



PUPILS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS ABOUT THE PBEC EFFECTIVENESS IN OMANⁱ

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to investigate the PBEC (Post Basic Education Curriculum) the views of key participants (pupils and students) about the PBEC effectiveness and the extent to which the PBEC aims, skills and content prepare young people for the world of work or higher education. In addition, we consider the question, what are the important aims, skills and content for these participants' future? And how can these be made effective to prepare students for their future? This study used specially designed questionnaires to collect data. The total sample was 550 pupils and students. The results showed that the participants tended to strongly support the PBEC aims, skills and subjects in principle. However, they seemed less satisfied with them in practice. Further, Participants were quite sceptical about the importance and need for some PBEC subjects; specifically, music and research methodology in preparing them for the world of work and HE. This research evaluates how the PBEC is viewed by pupils and provides the Ministry of Education with information about the PBEC efficacy in achieving its aims. This will give policymakers feedback to develop the PBEC to be more effective. A number of recommendations: the need to review and develop the content of PBEC to meet pupils' expectations and be more flexible so teachers can use it to deliver pupils the required skills. Also, reviewing the documents of PBEC and putting in place clearer and more realistic aims of learning compatible with its anticipated expectations. Finally, there is a need to make an improvement of a teachers training program for pre-service and in-service to developing teachers' skills on how to improve, the pupils' way of thinking, their way of working, their tools for working and how they can apply these in the world.

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Instruction

The real beginning of education was in Oman in 1970. The first stage in this period was spreading the education in all regions of Oman for males and females. The second stage beginning in 1997 when it was necessary to improve the quality of education through the application of the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) (1998) and then Post Basic Education Curriculum (PBEC) (2007) ([Ministry of Education, 2007](#)).

The reasons behind the development of education in Oman can be grouped into two basic factors: the first one is related to facing the future challenges and needs of society to reduce the numbers of foreign workers and prepare Omani citizens for the labour market (Ministry of National Economy, 2007). The second factor is related to the weakness of the previous education system (General Education System GES). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2003) highlighted that the education system in Oman does not produce the skills needed in an increasingly competitive world. Unemployment is particularly high among graduates and a large part of the educated labour force is employed by the government (Al-Lamki, 1998; Budhwar, Al-Yahmadi, & Debrah, 2002; Keller & Nabli, 2002).

In 2007, the Ministry of Education (MOE) responded by implementing a number of changes aimed at reforming secondary education, so as to face the worldwide change in the economy and the needs of society ([Porcaro & Reeves, 2013](#)). Dearing (2001) has argued that the increasingly rapid changes in information technology and the global economy have led to broad acceptance that societies must constantly update the skills and knowledge of its citizens in order to function effectively.

The MOE designed the PBEC, a curriculum which provides secondary education (grades 11 and 12) to overcome the weak points of the previous education curriculum (Al Minwaria, 2015). The *PBEC Document*, issued by the Ministry of Education in 2007, defines the curriculum in terms of its aims, structure, content, skills, characteristics, and assessment. This document emphasised that the PBEC is a link between the BEC (Basic Education Curriculum) level and the HE level. The PBEC aims to prepare future citizens for both the labour market and HE, and provides them with lifelong learning skills. The new curriculum is a two-year education programme following 10 years of basic education. Graduates from the PBEC are awarded a certificate called the 'General Education Diploma' (Al Sunhoore, 2015).

The *PBEC Document* (Ministry of Education, 2007) highlighted the general characteristics of the curriculum for grades 11 and 12 as follows: (a) pupil-centred

activities that are based on learning activities that allow pupils to develop their abilities, (b) understanding and problem-solving that can be applied in a variety of real-life situations, with emphasis on the development of individual differences and special talents, (c) a core programme that emphasises the development of employability skills and universal competencies, and (d) flexibility that permits the Ministry of Education, regions, or even schools to adapt to the changing needs of the community in terms of necessary grade 12 skills (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The researcher found four studies which focus on the PBEC due to the fact that the PBEC was only recently implemented in 2007. The first study was Issan and Gomaa's (2010) standalone literature review which analysed the PBEC reforms in Oman and aimed to determine the aspects of its success and failure. Also, the study aimed to determine the obstacles and challenges faced in the implementation of PBEC as well as to determine the reasons behind the reforms of PBEC in Oman. They presented recommendations for PBEC based on their results. First, they believe that the teachers need to be well trained to implement the PBEC. Most of the teachers are neither aware of nor know how they should go about applying modern pedagogy and teaching vocational skills. Second, most of the PBEC graduates leave with weak practical, vocational or academic skills, so they are not able to secure a position in the labour market. Third, the PBEC school environment does not match with the new standard demands of the PBEC implementation. For example, buildings and facilities such as labs and workshops are not well enough developed to meet the required criteria of the new curriculum.

The second study was Al-Mandari's (2011) which investigated the pedagogy and assessment methods that allow individual PBEC pupils to use language skills creatively. This study showed that the scores of the pupils' creative use of Arabic Language were very low and there is a dire need to provide professional Arabic specialists to train teachers on the creative use of Arabic Language pedagogy and practice.

The third study is Al-Mashani's (2011), which attempted to determine the most prominent requirements for aligning the outcomes of the PBEC general diploma with the requirements of HE. This study used two questionnaires to collect data. The sample of this study consisted of experts and faculty members from the MOE.

The results showed that there is an agreement among participants about the high impact of poor harmonization. There are two main reasons for this: Firstly, it's due to the shortcomings in the policies of the MOE and HE and lastly due to the poor communication and partnership between the MOE and HE.

The fourth study of importance was carried out by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the World Bank (2012) and was aimed at evaluating the quality of

education provided in Oman in all of its stages. The most important findings of this report which are relevant to this study were that: University tutors believed that there is a low level of skills in students enrolled in HE in science subjects; Omanis lack basic job skills required of them; Half of Grade 12 graduates do not attend any educational institutions and are considered part of the workforce; The performance of most students has fallen below levels that are achievable in many other countries of the world; Programmes designed to train teachers do not compliment the curriculum.

The aforementioned studies investigated public views related to the PBEC such as Issan and Gomaa (2010) and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the World Bank (2012). My study however intends to provide a specific perspective on the PBEC aims, skills and content to enable us to better understand how we can improve the PBEC; to what extent the pupils achieve its aims and skills and finally; to what extent PBEC content prepare them for their future.

Research question

What are the pupils/students views about the PBEC effectiveness in principle and practice?

Research Methodology

In this research, a questionnaire survey was used to collect data from PBEC pupils/students. The questionnaire was administered by the first author to the participants (pupils and students) and the answers were collected after giving the participants enough time to complete all of the questions. It was administered in the pupil's regular classroom in normal school time. Participants were told that their true opinions were being asked for, and that no-one but the researcher and her supervisor would see their responses. The process of completing the questionnaire typically took 20-40 minutes.

The questionnaire was devised in four sections in accordance with the perspectives of the research interest. In this article we present just the first three sections of this questionnaire. The first section covers the personal information; gender, school name/college name, branch of study and one question identifying the level of enjoyment experienced within PBEC study, to get an indication on the level of interest in PBEC. The second section investigates two related but distinct aspects: whether or not the PBEC aims are of importance for the participant's future, and how effective the PBEC is in helping pupils to achieve these aims *in practice*. The third section is about the importance of the PBEC skills for participants' future according to the MOE documents, and how effective the PBEC is in helping pupils to acquire these skills. The fourth

section explores the pupils' views about the importance of each individual subject in the PBEC in helping them to be ready for their future and how effective these subjects are in helping them to be ready for HE or the labour market. For example, the second part of the questionnaire investigates two questions corresponding to the PBEC aims and are presented in two columns (A and B) representing two main questions where (A) deals with the importance of PBEC aims for participants future and column (B) the extent of PBEC effectiveness in helping participants to achieve such aims through PBEC.

The total sample of this article was 550 pupils and students. They are PBEC pupils, SQU students and Technical college students. The sample of participants of each group is purposely selected as representative, as it is assumed that all the participants possess the required information to assist the study. The table below presents the population sample of this study.

Table1: The population of this study ([Department of Statistics and Indicators, 2011](#); [Salalah Technical College, 2011](#); [Sultan Qaboos University, 2011](#))

The school (2011/2012)	In all Oman region			Pupils numbers in PBEC schools & students numbers in TC in Dhofar region/ SQU in the language centre			The number of schools in Dhofar region
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
PBEC School grade 12	22,668	23,043	45,711	1,690	1,814	3,504	129
SQU	1,440	1,416	2,856	1,112	1,030	2,142	
TC	5,860	2,567	8,427	1,169	365	1,534	

Table (1) represents the population from which the sample for this study was selected and who participated by completing the questionnaire survey. The total number of PBEC pupils in 2011 was 45,711; the number of first-year SQU students admitted was 2,142; and the number of first-year Salalah TC students in the same year was 1,534. The researcher selected the samples from this population.

Table 2: The sample of participants who completed the questionnaire in the main study

Gender	Boys/ Men	Girls/ Women	Total	Art	Science	Total
PBE	77	104	181	106	75	181
SQU	81	106	187	94	93	187
TC	128	54	182	149	33	182
Total	286	264	550	349	201	550

Table 2 shows that the sample selected were: 181 PBEC pupils who were studying the PBEC in grade 12 for year 2011-2012; and students who graduated from the PBEC and who were enrolled at the SQU (n=187) and TC (n=182) in the same year.

A sample of three girls' schools and three boys' schools were selected from the PBEC pupils in Dhofar region. These schools were chosen because their environments are typical of PBEC schools in Oman as the MOE is the governing body for all PBEC government schools and provides the same environment and curriculum to all schools. In each of the schools, two classes were selected. The sample size of the PBEC pupils was 181 participants; 104 girls and 77 boys.

The second sample of participants in this study was the HE students. The size of the HE students is 369, of which 187 are SQU students (81 men and 106 women) and 182 TEC students (128 men and 54 women). Those students were then studying English language in the Language Center as a part of their foundation programme. The Language Center students were chosen because most of the students study English Language in their first university/college year as a prerequisite. The questionnaire administration and data collection can be done easily because all the participants are located in one place – the Language Center.

Piloting the Questionnaire

After completing the questionnaire design, a pilot test was run to make sure that the questions used in the main questionnaire were clear and easily understood by the participants and drawing attention to any issues that might need clarification. For instance, any uncovered important issues regarding the PBEC or any ambiguous statement. The total number of participants in the sample for the piloting of the questionnaire was 83. The pilot test was first administered to the PBEC schools and then to the TC College and SQU students. Most of these modifications were about misunderstanding; it shows that the PBEC pupils misunderstood and had some difficulty in understanding some of the questionnaire items. This misunderstanding can be attributed to the fact that they had not dealt with such concepts before. I clarified the situation by giving examples using simple words which were more likely to be more familiar to the pupils.

For example pupils did not understand the assessment word so we clarified this by providing synonyms such as *assignments* and *exam*. Comments received from the pilot sample gave the researcher the opportunity to modify and rectify the questionnaire accordingly.

Validity and reliability of questionnaire

Prior to using the questionnaire for the data collection, measures were taken to ensure content validity. To assess the construct validity of the questionnaire, the generated questions were scrutinized thoroughly in light of the corresponding theory of education and the available literature in the context of PBEC in Oman. In this study we depended on the *PBEC Document* (1) (Ministry of Education, 2007) to build the questionnaire which defined the characteristics of PBEC. Most of the statements in the questionnaire were taken from the *PBEC Document* (1), which allows the questionnaire to correctly measure what it is supposed to measure, which is the effectiveness of PBEC in regard to their characteristics that are set within its document.

The content of the questionnaire was examined to evaluate its validity. Therefore, huge effort was made to ensure that the questions fully represented and corresponded with the domain of PBEC from the research perspectives. Accordingly, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the fields of curriculum and instruction at Dundee University and Sultan Qaboos University, to reveal any ambiguity, threatening questions and any other amendments required to be done prior to administration of the questionnaire. Consequently, an improved form of the questionnaire was produced.

Reliability is about whether or not the measurement tool produces consistently the same results under similar circumstances ([Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010](#); [Sarantakos, 2005](#)). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the multi-items questionnaire using the SPSS statistical package. The Cronbach's alpha in the main study for all sections of questionnaire was 0.94, which is considered to be a high value, indicating that the questionnaire is a reliable measure.

The findings

The five-point Likert scale was used in this questionnaire with its responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". When analysing the data, this five-point scale was subsequently conflated to a three-point scale, in order to make the interpretation of the results easy and accessible. A column called 'Positive' (+) was added, presenting, as such, the percentage of participants who ticked the "strongly agree" and "agree" boxes. Similarly, a further column was added for the negative choices of participants and, as such, was called "negative" (-). The undecided column remained as it was (?). The following section provides a description of the general analysis for all of the questionnaire sections.

The importance of the PBEC aims versus PBEC effectiveness in helping participants achieving them – participants' perspectives

The aim of this section is to compare the participants' opinions on the importance of the PBEC aims for their future in principle, and how effectively the PBEC has helped them achieve those aims in practice. Table 3 below summarises the conflated percentages in each case.

Table 3: Comparing participants' views on the importance of the PBEC aims and their effectiveness

How important are the PBEC for your future?				Aims	Did the PBEC help you to achieve the stated aims?		
Conflated percentage					Conflated percentage		
No	Negative	Undecided	Positive		Negative	Undecided	Positive
1	4.7	6.9	84.2	Equipping pupils with the skills required for HE.	23.0	11.3	62.6
2	6.2	11.1	78.2	Equipping pupils with vocational skills required for the labour market.	28.5	18.9	48.6
3	6.0	7.8	82.6	Promoting loyalty to the Sultanate and his Majesty Sultan Qaboos.	7.8	14.5	73.5
4	3.1	8.7	83.4	Affirming the principles of Islam, instilling faith and spiritual values in pupils, and encouraging standards for pupils' behaviour.	18.1	10.9	67.8
5	6.9	8.2	80.9	Improving Arabic	21.0	11.4	64.5

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				language skills.			
6	6.3	5.3	82.0	Improving English language skills.	31.6	10.0	53.4
7	6.2	20.9	69.8	Raising awareness of global cultural trends and encouraging learning from the other's experiences.	20.3	27.4	49.7
8	7.3	10.0	77.1	Developing thinking skills and problem-solving skills.	24.5	18.9	52.9
9	6.7	10.7	79.2	Providing pupils with the ability to employ knowledge in real life and making decisions related to it.	25.2	17.4	54.4
10	8.0	13.8	74.6	Enhancing positive attitudes towards productive and voluntary work, money saving and property protection.	19.9	23.8	52.9
11	8.3	12.3	75.3	Encouraging effective use of autonomous learning skills, life-long learning skills and a continuous search for knowledge	22.3	21.2	53.5

12	6.2	7.3	82.8	Encouraging peaceful and productive interaction with other.s	13.3	11.6	73.2
13	6.7	9.8	80.0	Raising health, population and environmental awareness.	18.4	16.3	63.9

From table 3 it seems that the participants consistently reported a higher rating for the importance of the PBEC aims in principle than the PBEC effectiveness in helping them to achieve those aims in practice. For instance, “affirming the principles of Islam, instilling faith and spiritual values among pupils, and providing standards for pupils’ behaviour” obtained a high percentage (83.4%) in principle but scored lower (67.8%) regarding its effectiveness. The same applies to the aim of “providing pupils with the ability to employ knowledge in real life and making informed decisions”, which achieved a high percentage as an important aim for the participants’ future (79.2%), while in practice, it obtained a less positive agreement (54.4%).

The two basic aims of “equipping pupils with the skills required for HE” and “equipping pupils with vocational skills required for the labour market” recorded very high positive scores for importance in principle but scored lower in terms of their effectiveness. It is noteworthy that 23% and 28.5% respectively of pupils were negative about how PBEC prepared them in terms of these skills. Similarly, where language skill is concerned, the participants thought very highly of the English language as being a most important requirement for their future, but almost one third of respondents (31.6%) thought the PBEC did not help them achieve this in practice.

It is instructive to look at the negative responses in table 3, comparing for each item the negative figure for agreement in principle with the corresponding figure for effectiveness in practice. Remarkably, with items numbered 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 there are often six times as many negative responses for effectiveness as for the principle. These aims received negative responses rating from 20-28.5%, meaning that about one quarter of the participants are dissatisfied about the extent to which the PBEC is helping them achieve these aims. These six aims (numbers 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11) are related to skills that pupils need in order to be ready for the labour market and HE in general, and, in particular: developing thinking skills; employing knowledge in real life; life-long learning skills; enhancing positive attitudes towards productive and voluntary work; and raising awareness for a global culture. It is also interesting to note that the participants reported a slightly higher rating in the undecided column for the PBEC’s

effectiveness in helping them achieve those aims than the importance of those aims for their future. Overall, there seems little doubt that participants tended to be less satisfied about the effectiveness of PBEC in providing them with skills to be ready for their future.

The following section looks more carefully at the specific skills identified in the PBEC and provides a comparison between the participants' views about the importance of these skills for their future in principle and how effectively the PBEC helps them achieve those skills in practice.

The importance of the PBEC skills versus PBEC effectiveness in helping participants achieve them – participants' perspectives

The aim here is to compare participants' views on the importance of the PBEC skills in principle and how effectively the PBEC has helped them achieve those skills in practice. Table 4 below draws a comparison between the conflated percentages in each case.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for participants' views on the importance of the PBEC skills for their future, and its effectiveness in realising them

How important are the PBEC skills (as listed) for your future?				Skills	Did the PBEC help you to achieve the stated skills?		
Conflated percentage					Conflated percentage		
No	Negative	Undecided	Positive		Negative	Undecided	Positive
				Communication skills			
1	3.8	8.3	80.6	Efficiently and confidently communicating through different forms and means of communication.	26.0	14.0	52.1
2	5.5	13.1	75.9	Appropriately and efficiently expressing and reacting to emotions within various social, cultural and linguistic contexts.	23.6	23.4	49.0
3	6.0	13.1	75.4	Developing differentiation, analysis, and critical thinking skills.	26.6	19.8	47.7
4	6.6	7.8	80.6	Discussion of a topic clearly, logically and persuasively with others.	24.0	14.3	58.2

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How important are the PBEC skills (as listed) for your future?				Skills	Did the PBEC help you to achieve the stated skills?		
Conflated percentage					Conflated percentage		
No	Negative	Undecided	Positive		Negative	Undecided	Positive
				Communication skills			
Mathematic Skills							
5	13.0	10.3	69.3	Being able to handle complex mathematical calculations accurately.	35.4	15.6	44.7
6	10.9	10.5	73.3	Being able to read, understand and analyse charts and graphs.	27.4	14.7	55.7
7	9.3	12.7	73.0	Organising and classifying information logically and persuasively.	28.0	21.1	48.1
8	11.6	16.9	65.4	Using mathematical patterns and Numerical relations.	26.1	21.4	49.7
Information Technology Skills							
9	6.1	11.8	77.7	Organising, analysing, evaluating and using information.	24.0	18.0	55.2
10	5.6	10.9	79.5	Presenting information clearly, accurately, logically and briefly.	26.0	15.8	56.4
11	5.6	11.8	78.8	Recognising, describing analysing others' viewpoint and being able to differentiate between facts and personal opinions.	23.0	19.8	55.5
12	8.0	14.7	72.6	Retrieving information and processing it confidently and efficiently.	29.0	21.4	47.3
Problem-Solving Skills							
13	7.4	14.7	73.4	Unleashing imagination and being flexible and taking initiative.	27.0	19.6	51.9
14	8.9	11.6	73.5	Identifying problems, describing them and troubleshooting around them.	24.0	20.1	52.5

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How important are the PBEC skills (as listed) for your future?				Skills	Did the PBEC help you to achieve the stated skills?		
Conflated percentage					Conflated percentage		
No	Negative	Undecided	Positive		Negative	Undecided	Positive
				Communication skills			
15	6.9	16.2	71.6	Linking ideas and relating them to each other.	23.6	20.0	54.5
16	7.5	10.5	78.1	Testing ideas and solutions, and making decisions based on experience, logic and evidence.	24.7	17.6	55.7
Personal and Social Skills							
17	4	8.3	81.9	Taking responsibility as an active member of a team to achieve agreed upon tasks and decision.	18.3	16.7	61.7
18	7.1	13.1	74.6	Presenting description of tasks to be completed in terms of time and effort required.	21.4	20.9	55
19	5.5	11.1	77.8	Negotiating positively to reach agreements in controversial issues.	24.0	18.1	54.4
20	5.1	12.7	78.3	Developing time-management techniques by determining priorities of tasks, executing them and following them up.	25.6	21.2	50.9
21	5.2	9.1	80.9	Proving efficient in serving others as a basis for success in running small business projects.	24.0	17.4	57

Participants consistently reported higher ratings for the importance of the PBEC skills in principle than they do for their effectiveness in practice. It can also be seen from the table that personal skills took the priority in their importance (in principle) according to the participants' views but, as with the previous analysis in table 3, the effectiveness of PBEC to help them achieve those skills was considerably lower. In contrast, Mathematical skills were ranked as less important than personal skills for pupils' future, again with a lower score for effectiveness.

As with the previous analysis, what is most interesting is that although the participants tended to agree with the importance of the PBEC skills for their future, they were less satisfied about the PBEC effectiveness in helping them achieve these skills in practice. Focusing on the negative scores in the 'in practice' column, it is notable that often a quarter or more of pupils are negative about the extent to which the PBEC is helping them to acquire the necessary skills. This seems a particularly high figure and certainly indicates that a high proportion of pupils feel that the PBEC may be ineffective in terms of helping their skill development.

The Importance of the PBEC subjects in principle versus the PBEC subjects in practice – participants' perspectives

The aim of this section is to compare the importance of PBEC subjects for participants' futures and how effectively those subjects prepare them for the future. Table 5 illustrates the conflated percentage for each of these subjects.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for participants' opinions on the importance of the PBEC subjects versus the effectiveness of the PBEC with regard to the taught

How important are the PBEC subjects (as listed) for your future?				Subjects	How effective were the stated subjects in helping you to be ready for work or HE?		
Conflated percentage					Conflated percentage		
No	Negative	Undecided	Positive		Negative	Undecided	Positive
				Culture			
1	4.1	4.0	85.7	Islamic Culture	16.4	8.7	69.4
				Language subjects			
2	6.7	6.5	79.0	Arabic Language	17.6	9.4	67.2
3	5.1	6.5	73.2	English Language (A)	20.3	10.2	54.4
4	6.6	10.3	59.3	English Language (B)	18.7	12.7	50.1
				Scientific subjects			
5	8.2	8.0	63.3	Pure Mathematics	12.8	15.1	54.1
6	11.1	14.3	51.9	Applied Mathematics	13.2	18.5	47.8
7	9.6	11.4	59.7	Biology	11.3	14.0	56.5
8	8.2	10.3	61.9	Chemistry	11.6	15.4	54.4
9	8.3	11.1	61.0	Physics	13.1	14.2	54.6
10	14.8	18.0	43.2	Environmental science	18.5	24.1	34.5
11	14.9	19.2	40.4	Science and Technology	18.5	24.9	33.9
				Social study subjects			
12	13.0	17.8	42.3	Economic Geography	15.4	21.1	37.7
13	13.2	15.6	44.6	Modern Technology	14.7	21.4	37.9

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				and Geography			
14	13.5	14.3	45.0	History of Islamic Civilization	16.7	19.4	38.0
15	14.7	10.0	65.6	This is my Country	18.3	14.2	57.6
16	16.9	18.9	41.0	The world around me	19.1	22.5	37.4
				Technology subjects			
17	11.7	11.6	52.8	Introduction to Information Technology	17.4	13.4	47.2
18	9.3	11.8	54.8	Computers in Telecommunication and Business	15.8	17.8	42.8
19	8.2	12.3	52.8	Computer Science	15.0	18.1	40.6
				Generic skills subjects			
20	29.4	17.8	32.6	Fine arts	29.0	19.6	30.5
21	38.5	16.5	22.7	Musical skills	33.3	20.3	22.9
22	30.0	13.2	45.7	School Sports	29.8	14.3	44.8
23	23.4	10.0	54.7	Life skills	35.9	10.9	44.5
24	35.5	11.1	43.7	Research Methodology	23.4	9.8	55.6
25	20.3	9.6	58.2	Career Guidance	17.4	13.4	47.2

Displaying similar trends to the previous analysis above, participants reported higher ratings for the importance of the PBEC subjects in principle than that they did for how effective those subjects were in helping them to be ready for the world of work or HE. For example, both Islamic culture and English language subjects obtained a higher level as being important subjects for participants' future while they were given lower ranking in terms of PBEC effectiveness in preparing pupils for the world of work or HE. Similar patterns were evident across the different subject groups, with the exception of the generic skills group,

Participants seemed to think of certain subjects as being less important for their future. For example, music and research methodology subjects got a high negative percentage (38.5% and 35.5%, respectively) as important subjects for their future but were slightly less negative (33.3% and 23.4%, respectively) about their effectiveness in preparing them for the future.

It seems that the difference between PBEC subjects in principle and practice is not as strong as with the earlier analysis of aims and skills in principle and practice. However, some subjects received negative views that were two or three times higher in practice than in principle. For instance, the language group subject showed a negative figure that was two or three times higher in practice than in principle. Participants tended to be dissatisfied about the PBEC language subjects' effectiveness in helping

them to be ready for the world of work or HE. Given the importance of language, both in the workplace and in HE, this seems to be a worrying finding.

Another important conclusion from the above data is that participants seemed to be discriminating in how they viewed different groups of subjects. They tended to view some of the PBEC subjects as important for their future but were less happy about their effectiveness in helping them get ready for the world of work or HE.

Conclusion

In general, it is clear from the questionnaire data results that there is a remarkable difference in participants' views about the PBEC aims, skills and subjects in principle and in practice. From this perspective, the participants tend to strongly support the PBEC aims and skills in principle. They, however, seem less satisfied with the effectiveness of the PBEC in achieving the aims and skills concerned.

In particular, the two basic aims (preparing for the world of work and HE) which were used to justify the introduction of the PBEC received high scores as being important aims but very few participants felt that the PBEC is effective in achieving those aims. Moreover, the aim of providing pupils with English Language skills, which is a basic skill in the labour market and HE education, also received a low percentage. The same scenario was evident in regards to the PBEC skills. Participants seemed less satisfied about the PBEC effectiveness to provide necessary skills for their future. According to the respondents, the most important skills for participant's futures are personal skills and the least important are Mathematics skills. It seems clear that while pupils need personal skills to succeed in their future, Mathematics skills are specific skills for a certain job.

There are many factors which may contribute to develop pupils' skills, such as teachers' skills, teaching methods, the content and the learning environment. Several studies have reported that teachers feel that they do not have the time to think about how to make their teaching more effective because of the burden of administration duties (Al-Darmake, 2008 & Al-Hadabia 2010). Wyatt (2013) added that teachers in Oman lacked job satisfaction and motivation.

In regards to the PBEC subjects, the difference between the PBEC subjects in principle and practice is slightly larger. In particular, Islamic culture and Language subjects (Arabic and English) got a high score as important subjects for participants' future. This is not a surprising result because Omani society is an Islamic society. The language is a basic skill for the participants' future to succeed in HE or labour market. Even in these two areas there seems a degree of dissatisfaction in the extent to which the PBEC prepares pupils with them.

On other hand, Research methodology and Music subjects got the lowest percentages as important subjects. Despite the importance of Research methodology as a subject, the participants have a negative view about it. We might attribute this negative feedback according to my experience with teachers and pupils/students in PBEC schools to the lack of specialised teachers, the nature of study and research of this particular module, which is in stark contrast from the tradition of studying at schools in Oman. Music subjects got the lowest score, and it is not difficult to see why some pupils may regard this as less important to their future. However, it does seem strange that pupils did not see research methodology as being important, given current educational views about the ability to access information independently and the growth of self-directed learning. This is an issue that requires further examination.

The inconsistency between principles and practices leads the discussion to the weaknesses of PBEC in terms of its planning and implementation. The researcher thinks that planning and implementation are interrelated in that planning needs to take into account the feasibility of application while implementation needs advanced planning to achieve its anticipated goals and objectives. The existing gap between the principles and practices of PBEC has noticeably affected the whole educational process and its outcomes. This study shows that to prepare teachers adequately, the PBEC does not fit with the curriculum. Clearer and more realistic aims of learning compatible with its anticipated expectations are needed.

The researcher recommends that more in-depth information needs to be gathered about the PBEC, particularly about its aims in preparing pupils for the world of work and HE. We need to know what the obstacles are that may hinder it to become more effective. Whilst the literature review mentions some reasons such as teachers' skills and teaching methods, it would also be worthwhile to conduct a robust qualitative study which would illuminate the barriers and obstacles preventing the PBEC from becoming more effective. In particular it will be important to explore with pupils why they feel that the PBEC is not effective in practice. Does the problem lie with the beliefs of pupils towards PBEC or is it the poor quality of curriculum content, or the activities that the children are expected to engage with the teaching approaches employed. Further exploration on the PBEC aims, skills, and subjects to improve their efficacy and the methods that can deliver the skills and content would also be a valuable endeavour. Lastly, there is a need to review the subjects that got high percentages as important subjects for pupils/students such as Islamic culture and English language as this might help us to understand how to make the other subjects just as important for them.

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