP and argued that ‘it requires a regulatory framework at a level higher than the [MOE]’. Adopting a PPP programme ‘might face some challenges and complicated procedures related to the financial system, financial auditing and the Civil Service system’, (Government official, GSA11/02/12). According to a school principal in FG3, the ‘Civil Service system deprives the [MOE] of a lot of legal authority over its personnel’, generating problems such as teacher absenteeism and a lack of accountability.

While the overall regulatory climate is not conducive to PPP in education, some respondents believed that decision makers at the MOE level are open to any constructive reform which would make the regulations sufficiently flexible and adaptable. An MOE participant (GAsB18/02/12), although considering that the regulatory framework is flexible enough to integrate some small projects, stressed that it does not support ‘big-scale projects like a PPP programme’. A private sector participant (PMN19/02/12) also pointed out that the MOE’s regulations lack ‘consistency’ in implementation.

Some of the current private education regulation may also challenge PPPs. A demand-based PPP scheme rests primarily on the capacity of the private education sector. Hence, this sector needs strengthening for it to be effectual. A private sector respondent (PDH15/02/12) reflected on personal experience and described the current regulation as ‘far too cumbersome’ and involving ‘a lot of red tape’, which can restrict the expansion of this sector. Another private sector participant (PFL20/02/12) warned that the policies pertaining to the support of private education are ‘ink on paper’ and are not translated into reality. He described some of these MOE regulations as ‘lenient and non-binding’, adding that some regulations, such as granting land plots to private schools, have criteria which are not universally clear; there is also ‘some nepotism and favouritism’ in distributing plots. The CEO of an education company (PASH27/02/12) partially attributed the inefficiency of regulation to the non-involvement of private providers in the enactment of policies and regulations. Another participant (PBM25/02/12) suggested the need for ‘a forum’ to discuss modification of regulations.

Practitioners who supervise and interact with small private schools identify further flaws in the current private education regulations. A member of FG1 contended that:

... the regulation and controls of investment in education require more development and modification. ... [Some regulations] have encouraged the use of small rented buildings as school buildings which are now unfit as private schools. This has created an abundance of private schools but a paucity of quality private schools.

Another participant in the group linked this impairment in quality to the 'lack of authorisation of the [MOE's] educators to establish private schools', while permitting other non-professionals to establish such projects. Such regulatory flaws undermine the quality of service provision and have negative consequences for any future PPPs.

The centralised education system in Oman is perceived by some respondents as an additional regulatory hindrance to an effective PPP programme. The autonomy and independence of schools under these programmes may be compromised by centralisation. A private sector participant (PDH15/02/12) described the system as 'autocratic [so that] it is not easy to get things done quickly' because it encourages 'bureaucracy' (PFL20/02/12). An FG4 participant believed the bureaucratic 'top-down policy, where decisions are taken centrally and applied by schools and practitioners, constrains creativity if it doesn't kill it and impedes development'.

An MOE official (GAA31/01/12) affirmed the need for more decentralisation and granting public schools some autonomy and 'more independence'. A private sector participant (PAM26/02/12) perceived the lack of school autonomy as a serious challenge to PPPs. In particular, he described the constraints of 'the government's national educational system' and curricula as negatively affecting PPPs. However, a public school principal in FG3 exhibited some concerns about the readiness of public schools for autonomy: 'we (public schools) demand authority in teacher hiring. But not all schools are ready for it yet'. This reveals that some school administrations lack capacity and are not prepared for autonomy at this stage, which could hinder any PPP programme.

Generally, interviewees from all sectors believed that the current regulations need to adapt to the new needs and aspirations of the educational context. A private sector participant (PDH15/02/12) stressed that ‘there is a need for regulation to ... keep up with the requirements, to enable the private sector models to come in and operate efficiently’. He specifically argued that these regulations should ‘untie the hands’ of the private schools.

4.5.3 Practical impediments

Practical challenges were extensively discussed by research participants. Major challenges included the limited capacity of private education providers, lack of MOE organisational capacity and maturity, limited financial resources, problems with PPP sustainability and evaluation and various curriculum issues.

Capacity of private education providers

Research respondents, particularly from the public sector, observed that the limited capacity of the local private sector in terms of quality and breadth of service provision is a major deterrent of educational PPPs. A demand-based PPP reform requires a vibrant and dynamic private education sector. The majority of the respondents agreed that this sector, with the exception of a few international schools, is immature, inexperienced and inefficient and mostly lags behind the advances made in the public education sector. A government official (GSA11/02/12) commented that ‘the (local) private (education) sector doesn’t actively contribute to education’. A typical view of this challenge was expressed by a public sector participant (GSR13/08/12) when he observed that:

... the private provision of education is active at the levels of pre-school education and the first cycle of basic education, but not as active at other higher levels. The number of (private) schools is very limited at higher levels to the extent that certain governorates don’t have any schools of this kind.

Another official (GSB08/02/12) suggested that the limited breadth of private education provision means that ‘the private (education) sector is not equipped to take over’. She specified the limited capacity in human resources and physical infrastructure of the private education sector as barriers to implementing an effective PPP programme. A government official (GNK22/02/12) indicated that ‘the non-stringent and unclear teacher hiring criteria’ aggravate human resource inefficiencies in private schools. The infrastructural incompetence of the private education sector was seen by a respondent from the OCCI (ORS29/02/12) as ‘a persistent problem’.

However, private sector and MOE participants who liaise closely with private schools did not entirely share this perspective. Some agreed that the private education sector in Oman is relatively new, but stressed that it is a growing and promising sector. Hence, they suggested that its capacity does not constitute a challenge to PPP. A Private Schools Directorate official (GAA31/01/12) argued that ‘there is no problem with capacity. Capacity can be increased ... more organisations, more companies ... can take part’. A private sector participant (PAM26/02/12) admitted that although Muscat has a good density of private schools, other governorates in Oman have only a few or no private schools. According to him, the ‘abundance of government schools’ and the unaffordability of private education in these regions make the private education sector hesitant about investing. However, if there were a governmental intervention through PPP, this sector would operate there because ‘the risks are shared’. The incentives for risk-sharing and the reduction of costs that a PPP programme would generate are perceived to be two PPP-enabling factors.

Management

Capacity at the MOE is another practical PPP challenge. According to the State Council participant (OSR28/02/12), the capacity of the MOE personnel to implement a PPP

programme is questionable. He wondered ‘do we have sufficient directors, supervisors and employees who are qualified to monitor and evaluate PPP programmes?’ A private sector respondent (PFL20/02/12) stressed that the adequate training of MOE personnel who would supervise PPPs is a necessity because ‘if these personnel are only trained to supervise conventional public school programmes ... this would revert these (private) schools to public school routines’. A government official (GMGh21/02/12) viewed qualified human resources as a prerequisite of any reform. She considered ‘the financial constraints insignificant and secondary compared to the lack of qualification and expertise’ and added that qualified human resources render PPPs ‘sustainable and effective’.

Apart from personnel training, the MOE seems to be missing several important aspects of organisational maturity which are prerequisites for any PPP venture. A participant in FG3 observed that ‘there are no (stringent) monitoring and accountability mechanisms applied to ensure the quality of work’. An MOE participant (GAK29/01/12) also highlighted the current absence of quality standards and evaluation mechanisms concerning school performance, stating that ‘some sort of assessment system for school performance’ is necessary to attain accountability. Another official (GNL28/02/12) pointed out that ‘[when] the principles of (performance) standards, accountability and monitoring ... are absent, it would be extremely difficult to implement PPP programmes’. Based on their practical experience, public school principals in FG3 identified that lack of accountability leads to many problems, such as low teacher quality and teacher absence. A government official (GMN27/02/12) pinpointed a number of additional facets of organisational and administrative immaturity at the MOE which could impede the effectiveness of a PPP programme, in particular ‘a problem with documentation’, ‘the absence of time-bound planning and implementation’ and ‘evaluation and monitoring’.

Financial constraints

Besides human resources and long-term planning, financial constraints were identified by some respondents as a barrier to effective PPPs. According to the OCCI participant (ORS29/02/12), ‘because the (PPP) reform is fundamental, the financial allocations require courage in decision making’. A respondent in FG1 warned that ‘lack of funds might impede the realisation of the noble aims of partnership’.

In particular, a demand-based PPP reform could be challenged by lack of financial resources. A government official (GSG28/02/12) asserted that ‘the inefficiency of the private education infrastructure doubles the financial costs demanded by private education providers (as in the operational contracting model) to be able to fulfil their commitments and provide quality outcomes’. An MOE participant (GMGh21/02/12) doubted whether ‘the government’s (financial) resources would support a PPP programme’. She associated the success of some PPP programmes in neighbouring countries with the huge financial resources available there, unlike in Oman. Another participant (GNK22/02/12) attributed some of these financial shortcomings to the mindset of finance people at the MOE who ‘cling to [outdated] financial models’, and to the mismanagement of resources. According to him, spending is generous on infrastructure but meagre on educational reform projects. He added that addressing the management of and imbalance in MOE expenditures ‘requires a strong political will to remove these authorities’. A government official (GMA31/01/12) referred to the substantial funding that PPP requires as ‘the biggest challenge to PPP, [which] can be overcome through a real partnership with different parties’. This suggests that a multi-stakeholder partnership is preferred in the case of limited resources.

PPP evaluation

PPP project evaluation is a key practical obstacle discussed by the respondents. It has several repercussions for the effectiveness and sustainability of projects. Irregularity, subjectivity and the difficulty of evaluation were some of the dimensions discussed. In principle, the evaluation of educational PPP projects is a complex process because the outcomes are not material or tangible. As a private sector participant (PBM25/02/12) put it, any progress is the result of ‘many other variables’. This indicates that it is essential to conduct careful and regular evaluations of PPP programmes to ascertain their effectiveness.

An NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) stated that even though PPP programme evaluation is part of large companies’ best practice, many do not perform it on ‘a regular basis’. The respondents highlighted that these evaluation deficiencies are not limited to the private sector, but even at the MOE level evaluation is not optimally exploited. This can have detrimental consequences for the effectiveness of PPPs. An MOE director (GNK22/02/12) described evaluation at the MOE level as ‘irregular’, which prevents early intervention when problems occur. A private sector participant (PMN19/02/12) expressed disappointment with the lack of MOE feedback on PPP initiatives in which her school is involved. Similarly, another private sector participant (PFL20/02/12) exemplified how the lack of monitoring and evaluation from the MOE threatens the sustainability of PPP initiatives, citing the case of his school’s PPP initiative which was discontinued because ‘the [MOE] didn’t monitor, support or adopt it’.

A number of respondents discussed several examples of projects implemented by the MOE, which lost their effectiveness and momentum due to lack of regular evaluation. A government official (GSR13/08/12) noted with regret that ‘a number of programmes like the literacy project, the special education project and many others ... were brought into

existence but were never evaluated'. Highlighting the extensive financial and human resources involved in a project such as the basic education system and its far-reaching effects on the quality of education in the country, he stressed that 'these qualitative programmes must be subjected to evaluation'. This example of the basic education system was used frequently by the participants to demonstrate the lack of evaluation by the MOE. A participant in FG4 remarked mockingly that 'the basic education system ... was granted success before it was even born'.

A government official (GNK22/02/12) criticised the non-involvement of independent bodies in the evaluation process of systems at the MOE and described it as 'a deficit'. He explained, '... the party that owns, funds and looks after the whole project is the one that evaluates it. ... We need an external and independent party to measure the achievement of objectives to ensure transparency'.

One can conclude that the evaluation of projects is an essential component of their effectiveness. It determines not only their progression or discontinuation but also has an impact on their extent, objectives and operation, which in turn determine their sustainability.

PPP sustainability

The sustainability of PPP projects is another practical challenge. An NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) observed that 'so far these partnerships have been one-off initiatives'. Furthermore, a government official (GSB08/02/12) pointed out that 'a lot of our private sector people are looking for short-term rather than long-term involvement'. Another official (GMNT30/01/12) referred to an abundance of PPPs but noted their unsustainability. Yet another respondent (GAsB18/02/12) remarked: 'Most of the PPP initiatives are short-

term and limited (in scope) mainly due to the lack of financial resources and evaluation'. A member of FG3 partially attributed this lack of sustainability to the absence of 'a well-planned strategy with a long-term time scale' when planning PPPs. Other participants ascribed it to factors such as lack of resources, partners' mindsets and the absence of formal and long-term planning.

Curriculum issues

An interesting point that emerged when discussing practical challenges to PPPs and can pose a significant challenge to quality-driven PPPs, such as those related to curricula and teacher training, is the paucity of high-standard materials written in Arabic. Pointing out that mainly 'foreign international partners' are involved in current PPPs, an MOE director (GAsB18/02/12) contended that the need for translation 'increases the costs of implementing such PPP projects'. Similarly, a demand-oriented PPP programme that adopts international curricula can face a serious challenge in terms of the scarcity of international and accredited curricula written in Arabic to cater to local requirements. An MOE official (GAT29/01/12) pointed out that 'there are no publishing companies which satisfy international curricula standards (in Arabic)'. This can have ramifications for curricula quality, teacher training and hiring processes, as well as bringing financial burdens.

The availability of international curricula in English requires that it be used as the main medium of instruction, but this means that Arabic would be taught as a second language, which could give rise to opposition for cultural and social reasons. Based on his experience, an international school principal (PDH15/02/12) acknowledged the existence of practical challenges in implementing an international educational programme: adopting such a programme would require some sacrifice in relation to national curriculum subjects, such as

‘social studies, Islamic studies (and) Arabic’, but it is doubtful whether society would accept such a move.

In addition, a reform of this sort could create fundamental changes to teacher training and teacher hiring procedures, potentially making a significant number of Omani teachers redundant or incapable of functioning in the new system. An MOE planning official (GSR13/08/12) viewed the teacher-related consequences as a major challenge to a PPP programme. He asked ‘how will the government deal with the redundancy in school teachers and other educational cadre?’

Although such practical challenges were foreseen by the participants, they agreed that they would be soluble and easy to overcome with careful planning and implementation. A private sector participant (PTY26/02/12) pointed out that ‘the (current) overall policy in the country gives rise to many obstacles. ... An education system open to innovations would face only limited challenges as opposed to a conservative system’.

4.5.4 Social impediments

The participants also identified several social challenges to PPPs pertaining either to society and its perspective on PPP or to the private sector. Main challenges discussed included social opposition, lack of awareness, the private sector’s self-interest and profit-making bent and conflicts of interest.

Social opposition

According to participants, society could defy PPP reform if it did not have sufficient knowledge about it, if the reform targeted only a select cross section of students and if society were not constructively involved in the reform. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) warned that ‘it takes a long time to change people’s beliefs and practices.

... [You] have to get people on board'. Interestingly, an MOE official (GBKh13/08/12) pointed out that intense resistance to reform tends to come 'mainly from teachers', because change takes them out of their comfort zone and thus they do not welcome it easily.

However, another official (GAK29/01/12) dismissed the possibility of any serious social opposition to PPP, believing that 'everybody is keen to develop school education' provided that the proposed reform is proven to be fruitful. Indeed, another participant (GAR31/01/12) averred that 'once the reform demonstrates its trustworthiness and the benefits of its outcomes, society will change its initial view'.

Lack of awareness

A participant in FG1 observed that 'the culture of PPP is not yet embedded in the educational field and other governmental sectors'. He added that the understanding of PPP might vary between the public and private sectors. A member of FG3 argued that 'awareness of the majority of the community may work against the application of partnership models'. She stressed that 'it isn't social opposition as much as social ignorance about these innovations and lack of support for them' that might hinder PPP implementation. A participant in FG4 stated that as an educator herself, she initially associated PPPs with mere privatisation of education and wondered how a layman would understand the concept. According to her, this reveals a lack of awareness of PPPs in education.

Lack of awareness of some private sector parties about the significance of forging PPPs for education is one of the salient social challenges. A government official (GSB08/02/12) pointed out that this is particularly true of local partners, noting that PPP 'is a new culture for them' in terms of getting involved in education. However, even for some international

partners, the outcome of their involvement in education is not tangible. Hence, the issue of awareness is combined with the issue of ‘visibility’ as highlighted by an NGO participant (OLG29/02/12). Comparing investment in educational outcomes to fund-raising for wheelchairs, she continued ‘the outcomes are not very visible. ... when it comes to social development issues, it becomes much more difficult because then you make an advance and you have to wait for a number of years before it produces results’. However, lack of awareness can be tackled through education and awareness raising.

The private sector’s self-interest and profit-making motives

A further attribute of the private sector in Oman, as identified by the participants and which poses a challenge to PPPs, is its self-interest. An MOE respondent (GMNT30/01/12) disapproved of the reluctance of some large industrial corporations stationed in Oman to contribute to education. A government official (GAD28/02/12) ascribed this reluctance not to a shortage of resources but to a lack of ‘faith in the importance of the private sector’s contribution to education’. He also observed that many private sector parties seek a tangible return, such as publicity, for their contribution. As another official (GSA11/02/12) put it, ‘These parties have commercial targets that supersede their social and patriotic roles’. This short-sighted vision of PPP which puts preconditions on support for education and links it to immediate benefit discourages the MOE from forging partnerships with these parties. A government official (GNK22/02/12) explained that:

... the [MOE] avoids having local partners in school infrastructure because unfortunately the prevalent concept of partnership is that the private partner owns half of the school. ... This compels the decision makers at the Ministry to abstain from these partnerships.

These observations clearly reflect the need for a national duty perspective of PPP in which the public and private sectors work collaboratively for the long-term benefit of education rather than immediate gain.

Furthermore, the participants identified the private sector's sole focus on profit-making at the expense of community welfare as an additional PPP challenge. A participant from the State Council (OSR28/02/12) observed that:

... altruism doesn't exist ... Unfortunately, investors here in Oman mostly seek personal welfare more than they consider the collective welfare or the beneficiaries' welfare. ... [The] private sector doesn't have the culture of giving and expending. In fact, it has a culture of instant profit-making.

A different but relevant manifestation of corporate egotism is the insistence of some private corporations on extending financial and material support only to those educational institutions that fall within their concession areas. According to a curriculum officer (GAD28/02/12), this creates 'disparities between the different governorates' in PPP projects and imbalance in resource distribution among public schools.

A number of participants perceived the private education sector not to be immune to these drawbacks, which can downplay the effectiveness of any PPP programme. A government official (GSA11/02/12) highlighted that 'private education here (in Oman) is mostly a mere commercial activity. ... [This] hinders the introduction of any PPP reform'. Similarly, another official (GAR31/01/12) feared that the profit-making motive would override the quality of educational services when implementing certain models of PPP. He anticipated 'a sudden emergence of private education companies in a flash to benefit from this (contracting) model' and was concerned that their main aim would be 'pure profit rather than educational aspects'. However, a private sector respondent (PFL20/02/12) described this vision of private schools as 'profit-seeking institutions' as 'a deficient vision', which

causes the MOE to view private schools as incapable of forming partnerships with public education. The above highlights a privatisation and profit perspective of PPP and calls for striking a balance between profit-making, service quality and community welfare.

Conflicts of interest

The above concerns about the nature and extent of the private sector's involvement in education might reflect a possible conflict of interest between this sector and the government which could seriously impede the effectiveness of any PPP reform. A government director (GMN27/02/12) stipulated that 'if there isn't a 100% agreement on vision and objectives, some sort of conflict of interest will emerge'. She added that this becomes evident if the profit driver supersedes the quality of services in private schools, giving rise to a conflict between the school's interests in profit-making and the MOE's interest in the provision of quality education. A private school principal (PMS20/02/12) argued that the competitive nature of private schools might impede a successful PPP programme:

... the partnership process requires courage. Every private school strives to develop itself and improve its services. However, they need to be assured that this partnership would not threaten their status, quality or the number of their students.

This concern was openly stated by a private sector participant (PDH15/02/12) when he said 'we probably are quite protective of our intellectual property and visions and so on. So we don't link up a lot with other schools'. A member of FG1 pointed out that this conflict of interest might be more evident in private-private rather than in public-private collaboration due to the for-profit principle on which these schools are founded. She argued 'it is extremely difficult to get two private schools to collaborate together due to the profit factor. ... It is as difficult as integrating two different commercial stores because each of these has its own capital and funding'.

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents believed that this sort of conflict is minimal in Oman. A private sector participant (PFL20/02/12) rejected the existence of any conflict of interest between the MOE and private schools ‘because the two parties complement each other ... and seek to achieve the same objectives of promoting educational outcomes’. However, he conceded that it ‘might occur if there are some international founders of private schools who have different agendas’. A government official (GNL82/02/12) stressed that a clear and precise PPP contract or agreement could prevent any possible conflict: ‘as the proverb goes “forewarned is forearmed” and there won’t be any conflict of interest or vision if there is an agreement over objectives, mechanisms, time and roles from the very beginning, especially in a written format or a contract’. This vision stresses reciprocity and contractual PPPs within a multi-stakeholder and complementarity perspective where the benefits are shared.

4.5.5 Ideological impediments

The impediments least discussed were ideological challenges to PPPs. Some potential ideological barriers identified were fear of globalisation and concerns about the privatisation of education, mainly linked to involvement of international partners.

Globalisation

In terms of globalisation, PPP is envisaged as a threat to national identity due to the liberalisation and internationalisation of education and a reduced public sector role. A considerable number of participants agreed that the community might react negatively to the involvement of foreign partners out of suspicion that they might have hidden agendas. According to a research participant (OSR28/02/12), this involvement can ‘lead education to deviate away from its national objectives’. He added that school education is a sensitive issue which should not be left in foreign hands. This reservation was echoed by another

official (GNK22/02/12) who explained that ‘society has a tendency to associate the involvement of foreign and non-local parties in education with some hidden targets and agendas ... which constitutes a major challenge [to PPPs]’. Another participant (GAmB13/02/12) considered that society would challenge PPPs run by foreign education companies due to concerns over ‘culture, traditions and religion’. However, she asserted that ‘as long as this partnership has no influence on curricula (cultural aspects), society would accept it’.

Privatisation

Another ideological challenge to PPPs relates to concerns about the privatisation of education. Interestingly, this concern was raised by a private sector participant (PTY26/02/12) as well as some public sector participants. This participant envisaged the concept of multi-stakeholder partnerships in education as a threat to governmental control over education. He viewed PPP from a shareholding perspective whereby a high proportion of involvement on the part of international partners could ‘lead to the control of international institutions over the education sector... [and] divert the education system away from national policies and orientations’. A member of FG1 voiced similar concerns when he asked: ‘these different partners, don’t they impose their viewpoints on the school? Don’t they exercise pressure to pass on certain goals? These viewpoints might contradict the country’s vision and objectives’. Such perspectives do not seem to recognise either the collaborative relationships in PPPs or formal agreements which specify roles and responsibilities.

4.6 Solutions

The PPP challenges in Oman can be tackled at three different levels: a political and legislative level, a practical technical level and a public awareness-raising level. Whereas

the legislative level addresses political and regulatory challenges, the technical level relates to practical challenges and the awareness-raising level targets social and ideological challenges.

4.6.1 Political and legislative level

Respondents identified a range of procedures to overcome political and regulatory-related challenges, including adopting a formal PPP policy, creating a PPP management unit and restructuring public and private education investment regulations.

Adopting a PPP policy

The majority of research participants suggested that it was time the government adopted a formal national policy regarding PPPs in education, involving the private sector and civil society. This need is dictated by many current economic and social factors. Many participants described such a decision as ‘courageous’, ‘strong’ or ‘fundamental’ due to the extensive ramifications it would have for educational policies in Oman. A participant in FG2 explained that this ‘political decision (needs to be) translated into a vision’. According to him, this vision would constitute a formal PPP policy, setting goals and prescribing partners’ responsibilities. He also stressed that this decision goes beyond the MOE’s authority. Hence, it would have to be taken at a high political level. A participant in FG4 stated that a PPP programme would require ‘prioritising governmental expenditures in the country and making education a priority’.

Establishing a PPP authority

According to participants, establishing a PPP authority (cf. 6.4.2) should be the formal manifestation of a PPP-orientated policy. This authority would regulate, manage, coordinate and monitor PPP programmes in education. The PPP implementing body would

be exempt from the Civil Services law for greater autonomy and flexibility. Stressing the need for this independence, a participant in FG2 added ‘financial aspects’ as a further area that would warrant autonomy. He continued, ‘we need a supreme education council with some decentralisation in the governorates, but with a reinforcement of performance standards’. This autonomy would be regulated by performance standards.

The PPP unit would be expected to promote dialogue between government and private sector, as well as conducting needs analyses. One private sector participant (PBM25/02/12) said ‘dialogue’ between the government and private sector is essential to resolve any regulatory issues and facilitate long-term planning. Another (PASH27/02/12) believed that the involvement of the private education sector in setting laws that have an impact on this sector could eliminate unnecessary regulatory complexities, exerting a positive impact on education provision. Hence, any future PPP approach needs to consider dialogue between partners.

Regulating the private sector’s contributions

Participants believed that PPP regulation should create a PPP-enabling environment and structure the involvement of the corporate private sector in education by introducing laws to legislate and promote PPPs in education. These laws are expected to counteract the challenge of the private sector’s lack of awareness and interest in contributing to education as well as regulating CSR funds. Many respondents suggested enforcing legislation structuring PPPs because, as noted by an MOE participant (GAmB13/02/12), ‘the corporations’ own policies don’t recognise their partnership role in developing the country’. A planning official (GSR13/08/12) maintained that because PPP and its regulation ‘are not actively handled..., this partnership needs to be addressed formally by policy makers and legislators’. He explained that because the private sector lacks the intrinsic motivation and

commitment to serve the community, PPP should be ‘based on specific frameworks, criteria and even contracts ... (to) make the role of the private sector more effective’. He added that because voluntary and philanthropic PPPs are not sustainable, formally structuring PPP through legislation could overcome sustainability problems. This vision represents a shift away from the philanthropic perspective of PPP and adopts a more formal partnership perspective in which PPP is formally structured and regulated.

This participant propounded using the CSR principle as a basis for involving the corporate sector in educational PPPs. He suggests that ‘the agreements and contracts that are drawn up between the government and private companies should include specific and detailed clauses that address support for different educational aspects’. Similarly, a participant in FG2 suggested that ‘government tenders to the private sector can include conditions relating to building partnerships with education in the local community’. Other suggested legislation to encourage and regulate the contribution of the private sector included introducing an education tax. A participant in FG3 suggested that this tax could be deducted from the contracts’ renewal fees. A more practical suggestion pertained to creating an education fund ‘wherein companies ... are expected to contribute to some kind of educational fund’, as recommended by a government official (GMNT30/01/12).

Restructuring the public education regulatory framework

Modifications to the public education regulatory framework comprise another area that could tackle some regulatory, management and capacity-related PPP challenges. Data analysis shows the decentralisation of the education system and school autonomy as aspects requiring change. An MOE official (GAsB18/02/12) observed that although ‘the regulatory framework in education is flexible to an extent ... the adoption of a partnership programme requires greater flexibility’. Another official (GNK22/02/12) stated that the implementation

of any PPP model needs ‘an institution with a clear system of monitoring, accountability and reinforcement’. A carefully formulated PPP regulatory framework can address many of the current PPP challenges, such as the centralisation of education, the corporate private sector’s lack of interest in contributing to education, PPP sustainability and the limited capacity of both the public and private education sectors.

Respondents agreed that implementing a PPP programme requires a decentralised education system. The subordination of the centralised education system to the Civil Service system limits the MOE’s financial and administrative authority. A government official (GSB08/02/12) stated ‘if we (the MOE) aren’t tied to the Civil Service rules and regulations, it will be easier for us to accept that (PPP) and to work accordingly’. Accordingly, a PPP regulatory framework needs to grant schools some autonomy. An MOE participant (GAA31/01/12) envisaged school autonomy in relation to ‘technical issues’ as vital for any PPP programme to be effective. A participant in FG3 considered ‘teacher recruitment and dismissal’ as areas in which public schools need more autonomy. A participant in FG4 believed that autonomy would ‘improve teachers’ productivity and creativity ... because independence means that they are relieved from many administrative burdens’. She then discussed how the decentralised system in international private schools promotes productivity and the development of education, as well as encouraging a pay-for-performance practice that is absent in public schools. However, she stressed that this autonomy requires the enforcement of monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Besides macro policies, the education regulatory framework requires micro policies to accommodate a PPP programme, primarily related to adopting performance standards and accountability and monitoring schemes. A government official (GSR13/08/12) considered ‘enforcing accountability systems and incentives which need to be incorporated as

regulation..., a comprehensive evaluation of the education system ... and a long-term strategy for education' as fundamental additions to the education system and prerequisites for PPP. Another official (GNK22/02/12) emphasised that adopting a PPP programme requires 'the existence of a clear system of accountability, monitoring and reinforcement'. A further quality-related regulatory change is the standardisation of educational inputs, such as curricula and teacher qualifications to ensure quality and competition between providers. This indicates that introducing a PPP programme requires concerted efforts on various fronts: the provision of resources, enactment of legislation and capacity building.

The way in which these regulations are implemented has a bearing on the effectiveness of PPP. A government official (GMN27/02/12) highlighted that the involvement of high-level decision makers at the MOE would ensure that 'the regulations are flexible and adaptable to accommodate change'. Another MOE participant (GNK22/02/12) pointed out that 'the system exists everywhere. What matters is how this system is implemented. The success of the reform is dependent on the support and involvement of decision makers and leaders'. This might suggest that it is possible to circumvent bureaucracy through having direct and clear communication channels to avoid delays in getting clearances and performing administrative work. To overcome bureaucratic obstacles, a private sector respondent (PDH15/02/12) suggested that 'things need to be streamlined, so the decisions can be made quickly'.

Revision of private education regulations

Due to private education's potential role in PPPs, the participants believed regulation pertaining to investment in private education is another area that requires reconsideration. Some FG1 participants stated that this regulatory framework must be updated and improved to meet current needs and requirements. In particular, the aspects of school infrastructure,

teacher quality and the involvement of educators in investing in private education are in dire need of reconsideration. The participants considered that regulation should approve educators' investment in private education due to the positive effect it has on service quality. In addition, certain quality-promoting regulations need to be enforced, especially in the area of school buildings and teacher quality. A participant in this group recommended introducing 'teacher licensing procedures' to improve teacher quality. According to these participants, regulatory intervention in these aspects could improve the quality and standards of private education in the country. Many participants suggested regulating support for private schools by stipulating various subsidies for teachers' salaries and school buildings based on specific quality criteria.

In the same vein, research participants recognised that the high turn-over of employees, particularly in the private education sector, is a matter of concern. The 'piracy' of trained private school teachers by other private schools, as it was termed by some private school principals, is a disturbing issue influencing teacher stability and the quality of services in private schools. It is seen as a threat to any potential PPP programme and the stability of the education system in attaining its aspired results. Hence, participants observed the need for regulation to enhance stability. Proposed measures include introducing stringent controls on teacher transfer and fixed salary scales for teacher qualifications. Because 'this stability is crucial to quality outcomes', a participant in FG2 suggested 'that the teaching force in education is made stable for at least five consecutive years. ... The role of the contract with the teacher is significant here'. This is a direct call for a PPP programme to tackle the flaws in the education system and target salient improvement areas to add value and improve outcomes.

4.6.2 The practical level

Practical solutions to PPP challenges include measures to address evaluation and sustainability issues, tackle challenges pertaining to management and capacity building in both private and public sectors, as well as mobilising financial resources.

Capacity of the private education sector

The private education sector's current capacity is seen by the respondents as a key deterrent to a successful PPP programme due to the quality and scope of its services. In a future demand-oriented PPP scheme, private education providers would shoulder significant responsibilities. Hence, their capabilities would determine PPP success. Some respondents suggested partnering with international education providers to overcome this capacity challenge. However, other participants would prefer home-grown solutions and raised concerns regarding the involvement of international partners in education. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) considered that 'using local expertise' could overcome the unresponsiveness of imported PPP models to local needs. Other participants thought the MOE should intervene and impose strict controls on teacher quality, curricula and school infrastructure to lift the standard of the majority of private schools in the country. A participant in FG4 advanced the solution of 'introducing specific controls on teachers and principals' recruitment procedures in these schools'. Other group participants also suggested that the MOE take responsibility for in-service training of staff to improve their capabilities. Others even recommended some type of public funding for small private schools through contributing to the payment of teachers' salaries to overcome the issue of compromised teacher and service quality due to the savings in expenditures followed by certain schools. However, another FG4 participant believed that 'funding should be linked to an accreditation system'.

According to participants, the breadth of private education service provision in Oman could be improved through adopting a contracting model of PPP in which the MOE would contract with some leading private schools to operate public schools using international programmes. Although some participants supported this proposal on the basis of availability of school infrastructure, others warned that it might have negative consequences on education due to lack of gradual implementation and the repercussions it could have on teacher recruitment and quality.

According to most participants, building the capacity of the local private education sector is a process that can take decades. Hence, most respondents believed that the current state and capacity of the private education sector necessitates linking with international partners to participate in the implementation of any future PPP programme. However, they stressed the need for careful selection of partners, based on quality and adaptability to address cultural and social sensitivities.

Management at the MOE

Capacity building at the MOE is a prerequisite for any PPP reform in education. The effectiveness of reform depends largely on personnel capacity to manage, monitor and evaluate this reform. An NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) pointed out that ‘monitoring progress ... requires investment in internal systems of ministries’. According to her, PPP demands capacity building to produce trained personnel ‘who really know how to monitor for progress and results’ because the evaluation of educational outcomes is more complex than the evaluation of the reform’s material aspects.

Similarly, school-level practitioners believed that raising the managerial capacity and administrative maturity at the MOE is a prerequisite for PPP reform. They saw the need for

the application of principles such as accountability, performance standards and democratic decision-making at the MOE level and school level. A participant in FG4 asserted ‘once the principles, objectives and standards are clear, decision makers can’t take autocratic decisions. We need performance standards for all. ... In this case, we won’t have a project cancelled because the initiator has left the position’. Here, he stressed that reform projects should emanate from real practical needs and be based on a specific formal policy that everyone would follow rather than being based on individuals’ inclinations and orientations.

PPP evaluation

The evaluation aspect of programmes is envisaged as a challenge to any potential PPP programme in Oman. Many respondents considered that this challenge could be overcome if certain measures are taken. A government official (GAK29/01/12) pointed out that enforcing quality standards, monitoring and regular evaluation can help avoid challenges associated with the evaluation of programmes at the MOE. He suggested borrowing from and adapting some international experiences, ‘like OFSTED’, to overcome evaluation issues and improve the climate for adopting a PPP programme. Another official (GAR31/01/12) called for ‘early and regular evaluation of programmes to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the programme’, providing an early diagnosis of problems. According to him, this would improve the chances of the programme being more sustainable. Besides regularity, an MOE participant (GMGh21/02/12) suggested assigning this responsibility to an experienced and independent body to attain objectivity, saying ‘[The] evaluating body needs to be independent of the [MOE] and the (private) institution’. In support of this, an NGO participant (OLG29/02/12) stated argued ‘it is a challenge when a ministry, which is a service provider, does an evaluation of its own services. It is never

truly objective. But having such a mechanism through either an independent council or a board ... brings value to providing an objective assessment.’ According to an MOE participant (GMGh21/02/12), this would ensure the ‘objectivity and transparency of evaluation’.

Nevertheless, according to a private sector participant (PBM25/02/12), evaluation should be informed by the aims and outcomes of PPP. He also viewed the involvement of representatives of the different partners and stakeholders in the monitoring process as vital because ‘if it is truly a partnership, it has to be monitored as a partnership’.

Another relevant evaluation dimension, repeatedly pointed out by the participants, is the careful and gradual implementation of a PPP programme. A participant from the State Council (OSR28/02/12) supported implementation ‘in limited (educational) institutions to monitor and evaluate carefully the results to check the worthiness of such projects’. According to the participants, the piloting of PPP programmes before scaling them would prevent many obstacles and improve the quality and sustainability of the programmes.

Sustainability of PPP

To address the sustainability issue that is currently inherent in PPP projects in Oman, many participants supported forging partnerships with strong and reputable partners to enhance sustainability. A participant in FG4 specified that they should, in particular, have ‘strong internal and economic systems’. Another participant in the group added that ‘these partners must have successful projects at the international level’.

However, it is not only the features of potential partners that determine the sustainability of PPP. Other factors are at play. A key MOE official (GNL28/02/12) viewed sustainability not as time-bound but rather as objective-bound and dependent on ‘a number of factors,

such as the durability and expansion of partners, funds, educational innovations and the priorities of both the education sector and the private sector partner'. Another director (GMN27/02/12) approached sustainability in a similar manner. She contended that 'any partnership project ... should be time-bound but can be extended in the light of the achieved objectives'. Besides the evaluation process, another MOE official (GAA31/01/12) suggested that sustainability could be improved with careful and thorough planning. This indicates that sustainability does not constitute a major challenge to PPP in Oman provided that the planning, monitoring and evaluation stages are undertaken with care.

A participant in FG1 suggested that a multi-stakeholder partnership has a greater chance of sustainability than two-party relationships in terms of the availability of partners and funds. He noted 'if one party withdraws, there are other parties than can take over. ... Such partnerships can also establish other institutions that generate sustainable financial yields'. A participant in FG4 suggested the establishment of public interest companies in which 'local investors and individuals can be shareholders and create educational companies'. According to her, this would enhance the financial stability and sustainability of private investment in education, thus having a positive impact on a PPP programme.

4.6.3 The public awareness-raising level

The public awareness-raising level involves educating the community as well as MOE personnel about PPPs to raise awareness of their value and avoid any possible social opposition. It also involves raising the private sector's awareness of their role in education and encouraging their involvement in this field. The procedures discussed below suggest ways of overcoming social and ideological impediments.

Introducing PPPs to society and practitioners

Social resistance to any educational reform, including PPP, is a predictable challenge and a natural one. However, there are a number of measures that can be adopted to reduce or overcome resistance. The first of these concerns the way in which the reform is introduced to society and educational practitioners. 'It is how the reform is introduced to society that determines acceptance of this reform. ... Social resistance can be overcome through awareness raising and involving the stakeholders concerned in this reform', a government official (GNL28/02/12) argued. This indicates that although there is the likelihood of some sort of social opposition to PPP, society would accept the reform if it proves its value and sensitivity to local context and needs.

Criticising the current language used at the MOE to introduce reform and which 'build(s) the success of the new system on the failure of the older one', an MOE participant (GNK22/02/12) stressed that:

... there have to be some awareness-raising campaigns to convince people that needs have changed and require some change (in the system). We also need to convince them of the benefits of the proposed system to reduce this resistance.

This participant focused on three aspects in the introduction of reform: using simple and non-judgmental language, clarifying the rationale and advantages of the reform and developing positive attitudes towards it. Another participant (OSR28/02/12) also suggested that awareness raising should 'establish ... an objective portrayal of all of its (PPP) positives and negatives ... and how it serves the unique needs and characteristics of the local community'. Simply, it is about educating educators and the public about the reform. A participant in FG3 highlighted the importance of spreading the culture and notion of PPP among the MOE's decision makers and practitioners. She clarified that 'the culture and concept of PPP need to be spread among all (MOE) personnel' to gain consensus on its

meaning and how it is internalised. Another participant in the group believed that awareness of society as a whole starts with ‘the understanding and awareness of the Ministry of Education’s officials and their role (in spreading this understanding)’.

Involvement of stakeholders

‘Getting people on board’, as one participant (GMNT30/01/12) called the involvement of different levels of stakeholders at the MOE and in the community in the decision-making process, was discussed as the most effective way of avoiding any social opposition to PPP reform. Winning the support of educators would be the first step. A government official (GMA31/01/12) stressed that:

... we have to consult the educational field. We need to adopt bottom-up decision making rather than a pure top-down approach. The community and parents need to be involved to avoid any potential resistance.

A participant in FG3 affirmed the need to involve school practitioners in the planning and decision-making processes to render any reform effective. He explained that ‘if schools are involved in the planning of different aspects ... the results would be rewarding’ for both decision makers and schools because practitioners are more aware of the needs of schools than high-level officials. Another official (GAR31/01/12) believed that the involvement of students in planning reform ‘can open up wide horizons of thought for planners’.

The community, with all its constituents who comprise stakeholders in education, needs to be involved in reform. An MOE respondent (GMN27/02/12) succinctly summarised the scope of beneficiaries who should be consulted about the reform and how it should be implemented to gain their insights and avoid their resistance. She elucidated:

... all the stakeholders and beneficiaries – both internal, who are the practitioners of reform, and external, who are the recipients of reform, like students, the community, the job market and higher education institutions – should approve it before

implementation. It shouldn't be only consultancy but also involvement in planning and implementation. This way reform is received better.

This call to involve all stakeholders in planning PPP reform reflects a multi-stakeholder perspective.

Awareness-raising of the role of the corporate private sector

The corporate private sector requires some awareness raising of their potential role in supporting education. According to the participants, it is mandatory that this sector become involved in education because it is the prime recipient of educational outcomes. The participants believed that this involvement should not be driven by immediate material gains. Rather, it should be stimulated by a sense of belonging to the community and by long-term plans of preparing a qualified and trained workforce. This vision, while it recognises the reciprocal features of PPP, reflects national duty and multi-stakeholder PPP perspectives. An MOE participant (GAmB13/02/12) viewed this sector as an integral part of society, one which needs 'to play a role in the preparation of responsible and patriotic generations ... (and) contribute to the development of this sector (education) and the whole country'. Another official (GMNT30/01/12) perceived economic competitiveness as a long-term benefit in the involvement of big private corporates in education. She emphasised 'we MUST involve them in ensuring that our students meet the needs of the future job market'.

The implied message of these participants is that a clear formal PPP policy would convey to the private sector their significant role in education and exploit it optimally for the benefit of both the public and private sectors. Hence, some practical measures are required to promote the role of the private sector in education through involving it in the preparation of its future workforce.

This section has suggested several measures to tackle PPP challenges in Oman. The next section explores the features of effective PPPs.

4.7 Attributes of an Effective PPP Model

Research participants identified a number of attributes of an effective PPP model, pertaining to design and practical aspects, resources available and partners involved. A private sector respondent (PMN19/02/12) summarised these aspects when she described an effective PPP programme as ‘meaningful, understandable and transferable.’ Whereas ‘meaningful’ pertains to the objectives and rationale of the PPP programme, ‘understandable’ indicates an awareness of its goals, operation and expected outcomes and ‘transferable’ covers the practical implementation aspects, as well the resources needed for the programme.

4.7.1 Design and practical aspects

Clear objectives, processes and outcomes, evaluation and sustainability were the key design and implementation success factors identified by the participants. An MOE participant (GNL28/02/12) described these features thus:

Initially, it (a PPP programme) has to be well planned so that the roles, vision, objectives, the timescale and the budgetary requirements are clear and identified. It also considers all the relevant aspects of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which are also accompanied by awareness raising.

The following aspects are the key design and implementation success features discussed.

Needs-based

An effective PPP programme is simply ‘one that delivers the results and achieves the objectives’, as described by a government official (GMNT30/01/12). Another official (GAR31/01/12) stressed that it ‘should provide added value to the education system ...

consider current needs and ... tackle the vulnerable areas of the system'. This highlights the need for any potential PPP programme to be based on needs analyses and to provide solutions to existing educational challenges. A major education deficit identified by the participants is the mismatch between schooling outcomes and the requirements of the job market and HE. To ameliorate this, the participants stressed the need for a PPP programme to focus on particular curricular areas, such as ICT and the sciences, to prepare the students for the workplace and the knowledge economy. According to a participant in FG3, a focus on e-curricula 'creates human resources able to learn autonomously ... (through) discovery and creativity' and according to a participant in FG4, 'makes schools keep pace with the technological advances in the third millennium'.

The capacity of the private education sector was another area for improvement discussed. A future PPP programme could address this aspect through public intervention in the areas of teacher quality and school infrastructure. A participant in FG4 identified a further education challenge and envisaged that a future PPP programme would 'foster equity' between students in public and private education. To achieve this, he suggested that public schools should be open to other educational models, curricula and evaluation systems and should strive to provide similar services and experiences to students in these two sectors.

Specific objectives, processes and outcomes

Once the needs and gaps are identified, PPP objectives, processes and outcomes need to be specified. According to an MOE participant (GSB08/02/12) 'objectives and policies should be clear from the beginning' and a member of FG2 stated 'should be jointly formulated by the two sectors to avoid miscommunication and wastage of resources'. This necessitates 'a precisely formulated (PPP) contract' according to a government official (GAR31/01/12). This might indicate that clear objectives should be accessible not only to policy makers and

practitioners but also to the wider community and all stakeholders. This vision indicates a call for contractual PPP arrangements.

Regular evaluation

The participants agreed that regular and stringent evaluation is a key determinant of PPP effectiveness. This aspect is elaborately discussed in Section 4.6.2.

Sustainability

The sustainability of a PPP programme is another practical feature of its effectiveness. This is especially true in education, as an international school principal (PDH15/02/12) argued, because change requires a relatively long time to show results. The participants had a holistic vision of sustainability one which transcends individual PPP projects and limited timescales to encompass a more comprehensive approach towards supporting education. According to an MOE participant (GSG28/02/12), sustainability involves ‘a long-term commitment and collaboration from the private sector to support the education process’. A deeper discussion of sustainability is provided in Section 4.6.2.

4.7.2 Resource aspects

The human and material resources available to PPPs determine to a large extent their viability. The resources exploited in PPPs range from the diversity of participants to material resources available in schools. The partners involved in a PPP programme and their attributes also shape the nature and extent of the programme.

Local resources

An effective PPP model, the participants considered, is one that utilises the context’s resources and responds to its requirements. A government official (GBKh13/08/12) stated that no uniform PPP model exists and ‘every society has its own way (of realising this

partnership) because the nature of the private sector, its strengths and weaknesses, differ from one country to another'. An MOE director (GSG28/02/12) pointed out that 'the model needs to consider the attributes, capabilities and aspirations of society'. These goals, as a private sector participant (PASH27/02/12) contended, are better achieved if the educational operator is 'aware of the local culture'.

Based on this perspective, the nature and diversity of the private sector play a role in shaping the essence and scope of PPP. This implies that having a home-grown PPP model that uses local resources will respond better to local context and needs. Preserving the identity of society was the aspect most flagged by participants. They expressed their rejection of any imported PPP model and insisted that any model introduced should be tailored to serve Omani educational requirements and to suit the culture and traditions of society.

A considerable number of participants stressed that this model should be informed by regional and international expertise but in a way that adapts to the context's requirements. An MOE director (GJL11/02/12) expressed a desire for a PPP to be 'dynamic, to explore, to learn from other people's experiences [and] to take what ... is appropriate for Oman'.

Human and physical resources

Besides the broad vision of resources, other human and physical resources play a vital role in the effectiveness of PPPs. Many participants maintained that for a PPP programme to survive and be efficacious, a number of prerequisites have to be met to ensure that schools are equipped with the tools to implement it. These prerequisites include the availability of physical infrastructure, capacity building through training of human resources and introducing necessary regulation. The participants identified capacity building as a

fundamental practical feature for the success of a PPP programme. This includes the training of MOE personnel and school teachers, as well as preparation and training of principals in both public and private sectors. According to the participants, capacity building must precede any large-scale PPP programme for the MOE personnel to be able to plan, monitor and evaluate the reform and for the practitioners in schools to be able to implement it. The teacher, whom a private sector respondent (PMN19/02/12) described as ‘the cornerstone of any reform’, should be the target of an intensive training programme to deliver the desired results. This respondent clarified that ‘it is not the buildings, it is not the curriculum, it is not the resources. NONE of these is as important as the quality of the teacher’.

This focus on human resources indicates that organisational capacity in the education sector is vital for the success of PPPs. Some of the key administrative capacity indicators identified included school autonomy and the enforcement of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. A private sector respondent (PFL20/02/12) called for a shared vision or platform for all partners, granting partners autonomy and trust to achieve the agreed goals and outcomes. However, in return he suggested ‘enforcing controls ... [and] introducing accountability schemes ... wherein the principles of incentives and sanctions are applied’.

Non-profit PPP

A significant number of participants argued that a PPP programme in education must be a non-profit programme because the non-profit element is congruent with the public education model, as perceived by a private sector participant (PASH27/02/12). It also prevents profit overriding service quality. Another participant (OSR28/02/12) stated:

... the (PPP) project should be a not-for-profit one. In the long term it can be for-profit, but this shouldn’t be sought immediately from the beginning as in the case of

some of our higher education institutions who thought of making a quick profit at the expense of the quality of education. ... It is a long-term investment.

This suggests that profit-making is acceptable in principle, as long as it does not compromise quality and has no negative consequences on access to education for all segments of society.

4.7.3 Governance and partner aspects

Another dimension of PPP effectiveness is the partner and governance element. Initially, a PPP programme requires people with mindsets that embrace and believe in the value of partnership. According to an MOE participant (GSB08/02/12), an effective PPP initiative requires ‘people who believe in making a difference’. Many participants believed that an extensive reform needs to be led by high-level leadership in the country or some influential society figures. This would help garner support for the reform. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) stressed that a PPP reform ‘requires faith and trust in leadership’. Other features of PPP partners include communication and reciprocity, as well partners’ quality, adaptability and diversity, all of which contribute towards PPP effectiveness and sustainability. These are addressed below.

A two-way PPP process

Reciprocity in terms of benefits, risks and information is essential to the effectiveness of PPPs. Communication between partners is an essential feature of an effective PPP programme. An MOE participant (GMN27/02/12) used an expressive analogy to demonstrate the significance of communication for the success of PPP. She argued:

... one of the basic principles for the success of any partnership is communication (between partners). For example, if you have two revolving cogs but they do not mesh ... there is no communication or movement and consequently they don’t achieve their goal. However, when they make contact and revolve around each other, they produce motion and achieve their goal.

Another participant (GMGh21/02/12) perceived communication to bridge the gap in background between partners and to assimilate and harmonise the varied ‘financial, administrative and technical’ visions of partners. Trust, mutual understanding and collaboration are other crucial attributes of the relationship between partners that are enhanced by communication.

A significant number of participants perceived an effective PPP programme to have the features of mutuality and reciprocity so that the roles, benefits and risks are shared between partners. A government official (GJL11/02/12) described this PPP feature as ‘a two-way-involvement’. To achieve reciprocity, the precise roles and responsibilities of different partners need to be identified. Another official (GBKh13/08/12) considered that these roles should be formally addressed. He argued ‘each partner should know what the expectations of the other partner are and it needs to be done through a very official ... and well-structured protocol’. The division of labour, according to another participant (GMGh21/02/12), requires that ‘who takes the role of funding, the role of management, the role of evaluation, and so on’ be spelt out. These roles should be viewed from a complementarity perspective rather than from a superiority/inferiority perspective. Contractual PPP arrangements seem to fulfil such roles, which makes them indispensable in any comprehensive PPP policy.

Partners’ quality

Other relevant attributes of PPP partners identified by the respondents and considered major determinants of PPP success are the quality and flexibility of partners. A government official (GMNT30/01/12) specifically linked this to international education providers, saying ‘if you are bringing in people, you have to bring in the best and not only the best but also people who are open to different ways of working’. Another official (GAR31/01/12)

pointed out that ‘these educational institutions need to be highly experienced in education ... and should be operated by well qualified educators’.

Multiple stakeholders

The inclusion of multiple stakeholders is an attribute of effective PPPs frequently discussed. This vision indicates that the contribution of stakeholders to planning and implementation leads to ownership and success of reform. The benefits of multiple stakeholders in PPPs are thoroughly discussed in Section 4.4.1.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the first part of the research results. It has discussed the participants’ perspectives concerning PPPs, ranging from philanthropy, through reciprocity to multi-stakeholder PPPs. It has also identified the types of existing PPPs in Oman and highlighted potential future PPPs and partners. It has explored challenges and suggested mechanisms to address them. Chapter 5 draws conclusions based on these findings and links them to the research questions. It also discusses them in light of the research context and supports them with empirical evidence from the PPP literature, highlighting aspects of convergence and divergence.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

As illustrated in Chapter 1, this research has sought to:

- highlight how PPPs are perceived by the different stakeholders; namely administrators, private providers of education, supervisors and school principals;
- identify existing PPP patterns and types in the Omani educational context at the basic and post-basic education levels;
- identify potential partners who have the capacity to partner with the government in implementing the proposed PPP framework;
- investigate the regulatory, social, political, capacity and other impediments to the effective implementation of PPPs in the Omani education system. Procedures for how these can be tackled are suggested;
- identify the features of an effective PPP programme as highlighted by the research participants and informed by the literature; and
- drawing on the research findings, design a coherent and comprehensive PPP framework that is responsive to Omani cultural and educational needs.

This chapter discusses the research findings covered in Chapter 4 and interprets them in light of the unique Omani context and the broad PPP literature. The consistency of these findings with previous PPP research is highlighted and any new trends are identified. The final objective of this research, suggesting a PPP framework, is addressed in Chapter 6 and draws input from the research data as well as the PPP literature reviewed. This chapter is organised around the research objectives stated above.

5.2 How are PPPs Conceptualised in the Omani Education Context?

The majority of the research participants held ideologically neutral perceptions of PPPs. A few viewed PPPs as synonymous with privatisation, whereas a significant number of respondents envisaged PPPs in education as a national duty and as a tool for mobilising resources for education and improving its quality. These diverse conceptualisations reflect, to a certain extent, the ongoing debate about PPPs. The perception of PPP as privatisation revealed two trends: one capitalising on the private sector's expertise, management skills and work ethic, leading to greater accountability, productivity and innovation; the other reflecting a misunderstanding of how PPPs function. Concerns such as introducing user fees and the loss of governmental control over education represent this latter trend. According to Mahmood (2013), such concerns are typical when discussing educational PPPs.

Philanthropic PPP was perceived by the participants as a means of mobilising resources for education through support in the form of finance, infrastructure or expertise. Although prevalent and commonplace in the Omani education system, this PPP was criticised by the participants as lacking focus, sustainability and structure. This is consistent with previous research which concludes that philanthropy is not a reliable or sustainable foundation for PPPs (Akyeampong, 2009; Miraftab, 2004; Pachauri, 2012). The participants stressed that such PPPs need to be integrated into a comprehensive PPP framework that structures PPP ventures and optimally utilises resources. This consolidates suggestions by the World Economic Forum (2005) that philanthropic funds need to be integrated into formal PPP policy to attain sustainability.

When PPP was perceived as a reciprocal process, the participants emphasised the shared and mutual benefits to both sectors which dictate a multi-level collaboration in the

planning, implementation and evaluation stages of PPP projects. While meeting marketing goals and funding education are some of the short-term goals, establishing an education system responsive to the needs of the work market and building a skilled workforce are the most prominent long-term benefits of this type of PPP.

A relevant two-way process but a more long-term orientated PPP perspective was the ‘integral’ PPP, in which the two sectors pursue different but complementary roles. Its benefits transcend the immediate and tangible benefits of the two sectors. This perspective of PPP envisages education as a national duty and a joint responsibility between the two sectors. According to the participants, this PPP is formal, well-structured, sustainable and realised at the different levels of the educational process, from the classroom level to the policymaking level. The involvement of the various educational stakeholders in the community in this form of PPP leads to ‘multi-stakeholder’ PPPs. Nevertheless, formal contractual arrangements are indispensable here and complement the role played by multi-stakeholder PPPs. The majority of respondents showed a preference for multi-stakeholder PPPs to address the priorities of improving educational quality and relevance to the economy. Evidence from different parts of the world shows that these PPPs ensure multi-sector collaborations (Fennel, 2010), capitalise on the role of different educational stakeholders, including society, to achieve the public good (Cathcart, 2008; Latham, 2009) and guarantee the synergy of efforts at the macro level (Draxler, 2008).

5.3 PPPs in Oman: Real and Aspirational

A number of PPP types exist in the Omani education context. However, most of these are voluntary and unstructured. Initiatives range between philanthropic ventures and cultural, social, policy-orientated and educational initiatives. These roughly correspond to the key PPP types identified by Kernaghan (2004): collaborative, consultative and traditional

contractual arrangements. However, the number of PPPs in each of these categories varies considerably. Philanthropic PPP is the most prevalent type of PPP in the Omani education context. In these PPPs, the private sector and other community institutions offer financial and in-kind donations to the education sector to fund particular projects or events. Thus, these PPPs are usually one-off initiatives and address short-term goals. The abundance of these PPPs in the Omani context can be explained by the fact that they are voluntary, informal and require no long-term commitment. However, lack of focus and sustainability, it is argued (van Fleet, 2012), are common limitations with philanthropy. These short-term PPPs can divert attention from longer-term goals. PPP experts in roundtable discussions convened by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2005) suggest that philanthropic funds should be integrated into a long-term PPP policy to enhance their sustainability and focus. They need to be aligned with government-defined and government-led reform priorities (van Fleet, 2012). The research respondents acknowledged the benefit of such initiatives, but stressed that PPP in education must go beyond philanthropy to include other levels and types of collaboration to improve learning outcomes. One way to achieve this is through involving the private sector in policy setting and PPP design and execution. This can only be attained through a formal PPP policy.

Social PPP initiatives address some of the educational aspects that have social dimensions, such as safety on roads, voluntary work, inclusion of children with disabilities and adult education. Cultural PPP initiatives address mainly cultural-exchange programmes through collaboration with national, regional and international NGOs, enabling youth from different countries around the world to meet and work on issues of relevance. These PPPs are limited in nature, with some targeting only a select number of students. Addressing these in a PPP policy might produce a more comprehensive and sustainable impact.

Policy-orientated PPP initiatives were found to be the scarcest of all PPP types in the Omani context. These are limited to liaison and several joint committees involving the MOE, other ministries and the private sector, the latter of which is not well represented. This lack of well-structured collaboration can be attributed to the absence of a clear formal PPP policy and authority in the country. The contribution of the private sector to the national economy requires that it be given ‘a voice in the debate’ in education, as suggested by Luff (2012, p. 171, in Ginsburg et al, 2012).

The data revealed the existence of some outcome-orientated PPP initiatives. These primarily address areas such as teacher training, career guidance, curricula, evaluation and pre-school education. The most evident of these, though still limited in scale, address teacher training and career guidance. Despite the acknowledgement of participants from both sectors of the importance of these PPPs, they do not receive their due attention as financial PPPs do and are not systemically addressed, which might reflect the absence of prioritisation at the MOE. It might also point towards a lack of communication and joint planning between the MOE and the private sector regarding PPP projects and goals.

PPPs addressing curricular inefficiencies were found to be extremely limited despite the fact that the recent TIMMS in science and mathematics and PIRLS 2011 literacy results revealed that Omani students underperform in these areas. Many reports (Gonzalez et al, 2008; World Bank, 2012) have documented the gap between the educational outcomes in Oman and the capabilities and skills required for HE and the workplace, recommending deeper collaborations with the private sector. Nonetheless, the existing curricular PPPs are either implemented on a narrow scale or as non-core curriculum activities.

Similarly, PPPs with the private education sector are almost non-existent. The liaison between the two parties was described by the participants as comprising routine administrative chores rather than PPP. This reveals dissatisfaction with the depth of collaboration between public and private education at the classroom level and calls for more structured and targeted PPPs between these two sectors. This partnership is mainly restricted to the (partial) facilitation and registration and regulation levels identified by Rose (2010). This corresponds to Patrinos et al's (2009, p. 16) 'nascent' level of educational PPP on their continuum, whereby the government allows private providers to operate under a central regulatory framework but does not provide them with any public funds, although it does provide some technical and administrative support and certain incentives. The participants seemed to argue that such PPPs should reach out for higher levels of policy dialogue and demand-orientated PPPs (contracting). Current collaborations at these levels are severely limited or non-existent.

The data analysis also revealed some desired initiatives for PPPs in education. Whilst some of these are being formally considered at the MOE (planned initiatives), others were proposed by the participants (aspirational initiatives). Both types capitalise on the quality of education and outcomes and cover both demand and supply aspects; they vary between providing equal education opportunities to all children and adopting vouchers and contracting models in relation to demand and covering curricular matters, school ICT resources and teacher training in relation to supply. Lim et al (2007) emphasise that ICT PPPs in education contribute to preparing lifelong learners who can function in the global knowledge community. PPPs focusing on curricula, bridging the gap between educational outcomes and job market requirements and adopting vouchers and operational contracting models to improve educational outcomes and extend access to pre-school education and

special education were the aspirational PPPs most extensively discussed. This reflects awareness of the significance of these PPPs in raising educational quality, offering parental choice in education and meeting economic requirements. This specific focus on the quality of education can be explained by the Eighth Five-Year Plan (2011–2015), which includes numerous articles giving precedence to quality issues, such as setting standards, the revision of the curriculum and evaluation procedures and teaching foreign languages, over other aspects.

5.4 Who is Involved in PPP Programmes?

The current range of PPP partners is not extensive and the role of some partners, such as the private education sector, other governmental departments, the local corporate sector, HE institutions and the community, is not fully exploited. It can also be concluded that multi-stakeholder partnerships are preferred over two-party relationships in Oman. The research input discloses and justifies the need for a wide range of potential PPP partners in the Omani context. The perspective of educational PPP as a national duty coupled with the educational and economic demands placed on the education system all call for such partnerships. Such partners can comprise other governmental ministries and departments, NGOs, the corporate private sector, the private education sector and the community. Partners from the private sector can be of either national or international origin. These include specialised education centres, private providers of education, HE institutions, ICT companies and business firms. PPPs with HE institutions not only tailor their outreach and teacher professional development programmes to local needs, but also align high school curricula with HE admission criteria (Domina & Ruzik, 2012). PPPs with the ICT sector help to bridge the digital gap between communities in the knowledge economy (Lim et al, 2007). This diversity of partners was deemed essential by the research respondents due to

the multi-faceted nature of PPPs in education, which require different but complementary roles to be fulfilled by different partners. Education is also viewed as the joint responsibility of the community with its various official and civil institutions.

The involvement of other governmental bodies of relevance to education, such as the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Manpower, was perceived by the participants as valuable to inform the planning of educational policies and coordinate work, thus avoiding duplication of efforts and wastage of resources. Partnering with the private sector with all its orientations was viewed as having the potential to harmonise educational outcomes with labour market needs and aid the development of a knowledge-based economy. While the involvement of specialised education centres and private education providers could enhance the quality of public education, the corporate private sector could supplement education with the necessary technical (job experience) and material support.

International partners were regarded by the majority of research respondents as a key to any future PPP programme in Oman due to their established quality standards, commitment to social service as reflected in their CSR and their rich expertise in their relevant fields. They are perceived as having the potential to supplement and improve the capacity of local partners through providing investment capital and expertise (Patrinos et al, 2009). However, there were some who voiced reservations concerning the involvement of international partners in a PPP programme in education based on the lack of adaptability of these partners to the local context and their insensitivity to the local culture. Some respondents went to the extent of cautioning against a loss of public control over education, which would pose a threat to national identity. However, another group of participants considered that the involvement of community institutions in a PPP programme could act to

provide equilibrium and guard against such risks, preserving the local culture and national identity. This also offers what Rose (2006, p. 225) terms 'short-route' accountability of schools directly to beneficiaries and the community.

The involvement of the corporate private sector in education was seen by the vast majority of the respondents to emanate from companies' social responsibility towards the community in which they are based. Such involvement is envisaged to serve the investment interests of businesses as well as the interests of the community. However, these CSR contributions seem to be limited in size and scope. Because they are motivated mainly by publicity and marketing goals, they usually result in fragmented and disconnected projects. Added to this, the mismanagement of funds sometimes deters further contributions. Hence, the participants called for the structuring and regulation of CSR funds, as well as formally establishing a PPP culture within the corporate private sector to go beyond voluntary fragmented projects and encompass more comprehensive and strategic ones. According to Draxler (2008), a regulatory-conducive climate encourages the business sector to establish PPPs, through CSR, to achieve long-term added value represented by market development, image promotion, community relations and workforce quality. These PPPs converge the public good and business interests to produce shared value (van Fleet, 2012) and they reflect a recognition of the importance of quality education and the significance of the private sector's investment in future human resources (Mora, 2007).

5.5 What Impedes PPPs in Oman and how can Impediments be Tackled?

PPPs, both existing and future, seem to be hampered by a number of challenges which can be of a political, regulatory, practical, social or ideological nature. Some of these challenges are associated with the private education sector, but the majority pertain to the general private sector as well as the public sector.

5.5.1 Political and regulatory challenges

The political challenges are manifested in the absence of a political decision to introduce a PPP programme in education, the required hierarchical changes PPP implies and the lack of a unified PPP vision at the MOE. Harris (2004, p. 16) identifies ‘high-level political support’ as ‘the single most important element for a successful PPP programme’. PPP experts single out the lack of political will and public support as the greatest obstacles to PPPs around the world (WEF, 2005). Evidence from Ghana demonstrates that PPPs’ sustainability and effectiveness are hindered by the lack of formal arrangements which synchronise PPPs with public sector management (Akyeampong, 2009). The absence of a high-level PPP authority and a clear vision of PPP in education significantly impede any effective and comprehensive PPP programme and result in the wastage of resources and duplication of efforts. At the legislative level, there is a need to adopt a national education PPP policy, one which would prioritise education in the country. Such a policy dictates the need for the establishment of a PPP authority to manage and regulate PPP schemes. According to Johnston and Gudergan (2007, p. 579), the ‘institutionalized status’ of PPP not only legitimises PPP practices but also guarantees effective PPP governance. PPPs initiated by political agenda result in greater public sector commitment and supply of resources (Bidwell, 2005).

The non-committal political climate in relation to PPP is linked to various regulatory impediments. These pertain to both the education system and the corporate private sector. The centralised education system and the subordination of the MOE to the Civil Service system can be viewed as examples of these regulatory impediments. The Civil Service system involves many bureaucratic procedures and considerable red tape regarding teacher recruitment and pay scales, which can impede innovation in PPPs. Regulatory actions, such

as the decentralisation of the public education system, promoting school autonomy and improving the legal and regulatory framework for private education investment can remove certain obstacles to PPP, such as capacity and sustainability issues. According to Patrinos et al (2009), PPP policies should stipulate the role of private providers in national education strategy, streamline private schools' registration processes, allow foreign investment, ensure flexibility in educational programmes and qualifications, avoid restrictive laws on profit making and teacher hiring, and develop quality assurance processes to monitor and evaluate private schools' performance and improve information flow to the public.

Some of the current regulations linked to investment in private education are outdated, ambiguous or inconsistently implemented. Others, concerned with private school infrastructure and ownership, are prohibitive in terms of improving the quality of education. Table 5.1 below summarises some of the regulations concerning the establishment of private schools.

Table 5.1: Some regulation structuring private schools

Area	Regulation
Ownership	Omani citizen or party. Foreign investment is permitted. Non MOE personnel
School size	The school size, class size and number as well as school fees can be
Class size	determined by the school owner, subject to MOE approval. Class size
Tuition fees	needs to be proportionate to number and age of students.
Teacher qualifications	Teachers must be qualified in specific subject areas to teaching which they must be restricted.
Educational programmes	Educational programmes can be determined by the school owner, subject to MOE approval. Teaching the national curriculum in certain school subjects at certain levels (Islamic studies (classes 1-12), Arabic and social studies (classes 1-8)).

Source: MOE (2006b)

Whereas some of these regulations are conducive to the implementation of PPPs- such as the involvement of international investors and flexibility of educational programmes-, others seem detrimental and counterproductive. For example, regulations related to school and class size which do not specify minimum requirements can lead to infrastructure deficiencies. Those concerning teacher qualification can be too restrictive and impede innovation. The non-involvement of private education participants in the development of these regulations aggravates their irrelevance. Thus, the respondents recommended the establishment of a forum in which these regulations could be discussed and modified. Governmental intervention in the aspects of infrastructure, teacher quality and provision of subsidies was also suggested. Patrinos et al (2009) suggest that well-designed PPPs require an enabling regulatory framework which creates the conditions for private providers to operate effectively while maintaining a high-quality education system and protecting the wider public interest.

Pertaining to the corporate private sector, the lack of a structure for managing and regulating the contribution of the private sector to education is a key regulatory challenge. Formally structuring the relationship between the private sector and the public education sector through regulation could promote this relationship from philanthropy to more sustainable partnerships. Evidence from around the world demonstrates that PPPs thrive in countries with strong and stable governance and legal systems, but suffer in developing countries where adequate regulatory mechanisms are missing (Draxler, 2008). The underdevelopment of PPP regulatory frameworks in countries like Pakistan has undermined the effectiveness of many PPP projects (Mahmood, 2013). According to Srivastava (2010), regulating PPP leads to a comprehensive, effective and efficient delivery of education and strengthens the role of the state.

5.5.2 Practical challenges

Educational PPPs in Oman also seem to be hampered by a host of practical challenges, of which the most significant is the private education sector's limited capacity. Its constrained human resources, infrastructure and breadth of provision all contribute to its inability to handle a large-scale demand-based PPP scheme. Although the expansion of private education was a national development priority in the Seventh Five-Year Plan (2006–2010), practical measures to address this priority were insufficient. The goals of expanding private education and forging PPPs in education were more evident at the HE level than the schooling level. Currently the private education sector in Oman is immature and inexperienced, with the exception of a few international providers, and this can seriously harm demand-orientated PPPs. A World Bank (2012) report documents the modesty of private education provision at the secondary level in Oman. Lack of capacity has threatened the sustainability and scalability of some large-scale PPPs, as in the Rajasthan Education Initiative (Pachauri, 2012). The limited breadth of private service provision has also been found to be a major hindrance to the effectiveness of various market-orientated PPPs, as in Sweden and Chile, where voucher schemes were supposed to offer choice to rural and marginalised children (Ron-Balsera & Marphatia, 2012). Nevertheless, although the research respondents from the private sector agreed that the private education sector in Oman has only recently developed, they believed that it is a promising sector, the capacity of which can be improved through adopting a PPP policy and contracting models in which private providers can deliver public education and the government shares the risks in private education investments.

The participants suggested that the capacity of the private education sector could be improved through imposing strict controls on school infrastructure and teacher quality, as

well as governmental intervention through some form of public funding. Although some participants had reservations about the involvement of international partners in PPP schemes due to cultural sensitivities, others viewed it as essential to improve capacity. However, they pointed out the need for selection criteria and emphasised that international partners would need to be experts and sufficiently flexible to adapt to the local context and culture; in relation to this, Hofmeister and Borchert (2004, p. 220) highlight that experienced ‘third parties’ can be involved in the identification and selection of quality private partners.

Lack of public sector capacity to implement and monitor PPPs and aspects of organisational immaturity at the MOE, as manifested in the lack of documentation, performance standards and accountability measures, are also viewed as deterrents to the effective implementation of a PPP programme. Adopting clear performance standards and stringent monitoring and accountability schemes not only leads to improved capacity but also promotes the autonomy and organisational maturity of educational institutions. The monitoring of complex PPPs requires considerable capacity building among public sector personnel or contracting in for expertise (LaRocque, 2008) because the shift from input controls to output-based performance requires a different set of skills (Patrinos et al, 2009). Capacity building is imperative to generate sustainable developmental outcomes (WEF, 2005). School autonomy and teacher professionalism in education are central contributors to high academic achievement in assessments such as PISA (Patrinos, 2010; PISA, 2012²). School–business partnerships are particularly useful in education systems that promote school autonomy, where school leaders are responsible for financial, resource, site and

² <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm> (Accessed 17 February, 2014)

personnel management. These PPPs can free head teachers from the management of business aspects to focus on core educational aspects (Mertkan, 2011). Nevertheless, effective autonomy requires central management structures to help schools ‘develop internal capacity to improve instruction’ (Jaimovich, 2012, p. 278). The case of the FyA school network is illustrative of this central support to build school capacity for autonomous decision making in relation to various day-to-day aspects, such as mobilising resources, developing data analysis capacity and implementing and monitoring a teacher professional development system.

Other operational challenges include lack of financial resources, lack of regular and stringent evaluation and monitoring, the sustainability of PPPs and various language-related curriculum issues. While some of these challenges, such as capacity, evaluation and sustainability, are common in other PPP contexts, others, such as curriculum-related aspects, are specific to the Omani context. Evaluation-related challenges include the absence of evaluation mechanisms, evaluation irregularity and subjectivity. Gonzalez et al (2008) highlight the evaluation limitation inherent in the Omani educational context, where evaluation is not built in as an integral component of the planning and implementation of policy changes. To overcome these challenges, the respondents suggested adopting independent and regular evaluation mechanisms. Lewis and Patrinos (2012) assert that rigorous impact evaluation can support evidence-based policy making.

The voluntary nature of current PPPs in Oman makes them unsustainable financially and otherwise. The lack of long-term financial security and sustainability has terminated some PPPs designed to increase the access of the poor and marginalised to education in Ghana (Akyeampong, 2009) and has constituted an obstacle in a UK (PFI) PPP (Gibson & Davies, 2008). Continuity and evaluation challenges seem to be common in other contexts. In

Pakistan, Mahmood (2013) notes that reform projects initiated by previous leaders or governments are considered 'pet' projects by subsequent administrations, which then discarded them, thus wasting already scarce resources. She suggests enforcing a legislative requirement that bases the termination of any educational programme on independent evaluation rather than political or administrative whims. She perceives that commitment to a clear national PPP policy, the proper handover of projects and the signing of time-bound memoranda of understanding would mitigate the disturbance of personnel change and private partners' withdrawal, thus enhancing PPP sustainability.

According to the participants, the sustainability of PPP can be enhanced through forging partnerships with quality partners. This is especially true in demand-based PPPs. LaRocque (2008) maintains that funding-based PPPs provide greater sustainability because the role of the private sector is embedded in the education policy. The financial sustainability of PPPs requires that they are not built on philanthropy (Pachauri, 2012) because 'Philanthropy from the private sector or government benevolence is not a reliable foundation for a partnership' (Miraftab, 2004, p. 92). Rather, sustainable resources should be a key component of the PPP design. CSR and philanthropic funds need to be integrated into formal PPP policy to attain sustainability (WEF, 2005). The financial fragility of some educational PPPs in Rwanda was found to threaten their sustainability (Akyeampong, 2009). However, the participants in this study viewed temporal dimensions as secondary considerations in sustainability. Rather, sustainability is outcome-bound and determined by the dynamic nature of PPP and the ability to adapt to emerging needs and resources.

The paucity of high-standard curricula in Arabic seems to be specific to Oman and other Arab countries where Arabic is the medium of instruction. This challenge is of particular relevance to demand-oriented PPPs in which the private education sector, mostly

implementing bilingual and international curricula, is contracted to deliver education services. This has significant consequences for teacher hiring procedures, the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction and the coverage of national history and culture in curricula. If such PPPs are adopted, ameliorating these negative ramifications might incur huge costs in curriculum development/translation and teacher-training processes.

5.5.3 Social challenges

Public social opposition and lack of awareness concerning PPPs are potential social challenges, although the respondents dismissed social opposition as a serious challenge. If it occurs, it is mainly driven by lack of understanding of PPPs. This is consistent with other research findings such as those of Gibson and Davies (2008) who found that attitudinal aspects constituted barriers to the success of PPP. Local opposition, public sector culture and the negative image of PPPs were the most notable of these barriers. Similarly, Parente (2012) found that attitudes and school culture significantly hampered the effective implementation of an ICT-based PPP in Brazil.

Social resistance and lack of awareness of PPP can be ameliorated through awareness-raising campaigns. Educating the public and education practitioners about the value of PPP can win the community's support. Involving different educational stakeholders in any PPP reform, from planning to implementation, can have a positive impact on its success. Prior research reveals that the failure to involve key stakeholders, such as teachers, can hamper the ownership and sustainability of large-scale PPPs (Pachauri, 2012). Stakeholder involvement allows a balance between bottom-up and top-down decision-making strategies, as suggested by Anderson (2006). Using either of these approaches exclusively has negative consequences for reform outcomes and impact, as evidenced by Thorne (2011). Besides stakeholder involvement, the participants stressed that PPP reform should be

supported by governmental and community figures. The involvement of key community and political figures is perceived to promote PPP reform and win the support of society. This was the case in prominent PPP programmes in Latin American countries (Allcot & Ortega, 2009), the Jordan Education Initiative (Bannayan, 2012), ICT PPPs in five Asian countries (Lim et al, 2007) and an art education PPP in Oklahoma (Morgan, 2013). Pro-PPP champions can be drawn from political, civil society or private sector levels to promote cultural change and explain and defend the PPP policy (Harris, 2004). In addition, reflecting the national culture and context-specific features in PPP design is essential for success (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004).

In relation to the corporate private sector, PPP is challenged by lack of awareness of its significant role in education, its self-interest and its reluctance to become involved in education. This is particularly true of local private corporations within which the principle of CSR is not well-developed. The demands for short-term tangible gains as well as restricting PPPs to concession areas are two facets of private sector's self-interest which may deter the public sector's interest in PPPs. This may also lead to a conflict of interest between the two sectors, although this is perceived to be minimal in the Omani context. PPPs that are grounded on moral concerns while partially serving business performance (Ginsburg, 2012) to produce long-term 'shared value' (van Fleet, 2012, p. 179) are abundant. Adopting a formal PPP policy can favourably influence the private sector's awareness of PPP and improve its involvement in public education. Any potential conflict of interest can be addressed through agreement concerning the terms of the PPP, its objectives, processes and outcomes.

5.5.4 Ideological challenges

Fear of privatisation and globalisation is perceived as an ideological impediment to PPP in education in Oman. Whilst the privatisation concern is linked to the empowerment of the private sector and reduced governmental control over education, the globalisation perspective considers PPPs with international partners as a threat to national identity and culture. Concerns that PPPs lead to educational liberalisation and internationalisation and a reduced governmental role are common, as highlighted by Verger and Robertson (2012). Nevertheless, spreading awareness of the nature and outcomes of PPP reform (LaRocque, 2008) and involving different educational stakeholders in PPP reform is believed to mitigate such concerns. Whilst internationalisation is beneficial in certain respects, such as those related to technology and science, it is not preferred when it comes to cultural, religious and citizenship aspects. This calls for a careful balance between the international, regional and local dimensions of particular educational issues in PPPs.

5.6 What Features does an Effective PPP Programme have?

The research respondents identified a number of features of an effective PPP programme. These are linked to the design and implementation of the programme, its resources and its partners. Taken together, these features correspond closely to the PPP success elements summarised by the AKF team (2007): vision, intimacy and impact. They also reflect Kanter's (1994, p.100) 'eight I's that create successful we's', (cf. 2.6), which are essentially the key criteria of effective PPPs.

The success factors in terms of design include basing reform on real needs, clarity of objectives, processes and outcomes, careful planning and the early involvement of stakeholders in consultancy and planning. LaRocque (2008) warns that a poorly designed and implemented PPP programme can lead to significant financial and policy risks. Case

studies of two PPPs by van Marrewijk et al (2008) concluded that project design and organisational aspects are key determinants of success and functionality. Loosely defined objectives and inadequate control and evaluation procedures are common pitfalls in PPPs (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). According to Pachauri (2012), the lack of a precise PPP plan inhibited the effectiveness, sustainability and scalability of the Rajasthan Education Initiative.

The participants stressed that the PPP's objectives should serve real needs and fill gaps in the education system. Basing PPP reform on real needs is perceived as a key requirement. Draxler (2008) emphasises that the identification of these needs must be based on need analyses and consultations with end users rather than on the knowledge of PPP initiators. The innovative Brazilian curriculum PPP model, which addressed the short school day and the irrelevance of curricula to the economy, demonstrates that reform effectiveness is highly dependent on the identification of gaps and formulation of specific objectives (Chattopadhyay & Nogueira 2013). This consolidates the participants' suggestion that PPP reform in Oman should predominantly address some of the education system's identified deficits related to the curriculum, such as the strengthening of science, literacy and ICT education and bridging the gap between educational outcomes and the requirements of HE and the workplace. Complementary to needs identification is the stakeholders' ownership of PPP, which enhances understanding of the reform context and stakeholders' participation (Draxler, 2008). The respondents stressed the need for formal PPP agreements with clear goals, processes and outcomes, accessible to all stakeholders and jointly formulated by the partners concerned.

Regular and independent evaluation of PPP programmes, stringent monitoring and sustainability are some of the key desired qualities for the implementation of a PPP

programme. Due to the lack of rigorous evidence on the impact of current PPPs, it is imperative for any PPP programme to be accompanied by a well-designed rigorous evaluation (Patrinos et al, 2009). Sound impact evaluation of PPP helps policymakers to make informed decisions (LaRocque, 2008) and expands international knowledge on success factors and conditions (Patrinos et al, 2009). The success of the Latin American FyA PPP network of schools is mainly linked to their stringent accountability and monitoring procedures (Mora, 2013). Some of the participants suggested that a PPP reform should be preceded by a pilot project the evaluation and outcomes of which would determine reform scalability. This requires evaluation to be an integral component of the reform structure. As already highlighted, sustainability is another feature identified as relating to successful implementation; rather than comprising temporal factors alone, for the research respondents in this study, it comprised a dynamic process dependent on outcomes and responsive to emerging needs.

The resource-related features, identified by the participants, include using local resources to address local needs and consider local culture while benefiting from international expertise. National and international models can be used as a base which is adapted to consider local issues and indicators (AKF Team, 2007), or even better, ‘home-grown’ local models can be nurtured and encouraged (Al-Harr, 1999; Thorne, 2011, p. 174) to meet the needs of specific communities (Lewis & Patrinos, 2012). According to Genevois (2008), transplanted PPP models cannot guarantee success. Rather, PPP models need to take various contextual differences into account. The operation and outcomes of PPPs are defined by the political, legal, social, economic and cultural institutions in which they function (DeStefano & Schuh Moore, 2010) which makes PPP ‘a highly context-dependent phenomenon’ (Chattopadhyay & Nogueira, 2013, p.1). This indicates that in the Omani

context, when international expertise is sought, it may be best obtained from international operators who are already stationed in Oman and who are aware of the country's social, cultural and political features.

Physical and human resources are also vital assets of PPP reform. Capacity building of educational practitioners through training, introducing school autonomy and enforcing accountability mechanisms is essential to attain organisational maturity, which is a prerequisite for any PPP reform. The participants also maintained that a PPP programme in education needs to be non-profit, at least initially, because education is a long-term investment. They acknowledged that profit and outcomes in such PPPs require time. This suggests that in principle making a profit is acceptable as long as it does not compromise quality and has no negative consequences for access to education for all segments of society.

The partner dimension of PPP effectiveness comprises high quality and adaptable partners, streamlined communication channels, relationships of trust and understanding and the inclusion of multiple stakeholders. Effective PPPs require strong leadership. Reciprocity, two-way communication processes and the clear division of roles are other essential governance features. Empirical evidence shows that blurred lines of responsibility between different partners has limited the effectiveness of a UAE PPP programme and subjected school leaders to conflicting visions (Thorne, 2011). The involvement of multiple stakeholders not only guarantees ownership of reform as demonstrated by Pachauri (2012) and Draxler (2008), but also harmonises efforts and uses resources efficiently. Involving the local community is seen to enhance PPPs' strength and sustainability as well as preserve the national culture and identity.

5.7 A PPP Framework for Oman

This research culminates in developing a PPP framework for the Omani educational context at the basic and post-basic education levels. This framework specifies the PPP objectives, approaches, stakeholders and its regulatory and financial requirements. The World Bank (2012) suggests enhancing education quality in the country through addressing three priorities: improving the students' learning outcomes, raising the quality of teaching and improving the relevance of education to HE and the labour market. This begs a focus on curricula, teacher quality and closer collaboration with employers. Hence, a combination of supply-side and demand-side approaches is viewed as essential to alleviate some of the educational problems in Oman. The current education context suggests that supply-side PPPs need to take precedence over demand-side PPPs to establish the capacity and quality assurance systems deemed essential for demand-orientated PPPs. However, both types of reform involve a number of prerequisites related to regulation, funding and partners. These are detailed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: A SUGGESTED PPP FRAMEWORK

It is one of the priorities of the current stage and the approaching next phase, that the education policies, plans and programmes are reviewed and developed to keep pace with the changes taking place in the country and the requirements imposed by the scientific progress and the cultural developments to build a generation armed with awareness, knowledge and the capabilities required for useful work.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman, in his address to the Oman Council, Fifth term, October 2012

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to suggest a framework for an initial PPP model that seeks sustainable outcomes and can serve the education context at the basic and post-basic education levels in the Sultanate of Oman. Because any educational reform should address gaps inherent in the education system, as advised by Chattopadhyay and Nogueira (2013) and Draxler (2008), this PPP framework seeks to ameliorate some of the current challenges identified in the Omani education system. Evaluations of the education system in Oman (Gonzalez et al, 2008; World Bank, 2012) identify improving students' learning outcomes, the quality of teaching and the relevance of education to HE and the labour market as the main priorities of enhancing education quality in the country. The need for these improvement priorities is reflected in the underachievement of students in national and international assessments and concerns over the readiness of school graduates for HE and the labour market. The World Bank (2012, p. 26) report suggests formulating a national strategy for education whereby high standards are introduced and 'a high-level body' is established in which all the relevant ministries as well as the private sector are represented and involved in the planning of education. According to the report, these actions will not only utilise resources optimally

but help to overcome many of the existing challenges of education. This is an explicit call for the involvement of various stakeholders in education and the forming of partnerships to improve educational quality.

The data derived from the interviews and focus group discussions informed the design of this framework. A total of fifteen themes, derived from the data analysis, were compiled and distilled, culminating in the proposed framework. Specifically, the design rests on the identification of the attributes of an effective PPP model and the careful synthesis of the respondents' observations concerning the PPP models discussed and their reflections on their own prior knowledge of other PPP practices. It also draws on the respondents' thoughts and recommendations relating to structural and regulatory changes that would facilitate PPP in Oman, as well as an evaluation of the current legislation relevant to PPP and investment in education. The perceived impediments to PPPs in Oman were factored into the suggested model. Considering these impediments helped to outline a practical PPP framework. However, its implementation requires fundamental hierarchical and regulatory changes, some of which might still present challenges to implementation until a PPP culture is established. The scope and nature of partners in a PPP programme, as envisaged by the participants, also contributed to shaping this framework. The discussion of perceptions, outcomes and future PPPs informed the formulation of the framework's objectives and desired outcomes. In addition to the research input, the framework considered and built on the literature on PPP models and best practice.

The framework benefited from the wide spectrum of expertise of the research participants. Assembling respondents from the public sector, private sector and other sectors related to education in Oman made it possible to gain an overall picture of PPP practices, visions and requirements in the country. The public sector participants comprised officials and

personnel from various planning, curricular, research, private education and human resources departments and involved different management levels from high-level directors to school-level practitioners. The same breadth was also observed in selecting private sector participants, as discussed in Chapter 3. This helped to probe the PPP context in depth and shape the different dimensions of the PPP framework, balancing the concerns and aspirations of public and private sector participants. While the planning, human resources and curricular officials provided informed suggestions on macro policies and broad visions of PPPs in their respective areas, school-level practitioners offered insights concerning actual PPPs, identified the merits and challenges to their implementation and suggested some micro PPP policies.

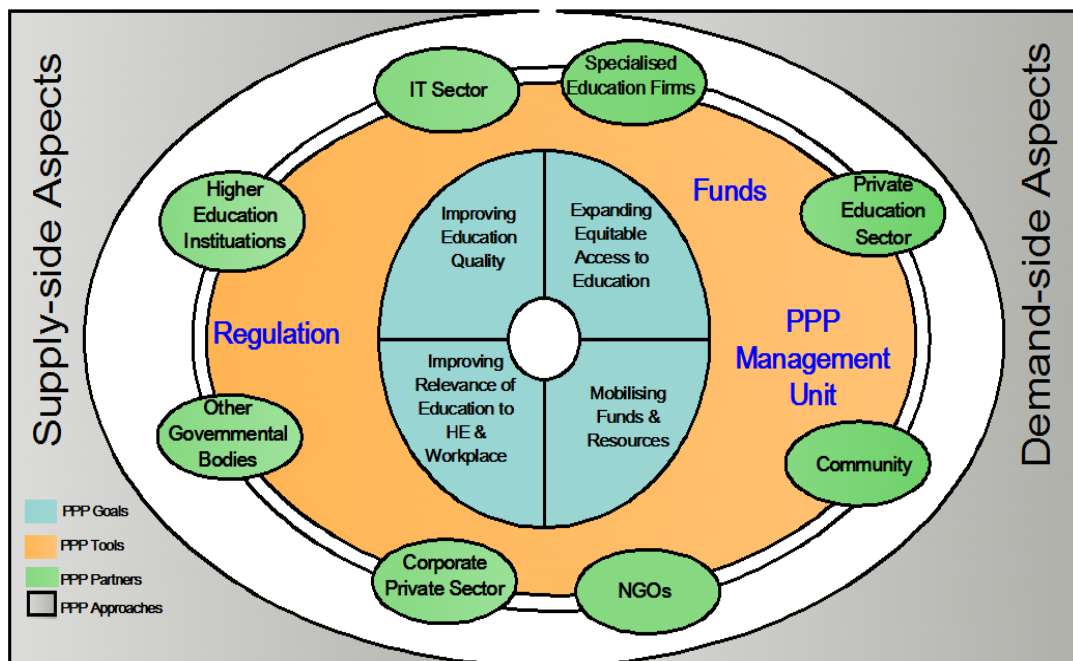
The resulting PPP framework strives to address most of the concerns and suggestions of the respondents and tries to approximate the visions of public and private stakeholders. However, certain proposals, such as completely deregulating the private education sector, have not been considered because they are not consistent with PPP international best practice in which regulation is employed to protect the public interest and assure quality. While this framework is essentially based on the research input and findings, it also builds on the PPP literature and international practice. Aspects such as the suggested PPP regulation, management, approaches and partners are supported with input from the literature.

Three possible frameworks could have been developed based on the research findings: a supply-oriented framework, a demand-oriented framework, or a framework combining supply and demand. The last option was selected because the challenges faced by the education system in Oman require the simultaneous consideration of both supply and demand aspects. Accordingly, the framework addresses aspects such as educational quality,

curricula, teacher training, educational resources and infrastructure. Such a comprehensive framework is essential to achieve change because Oman’s past educational experience has demonstrated that partial and isolated solutions do not work. Only a comprehensive system, in which efforts, resources and directions are synchronised, can guarantee change. Nevertheless, this framework has one limitation: it does not address the costs of the PPP programme. Estimating the implications of PPP for budgets and efficiency in the Omani context requires thorough financial and economic knowledge which is beyond the scope of the study and the expertise available.

The basic structure of the framework incorporates the key pillars of PPP: aims, partners, tools (regulation, a PPP management unit and funding) and PPP approaches, as shown in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Elements of the suggested PPP framework



Source: Author’s research

The main PPP approaches in this framework include procedures on both the supply and demand sides (Section 6.5). These can be outlined as follows:

- Supply-side aspects:
 - Curricula
 - Teacher training
 - Resources
 - Infrastructure
- Demand-side aspects:
 - Voucher schemes
 - Contracting models

6.2 PPP Aims and Objectives

The aims of the suggested framework draw on Latham's (2009) proposed PPPs in education. In particular, it addresses the three priorities of improving school infrastructure and resources, promoting quality in education and improving the relevance of education. Even though Oman has attained universal access to basic education, access to pre-school education is still restricted. Thus, Latham's fourth priority of reaching the excluded is used to address this level. Furthermore, increasing access to quality private education can also be assumed under this priority. Some of the current deficits in the Omani schooling system can be addressed through a targeted and carefully planned PPP framework centred on the following four overarching goals. These goals act as driving forces to shape the suggested PPP framework and identify its structure and the scope of its partners. Hence, some of these goals are tackled through suggesting either PPP policies, approaches or both. Following each goal are its expected outcomes.

- **Improve the quality of (public and private) education and educational outcomes**
 - Empower schools and improve their autonomy through decentralisation and devolving some authority to the school level
 - Attain better student achievement in national and international assessments in the core areas of mathematics, science and reading
 - Train and maintain a high-quality teaching force through introducing focused in-service training and performance incentives
 - Establish the principles of accountability, autonomy and performance standards, which lead to administrative and organisational maturity in the education sector
- **Expanding equitable access to education**
 - Expand access to pre-school education
 - Expand access to quality private education across the country
- **Improve the relevance of education to HE and the labour market**
 - Harmonise educational outcomes with the requirements of HE and the labour market
 - Improve linkages between the public education sector, other public sectors and the private sector for the benefit of education
 - Develop a high-quality school curriculum that is responsive to social and economic demands with a focus on ICT as a catalyst for educational change
 - Prepare autonomous life-long learners who are capable of functioning in the knowledge economy of the 21st century
- **Mobilise funds and resources for education**

- Create an Education Fund to sponsor and finance PPP programmes in education
- Diversify resources for education to attain sustainability

6.3 Partners

There is a consensus amongst the participants that multi-stakeholder PPP is warranted in the Omani education context rather than two-party relationships. However, contractual PPPs are also seen as essential to improve the quality of education. A wide spectrum of partners, whose interests are aligned with the aims of this PPP, can contribute to a future PPP programme in education in Oman. This diversity of partners in PPP in education emanates from a perception that education is a national duty that excludes no one and is dictated by the current economic demands.

The key PPP partners include: the MOE, other governmental agencies, specialist education firms, the private education sector, the private corporate sector, NGOs, HE and the community. Each of these partners pursues different but complementary roles for the benefit of education. While some contribute financially and through the provision of infrastructure, other contributions take the form of expertise and consultancy provision. This wide range of partners draws on Ginsburg's (2012) framework of partnering organisations that includes partners at local, national and international levels as well as public, for-profit private and non-profit organisations. International partners can supplement and develop local capacity due to their established expertise, high quality and enforcement of performance standards. A brief description of each of these partners and their potential roles in PPP in education is given here (for in-depth discussion, see Section 4.4):

- **Other governmental departments:** due to their links with education through day-to-day affairs, future employment or processing clearances for private schools, these governmental bodies need to be more closely involved in education. This involvement can be through consultancy, planning, provision of student internships and setting up a ‘one-stop-shop’ to reduce red tape in granting new educational institutions clearance and licensing.
- **Specialist education firms:** partnership with these providers mainly targets improving the quality of education and practitioners. Consultancy and expertise regarding curricula, evaluation and teacher training as well as implementing relevant programmes are some of the functions these partners can perform.
- **IT sector:** because education for a knowledge economy is identified by the respondents as a priority for education, the role of the IT sector in any PPP programme is prominent. The establishment of IT infrastructure, the development of IT curricular content and teacher training in IT aspects are some of the proposed facets of PPPs with this sector.
- **The private education sector:** this sector offers the public educational services of differentiated quality and demand. The provision of quality international qualifications and access to services where there is public undersupply, such as pre-school and specialised education, are regarded as the key manifestations of this sector’s contributions. A PPP programme can bolster the positive contributions of private schools through contracting and exchange of expertise and at the same time offer support to small private schools through subsidies and infrastructure ventures.

- **HE institutions:** there is a loop of partnership between the MOE and these institutions so that the outputs of each partner are the inputs of the other. This makes it imperative for the two sectors to work collaboratively. The schooling outcomes constitute the intakes of HE institutions and on the other side, teacher graduates are employed by the MOE. This necessitates a dual-direction partnership. These PPPs align the goals of the two sectors (Domina and Ruzik, 2012). HE institutions can be involved in the planning and execution of curricula, student evaluation systems and teacher training. The MOE is also required to assume a role in teacher preparation and initial training. HE institutions can also pursue a research and development role in schools, which constitute research test-beds and innovation centres.
- **NGOs:** because these are an integral part of the community, they play a significant role in socially-oriented educational issues, such as pre-school education and special education. They also address aspects such as cultural exchange and youth programmes.
- **The private corporate sector:** being an indispensable part of the community, this sector has social commitments as well as long-term business interests in supporting education. PPPs with this sector can be of a financial or material nature, or comprise the provision of expertise. Funding some educational programmes, contributing infrastructure and equipment and providing work experience on a limited scale are some of the current facets of this sector's involvement in education. A more formal and structured involvement is required, particularly with regard to financial contributions, curricula development, internships and provision of entrepreneurship opportunities for students.

- **The community:** because any reform primarily targets the wider community, a PPP programme needs to respond to the community's concerns and requirements. Hence, the community is a key partner in this reform. Its involvement in a PPP programme guards against the negative impacts of globalisation and preserves the national identity. It is also seen as securing the collective welfare of society and holding the public sector accountable to the beneficiaries.

These myriad partners help to produce sustained commitment to PPP as well as leveraging diverse and complementary competences. However, the variation in the nature and volume of partners' contributions necessitates a careful demarcation and monitoring of roles to ensure complementarity and the optimal use of resources. A well-structured PPP authority is essential to manage and oversee these roles.

6.4 PPP Tools

To function effectively, the suggested PPP framework needs to be buttressed by a number of regulatory, organisational and financial measures. These include regulation conducive to reform, a management body and sustainable funding, each of which is discussed below.

6.4.1 Regulation and policies

Despite the fact that a number of five-year development plans in Oman have stressed the role of the private sector in education, the practical measures and formal policies aimed at addressing this priority are insufficient. PPPs involve complex arrangements that demand detailed policy design as well as high management capability (LaRocque, 2008). Hence, among the other necessary legal arrangements which PPP presupposes, a number of education-related macro-level and micro-level policies are required to facilitate the introduction of a PPP programme in education in Oman and to avoid the detrimental

consequences of poorly designed contracts. These also set a code of conduct in PPPs (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). The macro-level policies address some broad national-level measures, such as hierarchical restructuring and the enactment of laws. The micro-level policies pertain to regulation and practical procedures at the MOE and school levels. Furthermore, other private education-related policies need to be introduced to promote investment in this sector.

Macro-level policies

The macro-level policies cover a range of laws and strategies that legislate and facilitate the adoption of a PPP scheme in education. These are mainly linked to the PPP design stage. One of the structural changes considered in this research has already taken place with the establishment of a supreme education council by royal decree (48/2012) on 10 September 2012. Hence, one cornerstone of PPP reform is in place. Other broad structural and regulatory arrangements required are:

- endorsing a high-level political decision to introduce a PPP programme in education;
- developing a long-term education strategy that combines different types and levels of education in the country and defines the role of private providers in this strategy (Patrinos et al, 2009);
- establishing a PPP authority to manage and regulate PPP programmes;
- removing this PPP authority from the remit of Civil Services law and granting it financial and administrative autonomy;
- introducing a decentralised administrative system in the educational governorates in Oman;

- enacting some laws to structure and regulate CSR and the private corporate sector's involvement in education;
- establishing an education fund, managed by the PPP authority, through which the private and civil society sectors can contribute to education.

Micro-level policies

Micro-level policies serve the PPP implementation and evaluation stages. They target the creation of an educational and school environment supportive of a PPP programme. The key amendment areas are:

- implementing some changes to the public education law and the private education investment law to accommodate the required structural and regulatory updates;
- gradually building a decentralised education system within which the governorates enjoy some educational independence;
- introducing the principles of performance standards, accountability and quality assurance in the educational field to enhance its organisational capacity and quality;
- introducing the principles of school performance-based incentives and sanctions following the introduction of effective performance monitoring and accountability mechanisms (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004; LaRocque, 2008);
- introducing flexible teacher licensing procedures to ensure teacher quality;
- introducing a revised teacher evaluation system which capitalises on and rewards quality performance. Both monetary and non-monetary performance incentives are effective in improving teacher efficiency and job satisfaction (Mora, 2007);
- creating a quality assurance system, similar to the UK's system of 'league tables', which monitors and evaluates education providers' performance and provides the

public with information on their performance and services. The regional PPP experience of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDE) in Dubai of introducing a school inspection system is instructive here. It not only maintains standards but enables parents to make informed school choice³;

- introducing binding regulation to promote teachers' and practitioners' stability in (private) schools to avoid high turn-over and improve educational outcomes;
- empowering schools through granting them some autonomy in relation to finance and teacher hiring and dismissal following the introduction of monitoring and accountability schemes;
- establishing school boards which co-manage schools and hold them accountable.

Private education investment policies

The private education sector at the schooling level requires some specific policies and incentives to encourage its productivity and improve its quality. The current policies seem unsatisfactory in terms of promoting investment in this sector. These policies and incentives address aspects such as levied income taxes for 10 years, some teacher training, provision of technical and administrative support, provision of some textbooks and teaching materials and granting some land plots (in certain areas), most of which is consistent with typical government subsidies identified by Levin (1999). Nevertheless, these education providers require more structured support based on clear policies and regulations. The major financial policies that warrant a degree of governmental intervention include:

- abolishing income tax;

³ <http://www.khda.gov.ae/en/dsib/reports.aspx> (Accessed 20 October, 2014).

- granting land plots based on clear and specific quality criteria;
- enabling access to capital and soft loans;
- provision of partial public funding related to school buildings and teachers' salaries based on quality standards;
- subsidising electricity, internet and water rates;
- levying registration and clearance fees.

The administrative-oriented policies and regulations required can be summarised as follows:

- establishing a private schools association;
- provision of town planning and relevant infrastructural and technological requirements to attract investments in private education;
- enforcing some controls on teacher quality, recruitment procedures and turn-over;
- specifying controls on students' enrolment in and exit from private schools;
- regulating private school fees;
- linking any public funding of private schools to quality-related criteria. Evidence from India reveals that when supply-side financing is not structured on performance incentives, it does not yield positive results (Kingdon, 2007);
- creating a level playing field or 'competitive neutrality' for private education providers through setting equal work conditions for public and private schools, for example in relation to the length of the school day, teacher teaching load and type of extra-curricular activities. This promotes competition between public and private schools in service delivery and attracts quality teachers. A level playing field can improve educational quality and meet demand (McIntosh, 2007, p. 70).

6.4.2 PPP management authority

Because introducing a PPP culture in education in Oman is a drastic change that requires a shift from the conventional ‘purely governmental services’ perspective, it demands the establishment of an authority (discussed briefly in Section 4.6.1) to manage, regulate and coordinate PPP programmes in the country. The research respondents strongly recommend this and stress that this authority needs to be established at a high level and should assemble an array of education stakeholders. The rationale for this authority and its proposed structure and functions are discussed below.

Rationale

The literature reveals that most countries which have successfully developed significant PPP programmes have central units that manage PPPs (Harris, 2004). Added to this, when PPP is coordinated by a dedicated body, its efforts are more effective and better synchronised with public education policies (Bannayan et al, 2012; LaRocque, 2008; Mahmood, 2013; Patrinos et al, 2009). While the debate around ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ change strategies is well-documented, there is little empirical evidence to support either, which has given rise to approaches building on both strategies (Anderson, 2006). Analysing Abu Dhabi’s PPP programme, Thorne (2011) perceives that the central coordination of PPP reform could have ensured a uniform approach to reform and produced better results. This coordination at a central level does not undermine autonomy at the school level, as evident in the FyA programme in Latin America (Allcot & Ortega, 2009). An independent, oversight authority not only improves technical and social governance, but also ensures appropriate risk assessment (Johnston & Gudergan, 2007).

In Oman, a centralised PPP body is essential, especially in the initial stages of reform, because the education sector institutions, both regional authorities and schools, lack

capacity and autonomy. Many PPPs around the world started with relatively centralised control, most of which was devolved to local and school levels at later stages once capacity had been built (Bannayan et al, 2012; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006). The comprehensive and large-scale PPP programme this research proposes, with its focus on both supply and demand aspects, requires a management unit which plays a significant role. While the central PPP unit is initially expected to provide blueprints, set out national strategies, supervise delivery and manage PPP resources, these functions are later reduced to minimal ‘top-down’ strategies, regular monitoring and evaluation, with implementation more decentralised and context-specific, so that different PPP structures can emerge based on needs. This ensures a balance between maintaining capacity and resources and ensuring partners’ integration and their ownership of PPP programmes.

Structure and governance

The research respondents maintain that a PPP-in-education authority should assemble an array of stakeholders and partners from different public, private and civil sectors, as well as integrating the different types and levels of education to harmonise educational outcomes with community and job market requirements. Thus, they suggest that its status and level should go beyond the MOE level because it requires a degree of regulatory power and authority to establish a PPP culture and manage the significant resources that a PPP scheme demands. This assumes high administrative and financial capacity on the part of its personnel because PPPs involve a wide range of complex functions, such as regulating and designing projects, accrediting and registering schools, mobilising, managing and auditing funds and implementing quality assurance functions (Patrinos et al, 2009). Participants also stress that this authority needs to be incorporated within the overall educational establishment to abide by national educational policies. All of these factors make the

recently established Education Council the body best suited to accommodating a PPP management unit.

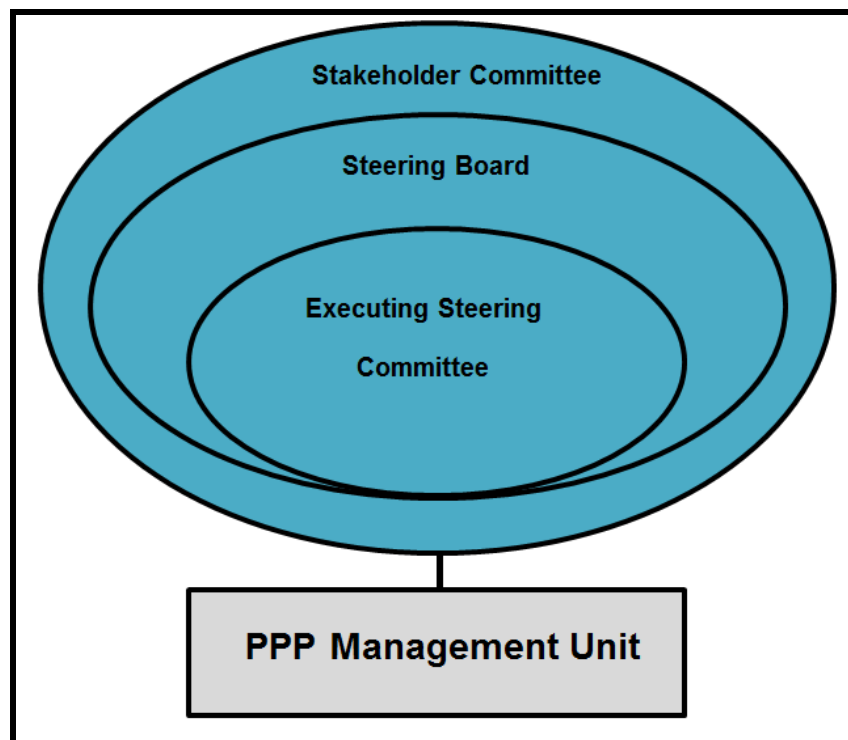
The participants also suggest that this authority should be autonomous and involve a range of stakeholders. According to Flinders (2005), this protects the public interest while harnessing specialisation and diluting the profit motive. The autonomy of such a PPP body, the participants believe, enhances its productivity and effectiveness. This not only ensures objectivity and transparency in its monitoring and evaluation of education providers, whether public or private, but also in monitoring the contributions of the private business sector towards achieving their developmental objectives. An autonomous PPP authority can address threats to accountability usually associated with PPPs which do not have a well-defined administrative hierarchy (Acar & Roberston, 2004).

A number of educational stakeholders need to be represented in this PPP authority. The public education sector, other governmental bodies, HE institutions, the private education sector, the corporate private sector, NGOs and the community are key partners in any PPP programme. Hence, each of these is a vital constituent of this PPP authority. This diversity guarantees that the various educational, social and economic perspectives will be factored into the PPP reform, resulting in a unified overall education strategy.

The structure of the PPP unit can draw on governance in existing multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as the JEI (Bannayan et al, 2012; McKinsey & Company, 2005), the Sindh Education Foundation (Mahmood, 2013) and the Public Interest Companies (PIC) experience in the UK. Figure 6.2 below provides a basic governance structure. Nevertheless, it should also learn from the challenges encountered in these PPPs, such as

lack of staffing and resources and the absence of research and development components, which restricted their impact.

Figure 6.2: Governance structure of the PPP management authority



Source: Adapted from McKinsey & Company (2005, p. 38)

Functions

The participants stress that before embarking on any PPP reform, the authority with oversight needs to conduct needs analyses to determine the requirements of HE, the labour market and society in terms of educational outcomes. It is also necessary to subject the education system to an objective and stringent evaluation to detect its deficits and gaps. This helps to set the PPP reform's priorities and goals. It is essential to determine where and how PPPs are better suited than traditional public provision to implementing educational measures (Patrinos et al, 2009). In its endeavour to address needs, the PPP body should seek regional and international expertise to avoid any pitfalls and drawbacks

that other models have exhibited. Case studies, good practice guidelines and lessons learned from experiences in other countries can serve this learning purpose (Patrinos et al, 2009).

The authority offers a split between the purchaser and provider roles within the educational body, as recommended by LaRocque (2008) and Patrinos et al (2009). This entails a separation of the regulatory and policy functions from service delivery, which ensures the transparency and neutrality of 'education purchase functions'. The stakeholder governance framework also increases the accountability of service providers directly to local communities and service users (Flinders, 2005). The participants suggest that even though autonomous, the authority should abide by and submit to the overall education policy in the country to achieve its national goals. Thus, it not only observes the overall legal structure in the country but also serves as a central PPP coordination and steering mechanism (Flinders, 2005).

The authority also acts as a platform for communication and coordination between the government, private sector and other community sectors, representing a 'go-between' organisation as Mahmood (2013, p. 84) terms it. The participants expect it to regulate the relationship between the public education sector and the private sector, setting a clear demarcation of roles and creating an environment conducive to investment in education. This can include creating a 'one-stop-shop' in which all clearance and licensing procedures for establishing private education institutions can be processed, thus reducing bureaucracy and red tape and improving the investment climate for private education in the country. The PPP management unit also acts as a vehicle to transfer capacity from the private sector to the public sector. According to Patrinos et al (2009), extending the remit of PPP units to include the various functions of regulation, technical assistance, quality control and PPP

promotion, rather than limiting them to a single function, makes it ideal for these units to operate effectively.

6.4.3 Funds

PPP reform requires significant financial resources and funds. In the Omani context, these can be secured through a number of sources:

- **Public funding:** this includes an annual public budget as well as any other contributions from other governmental bodies and departments in the country.
- **CSR:** the research revealed a consensus among the participants that the private corporate sector's CSR is one of its key means of involvement in education. It represents commitment and care to the local community in which these private corporates are stationed. Hence, it needs to be structured and encouraged in PPP reform to attain solidarity in the pursuit of improving education. In this sense, it is considered a major constituent of PPP resources and forms the basis for structuring PPP. Thus, CSR funds need to be integrated into formal PPP policy to attain sustainability as recommended by the World Economic Forum (2005).
- **Education fund:** this fund is established at a formal national level where the private corporate sector, HE institutions, NGOs and the community can contribute to education. It welcomes financial, in-kind and expertise contributions from these parties. This centralised fund is used to address national and large-scale PPP initiatives and educational priorities as defined by education experts. This guarantees the optimal and effective use of resources. It also maintains some equity between schools and governorates in the distribution of these funds.

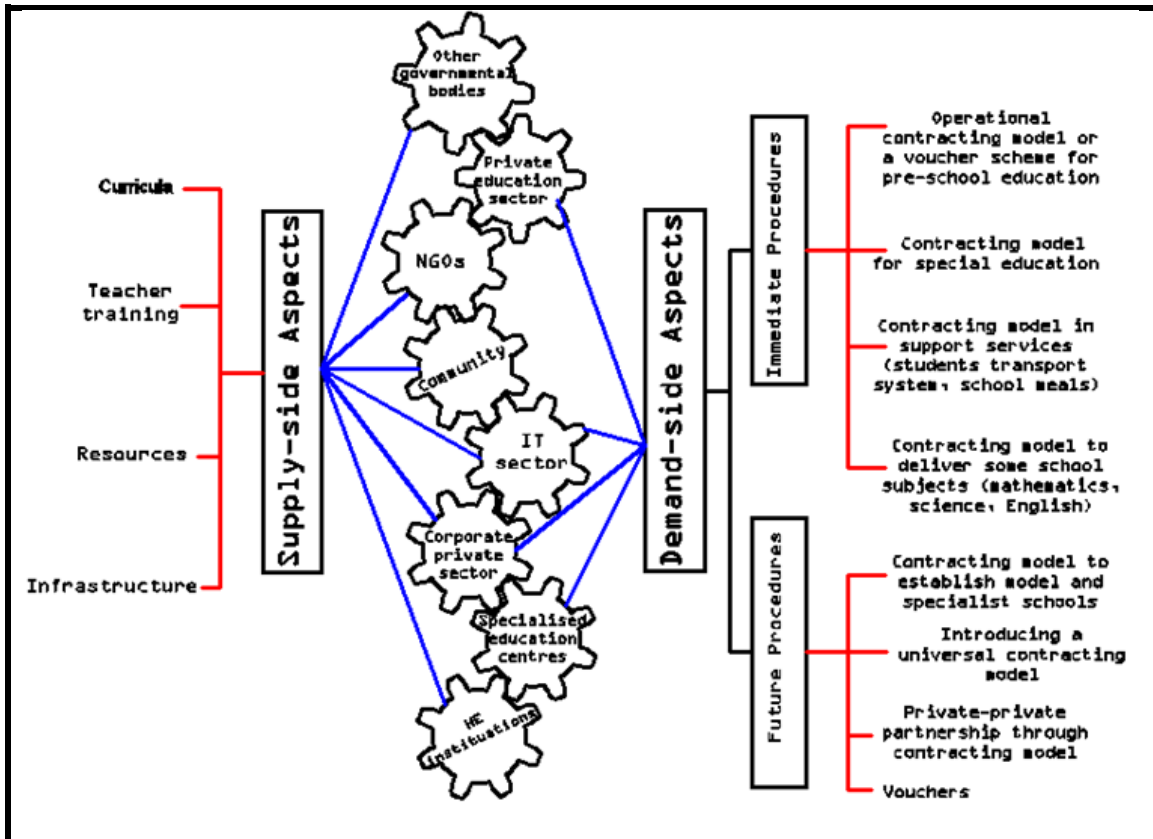
- **Sustainable for-profit projects:** establishing shareholding educational companies (public interest companies), in which the public and investors can invest and contribute to education, is one such type of project. Other suggestions include investing part of the educational fund or the MOE pension fund in profit-yielding investments. Self-sustaining efforts may also include offering paid consultancy services and PPP project implementation at the national and regional levels (Bannayan et al, 2012).

6.5 PPP Approaches

An effective and balanced PPP model targets both the supply side and the demand side. It also balances short-term and long-term goals and embeds them in an overall PPP concept to guarantee addressing current priorities effectively as well as ensuring a sustainable PPP design that addresses future demands (Hofmeister & Borchert, 2004). According to Kingdon (2007), addressing both supply- and demand-side aspects and rigorously evaluating the impact of both approaches aids in selecting effective and equitable PPP policies. The supply side addresses inputs such as curricula, teacher quality, resources and infrastructure, whereas the demand side is more concerned with outputs and giving students choices. Hence, this framework builds on the benefits of the MSPE and contractual PPP approaches with a focus on supply-side aspects and multiple partners in the former and formal contractual arrangements related to both supply- and demand-side aspects in the latter. Furthermore, this model adopts Smith and Wohlstetter's (2006) flat typology of PPPs (cf. 2.2.4), which does not assume the superiority of one PPP type over another. Rather, the context's specific needs dictate the nature of the PPPs adopted.

Based on the data and findings of this research, as well as the state and requirements of the current educational context in Oman, the supply-side reform requires precedence over large-scale demand-side reform in the initial stages of any PPP reform in Oman to build capacity in both the public and private education sectors and to promote organisational maturity. In particular, the inputs of curricula, teacher quality, educational programmes and resources are in dire need of strengthening and reconsideration. Once the educational service quality is standardised and capacity is built, the reform can embark on large-scale demand-oriented PPPs. Hence, this research suggests a multi-layered PPP framework that gradually responds to different educational challenges and demands. Therefore, it tackles the most pressing priorities before approaching a more comprehensive reform of service provision. In its endeavour to do so, it offers a range of short-term and long-term PPP approaches on both the supply and demand sides. Figure 6.3 summarises the key PPP supply and demand aspects and the partners involved in implementation.

Figure 6.3: Who may realise PPP goals and how



Source: Author's research

6.5.1 Supply-side PPP

The supply-side aspects target the areas of curricula, teacher quality, resources and infrastructure. Addressing these educational venues is expected to improve the quality of teaching and learning leading to better student outcomes. Supply-oriented PPPs also promote the coordination of educational outcomes with academic, economic and social expectations, as well as mobilising financial resources for education. Whilst the PPP authority sets and monitors the national supply-targeted programmes to guarantee a uniform reform approach, other localised groups can be developed to address local needs. Different governorates can develop local 'learning coalitions' or learning trusts, which involve participating partners from the education authorities, individual schools, other governmental bodies, HE institutions, the private sector and other community sectors.

These coalitions or trusts should have reference to the central PPP management unit regarding main policies and standardised PPP programmes, but essentially work at the local level to serve the needs of individual schools and promote collaboration between the constituent parts of society. The experiences of the FyA PPP schools in Latin America and the Learning Trusts in the UK demonstrate the potential for this kind of coordination.

Curricula

The curriculum is a major facet of educational reform. Curricular input formulates the knowledge and skills to be developed and significantly shapes the character of the student. It later determines the employability of schooling outcomes. Curricular-related PPPs can include:

- introducing the standardisation of curricula to ensure that they are of international quality and standards and guide future reform;
- introducing a high-standard core curriculum to protect the public interest as suggested by Levin (1999). This can be supplemented by individual providers to induce creativity and competition. This can lead to the development of specialist schools in area such as the sciences, technology, sports, etc.;
- adjusting school subjects, skills and activities to consider the requirements of the labour market;
- involving the private sector and/or other governmental departments in introducing and funding job market-related school subjects into public and private schools. A recent PPP reform in Brazil represents an innovative curricular delivery model within which technical tracks are integrated into academic subjects and supported by the corporate private sector (Chattopadhyay & Nogueira, 2013);

- introducing and implementing extra-curricular activities in schools through the private sector in areas of relevance and interest to school children;
- providing work experience to school students in private sector institutions and other governmental departments to orientate them to workplace requirements;
- strengthening the ICT aspects in the curriculum to prepare lifelong learners for the global knowledge economy (Bhanji, 2012; Lim et al, 2007);
- ensuring that science-related public and private institutions participate in developing interactive and practical science curricula to overcome students' underachievement in scientific subjects as revealed by international assessments such as TIMMS (the same applies to mathematics). For example, a PPP designed to overcome curricular deficiencies in arts education in Oklahoma, the US, provided equitable access to art education for all students and yielded a positive impact (Morgan, 2013).

Teacher quality

The quality of the teacher is a key supply area to be addressed in any reform. The research suggests that a PPP programme can enhance teacher quality through the following measures:

- the exchange of resources (human and educational) and expertise between public and private schools through a 'twin school' programme involving partnerships between public and private schools. However, these programmes need to have clarity of purpose and a shared understanding of intended outcomes to produce results (Anderson, 2006). Another suggestion pertains to forming 'learning clusters' within which public and private schools in a particular area work collaboratively,

sharing resources and expertise. Teacher secondment between public and private schools can also be introduced here;

- the participation of specialised private sector corporates (voluntarily or through procurement) in teacher training and professional development in relevant curricular areas. For example, corporates specialised in ICT, geographical information systems, petrochemicals and English language teaching can contribute to school teachers' professional development in the subjects of ICT, geography, the sciences and English respectively;
- the involvement of HE institutions in the planning of education and research and development efforts through conducting school and classroom-based educational research to address educational gaps and needs. Such institutions can also support and supervise research by educational practitioners and build research practitioner networks;
- PPPs with HE institutions to prepare teachers to international standards and equip them to deal with international curricula to cater to the needs of the private education sector and raise the standard of education in public schools.

Resources and infrastructure

The area of resources and infrastructure constitutes a wealth of opportunities for supply-side PPP and encompasses the majority of PPP partners. While some of the suggested PPPs address the education sector in general and its resources and infrastructure, others intersect with these but are specific to private education sector. The following aspects highlight supply-side PPP approaches in each of these three areas.

- **Resources for education**

- Financial resources for education must be mobilised.
- Sustainable sources of funding for education need to be established.
- Specialised ICT firms can be commissioned to establish e-learning infrastructure in schools. The lack of appropriate infrastructure compromised the effectiveness of an ICT-based PPP in Brazil (Parente, 2012).
- The private business sector can be encouraged to set up school libraries to promote reading among students, thus tackling reading problems associated with students' achievement as indicated by international reading assessments such as PIRLS 2011 and documented by independent evaluations (MOE, 2006a).
- The private sector can be encouraged to set up high-quality and high-tech science laboratories in public and private schools to overcome students' underachievement in scientific subjects as indicated by international assessment studies such as TIMMS 2007 and 2011.
- An 'adopt-a-school' policy can be introduced whereby private sector corporates adopt and financially support either public or private schools or particular amenities/rooms within the school, such as libraries, learning resource centres, sports facilities, or laboratories. These can also function as community facilities serving both communities and schools.

To be effective, these cash and in-kind contributions need to meet schools' needs and tackle core educational problems in relation to learning outcomes. Although a managing authority with a clear structure, long-term planning and sustainable funding is essential in achieving such aims, direct liaison with individual schools guarantees targeting the relevant teaching and learning processes (Green, 2005).

- **Infrastructure**

- A consortium of educational infrastructure partners, including design and building firms, maintenance firms and financial firms, can be formed to undertake school infrastructure and maintenance. The experiences of New Zealand and the UK are instructive in this regard.
- The private corporate sector can contribute to school infrastructure through the provision of buildings and equipment.
- HE institutions can establish affiliated schools providing quality services.

- **Private education resources**

- The government can establish quality private school buildings, especially in new developments and industrial centres, to be leased to the private education sector to establish private schools.
- The government can provide partial funding to develop private schools' infrastructure to attain a minimum standard of quality.
- The government can subsidise teachers' salaries in private schools based on specific criteria to promote teacher quality.
- The government can create some form of quality-improvement fund accessible to private schools through competition and based on quality mechanisms (World Bank, 2012).
- The government can provide land for private education projects based on clear criteria.
- The government can create incentives for private education providers to operate in underserved areas.

- The government can set a particular quota for admission of children from low-income families to private schools against which public support is given (World Bank, 2012).

6.5.2 Demand-side PPP

Demand-oriented PPPs are concerned with educational outputs. In particular, they target areas such as access to education, educational choice and improving students' outcomes. Because this type of PPP requires high educational capacity on the part of both the public and private education sectors, in the Omani context it follows supply-targeted PPPs. In this context, demand-oriented models, such as those involving vouchers and contractual arrangements, can be of short-term or long-term types depending on the requirements of the educational context. The gradual introduction and constant evaluation of these models is essential to determine their effectiveness and scalability.

Immediate PPPs

In the initial stage, demand-side PPPs should address certain vulnerable areas in the Omani educational system. The aspects of pre-school education, special education and offering quality educational programmes can first be addressed before introducing large-scale demand-oriented schemes such as vouchers and operational contracting models. Some of the facets of demand-oriented PPP reform in its initial implementation and which tackle immediate educational demands include the following aspects:

- The private education sector can be funded and given the responsibility of rolling out a national pre-schooling programme to provide access to all students either through opening classes in public schools or absorbing greater numbers of students in private schools through vouchers. Contractual arrangements operate best in the

context of most regions in Oman due to the limited breadth of private education provision in some regions, which does not support a wide-scale voucher scheme.

- Through contractual arrangements, the private education sector can take part in the delivery of certain school subjects (science and English) and professional development for teachers in public schools. A similar PPP is regionally implemented where the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) has outsourced the public schools to private management to raise standards. This PPP model involved the delivery of science and mathematics by the private partners (Thorne, 2011).
- The contracting model can be piloted at the support service level wherein the private sector handles matters such as the students' transport system, school meals and maintenance services.
- Special education programmes can be commissioned from specialist local or international providers.

Future PPPs

At a later stage, demand-side PPP approaches can be introduced and piloted through introducing voucher schemes and operational contracting models. However, a number of parameters, such as equity, quality and information provision, control the introduction of such PPPs. These programmes require a system that provides information on the quality and services of the different public and private education providers. Such a system is perceived to promote service quality in public and private schools. However, it must also be preceded by the introduction of stringent and fair monitoring, including evaluation and accountability mechanisms. A certain level of organisational maturity and performance standards is deemed a prerequisite for the implementation of such models. Capacity building at both the monitoring and implementation levels is another prerequisite of

demand-oriented PPPs. High-capacity and qualified public sector personnel are required to implement and monitor such programmes.

These types of PPPs must also prioritise equity between students. They have to be designed carefully to avoid adverse effects on equity, such as creating some magnet schools and others that are abandoned. These PPP models should strive to give students equal opportunities. This can be achieved through designing a weighted formula for public funding and incorporating a student aid system for students from low-income families.

Vouchers and scholarships

Despite the relative success of this model at the HE level in Oman, it does not seem viable at the school level in the current circumstances. Some of its documented benefits are that it constitutes a means of supporting private education, it is more cost-effective than public education, it promotes competition among education providers and it offers quality education to the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the screening procedures associated with certain voucher programmes, although appropriate for HE, have adverse consequences for equity in basic education. This model requires stringent and clear parameters and criteria for awarding vouchers or scholarships to ascertain equity.

A number of factors might impede the effectiveness of this model in Oman in the current educational circumstances. These include the limited capacity and breadth of the private education sector, the inconclusive results concerning the superiority of private education over public education in Oman (Al-Shaili, 2007) and the lack of cost-effectiveness of this programme under the current regulations. Although the research did not reveal a consensus concerning the application of vouchers (scale, value) at the current stage due to capacity issues, this model can be considered at a later stage of the PPP reform once the capacity of

the private education sector is established. It can address areas such as specialist education (arts, sciences, IT) as well as targeting disadvantaged children.

The operational contracting model

This model can serve the long-term goals of improving education quality, meeting social demand, creating specialist schools and extending access to education where public provision is not extensive (pre-school education, technical education). This model is versatile because it can involve the comprehensive takeover of public schools or provide partial solutions to some problems in the public sector. There are abundant examples of contracting PPPs in the region aimed at increasing the efficiency of public education and raising standards. The independent schools in Qatar and Al Ghadd schools in the UAE are autonomous public schools operated by private providers of education. Oman can learn from such experience in a similar future PPP scheme. This research concludes that this model offers choices between across-the-board implementation, or limiting it to the post-basic education level or the teaching of certain school subjects, such as science and English (cf. 4.3.3). Drawing on the small-scale experience of three private schools in Oman that are partially publicly-funded by bodies other than the MOE and operated by international providers, this model seems to be viable in the Omani context. Hence, this experience warrants evaluation to consider scaling it up to benefit public education. These experiences of the private operation of public schools which have endured the passage of time (some being approximately 40 years old) are organic examples of PPPs that relate to the Omani educational context and culture. They can form the nucleus of a future demand-based PPP programme. The following are some examples of proposed long-term demand-oriented PPPs:

- The leading private education schools in the country or the specialist business sector can be contracted to run a number of public schools which can serve as either model schools or specialist schools. The UK experience of studio schools and university technical colleges (UTCs), which offer technical and vocational education alongside academic education in partnership with employers (Department of Education, 2013), is instructive here.
- Post-basic education can be contracted out to private providers offering diversified programmes alongside a public option to meet differentiated demand.
- Through the contracting model, leading private schools can operate and manage smaller private schools through a franchising policy to enhance service quality and to benefit from economies of scale. There is some empirical evidence that franchised private schools outperform both public and private independent schools in terms of student outcomes (Elacqua et al, 2009).

At the current stage in Oman, the operational contracting model seems to be challenged by a number of obstacles, the most prominent of which are the private sector's capacity, lack of school autonomy, clear monitoring and accountability schemes and the lack of community awareness concerning the contracting culture. However, the contracting model in support services, such as the students' transport system, sports facilities and school meals, can be introduced immediately. Once the supply-side PPPs discussed above tackle these impeding factors, the operational contracting model can be introduced in Oman on a large scale.

6.6 Summary, Final Comments and Suggestions for Further Research

This research mainly explores PPPs in the Omani educational context at the basic and post-basic education levels. In doing so, it highlights different stakeholders' perspectives of PPP, identifies existing and future PPPs, singles out potential PPP partners, identifies PPP challenges in the Omani context and recommends ways of ameliorating them, and presents the features of an effective PPP programme as envisaged by the research participants. Ultimately, this research input, informed by the PPP literature, feeds into suggesting a PPP framework for the Omani educational context.

Based on the goals of this research and enlightened by previous PPP research (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2), this research has adopted a case-study approach utilising multiple strategies (detailed in Chapter 3) to investigate the different dimensions of PPPs in Oman's education system (discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Drawing on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that PPPs exist in the Omani education system at the basic and post-basic education levels. However, these are mainly voluntary and informal and do not necessarily address educational priorities. These PPPs also seem to be hampered by a number of challenges, the main ones being political, regulatory, social and practical. These can easily be mitigated by adopting a formal PPP policy and structuring the collaboration between public education and the private sector.

To pursue PPPs in education in Oman as postulated by previous development plans in the country and recommended by observers (Gonzalez et al, 2008; World Bank, 2012), the structure should primarily address persistent education problems, such as the quality of outcomes and preparing students for a knowledge economy, as well as those that dictate collaboration with the private sector. This requires actions at the macro level. Based on the results of this research, a multi-stakeholder partnership coupled with contracting

arrangements is the approach best suited to attaining such laudable and long-term aims. This research has identified a number of partners who can contribute to a multi-stakeholder approach to PPP.

The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, supported by PPP best practice, have culminated in a comprehensive PPP framework for the Omani education system. It addresses the rationale for a PPP programme at the schooling level in the country, outlines its key objectives, identifies its different facets and approaches and explores its regulatory, structural and financial requirements. This research highlights a number of implications and recommendations for future research.

In terms of implications, the investigation of the MOE's PPP experience and its numerous dimensions has highlighted a number of meaningful lessons to improve the local and regional experience of PPPs. To this effect:

- The government should promote education as 'a priority investment sector' to attract foreign investment and expertise (Patrinos et al, 2009, p. 44). This also places educational PPPs at the centre of political and social attention, leading to more support and resources.
- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries should share PPP experiences. A number of countries in the region, such as Qatar and the UAE, have embarked on large-scale PPP projects. Sharing the success and pitfalls of such PPPs can inform future projects in the area. The Arab Education Office can take on this responsibility through its publications and forums or through creating a repository of PPPs identifying impact, success features and challenges.

- The private sector corporates can be encouraged to become involved in educational PPPs through some levied or reduced income taxes based on their contribution to education.
- The MOE needs to undertake systematic evaluation of the impact of existing PPPs to determine their sustainability. Some current PPPs divert scarce resources to unnecessary activities while some pressing needs are neglected.

Ultimately, this case study has accomplished its principal goal of designing a PPP framework that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Omani education context. The findings of this research are expected to serve as a useful instance for the development of a PPP policy and model for the education system in Oman. However, these findings are not generalisable to other contexts due to the research limitations discussed in Chapter 3. Future research can investigate similar PPP contexts in the region and compare them to these research findings to determine aspects of divergence and convergence. In particular, it can address and investigate the regulatory frameworks in neighbouring countries such as Qatar and the UAE, where large-scale PPPs are in progress, and identify PPP-conducive regulatory features.

Apart from the exploration of PPP policy, further research can investigate and evaluate the impact of specific PPPs in the Omani context, such as PPPs at the pre-school level in light of absence of universal public pre-school provision. In addition, it can explore the nature and depth of current PPPs between public schools and HE institutions in Oman and how they can be improved. The literature reveals some positive impacts of such PPPs (Domina & Ruzek, 2012). Other research can study the viability and scalability of the operational contracting experience of three international schools in Oman (The Sultan, Al-Sahwa and the Royal Guards Schools), which are partially publicly funded by governmental bodies

other than the MOE and operated by international providers. Furthermore, research can tap the perceptions of students, parents and the wider community, who are the recipients of reform and of PPP. Another aspect is to highlight the politicians' perspective of PPPs and their implications for educational budgets and efficiency. The findings of such research can inform any future governmental PPP policy. Thus, this case study can meaningfully serve as a stepping stone to other research on the practices, modes and impact of PPPs in line with the international thrust towards PPPs in education.

CHAPTER 7: POLICY BRIEFING: THE WAY FORWARD

7.1 Introduction

This research on PPPs in the Omani education context has been motivated by a series of concerns which can be linked to quality, access, equity and finance issues. The fundamental concern of the quality of education in the country has been a key driver. National and international students' assessments document that Omani students perform well below international benchmarks in the core areas of mathematics, science and literacy. There are also concerns about the readiness of school graduates to join HE and the labour market as there is a lack of relevance between school curricula and the requirements and skills of HE and the workplace. Some of these quality-related concerns have in fact access and equity dimensions. While there is universal access to basic and post-basic education in Oman, public supply of pre-school education is restricted. This might point towards consequences on students' achievement outcomes in later education stages. Added to this, the limited public supply of technical and vocational education is closely linked to the decreased quality of educational outcomes and lack of relevance to workplace requirements. Furthermore, the provision of private education is not evenly distributed across governorates or educational levels with modesty at the secondary level. This undersupply in these three crucial areas creates access and equity issues. The long-term finance of education is a further driver for this research. The government faces an increasing demand on education due to high demographic growth; yet at the same time resources are declining which can threaten the sustainability of the current level of public expenditure on education on the long run.

This research foresees a huge potential in PPPs in alleviating these four concerns of quality, access, equity and finance. The research results as well as the impact of many PPP initiatives and models around the world all point towards a promising role for PPP in education.

This chapter presents a briefing summary of the suggested PPP framework. A national PPP scheme in Oman has to address the aspects of regulation and practical PPP strategies targeting each of the four concerns discussed above.

7.2 PPP Conducive Regulation

To function effectively, the suggested PPP framework needs to be buttressed by a number of regulatory measures at both the macro and micro levels. Other regulations pertaining to the functioning of private schools are also required.

7.2.1 Macro-level policies

The macro-level policies cover a range of laws and strategies that legislate and facilitate the adoption of a PPP scheme in education. These are mainly linked to the PPP design stage. One of the structural changes considered in this research has already taken place with the establishment of a supreme education council by royal decree (48/2012) on 10 September 2012. Hence, one cornerstone of PPP reform is in place. Other broad structural and regulatory arrangements required are:

- endorsing a high-level political decision to introduce PPP in education;
- developing a long-term education strategy that combines different types and levels of education in the country and defines the role of private providers;

- establishing a PPP authority to manage and regulate PPP programmes and removing it from the remit of Civil Services law to grant it financial and administrative autonomy;
- introducing a decentralised administrative system in the educational governorates;
- enacting some laws to structure and regulate CSR and the private corporate sector's involvement in education;
- establishing an education fund, managed by the PPP authority, through which the private and civil society sectors can contribute to education.

7.2.2 Micro-level policies

Micro-level policies serve the PPP implementation and evaluation stages. They target the creation of an educational and school environment supportive of a PPP programme. The key amendment areas are:

- implementing changes to the public education law and the private education investment law to accommodate the required structural and regulatory updates;
- building a decentralised education system within which the governorates enjoy some educational independence;
- introducing principles of performance standards, accountability and quality assurance in the educational field to enhance its organisational capacity and quality;
- introducing principles of school performance-based incentives and sanctions following the introduction of monitoring and accountability mechanisms;
- introducing flexible teacher licensing procedures to ensure teacher quality;
- introducing a revised teacher evaluation system which capitalises on and rewards quality performance;

- creating a quality assurance system, similar to the UK's system of 'league tables', which monitors and evaluates education providers' performance and provides the public with information on their performance and services. The regional PPP experience of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDE) in Dubai of introducing a school inspection system is instructive here. It not only maintains standards but enables parents to make informed school choice⁴;
- introducing binding regulation to promote teachers' and practitioners' stability in (private) schools to avoid high turn-over and improve educational outcomes;
- empowering schools through granting them some autonomy in relation to finance and teacher hiring and dismissal following the introduction of monitoring and accountability schemes;
- establishing school boards which co-manage schools and hold them accountable.

7.2.3 Private education investment policies

The private education sector at the schooling level requires some specific policies and incentives to encourage its productivity and improve its quality. The current policies seem unsatisfactory in terms of promoting investment in this sector. These education providers require more structured support based on clear policies and regulations. The major financial policies that warrant a degree of governmental intervention include:

- abolishing income tax;
- granting land plots based on clear and specific quality criteria;
- enabling access to capital and soft loans;

⁴ <http://www.khda.gov.ae/en/dsib/reports.aspx> (Accessed 20 October, 2014).

- provision of partial public funding related to school buildings and teachers' salaries based on quality standards;
- subsidising electricity, internet and water rates;
- levying registration and clearance fees.

The administrative-oriented regulations required can be summarised as follows:

- establishing a private schools' association;
- enforcing some controls on teacher quality, recruitment procedures and turn-over;
- specifying controls on students' enrolment in and exit from private schools;
- regulating private school fees;
- linking any public funding of private schools to quality-related criteria;
- creating a level playing field for private education providers through setting equal work conditions for public and private schools.

7.3 PPP Approaches and Strategies

An effective and balanced PPP model targets both the inputs and outputs of education. It also balances short-term and long-term goals and embeds them in an overall PPP concept to guarantee addressing current priorities effectively as well as ensuring a sustainable PPP design that addresses future demands. The suggested PPP framework prioritises a focus on the four educational concerns in the Omani context: quality, access and equity and finance. This framework suggests strategies aimed at tackling each of these challenges.

7.3.1 Quality

The quality aspect includes PPP measures and strategies addressing inputs such as curricula, teacher training, and educational programmes to raise educational outcomes.

Educational programmes

PPPs have a great potential in improving educational outcomes through well-structured and thoroughly planned contracting models at the levels of school management or operation.

- Through contractual arrangements, the private education sector can take part in the delivery of certain school subjects (science and English) and professional development for teachers in public schools. A similar PPP is regionally implemented where the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) has outsourced the public schools to private management to raise standards. This PPP model involved the delivery of science and mathematics by the private partners (Thorne, 2011).
- The leading local or international private education providers or the specialist business sector can be contracted to run a number of public schools which can serve as either model schools or specialist schools specialising in areas such as sciences, arts, IT and technical aspects. The UK experience of studio schools and university technical colleges (UTCs), which offer technical and vocational education alongside academic education in partnership with employers, is instructive here.
- Post-basic education can be contracted out to private providers offering diversified programmes alongside a public option to meet differentiated demand.
- Through the contracting model, leading private schools can operate and manage smaller private schools through a franchising policy to enhance service quality and to benefit from economies of scale.

Curricula

The curriculum is a major facet of educational reform. Curricular input formulates the knowledge and skills to be developed and significantly shapes the character of the student.

It later determines the employability of schooling outcomes. Curricular-related PPPs can include:

- introducing the standardisation of curricula to ensure that they are of international quality and standard;
- introducing a high-standard core curriculum to protect the public interest. This can be supplemented by individual providers to induce creativity and competition. This can lead to the development of specialist schools in area such as the sciences, technology, sports, etc.;
- adjusting school subjects, skills and activities to consider workplace requirements;
- involving the private sector and/or other governmental departments in introducing and funding job market-related school subjects into public and private schools;
- introducing and implementing extra-curricular activities in schools through the private sector in areas of relevance and interest to school children;
- providing work experience to school students in private sector institutions and other governmental departments to orientate them to workplace skills and requirements;
- strengthening the ICT aspects in the curriculum to prepare lifelong learners for the global knowledge economy;
- ensuring that science-related public and private institutions participate in developing interactive and practical science curricula to overcome students' underachievement in scientific subjects as revealed by international assessments such as TIMSS (the same applies to mathematics).

Teacher quality

The quality of the teacher is a key educational input to be addressed in any reform. A PPP programme can enhance teacher quality through the following measures:

- exchange of resources (human and educational) and expertise between public and private schools through a ‘twin school’ programme involving partnerships between public and private schools. Another suggestion pertains to forming ‘learning clusters’ within which public and private schools in a particular area work collaboratively, sharing resources and expertise. Teacher secondment between public and private schools can also be introduced here;
- participation of specialised private sector corporates (voluntarily or through procurement) in teacher training and professional development in relevant curricular areas. For example, corporates specialised in ICT, petrochemicals and English language teaching can contribute to school teachers’ professional development in the subjects of ICT, the sciences and English respectively;
- involvement of HE institutions in the planning of education and research and development efforts through conducting school and classroom-based research to address educational needs. Such institutions can also support and supervise research by educational practitioners and build research practitioner networks;
- PPPs with HE institutions to prepare teachers to international standards and equip them to deal with international curricula to cater to the needs of the private education sector and raise the standard of education in public schools.

7.3.2 Access and equity

Access and equity concerns are best served by outputs-oriented PPPs. These target areas such as access to education and educational choice. In this context, demand-oriented models, such as those involving vouchers and contractual arrangements, can be introduced.

PPPs in areas undersupplied by the public sector

In the initial stage, PPPs should address certain vulnerable areas in the Omani educational system. The aspects of pre-school education, special education and technical education are a priority. Some of the facets of such PPPs include the following aspects:

- The private education sector can be funded and given the responsibility of rolling out a national pre-schooling programme to provide access to all students either through opening classes in public schools or absorbing greater numbers of students in private schools through vouchers. Contractual arrangements operate best in the context of most regions in Oman due to the limited breadth of private education provision in some regions, which does not support a wide-scale voucher scheme.
- Special education programmes can be commissioned from specialist local or international providers.
- Voucher schemes or contracting models can be introduced to address areas such as specialist education (arts, sciences, IT).
- The management and operation of some public schools across the country can be outsourced to private operators to provide an equitable access to quality private education to all students. The principles of cost effectiveness and risk-sharing of such models incentivise the private sector to operate in underserved areas.

7.3.3 Finance

The framework approaches the finance priority through some broad PPP strategies as well as some focused practical measures. It mainly aims at mobilising funds for the education system and creating some new financing modes. These are detailed below.

Funds

A number of broad PPP strategies can be proposed in this regard:

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** the research concluded that the private corporate sector's CSR is one of its key means of involvement in education. Hence, it needs to be structured and encouraged in PPP reform to attain solidarity in the pursuit of improving education. Thus, CSR funds need to be integrated into formal PPP policy to attain sustainability.
- **Education fund:** this fund can be established at a formal national level where the private corporate sector, HE institutions, NGOs and the community can contribute to education. It welcomes financial, in-kind and expertise contributions from these parties. This centralised fund is used to address national and large-scale PPP initiatives and educational priorities as defined by education experts.
- **Sustainable for-profit projects:** establishing shareholding educational companies (public interest companies), in which the public and investors can invest and contribute to education, is one such type of project. Other suggestions include investing part of the educational fund or the MOE pension fund in profit-yielding investments. Self-sustaining efforts may also include offering paid consultancy services and PPP project implementation at the national and regional levels.

Resources and infrastructure

The area of resources and infrastructure constitutes a wealth of opportunities for supply-side PPP and encompasses the majority of PPP partners. While some of the suggested PPPs address the education sector in general and its resources and infrastructure, others intersect with these but are specific to private education sector. The following aspects highlight PPP approaches in each of these three areas.

- **Resources for education**

- Sustainable sources of funding for education need to be established.
- Specialised ICT firms can be commissioned to establish e-learning infrastructure in schools.
- The private business sector can be encouraged to set up school libraries to promote reading among students, thus tackling reading problems associated with students' achievement.
- The private sector can be encouraged to set up high-quality and high-tech science laboratories in public and private schools to overcome students' underachievement in scientific subjects.
- An 'adopt-a-school' policy can be introduced whereby private sector corporates adopt and financially support either public or private schools or particular amenities/rooms within the school, such as libraries, learning resource centres, sports facilities, or laboratories. These can also function as community facilities serving both communities and schools.
- The contracting model can be piloted at the support service level wherein the private sector handles matters such as the students' transport system, school meals and maintenance services.

To be effective, these cash and in-kind contributions need to meet schools' needs and tackle core educational problems in relation to learning outcomes.

- **Infrastructure**

- A consortium of educational infrastructure partners, including design and building firms, maintenance firms and financial firms, can be formed to undertake school infrastructure and maintenance. The experiences of New Zealand and the UK are instructive in this regard.
- The private corporate sector can contribute to school infrastructure through the provision of buildings and equipment.
- HE institutions can establish affiliated schools providing quality services.

- **Private education resources** – the government can:

- establish quality private school buildings, especially in new developments and industrial centres, to be leased to the private education sector.
- provide partial funding to develop private schools' infrastructure to attain a minimum standard of quality.
- subsidise teachers' salaries in private schools based on specific criteria to promote teacher quality.
- create some form of quality-improvement fund accessible to private schools through competition and based on quality mechanisms.
- provide land for private education projects based on clear criteria.
- create incentives for private education providers to operate in underserved areas.
- set a particular quota for admission of children from low-income families to private schools against which public support is given.

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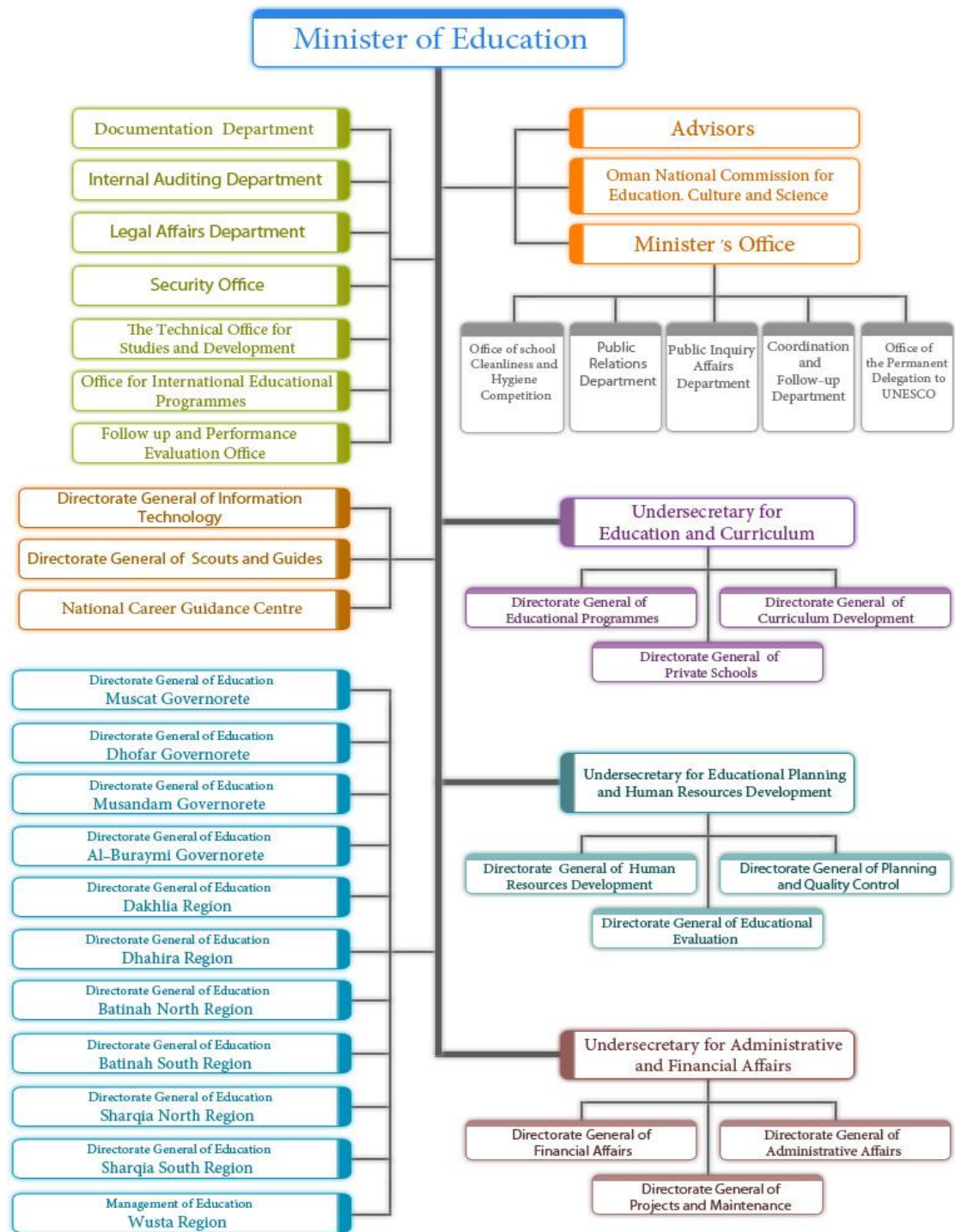
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Appendix A: Ministry of Education organisational structure

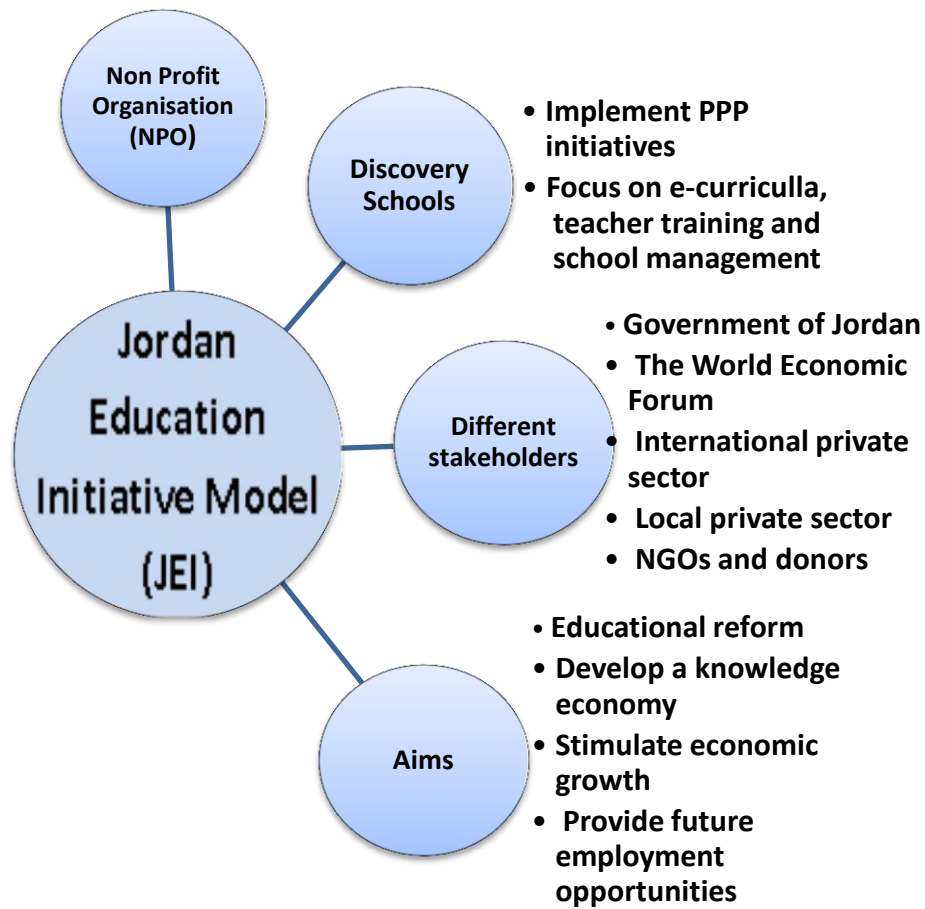


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Source: www.moe.gov.om (Accessed 30 November, 2012)

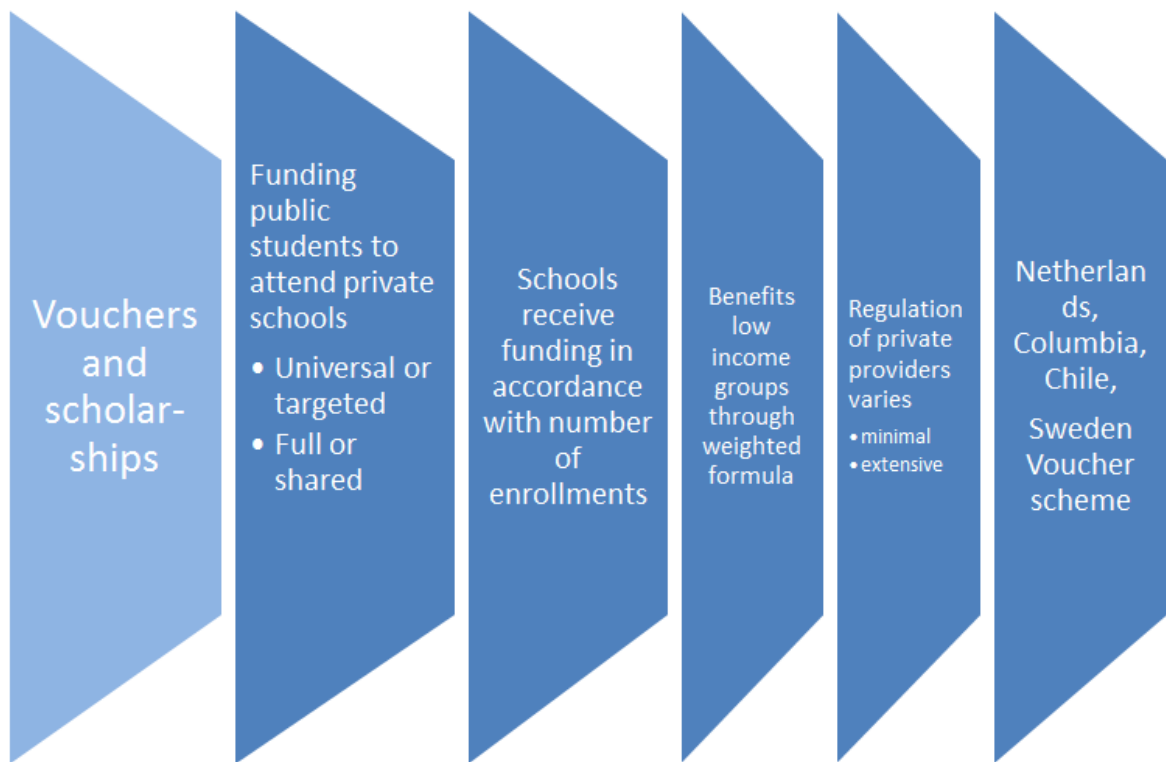
Appendix B: PPP models discussed during interviews and focus groups

Jordan Education Initiative (JEI)



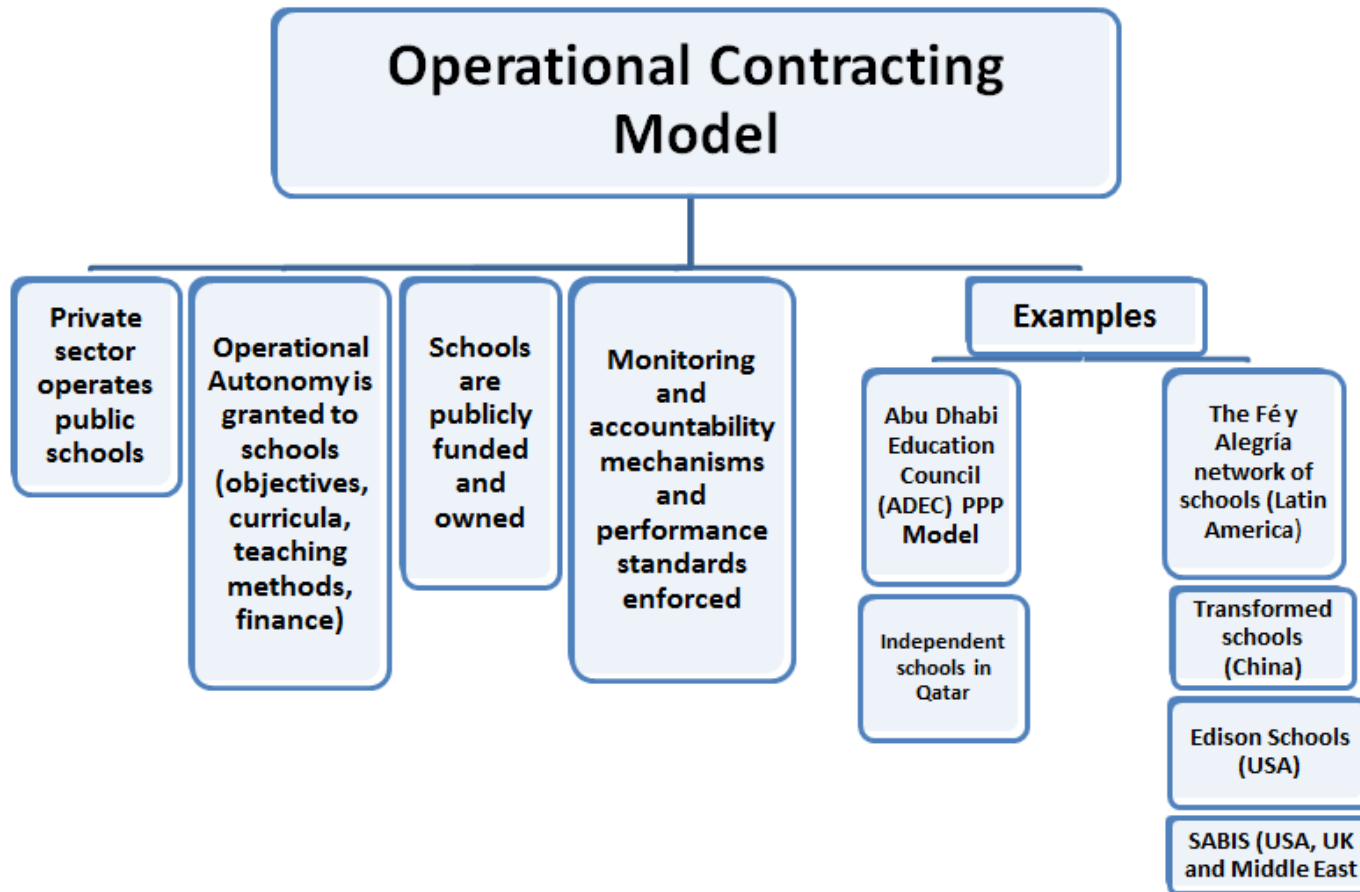
Source: Own compilation based on the literature

Vouchers and Scholarships



Source: Own compilation based on the literature

Operational Contracting Model



Source: Own compilation based on the literature

Appendix C: Interview schedule



Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Interview Protocol

(Private Sector)

1. What is your understanding of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)?

2. Do you know about any Public-Private Partnership programmes in other countries? What type of Public-Private Partnership programmes would you be interested in and would personally encourage?

3. In the Sixth five-year plan 2001-2005 a major objective of expanding private education was stated as a national policy priority, how did the Ministry of Education address this goal?
 - How far, do you feel, was this reflected in private primary and secondary education?
 - How did this objective serve to advance Public-Private Partnerships in education?

4. Are there any public-private partnership initiatives that your department/company/school is involved in? What are the specific projects that have been implemented in this area?
 - What goals did the initiatives seek to achieve?
 - What other goals should have been integrated into the PPP programmes?
 - What is the nature of collaboration between partners?
 - What benefits did each partner gain from the partnership?

5. What specific Public-Private Partnership programmes/initiatives (if any or those you know about) have been implemented to address education quality issues?
 - What are the specific goals of this initiative?
 - What goals have been achieved and which goals remain significant challenges?
 - Are there any evaluation mechanisms to measure the progress in achieving the planned goals?

6. How feasible is it to implement education output-oriented/instructional PPP programmes in Oman (Jordan Education Initiative (JEI Model), vouchers, independent schools- privately operated and publicly funded, etc)? What forms would be most applicable to the Omani educational context? And why)

7. What are the most significant impediments to the adoption of Public-Private Partnership programme to enhance the educational outcomes?

- Strength of the private sector
- Conflicts of interests
- Regulatory framework
- Political and social opposition
- Monitoring private provision
- Protecting the public interest
- Sustainability of programmes
- Evaluation of programmes

8. How can these challenges be overcome and what strategies need to be adopted?

9. What are the characteristics of effective Public-private Partnerships?

(Two-way system, trust, organisational maturity, mutual objectives, agreement over structure and processes, sustainability, etc.)



Newcastle University
School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Interview Protocol
(Public Sector)

1. What is your understanding of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)?
2. Do you know about any Public-Private Partnership programmes in other countries? What type of Public-Private Partnership programmes would you be interested in and would personally encourage?
3. Who are the existing and/or potential partners in education in Oman?
 - national and international companies,
 - ICT world companies,
 - local private providers/small providers.
4. In the Sixth five-year plan 2001-2005 a major objective of expanding private education was stated as a national policy priority, how did the Ministry of Education address this goal?
 - How far, do you feel, was this reflected in primary and secondary education?
 - How did this objective serve to advance Public-Private Partnerships in education?
5. What are the major public-private partnership initiatives that the ministry is involved in? What are the specific projects that have been implemented in this area?
 - What goals did the initiatives seek to achieve?
 - What other goals should have been integrated into PPP programmes?
 - What is the nature of collaboration between partners?
 - What benefits did each partner gain from the partnership?
6. What specific PPP programmes/initiatives (if any) have been implemented to address education quality issues?
 - What are the specific goals of this initiative?
 - What goals have been achieved and which goals remain significant challenges?
 - Are there any evaluation mechanisms to measure the progress in achieving the planned goals?
7. How feasible is it to implement education output-oriented/instructional PPP programmes in Oman (Jordan Education Initiative (JEI Model), vouchers, independent schools- privately operated

and publicly funded, etc)? What forms would be most applicable to the Omani education context? And why?

8. What are the most significant impediments to the adoption of Public-Private Partnership programme to enhance the educational outcomes?

- Strength of the private sector
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- Regulatory framework
- Political and social opposition
- Monitoring private provision
- Protecting the public interest
- Sustainability of programmes
- Evaluation of programmes

9. How can these challenges be overcome and what strategies need to be adopted?

10. What are the characteristics of effective Public-Private Partnerships?

(Two-way system, trust, organisational maturity, mutual objectives, agreement over structure and processes, sustainability, etc.)

Appendix D: An example of data analysis tables

Interviewee Code	Background Information	Theme: Perceptions about PPP	Quotations	Researcher Notes/Thoughts
GSB8/2/2012	Female, National Career Guidance Centre	<p>The partnership means a lot to me maybe because I was among the first people who tried to make the connection between the ministry of education and the private sector whether we talk about knowing their needs from our graduates or working with them in a number of projects where the students get the benefit of what is available in the private sector like institutions</p> <p>So that's what it means to me. It is like connecting the education community with the private institutes or the private partnership, like we work together for the benefit of the students.</p>	<p>connecting the education community with the private institutes ... we work together for the benefit of the students.</p>	PPP to benefit the students.
OLG29/02/2012	Female, UNICEF representative	it is really an approach that mixes together different stakeholders to bring about a desired result or outcome whether in education or any other developmental outcome. The concept of private-public partnerships is imbedded in an ocean of shared	an approach that mixes together different stakeholders to bring about a desired result or	Brings together different education stakeholders (multi-stakeholders) who work together to achieve common outcomes.

responsibility in terms of ...by the governmental partners, by other partners non-governmental, civil society, organizations private corporation even at the community level. It has different modes of implementation, but it definitely involves shared financial responsibility, as well. One of the key important elements is the financial responsibility among different stakeholders.

outcome ...

The concept of private-public partnerships is imbedded in an ocean of shared responsibility...

GMNT30/01/2012	Female, Human Resources Development	Public private partnership to me, it would involve the government working with the private sector in many different ways to enhance the overall efficiency and raise standards at the ministry of education in Oman. As I see it, there are many different ways that public private partnership could work here far more effectively in Oman than what is actually happening.		PPP can raise the overall efficiency of MoE
OSR28/02/2012	Researcher at State Council	الشراكة التربوية تعني عدة أمور على خلاف أيضا ما سبق في مخطط البحث لديك. الشراكة التربوية قد تكون شراكة لمجمل أطراف العملية التربوية يعني بأنها شراكة في المؤسسة التعليمية بما فيها من مسئولين ومعلمين وطلاب أيضا وموجهين ومشرفين تربويين بالإضافة إلى المجتمع أيضا وما يتضمنه من البيت والأسرة. هنالك أيضا شراكة تربوية أخرى بين القطاع الحكومي والقطاع الخاص وهذا الذي أتوقع بأنك تقومين بالعمل عليه، وهذا هو مفهوم الشراكة على حد علمي	شراكة في المؤسسة التعليمية بما فيها من مسئولين ومعلمين وطلاب أيضا وموجهين ومشرفين تربويين بالإضافة إلى المجتمع أيضا وما يتضمنه من البيت والأسرة	Multi-stakeholder partnership
ORS29/02/2012	Services Committee at OCCI	يجب أن تكون هناك شراكة قوية ، لأن لا القطاع الخاص يستطيع أن يتحمل مسؤولية بمفرده ولا القطاع الحكومي، لأن هناك شريحة كبيرة من المتعلمين فيجب	يجب أن تكون هناك شراكة قوية ، لأن لا القطاع الخاص يستطيع	Education as a joint responsibility between public

		أن تكون المساهمة موجودة من جانب القطاع الخاص لاستيعاب هذه الشريحة وخاصة الذين يستطيعون تحمل نفقات الدراسة ويجب على القطاع الحكومي أن يدعم القطاع الخاص ليتجاوز هذه المرحلة مثلا توفير أراضي مناسبة لإقامة مشاريعهم و تناسب مواقع تواجد هذه المدارس،	أن يتحمل مسؤولية بمفرده ولا القطاع الحكومي	and private sectors
GAR31/01/2012	Private Schools dep. Official(licensing)	مفهومي للشراكة هو تحقيق نفس الاهداف المرسومة والمرجوة من القطاعين بجهد مشترك بحيث يتم العمل لتحقيق هذه الاهداف بصورة مشتركة ، فالشراكة الحقيقية يجب ان تكون تحقيق نفس الغرض ولكن بشراكة حقيقية بين الجانبين. شراكة مجتمعية أو شراكة تعليمية بحيث يتم تبادل الخبرات بين المدارس الخاصة وتفعيل لكل اوجه الشراكة الممكنة تعليميا واجتماعيا وثقافيا برنامج بعيد في مدرسة ومدرسة اخري لا تعلم به في الجهة المقابلة، احيانا نري بعض البرامج المطبقة والمستفاد منها في جهة مثلا مدارس حكومية و لا تعلم بها المدارس الخاصة وبالعكس ، الشراكة الحقيقية بأن ندمج جميع هذه الفئات وكأنها تعمل في محور واحد ولكنها بطرق مختلفة لتحقيق نفس الهدف.	شراكة تعليمية بحيث يتم تبادل الخبرات بين المدارس الخاصة وتفعيل لكل اوجه الشراكة الممكنة تعليميا واجتماعيا وثقافيا	Joint effort from both sectors to achieve joint objectives. PPP includes partnership with the community in educational, cultural and social aspects. Real PPP denotes everybody working towards the same end but through taking different complementary roles.

Appendix E: The MOE directorates, departments and sections participating in the research

Department	Section
Directorate General of Curriculum Development	-Science Curriculum Development Department - Math Curriculum Development Department
Directorate General of Human Resources Development	- Educational Supervision Department - Training Department
Directorate General of Private Schools	- Licensing Department - Supervision Section - International Schools Programmes Section - Global Schools Section
The Technical Office for Studies and Development	
National Career Guidance Centre	
The International Educational Programmes Office	
Directorate General of Planning and Quality Assurance	
Directorate General of Information Technology	- The Public-Private Cooperation Committee (The Initiatives Support Committee)
The Minister's Consultant's Office	

Appendix F: Participant briefing

English version

Participation Information Sheet: Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Education at the Basic Education and Post-basic Levels in the Sultanate of Oman: towards a Suggested Framework



The project investigates the Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) practices in the education system at the basic education and post-basic levels in the Sultanate of Oman. It is concerned to outline the nature and extent of these PPP initiatives in the education system. The research has five main objectives:

Objective 1: Eliciting perceptions. The research seeks to highlight how PPP is perceived by the different stakeholders; namely administrators, private providers of education, supervisors and school principals. Their awareness of the concept and its practices are tapped.

Objective 2: Identification of existing PPP patterns in the education system in Oman. Through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis, the research identifies the type of PPP initiatives that exist in the Omani educational context at the basic education and post-basic levels.

Objective 3: Identifying potential private players who have the capacity to partner with the government in implementing the suggested PPP model.

Objective 4: Identification of PPP challenges. The research investigates the regulatory, social, political, capacity and other impediments to the effective implementation of current PPP initiatives and a future PPP model in the Omani education system. Mechanisms and procedures for tackling these challenges are explored.

Objective 5: Identification of features of effective PPP programmes. Drawing on the participants' input from interviews and focus groups as well as from the literature review, the research highlights the characteristics of an effective PPP programme and later factors these into the suggested PPP model.

Objective 6: Suggesting a PPP model. The project culminates into suggesting a coherent and comprehensive PPP model that is responsive to the Omani cultural and educational needs. A number of PPP models that are implemented in the area and around the world are discussed with the participants. Based on these discussions, the literature and documentary analysis, the new model will be developed.



Newcastle
University

ملخص موضوع الدراسة (للمشاركين):
الشراكة بين القطاع الحكومي و القطاع الخاص في مجال التعليم
في مرحلتي التعليم الأساسي و التعليم ما بعد الأساسي في
سلطنة عمان: نحو نموذج مقترح

تبحث الدراسة أوجه و تطبيقات الشراكة التربوية بين القطاع الحكومي و القطاع الخاص في النظام التعليمي في مرحلتي التعليم الأساسي و ما بعد الأساسي في سلطنة عمان. و تهتم الدراسة بتحديد طبيعة و مدى مبادرات هذه الشراكة في النظام التعليمي بالسلطنة. و يمكن إجمال أهداف البحث في ست نقاط رئيسية:

الهدف الأول: إستطلاع آراء و معتقدات بعض الفئات العاملة في النظام التعليمي بالسلطنة حول الشراكة التربوية بين القطاعين الحكومي و الخاص، حيث تسلط الدراسة الضوء على وجهات نظر مختلف الشرائح العاملة في النظام التعليمي من إداريين و مشرفين تربويين و مديري مدارس و العاملين في القطاع التعليمي الخاص حول مفهوم الشراكة التربوية بين القطاعين الحكومي و الخاص و مجالات تطبيقها.

الهدف الثاني: تحديد النماذج القائمة للشراكة التربوية في النظام التعليمي في سلطنة عمان، و يهدف البحث تحديدا إلى إبراز أنواع مبادرات و تطبيقات الشراكة التربوية القائمة في مرحلتي التعليم الأساسي و ما بعد الأساسي في النظام التعليمي و ذلك من خلال المقابلات و الحلقات النقاشية و تحليل الوثائق و دراسة بعض الحالات.

الهدف الثالث: تحديد الجهات المحتملة من القطاع الخاص و التي تمتلك المقدرة و المقومات اللازمة للشراكة مع القطاع الحكومي في مجال التعليم و التي يمكن أن تخدم تطبيق نموذج الشراكة التربوية المقترح.

الهدف الرابع: تحديد معوقات الشراكة التربوية بين القطاعين الحكومي و الخاص، حيث يدرس البحث المعوقات و التحديات سواء كانت قانونية أو إجتماعية أو سياسية أو تحديات تتعلق بالكفاءة و التي تحد من فعالية تطبيق برامج الشراكة التربوية القائمة أو أي نموذج مستقبلي مقترح للشراكة في النظام التعليمي في السلطنة.

الهدف الخامس: تحديد مواصفات برنامج الشراكة الفعال للسياق التعليمي في عمان من خلال ما طرح خلال الحلقات النقاشية و المقابلات و الإسترشاد بما تم مناقشته في الإطار النظري للدراسة، و بناء تلك الخصائص في برنامج الشراكة المقترح.

الهدف السادس: إقتراح نموذج للشراكة التربوية بين القطاعين الحكومي و الخاص، حيث أن محصلة مشروع البحث هو تقديم نموذج شامل و رصين للشراكة التربوية بما يتلائم مع الخصائص و الإحتياجات التربوية و الثقافية للنظام التعليمي في سلطنة عمان. و سيتم مناقشة بعض نماذج الشراكة التربوية المطبقة في المنطقة و الدول الأخرى مع المشاركين في الدراسة و الإستعانة بالأدبيات التربوية الخاصة بموضوع البحث و تحليل بعض الوثائق و ذلك لغرض تطوير نموذج الشراكة المقترح.

Appendix G: Permission letters obtained from the MOE, Oman

To the Muscat educational Governorate

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Education
Directorate General of Education - Muscat
Director General Office



سَلْطَنَةُ عُومَانِ
وَزَارَةُ التَّرْبِيَةِ وَالْعِلْمِ
الْمَدِينَةُ الْعَامَّةُ لِلتَّرْبِيَةِ وَالْعِلْمِ بِمُحَافَظَةِ مَسَقَطِ
مَكْتَبُ الْمَدِيرِ الْعَامِّ

الرقم: م ع ت م / ١٠ / ١ / ١٥١

التاريخ: ٢٨ / ٩ / ١٤٢٢ هـ
الموافق: ١ / ١ / ٢٠٢٢ م

الأفاضل / مديرو الدوائر بالمديرية العامة للتربية والتعليم بمحافظة مسقط المحترمون

السُّلْطَانُ عَلِيٌّ وَرَمَّةُ التَّمْرِ وَبُرْكَانَةُ

الموضوع / تسهيل مهمة باحث

تقوم الفاضلة/ ربا بنت ناصر بن حمدان التويبة ، طالب دراسات عليا (دكتوراه) بجامعة نيوكاسل بإجراء دراسة حول :

(الشراكة بين القطاع الحكومي والقطاع الخاص في التعليم / نموذج مقترح).

وترغب الباحثة في تطبيق أداة الدراسة على الموظفين التابعين لدوائركم .

وعليه : فإننا نرجو منكم التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحثة ، في تطبيقه لأداة الدراسة ، بشكل مُهم وعاجل وفي حالة وجود أي استفسار لديكم الاتصال بالباحثة مباشرة على هاتف رقم (٩٩٤٥٣٥٤٤) .

شاكراً من لكم إسهامكم لحرمة (أخر الصبي) البحث العلمي .

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير

مباركة بن سعيد المعنري

عضو دراسات ومتابعة بمكتب السيدة (مديرة العامة)

To private schools in the Muscat Governorate

الرقم ٤٦٣
التاريخ : هـ الموافق : ٢٠١٤/١٦



سلطنة عمان
وزارة التربية والتعليم
المديرية العامة للمدارس الخاصة
دائرة طلبات الترخيص

المحترم

الفاضل / مدير المدرسة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،،، وبعد

الموضوع / تسهيل مهمة باحثة

بالإشارة للموضوع أعلاه، نود إفادتكم بأن الفاضلة / ربا بنت ناصر بن حمدان التوبية طالبة دراسات عليا دكتوراه تخصص اقتصاديات تعليم تقوم بإجراء دراسة حول (الشراكة التربوية بين القطاع الحكومي والقطاع الخاص في مجال التعليم في مرحلتي التعليم الأساسي وما بعد الأساسي في سلطنة عمان) وترغب المذكورة في تطبيق أداة الدراسة ومقابلة بعض المسؤولين (مدير المدرسة و عضو من مجلس المدرسة) بالمدارس الخاصة، خلال الفترة من (١١- ٢٠١٢/٢/١٥ م).

عليه يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحثة في تطبيق أداة الدراسة في مدرستكم ، ولزيد من الاستفسار وتحديد موعد المقابلة برجاء التواصل مع الباحثة على هاتف / ٩٩٤٥٣٥٤٤ .

ملاحظة : مرفق مع الرسالة ملخص موضوع الدراسة باللغتين العربية والانجليزية

شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم . . .

وتفضلوا بقبول وافر الاحترام والتقدير . . .



عبد العزيز بن حمد بن حمود الرواحي

مدير دائرة طلبات الترخيص

To Al-Dakhiliyah educational Governorate

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Education
Directorate General of Education
Al- Dakhiliyah Region



سُلْطَنَةُ عُومَانِ
وَزَارَةُ التَّرْبِيَةِ وَالْتَّعْلِيمِ
لِلْمَدِينَةِ الْعَامَّةِ لِلدَّخِيلِيَّةِ وَالْتَّعْلِيمِ
لمحافظة الداخلية

الرقم:
التاريخ:
الوزن: ١٦٦ / ١ / ١٤٠١٤

دائرة تنمية الموارد البشرية

المحترم
المحترم
المحترم

الفاضل / مدير دائرة البرامج التعليمية
الأفاضل / رؤساء أقسام دائرة تنمية الموارد البشرية
الأفاضل / مديرو مدارس المنطقة ومديراتها

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته، وبعد:

الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة باحثة

بالإشارة إلى الموضوع أعلاه، يطيب لنا إفادتكم بأن الفاضلة / ريبا بنت ناصر بن حمدان التوبية، تقوم بإجراء دراسة تحت عنوان (الشراكة بين القطاع الحكومي والقطاع الخاص في التعليم)، وترغب المذكورة في تطبيق أدوات الدراسة على العينة الآتية:

- ١- مديرو ومديرات مدارس المنطقة .
- ٢- مشرفون تربويون (قسم العلوم الإنسانية - قسم العلوم التطبيقية) .
- ٣- مشرفون إداريون من (قسم المدارس الخاصة - قسم تطوير الأداء المدرسي) .

عليه يرجى التكرم نحو تسهيل مهمة الباحثة في تطبيق أدوات دراستها . .
شاكرين حسن تعاونكم معنا

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير .



ناصر بن علي بن سليم الخياري
مدير دائرة تنمية الموارد البشرية

ص ب : ٢٦ - الرمز البريدي : ٦١١ - هاتف : ٢٥٤٣١٠٣١ - هاتف : ٢٥٤٣١٠٣٥ - فاكس : ٢٥٤٣١٠٣٤
P.O.Box : 26 - Postal Code : 611 - Tel. : 25431031- Tel : 25431035 - Fax : 25431034
موقع المديرية : Website : www.moe.gov.om موقع الوزارة : Website : www.moe-nizwa.net

Appendix H: Consent forms

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Education at the Basic and Post-basic Education Levels in the Sultanate of Oman: Towards a Suggested Framework

Main Supervisor: Professor James Tooley, james.tooley@ncl.ac.uk

Researcher: Raya Nasser Hamdan Al Tubi (PhD Candidate), r.n.al-tubi@newcastle.ac.uk

Participant Informed Consent

Interview Participants [for Focus Groups it was similar]

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature and extent of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education at the basic education and post-basic education levels in the Sultanate of Oman, to identify different stakeholders' perspectives of these partnerships, to investigate the impediments that challenge the implementation of PPPs in Oman and to suggest a PPP model that considers the cultural and educational needs in Oman.

Your directorate/department is in the Ministry of Education Headquarters/ Your company/school is in the Muscat Governorate education directorate which was chosen for a research project leading to a PhD degree from Newcastle University (Please see attached sheet). We are seeking your permission to conduct this research in your directorate/department/company/school.

If you agree to take part, this research will involve a semi-structured interview with yourself and the researcher. This interview will explore aspects of public-private partnership practices that your department/company/school might be involved in, their challenges and ways to improve them.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. If you agree to take part, you can leave out any questions that you do not want to answer, and no pressure will be put on you to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable.

If you give permission, we will record the interview with you. This tape will be transcribed, but only the research team will have access to the full transcript. Importantly, we will make sure that all information you provide will be made completely anonymous and will be used for research purposes only. We will not share this information with any other body, in government or out of government. Once transcribed, the digital recording will be erased.

The research findings might be published in academic journals. However, these findings will be on an aggregate level and will not feature information about any particular company/school in any way. Your school/company will not be identifiable from anything published.

Your statement:

I declare that I have read the participant information sheet, have had the opportunity to ask questions and has received satisfactory answers on submitting additional questions. I understand that I may withdraw myself /my school from the study without any penalty at any time by advising the above named researcher of this decision. I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethical clearance through, the Newcastle University's Research Ethics Committee.

I declare that I understand that all information and data from my answers will be made anonymous and hence confidential. I understand that it will be impossible to identify me /my school or any of the other participants in the study from published articles that may be published based on the data.

I declare that I agree for myself /my school to participate in the study and understand that I can raise any concern or make any complaint through the named researcher above.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Researcher: Raya Al-Tubi

Date:

Signature: