

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Background**

#### **1.1 Sultanate of Oman**

The Sultanate of Oman occupies the South Eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Oman borders the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the west; the Republic of Yemen in the south; the Strait of Hormuz in the north and the Arabian sea in the east. The total area is approximately 309,500 sq.kms. and it is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. (Oman Ministry of Information, 2001, p.21). Oman is divided into eight administrative regions, which are further sub-divided into fifty-nine districts called Wilayats. Each is governed by a Governor called Wali. (Oman Ministry of Information, 2001, p.21).

The climate of Oman differs from one area to another. During summer, it is hot and humid in the costal areas, while hot and dry in the interior. Rainfall is generally light and irregular, except in the south region of the country. The Dhofar region has a moderate climate and the pattern of rainfall is predictable. The heavy monsoon occurs regularly between May and September (Oman Ministry of Information, 2001, p.24)

Long known as the hermit of the Middle East, the Sultanate of Oman is slowly emerging from its shell, revealing a land of friendly people, dramatic landscapes and lots of forts. During the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, Oman was an imperial power that struggled first with Portugal and later with Britain for influence in the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the coasts of India and East Africa. Its development since the ascension of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970 is all the more striking because the country's oil

reserves are so limited. Today, Oman is considered a safe and secure destination. The northernmost part of the country is the Musandam Peninsula, extending into the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow, but important sea route for oil tankers supplying the world with one-fifth of available petroleum reserves. Northern Oman is surrounded by the rugged Hajar mountains, a genuine paradise for geologists. Here an overabundance of natural formations are openly accessible for observation and study, such as exposed layers of oceanic deposits that have subsequently thrust to the surface.

The central part of the country is part of the large central Arabian desert, otherwise known as the R'ub al Khali, the Empty Quarter. It covers a quarter of the Arabian Peninsula and is, for the most part, a barren wasteland. In the south of Oman, the region of Dhofar, there exists a world unto itself. From the dry plain the landscape of the Nejd, an escarpment rises up to form the plateau surrounding Salalah on the coast. This limestone massif gives way to a fertile plain with sandy beaches.

### **1.1.1 Education**

Education in Oman is given a high priority since the renaissance led by H. M. Sultan Qaboos on 23 July 1970. The number of schools has risen substantially from three schools in 1970 to 1980 state schools provide education at primary, preparatory and secondary level. (Oman, Ministry of Information, 2001, p.110). Education in Oman is free and it is available for both males and females.

The Ministry of Education has a comprehensive plan to modernize the education system to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A new basic education system has been introduced from the academic year 1998-99 in two phases. The basic education phase is for 10 years and the secondary education phase is for two years when there will be greater

emphasis on Science, Math and Computers (Oman Ministry of Information, 2001, p.113). The basic education system will gradually replace the existing system of primary and secondary schooling.

### **1.1.2 Higher Education**

The first institution of higher education in Oman was established in 1986 when Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) came into existence. Earlier, Omani students were sent abroad for higher education, only a few of them were sponsored by the government annually.

The SQU consists of seven colleges: Agriculture, Arts and Humanities, Commerce and Economics, Education, Engineering, Medicine and Health Science and College of Science.

The number of students registered for bachelor level for the Academic year 2002-2003 is 10059, and 1381 at the Diploma level, whereas in the academic year 1986-87, it was 520 (320 males and 200 females). Postgraduate studies were introduced in the SQU in 1993 with a few students in College of Arts and Humanities only.

The College of Education, SQU, includes the following departments and center: Department of psychology, Department of Islamic Sciences, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Art Education, Department of Physical education, Department of Home Economics, and the Educational Research Centre. The College of Education aims to prepare highly-qualified teachers to teach in various specializations at both preparatory and secondary levels in keeping with the highest pedagogical standards in order to meet the increasing demand for education in the Sultanate and to train its students with up-to-date teaching methods and foster their Arab and Islamic values.

Moreover, some more institutions provide higher education for Omanis such as Education Colleges. There are six Colleges located in six different regions in Oman offering bachelor degrees in education. The number of students in these colleges by the year 2000 was 8,741. (Oman Ministry of National Economy, 2000, p.505)

Also there are five Technical Industrial Colleges offering Oman National Vocational Certificate. It was adapted and modified from the British Technical Programme (GNVQ) to suit requirements of the local market. The number of students in these Colleges by the year 2000 was 4,659. (Oman Ministry of National Economy, 2000, p.505).

The other Government institutions offering higher education is the College of Sharia and Law, which was established in 1997. The college prepares Omanis to become judges and legal experts after pursuing a four-year course that will lead to bachelor's degree in both Islamic Jurisprudence and Law" (Mufaraji, 2000, p.31)

Recently, many private colleges and universities were set up in different regions of Oman. Some of them were from foreign universities, while others were established by the private sector in Oman.

### **1.1.3 Libraries in the Sultanate of Oman**

Before the beginning of Oman's renaissance in 1970, modern libraries did not exist at all. They were only very few small libraries located in the Mosques and other places called Assabla (a public sitting room for males only) (Wardi, 1991, p.23). The materials available in these libraries were manuscripts only and used by a limited number of people.



With the development of Oman since 1970, libraries were also developed side by side. The development of libraries in Oman, after thirty-one years of Oman's renaissance is discussed in details in the following sections.

#### **1.1.3.1 School Libraries**

The school library is the foundation in the building up of any education system. The Ministry of Education is trying to improve the quality of education by providing for the development of school libraries and it has established the Department of School Libraries. The department is responsible for selecting, purchasing, processing and building up school library collections and also training its personnel (Mufaraji, 1992, p.474).

The development of school libraries began in 1977 with 9 libraries, and the number reached 315 libraries and 211 educational resources centres in 2001. School libraries in Oman are still suffering from lack of fund. This is evidence by looking at the small number of schools exist today in Oman. Libraries are usually available in the secondary schools.

#### **1.1.3.2 Government Libraries**

Almost all ministries and government directorates have set up their libraries. But these libraries vary from one to another. In some ministries, the libraries were given good attention. Such libraries have good collection and are managed by professionals, while in some other ministries, libraries are facing many problems, as in all government libraries in the developing countries due to the lack of professionals, shortage of fund and poor services and also do not meet the of established library standards (Mufaraji, 1992, p 475).

According to Mufaraji (1992) the Oman Government libraries are two types:

- Libraries attached to government departments, and
- Libraries attached to research institutions or learned societies.

A few government libraries have adequate collection, render good service and employ professional staff. To name a few are: The Library of the Institute of Public Administration, The Central Medical Library (Ministry of Health), The Library of the Ministry of Defense, The Sultans Diwan of the Royal Court and the Library of the Directorate General for Educational Development (Mufaraji, 1992).

#### **1.1.3.3 Special Libraries**

There are a limited number of special libraries in the country and these are attached to business organizations (Mufaraji, 1992, p.475). These libraries face the same problems as the government libraries such as lack of professionals, poor quality of service and poor management. Some prominent special libraries include those in The Central Bank of Oman, The Institute of Bankers and The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

#### **1.1.3.4 Public Libraries**

Oman, like other developing countries, is suffering from the lack of public libraries. A few reasons can be cited for this situation:

- Absence of a National Library, to lead libraries in the country and to supervise library services.
- Absence of Library Association to gather librarian and to help in developing the profession.
- Poor reading habits where watching television has precedence over reading.

There are only three public libraries in the country. They are:

- The Islamic Library of the Ministry of Heritage which was founded in 1980 and has two branches in the Sultanate-one in the capital city and the other in Salalah-the South Region.
- The Public Technical Library in Muscat which was a gift, from the Petroleum Development Company to the Oman people on Omani National Day Anniversary. It was inaugurated on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1990. (Wardi, 1991).

#### **1.1.3.5 Foreign Libraries**

The most important foreign libraries in Oman are The British Council Library and the United States Information Services (USIS) Library. These libraries provide useful services to citizens, such as educational counseling and guidance for those who want to study abroad in the UK or the USA.

#### **1.1.3.6 Academic libraries**

The academic libraries in Oman are:

- The Sultan Qaboos University Libraries affiliated to various Colleges of Education situated in the Oman Technical Colleges Libraries
- The libraries of special or private universities and colleges such as the Caledonian College, the Modern College of Business and Science, The College of Administration Sciences and the Suhar University.

The Sultan Qaboos University Libraries are the only academic libraries in the country which fulfill the standard of academic libraries. They are:

- Fully automated,

- Provide reference services,
- Extend Inter library Loan services- have Electronic Databases and access to online and full text journals- have large and developed collections of books and journals,
- Well-defined library policy, and
- Have Library Committees for supervision and guidance

The University Library attempts to build and maintain a collection of materials in various media, and of sufficient range and depth to support the educational programmes and research activities of the University colleges. The SQU Library system comprises of the Main Library, the Medical Library and the Mosque Library (Mufaraji, 1992).

#### **1.1.3.7 The Main Library**

The Main Library is centrally located in a three storey building, a location fitting its importance to all segments of the university community. The library is an open access library which offers the users ready access to most of its resources. The Main Library aims to fulfill several objectives such as:

- i) To develop and maintain a balanced collection of materials in various media to support the teaching programmes and research activities of the University.
- ii) To provide professional expertise to users by accessing both local reference sources and those available from other countries through postal media and modern telecommunication links.
- iii) To enhance the students' learning ability by providing them with instruction in research methodology and use of contemporary information sources.

Audio visual materials are on the ground floor, whilst reference, circulation, interlibrary loan, reserves and literature searching through CD-ROM are located in the first floor. The Reference Desk is located near the reference collection. The special collections, the general stacks, the periodicals, newspapers and the microforms are located on the second floor. Photocopying facilities are available on the first and second floors.

English books represent 59% of the total collection while periodicals collections are mostly in English. The library collection are catalogued and classified according to the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, and the Library of Congress classification system, respectively.

In order to automate library services, consultants selected DOBIS/LIBIS software for the integrated automated library system. The system is capable of handling acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, periodicals and OPAC using one of the university IBM's main frame computers.

#### **1.1.3.8 Medical Library**

In addition to the Main Library, there is a detached and self-sufficient Medical Library of the College of Medicine. It was established in 1988 with the aim of supporting education, research, and training programmes for students, faculty, and staff members of both the college of Medicine and the University Hospital. It maintains a substantial collection of current and retrospective Medical literature in various media to support the academic programmes of the College of Medicine, University Hospital and Health Care Community in the Sultanate. The library provides reference services including online searches, interlibrary lending, and bibliography and photocopying.

### **1.1.3.9 Mosque Library**

The Mosque Library at Sultan Qaboos University was established in 1986 to meet and support the needs of students at the College of Education and Islamic Sciences.

### **1.2 CD-ROM in the Library**

The philosophy of the library has been to provide immediate access to the most up-to-date equipment and ideas within the academic framework has been quickly achieved through the electronic media (Johnston, 1992).

The service that attracts the most attention is online searching capability. However, many problems are encountered when providing this service such as high telecommunication charges. One quick solution to this problem is to provide a search facility using CD-ROM discs. The CD-ROM service was set up in 1987. The computer center provided an IBM PC XT with 640Kbyte capacity, an IBM monitor and graphics printer, while the library purchased a Hitachi CDR 1503S compact disc player. Initially the library purchased three databases, namely, Agricola (Agriculture), ERIC (Education), and Medline (Medicine) which are produced by Silver Platter and supplied through LBI International based in Malta. Gradually, additional databases were added to serve all seven colleges of the University (Appendix A).

These databases are available on CD-ROM only and as stand alone. Due to increased demand from end-users, the library purchased servers to accommodate all available CDs so that the researchers can search several CDs of different years at any one time.

As there is no designated National Library in Oman, the Sultan Qaboos University Library partly functions as a national library. It maintains a special collection, which includes a lot of grey literature on Oman.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Since the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) admitted its first students in 1986, it has tried to provide immediate access to the most up-to-date equipment and resources within the academic framework. Thus, the library embraced wholeheartedly complete automation and the “electronic library.”

One of the basic elements of an electronic library is to provide online information retrieval via online databases. However, the distance between the university and the host search service results in high telecommunication charges making realizing this objective more difficult. The library authority drew up a number of options to overcome such difficulties and one of them is to provide a search facility using CD-ROMs. However, no systematic study has been conducted in SQU on the searching behavior of end-users. Since the university is encouraging its students and academic staff to fully utilize this facility, therefore this study will try to study the searching behavior of end-users at the SQU.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to investigate end-user searching behavior with the following objectives:

- i) to identify users of CD-ROM databases
- ii) to investigate search techniques used
- iii) to identify types of training received
- iv) to determine effectiveness of CD-ROM usage

## **1.5 Research Questions**

This study tries to answer the following questions:

- i) Why do the end-users use CD-ROM databases?
- ii) What are the common types of searches conducted by the end-users?
- iii) From whom do the end-user learn how to use the CD-ROM?
- iv) Do they need training?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The Sultan Qaboos University is moving towards realizing their electronic library, and one element of this library is the introduction of online searching either via direct online databases or through CD-ROM databases. The latter has several advantages such as:

- i) The information stored within is not affected by power failure
- ii) The CD-ROMs are easy to use and facilitates end-user searching
- iii) There is no need for telecommunication
- iv) Information is available without worrying about online charges

The library is encouraging its patrons to use CD-ROM facilities. In order to help users to utilize CD-ROMs effectively, the librarian should know how these patrons search. Therefore, this study will investigate the behaviour of end-users of CD-ROM databases in the Sultan Qaboos University library in the Sultanate of Oman. This study hopes to collect data which may help the library to identify the type of instructions that are useful for the end-users. Designing and planning of training programme to enhance end-user searching abilities and skills required pre-knowledge of their searching behaviour and errors and mistakes they often committed.



### **1.7 Limitation of the Study**

This study is limited to postgraduate end-users who are from the College of Education at the Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman. The college students were selected, after an interrogation by librarians for their familiarity with the CD-ROM databases and their heavy use of the technology. Only CD-ROM databases, which were accessible to end-users, will be included.

### **1.8 Summary**

Chapter one discussed important issues for better understanding of the study. The chapter provided background information on the Sultanate of Oman, its higher educational system, and various types of libraries in the country. It discusses the key issues indispensable for conducting the study. This includes clear statement for the problem of the study, research questions, and significance of the study and the limitation of the study. Chapter two will review literature relevant to the topic.