

Social Responsibility: A Challenge Facing Universities in the Middle East

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Abstract: *The objective of this study is to figure out why the universities in the Middle East in general and in the Gulf, countries have been unable to apply programs of social responsibility properly. It is true that social responsibility has been applied recently by universities in Europe and North America while corporations have practiced it earlier. Yet living in a world which has magnificently been connected by means of communications and transport, any delay of transferring useful ideas is unjustified. Universities in the Middle East began to emphasize the role of the university in the community. But it has still being traditional and related to material aid to needy people or offering free lectures to raise the general awareness of the community. However, the fast political changes, civil wars, extreme Islamic fanatic groups and the threat of distortion and terrorism need specific standard of social responsibility. The Arab countries do not need the traditional services that any university can offer helping the needy people in the local community. They rather need comprehensive programs capable of initiating real change in the construction of the collective mind in the Arab community. Social responsibility needs to use civic education as a means of social change. Civic education is a cultural operation that enriches awareness with new ideas that evolve round the nature of citizenship and its foundation of political and civil rights. Civic education can be achieved through social nurturing in formal and informal social institutions. The main challenge that this study will investigate is the combination between social responsibility and civic education and utilizing the concept of civic education in practical achievement of social responsibility. Other minor challenges include allocation of resources to serve social responsibility; awareness of the university family consists of professors, officials, workers, and students and problems of cooperation and coordination with some communities. In order for the study to investigate and analyze this issue the theoretical concepts of civic education are clearly illustrated, and data will be collected from actual experience of three universities in different countries in the Arab Region. The research will follow a qualitative method that depends on analysis of wide range of theoretical conceptual framework as well as information from actual experiences of universities in the region on the issue of social responsibility. In the conclusion the study will illustrate the results and suggest practical ways of applying civic education in the process of social responsibility carried by the university.*

1. Introduction

Social responsibility of the university has been defined as (A policy guided by moral values directing the performance of the university community “professors, students, officials and workers” through a competent administration to promote education, awareness, social work and the environment; in interaction and cooperation with the society to create sustainable development) (Giuffre and Ratto 2014). Though this definition is clear, it still unable to push the concept of social responsibility of the universities outside the limits of the traditional role which has been for a while restricted by either material aids or general lectures that raise the awareness of the members of the local community. Some universities realize that their role should be more influential especially in the Middle East where the youths who are most of the population are at the same time the target of recruitment of the terrorist Islamic groups.

For the social responsibility to affect the collective mind of the youths and guarantee the social change, it should appeal to basic human rights which could be provided by civic education. There is an organic connection between social responsibility and civic education. Both of them stem from moral reference (UNESCO 2009). In order for the universities to contribute effectively through social responsibility the community should positively respond to the programs initiated by the university. For that it needs a sharp consciousness which can only be achieved by civic education.

Civic education is a cultural awareness operation that aims to help individuals to acquire new ideas about the nature of

citizenship and civil and political rights. These ideas will be established through social nurturing within formal and informal social institutions. Civic education constitutes the main dimension that builds patriotism, respect of citizenship, observation of human rights and creation of a healthy tolerant society (Finkel, 2000). In other words civic education is a continuous operation in awareness promotion and creation of values that establish civilized behavior in daily life. This is why it is able to achieve an effective complement in the political construction of the state and the group of cultural values that support it (UNDP 2004).

This study explains how the programs of social responsibility enriched by the concept of civic education will promote the traditional ways to stand up for the challenge of changing the youths positively to face the threat of terrorism and fanatic ideas in the thought battle which is not less important than the armed war against terrorism.

2. Literature Review

Although many studies have been conducted on social responsibility of the universities, we never came across one that combined between social responsibility and civic education.

The Hashemite University in Jordan was established in 1991 and in 2016 it has 28 thousand students distributed into 12 colleges. Also, there are 6 research centers. In a paper entitled, “Social responsibility in Higher Education Institutions: Application Case from the Middle East”, two professors from the university explained its role in social responsibility. They think that social responsibility of the

university should support the most important issues in the society in accordance with the ability of the university. Some of the examples they provided are: promotion of education, protection and preservation of the environment, preservation of resources, energy, and promotion of preventive medicine. The goal is to establish sustainable development. As a research unit, the university should make researches in favor of the stakeholders and the society in general. The authors think that their university is one of the best universities in the Middle East regarding social responsibility. According to the authors the university achieved the following:

- Social interference of the university: by providing social programs and certificates of vocational training. Help of people like the open day free medicine.
- The university erased location of education by introducing far distant centers and education by the satellite.
- Cooperation between the university and the industry for scientific research that promotes industry.
- The university uses solar energy and electronic technology to limit the usage of paper, plant trees and reuse the waste (Alzyoud&Hani 2015).

Ajman University in the U.A.E has been established in 1988. Now it has 8 colleges and 4 research centers. In 2016 the number of the student was 75345. At the same year they opened a unit for social responsibility to handle all the activities of the university with different institutions in the community of Ajman city. In a prolonged interview with the director of the unit of social responsibility we discussed most of the programs and activities the university conducted. A lot of the information is posted in the university website too. The university established relationships with government departments, the police and the civil defense and representatives of these institutions visited the university and delivered lectures on different topics. Classes were cancelled to encourage students to attend. The university through the unit of social responsibility celebrated the women day, the day for people with special needs and the day for autistic children. They organized campaigns for blood donation, shores cleaning and traffic awareness. As for the challenges facing the program of social responsibility the director mentioned the lack of awareness in the university of the importance of social responsibility and allocation of limited funds to its projects. [Ajman University: www.ajman.ac.ae]

Dhofar University in Oman was established in 2004. Now it has 4 colleges and 4 centers of research and services. One of these centers is called Community Service and Continuing Education Center. It is technically the unit that should perform social responsibility, but it concentrates on continuing education more. Students cultural societies invited different institution that conducted workshops or celebrate international days but still the relation between the community and the university has not been established very well. One of the authors of this study delivered a lecture about social responsibility and is working within the department of social science to make a manual for it that will help the university to deal with this crucial issue [Dhofar University: www.du.edu.om]. It is clear from the experience of these three universities and other we are acquainted with some times, they did not practice real social

responsibility. Being the younger university established in 2004 and with limited colleges and number of students, Dhofar University might be to some extent excused of being hesitant to interfere in the wide field of social responsibility.

3. Methodology of Research

This study used the method of Participant Observation with partially ethnographic qualitative descriptive analytical approach. This multi-dimensional approach has been chosen because both authors of the study are professors in Dhofar University. While one of them spent enough time in the university to know it very well, the other is a new comer. But he has been in Ajman University in the U.A.E for four years. So, they observe the activities of the universities mentioned in this study. The primary data has been collected by direct interviews with responsible officials in these institutions. The secondary data has been retrieved from literature and the websites of these universities.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Social responsibility of the universities should be comprehensive and deep. In addition to training, raising awareness regarding social issues, it must contribute in introduction of new culture of peace, tolerance, gender equality, and human rights (Finkel 2000). For the university to conduct social responsibility properly the objectives should be carried as follows:

*The gap between theory and application should be bridged in a way that makes the theory more suitable for the status quo and the application more appealing to it. University education should be connected to the local society. In this respect the professors and students should apply their knowledge and skill on specific community to enhance the living of people in that community. In a certain village or a residential area in a city, students from different specializations apply their knowledge to face the challenges of that community. These challenges might be social, political, economic or environmental.

- Conducting researches and projects that are built on the real need of the local community and directed by its interest as a partner in the researches which will create a social development policy. Colleges and programs should make compound researches where the local people provide the information and the students design and execute the research. Students will get their degrees and at the same time absorb the societal knowledge in their studies.
- Information owned by the professors and students in different disciplines should be put in the hands of the local community to enable it to know its rights and obligations, have its development aspirations, and demand what it deserves from governmental and non-governmental institutions. This information could be: statistics, surveys, evidences, films, maps, reports, lectures, free health services or legal services and complaints.

*After consultation with the local community, the students, related government agencies and local NGOs the university should develop curricula and create new syllabuses. The new organized set of knowledge should cater for citizenship,

patriotism, equality, human rights, democracy, and progressive understanding of Islam.

The civic education which will be like the soul for the structure of the social responsibility is divided to three fields:

- 1) Civic knowledge: means helping the people to know about their political system and their civil political rights such as the right of expression, voting and running a public office and responsibility of respecting the law and right and privacy of other people. It is important that each individual would have the chance to ask salient questions about the government and the civil society and the relation between them such as: what is the purpose of the government? What is the constitution? What are the foundations and references of the political system? What are the mechanisms by which the local, state and central governments being held accountable?
- 2) Civic skills: means the ability of people to analyze and evaluate to take stand in any public matter. These skills which could be acquired by training could be used in political and civil operations such as: monitoring the performance of public offices or lobbying people behind a national cause. Civic skills develop the individual ability from the communication and organization of using money and time to the ability of analysis of social problems, manipulation of masses and creation of social tolerance and social cooperation for political change.
- 3) Civic attributes: are necessary attributes of individual behavior that help in achieving democracy such as: tolerance, public courage, civilization, critical mind, ability of listening, debating and acceptance of new ideas. The civic attributes that could be planted into the individual through awareness and training within the programs of social responsibility can be summarized as follows:
 - a) The individual becomes an autonomous member of the society: this attribute includes volunteer obligation with good conduct where the member bear legal and moral responsibilities with regard to the results of his/her actions.
 - b) The individual should bear the personal, political, economic and social responsibility of the citizen. This includes taking care of himself, supporting his family and nurturing his children. It also includes being active in the public sphere like voting, paying taxes, and working in all fields of leadership positions according to his / her qualifications.
 - c) The individual should respect the value and dignity of the human being. Respecting others means listening to their opinions, respecting their rights and interests being restricted by the principle of rule of majority with respect to right of the minority in opposition.
 - d) Promotion of a healthy constitutional democracy: this attribute means that the individual has the necessary information before voting or before the public debate. He /she has to be aware of the values and principles of the constitution and monitoring the behavior of the political leaders in office.

Using youths 'clubs, cultural center, theatres of High Schools, stadiums and university lecture theatres, the university community "professors, students, officials and workers" can inject its' programs of social responsibility by the ideas of civic education. The message in these ideas could be delivered by

lectures, seminars, symposiums, movies, plays, and TV programs.

5. Conclusion

The social responsibility of the universities in the Middle East has been traditional and limited and not helping the communities which are facing real challenges of existence. For the programs of social responsibility to be effective they should adopt ideas of civic education that can create a new citizen who will be knowledgeable and effective and cannot easily be manipulated by terrorists or fanatic groups.

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