

Jordanian Education Reform between the Ideal and the Actual

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the Jordanian Ministry of Education's reform model can be implemented. A qualitative approach of data gathering and analysis was used, including an analysis of official documents to reveal the perspectives of the Jordanian Ministry of Education (MOE). Interviews were conducted with seven teachers and six principals. Teachers participating in this study were those identified by the MOE as quality teachers. The results of the study showed that there was a gap between what the Minister of Education proposed and what the school stakeholders do and believe. Future directions for research, policy and practices are presented.

Keywords: education reform, school stakeholders, culture sensitivity, teaching and learning, Jordanian Ministry of Education

1. Introduction

The education system in Jordan, as in many other countries, has undergone significant change in all aspects, including curriculum and textbooks, length of schooling, and teaching practices to cope with the structural problems of a country facing serious problems filling professions and creating employment (Alshurfat, 2003). The Jordanian Government has observed the exogenous initiatives and shifts forcing policymakers to focus on providing education systems that can meet the needs and demands of globalisation and provide labour markets with a skilled labour force (Alshurfat, 2003; Massaad et al., 1999; Ministry of Education, 2006).

The first serious attempt by the Government of Jordan to meet the country's needs was in 1987 when the late King Hussein launched the National Conference for Education Reform (Ministry of Education, 1988, 2001). The result of the conference was a comprehensive education reform program to be implemented over the following 20 years (Alshurfat, 2003). Its purpose was to improve the quality of educational outcomes. The plan focused on developing the curriculum and textbooks, training of teachers and supervisors, establishing educational technology and centres for learning resources, improving education facilities and school construction, developing vocational and technical education and training, and promoting educational research (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988, 1996).

In 2002 the Jordanian national education vision and mission were developed and endorsed (Ministry of Education, 2006). This was the outcome of a forum on the future of education in Jordan held in Amman during September 2002, with participants from around the world (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006). A major consultative document, which was produced and discussed, 'helped shape the national vision and set directions for educational reform initiatives spanning kindergarten to lifelong education' (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.13). This document 'articulated both a national reform strategy and practical reform programs for Higher Education, General Education, and the Technical and Vocational Training Sub-Sectors' (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.13). 'The overall strategy proposed by the forum was endorsed by the Economic Consultative Council (ECC) in October 2002' (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.13). 'The national development strategy and the forum results were consolidated into specific development plans. The governing plan is called the Social and Economic Transformation Plan, overseen by the Ministry of Planning since 2003' (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.13). According to the MOE (2006, p.13), three relevant blueprints were established. First is 'the general education plan (2003-8) that translates all of the governing vision statements and planning documents into a Ministry-wide five-year plan'. Second is 'the Education Reform for Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) program, currently being implemented by the Ministry with support from the World Bank and a consortium of other donor agencies' and, third is 'the Jordan Education Initiative (JEI), a public-private partnership under the leadership of the World Economic Forum, that aims to provide Jordan with a model for developing e-learning resources and ICT deployment that supports education reform'.

Such a comprehensive but staggered reform movement in the Jordanian education system is desirable since it implies that articulation in general terms precludes development of a comprehensive package. The Ministry of Education (MOE), however, consistently considered teachers' roles in rhetorical rather than practical terms. For example, MOE (2006, p.17) stated that 'Those who are most affected by decisions are the best placed to make those decisions'. In practice, teachers are most affected by these decisions and their implications so they should be involved in making them. But, in reality, teachers were neither consulted in regards to educational reform (Alshurfat, 2003) nor did they receive any real guidance on conceptualising or implementing quality teaching. As mentioned before, the impetus for educational reform in both Jordan and the rest of the world came

from the ideas and concepts of a constructive orientation (Alshurfat, 2003; Chorrojprasert, 2005; Fullan, 1997; Hargreaves, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). The new ideas and concepts of teaching and learning led educational policymakers to ask questions such as: What do we want our students to learn? Why is that learning important? How should we teach them? Finding the right answer to these questions is the most central and challenging proposition. In Jordan, at least nominally, they have led to a shift in conceptualising the teaching-learning process from being teacher-centred to being student-centred. In effect there are increasing duties and roles for both teachers and students. The teacher, according to the new vision, has to be a facilitator and the main body of work has to be carried out by students with teacher supervision and support.

The education system in Jordan has been extensively reformed in line with the global movement informed by constructivist thinking. However, there are many fundamental challenges and issues that are still impeding and restraining reform. A related issue is that graduates of Jordanian schools have been described as lacking crucial knowledge and being weak in their critical thinking skills. Some improvement in knowledge and skills is essential if Jordanians are to become competitive in national and international labour markets. This historical weakness in educational outcomes arose for at least two reasons: i) the dismissive cultural attitudes toward teachers because of their status, and ii) growing demands on teachers from school leaders, policymakers, communities and students leading to teacher burn-out and resignations (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 1997; Massaad et al., 1999). The cumulative result of these and other factors is that lower achievers studied teaching at tertiary institutions; a trend that eventually reflected in the sub-optimal achievement of school students (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 1997; Massaad et al., 1999).

So, despite the Government's move to reform the education system in Jordan, studies conducted to evaluate the results of the reforms have shown that students still demonstrate low skills in relation to critical thinking. Furthermore, since the reforms began, students' basic skills and concepts in mathematics and science and performance in Arabic have not improved (Anani & Al-Qaisee, 1994). Also, some studies of fourth grade students showed that they were failing to implement into their daily lives what they had supposedly learnt in school, and that in schools there was violence, absenteeism, smoking, and attacks on teachers (Oweidat & Hamdi, 1997). Another study showed that teachers still dominated most lesson time and did not give their students an opportunity to express and/or direct themselves nor direct their own learning activities. Most of the questions asked by these teachers were based on the memorisation of fixed facts. The study also showed that these teachers did not allow any positive interaction in the classroom and that behavioural problems were dominant in the classroom (Alnahar & Kishik, 1994). Because of research findings such as these, the education system in Jordan has faced significant criticism and has been accused of graduating unskilled people who cannot be competitive and meet the economic, social, cultural, political and national challenges and problems (Massaad et al., 1999; Oweidat, 1997). However, before considering external and foreign models of reform, it was necessary to examine the ground and the reasons of reform in specific country such as Jordan. There may be questions about the applicability of a model of reform developed in countries that are quite different from Jordan as a developing country, with differences in religion, language, customs, culture and social structure. It is recognised that it is important to understand what makes for successful reform. In part, since education reformers have given some recognition to a constructivist approach being appropriate for developing the education systems' potential, there have been calls for research into successful reform in its context. This study is a response to these demands as it deeply exploring the context of education reform in a particular country.

2. Literature Review

Globalisation and its accompanying processes are changing the ideas that have informed the new movement in education systems around the world. The most significant process of globalisation is the opening of borders allowing political, economic, social and educational ideas to move more freely between countries. Education authorities around the world have recognised that globalisation is a force for change and that education systems need to be reformed to take into account the new internationalising phenomenon.

The effects of globalisation, however, are disputed. Some commentators have felt that globalisation provides an opportunity for 'fresh blood' and significant reform for whole education systems (Alshurfat, 2003), but others have felt that globalisation is not a force for unmitigated good if education systems rapidly feel its full impact. Thus, there are still some issues to be considered in reforms encouraged under the rubric of 'globalisation'. This is not the place to discuss in great detail the political and economic arguments for introducing education reforms raised by governments under the sway of globalisation. Two issues set in train by globalisation will be discussed below: that a particular process of education reform appears to be encouraged by globalisation, and the issue of cultural compatibility of education reforms when transferred from one global site to another.

It has been argued that, whether in the era of globalisation or previously, many attempts at education reform have failed (Alshurfat, 2003). Different researchers attribute this failure to different causes. Beeby (1966) suggests that ambiguity in achieving educational goals can arise from teacher resistance, if teachers consider

themselves to have been 'de-prioritized' as stakeholders when changes are made by authorities without consultation. Teachers in most cases refuse to abide by changes when they feel marginalised by those who initiate them (Brady, 1987; Morrish, 1976). They sometimes feel threatened by changes because they believe that these will jeopardize their traditional way of teaching and related 'professionalism'. The more teachers are attached to tradition and the more they perceive change to be disruptive of that tradition, the more they react against subsequent acceptance of implemented changes (Smylie, 1991).

While interest groups such as politicians, teachers, administrators and parents have their own attitudes toward and perspectives on, reform (Alshurfat, 2003; Fullan, 1993), the chief responsibility for explaining reform in democratic societies lies with leading politicians who need to convince these groups of the benefits of change rather than blaming them for failure. At the same time that politicians lead reform, such top-down reform creates dilemmas and hurdles for educational change. Such reform processes can create feelings among lesser participants of neglect, of being rendered voiceless and of having their concerns dismissed because they are teachers (Hargreaves, 1994). Therefore, the teacher's role in education reform is vital and only they can bring about all the aspects intended by reforms, especially in crucial areas such as curriculum planning and implementation (Alshurfat, 2003; Clark, 1995). Another possible reason for the failure of education reform is the lack of understanding by authorities of the uniqueness and sensitivity of particular cultures. Masemann defines culture as: 'It refers to ideas people have, the relationships they have with others in their families and with larger social institutions, the languages they speak, and the symbolic forms they share, such as written language or art/music forms' (Masemann, 1999, p.116).

This definition proposes that each culture in its geographic place has its unique attributes. The way people think and act differs from group to group not only across cultures but also within that culture. Education is immersed in particular cultures and it should not be assumed that something called 'education' in all its aspects exists separately from particular cultures. Investigating any aspect of education without acknowledging the cultural context of that 'education' can jeopardise the usefulness of such investigations (Masemann, 1999). Examples of cultural conflict in education need not simply be between different 'national' cultures. Masemann finds such conflict arising from incompatibility across a broad swathe of groupings, 'from the growing numbers of home schoolers who resist state domination of education systems, from religious and linguistic minorities, from feminists, from philosophical alternative schools, and from aboriginal and indigenous minorities worldwide' (Masemann, 1999, p.130). The aspects of cross-cultural perspectives of education probably appeared in the work of cognitive psychologists who tried to examine the applicability of different psychological theories to different cultures (Dasen, 1974; Dasen & Heron, 1981; Irvine & Berry, 1988; Keats & Keats, 1988; Pick, 1980). From these studies, it can be concluded that the way in which people think, perceive, and interpret the world around them is influenced by physical and social structures (McInerney & McInerney, 1994) and this can be found clearly in the education context. In recent years, education reform programs initiated by industrialised countries have been exported to less-developed countries. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned researchers' perspectives, it could be assumed that these reform programs may be difficult to establish in different cultures and that they would only work effectively in the same or similar cultures.

Some developing countries that have borrowed reform programs have found the results not up to expectations. The content of these reforms shifted pedagogy from being teacher-centred to student-centred. This trend in education emanated from the rediscovery in the 1970s of the educational philosophies of 'Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Steiner, Montessori, and Dewey' (Masemann, 1999), such eclecticism being seen as legitimate in an era of postmodernism. These philosophers, however, all developed their thinking about education from specific (and sometimes large) communities with particular cultures. Therefore, caution is required when trying to implement educational changes resting on these philosophers' paradigms of pedagogy. It would appear that the best way to implement changes derived from one culture into another is to first intimately compare elements of the foreign approach with what already exists in the target culture. When this is done thoroughly and systematically, then it may be possible to select the appropriate elements from the foreign reform program for implementation in the new context.

3. Research Method

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the Jordanian Ministry of Education's reform model can be implemented. Using a content analysis methodology and interview, this investigation attempted to answer two questions: What are the elements of education reform as it is described ideally in Jordan? And what are the elements of education reform as it is described actually by school stakeholders?

3.1 Participants

Sample size in qualitative research is relatively small. Therefore, because of the nature of the study, specific participants with known characteristics needed to be selected (May, 2001). The participants included seven quality teachers in inclusive primary schools and six principals of the selected teachers. The researcher used four criteria to identify the quality teachers which were: Supervisors' Recommendations, Principals' Confirmations,

Colleagues' Confirmations and Parents' Confirmations.

3.2 Documents

Official and published documents from the Jordanian MOE were collected and examined. These documents are a fertile ground base to develop the national education strategy in Jordan, and a reference framework for wording the general education plan and sub-plans which are being prepared by the Ministry. Therefore, these documents are meant to be a valuable reference for researchers. People in the field and in administrative positions in Jordan were consulted about the significance of the selected documents and whether more documents needed to be examined.

3.3 Interview

Interview technique was used in this study. The interview is a common technique in the qualitative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002). The aim of any type of interview is to let the people talk about their perspectives regarding issues related to the subject of the study (Kellehear, 1993); they are in central to the context, they live it day after day. Each participant was interviewed once and each interview lasted 30 to 40 minutes. The participants interviewed were the six principals and seven teachers. The questions asked by the researcher in this study sought to explore particular issues. The questions, for both interviews, were developed by reviewing the literature related to the education reform and some of them were adapted from other researchers who conducted research in the same field (NSW Ministry for Education and Training & Australian College of Educators, 2004).

3.4 Data Analysis

In this investigation, the researcher had to explore the description of the elements of education reform according to the perspectives of the Jordanian primary school stakeholders. However, in qualitative paradigm, there is no common formula or recipe for data analysis, each researcher analysing their data in a unique pattern (Patton, 2002). After translating and transcribing the interviews, the researcher treated them as a whole body of text. The interviews were analysed in this way because there were few transcripts and so the researcher had to read and analyse these interviews thoroughly. In analysing such transcripts the obvious interview analysis techniques, such as electronic or computer programs, were very difficult to apply. The researcher, therefore, treated these transcripts and the documents as texts together and analysed them by developing a category system. The first aspect to the analysis was the search for the dimensions of quality teaching. The researcher then considered the newly merged patterns, themes, and categories. Interviews were analysed to identify recurring themes, "developing concepts, and developing a story line" (Anderson & Burns, 1989, p.201). In this analysis, similar issues were categorized under tentative headings by continual reference to the text until all the data were realistically, described and fitted in themes. The researcher confirmed the contextual factors and the elements of education reform.

4. Results

4.1 The Jordanian MOE's Conception of Education Reform

From the MOE's perspective, the following principles of teaching and learning reflect current best educational practices and take into consideration psychological, environmental, developmental, and cognitive factors that can affect the student's ability to learn (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004b, 2006a).

4.1.1 Planning Based on Outcomes

The present curriculum in Jordan provides teachers with detailed 'units' which outline objectives and teaching methods in a very structured way. When teachers use an outcomes-based curriculum, they do not usually begin their planning with instructional strategies or learning activities (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a). According to the MOE, they start with the learning outcomes because the outcomes are most central to student learning (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.2 Quality Teaching and Learning Leads to Deep Understanding

Because learning is not passive, students are supposed to actively participate in learning. Quality learning tasks have a clear purpose and require students to create knowledge from new experiences that make connections to their prior knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.3 Variation of Teaching Methods

According to the MOE, a variety of teaching methods is required to address different learning approaches and to allow students to benefit from exposure to their preferred and non-preferred learning styles (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.4 Student-Centered Activities Enable Students to Apply Their Learning to Life

According to the MOE, a curriculum or classroom that is learner-centered allows consideration to be given to individual students as needed. Teachers do not judge their own success exclusively by whether they have presented all the subject material. They focus on maximizing learning for their students and following the interests and abilities of the students (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006 a).

4.1.5 Significance of Teaching and Learning

Real-life activities are those that relate to the world of the student outside of school. The use of real-life activities motivates students to learn, helps to illustrate new concepts, and helps students' knowledge. Lessons that involve topics of interest help students to make connections to what they already know and to develop new concepts with connections to the world outside of the school (Ministry of Education, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.6 Teaching and Learning Strategies that Meet Quality Teaching Practices

The MOE designed a range of strategies for teachers to choose from to achieve the desired learning, but the teaching and learning strategies need to be those with which the teachers are comfortable. It is important that a teaching strategy is selected with an underlying rationale. For example, for a teacher to say: 'Today, we're going to do group work', they have to know why working in groups is the best way to achieve a particular knowledge. The teaching strategies included are grouped as: direct instruction, problem solving and investigation, group learning, and activity-based learning (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a). In the following section, the researcher illustrates one teaching strategy that is mentioned in the MOE' Framework for Curriculum and Assessment.

4.1.7 Learning Strategy: Using Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the use of analysis, evaluation and reflection. It requires creativity and independence. Critical thinking involves: metacognition, visual organisers and analysis (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.8 Teaching and Learning Environment

Jordan's new curriculum provides all students with an opportunity to learn. According to the MOE, student learning is influenced by a number of factors, including the student's learning needs, gender, geographical location, and social background. Quality teachers understand the importance of creating classrooms that are equitable and safe for all students and accommodate a diversity of student needs (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006a). The following sections will describe the desired elements of the quality learning environment from the MOE's perspective.

4.1.9 Equity and Safety

Successful classrooms do more than provide students with basic competencies. They promote Arabic and Islamic values, beliefs and traditions, and foster positive social development. It is important that the curriculum in Jordan reflects the wide range of behaviours and attitudes available to all citizens (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2004b, 2006a).

4.1.10 Accommodating Student's Needs

According to the MOE, quality teachers should also take into account those students who have been identified with specific learning disabilities, or who are gifted learners. Quality teachers choose instructional strategies and learning resources that accommodate the needs of all their students, using different strategies to assist them to meet these needs (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.11 Use Information and Communication Technology

Teachers preparing students for the knowledge economy keep pace with cutting edge technologies and integrate this technology into their classrooms as individual and group learning tools. The effectiveness of technologies is evaluated and refinements are made for the best use of ICT for supporting teachers' work and student learning (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2006a).

4.1.12 Assessment and Evaluation of Learner Outcomes

Assessment is an on-going process aimed at improving both student learning and the instruction provided by teachers. Quality assessment builds skills on self-assessment and reflection both for the student and for the teacher. According to the MOE, a good system of assessment, evaluation and reporting should be based on clearly-stated student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003b, 2006a).

4.2 School Stakeholders' Perspectives of Education Reform

The analysis of the teachers' and principals' interviews shows that their perspectives of quality teaching as main part of the actual education reform revolved around the elements and themes discussed below.

The interviews with the Jordanian school stakeholders showed that they perceived the following as significant elements for producing quality teaching or for producing the characteristics of a quality teacher as main part of the education reform. The elements were: clearly determining instructional objectives; varying instructional methods; facilitating the acquisition and the implementation of knowledge; using teaching aids; having a physically and socially acceptable classroom environment; being conscientious, honest, and cooperating with colleagues and parents; having clear expectations of personal enjoyment, of professional growth and of the type of personal characteristics needed for teaching; having substantial content knowledge and knowledge of students and their abilities; and using ongoing assessment for teaching and learning. The factors assessed by the stakeholders as influencing quality teaching were: infrastructure, resources and funding, mentoring and evaluation, relationships with colleagues and community, curriculum content, professional training and support, school context, students' social and economic background, and instructional overload.

5. Discussion

The main area of incongruence was between the requirements of the MOE's Model of reform and the perceptions of the school stakeholders of quality teaching and learning as part of the reform. The Jordanian school stakeholders did not use particular conceptions of quality teaching explicitly as they were suggested by the MOE. When the school stakeholders were asked to articulate their understanding of the teacher's roll in the new education reform, they still privileged the transmission approach to teaching. That is, they appear to believe that the teacher is the only 'legitimate' source of information, that a quality teacher has a strong reliance on verbal direction and instruction, and that they are the sole classroom manager and only source of authority. They did not overtly express the teacher's role as a constructivist one in the era of the MOE's 'Knowledge Economy'. They talked about transmission elements of quality teaching, such as controlling the pace, timing, parameters and choices in the classroom and effective ways of dictating the curriculum content. For example, one teacher said, 'My strength is that I am able to control students in the classroom so that I have their attention during the lesson. If a teacher cannot control his class, he will not be able to deliver his lesson activities properly' (Sharefah, February 27, 2012). According to this teacher, students do not have a choice in selecting their learning activities; the teacher controls the process and is the key source of information. This perspective contradicts the MOE's suggestion of giving students choice over their learning activities and of shifting the instructional role to the student (from teacher-centred to student-centred).

One explanation for this incongruence might be the lack of retraining programmes for stakeholders on the MOE's policy changes, so teachers still regard quality teaching as based on a transmission approach. It may also be the case that even with teacher retraining their orientation towards a constructivist approach remains at a vague theoretical level and not at a practical level. Another explanation may be that the education reform was formulated without consultation with those school stakeholders who were meant to implement the reforms (i.e., it was top-down rather than bottom-up)

The Ministry of Education reform demands on teachers and consequently students, as reflected in the differing degrees of flexibility and experimentation encouraged by the reform. The Jordanian Ministry of Education recommends a comprehensive framework for curriculum and assessment to guide teachers' activities, while leaving pedagogical practice largely assumed to be standardised and, one would expect, less progressivist in approach. A possible reason for this is that the Ministry was required, almost immediately on the basis of international 'persuasion' and advice; to develop a new framework to meet what was proposed as an internationally comparable conception of a 'modern' curriculum and quality teaching. Such rapid transition without prior preparation created confusion, hesitation and the conditions for a plethora of competing demands to be advanced by politicians, advisers, administrators and teachers.

The pressure for rapid educational change for national development was placed on Jordan, in part, by its acceptance in 2000 of UNESCO's Dakar Framework that had been adopted by the World Education Forum in Senegal, Africa (UNESCO, 2000). This framework reaffirmed the view of education outlined by the World Declaration on Education for All developed in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. The Dakar Framework built on the results of the World Conference on Education in 2000 that assessed what was needed to provide basic education around the world and to evaluate progress towards the Jomtien goals (Tamatea, 2005; UNESCO, 2000). The participating countries, including Jordan, pledged to uphold and work towards the framework's recommendations, goals and targets. Of course, substantial international aid was attached to rapid progression towards implementing these goals. Of the six goals, one was about 'improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills' (UNESCO, 2000, p.8).

The Jordanian Government committed itself to meeting this and the other five goals. The concern was not only to establish an agreed blueprint for achieving these goals, but also to make sure these goals were implemented as conceived by the Dakar Framework. The main obstacle that Jordan and other countries encountered was the lack of existing groundwork and preparation for fully comprehending and activating these goals. It is understandable that participating countries committed themselves perhaps prematurely to such obligations due to loan conditionality required by aid donors and by the World Bank. A dilemma also lay in the variation and gap between these countries in terms of their levels of preparation, fiscal and economic resources, political stability and commitment to the process. Jordanian education officials rushed to put the new framework of quality education in place in an uncertain atmosphere with little preparation work at a grass-roots' level. In other words, the Jordanian Ministry was advancing but leaving teachers, students, and local administrators behind and at the same time ignoring the social context of the already-existing education and social system. Hence, the Jordanian framework was born and implemented in controversial circumstances, which could impact upon its sustainability.

On the one side, the Jordanian MOE has attempted to impose a package of educational reform, such as its desire for a knowledge economy. On the other side, there are unsolved contextual issues, which can enhance and/or hinder the implementation of this package. The school stakeholders addressed different contextual issues,

such as infrastructure, resources and funding, mentoring and evaluation, relationships with colleagues and community, curriculum quantity, professional training and support, content knowledge, school context, students' social and economic backgrounds, and instructional overload. The implication of this is that, without addressing these issues, it would be hard for the MOE to implement its framework. The case for Jordan is different; the MOE has centralized the curriculum. Teachers have no/little choice in selecting teaching activities because they need to abide to rigid lesson and semester plans and they have to cover the whole curriculum content within a limited timeframe. School stakeholders saw the MOE control over the curriculum and the quantity of that curriculum as problems.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the MOE's framework of education reform seemed to be inapplicable to some extent to what the school stakeholders reported. The MOE aims to develop an education system able to meet national and international labor market needs by preparing teachers and students with the attributes required by a knowledge economy that recognizes and meets global requirements and challenges. However, there is still a gap between the MOE and the school stakeholders in the perception of what makes of education reform. The school stakeholders, to some extent, still believe in the transmission approach to teaching; they did not mention the concepts of the constructivist approach in teaching and learning in the way these concepts are presented by the MOE. For the MOE's model of education reform to be completely applicable and subsequently functional, contextual and cultural factors need to be considered and prioritized.

7. Future Directions and Further Research

Teachers' interpretations of the guiding principles of education reform policies are critical to any reform of education. Considerable research already exists about the significance of teacher's beliefs (eg. shared understanding), and future research could apply some of those insights into the current reform of the Jordanian education system. To what extent, for example, do teachers share the vision of the Ministry but articulate it using a different language? Are the values of the Jordanian people shared by the policy makers and by those to whom the policy applies? Further research could be conducted conceptualising school stakeholders as policy implementers. Such research could be theoretically framed by comparing the theoretical and political background of the MOE as a legislative body and the school stakeholders as implementers. While the MOE is busy preparing to reform national educational programs, they still ignore bodies, including the school stakeholders, particularly teachers. Although the education reform has brought some positive results for the education system, there are still controversial issues that need to be resolved before reform plans can be implemented further. School communities, including parents, school stakeholders and administrators, need a deep understanding of the elements of the new constructivist trend in teaching and learning.

As the current study found a gap between the reality (school stakeholders' understanding) and the ideals (MOE's policy) of quality teaching and learning as parts of the education reform, it is inevitable to ask the following questions: What do the policy makers believe and want? What do Jordanian teachers believe and want? What do students believe and want? What do parents believe and want? What are the country's challenges and needs? These questions and other questions could be guides for qualitative-based research to solve issues hindering the reform of the education system in Jordan. Considerable research already exists about the failings of educational reform experiences; imported 'recipes' for education reform may threaten the culture (country and community), if they do not fail. Each culture or country has unique needs, circumstances and challenges. This applies to Jordan as a developing country that has its own different culture. Attempts to force any inappropriate form of educational reform, which do not take into account that culture singularity, will fail. To avoid such dilemmas and obstacles, it is important to explore these needs and challenges and so answer the above questions to have a clearer picture, and recognise these issues before any attempt to establish new reform and that ultimately will ease the policy makers' tasks in founding a solid platform for the next steps in reform.

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