

**FACTORS INFLUENCING SATISFACTION,
ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL LOYALTIES
AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN
PRIVATE OMANI HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS**

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF SYMBOLS.....	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiv
ABSTRAK.....	xv
ABSTRACT.....	xviii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Study.....	1
1.2.1 Private Higher Education in Oman.....	6
1.2.2 Preliminary Interview	18
1.3 Problem Statement.....	23
1.4 Research Questions.....	26
1.5 Research Objectives.....	27
1.6 Significance of Study	27
1.6.1 Theoretical Significance	27
1.6.2 Practical Significance.....	31
1.7 Scope of Study.....	33
1.8 Definitions of Key Constructs and Terms.....	34
1.8.1 Academic Aspects	34
1.8.2 Reputation	34
1.8.3 Price and Fee.....	34

1.8.4	Environment & Location of HEIs.....	35
1.8.5	Personal Motivation.....	35
1.8.6	Emotional Support.....	35
1.8.7	Ethical Conduct.....	35
1.8.8	International Student Satisfaction	35
1.8.9	Attitudinal Loyalty.....	36
1.8.10	Behavioral Loyalty	36
1.9	Structure of Thesis.....	36
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....		38
2.1	Introduction	38
2.2	International Student at HEIs.....	38
2.3	Benefits of Private HEIs in Oman	41
2.4	Benefits of International Students to the Omani HEIs	42
2.5	Underlying Theories.....	44
2.5.1	Service Quality Theory	47
2.5.2	Environment Psychology Theory	51
2.5.3	Expectancy Motivation Theory.....	55
2.6	Predictors of International Student satisfaction.....	56
2.6.1	Academic Aspects	69
2.6.2	Reputation	71
2.6.3	Price and Fee.....	74
2.6.4	Environment & Location of HEIs.....	78
2.6.5	Personal Motivation.....	81
2.6.6	Emotional Support.....	83
2.6.7	Ethical Conduct.....	85
2.7	International Student Satisfaction in Higher Education.....	88
2.8	Dimensions of Student Loyalty.....	92

2.8.1	Attitudinal Loyalty.....	98
2.8.2	Behavioral Loyalty	101
2.9	Gaps in the Literature.....	103
2.10	Theoretical Background, Research Model, and Hypotheses Development	105
2.10.1	The Effect of Academic Aspects on international Student Satisfaction.....	108
2.10.2	The Effect of Reputation on international Student Satisfaction.....	111
2.10.3	The Effect of Price and Fee on international Student Satisfaction.....	114
2.10.4	The Effect of Environment & Location of HEI on international Student Satisfaction	117
2.10.5	The Effect of Personal Motivation on international Student Satisfaction.....	119
2.10.6	The Effect of Emotional Support on international Student Satisfaction.....	122
2.10.7	The Effect of Ethical Conduct on International Student Satisfaction.....	124
2.10.8	The Effect of International Student Satisfaction on Attitudinal Loyalty	126
2.10.9	The Effect of international Student Satisfaction on Behavioral Loyalty	128
2.10.10	The Mediation Effect of international Student Satisfaction	130
2.11	Chapter Summary	133
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....		134
3.1	Introduction	134
3.2	Research Paradigms.....	134
3.3	Research Approach.....	137
3.4	Research Plan and Design	138
3.5	The Unit of Analysis.....	140
3.6	Population and Sampling Technique	141

3.7	Questionnaire Design	146
3.8	Measurement and Operationalization of the Study Variables.....	147
3.8.1	Operationalization of Academic Aspects	149
3.8.2	Operationalization of Reputation	150
3.8.3	Operationalization of Fee and Price.....	150
3.8.4	Operationalization of Environment & Location of HEIs	151
3.8.5	Operationalization of Personal Motivation.....	151
3.8.6	Operationalization of Emotional Support.....	152
3.8.7	Operationalization of Ethical Conduct	153
3.8.8	Operationalization of International Student Satisfaction	154
3.8.9	Operationalization of Attitudinal Loyalty	154
3.8.10	Operationalization of Behavioral Loyalty	155
3.9	Statistical Data Analysis.....	156
3.10	Questionnaire Pilot Test	156
3.11	Preliminary Data Analysis	158
3.11.1	Normality	158
3.11.2	Common Method Variance	160
3.11.3	Assessment of Measurement Models	161
3.11.4	Assessment of Mediation Relationship	164
3.11.5	Assessment of Structural Model	165
3.12	Chapter Summary	166
CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS.....		168
4.1	Introduction	168
4.2	Response Rate.....	168
4.3	Data Screening and Preliminary Analysis.....	169
4.3.1	Missing Value Analysis.....	170
4.3.2	Normality Test	170

4.3.3	Multicollinearity Test	172
4.4	Common Method Bias Test	173
4.5	Respondents' Profile	175
4.6	Assessment of Measurement and Structural of PLS-SEM Model	178
4.6.1	Assessment of the Measurement Model	178
4.6.1(a)	Individual Item Reliability	180
4.6.1(b)	Convergent Validity	181
4.6.1(c)	Discriminant Validity	183
4.6.2	Assessment of the Significance of the Structural Model	188
4.6.2(a)	Testing the Mediating Effect	191
4.6.2(b)	Coefficient of Determination R^2	193
4.6.2(c)	Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	194
4.6.2(d)	Assessment of Effect Size (f^2)	195
4.7	Summary of the Findings	196
4.8	Summary of the Chapter	199
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION		200
5.1	Introduction	200
5.2	Recapitulation and Summary of Findings	200
5.3	Findings Discussion	202
5.3.1	To what degree is the relationship between academic aspects, reputation, price and fee, environment & location of HEIs, personal motivation, emotional support, ethical conduct influences international student satisfaction in Oman?	202
5.3.2	To what degree does international student satisfaction mediate the effect of academic aspects, reputation, price and fee, environment & location of HEIs, personal motivation, emotional support, and ethical conduct on attitudinal loyalty and behavior loyalty?	210
5.3.3	Does International Student Satisfaction Influence Attitudinal Loyalty?	215
5.3.4	Does International Student Satisfaction Influence Behavioral	

	Loyalty?	217
5.4	Implications of the Study	218
5.4.1	Theoretical Implications	219
5.4.2	Practical Implications.....	223
5.5	Study Limitations.....	229
5.6	Future work	230
5.7	Chapter Summary	232
	REFERENCES	234
	APPENDICES	
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1 The titles of events which organized in Oman regarding international students.....	5
Table 1.2 Structure of private Omani HEIs, 2023-2024.....	8
Table 1.3 Cost of Bachelor Business Administration program in selected countries (2023)	16
Table 2.1 Measuring student satisfaction: Objectives and theories in previous and current study	46
Table 2.2 Examples of International Student Satisfaction Studies in Higher Education context	61
Table 2.3 Examples of student satisfaction definitions in literature.....	88
Table 2.4 Summarizes the essential difference between the two dimensions of loyalty	97
Table 3.1 Selection of the positivism approach.....	136
Table 3.2 Sample size for a given population.....	143
Table 3.3 Summarizes Krejcie and Morgan's fundamental rule.....	144
Table 3.4 Research methodology of the current study	145
Table 3.5 Measurement instruments	148
Table 3.6 Survey items related to academic aspects.....	149
Table 3.7 Survey items related to reputation.....	150
Table 3.8 Survey items related to fee and price	151
Table 3.9 Survey items related to environment & location of HEIs.....	151
Table 3.10 Survey items related to personal motivation.....	152
Table 3.11 Survey items related to emotional support.....	153
Table 3.12 Survey items related to ethical conduct	153
Table 3.13 Survey items related to International Student Satisfaction.....	154
Table 3.14 Survey items related to attitudinal loyalty	155

Table 3.15	Survey items related to behavioral loyalty.....	155
Table 3.16	Difference between PLS-SEM and CB-SEM.....	163
Table 4.1	Survey response rate	169
Table 4.2	Statistic Values of Skewness and Kurtosis (n =479)	171
Table 4.3	Correlations among the Exogenous Variables.....	172
Table 4.4	Values of the variation inflation factor for collinearity.....	173
Table 4.5	Principal components factor analysis result.....	174
Table 4.6	Demographic profile	176
Table 4.7	Deleted measurement items.....	180
Table 4.8	Convergent validity	182
Table 4.9	Cross loadings	184
Table 4.10	Discriminant validity of the constructs: Fornell-Larcker criterion	186
Table 4.11	Discriminant validity (HTMT Criteria).....	187
Table 4.12	Path coefficients and hypotheses testing for direct effect.....	189
Table 4.13	Mediation results	192
Table 4.14	Coefficient of determination R^2	194
Table 4.15	Assessment of effect size.....	196
Table 4.16	Summary of hypotheses testing.....	197

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1 The location of Omani HEIs.....	12
Figure 1.2 Numbers of international students who were enrolled in private Omani HEIs from 2018 to 2023 (In hundred)	13
Figure 1.3 The Specialization of current international students at private Omani HEIs.....	17
Figure 2.1 HEdPERF model.....	48
Figure 2.2 The environmental psychological model.....	53
Figure 2.3 Basic expectancy model.....	56
Figure 2.4 Stages of loyalty and their vulnerabilities	95
Figure 2.5 Four clusters of international student loyalty	96
Figure 2.6 The research framework.....	107
Figure 3.1 Research plan	139
Figure 3.2 General Mediation Model.....	164
Figure 4.1 Measurement model.....	179
Figure 4.2 Revised model.....	187
Figure 4.3 Structural model with mediator (Full model).....	189

LIST OF SYMBOLS

R	predictive power
f	effect size
Q	predictive relevance
α	Cronbach's alpha
X	Independent variable
Y	Dependent Variable
M	Mediator Variable
$a \times b$	Indirect effect of X on Y through M
c'	Direct effect of X on Y
CI.90	Bias-Correlated 90% Confidence Interval
t	t -statistics
p	Significance and Relevance
β	Path Coefficient

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BCa	Bias-Corrected and Accelerated
CB-SEM	Covariance Based-Structural Equation Modeling
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CLC	Construct Level Correction
CMB	Common Method Bias
CMV	Common Method Variance
CoI	Community of Inquiry
CR	Composite Reliability
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EMT	Expectation Motivation Theory
EPT	Environment Physiology Theory
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoF	Goodness of Fit
HEdPERF	Higher Education PERFormance
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HESQ	Higher Education Services Quality
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
PLS-SEM	Partial least squares based on Structural Equation Modeling
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
SQT	Service Quality Theory

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Questions for Administrator at Middle East College.
Appendix B	Questions of Students' Interview.
Appendix C	Survey Questionnaires.
Appendix D	Approval Letter from Supervisor.
Appendix E	Approval Letter from Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation.

**FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI KEPUASAN, KESETIAAN
BERASASKAN SIKAP DAN TINGKAH LAKU DALAM
KALANGAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA DI INSTITUSI PENGAJIAN
TINGGI SWASTA OMAN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa kurang tahap kepuasan, serta kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku di institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi swasta di Oman. Oleh itu, kajian empirikal ini mengkaji perhubungan di antara faktor-faktor Kualiti Perkhidmatan Pengajian Tinggi (HESQ), faktor-faktor tolak-tarik, faktor-faktor sosial, dan kepuasan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa dengan kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku dalam kalangan pelajar antarabangsa semasa dan akan datang di institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi. Kajian ini memperkenalkan satu model integrasi dalam mencapai kefahaman yang lebih baik melalui pemboleh ubah bersandar yang sesuai, seperti kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku dan pemboleh ubah perantara iaitu kepuasan pelajar. Kajian semasa ini menggunakan Teori Kualiti Perkhidmatan atau *Service Quality Theory* (SQT), Teori Motivasi Jangkaan atau *Expectancy Motivation Theory* (EMT) dan Teori Fisiologi Persekitaran atau *Environment Physiology Theory* (EPT) untuk mengkaji pengaruh faktor-faktor HESQ, faktor-faktor tolak-tarik dan faktor-faktor sosial ke atas kepuasan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa dan seterusnya, kesetiaan sikap dan kesetiaan tingkah laku dalam persekitaran institusi pengajian tinggi dengan menggunakan teknik bukan-kebarangkalian dalam pendekatan kuantitatif menerusi soal-selidik. Responden-responden kajian ini adalah 479 orang pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa daripada 27 buah institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi swasta di Oman dan model kajian dinilai menggunakan *Statistical Package for the*

Social Sciences (SPSS) dengan *Smart Partial Least Squares* (IBM-PLS). Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa aspek-aspek akademik, reputasi dan yuran, dan harga, memberi pengaruh yang tidak signifikan ke atas kepuasan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa. Seterusnya, persekitaran, lokasi dan motivasi peribadi mempunyai pengaruh yang signifikan ke atas kepuasan pelajar-pelajar tersebut. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sokongan emosi dan tingkah laku beretika memberi pengaruh yang signifikan ke atas kepuasan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa. Kajian ini juga membekalkan bukti empirikal peranan perantara yang dimainkan oleh kepuasan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa, di mana ia mempunyai perhubungan yang tidak signifikan di antara aspek-aspek akademik, reputasi dan yuran serta harga, juga kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku. Namun begitu, peranan perantara yang dimainkan oleh kepuasan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa adalah signifikan di antara persekitaran dan lokasi, motivasi peribadi, sokongan emosi, tingkah laku beretika, kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku. Kajian ini turut menunjukkan perhubungan yang positif di antara kepuasan, dan kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku pelajar-pelajar tersebut. Secara keseluruhan, kajian ini membekalkan satu model pelbagai pemboleh ubah berteori yang boleh membantu para pengkaji dan pengamal memahami dengan lebih baik bagaimana membentuk kepuasan, dan kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa dalam konteks pengajian tinggi. Selain daripada sumbangan teoretikal, dapatan kajian juga mengandungi implikasi utama untuk golongan pembuat dasar, pereka pembelajaran dan pendidik di institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi dan Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi agar mereka dapat memahami dengan lebih baik kaedah yang boleh digunakan untuk menerapkan nilai persepsi kepuasan, serta kesetiaan sikap dan tingkah laku pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa, di institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi di Oman. Kajian ini turut

membekalkan input untuk universiti-universiti swasta dalam membentuk strategi-strategi pemasaran yang boleh menarik minat pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING SATISFACTION, ATTITUDINAL AND
BEHAVIOURAL LOYALTIES AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN
PRIVATE OMANI HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

ABSTRACT

Studies show that international students have a decreased in their satisfaction and attitudinal and behavioural loyalty at private Omani higher education intuitions (HEIs). Hence, this empirical study investigated the relationships between the Higher Education Service Quality (HESQ) factors, push-pull factors, social factors, and international student satisfaction with attitudinal and behavioural loyalties to attractive current and future international students at HEIs. This study thus introduced an integrated model to achieve better understanding through appropriate dependent variables such as attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty and mediating variable student satisfaction. The current study applied Service Quality Theory (SQT), Expectancy Motivation Theory (EMT) and, Environment Physiology Theory (EPT) to investigates the influence of HESQ factors, push-pull factors and, social factors on international student satisfaction and, in turn, attitudinal loyalty, behavioural loyalty in HEIs environment. By using quantitative approach non- probability technique among questionnaires. The survey respondents of this study are 479 international students from 27 private HEIs in Oman and the model of the study was evaluated using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) with smart Partial Least Squares (IBM-PLS). The findings indicated that academic aspects, reputation, fee and price has an insignificant influence on international students' satisfaction. Furthermore, environment and location and personal motivation, have significant positive influences on international students' satisfaction. The results of the study also indicated that

emotional support and ethical conduct has significant influence on international student satisfaction. In addition, this study provides empirical evidence of the mediating role played by international student satisfaction has insignificant relationship between academic aspects, reputation and fee and price, attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. However, the mediating role played by international student satisfaction has significant in the relationships between environment and location, personal motivation, emotional support, ethical conduct, attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. In addition, the study indicated the positive relationship between international satisfaction attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. Overall, this study provides a theoretical multivariate model which would help researchers and practitioners in better understanding how to foster international student satisfaction attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty, in the higher education context. Besides, the theoretical contribution, the findings of current study also have key implications for maker polices, instructional designers and instructors at HEIs and the Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Innovation to better understand how to foster international students' satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty perceptions in the Omani HEIs especially for maker polices, instructional designers and instructors at HEIs and the Ministry to better understand how to foster international students' satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty perceptions in the Omani HEIs. In addition, this study also provides inputs for private universities to formulate marketing strategies international students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Beginning with a brief overview of the historical and geographical context of the study, this chapter starts especially with the Sultanate of Oman. The research problem statement then comes first, then the research objectives, research questions, theoretical and practical significances, scope, and definition of key terminology. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the challenges faced by overseas students in Oman, especially in terms of HEIs. The last part of this chapter offers a chapter overview together with a synopsis of the studies.

1.2 Background of Study

Singh (1991) asserts that globalization influences several essential dimensions of societies, such as education. The significant increase in international students is evident, with over 6 million enrolled globally in 2019, compared to 2 million in 2000 (UNESCO, 2021). As the global educational landscape evolves, HEIs worldwide are acknowledging the increasing significance of international student markets (Kotler et al., 2013). In the period of 2020-2021, international student mobility contributed over £41.9 billion to the UK (IAS, 2024). This transition compels universities and colleges to reassess the enduring significance of student satisfaction within a market-oriented context. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) assert that international students require a suitable quality of service in organizations operating in highly competitive environments. Businesses frequently implement strategies that emphasize service quality and associated factors to achieve a competitive advantage in the current

landscape. Education is becoming increasingly challenging. The quality of service offered by an institution significantly impacts student satisfaction and influences the institution's reputation (Bakrie et al., 2019). Raval and Grönroos (1996) assert that satisfaction with an entity, including a product or service, is contingent upon experience. The appreciation of international students encompasses both the product focus and the organization delivering the product or service.

In this context, the HEIs system was aligned with the quality definitions of the European HEIs Area, and quality qualifications were improved by following global trends and technological developments (SBB, 2023). This alignment not only ensured greater compatibility and comparability across national education frameworks; it also enhanced the international recognition of academic programs and degrees. By adopting innovations such as digital learning platforms, data-driven curriculum designs, and interdisciplinary approaches, institutions were able to provide more flexible, student-centered learning environments. Moreover, increased collaboration between universities, industries, and research centres fosters the development of competencies aligned with labor market needs, increasing the employability of graduates and strengthening the role of HEIs in driving socio-economic growth and innovation.

To differentiate themselves in the increasingly competitive educational landscape, universities must contemplate factors beyond mere academic rigour. Superior service quality serves as a crucial differentiator, directly influencing student satisfaction and, consequently, the institution's reputation (Bakrie et al., 2019). According to Raval and Grönroos (1996), satisfaction arises from favorable experiences. In education, this encompasses both the caliber of instruction (the "product") and the comprehensive support services offered by the institution (the

"organization"). International students, a significant market segment, are especially responsive to both factors. Students in HEIs can transfer to any institution globally and complete their studies, as numerous private and foreign universities employ an international curriculum and credit system or utilize the same curriculum as their parent university (Gill, 2008). Students possess the autonomy to select countries and locations for their studies driven by specific personal motivations. Malaysia is a prominent destination for international students, with 170,000 enrolled in 2022. They originated from 162 distinct nations, predominantly from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The cost of living is low in comparison to other nations (Aljazeera, 2022). The cost and fees are crucial determinants in the selection of a study destination.

Conversely, the fees and expenses paid by overseas students are considered a means of income generation (Santiago et al., 2008). Countries want to diversify income sources and improve the contribution of HEIs to GDP. According to the 2018 NAFSA, National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, international students helped the U.S. economy generate \$36.9 billion and supported almost 450,000 jobs. Though with a degree of reluctance that does not fit the civil development happening in these countries and the financial resources at their disposal, supported by significant government support for universities, the Arab Gulf States have begun to participate in this market (Al Maamari, 2018).

The OECD (2009) defines Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the benchmark for evaluating the whole value of completed goods and services generated by a nation over a designated period. Oman's tenth five-year plan highlights the sector of HEIs 's major GDP contribution by including it in its goals. With estimates showing a rise to 6.2% by the end of the plan in 2040, it represents a significant contribution and makes about 5% of the GDP in 2021 (Al Balushi, 2021). One major financial benefit is

international students looking for nations with reasonable tuition rates. The imported foreign money makes a major difference in the economic growth of the particular nations

Since it directly affects their degree of contentment, which influences their loyalty to HEIs in those nations, countries should make improvements to the features that attract international students to their institutions. Al-Maamari (2018) thus said that Arabic can be learnt as a second language in addition to the acquisition of Arab and Islamic cultures; international students in the Sultanate will have the chance to learn English in its institutions. Oman also stands out for its moderate Islam and its openness to various religions. Stated differently, it will enable the overseas student to fit very well into Omani society. To investigate the situation of international students in the Sultanate, several events and conferences were arranged between public and private HEIs in line with government departments. Finding the challenges these students experience and investigating strategies to boost their enrolment at Omani HEIs was the focus.

Apart from the above-mentioned benefits, the Sultanate of Oman has a unique geographical dimension that adds to its appeal because of its temperature and weather patterns. Its dry and semi-arid desert climate across the Sultanate, Mediterranean climate in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, and seasonal weather in Salalah, in the south, help to set it apart. This environment leads to a clear distribution of institutional sites. The Omani university enjoys a unique climate diversity thanks to its several locations, which can attract foreign students. This strait is of enormous importance for the oil exports from other Arab Gulf nations to the world market. Saudi Arabia lies west of Oman; Yemen is to the southwest; the United Arab Emirates is to the north. It falls southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. Alabri (2015) further divides the Sultanate, which

consists of eleven governorates, into 61 Wilayats. Analyzing Oman's HEIs policy in several regional contexts helps one take regionalism into account. Oman is scattered over the Middle East, Muslim states, the Indian Ocean, Asian and African countries, the Arab Gulf States, and the more general Arab states. The matter is rather important and calls for careful thought. See Table 1.1 for a table illustrating this.

Table 1.1 The titles of events which organized in Oman regarding international students

Title of event & Objectives	Organizers	Date & Year
Opportunities and challenges of attracting international students to study in Oman.	The Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Innovation.	15 May 2018
Omani station and ways to attract international students in the Sultanate.	The institution responsible for overseeing and promoting HEIs, scientific research, and innovation is the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation.	14 October 2018
The committee appointed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation is meeting with the Ministry of Tourism and the Capital Market Authority to monitor the implementation of the suggestions from the symposium aimed at attracting international students.	The government agency in charge of universities, research, and technological advancement.	7 January 2020
The Economic and Educational Role of Private HEIs to receive students from countries around the world.	Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry	25 November 2021
The promotional campaign of the "Study in Oman". To promote the Sultanate of Oman as an educational destination with attractive advantages for international students. These conditions are applicable to them, with the purpose of facilitating cultural interaction and offering an opportunity to showcase the Sultanate of Oman and its educational institutions.	Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Innovation.	30 September 2021

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Title of event & Objectives	Organizers	Date & Year
The Global Higher Education Exhibition (GEDEX) in its 22nd edition An opportunity for universities, colleges and academic institutions to enhance communication between academics and international students.	Arab House for Data Analysis.	30 April 2023
The Middle East Scholarship Forum. To build sustainable partnerships between government funders and academic institutions seeking to attract international students.	International Network and Gulf Conferences Foundation.	01 February 2024

Source: *Ministry of higher education, science research and innovation (2024).*

Hence, it is imperative to examine the present condition of attitudinal and behavioral loyalties among international students in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as to explore the factors that impact their satisfaction. This study examines the factors that impact the satisfaction of international students, as well as the correlation between HESQ components, push-pull factors, social factors, and student satisfaction. Additionally, examine the correlation between the satisfaction of international students and their levels of attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty.

1.2.1 Private Higher Education in Oman

The increasing number of international students in private HEIs in Oman with the expansion witnessed by the Sultanate with the increase of private educational institutions in Oman and reaching 27 private universities (see Table 1.2) (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 2023), but this increase witnessed a gain, a decrease in the number of students enrolled in these private universities after the year 2015.

The Sultanate of Oman had a total population of 2,949,564 Omani citizens, which is equivalent to 56.92% of the total population. According to the data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the overall population of the Sultanate is comprised of 2,231,253 individuals who are not citizens of the country. This number represents 43.08% of the total population. The population of Oman was 5,178,817 at the beginning of the month of May in the year 2024.

The Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation of an International Student (OAAA, 2016) declares that "A student who came to Oman from another country with the sole purpose of obtaining an educational qualification is considered a significant presence in Oman." This statement holds true for students who have come to Oman from other countries. The purpose of this statement is to highlight the significance of international students in the Sultanate of Oman region. The HEIs classify students who are not Omani as belonging to the international student category.

Several serious issues have been brought to light as a result of the recent decline in the number of international students enrolling in HEIs in Oman. These issues require immediate attention. The expansion of HEIs in Oman is being driven by the increasing competition that exists between the multiple institutions and colleges that are already in existence, both domestically and globally, as stated by Mishra and Gupta (2021). This competition is taking place in both domestic and international settings. There are institutions from both the United States and other countries participating in this tournament.

Table 1.2 Structure of private Omani HEIs, 2023-2024

Name of HEIs	Number of current international students at private Omani HEIs for academic year (2023-2024).	Degree Offred	Location
Asharqiyah University	11	Diploma, bachelor, and master	Ibra - A'Sharqiyah region
Arab Open University	162	Diploma, bachelor, and master	Muscat- Qurum
Dhofar University	135	Diploma, bachelor, and master	Salalah – Dhofar
German University of Technology in Oman	73	Bachelor and master	Muscat - Mubillah
Middle East College	301	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Muscat - Knowledge Oasis Al Rusayl
Modern College of Business and Science	180	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Muscat -Al Khuwair
National College of Automotive Technology	7	Bachelor	Muscat - Al-khoudh.
Muscat College	41	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Muscat -Ruwi
Oman College of Management & Technology	8	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Halaban- Barka
Oman Dental College	58	Bachelor	Muscat - Wattayah
Oman Tourism College	29	Diploma and bachelor	Muscat - Seeb
International College of Engineering & Management	63	Diploma, Advanced Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Airport Heights ‘Muscat
International Maritime College Oman	42	Diploma and bachelor	Falaj Al Qabail, Sohar

Table 1.2 (Continued)

Name of HEIs	Number of current international students at private Omani HEIs for academic year (2023-2024).	Degree Offred	Location
Majan College	130	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Muscat/ Darsait
Mazoon College	66	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Muscat - Airport Heights
Scientific College of Design	85	Diploma and bachelor	Muscat, Airport Heights
Sur University College	7	Diploma, bachelor, and master	A'Sharqiyah-Sur
National University of Science & Technology	404	Bachelor and master	Muscat- Al hill
Muscat University	16	Bachelor and master	Muscat-Bousher
Nizwa University	308	Diploma, bachelor, and master	A'Dakhilya-Nizwa
Sohar University	123	Diploma, bachelor, and master	Sohar
University Of Buraimi	61	Diploma and bachelor	Buraimi
Al Bayan College	11	Diploma and bachelor	Halaban- Barka
Al Buraimi College	47	Diploma, Advanced Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Al Buraimi
Al Zahra College	34	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	Muscat-madinat al-I'rfan
Global college of Engineering and Technology	85	Bachelor and master.	Muscat - Bousher
Gulf College	72	Diploma, bachelor, and master.	AL-Khuwair, Muscat
Total of HEIs 27	2559 students	-	-

Source: Ministry of higher education, science research and innovation (2023-2024).

Furthermore, among the factors influencing international students' cautious choice of a study location is the quality and efficiency of the study programs provided to them by the host nations. Consequently, the Omani government analyses the initiatives presented by Omani HEIs yearly (Al-Abri, 2018). The great desire of HEIs to create top-notch and well-reputed study programmes will appeal to foreign students. More precisely, offshore projects have a worldwide reputation that benefits all those involved. A reputable offshore program will encourage local students who choose to pursue HEIs at foreign universities to enroll in nearby private HEIs, stopping the flow of local money to overseas institutions, claims Akareem and Hossain (2016). It will also attract international students who will study there and earn a degree accepted worldwide, so bringing income from elsewhere (Ziguras, 2007). The government responded to calls for more access to HEIs in 1995 by letting the private sector help to build private institutions. This action sought to meet the Sultanate's demand for qualified and ready professionals (Al Lamki, 2006; MOHE, 2005). Stated differently, this chance gave private HEIs in Oman great benefits and a qualitative leap, as observed right now. These results were achieved since the government focused more on greatly raising the quality of the educational system than on just expanding the number of educational institutions (Oman Ministry of Education, 2004). Educational goals have changed to reflect a modern industry's needs as well as those of upcoming workers (Alsarimi, 2001).

Article 10, Page 26 of the MOHE document dated 2005 states that the majority of academic staff members for private universities must hold a PhD in their respective fields per the guidelines given by the Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Innovation. Since it followed the strict criteria established by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation, this guaranteed the provision of a

better educational system. When a teacher applies to work in a private educational institution in Oman, for example, the institution must forward the application to the Ministry, where a committee in the Ministry reviews and evaluates the qualifications of the person applying for work and then sends a letter to the educational institution evaluating the Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Granting a teaching licence, so enabling the student to have a high-quality education.

Hence, Al-Abri (2021) established the definition of international students as those who come for the aim of education and differ from students living with their parents; on the other hand, students who came with their parents connected with job prospects in the nation and among students who travelled for study. Conversely, the nation aims to draw more foreign students and offers scholarships for Omani students to study abroad, for Egypt, Jordan, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Al Shmeli, 2009). On the one hand, scientific cooperation agreements between nations include cultural interaction as part of their agenda. A rising country known for its modern infrastructure, natural beauty, consistent economy, and stable political system is Oman. Based on the MENA Global Peace Index, it is ranked as the most peaceful Arab country (GPI, 2018). Oman differs from other MENA nations in that general peace has improved most there. Therefore, as long as Oman maintains its high-quality HEIs, international students may choose it as their destination (Al Shikaili, 2019). Given a Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) index for universities, which includes among its elements the percentage of universality, knowing that the future vision of the Sultanate of Oman (2040) does not only put education, learning, scientific research, and national capabilities as national priorities but also emphasizes students in HEIs, especially.

Three universities at least within the QS classification are the aim of the vision of education for 2040. 2022 Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The increase of funding for HEIs in the Sultanate has improved Oman Vision 2040's possibilities. Article 29 of Royal Decree 27/2023 allows educational institutions to accept donations, endowments, special benefits, or similar contributions as long as they follow the rules and guidelines established and do not violate any applicable laws (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 2023). Most private HEIs in Oman concentrate in the Governorate of Muscat, the capital (see Figure 1.1). But this concentration fuels traffic congestion that peaks at the start and finish of the working day as well as a high cost of living in the capital.

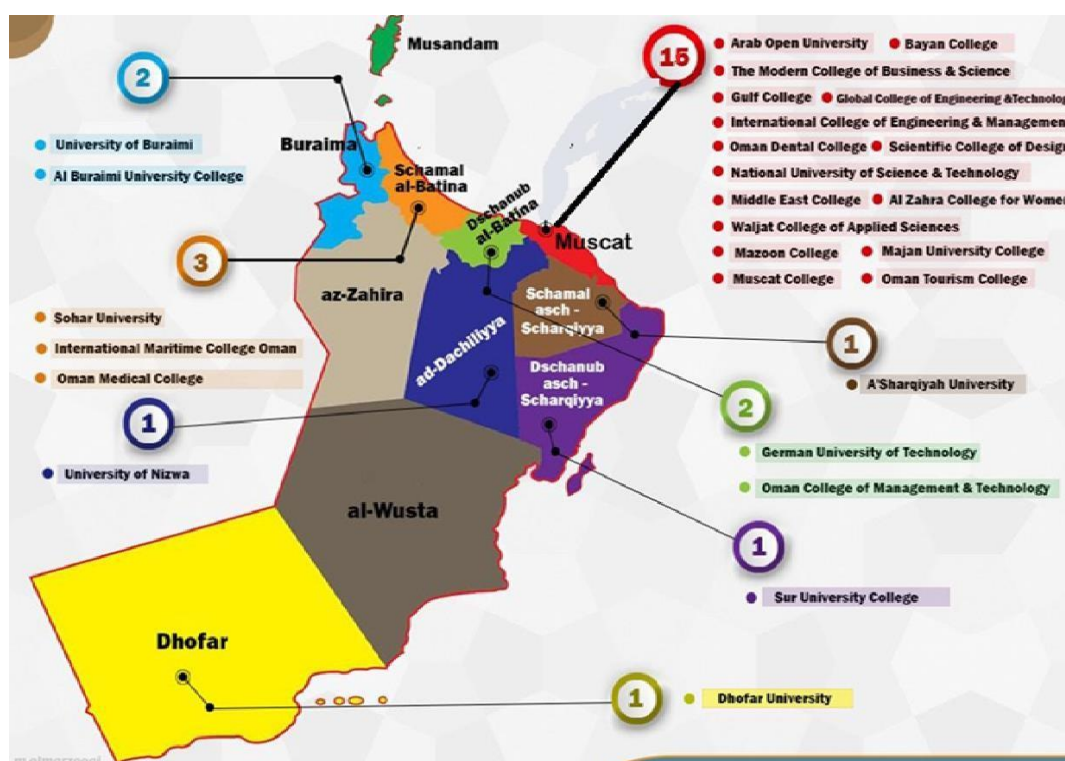


Figure 1.1 The location of Omani HEIs.

Source: *Author's Compilation based on data from the Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Innovation (2023).*

A growing number of institutional offerings and the quality of the programmes those institutions were providing motivated the committee of Omani HEIs to create a

new mechanism for licensing academic programmes in HEIs. This project aimed to ensure that institutions remain current and in line with the present guidelines (Al-Balshi, 2019). Omani educational institutions have tried to foster this feature to draw more present and future students. The development of this aspect aims to enhance the quality of instructional offerings for foreign students. As seen in Figure 1.2 below, the most current figures show that the number of overseas students registering for Sultanate of Oman classes has been declining.

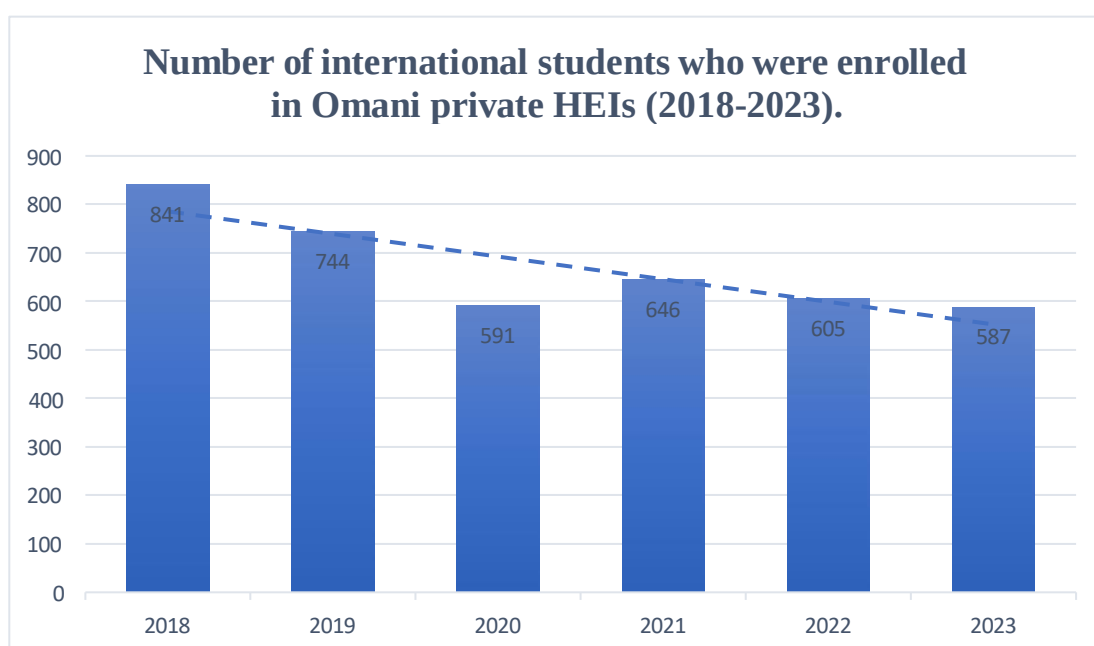


Figure 1.2 Numbers of international students who were enrolled in private Omani HEIs from 2018 to 2023 (In hundred)
Source: *National Centre for Statistics and Information (2024)*.

Using the knowledge and experience of eminent foreign universities in support of collaboration, partnerships, and worldwide twinning projects will help Omani institutions immensely. This will help them to improve the state of their universities and increase their influence on a larger worldwide student population. This approach is likely to greatly increase the enrolment of foreign students, supporting the general expansion and worldwide recognition of Omani institutions. The situation of private

HEIs in Oman, its possible influence on Omani development, and the difficulties it faces as a research topic have not received enough attention. Dedicated studies aimed at Oman's private HEIs are lacking. Still, in 2010 the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation (OAAA) was established. Moreover, Al Sawafi (2021) clarified that academic governance is one of the most crucial challenges private educational institutions faces. On the other hand, Alabri (2021) sees that the first prominent challenges are the difficulties of admission procedures and the equivalency of certificates, and the second difficulty is adapting to the environment hence, HEIs should have departments that help the student to gradually adapt to the environment. The student is searching for a study programme that satisfies his need for flexibility as well as an educational system. Thus, the academic programmes provided by the college or university, the scope of study programmes, the flexibility of degree programmes, the flexibility of major changes and the range of degree options" are determinants of HEIs selection (John et al., 1999). The competency and experience of the teaching staff in colleges and universities define the quality of education. This element is quite important in forming a favorable view among students. As a result, a lot of educational institutions are aggressively trying to improve the qualifications and competencies of their academic staff.

In essence, many competent Omani workers choose to work for government HEIs because of the higher compensation and extra benefits—such as pension schemes and vacation pay that either lack or are insufficient in the private sector (Al-Hamadi et al., 2007; Al-Lamki, 1998). Private HEIs have turned to hiring foreign academics due to the dearth of highly educated Omani professionals for academic roles; some of these academics may lack the necessary credentials according to Western standards (Issan, 2016). International quality assurance and foreign accrediting bodies are two more

strategies Oman employs to guarantee the calibre of degree programs and acquire global recognition (altbach et al. 2009).

Similarly, Harthy's (2011) study reveals that, although many private HEIs priorities academic affiliation with internationally recognized HEIs with accredited programs as a critical factor in ensuring quality, very few private HEIs make attempts to expand their quality assurance methods to demonstrate that they offer study programs of comparable high quality. Furthermore, driving demand for better universities worldwide, both local and international education markets, are globalisation, the internationalising of education, and the development of the information economy.

Therefore, universities thus face a great difficulty that calls for the enhancement of their academic quality in line with international colleagues to maintain competitiveness in the HEIs market (Lyndon Bird FBCI, 2012). Alamki (2010) suggested the growth and maintenance of government-sponsored grant and scholarship programs, which provide financial support to improve equity and access to HEIs. Desired student loans, then, are unrestricted funds given to low-income students who have shown academic promise as well as to academics displaying other specified qualities, such as those qualified for athletic scholarships. Al-Harthy (2011) exposed the significant cost involved in enrolling in these universities, especially for the large number of people who cannot afford this expense.

Consequently, it is noted that the high costs of studying in Oman account for the volume of Omani students seeking their education abroad (see Table 1.3). The business administration program was chosen for this reason since the data in Figure 1.2 shows that among current international students in the Sultanate of Oman,

commercial and business majors are the most preferred programs. HEIs grant scholarships covering all student costs in many nations to raise institutional quality, support national culture, and raise university rankings internationally. Awarded at the Expo Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, the Oman Chamber of Commerce (2022) helped provide 55 full scholarships for overseas students to study at Sultanate of Oman universities.

Table 1.3 Cost of Bachelor Business Administration program in selected countries (2023)

Name of Private HEIs	Fees of program/ (\$)	Country	Source
Majan college	48,000	Oman	Majan college.com
University of application sciences	37,000	Bahrain	University of application sciences .com
University of Petra	15,000	Jordan	University of Petra .com
Multimedia University	25,000	Malaysia	Multimedia University.com

Source: *Author's Compilation.*

In addition, Al-Asimi and Tomiki (2014) polled students from different Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) institutions at three colleges in Muscat, Oman, in the autumn of 2012 to identify the factors influencing student satisfaction with the counselling system; they found that "criticism" and "information technology" greatly affect this satisfaction. Lower-level students showed more satisfaction with advisory systems than higher-level students, suggesting that happiness is not dependent on academic level but rather on personal inclination independent of gender. Student satisfaction strongly correlates with advice training and orientation, as well as the apparent effectiveness of handling student problems.

From one in 1995 to 27 universities and colleges by 2021, the private HEIs sector has steadily grown in number since its founding in 1995. With 17 educational institutions spread over the Sultanate's governorates and nine universities and eighteen colleges combined, the current count comprises eighteen colleges and over fifty thousand male and female students. Muscat Governorate As shown in figure 1.3, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (2021) claims that private universities and colleges provide a wide range of programmes and specialities across many academic levels (university diploma, bachelor's, and master's degrees). More than 350 main academic programmes and sub-programmes are accessible. Al-Bolshi (2019) notes that the diversity and calibre of the programmes private universities and colleges provide help to explain their success.

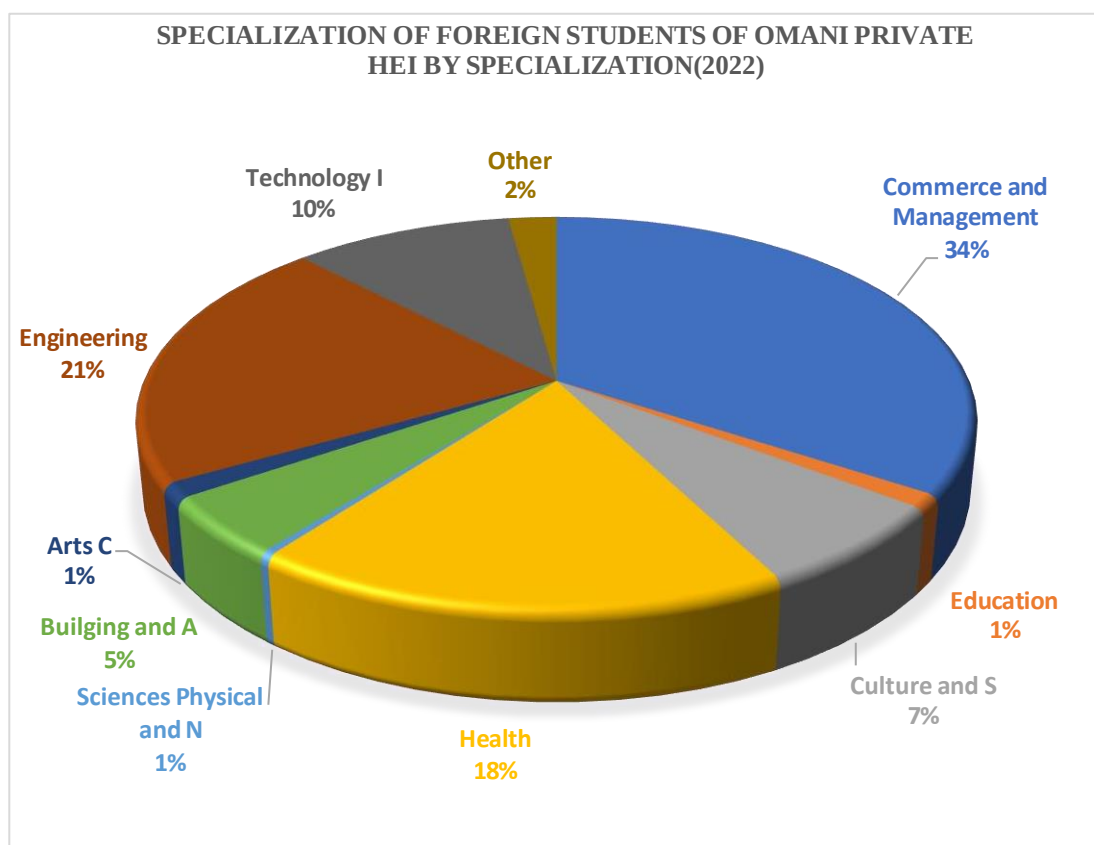


Figure 1.3 The Specialization of current international students at private Omani HEIs

Source: *Ministry of Higher Education, Science Research and Innovation (2023).*

Therefore, private HEIs have to find qualified people who have a scientific and practical teaching ability to help to raise the degree of the educational process. Every institution regularly assesses academic staff members based on specific and uniform criteria. Furthermore, the student participates in the process of evaluating faculty members at the end of every semester since they are at the core of the learning process in private HEIs. Furthermore, the Ministry encourages private HEIs to interact with highly esteemed universities in academic affiliation agreements to assess and enhance quality, diversify programme offers, and elevate the status of private HEIs degrees (Ministry of Higher Education & Research and Innovation, 2021).

However, the Oman Vision (2040) is trying to achieve impressive and wonderful results on the road to the development of HEIs in Oman by increasing the number of Omani universities from one university on the QS classification to four Omani HEIs, thus contributing to increasing the reputation of Omani universities among the world and achieving a highly competitive rate worldwide (Albulshi, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the factors influencing student happiness since this influences their attitudinal and behavioral loyalty later on. This is crucial to draw in both current and prospective students from outside Oman. This study aims to create a theoretical framework explaining how to efficiently satisfy students' needs in settings of HEIs. Furthermore, it seeks to look at, in the framework of HEIs, the effects of student satisfaction on both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty.

1.2.2 Preliminary Interview

First of all, interviews can offer richer qualitative data than surveys or questionnaires once one gets closer to insights. Students and administrators can explain their experiences, ideas, and emotions, enabling a better knowledge of their

satisfaction, loyalty, and possible areas of development. Second, by improving the research questions, one can also improve the emphasis of the study and the questions themselves. Directly hearing students' points of view helps one to spot the most important and urgent problems concerning their loyalty and satisfaction. This leads to a more focused and effective study. Thirdly, by means of the information acquired from interviews, pertinent survey tools can be developed, which the target population can use to find more relevant and interesting instruments. Higher response rates and data quality follow the inclusion of particular language, themes, and issues that arise from the interviews. Fourthly, interviews facilitate the development of rapport and trust with potential subjects. If international students feel heard and understood, they could be more eager to engage in the bigger research. These factors can raise the general participation rate and research result validity. Fifthly, interviews can reveal unexpected variables that you might not have initially considered. Such information will help you guarantee that you are painting a whole picture of the circumstances and widen the focus of the research.

Sixthly, customising interventions and solutions, the knowledge acquired from interviews can be applied to create actions and solutions more likely to meet the particular needs and concerns of foreign students in private Omani HEIs. More sustainable and successful changes in student satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty, and behavioural loyalty follow. When coupled with quantitative data from polls or questionnaires, interviews can offer insightful background and interpretation for quantitative data. Finally, it can help provide a more complex understanding of the research results and their consequences.

Three Middle East College administrators and five international undergraduate students registered in the bachelor's degree programme were thus first unstructured interviewed. This sought to provide better understanding of their opinions on behavioural, attitudinal, and satisfaction levels. (For further information, see Appendix B.) Interviews with three college officials helped to clarify their opinions on the loyalty and satisfaction of international students. For instance, the officials interviewing the candidates have found several difficulties and problems influencing the level of satisfaction of overseas students enrolled in private HEIs. The administrator reported, "These challenges include language difficulties, understanding lecturers, adapting to a new culture, differences in currency, quality of food, finding suitable and affordable housing, support from government and industry in securing training and internships, and poor effectiveness of university infrastructure facilities, such as printers, parking, canteen prices, and ID cards." Second, the officials verified that the degree of satisfaction of international students directly determines their attitudinal and behavioural loyalty as well as the quality of the given services. This encompasses not only the intellectual aspects but also the challenges posed by language and culture, as well as the availability of infrastructure features that are suitable for these foreign students.

The administrator reports: "I am confident that the university can provide solutions to the challenges faced by overseas students, who will then go on to advise others." Not getting suitable attention and support would be the only element opposing loyalty." Thirdly, the officials observed that, for a variety of reasons, there were few international students registered at the university. These factors included the university's admissions and scholarship policies as well as the difficulty of giving international students employment possibilities. "There is a specific cumulative GPA

required for studying abroad," the administrator reporting said, "and high tuition fees may also discourage international students from enrolling."

At last, the interviewers identified the elements influencing the level of satisfaction of overseas students studying at the university: government and college support, suitable teaching strategies, and, finally, the degree of their harmony and integration into Omani society. Another administrator reported the satisfaction with the teaching approaches and also the satisfaction with treatments by other students. The administrator is reporting, "Employability of expats support provided by government and college." The preliminary interview findings have revealed that it can be difficult for students to feel satisfied in HEIs settings, which has a negative impact on their loyalties to attitudes and behaviours for a variety of reasons. Firstly, international students are dissatisfied with their HEIs they are studying in due to problems and challenges they face related to the quality of learning, the high cost of living, difficulty in understanding officials, and problems with the infrastructure available to students. One international student reported, "There are problems with using the printer, parking, canteen prices, quality of food, cleanliness sometimes, an ID card not working, and difficulty understanding when talking with them."

The preliminary study conducted has proven that many interviewed international students have emphasized the importance of emotional support; for example, an international student report, "The main factor is the overall ambiance of the campus. There exists an ideal combination of a profoundly soothing and simultaneously inspiring ambiance. The individuals in my department are among the most amiable individuals I have ever encountered. Another international student states that having the opportunity to study is a unique experience that should be fully utilised by the individual who is granted it. Furthermore, everyone in the area has amazing

hospitality. “Secondly, international students have a decrease in attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty towards their HEIs, as they indicated that they not be recommend in the future to their friends towards the educational institution. One international student reported “I don’t give directions anything related to the future for my friends. I’m just saying the difficulties and the positives and I’m not recommending for a specific institution”.

Thirdly, the interviewing international students explained that the reason for the decrease in the number of international students in Oman is due to several reasons, the most important of which are the length of procedures, the visa, and the expensive cost of life in the country. International student reported “Because of the process and university law and ranking. Also, because some international students face long process due to cumulative procedure to study aboard”.

Last but not least, based on the responses of the interviewed international students, they pointed out a set of elements influencing their satisfaction: the development of academic aspects, the reputation of educational institutions and their global classification, the cost of living and prices (which must be reasonable), the environment being appropriate, and a social milieu accepting, supporting, and helping international students, for example, one of the interviewed students. One international student noted, "The satisfaction with thatching style also includes satisfaction with treatment by other students." These findings could be explained by the fact that different interviewed students in the preliminary study have shown favourable opinions of satisfaction with their surroundings and location of HEIs from several angles. "I am satisfied with the location of HEIs because it allows me ease of movement, as the college's location is in the middle of the services, which I need," international students said.

Furthermore, a suitable location ensures me the availability of office services, including printing, copying, and buying several teaching materials." Another foreign student said, "The environment of the educational institution is considered a vital and valuable element because it allows me to communicate with my colleagues and close friends in this distinguished and convenient location of the university campus directly and easily. Thus, my experience in the surroundings and location of the HEIs makes me happy. Interviews with preliminary study participants have revealed, "At the university, I discovered a calm environment that allowed me to concentrate on my research endeavours, with everyone displaying a friendly and amiable demeanour towards me. Universities and local governments could plan cultural events, including live theatrical performances or movie screenings highlighting local customs and practices, to improve the sociocultural experiences of overseas students.

Similarly, according to international students interviewed for the preliminary study, "Living abroad presents challenges of some sort for international students. This emphasises the need for emotional support." Being a resident and a bachelor's student at my university in Oman was new for me. At first, I had some problems, but the dean of graduate studies and the professors helped me to promptly fix all of them. I appreciate how the university keeps Islamic culture while handling all of its academic offerings. Another student, noting the friendly and cooperative nature of the people, was ready to assist as needed.

1.3 Problem Statement

Alabri (2021) noted that the Sultanate's safe and stable political environment as well as its geographical location, which puts it close to many nations from which HEIs may recruit students, present prospects. Most private colleges are located in the

governorate of Muscat, which increases the financial load on students and their families since many of them come from other parts of the nation and since Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman, has a higher cost of living than many other regions of the nation (figure 1.1). Future private HEIs should thus consider more regional and location dispersion (Harthy, 2011). Consequently, there is a mismatch between the quality of academic aspects including a program offered in Omani HEIs (Abdelfattah et al 2019), lack of specialization and employability (Al-Hashmi, 2019), and high tuition fees and cost of living (Al- Issa & Al-Najjar, 2022).

For many overseas students in Oman, expectations of employability following graduation and specialized programmes are rather low. Thus, the preliminary research carried out has shown that they are pursuing their studies while handling different challenges, including issues related to the quality of education, the high cost of living, the environment of the educational institution, difficulties in communicating with officials, and insufficient student infrastructure. One overseas student related their experience, saying, "Using the printer, parking, the process and university law and ranking causes challenges. high canteen rates, food quality, cleanliness, sporadic ID card failures, and problems". Low levels of satisfaction among international students in private HEIs in Oman also result from a number of major obstacles (Al-Mahrouqi et al., 2022).

Many overseas students, according to preliminary research, are satisfy with their academic experience because of different challenges. Among these difficulties are questions regarding the quality of the given education, which might not always satisfy their expectations or international criteria. Furthermore, these students find it challenging to control their spending since Oman's high cost of living burdens them financially. The language barrier and difficulty in comprehending administrative