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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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TO EXPLORE THE RELEVANCE OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION UNIVERSITY PROGRAMME TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN OMAN THROUGH AN EVALUATION OF CURRENT PRACTICE: RESEARCH APPROACH IN AN EVALUATION STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to explore the relevance of the Physical Education University programme to the needs of women teachers in Oman through an evaluation of current practice. This study revisited studies and literature done by the author in the same area and emphasis will be placed on contextualising the programme and currently in terms of the overall educational goals of the Sultanate and the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) as: Al Sinani (2013); Benn, & Jawad, Al-Sinani.(2014); Al-Sinani & Benn (2010); SQU 1992. The evaluation will focus on the studies were investigated the perceptions of key stakeholders: University staff and students, practising teachers, pupils and inspectors. It will aim to identify Research Approach in an Evaluation Study. It is anticipated that recommendations will emerge that could improve the relationship of the University programme with the reality of the profession in the schools of Oman. It is also anticipated that the study will make a theoretical contribution to understanding of gender, Islam and physical education.

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INTRODUCTION

"Evaluation may be defined as a systematic process of determining the extent to which instructional objectives are achieved by pupils. There are two important aspects of this definition. First, note that evaluation implies a systematic process, which omits casual. Second, evaluation assumes that instructional objectives have been previously identified. Without previously determined objectives, it is difficult to judge clearly the nature and extent of pupil learning". (Gronlund 1981 in Nunan 1992:184)

The Research Questions: The boundary between opposing research approaches such as positivist/descriptive can often be blurred, and in most cases the opposing approaches may share common features, for example, as Bassey (1996) rightly points out, both the positivist and interpretive paradigm involve the idea of observers trying to describe the phenomena of their surroundings. It is therefore not a matter of right or wrong to decide upon any particular paradigm for this study. However, based on the problem of the study, the research questions, and the aims of the study, and after a careful review of the various paradigms, this study can be said to be located within an interpretive paradigm. It is interpretive in the sense that attempts will be made, as explained in the methodology to elicit information from respondents, and since such reposes are likely to be based on perceptions rather

than empirical facts, the resulting data and their analysis would fit into the descriptive paradigm rather than the empiricist positivist paradigm.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will employ the survey approach using both qualitative and quantitative analyses in order to capture in depth the nature, process and effectiveness of the PE ITT program. Cresswell (2003) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) have recently advocated greater use of mixed methods in social science research. This phenomenon has attracted many researchers in the last decade (Brannen 1995), for example in sociology (Rogers and Nicolaus 1998), psychology (Debats et al 1995), economics (Lawson 2003). While quantitative methods are expected to show the numerical distribution of responses, qualitative methods were also selected for this study for the purpose of generating data rich in detail and embedded in context. As this study is centred on the teachers' initial training, a combination of both methods can yield results that are more reliable in building a foundation for an effective evaluation of ITT for women in physical education; not only by gauging perceptions of respondents but also by understanding the context upon which such perceptions are built. Qualitative research is concerned with a description of people and

their perceptions of the world (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, Bell 1993). We can say that each approach has its advantages and disadvantages and one cannot say that one approach is higher in rank than the other. Both approaches can be seen as complementary to each other. Perhaps for this reason it has become common in educational research to adopt an eclectic or multi-method approach. In this approach, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in order to provide alternative perspectives on the same phenomenon. This is often referred to as "triangulation" (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989: 104).

Triangulation: Triangulation is used to ensure the reliability and quality of information by examining the same research problem using different research methods. Cohen and Manion and Morrison (2004: 112) defined triangulation "as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour". Cohen and Manion (1986: 260-266) describe some situations where triangulation is appropriate:

1. Triangulation is effective when a comprehensive view of behavior is required. Cohen and Manion quote Isaac and Michael (1971) who suggests that most classrooms and teachers interested in the outcomes of education or achievement focus on attainment rather than on the development of attitudes. As an example regarding the importance attitudes, it is suggested that the relatively low popularity of mathematics as a subject in higher education is due to negative attitudes towards mathematics rather than low levels of ability.
2. Triangulation is useful where a complex phenomenon requires detailed study. As an example, consider how one might approach a comparative study of formal and informal classrooms.

Sampling: As indicated above, the research population will consist of stake-holders in the effectiveness of PEITPW in Oman: the head of PE, PE Lecturers and final year students at SQU, PE inspectors and teachers in the field. Some of those graduated from the programme under study while others graduated from other programmes whether in Oman or in another country, but sharing the common attribute of having the experience in teaching PE in Omani schools. The reason was to get the impartial views of outsiders rather than those who know the current programme or work towards it. It is hoped that such interviews could yield useful data for better management of sports education in Oman. The survey focuses on female subjects only because in my opinion, they are best placed to evaluate the suitability of the programme and suggest what it should stress and what it should ignore. Those of them who work in schools whether as PE teachers or PE inspectors know best what should be done to turn the situation around in a society where the PE teacher is not appreciated. Moreover the survey will enable respondents to express their feelings about how the programme relates to their identity as a Muslim woman. More than 300 respondents will be drawn for the questionnaire survey using a two-stage quota and random sampling method. Robson (2002: 262) defined stratified random sampling as: "Dividing the population into a number of groups or strata, where members of a group share a particular characteristic or characteristics (e.g. from among all women respondents, stratum A may be teachers; stratum B inspectors). Subsequently, respondents are randomly selected from each stratum in a manner that ensures fair representation of all strata".

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004:101) agreed with Robson that stratified random sampling "involves dividing the population into homogenous groups, each group containing subject with similar characteristics". They also recommend that the organization of a stratified random sample entails a simple two-stage process; first, identifying those characteristics which appear in the wider population which must also appear in the sample, i.e. divide the wider population into homogeneous and, if possible, discrete groups (strata), for example males and females. Second, random sample within these groups, the size of each group being determined either by the judgement of the researcher.

Translation: For the sake of respondents who do not speak or understand the English language, the questionnaire and interview schedules were designed in Arabic. However, the instruments were also translated into English for non-Arabic speaking individuals who would have to deal with this study such as the research supervisors and examiners. In doing this, the researcher went to great lengths to ensure that there were no discrepancies between the original questionnaires and interview questions in Arabic and their translations into English, as a means of maintaining the validity and reliability of the research instruments. Experts in translation in the Language Centre of the SultanQaboosUniversity assisted in the translation after which a panel of assessors were asked to go through both versions to further ensure their sameness. Later on a pilot test was done with a handful of respondents for the purpose of plugging the necessary loopholes in the questionnaire. The comments of the respondents were useful and incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire and interview questions. It was necessary to ensure that the translated versions of the research instruments employed in the investigation were also appropriate. The aim was to look for possible discrepancies between the English and the Arabic versions in terms of correspondence, accuracy, clarity and content. Therefore, the researcher followed the steps outlined below in the translation of the questionnaire and interviews. The researcher had the final drafts of the questionnaire and interview questions translated back into Arabic. The comments of the panel were very useful. Where the suggestions were taken into consideration, a number of revisions were made by the researcher and the final versions of the translation were retained. After the translation process was completed copies of the final drafts were shown to the both supervisors and drafts were shown to the panel looking at validity and reliability.

Ethical Issues: Ethical issues place responsibilities on researchers, for example: "As a researcher you have a duty to respect the people you are studying and you need to make sure you ask their explicit permission first, and then make very clear how you intend to collect, analyses and disseminate the data you have gathered by talking to them" (Grix 2004:142). The American Psychological Association (APA, 1998) was one of the first professional organizations to develop ethical guidelines for research, recognizing both the needs of the research and the rights of participants. These are now more common and are frequently updated, for example BERA 2004. The most important safeguard built into all of these guidelines, which will be used in my research, is that it is the participant's right to decide whether or not to take part. He or she also has the right to discontinue the study at any time, even after having agreed to participate. Ethical research is bound to honour this right and can neither coerce participants nor prevent them from withdrawing. Informed consent is an important safeguard; that is, the researcher must provide participants with enough information about the research to enable them to make informed decisions about their participation. Another important safeguard concerns the responsibility of the researcher to maintain strict confidentiality of information gathered about participants. In this respect, the researcher will use code numbers rather than participants' names on records that contain sensitive information to help protect participants' confidentiality. All the personal data stored on computers and files will not be saved without the knowledge, agreement and access of participants.

Research Validity: "More recently, measurement specialists have begun to view validity as a unitary concept (Thorndike, 1997) and advocate that scores are valid if they have use and they result in positive social consequences". (Hublely & Zumbo, 1996; Messick, 1980 on Cresswell 2005). For purposes of recollection, it is worth mentioning here that to the care taken in designing it, the validity of the research is ensured through the link between the research problem and the method of obtaining data to find answers to the problem. In addition to the care taken in designing it, the validity of the research is ensured through the link between the research problem and the method of obtaining data to find answers to the problem. The researcher can claim that her methods will enable her to find out what she needed from the research questions. Of course, I was fortunate to find respondents who could give detailed and reflective answers. The

researcher was also enabling to assess whether the methods she used measured what they were supposed to measure. In addition, the researcher arranged her questions in the questionnaire in a sequence, which built up a coherent sequence of ideas in the responses. The coherence of these ideas helped her to generate related data and explore the concepts and opinions, which the interments provided. Indeed, questionnaire and interview hope to be both effective methods for exploring relevant data, which in turn provide answers for the research problem through the data analysis. In conclusion the methods are judged to be valid if the tools measure accurately what they are supposed to measure.

Research Reliability: Research reliability is also shown by the consistency with which similar answers come from respondents asked the same questions at different times or by different researchers. Participants are fatigued, are nervous, misinterpret questions, or guess on tests". (Rudner, 1993) on Creswell 2005: 162). These instruments should show the reliability of the research if the designed questions are used in different locations and also in different seasons, e.g. autumn and winter, because they provide similar answers. The similarity of answers means that the answers, though not exactly the same, should cover similar related points or ideas. It does not matter if the answers bring different opinions, but they should always cover the main points needed for each question.

Feasibility and Flexibility: In this section a description is given of what should be taken into account when designing and carrying out research. Arksey and Knight (1999:60) have noted that "Irrespective of its size and finding, the most carefully managed study can be undermined by the smallest thing and go wrong. These sorts of issues are often not discussed in any great detail, possibly on the grounds that bringing them out into open might serve to deter would be researchers-especially students, who in many respects work in suboptimal circumstances, having to deal with constraints such as very short time scales and limited funding from this perspective, compromises have to be made in the research design between what is desirable and what is feasible".

Time constraints: As Arksey and Knight (1999:61) further recommend, "The calendar should contain a list of all the activities involved in the research, and target dates by which they have to be completed; at the same time, the schedule acts as tool for self-discipline in terms of those that have not yet been accomplished". Thus, the schedule for this research did include all type of activities to be done and the time expected to complete them. However, this time table could be change due to unforeseen circumstances. In such a situation a change will be necessary in the schedule. A separate timetable will be drawn for the field work for more time management and in order to avoid running out of time during the field work.

Reaching the study population: This involves two broad issues: access and personal safety.

Access: The importance of gaining access and the need for permission is stressed by Cohen et al (2001:53), who argued that: "Investigators cannot expect access to a nursery, school, college, or factory as a matter of right. They have to demonstrate that they are worthy, as researchers and human beings to be accorded the facilities needed to carry out the investigations". It was very important to secure the required access to conduct the study. So letters requesting permission to distribute copies of the questionnaire were sent to the people concerned in the Ministry of Education. As it is very difficult for the researcher herself to travel to each school, the Ministry of Education assisted by making extra copies of the questionnaire and dispatching to the selected schools where they were subsequently administered on the relevant respondents. They also helped to collect the completed questionnaires. For the PE lecturers and PE final year students another letter was sent to the Centre of Higher Education in SQU asking for permission to undertake the questionnaire survey and interview. PE lecturers will be surveyed at a time agreed between them and the researcher. Moreover, the researcher hopes to catch up with the final year students by the end of their final year, when they

would have completed two teaching practices. This as I hope may help them to answer the questionnaire after practices in real schools giving with valuable perspectives. I do mean by volunteer in doing this research interview -for the entire PE participant in all four groups- the one who accept to be recorded by the researcher because majority of female not like to be recorded. Also they might hastiest to specks honestly with the researcher as a person meaning with for first time.

Personal Safety: Efforts will be made to ensure the personal safety of the researcher during the period of data collection.

Generalizability: According to Robson (2002:93), "Generalizability refers to the extent to which the findings of the enquiry are more generally applicable outside the specifics of the situation studied." In his view, generalizability is probably the central element in establishing the value and trustworthiness of research enquiry.

CONCLUSION

In this research the questionnaire is considered the most appropriate instrument for the large number of female PE participants in over Oman. The sampling method ensures that respondents selected for the study are representative of the entire population, and it is therefore expected that their views can be fairly representative of the population. This study gives a description of the design for a proposed research.

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