CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

5.1: Introduction

This study has focused on the issue of quality assurance and accreditation of private higher education institutions, which have grown rapidly in Oman due to the high social demand by the society. Currently, the higher education system in Oman has more than 50 institutions offering programs to approximately 40,000 students. Of course, these figures are going to increase in the future due to demographic factor as well as lifelong learning factor. Consequently, the public and government of Oman are very concerned with the quality of programs and degrees offered by the private higher education institutions, and thereby emerges a strong need for quality assurance of the study programs to ensure quality of the graduates produced. Apart from that, by the notion of accountability, higher education institutions need to be accredited and recognized in order to protect the interests of students, parents, stakeholders, employers and society at large. In response to this issue, in 2002 the government of Oman established a monitoring body called the Accreditation Board for the purpose of accrediting higher education institutions to offer programs at specified levels and similarly accredits individual programs.

In the context of this study, quality assurance involves ensuring fitness for purpose, and in general it has been regarded as a means of improving overall quality, but it is sometimes felt that it gives insufficient weight to teaching and learning. For this study, quality assurance assessment is defined as a planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine that acceptable standard of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced.

To recapitulate, the main purpose of this study was to examine the extent of implementation made by private colleges and universities in the Sultanate of Oman in some aspects of quality assurance policy for institutional accreditation by the government. The aspects of interest in this research were mission, governance, effective management, academic program, teaching staff, learning resources, student admission and services, physical facilities, and financial resources. Specifically, the objectives of this study were:

1. To analyze students' perceptions regarding the quality of study programs, facilities, and instruction at some private colleges and universities in Oman.

2. To identify the main factors and their interrelations in the QA assessment model in private colleges and universities in Oman.

2. To analyze the perceptions of private college and university managers regarding the extent and level in ten aspects of QA policy implementation in Oman.

3. To explore the views of private college and university managers on how they carried out and what are their considerations in implementing the ten aspects of QA policy.

5.2: Summary of Findings and Implications for Improvement

Pertaining to research question 1, that is, "focusing on students as the main customer, what are their perceptions on the quality of study programs and infrastructure of private colleges and universities in Oman?" this study found that:

- In general, about three-fifth (56.8 %) of the students perceived that the study programs offered at the private colleges in Oman were fairly rigorous and heavy. This implies that private colleges in Oman ought to put more rigour and content in the courses of various study programs so that the curriculum has more depth and width and suitable for professional jobs in Oman.

- Most instructors in private higher education institutions in Oman gave sufficient time for students to master their learning materials. More tutorial classes, especially through online method, should be provided to students so that they could master better the knowledge and skills in the courses they took, especially the professional ones.

- Three-fifth of the students stated their courses were too theoretical and abstract; thus this implied that the students in the private institutions needed more examples and practical demonstrations related to theories and abstract concepts.

- More than half of the students perceived that the study programs offered at the private colleges in Oman were not rigorous and comprehensive in terms of their content. This implies that private colleges in Oman ought to put more rigour in the course contents of various study programs so that they are

relevant for the need of highly trained and knowledgeable workforce for national development of Oman in the future. Another implication here is that various agencies, corporations, and associations should be involved in curriculum design at private higher education institutions to ensure a better learning content of study programs offered.

- Three-fifth (3/5) of the students involved in this study said that the private institutions in Oman provided a limited number of course modules or learning modules. The implied that there was a lack of sufficient number of courses for a credible, high-standing qualification at diploma, bachelor, and master levels at the private institutions in Oman. Or, this could also be due to the lack of liberality or inter-disciplinary offering of courses that gave rise to the lack of sufficient number of course modules.

- A majority of students said too little interaction or integration with subjects in other disciplines. The lack of interdisciplinary mode gave rise to compartmentalization or isolation of discipline and the non-flexibility of graduates for employment. It was a common perception that graduates with a high chance of employability were the flexible ones and who knew how to integrate knowledge from several subject matters, especially business, management, law, and information technology. Again, the issue here is about curriculum relevancy and curriculum design by calling for the involvement of expert groups from various sectors such as education, health, business, communication, administration, religion, law, social development, and arts. The holistic approach of curriculum design seems appropriate for

ensuring the comprehensiveness of study programs in private institutions and for the betterment of future Oman society.

- As for curriculum relevancy to employment opportunities, this study found that three-quarter of the total respondents was satisfied with the issue of curriculum relevancy and believed that there was a relevancy between what they learned or the study content and the world of work. This implied that the private institutions should always maintain curriculum relevancy and should collaborate with government agencies, firms, and industries in order to improve their curriculum relevancy, or they should have internship program for on-the-job-training of graduates.

- Regarding the attainment of study program objectives, three-quarter of the total number of student respondents stated that their study programs achieved in fulfilling its objectives satisfactorily. This implied that the management of private institutions should monitor and upgrade the instructional and learning process so that the study programs objectives could be met fully. The QA process assessment by the Ministry of Higher Education of Oman should focus more on this fundamental aspect. It is imperative to do so for the purpose of accountability and good faith in doing business, i.e. the private institutions are fully responsible for offering high standard study programs, and no short-changing should be practised.

- As for the quality of learning facilities at private colleges in Oman, about two-third of the student respondents agreed that their colleges had a good resource centre or library that provided ample reference materials and textbooks. However, this implied that the private institutions should increase

their college library holdings, ICT (information communication technology) facilities, and computers for practical lessons. This result also implied that private colleges which had poor learning resources and facilities should not be given accreditation or licence to operate, not until they have fulfilled certain quality standards. This measure is to achieve the goal of making higher education institutions in Oman to be of world-class standard.

▪ Regarding students' academic performance, the study found that four-fifth of the student respondents stated that their study programs helped them to develop their problem solving skills and analytical skill. Also three-quarter of the total respondents also believed that the study programs at their college were of fairly high quality. This finding implied that instructors or lecturers in private institutions should stress on the development of high cognitive skills of their students. This means that instructors or lecturers should not just teach subject contents but should also employ various innovative approaches such as student-centred pedagogy or problem-based learning approach in their instruction. It seemed also that instructors or lecturers in private institutions need to have in-house training programs to upgrade their quality of instruction, or instruction that focuses on higher order thinking skills. The effectiveness of a college in delivering its educational programs and services can be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes. Students' academic performance is one of the important indicators of a college's performance and quality.

▪ In general, based on the statistical descriptive analysis, the quality of private colleges in certain aspects of quality assurance was fairly satisfactory, and

this means that private colleges in Oman had a lot to do for elevating their quality standard.

- From an inferential statistical analysis, it was found that the female students expressed a more positive experience than male students in the private institutions of higher education in the dimensions of personal development, college-life experience, general evaluation, and program evaluation.

Pertaining to research question 2, i.e. 'Based on students' survey responses, what are the main factors to be considered and their interrelations in the QA assessment model for private higher education institutions in Oman?' this study found that:

- By the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), there were four main factors identified by students in their QA assessment of private colleges/ universities in Oman, namely Personal Development (PD), Experience (E), General Evaluation (GE), and Program Evaluation (PE).
- By the structural equation model (SEM), student QA assessment model showed the quality of private institutions were positively interrelated (relevant) and had positive effects on students' Experience, Personal Development, General Evaluation, and Program Evaluation consecutively. The construct validity of the model is fit and that the items measure what they are intended to measure. The result strongly supports to what has been concluded from Principal Component Analysis (PCA), that the items were psychometrically sound.

- The student QA assessment model and the student survey instrument was suitable for portraying the quality of study programs, facilities, services, instructional process, and learning process in private higher education institutions in Oman.

- By multivariate analysis, the female students in private colleges/ universities in Oman scored relatively higher than their male counterparts on all the four factors; i.e., Personal Development, Experience, General Evaluation and Program Evaluation.

Pertaining to the research question 3, i.e. "In general, based on college and university managers' perceptions, what are the extent and level of implementation in ten aspects of quality assurance for accreditation undertaken by private colleges and universities in Oman? " this study found that:

- From the survey data elicited from 24 private college/ university managers, generally they rated 'moderate' for

  i. The mission statement of their institution had been designed collectively by the management and academic staff

  ii. The mission statement of the institution clearly expressed quality instruction and learning.

  iii. The mission statement of the institution clearly expressed that the curriculum content was appropriate for higher education standard

  iv. The mission statement of institutions was directed at achieving world-class benchmark.

v. The mission statement of private institutions expressed their commitment to excellence in student learning

vi. The institution's mission statement identified values to which all staff had conformed.

vii. There was widespread support and acceptance for the institution's mission statement.

- All the above findings portray that the college managers indicated 'moderate' level for the mission and vision of their college in the pursuit of quality assurance. And, most importantly, however, the college managers were aware of the importance of quality assurance, and thus also the issue of public accountability. The findings implied that private institutions in Oman did acknowledge the quality assurance policy, and as the first step, they had formulated the vision and mission statements of their educational enterprise.

- On the other hand, based on the managers feedback in the survey, extra efforts for the improvement of private colleges/ universities in Oman were needed in the following aspects:

  i. Opportunities to share knowledge and skills learned from training among employees.

  ii. Opportunities to talk to staff about successful programs or work activities in order to understand why they succeed.

  iii. Employees to be informed of how their role contributes to the overall institutional process.

    iv. Employees to be encouraged to understand the perspectives of people in other positions.

    v. Leadership in the institution should be opened to change and new ideas.

    vi. Leadership must involve employees in important decisions.

- Regarding management effectiveness, results of the study showed that private colleges/ universities ought to improve in the following areas:

    i. Convey to the public periodically their quality assurance initiatives of the study programs, college achievement, students' achievement, and quality of facilities.

    ii. The accuracy and accessibility of institution's databases.

    iii. The institution's capability in implementing its goals.

    iv. A set of quality assurance criteria be used by college management for defining its improvement priorities

    v. The goals of the institution to be broad-based, be understood clearly, and are practical to implement.

- Regarding the extent of quality assurance on instruction and learning, college managers said that 'degrees and certificates were clearly described' and 'student learning outcomes were included in the descriptions of courses and programs'. These results imply that instructors and students were clear about

the requirement for graduation at the certificate, bachelor, or master level and the expected level of learning outcomes. Furthermore, college managers stated that 'academic staff have opportunities for self assessment with respect to goal attainment' and the 'institution's information about its programs is clear and accurate'. These results imply that the college management asked academic staff to do self-assessment of their instruction, and the college management did provide clear and accurate information to students and instructors about the goals and contents of various study programs.

- The study also found that in order to assure high quality, college managers need to pay serious attention and improve their work processes in course evaluation, analysis of student performance for instructional improvement, and student counselling and advisory. To address this issue, private colleges in Oman should adopt a certain kind of quality assurance system, which later could become their in-built organizational culture. Other quality assurance aspects that needed to be improved by colleges include admission process and procedures, curriculum development of courses, variety of learning resources, and benchmarking academic standard.

- In terms of organizational evaluation, the study found that college managers said that they needed good and reliable methods for evaluating library and learning support services and the determination of quality standards for various areas of management. Stricter enforcement and guidance by the Ministry of Education was much needed here so as to ensure that private colleges could mobilise their staff to draw up a comprehensive quality

standard plan. This study also revealed that college management should take a positive action in using evaluation results to improve the quality and quantity of physical resources and to improve the effectiveness of services and facilities at colleges.

- As for human resources, the study found that college management ought to hire educational experts in order to provide in-house training for instructors pertaining to pedagogy, curriculum design, learning assessment, and instructional materials and technology. Training needs analysis could prove to be a useful tool for designing the most appropriate in-house professional development program for enhancing the quality of instructors.

- Regarding technological resources for staff and students, college managers gave a favourable response to the quality of technology resources available. Results also showed that college managers identified appropriately technological needs necessary for instruction and learning, and they constantly made plans for improving technological facilities. Colleges also installed secure and reliable ICT (information and communication technology) facilities so as to avoid disruption in its delivery of instruction and management services.

- As for financial resources in the management of private colleges in Oman, college managers indicated that it was in good order. Colleges had sufficient annual budget for its operations and development. However, college managers stated that budget planning would be tailored to meet the requirement of the quality assurance policy.

Pertaining to research question 4, i.e. 'In terms of college or university management, what are the managers of private colleges/ universities' reactions or feedbacks in carrying out the ten aspects of quality assurance in Oman?' this study found that:

- The mission statement of the institution had been designed collectively by the management and academic staff. The mission statement of the institution clearly expressed the curriculum content appropriate for higher education standard.

- The mission statement of most private institutions expressed their commitment to excellent learning, identified values to which all future employees of the private and public sectors must conform. Also, there was a widespread support and acceptance for mission and objective statement among the teaching and management staff of this college.

- Quality instruments such as self-assessment, enhancement, and development checklists were used for checking goal attainment in private institutions in Oman. The management provided different types of support systems to facilitate the teaching and learning processes at the institutions.

- The college/ university managers stated that for ensuring effective management in their respective private institutions, sets of criteria were used to determine their priorities, and that their respective institutions had some broad understanding of their goals as well as considerable capacities to achieve them. They also claimed that their institutions had articulated strategic plans in place, based on the data available and the sufficient financial resources carefully spent in line with the plans.

- The college/ university managers agreed that the role of libraries in teaching, learning and education was influenced by the institution's culture, values,

and stakeholders' perceptions of the library as an essential pedagogic tool in support of the institutions' enterprise. In turn, this determined the types of library services developed in support of the teaching and learning process.

- Institutional master plans existed and were linked clearly to financial plans both short term and long term. The financial planning process relied primarily on instructional plan for content and timelines.

Pertaining to research questions 5, i.e. 'Based on the college or university managers' experience as policy implementers, generally what are the main approaches and techniques used by college/ university managers in implementing quality assurance process in Oman?', this study found that:

- There were 15 approaches used for ensuring QA in private colleges/ universities in Oman, which included among others better student involvement in quality process, more effective course monitoring, monitoring requirements of professional bodies and external examiners, and internal quality audit process.
- Consistency in practice in the use of quality procedures was stated as the top most important approach in improving QA. The procedures they adopted were effective, efficient, reliable, very good, very important, and consistent in relation to the vision and mission of the private institutions.

5.3: Discussion

The predominant theoretical proposition on quality is customer satisfaction on all aspects of a product or a service. Customers include students, staff, parents, professional bodies, and government departments. Customer satisfaction is the critical factor for an institution's survival, growth, and good reputation. Customers' reactions and suggestions are vital for ongoing product or service improvement. In the case of higher education institutions, quality denotes accountability, i.e. taking responsibility for the quality of graduates produced in relation to the amount of investment made by the society. The expectation of the investment return is graduates who would be gainfully employed and driven towards high productivity in work.

The important question here then is: Would quality assurance policy in Oman guarantee customer satisfaction, or fulfil public accountability, or produce world-class higher education institutions? Country experiences pertaining to this policy such as in Malaysia, USA, and United Kingdom have provided a positive answer to that question. In Malaysia for example, the establishment of the Malaysian Accreditation Board (now the Malaysian Qualification Agency), has led to minimal public discontent and complaint against private colleges and universities. Before the establishment of the Malaysian Accreditation Board in 2000, there were frequent complaints from the public against private institutions on various quality and management issues such as entry qualification, campus location, residence halls,

students discipline, tuition fees, learning facilities, curriculum relevancy, examinations, academic staff, and many other aspects. Stringent quality assurance measures in Malaysia, however, have led to quality improvement of Malaysian private colleges (about 650 of them) and universities (16 of them), and the elimination of about 200 substandard private colleges. Malaysia is steadily becoming a higher education hub in the Asian region due to its quality assurance policy and other encouraging advantages such as low tuition fees, low living costs, multiculturalism, and highly recognised degrees.

In a broader perspective, quality assurance system should not be viewed only as a quality assessment tool, but rather as a diagnostic tool for a systematic organization development of higher education institutions, either public or private. In this regard, college management should view quality assurance system as the means for a systematic internal self-improvement, in accordance to quality dimensions and aspects as determined by an accreditation body or a government authority concerned. In this regard also, theoretically quality assurance system is part of the bigger concept of organization development, which emphasises identification of weaknesses and problems within an organization, and subsequently tackling the weaknesses and problems progressively by teamwork. Within this context, for the sake of mutual benefits, the accreditation body or a supervisory government agency should assist private colleges and universities in Oman to perform organization development. There should be a strong collaboration between private institutions and the government in order promote quality in higher education and also to encourage a wider involvement of private institutions in the services

sector of the economy. Hence, the quality assurance policy, as imposed by the government of Oman, should be well-received by private colleges and universities for their own betterment.

From the findings of this study, apart from the ones discussed above, other theoretical propositions or groundings that can be derived are:

- External customers (namely the students, parents, and educational officers) of the private colleges and universities are the critical determinant of quality in terms of the curriculum content, instructional or pedagogical approaches and technologies, learning approaches and technologies, student services, and physical facilities. Their input via a quality assurance assessment survey is vital for improvement, and thus private colleges and universities should periodically use this assessment method to upgrade their quality in many aspects from time to time. In this regard, the open system theory should be adopted by private colleges and universities in which information from the surrounding environment or the supra-system should be used to determine the necessary provisions and innovations to be made (Owen, 1994; Senge, 2002). A close system approach would be detrimental for sustainability.

- Internal customers (namely the academic and administrative staff) of the private colleges and universities are also the critical determinant of quality. They are the actual providers of education and services, and they also constitute another source of informative input for quality improvement. As such, college or university management should include the coupling concept to the open system theory, i.e. the internal information is coupled with the

external information and processed together for organizational management and development (Morgan, 1992). This is a fundamental theoretical perspective in quality assurance policy implementation.

- Quality assurance requires a proper governance circle, management structure, and academic structure for maintaining a balanced organisation in private colleges and universities. This is a classic theory of democracy as well as bureaucracy which proposes the necessity for the separation of powers and interests among the functional domains of an organisation, and the requirement for specialisation by division of work. The governing council rationally should comprise representatives of stakeholders, including the student body, government, and relevant business entities. By using the coupling concept and open system theory, the council formulate internal policies that are relevant for meeting the demands and expectations of both the external and internal customers of the private colleges and universities in Oman. The management structure should be designed in support of the academic structure, not to run counter or suppress it. For achieving quality education, the academic structure should be built upon various study disciplines and their branches. Professionalism and autonomy are two crucial ingredients for quality study programs, whether at private or public institutions (Clark, 1989; Sufean, 1996, 2008).

- Colleges and universities are fundamentally academic organisations, and therefore their core businesses are teaching (knowledge dissemination), research, seminar (knowledge exchange), publications, and student holistic development. In this regard, quality assurance policy should include

assessment and improvement of those academic qualities. Here lies the root motivation for the desire of achieving world-class level institutions and the sustainability of the institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.
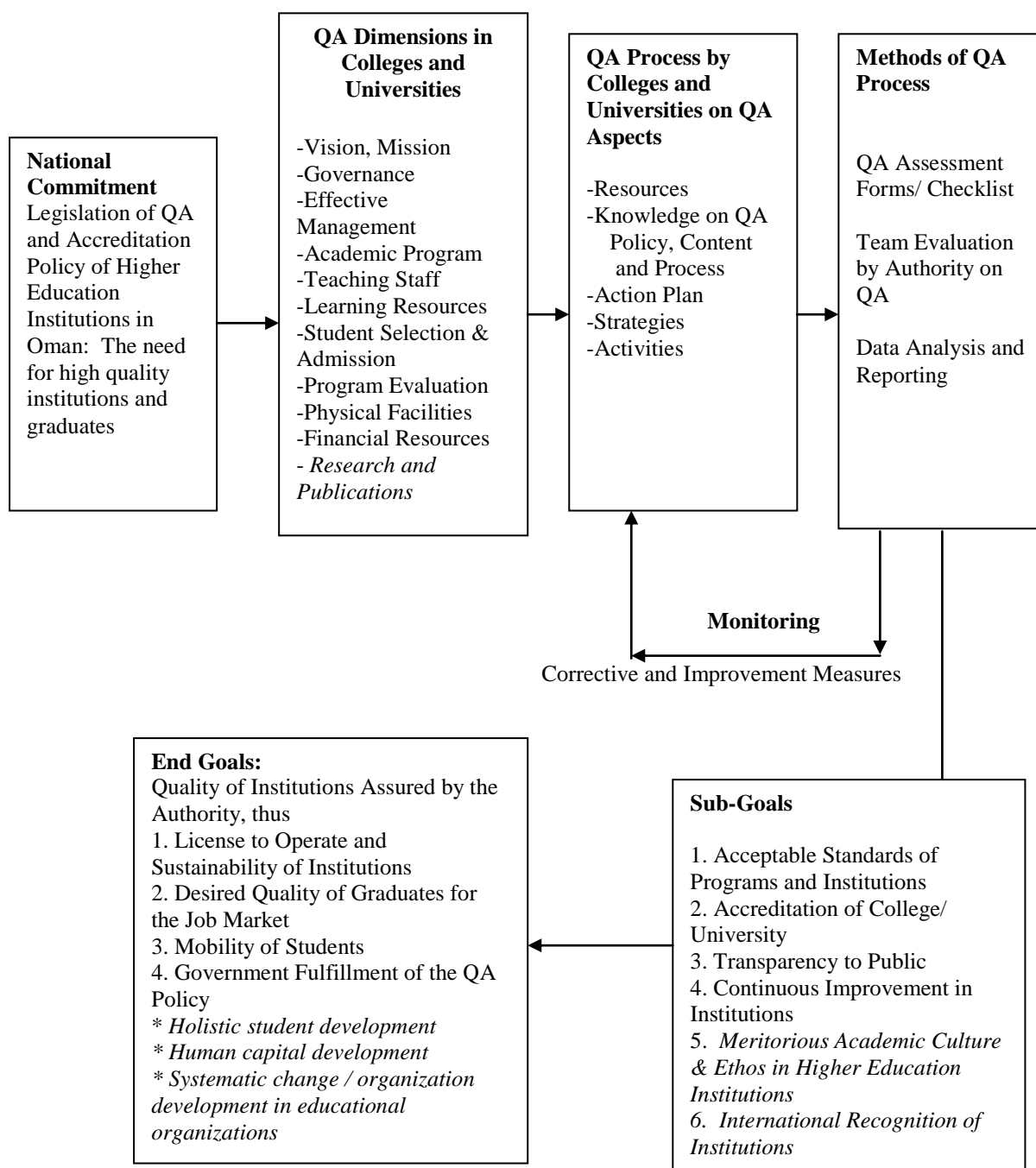
- Apart from academic qualities, the quality of higher education institutions is also predicated very much upon the provision of quality physical and technological facilities for the operation of management, instruction, and learning. Globalisation of information and knowledge in this contemporary era requires the innovative use of ICT (information communication technology) and the internet media. Easy access and use of the technology and media constitute one of the major elements of customer satisfaction, and thus quality assurance process must include a thorough assessment of this aspect.

- The ultimate goal of quality assurance policy in Oman is the formation of colleges and universities of international reputation in all disciplines of study, to serve not only the local students but also international students. The theory here is quality assurance is the route for world-class recognition, which is to be attained gradually and systematically. The ethos and culture are to be founded; this is the national commitment.

Furthermore, the findings of this study have directly support qualitatively the TQM (total quality management) theory. According to Harris (1994), there are three generic approaches to total quality management (TQM). First, a customer focus approach, where the idea of service to students is fostered through staff training and development; second, a staff focus approach, that is concerned to value and enhance

the contribution of all the members of staff to the effectiveness of the school; and the third, that takes a service agreement focus and seeks to ensure conformity to specification at certain key measurable points of the educational process. TQM combines quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement (Hoyl, 1994) and goes beyond traditional customer satisfaction by addressing the needs of internal customers, suppliers, and others stakeholders (Peach, 1994).

The findings of this study also have supported qualitatively the quality assurance theory which states that quality assurance is a management system aimed at instituting the highest standard and systematic work processes in organizations, producing the highest standard of products and services, and attaining the highest degree of customer satisfaction. The achievement of the highest standard in those facets is critical for the sustainability and expansion of corporations in the competitive global arena and boosting the reputation and status of corporations in relation to others (Brown, 2004; Marie, 2003).

On the basis of the above theoretical discourse, the emergent theoretical model on the implementation of quality assurance process in higher education institutions in Oman can be portrayed and summarised by the following diagram.

National Commitment
Legislation of QA and Accreditation Policy of Higher Education Institutions in Oman: The need for high quality institutions and graduates

QA Dimensions in Colleges and Universities

-Vision, Mission
-Governance
-Effective Management
-Academic Program
-Teaching Staff
-Learning Resources
-Student Selection & Admission
-Program Evaluation
-Physical Facilities
-Financial Resources
- *Research and Publications*

QA Process by Colleges and Universities on QA Aspects

-Resources
-Knowledge on QA Policy, Content and Process
-Action Plan
-Strategies
-Activities

Methods of QA Process

QA Assessment Forms/ Checklist

Team Evaluation by Authority on QA

Data Analysis and Reporting

Monitoring

Corrective and Improvement Measures

End Goals:
Quality of Institutions Assured by the Authority, thus
1. License to Operate and Sustainability of Institutions
2. Desired Quality of Graduates for the Job Market
3. Mobility of Students
4. Government Fulfillment of the QA Policy
* *Holistic student development*
* *Human capital development*
* *Systematic change / organization development in educational organizations*

Sub-Goals

1. Acceptable Standards of Programs and Institutions
2. Accreditation of College/ University
3. Transparency to Public
4. Continuous Improvement in Institutions
5. *Meritorious Academic Culture & Ethos in Higher Education Institutions*
6. *International Recognition of Institutions*

Note: The end goals indicated in italic are the theoretical-based end goals found by this study

Figure 5.1: The Modified Conceptual Model for the Implementation of QA for Accreditation in Higher Education in Oman

Figure 5.1 illustrates that, within the context of the international competitive paradigm in the globalisation era, governments of many countries in the world are concerned with the quality and reputation of their colleges and universities, and this is inclusive of the government of Oman. Typically, the quality assurance policy in many countries is instituted in education laws, which reflect national commitment towards the agenda.

On the basis of this study, quality assurance process or policy in higher education institutions encompasses seven major dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. In many instances, however, the emphasis of quality assurance assessment by certain accreditation bodies usually concentrates on three basic dimensions, but not on four others, namely governance structure and statutes, academic structure and autonomy, research and publications, and student development programs. Here lies the limitation of the national accreditation board of many countries. Why is this so? One of the probable reasons is the lack of professional status of the officers in the national accreditation board to examine and rank the quality of the governance structure and statutes of colleges and universities; to quantify the quality of research and publications; and to quantify the quality of student development programs and output. The three basic dimensions—management structure and process, academic programs, and physical and technological resources—seem easy to assess, and these are what the accreditation officers can do. Hence, there is a lack of comprehensiveness in quality assurance assessment. To resolve this issue, it is suggested here that the national accreditation board of Oman and many other countries should consist of professors, university managers, and governors in the

board (or as the consultants to the board) in order to examine competently the four deficient areas concerned.

On the basis of Figure 5.1 also, practically and commonly there are five important goals of quality assurance policy in many countries: public accountability, institution sustainability, international reputation, meritorious academic culture and ethos, and holistic student development. The achievement of these goals needs to be assessed in order to establish the effectiveness of the said policy, even though the conceptualisation and assessment of the goals seem to be complex and subjective. However, based on the theories presented in Chapter One, two other transcendental goals of QA policy should include human capital development and systematic change/ organization development. This is the new perspective of the QA model, which incorporates the pragmatic and intrinsic theoretical goals.

Theoretically, QA process is a guaranteed way human capital investment with the desirable ends of high quality graduates who are needed for social and economic development of a country. QA is a better way to realize the good investment returns (Psacharopoulos, 1985) Low quality graduates come from low quality institutions and programs, and vice-versa (Lim, 2001). University graduates are a critical professional human resource for national development, especially in developing countries.

The findings of this study have proven the importance of another theory, i.e. accountability theory which states that the government is accountable for assuring that educational programs provided by public and private higher education institutions must be of acceptable quality or standard so that the graduates produced by colleges and universities have attained a certain degree of professionalism and are highly employable in the job market, whether at the local level or international level. High quality graduates reflect the high standing of the institutions that produced and trained them (Green, 1994; Mayhew et. al.; 1990, Van Vught et. al., 1994).

It is hoped that the findings of this study will help to create a new wave of awareness among Oman's educators and policy implementers that educational reform and change is necessary, and thus Fullan's change theory and Senge's learning organization theory should be understood well. Fullan (2004) and Senge (1990) posits that the organizations which truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. A learning organization is one that continually expands its capacity to create its future. Adaptive learning is necessary for sustainability, and generative learning enhances the capacity to create.

5.4: Suggestions for Further Research

This study has focused on the implementation of quality assurance policy by private higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. This study has used the students and managers from eight (8) private colleges as the respondents to assess the status and extent of implementation of the said policy. Initially, 18 private colleges and universities in Oman were identified for the study, but ten of them were disrupted by a hurricane; thus, leading to a lesser number of locations and respondents. It is suggested here that a follow up study, which is similar to this study, to be done again in Oman in the near future in order to better monitor the implementation of the policy.

Besides that, a similar study can be conducted in other developing countries, such as in Malaysia and Thailand which have instituted the quality assurance policy in their laws and executive orders. Alternatively, a comparative study can be made on the implementation of the said policy in two or more countries, and this may prove useful in tracing the similarities and differences of the implementation process and success of colleges and universities in several countries.

To explore the quality assurance process in depth, a case study on a big college or university seems to be appropriate. The case study should attempt to examine and assess quality assurance process in the seven dimensions in Figure 5.1 before, the problems and issues in implementation, and the achievement status of the

policy goals. Even though this kind of study consumes a lot of time in data collection, it has the advantage of revealing the work process, logistics, structure, and values involved in performing quality assurance.

Or, if quality assurance can be thought of as a topic of change management, then a case study on change management at a college or university may be conducted to understand the receptiveness, resistance, challenges, issues, and strategies of bringing about change. Cost analysis, time usage analysis, work structure analysis, roles analysis, and other types of analyses can be made to understand the viability and effectiveness in making an organisational change.

Similarly, if quality assurance is considered as a topic of change management, then a case study on conflicts in a university organisation can be made to analyse the sources, characteristics, types, actors, and resolution strategies of conflicts. This kind of case study would yield new sociological theoretical propositions and practical strategies in dealing with conflicts and understanding organisational behaviour.

5.5: Conclusion

This study was triggered by the motivation to assist the government of the Sultanate of Oman in founding a world-class reputation of its higher education institutions, while at the same materialising practically the concepts of public accountability and high quality of the institutions. The search was for a workable and functional quality assurance model for Oman, using the experiences of Malaysia, Thailand, and some other countries in the world. The search for a model was translated into the initial conceptual framework at the beginning of the study and the construction of the survey instrument used to assess quality assurance initiatives of the colleges involved in this study.

The research had answered all the questions that guided this study. Not only that, some of the research findings had provided some new theoretical inputs to certain organisational theories, particularly open system theory, organisational learning theory, roles theory, change management theory, and quality assurance process model.

Open system theory, in the context of quality assurance process, suggests that the ability of higher education institutions to fulfil public accountability and high quality depends on their openness and receptivity to information, demands, and expectations of the external environment and external customers. Apart from that, coupling the information, demands, and expectations of the internal customers with

that of the external ones would yield better performance in achieving accountability and quality. In relation to this, organisational learning theory posits that the survival and sustainability of higher education institutions are obtained by scanning the external environment and making adaptive mechanisms in response to the changes and developments taking place in the external environment.

In addition, the roles theory in quality assurance process suggests that individuals in various dimensions of a higher education institution should orientate their thinking and attitude towards the prescribed vision, mission, and objectives of the institution, and should follow the agreed clearly prescribed roles and duties. In other words, the governing council, management, academic staff, supporting staff, and students all have clearly defined roles and duties for them to perform in assuring quality of their institution. Key performance index (KPI)—the ratio between what is done and what is expected annually—sets the standard of performance of individuals in their roles and duties.

Regarding change management theory, higher education institutions that are required by the government to implement quality assurance policy face the inevitability to be in the tide of change; as such, they would experience chaos, revamping, and stabilisation stages—or in other terms defreezing, liquidation, and refreezing stages. The policy is the evolutionary force of change, while institutions are in the dire situation of adapting to the change. Change management is a form of crisis management which needs to be done quickly but analytically, and

consequently adaptive changes need to be made swiftly, as in the evolutionary process.

This study eventually proposes a tangible quality assurance implementation model for higher education institutions in Oman to follow in order to design a systematically targeted and comprehensive kind of quality assurance process, and to design appropriate research methodology and tools for assessing the achievement of quality assurance goals. However, the model could be applicable to other countries also.

Quality assurance policy has been a top-down policy in many countries, in which the government requires higher education institutions practise quality assurance assessment in various dimensions and followed by improvement initiatives. Thus, the policy has the purpose of ensuring certain minimal standards to be adopted by colleges and universities as educational providers to fulfil customer satisfaction, and thereby reducing public complaints. In this regard, the policy does not guarantee that higher education institutions become world-class. Appropriately the next step then should be external-comparative benchmarking, that is, comparing the standards and performances of one institution in various dimensions and aspects with the one that is best-in-its-class. The resulting gap analysis data becomes the basis of developing strategic actions for organizational improvement.

Quality assurance by itself has no theoretical grounding. It is just an improvement tool for organizational improvement based on the assumption that an institution which practises quality assurance closely and continuously will have better quality, sustainability, reputation, and customer satisfaction than those institutions which disregard it. This is debatable because before quality assurance becomes a buzzword concept there have been hundreds of famous universities in the world. As such, quality assurance needs to be associated with some relevant theories in order to justify its place in the body of knowledge on educational management. This study has managed to associate quality assurance with some relevant theories, which have provided sensible theoretical interpretations and synthesis to the findings.