Challenges to Fostering Values among Omani School Students from the Perspectives of Social Studies and Islamic Education Teachers

Ahmed Al-Rabaani & Mohsin Al- Salmi & Hamad Al-Salmi
College of Education – Curriculum & Instruction
Sultan Qaboos University
B.O. Box: 32, Postal Code: 123 Al-Khod Oman
rabaani@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the views of social studies and Islamic education teachers about fostering values among Omani school students and the challenges they face. The study sample consisted of 430 male and female teachers. A questionnaire was used to collect the data and the results showed that both social studies and Islamic education teachers are highly concerned about the importance of fostering values among school students, and they believe that several methods are necessary to achieve this. The results also indicated that these teachers face many difficulties in fostering values, particularly Islamic education teachers.

Key Words: Values, Social studies, Islamic education, Students, Oman.

1. Introduction

Globalization and rapid technological penetration in the information age has had massive and unpredictable impacts on all global cultures and societies, with positive and negative outcomes. Among the latter are alienation and social fragmentation, manifest in the rising prevalence of antisocial behavior (e.g. increasing rates of violent crime), for which the fostering of values has been proposed as a remedy to guide behavior. These values either reflect religious or cultural principles that determine what is right and what is wrong; it is necessary from the outset to clarify what is meant by "values." The *Business Dictionary* (2015) defines them as "Important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable", while the *Oxford Dictionary* (2015) opts for "Principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life". Similarly, Halstead, Taylor & Taylor (2000, 169) defined it as "Principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guide to behavior; the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable". Based on these definitions, it can be noted that values guide human behavior and function as a socially-conditioned self-evaluator of what is right or wrong, acceptable or not acceptable. Such values are inculcated in people from childhood by their parents, schools and other institutions. Since 19th century colonialism, regional variations in values have been confronted by the hegemony of Western ideologies under colonialism, which has accelerated in the information age with modern communications, including TV, the internet, and social media.

While often hailed as the onward march of socio-cultural and economic development, these developments also have negative impacts, particularly on children and adolescents. For instance, the proportion of 16 year olds with serious emotional problems rose from 10% in 1986 to 17% in 1999 (Collishaw et al., 2004). Cook (2006) also found that nearly one in three girls and one in four boys in grade six reported being highly stressed. It also found that among 5.4% of nationwide had not gone to school on one or more occasions because they felt unsafe, and between 15-25% of students are bullied with moderate frequency. Antisocial behavior is also on the rise among young people; a report in 2002 found that 74% of American students admitted to having cheated on an exam in the past year, 38% of had stolen something from a store, 43% of them lie to get ahead in life (Britzman,2005). A UN report showed that around 475,000 people were killed in 2012 due to violence; most of them males aged 15-44 (World Health Organization, 2014). The Guardian newspaper revealed that the number of suicides in the UK was 6233 in 2013, a 4% increase on 2012, with a marked increase in prevalence among young people (theguardian.com, 2015).

According to the UN there are 230 million people have taken illegal drugs at least once, 27 million, and it is expected that the number of drug addicts worldwide will 300 million by 2100 (Economist, 2012). This is not a coherent catalogue of problems to be laid at the door of globalization; the causes of these issues are multi-faceted and complex, but this brief list is illustrative of the myriad problems in many societies worldwide associated with the fragmentation of traditional systems of values. All communities and governments are concerned to foster values among young people to prepare them to live peacefully and maturely in civilized communities, to avoid harming themselves and their societies. Peterson & Seligman (2004) noted that fostering values is important to prepare students to cope with life challenges related to economic wellbeing, technological change, and environmental risk in a world beleaguered by war, disease, and injustice. Leung (2005) stated that values are fundamental to guide human life and standards, connecting individual action, knowledge and the world. Therefore, there is great attention among societies and educators about fostering social, political, economic and environmental values among students to prevent or reduce behavioral problems (Regnerus, 2003), to achieve family and societal stability (Mahoney, 2005).Empirical studies have demonstrated the importance of values among adolescents, and that those who are aware of religious values have less risk and less stress (Cook, 2000; Hackney & Sander, 2003; Wagener et al., 2003). Brimi (2009) explained that fostering values among school students is very crucial, and teaching values make difference in developing students' abilities to manage their behavior. Campbell (2003) mentioned that schools can foster values among students through obvious or hidden curriculum activities, either inside or outside schools.

Teachers can enhance values instruction for their students through the selection of appropriate topics, interacting with them, forming of groups and promoting students and punishment (Hansen, 1993; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). The role of teachers is powerful in terms of not only academic instruction, but also being role model examples (Character Education Partnership, 2011). Many studies found that students strongly believe in the role of their teacher in fostering their values (Al-Hindi, 2001; Al-Saying, 2006; Barhom, 2009; Kashaln, 2010). However, fostering values among school students is not an easy task, as they are often disconnected from the role of education in non-academic dimensions as from the value system itself. This barrier is increasing due to the rapid pace of change and the role of international technology in life (Al-Dosoqi & Abdel Moti, 2004; Kutto, 2013).

In the Omani context, the concept of value concepts is widely included in social studies and Islamic education textbooks, and indeed traditional Arab-Islamic values still permeate public narratives and culture in the country (Al-Kuzire, 2002; Al-Hosni, 2003; Al-Yahyae, 2004; Al-Alwy, 2007; Al-Hadi, 2010; Al-Dekishi, 2013), but students cannot be assumed to passively absorb socially constructive beliefs and behaviors, and the role of teachers is very important in galvanizing these values among them. Thus, it is important to investigate social studies and Islamic teachers' views about fostering values among their students and the difficulties they face.

Thus, it is needed to investigate the views of teachers who are expected to be responsible for fostering values among school students in terms of the shortage of studies concerned about this perspective, namely social studies and Islamic education teachers in the Omani context.

2. *Purpose of the study*

- Investigating Omani social studies and Islamic education teachers' views about fostering values and its difficulties.
- Examining Omani social studies and Islamic education teachers' views about importance of fostering values among school students.
- Understanding methods used by social studies and Islamic education teachers to foster values among Omani students.
- Exploring the difficulties facing Omani social studies and Islamic education teachers related to fostering values among Omani students.
- Examining influence of teachers' specialties, gender, qualification, and experience in their views about fostering values among school students and its difficulties.

3. *Research Questions*

1. What are the views of social studies and Islamic education teachers about the importance of fostering values among school students?
2. What are the views of social studies and Islamic education teachers about the effectiveness of values fostering methods?

3. What are the difficulties that social studies and Islamic education teachers encounter in fostering values among school students?
4. Do the views of social studies and Islamic education teachers about fostering values differ according to their gender, experience, qualifications, and specialties?

4. *Methodology*

4.1. Sample

The total study sample consisted of 430 social studies and Islamic education teachers who are selected from seven provinces of the Sultanate of Oman, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Study sample

Variable		N	%
Gender	Male	164	38.1
	Female	266	61.9
	Total	430	100.0
Specialties	Social studies teachers	210	48.8
	Islamic education teachers	220	51.2
	Total	430	100.0
Qualification	BA	382	88.8
	MA	48	11.2
	Total	430	100.0
Experience	1-5	78	18.1
	6-10	138	32.1
	11-15	112	26.0
	over 15	102	23.7
	Total	430	100.0

4.2. Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on previous literature and experiences in the field, due to the lack of a ready questionnaire concerning the researched topic. A pool of items was constructed followed by several modifications to devise the first draft of the questionnaire, which consisted of 39 items. Validation by a panel of referees who are specialists in social studies, Islamic Education, and psychology led to the modification and rephrasing of some items and the deletion of others, so the final version consisted of 36 items divided into three domains: the importance of fostering values, effective methods for fostering values and difficulties encountered in fostering values among students. Reliability was examined by applying the questionnaire to 25 teachers not included in the main sample; Cranach's alpha revealed the reliability was .933.

5. *Results*

What are the views of social studies and Islamic education teachers about the importance of fostering values among schools' students?

The results showed that social studies and Islamic education teachers highly stress the importance of fostering values for students in order to develop their normal personality committed to the principles of religion and society. They also believe that enhancement of values enables students to navigate rapid life changes making appropriate choices, and develops their intellectual, religious, cultural, and political personalities. They also think that it will enhance students' abilities to deal with cultural openness and allow them to employ technology to achieve their ambitions.

Table 2: Importance of fostering values of students

Items	M	Std.
Developing normal individuals in behaviors and decisions	4.58	.680
Developing individuals committed to the principles of religion and society	4.59	.692
Developing individuals capable of navigating cultural changes	4.33	.832
Developing individuals who respect intellectual, religious, cultural and political differences	4.26	.858
Developing individuals rationally capable to deal with cultural openness	4.12	.960
Developing individuals capable of employing technology to achieve personal and nation ambitions	4.09	.914
Average	4.33	.627

What are the views of social studies and Islamic education teachers about effectiveness of values fostering methods?

The results showed that social studies and Islamic education teachers think fostering values could be achieved through using several methods, but some are considered more effective, such as teacher representation of values in front of students, followed by encouraging them to practice behavior consistent with the value system and reward them for it.

Table 3: Methods of fostering values

Items	M	Std.
Teachers' and parents' representation of values in front of students	4.50	.725
Teacher presentation of the danger of misusing technology on the value system of the individual and society	4.00	1.00
Teacher discussion of problems caused by the absence of a value system in society, such as drugs, car accidents, theft and murder	4.27	.828
Encouraging students to practice behaviors that are consistent with value system and reward them for it	4.40	.815
Providing students with journals and publications which involve values issues	3.71	1.07
Discussing risks caused by being exposed to media programs likely to undermine individuals' attachment to their value system	3.96	1.06
Holding workshops inside school to promote values among students	3.62	1.29
Visit historical heritage sites that highlight culture and values	3.56	1.17
Presenting examples of exotic behaviors in society incompatible with normative values	4.03	1.01
Inviting influential people who have the ability to strengthen values among students	3.90	1.15
Presenting exemplary modules of problems facing some countries due to the absence of values systems, such as family breakdown family, disintegration, elderly care homes, destruction of property, violence and the absence of social security	4.00	1.07
Enhancement of individual social responsibilities related to negative behaviors	4.14	.904
Introducing solutions to change negative behavior and present successful examples of those who abandoned smoking, drugs or theft	4.14	.992
Presenting economic losses resulting from negative behavior such irrational use of water and destruction of public properties	3.86	1.03
Presenting some behavior which does not reflect Omani identity and how to change it	3.94	1.00
Average	4.00	.705

They also think that some methods can make a difference, such as discussing the effect of the media on the value system, enhancement of individual responsibility, and introducing solutions to change negative behavior. The results also revealed that the teachers are concerned about linking fostering values with factors that may affect their values system, such as family and social issues resulted from absence of value with examples from different societies. They also think that inviting influential people is important to develop students' understanding of good examples in their society and the model of success.

What are the difficulties that social studies and Islamic education teachers encounter in fostering values among school students?

Table 4: Difficulties facing fostering values among students

Items	M	Std.
Diversity of family childrearing methods affects teachers' capability to promote values	4.41	.836
Strong effect of media, social media and peers on students' value system	4.51	.750
Less concern of some parents about changing negative behaviors of their children	4.38	1.024
Some parents teach their children some habits and customs which are not consistent with society's values because they consider it modernization	4.08	1.08
Weakness of values representation by teachers inside and outside the school	3.63	1.22
Students imitation of some famous people in media without realizing danger	4.23	.900
Some students affected by films and programs that undermine values	4.34	.927
Students participation in some activities that do not comply with values	3.64	1.13
Changes in lifestyle impose new types of behaviors that limit the representation of values	4.20	.886
The existence of a generation gap in the domain of values' commitment and its representation	4.10	.938
The weak role of religious institutions in promoting values among students	3.78	1.17
The weak treatment of issues related to values in the curriculum	3.96	1.18
Ineffective methods used to encourage students to embody values compared with counteractive methods	3.93	.996
The existence of currents of thought promoting "freedom of values" to undermine national values for modernization and integration with other cultures	4.01	1.05
The impact of cultural openness to other civilizations influencing children's behaviors	4.20	.876
Average	4.09	.632

The results showed that social studies and Islamic education teachers encounter many difficulties related to fostering values among students arising from several sources, such as the strong effect of the media, social media, and variations in family methods of childrearing and degrees of parental concern about changing their children's negative behavior. A generation gap was detected as another difficulty due to the effect of rapid changes in life. The teachers also explained the weak role of religious institutions in promoting values and treatment of issues related to values in the curriculum. They also believe that the undermining of national values is executed under the guise of "freedom" and "modernization."

Do social studies and Islamic education teachers' views about using fostering values differ according to their gender, experience, province, specialties, and qualification?
Gender

The results showed that females had higher concern about fostering values among students, and they believe more in the effectiveness of values fostering methods, although they face more difficulties than male teachers do.

Table 5: T-test of gender effect on teachers' views

Domains	Gender	M	Std.	t	df	Sig.
Importance of fostering values	Male	4.16	.682	4.535	428	.000*
	Female	4.43	.567	4.341	298.011	
Methods of fostering values	Male	3.78	.770	5.405	428	.000*
	Female	4.14	.623	5.144	291.953	
Difficulties facing fostering values	Male	3.93	.609	4.188	428	.000*
	Female	4.19	.626	4.216	352.526	
Average	Male	3.95	.560	6.084	428	.000*
	Female	4.26	.453	5.789	291.819	

Specialties

The results showed that both social studies and Islamic education teachers agree about the importance of fostering values among students and methods of fostering values. However, Islamic teachers faced more difficulties in fostering values compared to social studies teachers.

Table 6: T-test results of specialties effect on teachers' views

Domains	Specialties	M	Std.	t	df	Sig.
Importance of fostering values	Social studies	4.31	.632	.461	428	.645
	Islamic education	4.34	.624	.461	426.561	
Methods of fostering values	Social studies	3.99	.683	.237	428	.813
	Islamic education	4.01	.727	.237	427.910	
Difficulties facing values enhancement	Social studies	4.03	.609	2.081	428	.038✳
	Islamic education	4.15	.648	2.084	427.882	
Average	Social studies	4.11	.521	1.138	428	.256
	Islamic education	4.17	.513	1.138	426.324	

Qualifications

The results showed no significance differences between teachers who have BA and MA degrees in their views about fostering values.

Table 7: T-test test results of qualification effect on teachers' views

Domains	Qualification	M	Std.	t	df	Sig.
Importance of fostering values	BA	4.32	.630	1.066	428	.287
	MA	4.42	.603	1.104	60.647	
Methods of fostering values	BA	4.00	.702	.173	428	.863
	MA	4.02	.740	.166	58.144	
Difficulties facing values enhancement	BA	4.08	.639	.919	428	.359
	MA	4.17	.569	1.006	62.896	
Average	BA	4.13	.514	.883	428	.378
	MA	4.20	.547	.841	57.914	

Experience the results also showed that there are no significant differences in teachers' views due to their experience.

Table 8: ANOVA results of experience effect on teachers' views

Domains		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Importance of fostering values	Between groups	1.273	3	.424	1.077	.359
	Within groups	167.783	426	.394		
	Total	169.055	429			
Methods of fostering values	Between groups	.704	3	.235	.470	.703
	Within groups	212.888	426	.500		
	Total	213.592	429			
Difficulties facing fostering values	Between groups	1.396	3	.465	1.166	.322
	Within groups	170.021	426	.399		
	Total	171.417	429			
Average	Between groups	.736	3	.245	.915	.434
	Within groups	114.260	426	.268		
	Total	114.996	429			

Discussion

The results showed that social studies and Islamic education teachers highly believe in the importance of fostering values among students, because it leads to developing normal personality, individuals committed to the principles of religion and society, and it enables them to navigate a path in a volatile cultural landscape.

Their strong belief in the importance of values is due to several factors, including the Islamic principles upon which Oman and Arab-Islamic civilization is predicated, reinforced by the conservative nature of Omani society in particular, which is keen to foster national values to prevent young people being harmed by globalization and negative exposures to alien cultures. These attitudes could be due to the effect of the training of social studies and Islamic education teachers, whereby they are prepared to teach values during their pre-service courses, and the content of textbooks focus on teaching values. Based on these results, it found that teachers strongly believe in the importance of fostering values, in-line with literature stressing the importance of values for guiding people's behavior, coping with life changes and daily life selections and decision making (Regnerus, 2003; Peterson& Seligman, 2004; Leung, 2005).

Such beliefs support the results of some studies which showed that those adolescents concerned about values were exposed to less risk and stress (Cook, 2000; Hackney & Sander, 2003; Wagener et al., 2003). The belief among social studies and Islamic education teachers that values are fundamentally important reflects growing concern about the increase of violence, crimes, emotional problems, drugs at the global level (Collishaw et al., 2004; Britzman, 2005; Cook, 2006; Economist, 2012). News and reports about increasing prevalence of negative behaviors and noticeable daily life changes in people's conduct may drive these teachers to strongly believe in the impotence of fostering values because of the dire social consequences of a breakdown in the value system in terms of peace, security and antisocial behavior; while these have long been manifest as evidences of the alienation of modernity in a Western context, they are of more pressing concern in the Middle East due to the volatile and potentially violent nature of disturbances in the region, in a milieu of limited human value and rights to live in peace and practice their beliefs freely, wherein Oman has carved a peaceful but precarious niche. The results also indicated that social studies and Islamic education teachers believe that fostering values can be achieved using several methods. This is because of idea that values development and fostering process could be influenced positively or negatively by many factors related to interaction between students and surrounding environment. Thus, the teachers believe that the representation of value by themselves and parents is a powerful method because of the example they give to students. When parents and teachers manifest espoused values, this avoids adolescent allegations of hypocrisy (such as arise when smoking parents berate their children for the same action).

The results also showed that the social studies and Islamic education teachers strongly believe in the influence of discussing issues related to value. The discussion of issues enables students to widely understand the direct and indirect results of negative behavior on individuals and society, highlighting how the carelessness of some people could lead to several problems that may need a longtime to be treated, such as drugs, theft and violence. In addition, the teachers stressed the importance of teaching students to behave in consistency with the values system in order to develop a normal personality, which evaluates situations before acting. They also believe in the importance of the enhancement of individual responsibility in order to encourage students to take responsibility for their behavior, either at the personal or social levels. The teachers also highlighted the need to provide students with solutions that help them to change negative behavior. These simulations enable students to modify their behavior when they find themselves acting negatively in some situations, such as smoking or cheating. The results also explained that the social studies and Islamic education teachers are concerned about benefiting from influential people's experience and power of influence to foster values as role models. The above results related to effective methods for fostering values among students indicates that the social studies and Islamic teachers are highly interested in using a variety of teaching methods. Most of these methods depend on teachers' role inside and outside the classroom. Such results are in-line with literature that expressed the powerful role of teachers in fostering values (Al-Hindi, 2001; Al-Sayig, 2006; Barhom, 2009; Kashaln, 2010; Character Education Partnership, 2011).

The results also support literature which showed that fostering values is not any easy task because students exposed to several powerful factors that undermine their attachment to their (native) value system, such as the media, social media, increasingly open culture, counterproductive currents of thought, life changes and the influence of other cultures. These factors work effectively in light of the weak role of religious institutions and school curriculums, which makes the mission of fostering values more difficult. In addition, the generation gap,

variations in parental modes of childrearing preventing consensus, and students naturally imitating their peers or negative models in the media represent other difficulties. These results support previous studies which showed difficulties encountered in fostering values (Al-Dosoqi & Abdel Moti, 2004; Kutto, 2013).

The results also showed that female teachers are highly concerned about the importance of fostering values, using several methods for this, but they face more difficulties in fostering values among their students compared to their male teachers. These differences could be due to female teachers perceiving the disconnection of student behavior from their value system as more serious, particularly for their own female students, due to maternal and sisterly emotions common among women within the GCC, and the greater pressure placed upon women by the influence of information media and other sources It also found that Islamic education teachers have more difficulties in fostering values than social studies teachers, possibly due to the nature of their subject, which focuses more on fostering values and the spiritual obligation they feel about this particular pedagogical issue. On the other hand, the experience and qualifications of teachers were not found to affect their views about fostering values. This could be due to the issues related to values receiving attention by all, regardless of their experience or qualification level, as a major issue in Omani society.

6. Conclusion

The results showed that the social studies and Islamic education teachers strongly believe in the importance of fostering values among school students, and they think that this can be achieved by using several methods, particularly parents and teachers representation of values in front of their children and students. The results also revealed that fostering values in not an easy task due to the influence of many counteractive factors that function to disconnect students from their native value system.

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