

Interest in Entrepreneurship Course: An Exploratory Study for Non-Business Studies at Gulf College

Rowena Ocier Sibayan^{1*}, Gina Jocson², Alrence S. Halibas³

¹Gulf College
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

²Gulf college
Muscat, sultanate of oman

³Gulf College
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

*Corresponding author's email: rowena.sibayan [AT] gulfcollegeoman.com

ABSTRACT— *Education is a cornerstone of the Sultanate's Vision 2020 Economic Development Plan. One of Oman's primary objectives over the past four decades has been to improve the quality of education. Implementing a knowledge-based economy, creating jobs and ultimately boosting economic growth and the government is continuously making an investment in the education sector. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education have received increased attention in Oman. It is often thought subject for business discipline students, but not for technical students. As for technical discipline students interested in creating their own organization after graduation, they seem to be left, although in many cases technical students are the originators of product ideas.*

Many non-business studies strive to integrate entrepreneurship and innovation in the curriculum. However, integrating entrepreneurship and innovation education in non-business studies curriculum could have a significant effect on the creativity, innovativeness, leadership and entrepreneurial intentions of Gulf College non-business undergraduates. In this way, this paper presents a view of incorporating entrepreneurship and innovations course to Gulf College non-business studies.

From the theoretical perspective, this study contributes of Gulf College to the further development of education system in Oman where non-business students will not only develop their employability skills but also entrepreneurial skills.

Keywords — Entrepreneurship, Gulf College, education, innovation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The current global changes in the world direct new challenges and opportunities for the education system. The existing environment is very different from decades. The technologies, processes, methods and tools have been changed with the globalization development. Technology has had a significant impact on the education system worldwide, transforming how students learn, share and collect information. The adoption of technologies likes mobile applications, cloud computing, and game-based learning has helped students to produce positive results. For being consumers, students are now becoming creators and innovators. It is because of the technology's ubiquity.

In the Sultanate of Oman, the young generation face to different challenges in their lives, such as the rapid advancement of technology, multifaceted career, lifestyle which occupy greater personal responsibility in order to achieve success in their chosen professional career or in whatever segment. This young generation needs a higher education background, which will give them the adequate knowledge, skills, attitude, and qualities to lessen the challenges during their professional development.

Related to these challenges, the computer industry is one of the most powerful sectors and it is becoming reality in different areas. With this, the introduction to the entrepreneurship education in the non - business curriculum has a huge effect on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship intentions of the young Omani workforce. Throughout the history,

the entrepreneurship education has driven the different stages of innovation and technological advantages. Up to these times, entrepreneurship has become a commonly taught subject in different colleges offering a major field of academic programs in entrepreneurship beside traditional business and management courses. However, the entrepreneurship education for non-business curriculum is not fully integrated. The current situation has tended to increase the attention to the potential roles of entrepreneurs for non-business graduates. Therefore, the integration of entrepreneurship education for non-business studies will significantly increase the ability of the students lifelong and desire to innovate.

In this context, this study aims to explore and examine, what are the determining factors that influence technical students in choosing entrepreneurship as a career. Are the course modules offered adequate in their education programs to support the student's interest to become an entrepreneur? What are the types of training skills needed to become a successful entrepreneur?

1.2 Problem Statement

The Oman Government has recently showcased an increasing interest in the development and support of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME). The initiative is in compliance with His Majesty's directive to support and develop SME as "the future engines for the growth of Oman's economy". A new Royal Decree was issued on the 31st of May 2013 setting up a separate entity in charge of SME - the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises.^[6] Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education, which is the responsible agency in providing guidelines to all higher education in developing Omani graduate students not only to be competitive workforces but also to be entrepreneurs to contribute to the Oman Vision 2020 goal. In order to accomplish this mission, private and public university need to develop and motivate these future workforces to be entrepreneurs.^[7]

Despite the said government efforts, there is still a growing concern for non-business students who do not have sufficient entrepreneurial skills to venture in business. There are some remarks that these non-business students have narrow business perspectives and foresee themselves as job seekers and not job creators. The problem with a non-business degree is that the curriculum focuses in technical lectures instead of complementing with business lectures in order to stimulate business creation during the course.

Should this traditional approach persists, then the future engines for the growth of Oman's economy goal may be difficult to achieve. Therefore, the need arises to investigate why, despite the government efforts, Omani technical graduates are still into job seeking and not job creation. This indicates the need for colleges and universities to integrate entrepreneurship subjects to non-business students. It is this thrust that this study was conducted.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to assess the level of interest among technical students in Gulf College in learning entrepreneurship and choosing entrepreneurship as their future career. This study will concentrate on the variability of interest in entrepreneurship with specific emphasis on how this venture can be a challenge to respondents. This research sought to recommend an appropriate set of undergraduate as introductory entrepreneurship concentration related to non-business student's level of interest. They are as follows:

1. To examine the factors that may influence these non-business students in choosing entrepreneurship as their career.
2. To investigate the level of non-business student's interest in entrepreneurship education.
3. To identify an appropriate set of undergraduate courses to be introduced to the non-business students of Gulf College for an entrepreneurship concentration.

1.4 Scope and limitation of the Study

The study focuses to technical students who are enrolled in the non-business studies such as computer science, computing science, mobile computing, and information system. The interest of technical undergraduates in engaging entrepreneurship education would be derived from students' perceptions towards entrepreneurship education. A survey sample will be given to technical undergraduates of Gulf College.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The result of the study would provide more understanding to educators on how entrepreneurship education should be integrated into the non business studies. The results can be utilized by educators when designing programs to suit different needs and demands of the non-business students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This provides a background in entrepreneurship research previously done and findings that lead to the existence of this study.

2.2 Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneur Definition

Entrepreneurship is the development of a business from the ground up — coming up with an idea and turning it into a profitable business. Entrepreneurship is the journey of opportunity exploration and risk management to create value for profit and/or social good.^[4] While the definition of entrepreneurship is simple, but its execution is much more difficult. Entrepreneurship can be a minefield of new and hard-to-navigate experiences, from managing employees to defining a vision for the company.

The term entrepreneur is defined as an individual who rather than working an employee, runs a small business, and assumes all the risk and reward of a given venture, idea, or good or service offered for sale. The entrepreneur is commonly seen as a business leader and innovator of new ideas and business processes.^[8] Entrepreneurs play a role in the economy in any part of the world. These people have the skills and initiatives necessary to take new ideas, develop it, and make the right decision to make the idea profitable.

2.3 Entrepreneurship Education in Oman

Entrepreneurship education represents a special area of innovative new approach not only in Oman but also in the Arab countries. Entrepreneurship education has received increased attention in Oman. The Oman government has adopted certain steps in promoting entrepreneurship education. It is identified that entrepreneurship will help to accelerate the rate of economic growth in Oman.

In today's economic climate, many might expect that life is to be extremely difficult for those people with a more entrepreneurial spirit. Entrepreneurship has a more critical role in any country since it can be an engine of economic progress, job creation, and social adjustment. Entrepreneurship is the new revolution and it is about continual creativity and innovation. It is a major engine driving in many nations' economic growth, innovation and competitiveness.^[12]

One of the government strategies in promoting the culture of entrepreneurship by the HEIs, which was also approved by the The Education Council. By the next academic year 2015-2016, Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) issued a circular on the integration of entrepreneurial skills in education at all HEIs through a course that underpins the entrepreneurial mindset. One of the key recommendations of the SME Development Symposium at Seih al Shamikhat on January 2013 was to introduce a course and student activities in entrepreneurship. The MoHE was tasked to undertake and coordinate the execution of this decision through a committee represented by the higher education sector in the country.^[14]

In addition, MoHE, which has numerous plans through the collaboration of NGOs and educational institutions to stimulate entrepreneurial activities and continuously concerned to promote a culture of entrepreneurship among the college graduates to meet of creating an entrepreneurial and innovative society in Oman. As a result, many colleges in the Sultanate have adopted programs focusing on entrepreneurship education to improve the quality of education. Furthermore, many initiatives have been launched nationally to encourage young people to take up independent business options through an educational institution, private and government SME funding organization, and believes that through these different stakeholder collaborations will provide job creation opportunities particularly for the young Omani workforce. The government encouraged men and women to equally participate in the process of economic development of the Sultanate.^[17]

However, many studies cited that many recent college graduates lack practical skills and need extra training to obtain a job. Another challenge has to do with employability. The Gulf Countries have recognized the importance of education and skills.^[5] In an effort to address this issue, higher education sector in Oman has grown and made a significant development to improve the education infrastructure, increased education opportunities to ensure the quality focusing on the graduate employability. The spread of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of all types, diversified programs and establishment of the Quality Assurance Council is a testimony to the importance given by the nation to ensure the quality of higher education that the needs of the 21st century are met. Nevertheless, the fundamental misalignment of what the industry needs still remain. Employers struggle to find the skills they need, especially at entry level. Young people in schools, colleges and universities are unclear about how and why they should enter the job market and build a long-term career.

As a result, Gulf College has recognized the importance of education and skills, and responded to the vision of the Sultanate by collaborating with the NGOs, SME Funding Agencies encourage the students to participate in promoting the culture of entrepreneurship. Recently, Gulf College had signed a mutual understanding with the AL Naama Development Fund. With this agreement, different activities such workshop, games, exercises about entrepreneurship will be conducted for all students of different disciplines. In addition, advance course on Entrepreneurship will be introduced and awareness of financial support for students that led to campus business initiatives. The Gulf College management recognized the key role of entrepreneurs will drive for economic growth, and therefore aimed to develop the undergraduates not only to be competitive but to go for self-employment. Omani entrepreneurs are visions to be a real strength of Oman economy.

Furthermore, like other colleges and universities, Gulf College is also working collaboratively with the The Research Council (TRC) in promoting entrepreneurship through research where Omani students can invest their ideas, knowledges and skill to come up with a product or services through TRC-Faculty Mentored Undergraduate Research Award Program (FURAP) assistance. With this, Gulf College Omani students with different disciplines had started joining and working collaboratively to come up with a research related to business creation. This is one way how students can start developing their business ideas while studying.

Another non-profit organization called “Injaz Oman” which means “My Company” in English, inspires and trains students to join the country’s private sector. There are volunteers from Oman private sector visit high school and colleges, who give workshop to discuss the skills needed by the industry and aim to create a new generation of Omani entrepreneurs.^[2] Realigning these needs and expectation will require much closer collaboration between all the players and concrete initiatives to ensure that the coming new generation through school/colleges is equipped and motivated to compete in the private sector.

2.4. Entrepreneurial Approach and Motivation

Traditionally, motivation has been studied in order to answer three kinds of questions; (1) What activates a person?; (2) What makes him/her choose one venture over another?; (3) Why do different people respond differently to the same stimuli? These questions, give rise to three important aspects of motivation: activation, selection-direction, and preparedness of response.^[16]

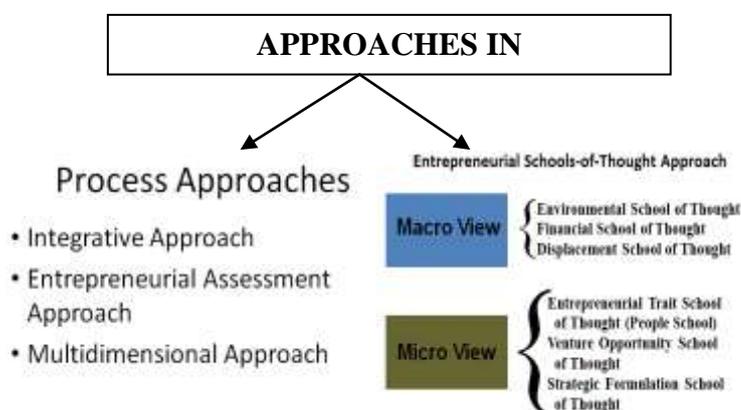


Figure 1: Entrepreneurship Approaches

Figure 1 shows two specific entrepreneurial approaches: macro and micro views. There are three schools of thought in each view which can be a foundation for entrepreneurial theory. The macro view of entrepreneurship is a view which

presents a broad selection of factors relating to success or failure in existing entrepreneurial businesses in the external locus of control. It also includes external processes that are beyond the control of the individual entrepreneur and can be broken down into three subcategories: the environmental school of thought, the financial/capital school of thought, and the displacement school of thought. Under the environmental, this school deals with external factors that affect the lifestyle of a potential entrepreneur. These could be positive or negative forces in the modelling of entrepreneurial desires. The financial/capital school of thought that is based on the capital-seeking process. The search for start-up and growth capital is the complete focus because securing venture capital is vital to an entrepreneur's development. The displacement school of thought concentrates on the negative side of the existence of the group, where someone can feel out of place or be displaced from the group. It argues that a group can slow a person's development, either bringing it to a halt or removing specific factors vital to the individual for them to advance.^[9]

The micro view examines the factors that are specific to entrepreneurship and are part of internal locus of control. The potential entrepreneur has the ability to direct or adjust the outcome of each major influence. This includes the entrepreneurial trait school of thought, the venture opportunity school of thought, the strategic formulation school of thought. The entrepreneurial trait school of thought focuses on researches about successful entrepreneurs and recognizing similar traits and characteristic that if it copied could increase success opportunities for the emulators. The venture opportunity focuses on opportunity aspect of venture development and the interest areas which contain the idea sources, the development of concepts, and the importance of venture opportunities while the strategic formulation school of thought emphasizes the planning process in successful venture development. The effective venture formations are constructed by unique markets, unique people, unique products, or unique resources in this school of thought. The process approach discussed three models. The integrative approach, entrepreneurial assessment approach, and multidimensional approach.

2.5 Relevance Studies of Entrepreneurship Education for Technical Studies

In order to achieve an international standard in higher education, all HEIs have adopted - imported curriculum, recruited international / expatriate faculty and English as a medium of instruction. These efforts will help to achieve the required quality of the 21st century education which will develop the graduates in terms of knowledge acquisition, skills, and attitude. As an evidence, some studies revealed that there are Omani technical graduates who became an entrepreneur. One of these is the founder of oil and gas sector service company wherein one of his objectives is to innovate their way out of the Oman employment crisis.^[13]

Therefore, understanding the importance of entrepreneurs in the development of the economy in the Sultanate of Oman, is an effort that need to nurture the culture of entrepreneurship in all ways since the government is concerned to promote an enterprise culture among the college students to meet the objectives of creating innovative and entrepreneurial society.

Moreover, the private sector of the Sultanate of Oman has also provided many programs to boost entrepreneurship and the Small Medium Enterprises such as Youth Projects Devopment Scheme, Intilaqa Program, Oman.^[1] This program provides an enterprise fund to provide capital and on-going support for SMEs in Omani. Furthermore, banks in Oman such Bank Muscat, Bank Sohar, HSBC Bank, and national Bank of Oman are providing loans to the aspiring entrepreneurs.^[3]

Traditionally, many colleges and universities have not prepared students for self-employment as a career option instead they are prepared to be job seekers. Undergraduate students, whether technical or business students are the future of the nation's economy and it is really important to focus on the factors that might influence these young generations to establish their own businesses after graduation. Therefore, entrepreneurship education is a critical aspect that colleges or universities have to pay attention into it. In addition, the government agencies should continue to provide valuable initiatives to support entrepreneurship education of the country.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The literature review indicates that there is a need to explore and further extend the research on non-business students' perceptions towards entrepreneurship education as their career options. This chapter will present the theoretical framework and discuss the data sampling procedures and instruments for collecting data and analysis of data.

A qualitative research methodology using a survey questionnaire has been used to collect the data in this study. A questionnaire is a means of collecting information from a wider sample than can be reached by personal interview. The

questionnaire used has been described and carefully designed to obtain the participants' perceptions of a defined area of interest and non-threatening environment. [15]

3.2 Theoretical Framework design

There are many literatures on entrepreneurship education tends to argue that a different learning strategies and environment are required to support the study of entrepreneurship within a college setting, [10] The attitudes and behavior of both technical and business graduates are influenced by a number of factors such as environmental, personal intention, and motivations. Many researchers have found the entrepreneurship education had a significant impact on the non-business students and therefore enhancing these will also have a positive impact on the technical students to choose entrepreneurship as their career after graduation.

The designed theoretical framework in figure 2 is to construct a conceptual model for evaluating the influencing factors such as environment, motivation, personal intention, the relevancy of subjects that being taught that will support the students to choose entrepreneurship as their career. The designed model has a certain extent to understand the importance of specific variables on entrepreneurship interest of students. [11]

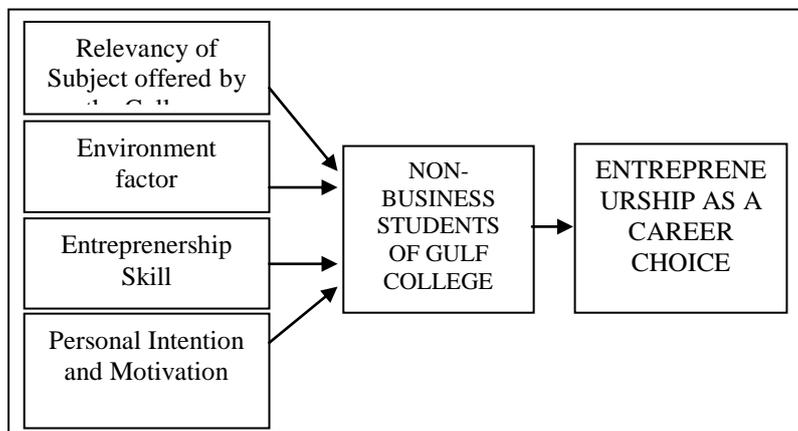


Figure 2. The Input-Process-Output (IPO) Theoretical Framework for Entrepreneurship as a Career Option.

3.3 Sampling procedure

Undergraduate non-business students from the Faculty of Computiciencies of Gulf College were chosen as the respondent of this study, namely: Computing Science, Mobile Computing, Computer Science, and Information System.

Among the four courses, only the Information System has an introduction to business concept, but not fully integrated. A survey of students was conducted to assist in developing a potential entrepreneurship course in Gulf College. Data were gathered through a questionnaire, which comprised of 10 major questions with an additional sub question. The questionnaire will be judged by the students on a 5-Likert scale, where a scale value of one being Strongly Disagree and five being Strongly Agree. The survey was distributed and completed at the beginning of the scheduled classes of Level 5 and Level 6 undergraduates. The distributed questionnaire has a cover letter that explained the purpose and importance of the survey, and provided an assurance that all responses will be strictly confidential.

A statistical method was applied in order to translate the collected data into a significant result. The result would serve as the essential input for Gulf College to design a more effective learning of Entrepreneurship.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The questionnaire was distributed to the non-business undergraduates in Gulf College. An interview was conducted specifically to the respondents who owned a business. In total, there were 200 respondents who completed the questionnaires. The data were gathered during the 2nd Semester of AY 2014-2015.

This chapter presented the data analysis and the data collected that can be very useful to educators. The detailed findings are presented in three tables, which composed of the summary of the respondents' demographic profile, the distribution of students by course, and students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a career choice.

A total of 200 respondents completed the distributed questionnaire from the Faculty of Computing Sciences of different courses.

Table 1. A: Demographic Profile

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Male	147	73.5%
Female	53	26.5%
Total	200	100.0%

Table 1.B

Age bracket	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
18-25	63	31.5%
26-33	65	32.5%
34-40	47	23.5%
41-above	25	12.5%
Total	200	100.0%

Table 1.A shows the demographic file of students were mostly of the respondents were male, comprising of 73.5 percent and female is only 26.5 percent. In Table 1.B shows the age bracket which indicates 32.5 percent of the respondents are all working age ranging from 26-33; followed by full time students with 31.5 percent with the age bracket of 18-25; 23.5 percent of the age ranging from 34-40, and 41 and above which only 12.5 percent of the total respondents.

Table 2: Distribution of Students by Course

Courses	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Information System	88	44.0%
Computing Science	36	18.0%
Mobile Computing	35	17.5%
Computer Science	41	20.5%
Total	200	100.0%

Table 2 shows the number of distributions of the respondents where Information System got 44 percent; followed by a Computer Science course with 20.5 percent. Computing Science got 18.0 percent and Mobile Computing got 17.5 percent.

Among the four non-business course, Information System has a module that introduced a very basic concept in business, but none of them owned a business because of the financial aspect and lack of knowledge on how to run a business.

Table 3: Entrepreneur as Career Choice

Variable Description	Responses in Number	Responses in percentage (%)
After my graduation, I will be a full-time employee before establishing my own business.	42	21.0%
After my graduation, I want to be a manager for other people's company.	35	17.5%
After my graduation, I will be a full-time employee and at the same time running my own business in part time basis	37	18.5%
After my graduation, I will be running my own business immediately.	22	11.0%
I will be an entrepreneur in the future.	64	32.0%
Total	200	100.0%

Table 3 shows that all of the respondents have an intention to run their own businesses in their chosen time if they want to venture into the market. Thirty-two percent of the respondents had an intention to venture into business in the future, which indicates that non-business students have an interest also in business, but they need to get more knowledge, skills in a business so they will know how it will progress. Some of the respondents, which 18.5 percent want to run their own business while being a full time employee with the purpose of applying the knowledge and skill from the workplace in their own business. Thirty-five percent of the respondents want only to be a manager of the other's company and only 11 percent has a determination to run a business right after the graduation. Thirty seven percent of the respondents want to apply their experience and skill in their business while working with another company. It is not the only the business students have interest to venture, but also the technical students based on this result.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sets out to the level of entrepreneurial interest of the non-business students of Gulf College and also investigating the significance of entrepreneurship education, particularly in all higher education and identifying the programs that Omani government, as well as an SME funding institution for Omani entrepreneurs.

The findings emerged from this study indicates that a) all the respondents have an intention to venture into the business, b) the main factors that were a significant impact on student's entrepreneurial interest are money and social support, c) no entrepreneurship course for non-business studies, and d) technical undergraduates are merely focusing on the technical subjects. The basic business concept module offered to the information system students is a starting point, but need to explore further on how the business modules could be integrated into the curriculum to all non-business studies. Hence, the curriculum of the non-business students should be revised in order to meet the interest of the technical students and the demand of the Ministry of Higher Education directive on the implementation of Entrepreneurship across the nation's colleges and universities.

There are numerous plans and support from Oman government and private sectors to educate Omani students on the significance of entrepreneurship in the development of Oman economy. Therefore, it is recommended to develop a course which can be called technology entrepreneurship. This course will focus on identifying the entrepreneurial and strategic challenges faced by startups in a high-technology sectors of the economy and provides tools/frameworks to address entrepreneurship challenges. A review to identify the salient characteristics and issues of these sectors is the key strategies to turn the attention to understanding techniques for identifying and assessing entrepreneurial opportunities in these fields. In technology entrepreneurship will examine the different ways in which such opportunities can be resourced and how critical competencies for a high technology start-up are developed. Finally, it will also focus on the strategic challenges that entrepreneurial firms in these fields need to address which include evaluation modes of commercialization, engaging in dynamic strategies and shaping the rules in the technology sectors. The findings of the

study add substantially to the understanding of the tendency of non-business students toward entrepreneurship. However, this study is a basis for our further research on the creation of techno entrepreneurship course.

6. REFERENCES

- [1] Al Sadi, R. Belwal, R. and Al Badi, (2013), “*Woman entrepreneurship in the Al Batinah Region of Oman: An identification of the barriers*”, Journal of International Women’s Studies, Vol. 12 (3), pp.58-75.
- [2] Al Mamari, S. (2015) “*Non-profit inspires Omani students to venture into private sector*”, The National World, in press.
- [3] Ashrafi, R. and Murtaza, (2008), “*Use and impact of ICT on SMEs in Oman*”, Electronic Journal of Information Systems Evaluation, Vol. 11 (3).
- [4] Brooks, C., (2015), “*What is Entrepreneurship?*”, Business News Daily, Available at: <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/2642-entrepreneurship.html>
- [5] Cooper, W., (2015), “*How will the GCC close the skills gap?*”, EY: Building a better working World, in press.
- [6] Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP, “*The Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises: The Future Engines for the Growth of Oman's Economy*”, July 31, 2013, Available at: <http://omanlawblog.curtis.com/2013/07/the-public-authority-for-small-and.html>
- [7] Dickinson, E. (2013), “*Oman entrepreneurs work to solve problems of Omanisation*”, The National World, Available at: <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/oman-entrepreneurs-work-to-solve-problems-of-omanisationon>
- [8] Entrepreneur definition, Available at: <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/entrepreneur.asp>
- [9] Hisrich, R. D.&M. P. Peters (1989). “*Entrepreneurship: Starting, Developing and Managing a New Enterprise*”, Boston: BPI-Irwin.
- [10] Hodgettes R. and Kuratko D., (2004), *Entrepreneurship – Theory, Process, and Practice* 6th Edition, Thomson South Western.
- [11] Jarvis, Peter (1999). *The Practitioner-Researcher. Developing Theory of Practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- [12] Jone-Evans, Dylan Williams, William and Deacon, Jonathan (2000), “*Developing Entrepreneurial Graduates: An Action-learning Approach*”, Education and Training, Vol. 42, No. 4/5, pp 282-288.
- [13] Journal of educational and instructional studies in the world, May 2012, Volume: 2 Issue: 2 Article: 02 ISSN: 2146-7463.
- [14] Kamanpoori, H. (2015), “*Entrepreneurship course approved by the Educational Council*”, Oman Daily Observer, Available at: <http://omanobserver.om/entrepreneurship-course-approved-by-the-education-council/>
- [15] Mason, J. (2002) “*Qualitative researching*”, London, Sage.
- [16] Perwin, L. (2003), “*The Science of Personality*”, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [17] World Trade Organisation, “*Trade Policy Review: Oman Report*”, March 8, 2014, Available at: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/g295_e.pdf