

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The development of Oman's education system in terms of the increase in educational enrolment rates and the level of teacher qualifications has been remarkably rapid. Almost 100% access to basic education has been achieved, and almost all students progress onto post-basic education (Al Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2018). Approximately 1,042 government schools were established, with 516,891 students being educated by 55,343 teachers. Over 83% of teachers have completed a bachelor's degree-level qualification or higher (Ministry of Education, 2016).

The educational policies in the Sultanate of Oman derive from the directives of His Majesty the Sultan and from governmental decisions that form the basis of the Ministry's educational policies and plans (Ministry of Education, 2001). This educational decision-making and administrative hierarchy structure is composed of three authority levels. The first one is located in the Ministry Central Headquarters in Muscat, forming the centralized top level of the hierarchical administration. The second is the mid-level administrative structure represented by the Directorate General of Education. Finally, schools operate as executive administrative units (Ministry of Education, 2001, p.3).

The Ministry mandated the Directorate General of Education to manage the implementation of the education system according to the Ministry's organization, structure, and administration system. In other words, the Directorate General of

Education in each governorate of Sultanate of Oman represents the Ministry of Education in Oman. They aim to improve their services to achieve higher quality. They intensify their effort to ensure the highest service quality level in all sectors as they control all learning and teaching issues in government and private schools. They provide educational supervision and technical support for employees, teachers, and heads of schools. Part of their activities is to follow up and analyze school performance and achievements of students and provide reports accordingly. Specifically, the Directorate General of Education takes charge of assessment procedures implemented in schools and exams given for students, follows up educational activities and projects, and provides schools and departments with relevant equipment that helps workers keep good quality work.

Recently, stakeholders have raised an issue about the service quality provided by the Directorate General of Education. For example, a recent study by Al Musawi and Amer (2017) was conducted among 1267 stakeholders from different educational sections of the Directorates General of Education, Oman, which consists of school specialists, principals, teachers, supervisors, and administrators. The participants were asked to describe the quality of services provided to them. The study indicates that the services provided are not 'always' implemented with quality. It could be argued that these and other services have yet to be improved and reach better levels of quality standards. A similar finding has been identified in a study by AlNabhani (2007) among the stakeholders (e.g., the Directors in the Ministry of Education Central Headquarters, the Directors in the Regional Directorates, the head teachers, and teachers). The study found that the issues in the Ministry of Education in Oman are related to poor service quality, such as lack of communication, ineffective time management, negative

interaction between the roles of different directorates, and lack of constancy of purposes between different directorates.

These findings need immediate action because the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman are responsible for managing all education issues in Oman. If the Directorates General of Education are unable to manage and keep its service quality at a high and excellent level, this will affect the administration of the education system in Oman. According to Rod and colleagues (2009), service quality plays a pivotal role in the organization's success, creating competitive advantage and increasing competitive power (Rod et al., 2009). An organization with higher service quality would present relatively more significant performance (Lin & Lee, 2005; Sheng & Chen, 2010). In other words, excellent service quality could create excellent performance for the organization.

Investigating the factors influencing service quality at the Directorates General of Education in Sultanate of Oman would be very valuable for the Ministry of Education to improve service quality. An adequate understanding of the factors that influence service quality in this context can help the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman plan a strategy and mechanism to enhance the service quality to stakeholders such as principals, teachers, supervisors, and administrators.

1.2 Problem Statement

Lack of service quality has become one of the issues in the Directorates General of Education. According to ALNabhani (2007), the issue in the Directorates General of Education in Oman is related to poor service quality, such as lack of communication, ineffective time management, negative interaction between the roles of different directorates, and lack of constancy of purposes between different directorates. Al

Musawi and Amer (2017) also discovered similar findings that indicate the services provided by the Directorates General of Education, Oman, are not 'always' implemented with quality, have yet to be improved and do not reach better quality standards.

Understanding the factors that influence service quality is one of the mechanisms to address the issue related to service quality in a particular organization. Service quality plays a pivotal role in the organization's success, creating competitive advantage and increasing competitive power (Rod et al., 2009). In addition, an organization with higher service quality would present more significant performance (Sheng & Chen, 2010). Therefore, many studies have been conducted in the past to understand the factors that may cause service quality. It was found that among the causes of service quality were organizational factors such as organizational learning culture (Al Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2012; Feo, 2015), top management support (Mosadeghrad, 2014; Durdyeva et al., 2014; Barkhuizen et al., 2014), and Islamic work ethics (Rokhman, 2010; Yousef, 2001). It was also found that other contributing factors to service quality is the factor that related to employees, such as motivation (Kimando & Njogu, 2012; Durdyeva et al., 2014; Barkhuizen et al., 2015) and job satisfaction (Anaza et al., 2012; Trivellas & Santouridis, 2014; Singh et al., 2017). Although the influence of these factors on service quality has been verified by previous studies, however, the influence of these factors on service quality has been tested separately in the non-Sultanate of Oman context, such as in South Africa (OluwoleAdekanmbi, 2014; Kimando & Njogu, 2012), Western (Durdyeva et al., 2014; Anaza et al., 2012) and East Asia (Kitcharoen, 2013; Sultan & Tarafder, 2007).

More research is needed to illuminate the factors that influence service quality in Arabic countries, such as the Sultanate of Oman, as the socio-culture in Arabic countries is sharply different from that in Africa, Western and East Asia. For example,

Arabs tend to be more family focused. However, in Western culture, individualism is more important to them, although families are also important. In addition, the Arab people, including the people in the Sultanate of Oman, are generally more comfortable showing their emotions. They are very passionate and eager when discussing matters. In other words, Arab people tend to passionately discuss a particular matter, such as politics, with loud voices as they are quarrelling, not discussing. Once the subject changes, the smiles and laughs are back as if they have never disagreed on an issue (Maha Odeh, 2016). On the other hand, the West is better off not discussing social matters related to religion and politics.

In addition, conducting research related to service quality among employees in the public sector, such as in the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman, is also very important because understanding this issue among employees in this context still needs to be improved. It is due to previous studies being more focus on employees from non-public sector contexts such as in private healthcare providers (Mosadeghrad, 2014), home improvement sector (Durdyeva et al., 2014), service Agent (Kitcharoen, 2013), staff at Midwestern Extension system (Anaza et al., 2012), tourism companies (Al Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2012), banks (Kimando & Njogu, 2012), and private universities (Sultan & Tarafder, 2007; OluwoleAdekanmbi, 2014). The findings from this study can extend the knowledge related to factors that influence service quality because the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman has its unique goals, values, and culture. These elements (goals, values, culture) may influence employees, particularly in delivering services to their customers.

This study believes that work environment factors (i.e., organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethic) are able to influence employee motivation and job satisfaction, which in turn will deliver quality service to the

organizational customers. Such an argument is in line with the social exchange theory, which believes that when employees perceive positive treatment from the organization, this kind of treatment will encourage them to show a positive work attitude and behavior that can help achieve the organizational goals. In addition, several empirical studies showed that if the organizational management implements a quality culture, Islamic work ethic and provides support to employees, this will affect employees' level of motivation and job satisfaction positively (Salehi & Babajani, 2017; Amilin et al, 2018; Ali & Dominic, 2017; Böckerman & Kangasniemi, 2017; Attiq et al., 2017; Hamdan, 2017; Sapada et al, 2017; Kim et al, 2017; Cronley & Kim, 2017). Although the previous studies have empirically justified the effect of work environment factors (learning culture, management support, Islamic work ethic) on employee motivation and job satisfaction, such relationships have been examined separately in the non-Sultanate of Oman context.

Another focus of this study is to investigate the consequences of motivation and job satisfaction on service quality. Previous studies have shown that employees with high job satisfaction show a high commitment to producing high-quality service to customers (Singh et al., 2017; Tasneem et al., 2018). Similarly, according to previous researchers (e.g., Barkhuizen et al., 2015; Durdyeva et al., 2014), motivation is one of the factors with a significant impact on service quality. Therefore, this study would like to investigate further the relationship between motivation, job satisfaction and service quality because such a relationship has yet to be verified in the context of the Sultanate of Oman.

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent does organizational learning culture influence employees' motivation and job satisfaction in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman?
2. Does top management support influence employees' motivation and job satisfaction in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman?
3. Is there an effect of Islamic work ethics on employees' motivation and job satisfaction in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman?
4. To what extent does employee motivation affect service quality in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman?
5. To what extent does employees' job satisfaction affect service quality in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman?
6. Does employees' motivation mediate the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethics and service quality?
7. Does employees' job satisfaction mediate the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethics and service quality?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To determine the effect of organizational learning culture on employees' motivation and job satisfaction in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.
2. To examine the effect of top management support on employees' motivation and job satisfaction in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.
3. To investigate the effect of Islamic work ethics on employees' motivation and job satisfaction in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

4. To determine the effect of employees' motivation on service quality in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.
5. To investigate the effect of employees' job satisfaction on service quality in the Directorate General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.
6. To examine the mediating effect of employees' motivation in the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethics and service quality.
7. To examine the mediating role of employees' job satisfaction in the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethics and service quality.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

From the theoretical point of view, this study will provide empirical evidence about the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethic, motivation, job satisfaction and service quality in a new context, which is the Directorates General of Education in Sultanate of Oman. Previous studies have determined the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethic, motivation, job satisfaction and service quality in different contexts. For example, the relationship between organizational learning culture and service quality has previously been determined in the context of tourism companies by Al Saleem and Al-Juboori (2012). Similarly, the relationship between top management support and service quality has previously been verified in the context of private healthcare providers by Mosadeghrad (2014). In comparison, the relationship between motivation and service quality has been tested in the context of the banking sector by Kimando and Njogu (2012).

This study also extends the existing literature about the factors that influence service quality, particularly in the context of public sector organizations (The Directorate General of Education) in the Sultanate of Oman. Such effort is very essential because the previous studies have focused on employees from non-public sector contexts such as private healthcare providers (Mosadeghrad, 2014), home improvement sector (Durdyeva et al., 2014), service agents (Kitcharoen, 2013), extension system (Anaza et al., 2012), tourism Companies (Al Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2012), banks (Kimando & Njogu, 2012), and private universities (Sultan & Tarafder, 2007; OluwoleAdekanmbi, 2014).

In addition, this study has extended the literature by providing empirical evidence about the role of motivation and job satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethic and service quality. More evidence of this role still needs to be provided in the literature. However, it is possible because the relationship between organizational learning culture (Hamdan, 2017), top management support (Ali & Dominic, 2017) and Islamic work ethic with motivation has been established. Similarly, the relationship between organizational learning culture (Sapada et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Cronley & Kim, 2017), top management support and Islamic work ethic (Salehi & Babajani, 2017; Amilin et al., 2018) with job satisfaction also has been established. In fact, the existing literature has provided evidence about the role of motivation (e.g., Barkhuizen et al., 2015; Durdyeva et al., 2014) and job satisfaction (e.g., Singh et al., 2017; Tasneem et al., 2018) as an antecedent to service quality.

From the practical perspective, the findings of this study provide essential information to the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman about the work environment and individual factors that contribute to service quality in this

context. By adequately understanding the factors that influence service quality, the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman can plan a strategy to maintain and improve the service quality provided to their customers. This, in turn, improves the organization's image.

1.6 The Scope of the Study

This study is conducted to examine the factors that influence service quality in the context of the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. The factors included in this study consist of work environment factors (i.e., organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethic) and individual factors (i.e., motivation, job satisfaction). In addition, this study also examines the role of job satisfaction and motivation as a mediator in the relationship between organizational learning culture, top management support, Islamic work ethic, and service quality.

This study applies quantitative research design. The data has been collected through a questionnaire among public sector employees at the Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. The questionnaire was developed based on a previously established instrument.

This study will provide essential information about the factors that influence service quality. However, its findings are limited to the public sector in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly the Directorates General of Education.

1.7 Definitions of Terms

1.7.1 Directorate General of Education

The Directorate General of Education represents the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. This organization is led by a Director General, who is considered

the top management of the organization. The directorate oversees all the educational issues in the region controlled by the Ministry of Education. There is one directorate in each region of the Sultanate of Oman. There are eleven (11) regions in Oman; hence, there are eleven (11) Directorates General of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

1.7.2 Service Quality

Service quality can be defined as an overall judgment similar to attitude towards the service and is generally accepted as an antecedent of overall customer satisfaction (Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2010).

This study defines service quality with five (5) dimensions by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) known as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangible refers to the physical appearance of service providers, such as equipment, facilities, and written materials that customers use to evaluate the quality-of-service organizations provide. The reliability dimension measures the employee's ability and willingness to undertake the expected service consistently and precisely. Responsiveness refers to the ability to inform the customers concerning the period needed to wait for their complaints and feedback to be addressed either promptly or at a later time. Empathy indicates the caring and special attention accorded to customers by employees. Assurance is normally experienced from the employees' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to inspire trust including confidence in customers.

1.7.3 Organizational Learning Culture

Organizational learning culture refers to an organizational skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Garvin, 1993).

In this study, the organizational learning culture refers to seven action imperatives for a learning organization. The seven actions are establishing continuous learning opportunities, promoting inquiry and dialogue, encouraging collaboration and team learning, enacting systems to capture and share learning, empowering people to have a collective vision, connecting the organization to the environment, and employing leaders who model and support learning at all levels (individual, team, and organization) (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996).

1.7.4 Top management support

Top management support is the willingness of top management to provide the necessary resources and authority or power for a project's success (Khrosrowpour & Travers, 1991).

In this study, top management support refers to the degree to which managers are supportive and accessible to employees and provide them with the resources and assistance necessary for work development (Prieto-Pastor & Martin-Perez, 2015).

1.7.5 Islamic work ethic

Islamic work ethics (IWE) inaugurates Islam's expectations regarding one's work behavior, which includes effort, dedication, cooperation, responsibility, social relations, and creativity (Sa-U et al., 2008).

In this study, the focus of the Islamic work ethic is on the view that work enables the person to be independent and is a source of self-respect, satisfaction, and fulfilment. Success and progress on the job rely on hard work and commitment to one's job. Commitment to work also involves a desire to improve the community and societal welfare (Ali, 1988).

1.7.6 Motivation

Motivation is defined as a series of energizing forces that originate both within and beyond an individual's self at work (Herselman, 2001).

In this study, motivation refers to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation Brenyah (2016). Intrinsic motivation is a motivation to perform an activity for its own sake and personal rewards, while extrinsic motivation is a motivation to perform an activity to earn a reward or avoid punishment.

1.7.7 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the reactions of the user's consent, feelings, personal attitude, physical and intellectual, regarding the environment of work, and general attitude, which carries using about his duties in the job (Wang, 2012).

In this study, job satisfaction refers to employees' general feelings toward the organization and their job, whether they like the organization, do not like it, or are satisfied with their job (Cammann et al., 1979).

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the study's background and problem statement. It then lists the research questions and objectives. The chapter also explains the significance and scope of the study. Finally, it explains the operational definition of each variable included in this study. Chapter 2 will discuss the literature relevant to this study.