

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The concept of quality teaching has been a core issue debated in educational circles both in Jordan and elsewhere. The debate about the quality of teaching and teachers at the micro-level and about the quality of education at the macro-level is the result of an education reform movement in part propagated by international agencies (Berkeley, 1991; Carr, 1989; Hargreaves, 1996); it has been dominant not only in Jordan but also in many other countries.

The education reform movement includes a call from policymakers both for public education to produce citizens able to meet future social and economic demands and for schools to act as social stabilizers (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Carr, 1989; Corrales, 1999; Crebbin, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003). As a result, politicians have looked to schools and teachers to remedy social and economic problems. It is remarkable that in most nations undertaking this type of micro-reform any perceived failures in the social, economic or political arenas sees blame sheeted home to schools and teachers. Perhaps more pertinently for the situation in the volatile Middle East, if a nation loses a war, sees its economy collapse, or sees unemployment and/or social problems increase, then the school system is held responsible (Massaad et al., 1999). When other agencies and strategies have failed to solve pressing economic and social issues, then the education system is considered the last resort (Hargreaves, 1994, 2003). In other words, responsibility rests on public education to be the saviour of society and the economy. Consequently, the education system has experienced changes in its areas of curriculum, teaching practices, teacher education and the participation of stakeholders (Alsturfat, 2003).

One important aspect of education in this time of increased demands on school systems and system accountability is quality teaching. This emphasis on quality teaching refers to the key stakeholders' interest (namely governments and, in some cases, international agencies) in investing in human capital growth. Despite the debate and the different interpretations and understandings displayed by 'politicians, economists and employers' (Carr, 1989, p.3) of the concept of quality teaching, classroom teachers remain the most

numerous and most direct participants involved in shaping the nature of quality teaching. Therefore, teachers should be considered first, and their views counted in any education reform process, rather than being ignored and/or having their roles undermined. If reform is imposed by authorities from the top-down, rather than from the bottom-up, it will be a difficult and slow, and, possibly forever, an incomplete process; and there is plenty of evidence of these results in the profession's long history (Alshurfat, 2003; Beeby, 1966; Fullan, 1982, 1993; Wood, 1990). An education reform movement needs to recognize the centrality of the role of teachers (Alshurfat, 2003), especially when it comes to the teaching and learning process. Finally, it would appear that the most fruitful way for education reform to proceed in general, and in Jordan in particular, is for it to be underpinned both at the macro – and the micro – levels by the theoretical ‘disciplines of constructivist perspectives’ focusing on a learner – centred approach for change (Alshurfat, 2003; Chorrojprasert, 2005).

In part, since reformers have given some recognition to a constructivist approach being appropriate for developing the education systems’ potential, there have been calls for research into quality teaching in its context. This thesis is a response to these demands. It is a qualitative study using data collected and triangulated in natural settings. The particular concern of this study is the applicability of the NSW Quality Teaching Model (NSWQT Model) to the Jordanian primary school context.

This introductory chapter presents an overview of the thesis. First, it explains the context of and reasons for the study. Secondly, it briefly highlights the problem to be studied and the consequent research questions. Finally, a brief outline of the study is presented.

The Context of, and Reasons for, the Study

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, 2004b, 2006b).

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, 2006b). 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, 2006b). 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, 2006b, 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, 2006b, p.13). 'The overall strategy proposed by the forum was endorsed by the Economic Consultative Council (ECC) in October 2002' (Ministry of Education, 2006b, 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, 2006b, p.13). According to the MOE (2006b, 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 MOE, however, consistently considered teachers' roles in rhetorical rather than practical terms. For example, MOE (2006b, 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 movement from transmission teaching practices, whereby teacher considered as a centre of teaching learning process, to this way of teaching is described by McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) as a new and emergent 'vision' for educational practices:

These visions depart substantially from conventional practice and frame an active role for students as explorers, conjecturers, and constructors of their own learning. In this new way of thinking, teachers function as guides, coaches, and facilitators of students' learning through posing questions, challenging students' thinking, and leading them in examining ideas and relationships. (p.1)

To meet the new orientation toward quality in teaching measured in a constructivist way, the teaching and learning process has to move seriously towards the practical aspects of quality teaching. According to the most celebrated recent research in this arena, the elements or aspects of quality teaching can be clustered into three main dimensions: 1) the intellectual work of the teacher and students; 2) the quality of the teaching and learning environment and its physical, psychological and social elements; and 3) the relevance to,

or connectedness with, real life of the acquired knowledge (Borich, 2000; Bruner, 1966; Cohen & Barnes, 1993a, 1993b; Dewey, 1916; Driscoll, 2005; Glasser, 1990; Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, & Corni, 2003; Killen, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; NSW Department of Education, 2003; Shulman, 1987; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993).

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 in 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).

If any education reform is to be successful, the dimensions of quality teaching should be included, taught, trained and implemented to meet the aims of that reform. In the experience of Jordanian education reform, these elements are ambiguous; desired teaching practices neither explained clearly nor adequately. To prevent this reform from failing, a tested and developed model of quality teaching practices based on and solidly grounded in theoretical and empirical platforms, such as the NSWQT Model (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003c), needs to be provided. This study was conducted to fill the growing gap between the policy and the practices of the education reform movement in Jordan. It aims to assess the Jordanian educational context before domesticating a new model of quality teaching. In other words, it was necessary to observe quality teaching practices in Jordanian classrooms before considering a new model of quality teaching.

The selection of this model was not random. First, the model was selected because it was developed using 'empirical and theoretical' and longitudinal studies conducted in the USA and Australia that show a strong correlation between quality teaching practices and student achievement (Newmann et al., 1996; Education Queensland, 2001; NSW Department of Education, 2003, p.3). Second, the model can be applied across all school grades from pre-school to high school and for all school subjects (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003c). Third, this model was developed to help the NSW Department of Education and Training reach the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*, known as the *Adelaide Declaration* (1999). In particular, the model deals with the implications of the declaration in terms of 'social justice and equity', which are meant to undergird other factors that increase students' outcomes (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003c, p.5). The model shares considerable overlap with the vision of the Jordanian MOE, which, in parallel with ministries in Australia, is to reform education by constructing a sustainable educational system capable of meeting the next millennium's demands and needs in terms of producing skilled and knowledgeable generations (Ministry of Education, 2002). Finally, the model is comprehensive, covering most elements of quality teaching. By reviewing the literature, and conceptualising and reporting on quality teaching and learning, it was clear to this researcher that the model largely covers the concepts of quality teaching built from a constructivist perspective (Borich, 2000; Brophy

& Good, 1986; Cohen & Barnes, 1993a; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Good & Brophy, 2000; Hughes, 1988; Killen, 2003; Lawton, 1988; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Newmann et al., 1996; NSW Department of Education, 2003; Shulman, 1987; Williams, 1988). This is the common and desired approach to teaching and learning in the current global education reform movement.

There may be questions about the applicability of a model developed in countries that are quite different from Jordan as a developing country, with differences in religion, language, customs, culture and social structure. That many non-Western countries look to the West for some leadership in terms of education practices is not necessarily a mark of inferiority; the Jordanian Government has done so after it has assessed its own needs, one of which is to move towards providing quality education. It is recognised that it is important to understand what makes for quality teaching and learning in primary schools. Nevertheless, it is not satisfactory simply to assume that theories apply across all contexts; it is important to test the applicability of models in different contexts. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the NSWQT Model can be applied in this different context. As far as the researcher could discover, no research of this kind with this type of comprehensive model has been done in Jordan. To achieve appropriate insight information about quality teaching practices, it is essential to know how quality teachers in Jordan are practicing their day-to-day teaching and to explore the extent to which they already meet the NSWQT Model's criteria of quality teaching. One way of doing this is to observe their classrooms and the contexts in which they teach.

Statement of the Problem and the Research Questions

The problem was to examine, describe and analyse the applicability of the NSWQT Model to the Jordanian primary school context. In order to achieve this overarching aim and the objectives outlined above, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How is quality teaching described officially in Jordan?
2. How is quality teaching described officially in the NSWQT Model?
3. What are the current quality teaching practices in Jordanian primary schools as judged by the NSWQT Model?
4. What are the perspectives of selected Jordanian primary schools' stakeholders of quality teaching?
5. What factors influence quality teaching from the school stakeholders' perspectives?

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter one presents the background and the scope of the study. It includes the context of and rationale for the study, the statement of the problem and the research questions, the research methods and processes of analysis selected to carry out the investigation. General background information on Jordan, including the historical and current developments in its education system, is provided in chapter two. Chapter three provides a review of the relevant literature. In particular, literature related to the following areas is addressed: the concept of quality teaching, the context of quality teaching, and the factors influencing quality teaching clustered around three main hubs, (1) political factors, (2) school factors, and (3) the influence of classroom practice. The methods used in this study are detailed in chapter four. They are: the research design; the process of selecting the participants; data collection techniques; the data analysis process; and ethical considerations. The first part of the results is presented in chapter five. These include: the description of quality teaching from the Jordanian MOE's perspective; the description of quality teaching from the NSWQT Model's perspective; and points of comparison and contrast between the two descriptions. Chapter six presents the second part of the results, the practices of quality teaching as it was observed in the Jordanian primary classrooms. Chapter seven presents the third part of the results. These were the ways the teachers and principals perceived and understood quality teaching practices and the factors influencing quality teaching from the school stakeholders' perspectives. The final chapter provides an interpretation of the results. This chapter presents a discussion of the results in the light of the earlier chapters, as well as the implications, the limitations of the study and future directions for educational policy and further research.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research problem has been described, its context of, and the reasons for, the study explained, and methods presented. It has been noted that this investigation is oriented qualitatively in nature, seeking to explore, in details, the applicability of the NSWQT Model to the Jordanian primary school context. This context has been divided into three authorities; the Jordanian MOE, the Jordanian schools stakeholders, and the classroom teaching and learning practices. Research questions have been established accordingly to help in answering the main research question which is: to what extent can the NSWQT Model be applied to the Jordanian primary school context? The following chapter presents facts about Jordan, particularly the education system and the related issues.

CHAPTER TWO

JORDANIAN EDUCATION CONTEXT

Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (H.K.J) is a small country and was an international entity following the First World War. It attained full independence in 1946. Jordan is situated in the heart of the Middle East region, between 33.29 north and 39.34 east (Bunker & Francis, 1975; Ministry of Education, 2004b). It covers an area of about 92 300 square kilometres, with the desert region (Badia) comprising 75 percent of the total area of the Kingdom (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004b). The country is bordered by six neighbours: Iraq and Saudi Arabia to the south and east, the Egyptian Arab Republic to the south, the Syrian Republic to the north, and Palestine and Israel to the west (Ministry of Education, 2004b). The port of Aqaba is the only access to the sea for Jordan (Bunker & Francis, 1975; Ministry of Education 2004b). Jordan can be divided into three main areas. Fertile Jordan Valley, east bank plateau which is 'broken only by the gorges cut by streams flowing into the Jordan River' and the dry desert which is stretching to Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Humphreys et al., 1997, p.403).

Jordan, to the east of the Jordanian River, has witnessed several empires come and go (Humphreys et al., 1997). The last empire was established in 1916 when it came under British influence (Alshurfat, 2003). The area remained a British colony and was supported by British financial aid until it attained full independence in 1946 (Alshurfat, 2003; Belt, 1998; Hoffman, 1992; Mansfield, 1990).

The country has a unique weather, from the oppressive conditions of the Jordan Valley through to the enjoyably cool and breezy highlands in Amman, to the harsh conditions of the southern and eastern deserts (Alshurfat, 2003; Humphreys et al., 1997). The arable area is situated in the north of the country and in the Jordan Valley (Alshurfat, 2003; Daniel, 2005; Hurst, 1983).

Political System

The political system in Jordan is a constitutional hereditary monarchy, created by the constitution in 1952, in which the King was vested with wide powers (Alshurfat, 2003;

Humphreys et al., 1997; Masri & Bermamez, 1995). The political system in Jordan has been stable since the country's independence for many reasons, one of which is the hierarchical succession of leadership. The King is at the top of this ladder; he approves and 'executes all laws' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.15). However, his veto on legislation may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses of the National Assembly (Alshurfat, 2003; Humphreys et al., 1997). 'He appoints and dismisses all judges by decree, approves amendments to the constitution, declares war and commands the armed forces' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.15). 'Court judgements, cabinet decisions and the national currency are issued in his name' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.15). 'The King may dissolve cabinet at the Prime Minister's request' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.15). He 'appoints the Prime Minister, who exercises executive authority in the King's name. The Prime Minister selects the cabinet, which is responsible to the *Umah Council*, that is, the bicameral National Assembly' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.15), comprising 110 speakers from the Speakers' Council (lower house) and 40 Senators from the Al-A'yan Council (Alshurfat, 2003; Daniel, 2005; Humphreys et al., 1997; Krien, 1992).

Jordanian citizens experienced an election in 1988, the first time in 22 years, because special circumstances faced the country (Alshurfat, 2003). As well, in 1992 the parliament, for the first time, formally legally recognized political parties (Alshurfat, 2003; Daniel, 2005; Krien, 1992). Since then there has been a significant increase in the number of political parties in Jordan (Alshurfat, 2003). The practices of constitutional and electoral rights have been started by people and political parties by fielding candidates to the *Umah* house (Alshurfat, 2003). 'The King has directed his ministerial cabinet to maintain transparency, equality and justice in elections to the Speakers' House' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.16).

Economy

Jordan is a small country with a scarcity of water and other natural resources, such as oil (Alshurfat, 2003; Humphreys et al., 1997). Furthermore, Jordan is facing increasing unemployment and poverty. In recent years the country was faced with a drought that restricted arable land and led to economic recession (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004b). As a result, King Abdallah undertook some initiatives with a long-term program to reform the economy (Ministry of Education, 2004b). These efforts took several

forms, including establishing free trade with various countries (Ministry of Education, 2004b).

The Jordanian economy is heavily dependent upon foreign aid and remittances from Jordanian workers abroad (Al-Qudah, 2002). Their remittances make a significant contribution to the national economy (Department of General Statistics, 1997). In addition, the Jordanian Government encourages in-bound tourism for religious and medical purposes through a sophisticated marketing program (Humphreys et al., 1997; Ministry of Education, 2004b).

Demography

According to statistics from the General Statistics Department, the total population was estimated as 5 329 000 in 2004 (Ministry of Education, 2004b). Sixty-eight percent of people live in urban areas where the density is 57.5 people per square kilometre, and there is a growing rate of migration from rural to urban areas (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004b). A high proportion of the population (about 38%) is under 15 years of age and the annual population growth rate is 3.2% (Ministry of Education, 2004b). Non-Arab ethnic groups make up a relatively small percentage of the population as against the 98% Arab majority, with Circassians one percent and Armenians one percent (Alshurfat, 2003; Daniel, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2004b).

Both private and government health system sectors operate in Jordan (Alshurfat, 2003). The government sector provides primary and secondary health services, such as vaccination, and health and medical care for the majority of Jordanians (Alshurfat, 2003). The private sector provides health care for employees who are covered by private health insurance (Alshurfat, 2003). The medical system has improved significantly in recent years so that health services cover all regions in the country (Alshurfat, 2003; United Nations Development Program, 2002).

The majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, which is the majority Islamic denomination in a country such as Saudi Arabia and a minority in other countries such as Iraq (Alshurfat, 2003; Daniel, 2005). Christians of differing denominations comprise six percent (Daniel, 2005). The rest are Shi'a Muslims and Druze Christians who comprise about two percent (Daniel, 2005). Such diversity is generally tolerated by Jordanians and this diversity and tolerance is reflected in the government and private sectors.

Education System

Historical Overview

The education system in Jordan and its aims and objectives emanate from a philosophy of education drawing on an Islamic and Arabic heritage (Ministry of Education, 2006b). It is considered a continuation of the Jordanian political, social and economical experience (Ministry of Education, 1988, 1994). The first regularisation of educational provision in Jordan occurred under the Ottoman Empire from 1516 to 1916 (Alshurfat, 2003). Education was provided by *Alkuttal*, with a curriculum focusing on teaching, a small number of students, and basic reading and writing skills, and this was accompanied by religious studies implemented by clerics in mosques or in private homes (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). Teachers were paid in-kind, such as with wheat or eggs or bread (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). Formal education was restricted exclusively to men. When the Emirate of Transjordan was established by the British in 1921, the education system was modernised (Alshurfat, 2003; Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993).

From 1921, there were 19 schools for boys and two for girls and the language of instruction was Turkish (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). The Government's total budget for education was 500 Jordanian Dinar (JD) (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). The relationship between teacher and student was severe and authoritarian and corporal punishment was common (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). By 1924 there were only three secondary schools for boys (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). After 1940 education started a new era with the implementation of a modern curriculum and the establishment of public schools (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993). In 1962, the Government established the first university, the University of Jordan (Altal, 1978). The years 1956, 1967 and 1973 saw wars between the Arab states in the region and Israel, and, as a result of Israel's expansion, Jordan was overwhelmed by Palestinian refugees, creating an urgent demand for new infrastructure, especially for educational provision (Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993).

During the last 20 years, the education system in Jordan has witnessed an increase in the number of the students enrolling in primary schools (Alshurfat, 2003). During and after the first Gulf War in 1991, numerous numbers of families returned to Jordan from Kuwait and Iraq, bringing with them a significant number of primary school-aged children (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1996). The statistics for the academic year 2003–2004

indicate that the number of schools in the Kingdom reached 5 526, with 76 945 teachers and 1 515 315 students, of which 746 840 were female. A much-reduced gender gap in enrolments was revealed, with 51% male and 49% female (Ministry of Education, 2004b). The expansion of the education system has generated major social change (Alshurfat, 2003). For example, primary and secondary education is free, while government assistance and scholarships for higher education have helped more students from low socio-economic and disadvantages backgrounds to attend (Alshurfat, 2003). Furthermore, women are participating in different sectors of private and government employment, 'especially in health, social work and education' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.19; Salameh, 1980).

The Organization of the Education System

The education system in Jordan is run by a hierarchy of three main bodies of authorities, each body having different tasks.

The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the head of the organizational hierarchy. The MOE is the policymaker in all the aspects of education, as well as recruiting teachers (Alshurfat, 2003). It is in charge of preparing, organising and supervising the General Secondary Examination (*Tawjehi*) (Alshurfat, 2003). Furthermore, it promotes and determines the structure of the curriculum for all the cycles throughout the Kingdom (Alshurfat, 2003). Beyond that, it provides all educational materials, such as textbooks, computers, audio and video programs, sporting equipment, and laboratory instruments, and establishes and maintains infrastructure (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988, 1994). Within the MOE there are about 25 directorates, each having different tasks, such as textbook development, staff appointments, teacher recruitment and promotion, finance, research, development and services (Alshurfat, 2003). Jordan has more than 30 Regional Education Directorates supervised and promoted by the MOE. These directorates cover the whole country and implement the Ministry's general policy at a local level. Moreover, the local education directorates supervise and promote the daily activities of their schools in each area, dealing closely with students' and teachers' issues (Alshurfat, 2003). This supervision and promotion includes staff professional development and training (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2002; Salameh, 1986; Touqan, 2002).

The Board of Education

Since the Board was established in 1969, its role has been to ensure the stability of general education policy and to promote the education system (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1994). The chair of this board is the Minister of Education, with 18 other members representing government and private agencies concerned with education, as well as including significant individuals drawn from community and business bodies (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988). The board is responsible for the final approval of the curriculum and other important issues relating to general policy directions in education (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988).

Central Education Committee

This committee offers recommendations related to the implementation of most of the aspects of the education policy in the Kingdom (Alshurfat, 2003). One of its important roles is to establish basic principles to be followed in terms of planning and developing the curriculum at a national level (Alshurfat, 2003). This committee consists of the 'Minister of Education as chair, the Under-Secretary, and all heads of Education Directorates' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.20). Part of this committee's responsibilities are to take charge of the Ministry's projects, endorse general policy to be applied by each directorate, plan draft laws and rules, supervise all general examinations, 'and authorise all educational publications' (Alshurfat, 2003, p.20; Ministry of Education, 1988, 1996).

Education Fees

School education in Jordan is provided free by the government, including the allocation of a special budget to implement the Education Reform Plan (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1994, 1996, 2002). The main priority in educational expenditure in Jordan is to provide education free of charge for all years from Cycle 1 to Cycle 12 (Alshurfat, 2003). Textbooks are provided to students, free for the compulsory basic Cycles (C1–C10) and at a minimum price for secondary Cycles (C11-C12) (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1996).

The Educational Agencies

Education in Jordan is provided by both public and private sectors (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004b). The public schools accommodate 70.5% of the total number of students in the Kingdom. The private sector, with 19.2%, has established increasing numbers of schools operating on a commercial basis (Ministry of Education, 2004b). The United Nations for Relief and Working Associations (UNRWA) provides educational services for the children of Palestinian refugees for the basic Cycles (C1-C10); this covers 8.9% of the total number of students (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004b). Other governmental institutions provide educational services in country areas for 1.4% of the total number of the Kingdom's students (Ministry of Education, 2004b).

The Schooling System

The school year in Jordan consists of 180 days divided into two semesters, from September until May. Students attend school for five days each week from 7.30am until 2.00pm (Alshurfat, 2003). In the Jordanian education system, there are two educational grades: 1–10, called basic education, and 11–12, called secondary education (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2001). Attendance at schools for grades 1-10 is compulsory but at the secondary level optional. Moreover, schools in Jordan are divided into three types: boys' schools, girls' schools, and mixed schools for children between 6–8 years of age in the private sector, while in public schools girls and boys join single-sex schools at the age of 10 (grade 5) (Ministry of Education, 1988, 2001). The schooling years in Jordan are based on three levels, described below.

Early Childhood Education

Both government and private organizations provide early childhood education in Jordan (Alshurfat, 2003). In both systems, kindergartens are under MOE supervision. They accommodate children from the age of 3 years and 8 months, and enrolment and attendance are not compulsory (Alshurfat, 2003). Some kindergartens are attached to government or private school buildings, others are separated (Alshurfat, 2003). In recent years, within the education reform, the MOE has committed to establishing kindergartens in all areas in the Kingdom, including Badia areas (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988; Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993).

Basic Education

According to education policy regulations, all children at the age of 5 years and 8 months must enrol in schools offering basic and compulsory education (Alshurfat, 2003). The delivery of basic education is standard for all students. The aim of basic education is to achieve general educational objectives and to develop various aspects of the citizen's personality: physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social (Ministry of Education, 1988, 2002). The common curriculum includes English, Arabic, History, Religion, Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Music, Geography, and Civics Education (Alshurfat, 2003). Recently, the MOE has started English-as-a-second-language instruction from first grade; it was previously started in fifth grade (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988, 1994, 2004b). At the end of grade 10, the MOE generally classifies students into two fields, academic and vocational, based on their interests and achievements (Ministry of Education, 1994; Tawalbeh, 2001).

Secondary Education

At the end of the basic grades (grade 10), students are classified into two major streams, applied or comprehensive secondary education (i.e. vocational or academic) (Alshurfat, 2003). After two years of study, students in the comprehensive stream sit for the General Secondary School Education Certificate examination in two fields: an 'academic sub-stream, which includes a scientific and literary specialisation', or a 'vocational sub-stream', which includes nursing, commercial, industrial, agricultural, hotel management and home economic specialisations (Alshurfat, 2003 p.23; Ministry of Education, 2004b). The advantage of the applied secondary program is to provide professional training for skilled labour to meet market demands (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1996, 2004b). In general, secondary education aims at providing specialized cultural, scientific and vocational experiences to meet the existing and expected needs of Jordanian society (Ministry of Education, 2004b). It also aims for students to continue on to higher education or to join the labour market, according to the student's capabilities and interests (Ministry of Education, 1988, 2001, 2002, 2004b).

The Curriculum and Textbooks

In the Jordanian education system the curriculum and textbooks are planned around subject areas for each grade, where each grade has a different textbook (Al-Qudah, 2002).

The Central Education Committee is in charge of preparing the curriculum for each subject and for each grade (Al-Qudah, 2001; Ministry of Education, 1988, 1994). Overall, the curriculum aims to develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in different subject areas (Al-Qudah, 2002). National committees of experts in different disciplines develop curriculum, textbooks and instructional aids and materials for each subject. Each subject committee consists of the following:

1. A teacher who teaches the subject.
2. A specialist teacher of the same subject for the next grade.
3. An educational supervisor.
4. A representative from the MCE.
5. A specialist member in the subject from the Department of Curriculum and Textbooks.
6. A parent who is interested in participating in educational work, on condition that he/she is a specialist in the subject and a member of any university in Jordan (Al-Qudah, 2002, p.3).

Based on the recent educational reform plan, the MOE has developed contemporary curricula and textbooks that consider individual differences amongst students. The students' creativity is targeted and their scientific thinking fostered (Al-Qudah, 2002). The curriculum and textbooks are prepared centrally by the MOE. Accordingly, the MOE provides the teachers in schools with centrally-prepared textbooks, teaching materials and guides (Al-Qudah, 2002).

The Background of the Educational Reform

For the Jordanian Government, the types of educational developments occurring at the global level have provided the direction for the Kingdom's educational reform (Alshurfat, 2003; Dinham, 1992; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Michael, & Hopkins, 1998). This reform is underpinned by the belief that educated human beings are the main resource for obtaining comprehensive economic and social development in a country with limited natural resources and high population growth (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006a). A reformed education system would meet the needs of the country and its labour market, with education the best solution for social and economic concerns (Alshurfat, 2003; Dinham, 1992; Hargreaves et al., 1998; Ministry of Education, 1988). Further to this, the Jordanian Government has repeatedly emphasized the importance of education, especially since

Jordan has been one of the largest labour-exporting countries in the Middle East and derives considerable income from this 'export' (Al-Qudah, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1996; Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993).

Since the 1980s, policymakers have acknowledged the need to improve education in order to develop domestic technological capacity and to maintain regional competitive advantage (Al-Qudah, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1988). Many attempts at this have been developed and implemented, the most significant being the first National Conference on Education Reform (NCER) in 1987 (Ministry of Education, 1988). The conference was held under the patronage of King Hussein and led by Crown Prince Hassan (Ministry of Education, 1988). The King pointed out the need for a clear focus on quality in the educational system to meet the country's human development needs, as well as to match overseas developments (Al-Qudah, 2002; Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988). It was hoped that this would provide a blueprint for setting a new policy direction in education to provide the next generation with creative skills to use available natural resources and, more specifically, to meet the country's need for skilled labour (Al-Qudah, 2002; Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988).

A national team of professionals was created and supervised by Crown Prince Hassan (Ministry of Education, 1988). The team came up with a comprehensive list of priorities for educational reform. Consequently, the 1988 *Education Act* included the following: an extension of compulsory basic education to ten years; comprehensive reform for the curriculum; new textbooks for the twelve grades; the upgrading of teacher education and qualifications; the provision of suitable school facilities; empowering educational management; and strengthening research and development (Al-Qudah, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1988, 2001). The main objective of the reform was to improve students' achievement by enhancing education quality, and by making education outcomes relevant to the country's current and future needs and to the challenges facing Jordan in the region and globally (Al-Qudah, 2002; Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004b). Consequently, the Government devoted itself to reconstructing and modernising the entire education system to achieve the vision of education reform (Alshurfat, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1988; National Centre for Education Research and Development, 1999).

To achieve and implement the education reform, the Government established a plan consisting of three phases. The first phase, a five-year plan (1989–1995), focused on

improving the examination system, establishing new well-resourced schools and extending basic education from nine to ten years (Alshurfat, 2003). The second phase was from 1996 to 2000. This phase aimed: to support teachers to upgrade their qualifications, to ensure the professional development of the administration staff, to encourage and support vocational education, and to provide preschool education in the remote areas (Alshurfat, 2003). The third phase was from 2000 to 2005. Here the focus was on curriculum development; introducing the English language as a compulsory language for all grades, dealing with illiteracy issues by opening evening schools and encouraging collaboration between the school and the surrounding community (Alshurfat, 2003).

Jordan witnessed significant growth in the number of educational institutions in the country (Al-Qudah, 2002). From one university in 1962, there are now eight public universities and more than ten private universities. In addition many community colleges offer a variety of courses. The Government actively encourages and supports such educational growth; with the limitations in natural resources the Government sees human resources as the main area of investment (Al-Qudah, 2002). Despite the satisfactory number of qualified professionals in many areas, there is still a demand for more quality education product in teaching and learning practices (Al-Qudah, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1988, 2004b; Obedat & Al-Rashdan, 1993; Touqan, 2002).

While the previous education reform plan was under implementation, the MOE launched a future vision for education in Jordan, presented at the 'Vision Forum for the Future of Education in Jordan' held in Amman, September 15–16, 2002 (Ministry of Education, 2002). There are four distinct coherent components to the project. The first component is about reforming the education policy in general and includes: redefining the future integrated educational vision and strategy, updating the future educational administration and decision-making mechanisms, building an integrated educational decision support system, activating educational research for monitoring, evaluation, policy development, and effective management, and coordinating investment in the field of educational development (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2006b). The second component is related to the educational programs and practices to be grounded on the concept of a Knowledge Economy. It includes: developing curricula and learning assessment methods, developing lifelong professional development programs, and providing resources for supporting quality teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2006b). The third component is about establishing quality learning environments and it includes: renovating existing

school buildings to accommodate and support learning, and establishing new school buildings to cope with population growth (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2006b). The final component is about developing complete readiness for learning through education from the early childhood cycle. This component includes: increasing the capacity of the institutions working in this field, professional development for teachers, increasing the number kindergartens and expanding existing ones to include areas with high demand, and propagating the importance of this age cycle (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2006b).

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced a brief overview of Jordan and its education system. The Jordanian education system and the government authorities (such as the MOE), which determine/control/develop the education system, were discussed from both historic and current perspectives. Aspects of the schooling system were explained and the present attempts at, and stages of, education reform in Jordan were discussed with emphasis on the elements of the new vision for the Jordanian education system. The following chapter presents the literature review related to the current inquiry.