

Oman

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

Education is among the most important pillars of sustainable environmental, economic, and social development, and is a priority for the Sultanate of Oman in its quest to enable its population to compete in the international economic arena. For centuries, the government of the Sultanate of Oman has understood the importance of education in leading comprehensive development of the country and has directed its education policy toward expanding education and making it accessible to all. In the present stage of the country's development, the government's priority is to improve the quality of education. The need now is to promote innovative knowledge and appropriate values so that the Omani population possesses the required competencies to make a positive contribution to national development. Following this approach, the National Strategy for Education 2040 is prepared to act as a primary source for the development of policies on the reform of the education sector in the Sultanate of Oman's future five-year plans.^{1,2}

The Ministry of Education is responsible for managing education at all stages (Grades 1 to 12). Ministry responsibilities include developing education policies, curricula, and schoolbooks; developing methods to assess student performance; and overseeing and providing technical and administrative support for teaching and administrative personnel in schools. The Directorates of General Education across all governorates are responsible for implementing the Ministry's plan. In return, the Ministry is working toward conferring more financial and administrative powers on these directorates.^{3,4,5} Oman's education system comprises preschool, public, and private school education.

Classical Arabic is the official language of the Sultanate of Oman and the language of teaching and learning in all government schools. In everyday communication, different dialects of Arabic are used. English is taught as a subject starting in first grade and is used as the language of instruction in some private and bilingual schools. Other spoken languages in Oman include Swahili, Baluchi, Lawati, and Jabali.⁶

Preschool Education

The Ministry of Education attaches great importance to preschool education and is keen to increase enrollment rates by engaging the private sector to provide this service. In the 2004–2005 academic year, the Ministry implemented preschool classes in public schools in remote areas where Kindergartens are unavailable.

Since the 2008–2009 academic year, the Ministry of Education has been responsible for the technical supervision of all schools and centers that provide preschool education programs. In the 20201–2022 school year, the Ministry also assumed full jurisdiction over private schools that provide preschool programs, including responsibility for licensing and recruiting teaching, technical, and administrative staff. This has resulted in many benefits, including the development of policies on curricula and qualifications of teachers, the application of national standards of education, the proportion of students to teachers and the number of teaching hours, and the quality of resources and facilities.

Public School Education

Public school education comprises the following:

- Basic education, which is divided into two cycles:
 - Cycle One (Grades 1 to 4): Students of both genders are taught in the same classes. The teaching and administrative staff in these schools are exclusively female.
 - Cycle Two (Grades 5 to 10): Male and female students are taught in separate schools. Accordingly, the teaching and administrative staff are male in male schools and are female in female schools.
- Post-basic education (Grades 11 and 12): The teaching and administrative staff are male in male schools and are female in female schools.
- Continuing education, which includes:
 - Literacy programs: These are three-year school programs, after which graduates obtain a Free from Illiteracy certificate, equivalent to completing sixth grade of basic education, and may proceed to seventh grade.
 - Adult education: Starting from seventh grade until twelfth grade, adult education is divided into regular schooling at centers and free home schooling.

Exhibit 1 presents an overview of Oman’s basic and post-basic education systems.

Exhibit 1: Structure of Basic and Post-Basic Education in Oman⁷

Level	Grades	Structure
Basic: Cycle One	1–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coeducational ▪ 1,600 minutes of instruction per week ▪ 180 school days per year
Basic: Cycle Two	5–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Separate boys’ and girls’ schools ▪ 1,600 minutes of instruction per week ▪ 180 school days per year
Post-Basic (Secondary)	11–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Separate boys’ and girls’ schools ▪ 1,600 minutes of instruction per week ▪ 180 school days per year

Private School Education

The Ministry is also responsible for approving the curriculum of private schools in Oman. Monolingual, bilingual, and international schools (community schools) all offer private education. International schools (community schools) are accredited by international education systems or bodies. Even though the number of private schools in Oman has been growing in recent years, the private sector continues to play a relatively small role compared to neighboring Gulf countries.⁸ As a result, the government continues to assume most of the cost of providing education.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Curriculum

The Arabic language curriculum for Grades 1 to 12 was developed based on PIRLS 2016 indicators. For example, there was an emphasis on developing reading comprehension skills from the early grades. The Arabic language curriculum for Grades 1 to 4 was developed from 2018 to 2020 in line with the levels of reading comprehension confirmed in PIRLS.

Moreover, the Ministry has started implementing some initiatives for improving students who are challenged in reading by introducing a special program that helps to improve students’ reading skills based on their weaknesses. Furthermore, Arabic language curriculum experts currently are designing a special reading and writing program specifically for students in Grades 1 to 4 that will be implemented during the tenth 5-year plan (2021–2025).

Assessment

Although the performance of Omani students in PIRLS 2016 was slightly better than in the previous cycle, the indicators still show that low performance primarily has been due to students’ lack of familiarity with the types and phrasing of the questions in the assessment. Subsequently, since the results of PIRLS 2011 and PIRLS 2016, the Ministry of Education has focused on educating teachers on the following two main aspects of question development:

- Classification of questions—Teachers have been trained on classifying questions according to the four cognitive domains of Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, and Reasoning. Examples for each domain have been developed based on items released by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).
- Format and wording of questions—Teachers have been trained to develop questions in line with PIRLS, and to incorporate these questions into classroom instruction daily without explicitly linking them to PIRLS.

Professional Development Programs

Established by the Ministry, the Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers developed two intensive professional development programs for Arabic teachers in Grades 1 to 4. These two short programs focus on providing the latest teaching practices that facilitate students' reading comprehension skills. They also focus on bridging the gender gap between male and female reading comprehension by introducing strategies that will increase male students' interest and motivate them to love and enjoy reading.

Arabic language supervisors and senior teachers also are trained on how to benefit from PIRLS 2016 school indicators, with a focus on identifying strengths and weaknesses in students' reading comprehension levels. Moreover, training has focused on differentiating teaching strategies and methods to suit both male and female students' interests and needs in order to address gender differences and raise the level of reading comprehension skills based on cognitive levels specifically for male students.

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

The Arabic language curriculum in the fourth grade focuses on four domains (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, and Reasoning), with instruction to support two domains in each semester. The content covered for each domain considers students' developing cognitive skill levels and their psychological and education needs based on their age.

Arabic language instruction builds the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in students through 4 listening lessons, 4 speaking lessons, 12 reading lessons, 12 lessons on language conventions and grammatical patterns in sentences, 12 lessons on writing, 4 lessons on rhyme/poems, and 4 extensive reading lessons.^{9,10}

Students read literary or informational passages in each reading lesson and then answer a set of reading comprehension questions that address four areas: understanding explicit meaning and obtaining direct information from the text; understanding the hidden meaning or conclusion; interpreting, integrating, and applying ideas and information; and evaluating and expressing an opinion.

Exhibit 2 lists Cycle One (Grades 1 to 4) Arabic language learning outcomes per skill.¹¹

Exhibit 2: Cycle One Arabic Language Learning Outcomes per Skill

Skill	Learning Outcomes
Listening	<p>Apply proper listening etiquette</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applies proper listening etiquette mentioned in the previous classes ▪ Understands the other opinion <p>Understand (audio texts) spoken texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listens and understands various text types such as narrative (story), informative, instruction, conversations, advertisement, radio program, etc. ▪ Predicts the content of the audio text through the title ▪ Understands the meanings of new words through context ▪ Identifies the partial ideas presented in the text ▪ Identifies some of the literary elements of the story (e.g., characters, time, place, events) ▪ Retrieves detailed information from the text, such as description of places, numbers, addresses, etc. ▪ Completes the events of a story he/she listened to ▪ Extracts the values presented in the text ▪ Asks questions about the topic ▪ Clarifies words and sentences indicating feelings in the text ▪ Suggests another title for the text ▪ Summarizes the text orally ▪ Extracts the general meaning of the text ▪ Shows his/her attitude toward a story he/she listened to ▪ Shows his/her attitude toward a character or event in a story he/she listened to ▪ Determines the predominant feelings in the text
Speaking	<p>Apply proper speaking etiquette</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applies proper speaking etiquette mentioned in the previous classes ▪ Commits to the allotted time ▪ Speaks using expressions and gestures <p>Organize the content of the conversation and use a variety of forms of oral communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talks about a topic based on given questions using cause-and-effect relationships, whole and part, general and specific ▪ Gives clear instructions using multiple sentences ▪ Describes what he/she sees or hears in meaningful sentences ▪ Talks clearly about what he/she has heard or read ▪ Retells a short story in logical sequence, explaining its elements ▪ Uses expressions of thanks, greetings, permission, and apologies ▪ Communicates with his/her colleagues and discusses the topics presented ▪ Provides an informational oral presentation that includes facts, details, and examples using technology ▪ Talks about some visual posters (e.g., art board, guiding board, stereo, electronic content)

Skill	Learning Outcomes
Reading	<p>Demonstrate knowledge of written language symbols and pronunciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recites, understands, and memorizes short verses of Quran ▪ Understands and memorizes Hadith ▪ Reads aloud different texts, with vocabulary up to 400 words and applies proper punctuation ▪ Reads, understands, and memorizes poems while keeping rhythm ▪ Reads freely and understands extensive reading materials appropriate to his/her level <p>Demonstrate reading comprehension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deduces the general idea of the text ▪ Distinguishes between the main idea and supporting details in the text ▪ Understands the meanings of vocabulary using context, antonyms, and synonyms ▪ Interprets the images, figures, and illustrations presented in the text ▪ Constructs new words in sentences of his/her own ▪ Classifies words into their lexical types ▪ Extracts some information from the text ▪ Determines cause and effect, opinion, and comparison ▪ Identifies values presented in the text ▪ Asks questions about the topic of the text ▪ Suggests an appropriate ending to the text ▪ Suggests another title ▪ Deduces the writer's aim ▪ Expresses his/her opinion ▪ Explains the aesthetics of rhetorical expressions ▪ Distinguishes between similes and metaphors ▪ Uses some rhetorical expressions ▪ Determines the feelings revealed in the text ▪ Shows the aesthetics of resonant words and structures ▪ Determines the elements of the story (e.g., events, characters, time and place, plot, solution) ▪ Arranges events, times, and places in the text ▪ Deduces the relationship between the characters and events
Writing	<p>Spelling: Identify and apply Arabic language spelling rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applies spelling rules in his/her writing: <i>hamzat al-wasl</i>, <i>hamzat al-qat</i>, middle <i>hamza</i>, <i>hamza al Mutatarifa</i>, letters that are written but not pronounced, letters that are pronounced and not written, and the different types of <i>alif</i> ▪ Applies proper punctuation marks: full stop, comma, colon, exclamation mark, question mark, quotation mark, etc. ▪ Spells the words correctly <p>Handwriting: Write letters, words, and sentences using the <i>Naskh</i> style of writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Writes two sentences using vocabulary up to 12 words; applies punctuation rules accurately for full stops, question marks, and exclamation marks; uses appropriate spacing; and writes the letters' positions in the line accurately ▪ Writes a short paragraph, using and applying punctuation, grammar, and spelling rules

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Teacher Preparation

A bachelor's degree is the current minimum qualification for teaching. Teacher education now comprises a four-year or five-year program offered at a college of education in several universities and colleges in Oman, as well as four private universities. Courses in these programs aim to help future teachers understand, analyze, and evaluate the teaching process while encouraging a high level of professionalism. The specialized and professional components of teacher education programs are integrated, and student teachers are expected to demonstrate specialized knowledge and skills with consideration of students' individual needs and abilities. There are differences in the duration of practicum experiences in the six institutions (Sultan Qaboos University [SQU], University of Nizwa, Dhofar University, University of Sohar, Rustaq College of Education, and Sharqiya University). SQU teacher students spend their entire tenth semester in school teaching (i.e., teaching practice). They teach five days a week for the entire semester. In addition, in the courses Teaching Methods I & II, teacher students spend four weeks observing lessons in schools. At University of Nizwa, teacher students spend one full semester practicing teaching two days a week for 16 weeks. At Dhofar University, the practicum duration is 15 weeks during the eighth quarter (three hours per day for two days each week for six total hours per week). At the University of Sohar, teacher students spend two working days per week at the school for six hours per day (total of 180 hours during their first semester), and three working days per week for six teaching hours per day (total of 270 hours during their second semester). At Rustaq College, teacher students spend a total of 28 teaching days in schools over two semesters; they practice teaching in Cycle One schools in the first semester, and in Cycle Two schools in the second semester. Finally, at Sharqiya University, practicum duration is one semester, or an average of 450 hours.¹²

Teacher Professional Development

The Ministry has allocated financial budgets for professional development programs delivered by the Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers. Two of the center's main in-service programs are for female Cycle One (Grades 1 to 4) Arabic language teachers. The first program is a one-week program for novice teachers to be completed at the beginning of the academic year. It focuses on equipping teachers of young learners with the most up-to-date teaching strategies in the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and also provides current classroom management strategies. The second program is the two-year Arabic Language Experts Program that was developed using a number of indicators, including those from PIRLS 2011 and PIRLS 2016. National and international trainers conduct the program, which focuses on practical teaching and introduces current international methods in teaching Arabic language. The program consists of three components. The first component focuses on applying the best and latest global practices and methods in teaching young learners. The second component is delivered online, as

the Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers is keen to build a virtual learning platform where trainers and trainees meet virtually to discuss their practices and the challenges that they face. The last component is on-the-job practical learning. The trainee applies the knowledge, theories, and teaching strategies that were discussed over face-to-face and online training sessions.

All of the programs offered by the Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers focus on equipping teachers with the most up-to-date learning skills, active learning, differentiated learning, and teaching methods. In addition, they focus on the concepts of citizenship and sustainable development.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The Center for Educational Evaluation and Measurement is responsible for preparing assessment frameworks and documents for assessing student learning in all subjects. The *General Framework for Assessing Student Learning* contains assessment policies and methods and is used as a guide in developing student assessment documents for different subjects in Grades 1 to 12.¹³

Assessing Student Academic Achievement

Throughout the school year, teachers continually monitor and assess student achievement with a wide range of formative and summative assessment tools such as presentations, homework, projects, and quizzes and tests. Cycle One students do not have final examinations, and there is no grade retention. Students who do not achieve the required level of performance during the school year move to the next grade with appropriate remedial plans. Students' performance is monitored throughout the school year with descriptive, periodic, and final reports.

Students in Cycle Two (Grades 5 to 10) and post-basic education (Grades 11 and 12) have their academic year divided into two semesters, although teachers continue to assess student achievement throughout the year with assessment tools such as presentations, homework, projects, quizzes, practical activities, and tests. Students in Grades 5 to 9 take end-of-semester examinations developed by teachers. The educational directorates in the governorates develop the end-of-semester examinations for Grades 10 and 11, and the Center for Educational Evaluation and Measurement develops, implements, and scores the twelfth grade end-of-semester examination; all end-of-semester examinations are weighted with increased weight at the higher grade levels. Students who pass tenth grade are awarded a certificate of completion of post-basic education, and students who pass twelfth grade are awarded a General Education Diploma Certificate.¹⁴

In addition, a randomly selected sample of students take annual national tests to measure knowledge and acquired skills after completing Cycle One (fourth grade), Cycle Two (tenth grade), and seventh grade. The tests assess learning outcomes based on public and private school curriculum in the following subjects:

- Arabic (Reading and Writing) and Mathematics at the end of Cycle One (fourth grade)
- Arabic, English, Mathematics, and Science in Cycle Two (seventh grade)
- Arabic, English, Mathematics, and Science at the end of Cycle Two (tenth grade)

These tests are accompanied by a set of questionnaires to measure the factors affecting student performance. The results are used as indicators for developing and improving the education process.

The test and questionnaire results provide information, statistical indicators, and data on the quality of the education process so policymakers can set appropriate development plans, strategies, and procedures to raise student achievement levels through the following:

- Evaluating what knowledge and skills students have acquired in Arabic language, mathematics, science, and English language based on national standards, and benchmarking with international standards
- Gaining comprehensive information about the school environment and curriculum, and identifying factors that may affect the achievement level of students
- Gaining comprehensive information about teachers' professional development needs
- Comparing student results from school-based achievement examinations with results from the national tests
- Comparing the results of national tests with results of international tests
- Determining national performance indicators for students in scientific and language subjects
- Providing data to academic researchers who are interested in the aspects of teaching and learning

A set of statistical reports published by various organizations include:

- A report for subject experts that includes the results of the psychometric analysis of the test items
- A report for decision makers that includes data and statistical indicators on the extent to which students acquired the basic skills for each particular education cycle or grade
- A report on students' performance on national tests at the student, grade, school, governorate, and national levels

Special Reading Initiatives

The Ministry has implemented several reading initiatives in recent years, the latest of which is publication of a series of 40 short stories (Arabic and English) written by teachers, with a central committee overseeing their writing, design, and printing. This initiative aims to instill a love of reading among students in Grades 1 to 5 and further develop their reading skills. With the help of the teacher, children select a story in their free reading classes according to their level, needs, and interests. The themes covered in the Al-Manar story series include the human values of citizenship;

coexistence with others; respect for others, including people with special needs; accepting reality; and expressing satisfaction and gratitude while at the same time encouraging children to be reflective, creative, and generous. These values are implicit and symbolic in most of the stories, which means that the teacher and student should delve into the content to get a sense of the feelings, values, and behaviors that each story can convey. The Al-Manar story series is suitable for every child. Furthermore, the series has been converted into audiovisual stories, and the stories are also available in sign language. The Ministry is working to digitalize these stories and publish them on the Ministry's website so children, teachers, and parents can access them anytime and from anywhere.

The Ministry also implements a language remedial program, called Improving Arabic Language, for students with learning difficulties and those who are behind in reading. Students move from three stages (red, yellow, and green) based on their reading skill level. Students in the red stage face significant reading challenges such as a delay in recognizing letters and syllables. Students in the yellow stage have moderate reading difficulties or delays. Students in the green stage have oral reading skills, but they need to achieve fluency in reading comprehension. Teachers and parents share equal responsibility to ensure students move from stage to stage.

Additionally, there are decentralized regional- and school-level reading initiatives such as reading competitions and other activities. Arabic language curriculum experts currently are designing a special reading and writing program specifically for students in Grades 1 to 4 that will be implemented during the tenth 5-year plan (2021–2025).

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Like in the rest of the world, education in the Sultanate of Oman was affected by COVID-19, as the pandemic caused the sudden end of the 2019–2020 academic year on March 15, 2020. This resulted in learning loss in all academic subjects for semester two as the pandemic continued and schools were closed. The Ministry issued a decree to end the school year in May 2020.^{15,16,17,18,19}

The following decisions were made with regard to student achievement for the 2019–2020 academic year:

- For Grades 1 to 11, students' results from the first semester became their final results for the academic year.
- Statistical standardization was adopted to calculate twelfth grade student results for the second semester to determine who received the General Education Diploma Certificate.

The beginning of academic year 2020–2021 also was delayed due to the pandemic, starting in November instead of September 2020. The Ministry implemented a blended learning system where twelfth grade students attended school in a shift system (one week in class/one week at home or one week in class/two weeks at home) depending on the number of students at each school. This

level was decided upon because twelfth grade is the final year of post-basic education before students continue to higher education institutions. Some schools with a small number of students continued in-person instruction.

For Grades 1 to 11, no more than 16 students could be in a classroom. Schools offered a number of instruction options to adhere to this requirement. Schools with 16 students or fewer in one class operated fully in person and also used an electronic educational platform for instruction. Schools with 32 students or fewer in one class rotated in-person and remote instruction on a weekly basis, with half the class attending school while the other half used an educational platform at home. Students in schools with more than 32 students in one class were divided into three groups and were rotated on a weekly basis, with 1/3 of the students attending school while the rest of the class used an educational platform at home. The educational directorates in each governorate strived to reduce the number of twelfth grade students in one class to 16, with a minimum of one meter between each student. Half of each group of twelfth grade students were taught in person while the other half used an educational platform at home on a rotating weekly basis.

The fluctuation of the epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19 affected students' school attendance and forced the return to distance learning for all students in Grades 1 to 11; from March 7, 2021, to the end of academic year 2020–2021, these students only attended classes online and did not receive in-person education. Students in twelfth grade continued to attend school in shifts.

The Ministry worked hard to ensure technical readiness in all governorates for academic year 2020–2021²⁰ once the decision was made to implement a blended learning model and took the following measures:

- Partnered with private sector institutions on digital agreements and initiatives
- Cooperated with global technical companies to support digital services
- Built capabilities, and facilitated and supported teachers in developing educational content and activating digital applications
- Trained supervisors, senior teachers, and teachers on how to integrate technology in blended and distance instruction
- Prepared a future digital transformation plan and developed national e-learning strategies

However, although distance and blended learning had a significant impact on preventing school closures and student absences, because it was so new, it created many challenges for students, teachers, and parents. These were mainly due to network communication problems, availability of computers for students to use at home, and challenges associated with the educational platform Al Mandhara used in Grades 1 to 4.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic directly affected student learning for several reasons. Semester two of academic year 2019–2020 ended much earlier than expected; academic year 2020–2021 started

later than normal; and curriculum content in all subjects was reduced by up to 50 percent in academic year 2020–2021, causing a delay of some content being taught to students.

Students in Grades 1 to 11 did not have the opportunity to be in the classroom with their teachers and peers. Therefore, distance learning may have an impact on motivation, achievement, and psychological and developmental aspects that can be studied only with further research.^{21,22,23}

Training was affected by the pandemic as trainers (from the Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers) and trainees (Cycle One teachers) were not adequately prepared to use online training effectively. In particular, they lacked familiarity with electronic applications and programs, while trainers had to acquire remote training skills during the early period of remote training. However, efficiency increased, and over time, trainers and trainees became more comfortable with remote training.

Policy and Practice Changes

The Ministry introduced several policies to ensure that schools implement blended learning and distance learning as effectively as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the teaching time per week was reduced by half.²⁴ Exhibit 3 shows changes in teaching time due to the pandemic.

Exhibit 3: Structure of Basic and Post-Basic Education in Oman Due to COVID-19²⁵

Level	Grades	Structure
Basic: Cycle One	1–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% distance learning 800 minutes of instruction per week
Basic: Cycle Two	5–10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% distance learning 800 minutes of instruction per week
Post-Basic (Secondary)	11–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blended learning (one week in person/one week distance learning) 800 minutes of instruction per week

Secondly, to ensure effective implementation of pandemic-related policies, the Ministry produced many operational documents and mitigation plans based on pandemic developments and closely monitored implementation.^{26,27,28}

Thirdly, the Al Mandhara platform was used in Grades 1 to 4, and Google Classroom was used in Grades 5 to 12. The Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers trained teachers on how to use these platforms with cooperation from the IT directorate.^{29,30,31,32}

Fourthly, methods for evaluating and assessing student learning have been adapted as all schools employed blended learning. Blended learning is an education approach in which students learn via online platforms when not in a physical classroom, in addition to learning through the more traditional face-to-face teaching method. To evaluate student performance and measure 2020–2021 academic achievement in Grades 1 to 12, the Ministry of Education decided to apply continuous assessment for a whole academic year, rather than for semesters as was done

previously. The Ministry also has reduced the curriculum content and outcomes. Furthermore, it has increased student learning time by using days previously spent taking examinations at the end of semester one for learning purposes.^{33,34,35,36,37,38}

Finally, as blended learning methodology is applied in all schools throughout the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry has advised teachers to carefully plan and prepare formative and summative assessment tools that align with the various instruction methods being used, such as online learning platforms (Google Classroom/Al Mandhara); distance learning through mail, email, or Google Drive; and traditional in-person instruction.^{39,40,41,42}

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

The implementation of PIRLS 2021 happened during the global pandemic, with most countries being affected. This had a clear impact on teaching and learning and extended to training and assessment.

Due to high COVID-19 infection rates in the Sultanate of Oman, Grades 1 to 11 schools implemented online instruction. Schools were closed on the day they were scheduled to implement PIRLS 2021. However, the Ministry asked permission from the Supreme COVID-19 Committee as well as from parents to proceed with PIRLS on that date; luckily, the committee and most parents agreed. All safety precautions were taken into consideration, and all selected sample public and private schools in all governorates were able to participate; however, one international school was not able to participate due to students being out of the country. In addition, some schools had less than 50 percent of students participate due to their being out of the country or parents' refusal. Although there were many challenges, Oman made sure that students in fourth grade participated in PIRLS to provide informative data.

Suggested Readings

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