

EDUCATION AND ECONOMY: ARE THEY PARALLEL?

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ABSTRACT

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said steered a new era in the history of Oman since his ascension as the Sultan of Oman. Developments in various and important areas like education, health and employment pay glowing tributes to the great visionary.

This paper focuses on nursing education in two contexts namely Sultan Qaboos University and Ministry of Health. It concentrates on nursing education specifically as one of the researchers is employed in Ministry of Health where nursing education is one of the specialties. The purpose of this research-based paper is to look at the programs, intake and employability of students during the past five years in order to assess the effect of this education on the economy of Oman.

In furtherance of achieving this purpose, a small-scale research has been conducted in the above-said contexts. The data have been obtained in the following areas: increase/decrease in the intake of students, courses offered, duration of the courses and adherence to standards of quality, annual results, consequent employment, and opportunities for nursing graduates. The data thus obtained was analyzed using statistical measures and compared across the period, keeping in the forefront the following research question.

KEYWORDS: Employment, Nursing Education, Oman Economy, Omanization, Research

INTRODUCTION

When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother what will I be?

Will I be pretty? Will I be rich? Here's what she said to me:

Queser┘, ser┘, Whatever will be, will be.

The future's not ours to see. Queser┘, ser┘

So ran the sentiments of Doris Day in the mid-1950s, just half a century ago from where we stand now. This was a time of seeming confidence in the present and the future, that "whatever will be" will be fine. In the West, this was a time of great optimism, dominated by the idea that we can improve ourselves and our environment, and that social, economic, intellectual and spiritual advance can all be planned for. The signs of this rational, technical approach to the problems confronting us could be seen in every area of society. Then, why not in the economic front?

What has all this got to do with language education? Well, we can learn a lot about our future by looking back.

A brief look at our past, and the context in which it arose, establishes the necessity for us to look at our context today.

When we, the researchers, began our teaching career in Oman, we witnessed a number of expats working in various fields. The locals were few. Gradually, the balance started tilting in favor of the locals. The reason for this tilt in the balance is the splendid vision and foresight of HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the ruler of the Sultanate of Oman.

His majesty, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, a great visionary has laid a golden path for young Omanis to replace the huge number of expats through massive expansion plans in almost every sphere. The tremendous rate of development has been witnessed in all major fields like education, health care, roads and so on. Omanization has been the song for the nation. This opened a plethora of opportunities for Omanis. As a result, many specialties of education became available and Omani students started getting enrolled in these higher education colleges/ Institutes. Their interest in getting educated and claiming their rightful place has been ignited. This change provoked the researchers to probe further into the effects of such development. This study is an offshoot of such probing. Nursing, a part of servicing industry, has been chosen because it is one profession which plays a prominent role in the safe keeping of the nation's health and thereby increasing the number of man hours. Also, one of the two researchers is working in the Foundation Center of Ministry of Health and the other researcher is part of the state university which offers instruction in diversified fields of education including nursing. This paper focuses on nursing education in two contexts namely Ministry of Health and Sultan Qaboos University. The following research question which forms the basis of this small-scale research has emerged out of informal but invigorating discussions between the researchers.

HOW DOES NURSING EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO THE ECONOMY OF OMAN?

The Study

As teachers, we all believe that educated citizens take the country forward. For this to happen, the masses need to be educated. Phil Hardwick (Economic development, July, 2010), an economic and community developer, says, "The primary economic development tool for any county is the education level." In Oman primary education is provided free of cost to all the citizens though it is not mandatory to attend schools unlike in other countries. This provision encourages students to go to school. However, the topic is higher education and hence we quote The Truman Commission Report (Higher Education for American Democracy), which, way back in 1947 itself, termed "Higher education is an investment ...in social welfare, better living standards, better health, and less crime. It is an investment in higher production, increased income, and greater efficiency in agriculture, industry and government ... It is an investment in human talent, better human relationships, democracy and peace."

This quote epitomizes the importance of higher education in building a country's economy. It is an investment and just like any other business, should yield immense profits to the investor. Profits or gains in this case are gigantic touching every sphere of people's lives and country as a whole.

Theoretical Background

Supporting this ideology is the theories that the researchers strongly believe in:

- **The Innovation Approach:** A country's economy is linked to education as it is through educated citizens, new ideas and technologies are developed that boost the economy.
- **The Knowledge Transfer Approach:** Once the ideas and new technologies are developed, they have to be disseminated and made available to policy makers to solve the problematic situations that arise in the process of the country's development.

- **Human Investment Approach:** Finally the new ideas and technologies developed and shared will improve the overall skills and abilities of the workforce leading to larger productivity and ultimately economic development.

The Context

The reasons that prompted the researchers to select this particular context are the ease of access to information, the greater potential of the specialty to accommodate large number of local community and the nobility of the profession.

Two contexts of the study are 1. Ministry of Health (MOH) and 2. Sultan Qaboos University(SQU)

MOH:There are twelve institutes which are spread through the length and breadth of the country, resulting in the availability of opportunities even in the remotest parts of the country.

Muscat Nursing Institute Oman Nursing Institute

- Rustaq Nursing Institute
- Sohar Nursing Institute
- North Batinah Nursing Institute
- Nizwa Nursing Institute
- Al Dakhlya Nursing Institute
- Ibri Nursing Institute
- Al Dahira Nursing Institute
- Sur Nursing Institute
- Salalah Nursing Institute
- Ibra Nursing Institute

Following are the programs offered by MOH. However, the data that will be presented in the next section and the focus of this paper are restricted to nursing only.

Programs Offered by MOH

- Nursing (Basic)
- Assistant Pharmacy Technician
- Medical Laboratory Sciences Technician
- Diagnostic Radiography
- Dental Surgery Assistant
- Post Basic Programs
 - Midwifery

- Nephrology Nursing
- Critical Care Nursing in Paediatrics and Neonatology
- Health Management and Health Care
- Physiotherapy
- Critical Care Nursing (Adult), to be launched soon

*The MOH's basic nursing program is equivalent to an Associate's Degree in Nursing from the United States. Each year some of our graduates travel to the U.S. for further education.

SQU: College of Nursing

Following are the programs offered at SQU:

- B.Sc. for Diploma Graduates
- B.Sc. for Nursing

The college requirement subjects and the University requirement subjects are appended. (Appendix 1)

Research Tools

The research tools used in this research are;

- Personal interviews for statistical information with the Educational Consultant, DGET, MOH and Assistant Dean, College of Nursing, SQU.
- Information from the official websites
- Informal conversations with the students to assess their level of motivation in taking up this specialty.

Data Analysis

This section provides the statistical data that support the researchers' claim of students' growing interest in getting educated. Table 1 is from MOH.

Table 1

| Year | Admissions | | | Graduated | | |
|------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| 2012 | 90 | 368 | 458 | 55 | 316 | 371 |
| 2011 | 74 | 369 | 443 | 88 | 397 | 485 |
| 2010 | 92 | 382 | 474 | 91 | 392 | 483 |
| 2009 | 84 | 350 | 434 | 107 | 415 | 522 |
| 2008 | 100 | 401 | 501 | 83 | 411 | 494 |

Discussion

From the above table, we can infer the following: In 2008, the total number of students enrolled was 501, while the number graduated was 494. In 2009, 434 students got enrolled while 522 graduated. In 2010, the number of enrolled students increased to 474, while the number graduated was 483. In 2011, the student enrollment was 443,

whereas the graduating students were 485. Finally, in 2013 the enrollment of students stood at 458, whereas the graduated students were 371. The difference between the number enrolled and graduated in 2012 is less and reasons for this could be dropouts, changes in the specialty, or personal reasons. It is evident from the discussion that, barring minor issues, intake of the students and the number of graduates has been increasing every year.

Table 2: Presents the Data from College of Nursing, SQU

| Institutes SQU(Source: Asst. Dean's Office, College of Nursing, SQU) | Admissions | | Graduated | |
|--|------------|--------|-----------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 2013 | 23 | 94 | 27 | 51 |
| 2012 | 29 | 89 | 18 | 48 |
| 2011 | 28 | 90 | 11 | 30 |

Discussion

As can be seen from the table above, the total enrollment in 2011, 2012 was 118 and in 2013, it was 117. The number of graduates in 2011 was 41, in 2012, it was 64 and in 2013, it was 78. The difference between the number of students enrolled and graduated might be because of several reasons. The following might be some of the reasons.

- Some of them going in for higher education
- Shifting their field of specialization
- Dropouts
- Personal reasons.

Now for the second part of the claim which is increasing the number of Omani graduates replacing the expat employees and thereby helping to strengthen the economy, the following table shows the increasing percentage of Omanization and evidences the claim. This table presents only the nursing aspect of health as this is the primary focus of the paper. This information is gathered from a bigger table where all the specialties of Health are presented. This table also includes the employed graduates from SQU. As the percentage of their graduates are less, it forms part of all the other institutes that offer nursing education like PDO, ROP.

Table 3

| Year | MOH | Non MOH* | Private | Total |
|------|-----|----------|---------|-------|
| 2012 | 66 | 26 | 5 | 54 |
| 2011 | 67 | 26 | 5 | 54 |
| 2010 | 67 | 28 | 5 | 55 |
| 2009 | 66 | 21 | 3 | 56 |
| 2008 | 65 | 23 | 7 | 56 |

*includes ROP, PDO and SQU Hospital

As can be seen from this table, Omanization of nursing jobs is on the rise. Figures previous to this year are also available. But as the scope of this research was only the last five years, data pertaining to only those years is presented. A positive and healthy trend is emerging from this table purporting the researchers' claim.

FINDINGS

Following are the major findings:

- Immediate and 100% employability plays a major role in educating Omani youth in the field of nursing.
- Education of Omani youth in the field of nursing has a direct and positive effect on the economy and development of the country.

These findings were also supported by the informal interview data obtained from the employed graduates. In their conversations, many nurses said that they identified the job potential in choosing this area.

CONCLUSIONS

As suggested at the beginning of this paper, the study conducted by the researchers concludes that;

- The number of educated youth joining the employee stream has a better impact on the Omani society.
- Immediate and 100% employability offered by MOH and SQU motivate the Omani youth to take up this noble profession.
- An increasing number of employable Omani youth coming out of these higher education institutes decreases the dependency on expat work force.
- This directly affects the economy where the drain of money reserves to other countries is reduced.
- Other benefits of educated youth include sound society and better living conditions for the citizens.
- As more number of educated local youth are given employment opportunities, the stability of the country is also safeguarded.
- Expat community, especially nurses, take up employment in this country as a stepping stone to further their career. They get trained with hands on experience from these hospitals and fly off to more promising lands for more pay. Attrition rates, to quote, are less than 0.6% in Omani nurses, whereas it is 12% in expat nurses. This leads to wasting of national exchequer which can be arrested by increased employment of local youth and also in providing a positive impact on health care.

(Source:<http://www.moh.gov.om/en/hr/OmanizationProspects.pdf>)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the findings of this study have been encouraging, Omani youth needs more awareness programs in Nursing Education and the job opportunities in particular and education in general. Omani youth needs more awareness in understanding the effect of education on the country's economy. These awareness programs should be delivered on an on-going basis. Employment as nurses is a stepping stone for foreign workforce whereas, it establishes stability with Omani nurses. So, the government should think of and plan more opportunities for the local youth.

LIMITATIONS

The study could only focus on Nursing education, for want of time and resources. A bigger picture would emerge if the same study could be carried out with as many fields of education as possible.

REFERENCES

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2. http://www.moh.gov.om/en/nv_menu.php?o=education/mohtraining.htm&SP=1
3. [http://www.squ.edu.om/nursing/Asst.Dean's office](http://www.squ.edu.om/nursing/Asst.Dean's_office)

APPENDICES

Degree and Study Plan

College and University Requirements

LANC2035 English for Nursing 3 -
 NURS1001 Introduction to Nursing Profession 2 -
 NURS1002 Sociology 2 -
 NURS1007 Psychology 2 -
 NURS1008 Microbiology & Immunology 3 -
 NURS1009 Communication/Group Dynamics 2 -
 NURS1010 Anatomy & Physiology I with Lab 4 -
 NURS2007 Fundamentals of Nursing 2 -
 NURS2008 Fundamentals of Nursing/Lab 4 NURS2007*
 NURS2015 Health Assessment with Lab 3 NURS2016
 NURS2016 Anatomy & Physiology II with Lab 4 -
 NURS2017 Basic Pharmacology and Dosage Calculation 2 -
 NURS2018 Pharmacology for Nurses 2 NURS2017
 NURS2019 Pathophysiology 4 NURS2016
 NURS2020 Adult Health Nursing I 3 NURS2008 + NURS2015*
 NURS2021 Adult Health Nursing I/ Clinical 3 NURS2020*
 NURS2032 Biochemistry 3 CHEM2105
 CHEM2105 General Chemistry for Nursing 3 -
 NURS3014 Adult Health Nursing II 3 NURS2021
 NURS3015 Adult Health Nursing II/Clinical 3 NURS3014*

NURS3016 Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing 3 NURS2021- NURS1009*
 NURS3017 Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing/Clinical 3 NURS3016*
 NURS3018 Maternal Health Nursing 3 NURS3015
 NURS3019 Maternal Health Nursing/Clinical 3 NURS3018*
 NURS3020 Child Health Nursing 3 NURS3015
 NURS3021 Child Health Nursing/Clinical 3 NURS3020*
 NURS3022 Gerontological Nursing 2 -
 NURS3023 Critical Thinking 2 -
 NURS3024 Nursing Research 3 NURS3026
 NURS3025 Psychosocial Aspects of Care 2 NURS1002 + NURS1007
 NURS3026 Biostatistics 2 -
 NURS3027 Nutrition in Wellness and Illness 2 NURS2032
 NURS4014 Critical Care Nursing 3 NURS3015
 NURS4015 Critical Care Nursing/Clinical 3 NURS4014*
 NURS4016 Community Health Nursing 3 NURS3019 + NURS3021
 NURS4017 Community Health Nursing/Clinical 3 NURS4016*
 NURS4018 Nursing Administration 3 NURS3019 + NURS3021
 NURS4019 Nursing Administration/ Clinical 3 NURS4018*
 NURS4020 Health Promotion and Education 2 -
 NURS4021 Nursing Informatics 2 -
 NURS4022 History, Trends, Issues & Ethics 3 -
 NURS4023
 Advanced Clinical Nursing/
 4 NURS4015 + NURS4017
 + NURS4019
 NURS4024 Graduation Project 1 NURS4023*
Total 118.