

THE ROLE OF SULTAN QABOOS UNIVERSITY IN PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE AMONG STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at identifying the role of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in promoting entrepreneurial culture among students with disabilities. 31 male and female students with visual and physical disabilities (VPD) responded to online questionnaire. The questionnaire included 25 items distributed into three domains related to entrepreneurial education, supportive environment, and business incubators. The results indicated that the role of SQU was moderate in every domain of the questionnaire.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Education, Entrepreneurial Supportive Environment, Business Incubators, Students with Disabilities, SQU.

INTRODUCTION

Spending on education is regarded as one of the investments aimed at developing human resources through which the fruits of economic and social development are achieved at all levels. Education takes the character of long-term investment whose positive effects are reflected in various areas of social development. Accordingly, worthy consideration of higher education system, research, and innovation has become a global indicator of the higher investment in human resources. Universities assume the responsibility for preparing students for the labor market and promoting their positive attitudes towards the work that drives the community development forward. However, universities are required to review their strategic plans, vision, mission, and academic decisions to keep up with the economic, political, and social changes that the world is witnessing this time. Therefore, entrepreneurship became important, especially in terms of economic stagnation, high unemployment rates, and fluctuations facing the global commercial market. It is important to introduce entrepreneurial culture in higher education institutions (Kyari, 2020).

Entrepreneurship is an impetus for development in the context of economic transformations, and considered as a means of restructuring universities whose visions strive for excellence and achieving global ranking. The process of admitting students with disabilities in higher education institutions led to reconsider the basis for admission. Consequently, it was obvious that the number of students admitted to universities is constantly increasing, as these universities provided services, support, and accommodations for those students (Erickson &

Lawrin, 2016). Universities also realized the importance of providing education and training opportunities for disabled students. The availability of these services contributed to improving the quality of life for students with disabilities through health, psychological, educational, and cultural services.

Oman's higher education institutions are a strategic partner in economic, social, and cultural and sustained development as a result of their active role in developing the self-employment of students, which depends on the quality of education which is supposed as the knowledge-based economy. The SQU, similar to other Omani universities, is required to integrate its educational philosophy into the knowledge-based economy by organizing entrepreneurial projects through the establishment of business incubators, technology clubs, and entrepreneurial centers to contribute its active role to economic development and achieving the contents of Oman Vision 2040. This will make SQU be a global leading university that relies on project management and entrepreneurship development for students with disabilities, that is these students have creative ideas for projects, in spite of not having sufficient knowledge of the techniques and strategies of managing their future projects. Reports indicated that the number of students enrolled in universities with disabilities continues to increase, and that they face difficulties in obtaining jobs as well as their low quality of life after graduating from universities (Erten, 2011).

Individuals with disabilities have a high level of career anxiety whose symptoms can be psychological, physical, and cognitive (Brick & Mashri, 2018). In this regard, Navarro & Martínez (2019). emphasized that individuals with disabilities face problems that prevent them from undertaking entrepreneurial projects that may be linked to lack of economic resources, avoidance of entrepreneurial activity because of low competencies they acquired. Therefore, SQU should pay attention of students with disabilities to entrepreneurship. The SQU is making great efforts in improving the quality of education and services provided to students with disabilities (Al-Rajhia & Al-Zafari, 2015). This research highlights the role of SQU in promoting the entrepreneurial culture among students with disabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Universities must provide activities that enrich the lives of students and provide them with methods that make them able to adjust to their communities. Osman et al. (2014) indicated that special social entrepreneurship programs affected the entrepreneurial competencies of disabled students. Maziriri & Madinga (2016) identified a set of challenges that entrepreneurs with physical disabilities face in the following fields: education and training, access to finance, government support, and facilities, and services. Abbas & Khair (2017) found that the entrepreneurial intention among special needs students in Malaysia was high. While, Dakung et al. (2017) revealed that pedagogy, course content, and entrepreneurship education are significant predictors of entrepreneurial action of disabled students. Viktorovich et al. (2020) revealed that persons with disabilities should be supported, and provided them with any assistance and conditions for the development of entrepreneurship. In order to improve the entrepreneurial intentions of university students, Letsoalo & Rankhumise (2020) recommended that entrepreneurship education be provided to students in the early educational stages.

In the Sultanate of Oman, a number of research was conducted on entrepreneurship. Al-Harrasi & Al-Salti (2014) indicated that SQU students had low entrepreneurial intentions due to a lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and governmental financial support. Ibrahim et al. (2017)

emphasized that the attitudes of SQU graduate students towards entrepreneurship were positive. But they prefer to work in government and private sectors rather than entrepreneurial projects. In other words, Omani university students were interested in starting their entrepreneurial projects, but at the same time they lack knowledge and fear of entering these projects (Belwal et al., 2015). In order to overcome these challenges that reduce entrepreneurial culture, it is necessary to enroll SQU students in training programs and workshops based on entrepreneurship. In this regard, Al Barwani et al (as cited in Ibrahim et al., 2017) maintained that more than 80% of the Omani entrepreneurs never received formal training programs related to the establishment and management of small and medium enterprises.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Total 68 students with VPD were included in this research. These students enrolled in colleges at SQU, Oman. The current research instrument was distributed to all students with VPD. While the research sample comprised of 31 students with VPD who responded to the research instrument.

Research Design and Instrument

The Descriptive Survey Research Design by questionnaire (Al-Zoubi & Al-Zoubi, 2020) was used to collect quantitative data. The questionnaire was developed after reviewing Arab and Foreign research related to entrepreneurship. To assess validity, the first version of the questionnaire was reviewed by five faculty members at the College of Education in SQU. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 25 items distributed into three domains: entrepreneurial education, supportive environment, and business incubators. This questionnaire is responded according to a 3-point Likert scale: 1 (rarely), 2 (sometimes), and 3(always). Cronbach's alpha consistency was estimated based on a pilot study comprised of 29 students without disabilities in SQU. The internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire domains was as follows: entrepreneurial education, 0.78; supportive environment, 0.77; and business incubators, 0.74. In order to analyze the research results, the mean became as follows: low (1 to 1.67), moderate (1.68 to 2.34), and high (2.35 to 3).

Procedures

This research followed these procedures:

1. Designing e-questionnaire through Google Drive.
2. Obtaining approval of the Department of Student Affairs with Disabilities at SQU to conduct this research.
3. Distributing e-questionnaire link to all students with VPD through WhatsApp and e-mail.
4. The data were analyzed by using SPSS program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results related to the main question: what is the role of SQU in promoting entrepreneurial culture among students with disabilities?. To answer this question, descriptive

statistics were used. Means, standard deviations, and role level were calculated as shown in Table 1.

Questionnaire Domains	M	S.D	Level
Entrepreneurial Education	2.15	0.419	Moderate
Business Incubators	2.09	0.575	Moderate
Supportive Environment	2.03	0.610	Moderate

The mean of questionnaire domains ranged between 2.15 to 2.03. This result means that all domains got a moderate level as perceived by students with VPD. In the entrepreneurial education domain, the academic leaders at SQU were significantly aware of promoting entrepreneurship among faculty members and students with and without disabilities. The SQU is required to include entrepreneurship courses at academic program plans in the scientific and humanitarian colleges. In this regard, Kirby & Ibrahim (2011) showed the impact of entrepreneurship education programs on university students who studied courses in entrepreneurship. Muñoz et al. (2019) confirmed that the entrepreneurship and disability course contributed to improving the attitudes of students with disabilities towards entrepreneurship.

Offering entrepreneurial education in the courses of SQU will help develop innovative entrepreneurial values. It also enhances the creativity, innovation and planning of business projects among students with disabilities. Escribano & Jiménez (2019) demonstrated the role of the higher educational level was to enhance getting individuals with disabilities access to the labor market. Kitching (2014) mentioned a number of obstacles that reduce entrepreneurship among individuals with disabilities such as: weak commercial knowledge and lack of skills which are associated with a lack of educational opportunities and practical experiences.

In regard to the supportive environment domain, the results showed that this environment had a meditational role in vision, mission and strategic plan of SQU which included a set of terms related to entrepreneurship and research based on creativity and innovation. Including these terms in the university's vision and mission is extremely important, but we need to apply it to the university's environment. In other words, SQU should adopt disabled students who have entrepreneurial and innovative ideas. In order to put these ideas into entrepreneurial projects, the university must provide financial support for disabled students, financial independence for colleges, participation in the international entrepreneurial project network. Accordingly, Balcazar et al. (2014) suggested a model for empowering entrepreneurship for individuals with disabilities which may become an important experience for these individuals in the USA.

The SQU environment is an incubator to increase awareness of entrepreneurship among students with and without disabilities. Therefore, conducting and holding seminars and conferences may contribute to promote entrepreneurial culture among students. In this regard, we can refer to the 7th international conference of the College of Education at SQU. This conference contributed to promoting entrepreneurial education by benefit from regional and international universities experiences in entrepreneurship. The SQU campus can also be invested in holding workshops and training programs that contribute to developing entrepreneurial thoughts among students with disabilities. Casado & Casau (2019) emphasized the positive role of training programs in developing the competencies of disabled entrepreneurs. These programs contributed to include individuals with disabilities in the business environment. While, Maritz & Laferriere (2016) believed that entrepreneurial skills training through small business training programs help individuals with disabilities to participate in self-employment activities. The SQU may invest its

annual career and training fair in spreading the entrepreneurial culture among students. This fair can be a national platform where students with disabilities meet with entrepreneurs who contribute to entrepreneurship education programs.

In the business incubators domain. The results indicated that the SQU has inadequacies in establishing business incubators. Establishing an innovation group at the SQU may help to promote entrepreneurial culture among students with disabilities. The work of this group may be limited to organizing theoretical lectures on entrepreneurship. On the other hand, this group may lack institutional work based on providing consultation and technical support to students with disabilities. Consequently, this group lacks experience in adopting innovative ideas of students with disabilities, encouraging students to participate in projects, marketing student projects, and making partnerships with business incubators outside the university. Accordingly, the SQU needs to establish a center for entrepreneurship. Ibrahim et al. (2017) recommended the establishment of business incubators in Omani higher education institutions. These incubators may contribute to change graduate attitudes of students towards entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, SQU is currently required to recognize entrepreneurship by including it in their curricula and organizing conferences and training workshops, as well as it must focus on the entrepreneurial education, supportive environment, and business incubators. The development of entrepreneurial education within SQU requires a strategy that supports entrepreneurial education, the use of entrepreneurial teaching methods in various disciplines, amendment of university regulations, offering entrepreneurial courses, the establishment of centers for entrepreneurial education, and improvement of institutional capacities in entrepreneurship, in addition to training university faculty members in pioneering education. In order that the university environment to be encouraging for entrepreneurship, it is necessary to develop facilities, equipment, and infrastructure, and encourage partnerships with private sector institutions. In addition, SQU can allow faculty members to work part-time in private sector institutions, to gain experiences and transfer these experiences to students by increasing their awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship. Business incubators have become as working institutions to support entrepreneurs who have ambitious ideas, and some necessary resources to achieve their aspirations, by providing them with an appropriate work environment during the first years of the project, and increasing the entrepreneurial success through completing technical and administrative aspects with low cost, and leading the project owner to focus on core business.

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