

To What Extent Dose Physical Education Training Programme In Oman Comply With Islamic Rules Or Culture?

Yousra Al-Sinani

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: December 04, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: July 05, 2022</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords : Physical Education, Muslim Women, Islamic rules, Omani culture, Positive changes, Social position</p> <p>DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6795969</p>	<p><i>The purpose of this paper is to address the concern that despite several developments and initiatives in Oman's Physical Education Teacher Programme (PETP) over recent years, female students have been little engaged with it since they doubt its ability to meet Islamic and Omani cultural requirements.</i></p> <p><i>The paper focuses on how the PETP contributes to this lack of engagement among women by exploring the level to which the training does in fact comply with Islamic rules and Omani culture. It also highlights how the PETP could bring positive changes to the lives of female students, and it considers ways in which it could contribute to developing respect in line with Islamic rules and the culture in Oman. Two main issues are identified as relevant for trainee PE teachers: compliance with Islamic rules and the prevailing Omani culture, and the opportunity to make positive changes to the lives of female students. Evidence suggests that the cultural aspect is more problematic since the Arab culture as it exists in Oman is stronger in some regions than others.</i></p>

Introduction

Two examples of the underlying factors affecting this study point to problems related to this study: Designed since 1991, the program is for both sexes, who participate in theoretical but separate courses in practice in compliance with religious teachings. The study seeks to understand the program's complementarity with religious teachings and its relevance to local culture. It focuses on the vocational training of Muslim female teachers in an Arab country and thus contributes to the issues of education and social diversity in both vocational training and physical education for Muslim girls in schools.

In order to simplify its scope and direction, the study will be guided by the following key research issues:

To what extent does the training program conform to or challenge Islamic rules or Omani culture?

To what extent has the training program brought about positive changes in the social status of Omani women?

Literature Review

According to Al Bakri (2019) reporting from Finland, the rising number of health problems associated with inactivity have become a serious issue for individuals and society, and that there are also many students who have low levels of physical activity that place their health at risk.

Studies have shown, however, that female students experience many different obstacles to their participation in physical activity, including lack of time, societal and cultural influences, lack of financial income, body image, safety, lack of support, lack of appropriate educational system and facilities (Al-Sinani, Al-Wahaib and Benn, 2021). Several of these obstacles are found in the Arab World where religious and cultural imperatives work against women's engagement (Al-Sinani and Benn, 2010). Research at the policy level has focused on the paradox of Olympic ideals regarding inclusion, that must co-exist with national sport policies that exclude certain women. Benn and Dagkas (2012), for example, critically considered the intersection of religious and secular values in their analysis of Islamic culture and the Olympic Movement, using the resurgence in religious interest as its rationale. They noted particularly that, on the one hand, while Muslim women, are catered for by the Olympic Charter's commitment to universal human rights to participate in sport and be free from discrimination on the grounds of gender and religion, they are, on the other hand, discriminated against by the Olympic sport dress code regulations that do not conform with the religious requirements of modesty in covering the body.

The authors catalogue the various outcomes of conflicts between religious and secular values, and explore how policy-makers can become more sensitive to the strategies required to enable the inclusivity of Muslim women in sport. In particular, they suggest the worldwide reach and influence of the Olympic Movement as a vehicle to push for negotiations and compromise to achieve greater inclusivity in sport.

Zahidi, et al. (2012) observe that Muslim women can experience particular problems when taking PE lessons, for example with dress codes, mixed-teaching and exercise during Ramadan; and they can face restrictions in extra-curricular activities for cultural and religious reasons. Two studies conducted in Greece and Britain Benn and Douglas 2017 that explored the views of Muslim women on school experiences of PE are compared. Both studies focused on diaspora communities, Greek Turkish girls and British Asian women, living in predominantly non-Muslim countries. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with 24 Greek Muslim women, and 20 British Muslim women. National curriculum status is accorded to PE in both countries using a similar rationale, but the two countries 'differing cultures of formality and tradition were seen to impact upon pupils 'experiences. Data suggested that Greek and British groups held positive views of PE but were restricted in their participation in extra-curricular activities. Religious identity and awareness of Islamic requirements were more apparent among British women than among Greek women. Differences in stages of acculturation, historical and socio-cultural contexts contributed to less problematic encounters with PE among Greek Muslims who appeared more integrated into the dominant culture.

In a more recent study, Laar, Shi and Ashraf (2019) considered the participation of female Pakistani students in physical activities, focusing on the influence of religious, cultural and socioeconomic factors on such engagement. Specifically, they explored the participation and perceived constraints of these students in physical activities, using a feminism-in-sports approach. Semi-structured and informant-style interviews with female students from Larkana, Pakistan, revealed that there is either no or very little engagement, primarily due to constraints imposed by socioeconomic factors, religious values, and culture. The authors recommended that sports decision-makers (at the school and government level), parents, and community practitioners (political and religious) should consider the different narratives they obtained from their research sample in creating policy and curricula that would encourage and support Muslim women's participation in sports activities.

Similarly, Kahan (2019) reviewed a number of qualitative studies on Muslim women's perceptions of physical activity barriers and facilitators in respect of physical activity in order to give a critical appraisal of those studies. To achieve this, Kahan (2019) assessed the quality of 56 papers published between 1987 and 2016 that reported on focus group discussions conducted with Muslim women to gauge their perceptions of cultural, religious, and secular determinants of physical activity. Using 26 items from the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) as the evaluation tool, as well as cross tabulations, Kahan (2019) studied relationships between paper quality (low vs. high) and binary categorical variables for impact factor, maximum paper length allowed, publication year, and the database in which the paper was indexed. Overall, papers averaged only 10.5 of 26 COREQ reporting criteria and only two out of 26 items were reported in more than 75% of the papers. Paper quality was not associated with impact factor and length. High quality papers were more likely to have been published more recently (i.e., 2011 or later) and in journals indexed in the PubMed database compared to low quality papers. There is contention among qualitative researchers about standardizing reporting criteria, and while the trend in quality appears to be improving, journal reviewers and editors ought to hold authors to greater accountability in reporting.

In the same vein, Benn (1995) found evidence that Muslim females experience difficulties with traditional approaches to PE in Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Using Figurational theory, Benn (1995) examined the relational dynamics influencing institutional and PE course developments affecting female Muslim students on a 4year primary ITT degree course at Greenacres College in England. Interview, observation and diary data were collected, analyzed and collated. Findings indicated a gradual unforeseen and unplanned process of negotiated accommodation as the management and staff responded to the expressed needs of the Muslim women whilst ensuring that state requirements for teacher training were met. One outcome was a reciprocal shift, in attitude towards PE amongst the Muslim students.

The training of PE teachers was also the subject of a study by Connolly (2012) whose interest was on the training impact on the PE teachers 'performance. Specifically, the study assessed the transfer of teacher's educational knowledge, skills, and dispositions as embodied by the National Standards for Initial PETE (NASPE, 2009) to the delivery of PE in government schools. Six new PE teachers were interviewed (two individuals and one focus group), observations were made, and artifact analysis was conducted. Trustworthiness was addressed through data triangulation, member checks, and an audit trail. The findings revealed a total of 18 themes addressing each of the six standards that constitute the National Standards for Initial PETE (NASPE, 2009): (1) Scientific and Theoretical Knowledge, (a) knowing the basics, (b) retention difficulties, (c) value and utility of knowledge in practice, and (d) teaching motor skills; (2) Skill-based and Fitness-based Competence, (e) variety of fundamental movements and physical activities, and (f) limited accountability for and knowledge of fitness; (3) Planning and Implementation, (g) lesson plan template with inconsistencies in practice, (h) student exceptionalities: assistance, understanding, and accommodations, and (i) instructional technology: computer programs and lack of resources; (4) Instructional Delivery and Management, (j) field experiences and student teaching, (k) methodology classes and peer teaching, (l) management: routines, and (m) instruction: feedback and cues; (5) Impact on Student Learning, (n) knowledge of basic assessment techniques, (o) nature of

physical education and grading, and (p) reflection: what, how, in practice; (6) Professionalism, (q) defining a professional physical educator, and (r) being a professional educator. Through examination and final analysis of the interviews, observations, and artifacts, several new recommendations were made for undergraduate PETE experiences as follows: bridge the gap between theory and practice, increase knowledge of health-related fitness concepts, expand diversity education, include more hands-on teaching experiences, examine coverage of assessment techniques and reflective practices, and address professional behavior and dispositions.

The literature about students' perception, and that of teachers who have been specially trained to deliver PE show the problems clearly. The next section presents the methods employed in the current study to explore the issue in the Omani context.

The study established the context of research in an attempt to explain the appropriateness of the program. The focus was on girls, since the limits of exercise have clear controls for girls to guide the understanding of the situation in which the study was conducted. Because the limits of exercise have clear controls for girls, the study focused on understanding the situation in which it was conducted by focusing on the girls. The study of the program focused on the perspective of the situation of the girls themselves, on the establishment of physical education in schools in higher education and its complementarity, and on the teachings of the Omani religion or the challenge of Omani culture. A key focus of the study was the perspective of the girls themselves, the establishment of physical education in schools of higher education as well as the challenge presented by Omani culture and religion. As an Islamic State, it is important to recognize the impact of Islam on the lives and activities of the Omani people.

Purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to reflect on the PETP for female students at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman and examine specifically the extent to which this programme complies with, or challenges Islamic rules and Omani culture.

The aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the physical education initial Teacher. The initial focus of the program will be being to understand the nature of Arab Muslim girls through previous studies, and the evaluation will focus on perceptions of to evaluate perceptions of the key stakeholders: University staff and students, practicing teachers, students and inspectors who graduated from the same program. It will aim to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program. It is expected that the emerging recommendations will emerge that will improve the relationship between the university program and the reality of the profession in Omani 's schools. The study is also expected to contribute theoretically to understanding gender, Islam and physical education.

Particularly, this aim translates into the following two Research Questions:

To what extent does the PETP comply with, or challenge Islamic rules or Omani culture?

To what extent does the PETP bring about positive changes in the social position of Omani women?

Methods

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data using a questionnaire and interview in order to capture the breadth and depth of perceptions on the effectiveness of the PETP at Sultan Qaboos University. Cresswell (2003) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) advocated greater benefits of using mixed methods in social science research. Brannen (1995) noted the attractiveness of mixed methods in the twentieth century decade in different research fields, for example in sociology (Rogers and Nicolaus 1998), psychology (Debats et al 1995), and economics (Lawson 2003). In the current study, quantitative data were required to show the numerical distribution of responses, while qualitative data aimed at generating detailed information embedded in context. As the study is centered on ITT, this combination of strategies yields results that are more reliable in securing an effective evaluation, not only by gauging perceptions of different stake-holders but also by giving depth to the understanding of meaning, significance and values upon which perceptions of teachers are built.

A semi structured questionnaire was used with both open-ended qualitative and multiple choice quantitative questions since the former provided more comprehensive responses and the latter were quicker to answer / analyses and described the context in which the responses were made.

The choice of a multi-method approach was made on the grounds that this would allow cross-validation and complementary support of the research techniques employed. The advantage of using different techniques, as Marshall and Rossman (1995: 133) argued, is that "limitations in one method can be compensated for by the strengths of a complementary one". Also, according to Brannen (1992: 32) "a multi-method strategy can serve

as an exercise in clarification: in particular, it can help to clarify the formulation of the research problem, and the most appropriate ways in which problems or aspects of problems may be theorized and studied”

The following coding system was drawn up to clarify data sources in the analysis of results chapter:

Table : 5.1 Questionnaire coding

Group	Codes
Final year students	QS1 to 27
Teachers	QT1 to 104
Lecturers	QL1 to 4
Inspectors	QI1 to 20

Table 5.2 Interview coding

Group	Number	Codes
Final year students	5	1 - 5
Teachers	25	Region 1: 6 - 13 Region 2: 14 -21 Region 3: 22 – 30
Lecturers	4	31 - 34
Inspectors	5	35 – 39

Results

The first Research Question:

To what extent does the PETP comply with, or challenge Islamic rules or Omani culture?

Although a questionnaire was administered to present a broad picture of how the PETP at Sultan Qaboos University connects with Islamic rules and/or Omani culture, the richest source of data addressing this question was produced during the interviews.

In the questionnaire, respondents were presented with 6 items regarding their perceptions of whether the PETP complied with or challenged Islamic rules and/or Omani culture, and were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement with each of the statements using a 5-point Likert scale as follows:

- 5 = Strongly agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Partially agree
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly disagree

Table 1: The PETP’s Compliance with Islamic Rules and Tenets

Statement	Student	Teacher	Lecturer	Inspector	Rank overall

	Rank Mean	Rank Mean	Rank Mean	Rank Mean	
The PETP contributes to the development of opportunities for Omani women to take part in physical activity	4 4.42	1 4. 18	2 4.50	1 4.39	1
The PETP supports women's rights to practice sport in Islam	2 4.46	2 4. 05	3 4.00	2 4.06	2
The PETP generally complies with the teachings of Islam	1 4.54	4 3. 91	4 3.75	4 4.00	3
The PEPT promotes girls' participation in sports separately from boys	3 4.42	3 3. 96	1 4.50	3 4.06	4
The PETP has some positive religious meanings for a PE teacher	5 3.88	5 3. 72	5 3.50	5 2.56	5

Most participants seemed to agree that the PETP at SQU conforms to Islamic tenets and rules. Inspectors are the only ones who do not consider the program to have a significant religious significance.

Table 2: Students 'Rating Means

Highest rating Mean			Lowest rating Mean		
Item	Mean	Rank	Item	Mean	Rank
The PETP generally complies with the teachings of Islam.	.54		The PETP contributes to the development of opportunities for Omani women to take part in physical activity	42 4.	4
The PETP supports women's rights to practice sport in Islam	.46		The PETP has some positive religious meanings for a PE teacher	88 3.	5
The PEPT promotes girls' participation in sports separately from boys	.42				

Table 3: Teachers 'Rating Means

Highest rating Mean			Lowest rating Mean		
Item	Mean	Rank	Item	Mean	Rank
The PETP contributes to the development of opportunities for Omani women to take part in physical activity	4.18	1	The PETP generally complies with the teachings of Islam	3.91	4
The PETP supports women's rights to practice sport in Islam	4.03	2	The PETP has some positive religious meanings for a PE education teacher	3.72	5
The PEPT promotes girls' participation in sports separately from boys	3.96	3			

Table 4: Lecturers 'Rating Means

Highest rating Mean			Lowest rating Mean		
Item	Mean	Rank	Item	Mean	Rank
The PEPT promotes girls' participation in sports separately from boys	4.50		The PETP generally complies with the teachings of Islam	3.75	4
The PETP contributes to the development of opportunities for Omani women to take part in physical activity	4.50		The PETP has some positive religious meanings for a PE teacher	3.50	5
The PETP supports women's rights to practice sport in Islam	4.00				

Table 5: Inspectors 'Rating Means

Highest rating Mean	Lowest rating Mean
---------------------	--------------------

Item	Mean	Rank	Item	Mean	Rank
The PETP contributes to the development of opportunities for Omani women to take part in physical activity	4.39	1	The PETP supports women's rights to practice sport in Islam	4.06	4
The PEPT promotes girls' participation in sports separately from boys	4.06	2	The PETP has some positive religious meanings for a PE teacher	2.56	5
The PETP generally complies with the teachings of Islam	4.00	3			

There are only minor changes of emphasis in the overall support for the PETP's adherence to the rules and tenets of Islam. All four groups, however, give their lowest mean rating to the possibility that the course may have some religious meaning for PE teachers.

Participants were invited to provide further insight into the training of PE teachers at SQU and the Islamic religion as observed in Oman.

In support of their argument, the final year students cited Hadith and verses from the Holy Quran as examples of positively encouraging women to take part in sport. They cited the race between Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his wife Aisha as proof that religion does not forbid women from engaging in sport. Furthermore, students expressed a strong desire to explain this proof to young women and convey the message to their parents and other women that religion is not a barrier to participation.

Teachers considered this issue from two perspectives: firstly, women must be made aware of the health benefits of PE and non-conflict with religious beliefs when dress codes are followed; and secondly, the provision of a closed facility would offer protection from the heat of the sun and allow for the relaxation of the dress code which would promote freer movement and could ensure an absence of male gaze.

All the lecturing staff on the PETP are females and believe that the programme respects Islamic rules. They have seen some students withdrawing from PE training due to their belief that certain aspects violate Islamic rules. According to the lecturers, however, this belief may be a result of the students' confusion between their Islamic beliefs and their cultural backgrounds.

No inspector offered any further comment.

The interviews yielded rich data which expanded on the findings from the questionnaire as follows:

In my group the girls were confused between whether the content of the syllabus was within Islam or against it. I think the programme is not against Islamic principles.

(Student: Interview 1)

I have difficulties when I do athletics in the men's hall. Yes, there are no men around but for me it is an uncomfortable place for learning. I reproach myself and sometimes get angry. I don't know if I should be studying PE or shift to another subject.

(Student: Interview 2)

It may be that it is unusual to us to wear swimming or ballet kit. Perhaps we only need time to get used to it. We are learning and improving ourselves to gain a qualification in a respected career through which I will be able to support myself and the family.

(Student: Interview 4)

The programme was not at all problematic in relation to Islam and sport for women. Doing sport, separate from men, wearing appropriate clothes around the university was in full compliance with Islamic requirements. Rather, the problems were located in the culture as substantiated in the following interviewee comments:

Personally, I had a very bad experience wearing the PE uniform of tunic and trousers and headscarf in my school. I went home one day to find my father was very upset and angry because he had been called to the local council about my clothing as a PE teacher in the school. Apparently, parents had been complaining about my wearing of the official clothing for PE teachers in front of the students. He was asked to ensure that I wore the abaya on top of my PE uniform all day in front of my students. I went to the PE Inspector and my school manager for their support and asked them to go to my father to explain to him why I must wear the PE uniform. The school manager refused to do that because she was a woman and felt unable to speak to my father. The PE inspector (a man) did speak to my father. When my father asked him to go with him to the court to explain, he refused. Why? He was working in an official capacity and needed to go through his official administration system to approach another official administration system.

(Teacher: Interview 29)

I believe the programme matches Islamic rules and respects the Omani culture. The sports halls for the girls are away from the boys and situated in the girls 'accommodation where there is no mix of the sexes. They do work together for theory of the subject.

(Lecturer: Interview 32)

Islam as a religion encourages individuals to seek knowledge. I have been through experiences of teaching rhythmic exercise, gymnastics, folk dance and creative dance, where I have felt students have been unhappy doing work with music. I am not teaching them these activities for Lahaw (play and time-wasting), I am doing it for teaching and learning aims. In Ramadan I try to be respectful to the students 'feelings so I organized the theory part of my courses in those four weeks.

Most of the girls come from a traditional cultural background where they say to me that they "didn't come to the university to dance and wear this stretch lycra" ... and I have to ignore what they are saying and ask them to take part because I know it is one of my rights. They follow and work with me.

(Lecturer: Interview 33)

I think that the PE teachers do not like the uniform which the Ministry of Education has asked them to wear. I believe it is respectable and within Islamic principles in schools for girls only. I think the PE teachers would like to change their uniform to be like the other teachers, wearing what they like. I think they would like to change this, even if they have the right to change the material and color. I don't think it is against Islam.

(Inspector: Interview 35)

There are differences in religious awareness and an increasing mismatch between traditional Omani habits and Islamic rules. This confuses many PE teachers with regard to wearing the appropriate dress for the subject. I think that the PE teachers don't have strong enough beliefs about themselves as PE teachers and that's why some are still confused about Islam and Omani tradition.

(Inspector: Interview 36)

The Second Research Question:

To what extent does the PETP programme bring about positive changes in the social position of Omani women? All respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement using the same 5-point Likert scale as adopted for Research Question one:

- 5 = Strongly agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Partially agree
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly disagree

Table 6: Rating Means

Statement	Students	Teachers	Lecturers	Inspectors
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
The PETP brings about positive changes in the social position of Omani women	4.27	3.18	4.25	3.28

The large majority of respondents believed that the training programme does bring about positive changes in the social position of women in Oman. The reasons for this were explored in a series of interviews. Typical responses were:

Through exercise I hope that I can keep my body shape, for my soul and my mental well-being.
(Student: Interview 5)

I like to keep my body in good shape. I know the health benefits that I gain from practicing sport. I want all the women in Oman to practice sport and see this reflected in their lives.
(Student: Interview 4)

Working as a PE teacher and doing physical activity gives my mind space to create and allows me have an optimistic outlook on life.
(Teacher: Interview 13)

Physical Activity is new to Omani women but they have proved that they are accepting the challenge and working through the difficulties of societal challenges.
(Teacher: Interview 20)

I believe sport has made lots of positive changes in my life and I keep in touch with most of my SQU fellow students. I can see the self-confidence and ability to challenge the reality of PE in schools. With my friends we have always wanted to improve our situation and satisfaction with being PE teachers, in the reality of that profession in Oman. In my married friends I see the application of the qualities of the PE profession in their lives - the commitment to moving forward, to discipline and fairness, to a modern education system for the benefit of the boys and girls who will be the future of Oman.
(Teacher: Interview 25)

We don't need to ask these questions about positive changes in the social position of Omani women through the programme. The positive changes can already be seen in the almost fourteen years since the opening of the physical education Department at Sultan Qaboos University and I can list many positive changes:

Girls can understand the demand for certain types of sports clothing.
Girls can participate in all sport occasions whether run by the University, outside SQU or outside Oman.
Girls can stand in front of boys and explain sport theory. This was culturally unaccepted before.
(Lecturer: Interview 31)

Through years of work in Oman I observed several positive changes which have appeared in the personality of Omani students. For example, they have become more challenging and more accepting of changes provided they hold with Islamic and cultural rules.

(Lecturer: Interview 32)

Sport has influenced my life positively. I cannot forget how doing exercise whilst pregnant helped to keep my spirit up. It also has influenced my children whom I have tried to engage in doing sporting activities since they were young. I try to encourage them to do sports in their free time.

(Inspector: Interview 35)

Physical Education at School is the first step in positive changes to Omani women's lives from my point of view. The girls at school enjoy themselves in the PE lesson very much. When they graduate from the school they can't remember the math or science class but they do remember the physical education classes. They like the enjoyable time they had and the exciting moments in PE. So, if we plant strong ideas about PE they can grow very successfully in life in terms of allowing sport for positive change in the generation.

(Inspector: Interview 38)

There are many positive changes to Omani women's social position through sport. For example, more women like practicing physical activity, encourage their children to practice sport and are feeling increasingly self-confident. There are also more women appearing in high leadership positions.

(Inspector: Interview 39)

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Question 1

Considering this second research question, it is clear/obvious that there is evidence that the PETP at SQU does comply with classical or authentic Islam (Jawad 1998). It complies with modernization of Arab societies identified by Al Tahtawi (2000), involving the improvement of equality between the sexes. Above all, it does not ask men or women to break with Islamic requirements (General Mufti of the Sultanate, 2007). The structure of the environment within which the programme operates facilitates adherence to religious belief since the University was established by the Sultan to be a respected place of higher learning and has been carefully designed on Islamic and Omani architectural principles. This ensures that it provides a safe environment containing separate and combined spaces for both men and women, as appropriate to activity and personal preference. For example, women have separate, elevated walkways between buildings but may use the joint walkways underneath if they wish. The men and women have separate living accommodation on the campus, joint lecture rooms and separate sporting facilities. They are taught in mixed-sex theory lectures but separate-sex practical sessions (Adnan, 1999). In terms of training women for a career in PE, the subject is also structured according to Islamic principles in Omani schools. All teachers at Cycle One are female, which is part of Oman's feminization process to raise the status of women (Ministry of Education 2002a, 2002b). Although in the West this might be considered disadvantageous to men and boys and failing to address the need for male role models, it is done to provide a caring environment for the children, and it does provide many jobs for women. All girls attend single-sex schools after Cycle One. Clearly, the stance taken by the Sultanate and SQU is a courageous one since the provision of PETPs for women in this region of the world is very rare, and the success of the venture should be acknowledged for its ability to improve opportunities for girls and women elsewhere.

It is important to realize that Arab culture is heterogeneous, and that some areas, even within a country, have a more traditional culture than others. This should be factored into efforts to deliver PE teacher training across the country. This brings differing perspectives whereby the traditional culture tends to depress the rights of Muslim women, whereas in a more authentically Islamic culture those rights would be upheld and issues of equality are seen. The Gulf region has this problem in particular, since Arab and Muslim cultures often clash with each other in those countries (Al-Sinani, Al-Ansari, Benn, Gaad, 2012).

The second research question explores the following: To what extent does the PETP comply with or challenge Islamic rules or Omani culture?

The Islamic feminist argument supporting physical activity for girls and women within Islam, strengthens the commitment to this study and to improving the provision of PE for girls and women in Oman. The research has emphasized the importance of school-based PE for girls in Oman because, in many places, their participation in physical activity and their wearing of special clothing that facilitates movement, is still seen as anathema to cultural traditions. Interestingly, the Islamic positive approach was evident in many of the students' views. Some participants cited verses from the Qur'an and Hadiths in their questionnaires and interviews about women 'freedom to participate in physical activity within Islamic guidelines.

The General Mufti of the Sultanate (2007) contributed a Fatwah to this study with the same message from within Islam. Participants expressed their confidence that the SQU programme met their needs as Muslim women in regards to aspects of dress and separate-sex study areas for practical studies. In addition, some also commented on the contribution that PE could make to body shape, health and life. In the interviews, however, most students commented negatively on the lycra leotards and tights required for gymnastics and dance and the swimming costumes since they had never worn such clothing before. The tight-fitting clothes conflicted with their normal loose-fitting attire, which made them uncomfortable. Being in single-sex as women only groups meant this was not an un-Islamic requirement.

Lecturers spoke about more difficulties concerning participation in certain clothing and activities in the early years of the programme. Students' confidence grew as numbers increased gradually from three per year to the current thirty-five. Interestingly, when confronted, the lecturers did not insist on the wearing of a particular kit, preferring participating students to feel comfortable. They recognized that the attitudes expressed by students were essentially those of their parents and home communities, and the SQU PETP was in the process of building a reputation and needed to do that cautiously and respectfully. This does accentuate the fragility of the position of this programme at SQU in the early years of the 1990s. In representing a new vocational training opportunity for women, the PETP was seen as challenging long-held beliefs about Omani women's role, their responsibilities, expected behavior, activities and dress codes within their communities.

The observation of one Omani woman in the mountains showed that PE's reputation remains fragile in some areas of Oman. A complaint from a parent to the local community court ended with the PE teacher's father being called to justify her wearing of the Ministry of Education's PE uniform in the local school. The complainant considered this to be contrary to the religious obligation for women to fully cover their bodies. The result was that the teacher subsequently wore her abaya every day at the request of her father. Such confusions between Islam and cultural beliefs are a product of multiple influences in the history of Oman. The country has been an Islamic country since the seventh century, but it has been subjected to different tribal rulers and taken over by various invaders, for example, the Portuguese, Arabs from other countries on the peninsula, the Iranians, and Europeans. Additionally, Oman's ruling of Zanzibar, Africa (Tanzania), and the influx of people from that territory have had a significant impact.

According to Al Musalami (1995) in the pre-1970 period a woman's identity, values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors were strongly influenced by their immediate community, particularly in the world of the Omani women: the sea women, the Bedouin women, rural women and urban women. In spite of many advances driven by the Sultan that have benefited women since that period, there remain challenges and "despite their enormous contributions, women in Oman continue to face formidable social, economic and political barriers" (Haddad and Esposito, 1998:144). As for the teacher in the case referred to above, attending the University for four years to gain a degree in PE was acceptable in the community, but the complaint about dress code, upon her return to teach in that community, indicated a stronger allegiance locally to traditional culture than to Islamic and Ministerial requirements. Since the teacher chose to accede to her father's wishes to wear the abaya daily in her teaching of PE, the issue has not been resolved to the benefit of other girls and women in that community. One solution would have been for the inspector to attend the court as requested by the woman's father, in order to challenge the complainant's view from within Islam and Ministry policy. This might have improved the future chances of all girls and women to participate in physical activity in more appropriate attire in that community.

Question 2

The first analysis relates to the data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews focusing on the first research question: to what extent does the PETP programme bring about positive changes in the social position of Omani women?

Here it can be seen that the combined evidence indicates the PETP to have been instrumental in bringing positive change in the social position of Omani women on two levels: personally, and in response to the Omani expectation of women's contribution to social development. It also brought difficulties for some on returning to their local communities as practicing physical education teachers.

At the individual level, women in all four groups believed that the PETP, its content and training opportunities, helped in the development of their personalities, the area of personal challenge and their capability to be positive role models for children, families and their local community. Many of the students recognized the values and benefits of physical education to their bodies and health, and to the lives of others they may teach (SPINED 2004). Many women in Muscat started going to the city's gyms after lectures to improve their fitness, and some teachers believed that taking part in physical activity and teaching physical education gave them a positive outlook on life. Inspectors recognized the benefits that physical exercise brought to their own lives and those of their families. The lecturers acknowledged the large range of positive benefits they had witnessed in their students over many years, including increased levels of self-confidence. This was exemplified by women

making theoretical presentations for men and vice versa, a small change by Western standards but a huge step in Omani society.

SQU graduates operate as agents of social change in their communities. Their confidence at the end of the course enables them to have some influence on many young girls, and boys at Cycle One, in the schools where they work. Although the status of PE teachers in schools sometimes lags behind that of other subject teachers, it is much better than it was a few years ago, which indicates an incremental improvement in opinions on the value of PE. SQU's regional quota system, which draws students from across Oman, ensures a representative and diverse PE intake. Upon finishing their course, students are given the choice of which region they will work in for their first teaching position. The majority choose to return home. Women's careers in local communities have varying degrees of potential for bringing about positive changes in Omani women's status. Some have more opportunities than others depending on the region they live in, resources, facilities and community attitudes towards women's role, their dress codes and participation in physical activity. Some graduates are faced with patriarchal, tribal, and cultural challenges and tensions as they attempt to present an alternative vision of Omani women and raise standards in their field, particularly in rural areas (Haddad and Esposito 1998). It is the challenge of the 'visible Omani physical education female teacher' that can create problems in a society that expects all its women to cover in the black abaya when in public.

National policy on equal opportunities encourages all Omani women to contribute to development of their society and indeed Oman prides itself on achievements of Omani women in high Ministerial and other roles (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 1998 and 2001). Through education, and in this case physical education, SQU graduates can contribute much to others 'knowledge, skills, health, well-being, longevity and quality of life. Teachers, inspectors and lecturers were more optimistic and positive about change in the Omani women's social position, probably because of their wider experience and contact with society. There is still a long way to go. Part of the new strategy encourages schools to be proactive in projecting the sport message within their communities. For the first time PE teachers, both male and female, are being asked to prepare displays with their pupils to contribute to the large national festivals. Positive messages about women's rights and roles are slowly reaching out across Oman. Gender relations, cultural, religious and political tensions will, of course, continue. The PETP represents the only chance for Omani women to train in the PE and sports field. It is the graduates of this course who are the role models for other generations, the future teachers, coaches, motivators, leaders, members of the Ministries and drivers of change. An example of this was the first women's handball refereeing training course to be held in Oman (May 2007). All twenty-two participants had been graduates of the PETP programme at SQU, including two of the first cohort of only three students. These women continue to teach and struggle to extend their skills for the benefit of bringing new opportunities to girls and women in Oman (Al-Sinani 2007). It is these women who lead the challenge in shifting the ground on gender relations in PE and sport in Oman. Such a shift comes via the contribution and potential of Islamic feminism in the lives of Omani women, as noted by Flintoff and Scraton (2005:161) who state that: "Theories (and societies) are fluid and dynamic, and reflect gender relations themselves that are not static and change over time".

Strengths and Limitations of the study:

One of the strengths of this study should be to try to determine the appropriateness of the program from the women's point of view of the program itself to collect data from the total number of teachers, investigators, lecturers and

Year-end graduates. One of this study's strengths will be to determine the suitability of the program from the women's perspective and collecting data from the total number of educators, investigators, lecturers, etc. of the program. Two sources of the data - the questionnaire and the interview - have enhanced the validity of the results and expanded access to the results. One of the greatest weaknesses of the study is the small number of lecturers in the program, the entire lecture community

Conclusions

It is evident that there is a need for more understanding of authentic Islam, particularly when it comes to the status of women and their involvement in sport and physical activity. This will require a clear separation of authentic Islam from pseudo-religious ideas assimilated into cultural beliefs and transmitted without question through generations. Clearly, this is a complex outcome to achieve, and efforts will be met with opposition and challenges. A feminist perspective from an Islamic perspective may be useful in preparing for that opposition.

Along with the adoption of an Islamic feminist approach, it would also be helpful to include a course to prepare students to deal with and overcome some of the socio-cultural challenges they face when attempting to teach PE

(Al Sinani, 2017). This would have the effect of engendering greater confidence and capability in students to improve the position of girls and women in society.

Participants' feedback, and in particular the fieldwork observations, indicate that training needs to be much more sensitive to the diversity of needs trainees will encounter in their teaching positions. Therefore, further research on how students negotiate their positions as PE teachers in the diverse contexts of Oman, how they cope with the demands of the profession, and how they manage gender positioning in this particular context, can add valuable insights into the lives of Omani women teachers of physical education.

Recommendations

There is much to be researched about the change in the status of women in Oman, and where sports fit into the process of change in the coming years.

Greater knowledge of the situation of girls and women in physical education and sports in other Islamic countries would be valuable in guiding development plans in Oman.

While the above-mentioned areas were highlighted for further research, it is hoped that the current study will have enhanced the value of research and literature on initial teacher training for women in Oman.

References

- Allan, B., & Smylie, J. (2015). *First Peoples, second class treatment: The role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada*. Toronto, ON: The Wellesley Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ReportFirst-Peoples-Second-Class-Treatment-Final.pdf>
- Adnan, B (2007) Sultan Qaboos University. http://www.squ.edu.om/adm/squ_adm1.html
- Al Bakri, K. (2019). Khadija Master's Thesis Female students 'participation in physical activities in Oman, University of Jyväskylä. Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences Social Sciences of Sport.
- Al Musalami, S.S. (1995) *Women Enrolments in Work and Changing Tradition Roles in the Sultanate of Oman*. Muscat: SQU.
- AL Sinani, Y. (2014). A Necessity in Today's Time: Physical Education in Oman. *International Journal of Learning Management Systems*, 2 (1), 21-32
- Al-Sinani, Y. Al-Wahaibi, A. Benn, T. (2021) Women's participation in physical education, physical activity, and sport in Oman., In Lopez, R., Koushki, M., & Luisa M, M. (Eds.). *Women in Sport In Asia* (pp. 136-147). London, LDN: Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9781003131885-16](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131885-16)
- Al-Sinani, Y Al-Ansari, M., Benn, T. & Gaad, M. E. (2012). Exploring the Effects of Context on Provision and Practice for Girls and Women in Physical Education in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries. *International Sports Studies*, 35(2), 3-21.
- Al Sinani, Y. (2017) *The Establishment and Development of the Initial Physical Education Teachers 'Training Program for Women in Oman. Sport in the Middle East: Power, Politics, Ideology and Religion*. (pp:85 – 110). DOI: [10.4324/9781315087726-6](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315087726-6)
- Al-Sinani, Y. & Benn, T. (2010). *The Sultanate of Oman and the Position of Girls and Women in Physical Education and Sport*. In Benn, T., Pfister, G., & Jawad, H. (Eds.). *Muslim Women in Sport* (pp. 125-136). London, LDN: Routledge.
- Al Sinani, Y. (2007) *International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women Bulletin* <http://www.iapesgw.org.uk>
- Al Ahtawi, R. (2000) *Islamic Feminism*. Lebanon: Dar Al-Bouraq-Bayreuth.
- Benn, T. Dagkas, S. (2012) *The Olympic Movement and Islamic Culture: Conflict or compromise for Muslim Women?* *international Journal of Sport Policy* 5(2):pp: 1-14. DOI: [10.1080/19406940.2012.656677](https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2012.656677)
- Benn, T. (1995) *Muslim Women and Physical Education in Initial Teacher Training*. *Sport, Education and Society* Volume 1, 1996 - Issue 1 Brannen, J. (1995) *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Brannen, J. (1995) *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Connolly, , G. (2012). *The Impact of Teacher Education on Beginning. Education Lessons*. *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 2 (1): 10-18, 2012 ISSN 2225-0883© IDOSI Publications.
- Creswell, J. (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2005) *Educational Research*. Person Merrill Prentice Hall. New Jersey
- Dagkas, S. Benn, T. (2006) *(Young Muslim Women's experiences of Islam and Physical*

- Debats, D. & Drost, J. & Hansen, P. (1995) Experiences of Meaning in Life: A Combined Qualitative and Quantitative Approach, *British Journal of Psychology*, 86,3,359-375 doi.org/10.1177/1356336X211004628
- Flintoff, A. and Scraton, S. (2005) Gender and Physical Education, in K. Green and K. Hardman (eds) *Physical Educational Issues*, pp.161-179. London: Sage.
- Haddad, Y. and Esposito, J. (1998) *Islam, Gender, and Social Changes*. Oxford: Oxford
- Jawad, H. (1998) *The Rights of Women in Islam*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Kahan, D. (2019) Critical Appraisal of Qualitative Studies of Muslim Females ‘Perceptions of Physical Activity Barriers and Facilitators. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 16 (24): 5040.
- Laar, R.Shi, S. Ashraf, M .(2019). Participation of Pakistani Female Students in Physical Activities: Religious, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Factors. School of Sports Science and Physical Education, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing Research Institute of Educational Science, Hunan University, Changsha, China
- Lawson, T. (2003) *Reorienting Economics*. London: Routledge.
- Ministry of Education (2002a) *Basic Education in the Sultanate of Oman -the Theoretical Framework*. Muscat: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education (2002b) *Basic Education in the Sultanate of Oman, A Guide to the First Cycle, Grades 1- 4*. Muscat: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (1998) *Social Foundation Supporting Omani Women*. Muscat: Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (2000) *Women Condition in 1999*. Unpublished. Muscat: Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. Pages 5-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332960010101>.
- Rogers, A. & Nicolas, G. (1998) Understanding the Patterns and Processes of Primary Care use; a Combined Quantitative and Qualitative Approach. *Sociological research online*, 3, 4.
- Teddlie, C. & Tashakkori, A. (2003) ”Major Issues and Controversies in the use of Mixed Methods” in Tashakkori, A and Teddlie, C. (2003) *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research*. London: Sage.
- Zahidi, M. Ali, S. Mohd Nor, M. (2012) *Young Muslim Women and Their Relation with Physical Education*. Bannu, Pakistan: The University of Education.
- Benn, T.(1995) Muslim Women and Physical Education in Initial Teacher Training. *Sport, Education and Society* Volume 1, 1996 - Issue 1, pp 5-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332960010101>
- Connolly, G. (2012). *The Impact of Teacher Education on Beginning Physical Education Teachers ‘Practices*. A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree. Athens, Georgia.
- Laar, R.Shi, S. Ashraf, M .(2019). Participation of Pakistani Female Students in Physical Activities: Religious, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Factors. School of Sports Science and Physical Education, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing Research Institute of Educational Science, Hunan University, Changsha, China.

Author Information

Yousra Juma Al-Sinani

College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University
