



Towards Economic Self-Sufficiency: Utilizing Global Best Practices for Entrepreneurship Development in Afghan Universities

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Abstract

Afghan universities currently play a limited role in fostering entrepreneurship, as entrepreneurship education is primarily confined to theoretical courses within economics and public administration faculties. This article explores how Afghan universities can enhance their impact on entrepreneurship development and national self-sufficiency by learning from the experiences of entrepreneurial universities worldwide. Utilizing qualitative analysis of secondary data, including case studies from Afghan and international studies and theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Entrepreneurial Intention Model, the study discusses the need for comprehensive reforms that integrate entrepreneurship across various disciplines, establish innovation hubs, and foster university-industry-government collaborations. Drawing on successful models from around the globe, the article provides actionable recommendations for Afghan universities to adopt innovative educational frameworks, build sustainable support systems, and create dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Self-Sufficiency, Entrepreneurial university, Innovation hubs, University-industry collaboration, Entrepreneurial ecosystem, Entrepreneurial education.

Introduction

Afghanistan's economic recovery hinges on reducing dependency on foreign aid and fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes local innovation. Universities are pivotal in this transformation by equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to start businesses that address local challenges (Sanchez, 2011; Bakotić & Kružić, 2010). However, Afghan higher education institutions currently lack the infrastructure and strategic orientation to effectively foster entrepreneurship. Unlike their global counterparts, Afghan universities have not fully embraced the "entrepreneurial university" model, which integrates academic learning with real-world entrepreneurial practices to stimulate regional economic development (Etzkowitz, 2003; Audretsch, 2014).

Entrepreneurship can be broadly defined as “doing something being different and daring to take risks” (Blesia et al., 2019). It involves four key stages: recognizing and assessing opportunities, preparing a business plan, utilizing available resources, and achieving goals (Barringer & Ireland, 2012). This process is increasingly recognized as a crucial driver of economic growth, innovation, and job creation (Anokhin, Grichnik, & Hisrich, 2008; Audretsch & Keilbach, 2004).

The concept of the "entrepreneurial university" emphasizes the role of higher education institutions not only in teaching and research but also in contributing to regional economic development (Etzkowitz, 2003; Audretsch, 2014). These universities integrate academic learning with real-world entrepreneurial practices to stimulate student entrepreneurship (Heinonen & Hytti, 2010; Kirby, 2006). Notable examples include MIT in the USA, Oxford in the UK, and Tsinghua in China, where education, innovation, and university-industry-government partnerships form the backbone of successful entrepreneurial ecosystems (Gibb, Haskins, & Robertson, 2013; Heinonen & Hytti, 2010). These leading universities provide robust support for startups through mentorship, funding, interdisciplinary innovation hubs, and practical learning opportunities—resources that Afghan universities currently lack. Afghan institutions can benefit from international experiences and adopt models that integrate entrepreneurship across disciplines, aligning with the "Triple Helix" model of university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz, 2008; Perkmann et al., 2013). This framework has proven effective in fostering innovation and economic development globally.

This article examines how Afghan universities can benefit from these global practices and proposes strategic reforms to enhance their role in fostering entrepreneurship and promoting economic self-sufficiency. By addressing the gaps in Afghanistan's higher education system, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on entrepreneurial education and regional economic development.

Material and Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology based on secondary data sources, including academic publications, government reports, and case studies from Afghan and international universities. Data were gathered through document analysis focusing on the implementation of entrepreneurship education, innovation hubs, and university-industry partnerships in Afghan institutions. The study utilizes Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior and Krueger et al.'s (2000) Entrepreneurial Intention Model to evaluate the impact of these initiatives on the entrepreneurial intentions of Afghan students. Comparative analysis was conducted with international examples to identify gaps and opportunities for Afghan universities.

Results/Findings

The research highlights several key findings that underscore the current limitations and opportunities within Afghan universities. These insights drew comparisons with successful global institutions and offer a roadmap for Afghan universities to enhance their role in fostering entrepreneurship. The primary findings include the following observations:

1. **Entrepreneurial Education in Afghan Universities:** Afghan universities such as Kabul University, Nangarhar University, and Kardan University have introduced entrepreneurship as part of their curricula, primarily in economics and public administration faculties. However, these efforts lack depth and fail to integrate entrepreneurial education across disciplines, unlike leading global examples (Fayolle & Gailly, 2014; Sanchez, 2011).
2. **Innovation Hubs:** There is a lack of dedicated innovation hubs or incubators in Afghan universities that support students in transforming theoretical knowledge into practical business ideas. In contrast, innovation hubs at institutions like Tsinghua University in China and Aalto University in Finland provide comprehensive support systems, including mentorship, funding, and collaborative spaces (Gubik & Bartha, 2016; Mele et al., 2019).
3. **University-Industry Collaborations:** Effective collaboration between universities and industry in Afghanistan is minimal. Successful models like MIT's extensive network of industry partnerships and Oxford's cross-disciplinary entrepreneurship programs highlight the potential benefits of closer academia-industry ties (Bechard & Gregoire, 2005; Drucker, 1985).

Discussion

The findings highlight significant gaps in the current approach of Afghan universities to entrepreneurship education. While initial efforts to embed entrepreneurship into the curricula are promising, they remain isolated and lack the integration seen in more developed entrepreneurial ecosystems. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of experienced faculty, and political instability further hinder the development of robust entrepreneurial ecosystems within Afghan universities (Kirby, 2006; Shattock, 2003). To address these challenges, Afghan universities can adopt best practices from successful models like the "Triple Helix" of university-industry-government relations, which fosters innovation and economic development through collaborative efforts (Etzkowitz, 2008).

A transformative shift is required to move from traditional pedagogical approaches to more innovative and entrepreneurial methods, such as collaborative co-learning and engagement with external stakeholders (Hannon et al., 2005). This shift must be supported by enhanced faculty training, institutional reforms, and international collaborations to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and competencies (Johnstone & Huggins, 2016).

Conclusion

Afghan universities have the potential to play a transformative role in the country's journey toward economic self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship development. By learning from the experiences of entrepreneurial universities globally, Afghan institutions can implement comprehensive reforms that integrate entrepreneurship across disciplines, establish innovation hubs, and foster university-industry-government collaborations. These efforts require sustained commitment, strategic planning, and support from both national and international stakeholders to achieve sustainable economic growth and innovation.

Recommendations

1. **Integrate Entrepreneurship Across Disciplines:** Expand entrepreneurship education

beyond business faculties to all academic disciplines, emphasizing experiential learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

2. Develop Innovation Hubs and Incubators: Establish innovation hubs and incubators to provide resources, mentorship, and funding to support student startups and collaborative research.

3. Foster University-Industry-Government Collaboration: Build stronger partnerships between universities, industries, and government agencies to create pathways for technology transfer, internships, and joint research initiatives.

4. Build Capacity for Faculty and Staff: Enhance faculty and staff capabilities through training programs on entrepreneurship education and exposure to global best practices.

5. Create Supportive Policies and Incentives: Develop supportive frameworks that encourage innovation and entrepreneurship at universities, including grants, tax benefits, and incubation support.

6. Promote International Collaboration: Engage in international collaborations and exchange programs to learn from successful global models and participate in entrepreneurship competitions

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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