

The Impediments Facing Community Engagement in Omani Educational Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

Prior to the vital role that social capital plays in accomplishing prosperity for any educational tertiary institution, it was emphasised in several countries' agendas, including the Sultanate of Oman. This study endeavours to explore the impediments facing the enhancement of the social capital in Omani educational tertiary institutions through the lens of community engagement. A case study method employing a purely qualitative approach was employed at one of the six public Colleges of Applied Sciences in Oman. Twelve academicians were purposively semi-structured interviewed. Performing the thematic analysis technique, the results revealed more than ten key impediments. Some implications to stakeholders were illustrated and several suggestions were provided for better performances in terms of this specific capital.

Keywords: impediments, social capital, community engagement, Omani educational tertiary institutions, CAS

1. Introduction

Within a remarkably short time, the sector of higher education in the Sultanate of Oman has experienced a dramatic growth (Carrol, Razvi, Goodliffe, & Al-Habsi, 2009) especially after the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) in 2001 by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said (Royal Decree No. 74/2001). Since then, the quality of tertiary educational institutions has been the focus (Lontok, Al-Ghassani, & Al-Saidi, 2013).

Accordingly, the process of quality assurance audit has been initiated in public institutions including the College of Applied Sciences-Nizwa (CAS-Nizwa). Since 2011, CAS-Nizwa has commenced the implementation of quality assurance to highlight the strategic issue of conducting research regarding attaining and sustaining quality in the educational and learning processes. CAS-Nizwa has always been supported and reinforced by the College administration to facilitate the achievement of quality in all aspects of the College- this quest for quality being considered as a vital goal of CAS-Nizwa's strategic plan (CAS Strategic Plan, 2010). Creating networks with industrial organizations in the Omani community is part of the College's endeavours in the pursuit to achieve quality via sustaining links with the community.

Social capital represents one of the four forms of capital of the Alignment of Transformation Model, which has been utilized internationally to explore the quality of any educational system including tertiary institutions (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008; Caldwell & Harris, 2008). As seen through the lens of the Alignment Model, social capital involves three broad categories: relationships with parent and other members in the community, networks with knowledge bodies nationally and internationally, and relationships with industrial organizations in the community.

It is, therefore, crucial to mention that this research aims at exploring the chief impediments that face the enhancement of community engagement (i.e. social capital) of the taught programs at CAS-Nizwa. Henceforth, this study seeks to fill the gap regarding this relevant issue of community engagement as it is one of very few studies conducted in the Omani context. At the same time, it enriches the knowledge literature regarding the impediments of enhancing the social capital in Omani educational tertiary institutions.

1.2 Background of the Study

This section is divided into four subsections. In the first subsection, the study is devoted to the review of tertiary education in the Sultanate of Oman. The second subsection illustrates the history of CAS-Nizwa. The third

subsection deals with CAS-Nizwa's engagement with industry. The fourth and final subsection examines the social capital of the Alignment Model.

1.2.1 Tertiary Education in the Sultanate of Oman

For most of the last century, Oman was secluded, remote, and undeveloped (Porcaro, 2014). Prior to 1970, there was no formal tertiary educational system (Carrol et al., 2014). Post 2007, after His Majesty Sultan Qabous came to power in Oman, the sector of higher education, like other sectors, witnessed substantial growth. This was evidenced by the launching of Sultan Qabous University (SQU) in 1986—it being the first university in the Sultanate of Oman (Porcaro, 2014). The mid 1990's observed a substantial growth in the private sector of tertiary education especially after their taking advantage of a policy initiated by the Omani government permitting local institutions to conjoin with well-reputed global affiliate universities as ways of offering overseas programmes for the attainment of degrees. In spite of the magnificent results of implementing such programs, the demand for tertiary education in the Omani context continues to be a challenge due to the prevailing culture of not fully regarding the private sector as an alternative option (Carrol et al., 2014). This challenge was underlined in the Razvi and Carroll study (2007) which considered that the diversity of educational programs was a real impediment because of the related quality assurance schemes which were as diverse as the programs themselves.

In 2006, the Omani Higher Education Quality Management System (OAC) Board commissioned an international consultant to commence a new system of getting the higher education system constantly analyzed to improve its performance from both the public and private sectors. Consequently, over 60 tertiary institutions were established to offer diploma and degree programmes. In fact, the majority of these were within the public sector, being licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education - for instance, the Colleges of Applied Sciences. Others came under the auspices of various other ministries: the Colleges of Technology were authorised by the Ministry of Manpower; the Nursing Institutes and the Institutes of Health Sciences were founded by the Ministry of Health; and the Military Technological College was established by the Ministry of Defence (Carrol et al., 2014; Lontok, 2013; OAC, 2012).

1.2.2 CAS-Nizwa

CAS-Nizwa is one of six public Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASEs) governed by the Omani Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). This educational tertiary institution was first founded in 1990 and progressed through several stages (Issa & Al-Dhahli, 2014). It started as an Intermediate Teacher Training College offering a diploma in teaching. In 1994-1995, the college was upgraded into a College of Education offering Bachelor Degrees in Education (B.Ed). When the College of Education had trained a sufficient number of teachers, to the point that no further need of B.Ed graduates was envisaged, the College was then converted into a College of Applied Sciences launching new degree routes. This conversion took place in the academic year 2005-2006. The conversion came as part of the MoHE's continuous endeavours to upgrade the offerings of the HEIs under its jurisdiction thus bringing them into line with the ever-changing demands and ever-rising standards required by the labour market. The conversion was also linked to the national aspiration of a diversified economy, an economy which is a guarantee of Oman's sustainable and non-oil dependent productivity in this new era of globalization (CAS-Nizwa, 2012).

CAS-Nizwa's vision and mission have compelled it to dedicate itself to advancing academic excellence among its students and staff. The college has offered lots of facilities to ensure its main vision which is *"to be the leading academic institution in Oman in the field of Applied Sciences"*. To be able to achieve this, CAS-Nizwa is seeking quality attainment to maintain a good reputation among the competing educational institutes. Therefore, CAS-Nizwa has conducted a Self-Study Project for the itself as this would help the it in evaluating and assessing policies, processes, activities, programmes, practices, services, etc, and the extent to which these were aligned with the its vision, mission and strategic goals (CAS Strategic Plan, 2010). This was followed by the issuing of an internal Decree establishing a Steering Committee and ten Sub-Committees. Nine of the Sub-Committees were each assigned the responsibility for one of the nine areas of the Quality Audit Scope as per the Quality Audit Manual which was provided by the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) (2012). CAS-Nizwa views the process of Quality Assurance not as something which is a once-off phenomenon and thus static in its nature, but rather as an on-going and open-ended process which endeavours on a continuous basis to design and define policies, curriculum, services, activities, and so forth and to implement these in the most practical and effective manner possible. In addition, the College continues to evaluate these policy areas within its remit and the processes whereby they are implemented (Issa & Al-Dhahli, 2014). In this, it has the aim of further improvement and upgrading so that quality and standards are constantly under surveillance. This ultimately leads to the betterment of the College's overall operation within a context of dynamism and

enthusiasm.

1.2.3 Industry Engagement at CAS-NIZWA

“CAS-Nizwa prides itself on the strong ties that have been established and maintained with industry and business as well as with the local community and other Higher Education Institutions” (CAS-Nizwa, 2011). The type of relationship between CAS-Nizwa with the industry and community stakeholders is reciprocal; *“the College benefits from the services provided by those stakeholders who can, in return, make use of the College’s premises and services”* (CAS-Nizwa, 2011). As stated under CAS’ values, industry and community engagement are lined up with CAS’ Mission of seeking to bring forth graduates who will contribute to Oman’s economy and society and with the College’s commitment to stakeholders in the wider community.

In addition, it has been included as a key strategic goal underpinning the College’s commitment to building strategic partnerships through creating and maintaining reciprocal relationships with the public and private sectors and the local community. The College has recently established the Public Relations Department which works alongside the Training and Career Guidance Centre (TCGC) which together, are responsible for industry and community engagement planning and management (CAS Strategic Plan, 2010). Moreover, CAS-Nizwa’s objectives are steered towards enhancing engagement with other HEIs and accrediting bodies by seeking excellence through partnership and accreditation.

1.2.4 Social Capital

Social capital is one of the four forms of capital that are used as indicators of quality within the context of the Alignment Model which offers researchers in the international context a unified and flexible framework (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008; Caldwell & Harris 2008). The concept of social capital was utilized by Caldwell and Harris (2008) to indicate the *‘strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school’* (p.59). Hence, social capital is defined as all the relationships with all community members who have mutual support and trust in the educational institution (Caldwell, 2008; Harris, 2010; Jamil et al., 2010; Issa, Jamil, & Shakir, 2013; Issa & Jamil, 2014).

The concept of social capital was viewed by Fukuyama (1995, p. 10) as that of being people’s ability *‘to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations’*. Putnam (2000) asserted that the concept of social capital was first used in the context of school education in 1916. Malloch (2003) identified the social elements of social capital that contribute to innovations and productivity as a result of knowledge sharing. Adger (2003) indicated that social capital involves relations of trust and exchange. Hence, social capital, according to Adger (2003), grants a function to civil society and encourages collective action through different patterns of societal interaction. Accordingly, there are three broad categories for the different patterns of relationships that social capital implies: relationships with parents and other members of the local community; networking with other educational organisations; and relationships with business, agencies and organisations (Caldwell, 2008).

Several countries have highlighted in their agendas the vital role that social capital plays in accomplishing prosperity for any institution or organisation such as are found in Australia, England, The US and Finland. This is confirmed in the findings of the international project that was carried out in six countries: Australia (Victoria), China (Chongqing), England, Finland (Tampere), United States, and Wales (Caldwell, 2008; Harris, 2010) and now being replicated in another four countries from the Asia-Pacific region: Australia (Queensland), Hong Kong, Malaysia, and South Korea (Harris, 2010; Jamil et al., 2010; Issa, Jamil, & Shakir, 2013; Issa & Jamil, 2014).

The third category of social capital is in the founding of a kind of partnership with business, agencies and organisations. Good examples shown in the literature are the links between specialist schools in England and specialised organisations whose aim is in providing the necessary practical support, knowledge and financial support. Another example was schools in the US that have partnerships with other organisations such as The Young Women’s Leadership School in New York whose aim is to provide staff expertise, time and financial donations (Caldwell, 2008; Issa, Jamil, & Shakir, 2013; Issa & Jamil, 2014). For the purpose of this study, social capital in its three categories represented by community engagement is the focus, as Cas-Nizwa commenced the initiation and enhancement of such relations with industry through the major programmes it offers: Communication Studies, International Business Studies, and Design (Issa & Al-Dhahli, 2014). As a result some impediments are facing the enhancement process; these were explored via this study and exhibited in detail in the discussion section.

1.2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on the Invitational Educational Theory (Purkey, 2011) which is an educational theory

tackling practices' issues; this being applicable to practitioners and counsellors (Smith, 2006). Invitational theory was established by William W. Purkey to deal with the totality of the educational setting: social, physical, cognitive, spiritual, and emotional (Purkey & Schimdt, 1996; Purkey & Novak, 1996). In addition to its arising as a response to the current educational practices, the Invitational Theoretical Model was devised as an approach for modifying forms of collaboration and communication between educational institutes (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Schmidt, 1996) as this theory aims at making institutes the most inviting spots through emphasising the importance of quality processes including teaching and learning (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Furthermore, it maintains that the entire educational environment echoes and accentuates the essence of advantages that can be offered to humankind via education.

Invitational Educational Theory highlights the five Ps which are people, places, policies, programs, and processes, all of which facilitate or impede success (Purkey, 1999; Purkey & Novak, 1996). Preferably, the five environmental areas of people, places, policies, programs and processes ought to be very inviting in order to generate a world where individuals are pleasantly called to be cultivated intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually in order to accomplish their full potentials in different sectors of worthy endeavour (IAIE, 2011). The Invitational Theory is grounded on four main principles. Undoubtedly, when individuals learn only the processes of the Invitational Theory and not its principles, they can easily despoil it. Therefore, it is essential to clarify its principles: Optimism, Respect, Trust, and Intentionality.

Reviewing literature exhibits that the Invitational Theory has gradually paved its way into different sectors such as: management, health services, and education in general at different stages. Furthermore, it is viewed as a theory of practice offering actual, concrete, secure and fruitful ways to realize the set objectives (Cloer & Alexander, 1992). Stanley, Juhnke, and Purkey (2004) highlighted the fact that the Invitational Theory is utilised to create and maintain safe and successful institutes via addressing the total culture of the educational environment.

2. Method

The current study was an exploratory case study as it endeavoured to shed light on a single case study of a phenomenon, which could be an individual or institution (Gillham, 2000). A case study can use questionnaires, observations, interviews, diaries, and historical documents (Gillett, 2011). This study employed a pure qualitative approach. In fact, qualitative sampling is a process of selecting a small number of individuals to be interviewed to contribute to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon (Best & Kahn, 2006). Thus, seeking to explore the main impediments facing community engagement in CAS-Nizwa required an in-depth study.

2.1 Methodology Subsections

This section of the study is devoted to explain about (a) respondents of the study (b) sampling procedures (c) sample size and (d) the instrument used to collect data as well as data analysis techniques.

2.2 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were defined as a group of individuals or organisations that interested the researcher during the investigative process (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001; Collis & Hussey, 2003). This study's respondents were represented by 11 heads and senior academic staff of the top management of the different programs offered at CAS-Nizwa.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

Accordingly, this study employed a purposive sampling technique as the selection depended on the researcher's experience and knowledge of the individuals being sampled in addition to the fact that the participants were already in a specific context when conducting the research (Sekaran, 2009). Thus, all the heads and senior academic staff of the top management at CAS-Nizwa were addressed during the process of collecting the qualitative data needed to meet the ends of this study and attain its objective.

2.3.1 Sample Size

In fact, 11 heads and senior academic staff at CAS-Nizwa were asked about the main impediments in the way of strengthening the social capital of the different educational programs offered at CAS-Nizwa: Communication Studies, International Business Studies, Design, English Department, and General Requirements.

2.3.2 Instrumentation and Data Analysis

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were audio recorded by the researcher during the interview sessions of 11 heads and senior staff of the top management and the heads of the various programs offered at CAS-Nizwa.

The study's instrument was tested for its validity and reliability. The data collection took more than two weeks. Next, analysing and interpreting the interviews was done by the researcher herself employing the thematic technique (Cresswell, 2003). The essence of thematic analysis is the content of the speech, and hence attention should be drawn towards it (Riessman, 2004). Thematic analysis was identified by Howitt and Cramer (2007) as "*one of the most commonly used methods of qualitative analysis*". In this respect, Braun and Clarke (2006) described the researcher's job as being the identification of a limited number of themes. To ensure getting an insightful qualitative analysis, it was extremely important that the researcher should be very familiar with the data in all its stages of conducting the interviews and transcribing as well as in the coding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2007). Therefore, and for the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted the interviews herself and did the transcription and coding procedures.

Therefore, the 11 interviewees were asked about the impediments that they encounter in their efforts at enhancing the social capital from the perspective of its three broad categories: relations with parents, relations with other knowledge bodies, and relations with industry including business agencies and entrepreneurs. Accordingly, the main and key impediments were revealed.

3. Results

As a result of employing the thematic technique, more than ten key impediments were revealed; some of these mirrored similar results of previous studies in different parts of the world. Table 1 below summarized the key impediments in enhancing the social capital:

Table 1. Summary of the key impediments in enhancing the social capital

No.	Impediments to social capital
1.	Lack of personnel / links with the industry
2.	Lack of belief on the ministry level / Stakeholders' attitudes
3.	Workloads and distraction
4.	Lack of time
5.	Lack of Training in industrial sites
6.	Lack of awareness about CASs
7.	Lack of Parents' and industry's involvement
8.	Bureaucracy and centralization
9.	Quantity and quality of graduates and new intakes
10.	Availability of job opportunities for CAS graduates
11.	Lack of practical skills in curriculum
12.	Location
13.	Shortage of qualified staff

The first key impediment was "*the lack of professional personnel*" who are responsible for creating the links with industry; as was stated by one of the interviewees - "*Lack of personnel who co-ordinate between the College and industry*". Likewise, another interviewee voiced the same concern - "*There are links among the academics of CAS but no links with industry*". Actually, one of the interviewees clearly indicated that this might be due to the lack of confidence on the part of stakeholders at the ministry level as explained by one of the interviewees:

"To some extent, I agree that people at the ministry level might not be aware of the importance of creating links with industry. There should be some persons assigned from the same field to be responsible for this and be asked about the achievements in this regard".

Similarly, another interviewee illustrated that it is the stakeholders' attitudes regarding creating links with the industry—as illustrated in the below quotes:

"Stakeholders are not convinced of the need to start co-operation between the college and

industry and the community.”

Another interviewee expounded a similar idea with regard to the stakeholders concerns:

“Lack of appreciation, at the ministry, level towards teachers who initiate activities to involve the community in the College’s plans and policies.”

However, another interviewee disagreed clarifying that:

“Actually, in all the meetings, this issue is highlighted as one of the most important concerns because part of what we are doing is to train our students for entry into industry. So, industry is very important to the department as partners. Maybe there is no down-to-earth practice or implementation or efforts in this regard but for the level of belief it is available.”

This interviewee even furthered that:

“We are still in the phase of belief but we need to step outside this stage and try to build this kind of relationship. The best thing to do is to assign someone to do this work. There is the Career Guidance Centre; however, I can tell from the results that nothing has been done. I think that the actual work is to get the students places to work through personal relations and phone calls but there are no annual plans. Why haven’t they achieve anything yet? This could be an impediment”.

Workload and distraction was highlighted as another key impediment by some interviewees - as in the following:

“Not very clear who should do things. So, people come here and they have an essential job to do. However, you will find yourself doing other tasks and duties. Hence, lots of workloads have been distractive in the way of focusing on the essential things. So, there is no systematic and clear procedure.”

Similarly, another interviewee stated his views in this regard—as per the following:

“The workloads being the cause of distraction from tackling the many issues would be one of the reasons. We have tried to support our students on a personal basis rather than on a systematic and operational planning for the students in order to follow a certain criteria of training or being connected with the external social capital and vice versa.”

Furthermore, lack of time was accentuated by some interviewees as one of the main impediments especially with the teaching and administration workloads. One of the interviewees described this as follows:

“Time was the main impediment; the sudden change of the Colleges from Colleges of Education to Colleges of Applied Sciences in 2005 caused them to spend most of their time establishing the infrastructure for running the new programs, there being no time remaining to plan for strengthening the social capital.”

However, there were some other interviewees with an opposing opinion considering that time is not a main constraint for the academic world—this is exemplified in the following lines by one of the interviewees:

“Time is not a constraint especially in the communication studies for example when working in the media because people are used to working for 24 hours.”

Likewise, another interviewee clearly stated that time is not an impediment:

“For academics, time is not a constraint because we can specify one or two hours per day for the College work.”

Moreover, “Lack of training on industrial sites” was pointed out as a main impediment in enhancing the students’ social capital - as explained by the following:

“It is difficult to find organizations to train our students. Industrial investment in Oman is being challenged to create sustainable co-operation between our educational system and the needs of industry. Big companies embark upon a project for a limited period of time, after which they leave the country.”

Nonetheless, integration with industry is urgently needed on a large scale bearing in mind that this issue is still new, as described by one of the interviewees *“the concept of engagement with industry is still in its nascent stages”*.

Additionally, bureaucracy and centralization were viewed by all the interviewees as a main impediment: this

sentiment was represented by such expressions as “*delay of plans and policies execution*” or “*Lack of co-ordination between colleges and stakeholders*” or “*Centralization of CASs makes it difficult for CASs to establish changes*” or lack of co-ordinating policy as in “*No clear policy on how to establish relations with the industry or how to offer opportunities to our students to engage with the outside community.*”

Also, the importance of the location of the College was underlined as another main impediment - as stated by the following interviewee:

“Nizwa College was built without first taking into consideration the nature of the programs. So we are dealing with a reality that we didn’t choose but we have to deal with it. Actually, this issue affects a lot concerning what we can do with the College’s surroundings.”

Similarly, another interviewee clarified that location is a main impediment to the enhancement of engagement with industry—his words are as follows “*Locations of CASs are very far from industry locations*”. Also, the theme of location was underlined by another interviewee for its relevance to delivering effective programs:

“The main industrial corporations are from the College. Industry in Oman consists of branches of bigger organizations from outside of Oman which makes communication between the College and industry very difficult.”

Another main impediment was raised by most of the interviewees regarding the quantity issue of new intakes and neglecting the quality part; this is stated in the following:

“Quality of graduates and intakes are the most problematic of issues because not all intakes have the passion to study and to gain knowledge as they are not interested in studying. There is social need in society involving the obtaining of a higher educational certificate for self-esteem and prestige purposes.”

In the same regard, another interviewee went even further by suggesting that the problem lies in the increase in the new intakes:

“The society is putting pressure on the educational institutions to receive and accept more students for the obtaining of a higher certificate. If we refuse to accept this increasing number of new intakes on the basis of low market requirement related to the eventual qualifications of the graduates, we will come under the censure of society. Contrariwise, if we accept an increase in the intake, without taking into consideration that jobs may not be available for them we will be likewise censured by society. Hence, it is the education institute that is blamed and asked to stop the programs. The Ministry is under pressure to accept more students. Each year there is an increased intake of about 10%. However, this intake is out of kilter with market requirements. The problem is not in the programs themselves but rather in the number of graduates which exceed market needs. In the Omani context, there is a need to adjust downwards the number of people going for the general diploma. There is a difference between the capacity of all the higher education institutions and what the private sector and governmental sector can offer in the way of employment for those graduates. Let’s say that 70,000 obtain this graduate diploma whereas only 25,000 job opportunities are available; yet their insistence on receiving more students and the Ministry’s positive response to this demand, creates a problem in society. The proof is published in today’s newspaper (the graduates cannot find jobs so the problem is about the program itself).”

As a result of the new intakes, another key impediment occurred regarding providing job opportunities for the large number of graduates as their number does not match the job market. See the following:

“CAS’ majors are not popular in the job market. Less chances for employment.”

In fact, one of the interviewees confirmed that the majority of the new intakes are females - as in the following:

“Female intakes are more in number than males. This creates difficulty in send students to industry due to the impediment of finding culturally suitable places for training.”

As a result, there is a lack of understanding regarding the main role of the educational institution whether it is social or educational or both at the same time. See the following quote:

“Hence, the main problem is that: Should the program play an educational role and a social one or just one of them? Hence, there is a misunderstanding that the program’s

input does not meet the market's output. Actually, these are two contradictory roles: a social role to open the doors and receive but after not finding a job the accusations start. In fact, all the well-reputed and prestigious institutes only take the interested students with skills and talents. Besides, there should be an entry exam but stakeholders refuse that because it will lead to a limiting of the number of new intakes. So the problem lies in the quantity and not in the quality of the delivered program."

Thus, another impediment was noticed in the "Misunderstanding and confusion on the role of the department regarding job opportunities".

"As an educational institution, our main role is to disseminate knowledge and not to guarantee jobs for our graduates. We need to make sure that this kind of knowledge is needed in the job market. In Oman, people point at educational institutions and blame them for not getting jobs for their graduates. The market in Oman is still young. As a program provider, the solution is not to close the program. There are very few job opportunities in the design market, so the best solution is to reduce the number of new intakes and continue with the program."

Furthermore, Lack of awareness of CASs, on the industrial and community levels was highlighted as another impediment in strengthening the social capital especially in terms of marketing for CASs and their majors. It was revealed that industry and community do not know much about the Colleges of Applied Sciences. On the other hand, there is a lack of parental and industrial involvement as emphasised by some interviewees:

"We expect parents' involvement and also industry's involvement. Some industrialists feel that there is a difference between the education system and industry. They don't want to be involved in the education system although they welcome offering help. However, they don't want to be involved in the practical experience. They think that they shouldn't be involved when the academic environment is concerned. They accept to provide reviews and give feedback but not to go very often and get involved in such activities. The industrialists should come and accept our invitation to be members in certain suggested committees. Some might argue that parents should be involved and that it is the College's responsibility to produce the products after being given the raw materials. However, parents' feedback is needed during the process itself so as to improve on the delivering of the program. Not only that even the industry and other areas of society, as well as industry should be involved."

Curricula were described by the majority of the interviewees as having some problems. On the one hand, some years ago, the ministry, for the first time, outsourced the curriculum. The objective behind this was for determining the programs to be offered at CASes: This was elaborated on by one of the interviewees:

"I am aware that the first time this College was converted from the College of Education to the College of Applied Sciences, some experts from New Zealand were brought in and I heard that they conducted a kind of marketing study after which they advised the implementation of the four current programs. That's what we heard but the question is "how deep was that study?" It might have been a shallow one because we find that the expectations do not meet the needs of industry. Besides, it is very clear that the students cannot find jobs in the market. The actual number of students who manage to get a job contradicts the size industry's human resource intake needs."

On the other hand, another impediment in the same regard was revealed: It was the lack of practical skills in the curriculum; it being a solely theory-based curriculum. Finally, a minor impediment in enhancing the social capital was the shortage of qualified staff. It was averred that the College was not taking the quality issue into account when recruiting its staff:

"The College is hiring sufficient numbers of staff, but not necessarily qualified staff. There is no clear system of assessing the qualities needed for specific academic positions."

4. Discussion

This section discusses the results and entails the novelty of the current study for using social capital in its three broad categories from the standpoint of the impediments encountered. In terms of links with industry, the lack of professional personnel is highlighted as a key impediment. This finding indicates that this impediment is due to

the absence of a systematic policy that governs the relationship between the College's educational system and industry. The attempts to establish this kind of relationship have only been done on the basis of individual initiatives that are not documented. As a result, tracking the established relationships with industry is not an easy task since there is no available database in this regard. Hence, new initiatives seeking relationships with industry have to start by building the links from the outset. Thus, this process is consuming in terms of time and effort from the standpoint of systems and human resources. Indeed, this finding is not in line with previous literature as published studies acknowledge very strong links with the industrial sector such as the international study conducted by Caldwell and Harris (2008) or as in the Malaysia case as reported by Issa (2013) where very strong links have been founded and sustained with industry to the extent that there is an assigned deputy dean for each school or faculty who is responsible for links with the industry.

In terms of stakeholders' attitudes, it is revealed that the lack of confidence at ministry level constitutes a main impediment in enhancing the social capital of the educational programs. Hence, bureaucracy and centralization constitute key impediments in enhancing the social capital. Indeed, the decision makers believe that the tertiary educational institutes are supposed to offer the theoretical knowledge of the programs. However, the responsibility for the development of the students' training skills lies on the students themselves. Nonetheless, the stakeholders' attitudes are slowly changing. Thus, an important issue to be highlighted is that the change is happening now but it is very slow.

The other key impediments are workloads and lack of time. In fact, it is revealed teaching and administrative workloads make another burden for the academic staff. Of course, this leads to the delay in building the links with industry as this process requires the dedication of some time for this purpose. Furthermore, it is exposed that burdening some staff with many tasks really leads to distracting those particular staff members' attention from concentrating and focusing on the given task. Unsurprisingly, this finding echoes the findings published in previous literature, such as the international study by Caldwell and Harris (2008) or the case of Malaysian tertiary institutions (Issa, 2013; Issa, Jamil, & Shakir, 2013; Issa & Jamil, 2014). In fact, the published research highlights this key impediment in strengthening the social capital especially in terms of establishing the necessary links, whether with industry on the one hand and with other knowledge bodies on the other hand.

Moreover, lack of training opportunities for the students in industrial sites, is another serious impediment to enhancing the social capital. It is stated that students' training is not credited and therefore, students are not encouraged to go and search for training opportunities. In addition, the College is not providing enough training opportunities for students since the relationship with industry is not strongly established. Although, the College has established the Training and Career Guidance Centre (TCGC), which is charged with strengthening the links between the colleges, employers and the job market, this Centre is understaffed and with no industry contacts database to work with. As a consequence, maintaining contacts with the private and public sectors to assist graduates in finding suitable training opportunities is very slow and lacks a systematic policy. This finding contradicts the findings of previous studies where great philanthropic efforts were recorded such as in the US example where some schools have developed partnerships with local and international organizations - for instance, the partnerships of Young Women's Leadership School in Manhattan with Mercedes-Benz and the New York Academy of Medicine (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

The impediment, regarding the lack of awareness of CASes and their programs, results in industry and community members not knowing much about the Colleges of Applied Sciences. Therefore, the new strategic plan of the Colleges is directed towards focusing on Marketing for the Colleges. For quite some time, there was no marketing for the Colleges and their programs with the result that the community and industry had not heard about the CASs. People and other institutions doubt the College's intentions. Henceforth, there is a problem of trust between the community and the College. Besides, there is no consistent policy for the College's marketing campaigns, and whatever marketing initiatives there may be, these are not documented properly. Some successful marketing campaigns have been organized in the College by individuals' initiatives that target different aspects of the community. However, those initiatives are not documented and shared with other CASes, that all work under the same system. This finding entails the second novelty of the study.

The aforementioned impediment necessarily leads to the raising of another impediment, which is the lack of parents' and industry's involvement. This is in stark contrast to the results of published international studies which show that members of various communities mentioned in those studies represent major components in the planning processes of educational institutions. There is no systematic planning for involving the community and industry in the College's activities and curriculum development. The little participation that was effected was carried out purely on an ad-hoc basis. Plans are written now by different stakeholders to organize co-operation between the CASes and the community. Besides, those plans are written without involving the relevant

stakeholders such as parents and industry. It has also been revealed that CASes previous and current engagement with the community is not documented and therefore their involvement with the outside community is not acknowledged. This has negatively affected the employment opportunities of CAS' graduates in the job market; and this being on top of the already existant problem which is that the number of graduates exceeds the number of available job vacancies in the Omani market. This is quite in contrast to the employment situation in some neighbouring countries such as the UAE. The bureaucracy and centralization policy makes it difficult to control the number of fresh intakes and to make an entry exam to test the skills of students who wish to join certain programs such as the Design program. Hence, the two aforementioned impediments regarding the quantity issue of graduates and employment prospects in the job markets are examined as the main issues in the study. In fact, the absence of such systematic planning, regarding the entry requirements or the job market's needs, is noted and acknowledged by the ministry's stakeholders. It is, therefore important that a number of committees be set up to formulate cohesive policies to overcome such impediments.

Moreover, lack of practical skills in the taught curriculum is highlighted as a key impediment in enhancing the social capital. This is due to the requirements of getting a job in the current market as skills have become a must for getting a job. However, the current curriculum lacks this important aspect. Hence, a suggestion is herein made to reform the current curriculum by forming a specialist committee to look into this matter. Furthermore, two minor impediments are documented in this study regarding the suitability of location of the College in relation to the industrial zones, and the shortage of qualified staff in the College. There is a consensus that the location of CAS-Nizwa paves the way for the offered programs attaining relevance, since the College is near Nizwa's industrial zone and the capital city, Muscat. However, this is in contrast to some other CASs, such as CAS-Ibri, where they are quite far from the locations of industrial zones. Also, another minor impediment is herein+ recorded by some interviewees who highlight the shortage of qualified academic staff. It is herein emphasised that quality is a critical issue that should be taken into consideration when the education system is the issue under consideration.

Regarding the human and financial resources, the College has a very good system in building the structure pyramid. However, the performance of some parts of this pyramid needs to be enhanced especially regarding the human and financial resources parts of it. CAS-Nizwa has a Centre for students' job orientation (TCGC). Yet, this Centre needs to be better staffed in order to achieve greater results as the only one person manning it cannot be reasonably expected to do all the work. Additionally, the research centre has not been set up for actual functionality. Plans are formed to recruit some more staff in the TCGC to enhance students' training opportunities and to improve the relationship between CASes and industry. However, the processes towards achieving the targeted plans are being implemented very slowly. A suggestion is herein made to assign some faculty members to do certain jobs related to industry. It would have to be made sure that those so assigned do not have heavy workloads. This can be achieved by reducing their teaching loads. Actually, faculty are not very enthusiastic about doing this due to their current teaching loads.

Some suggestions are herein made to the stakeholders at ministry level as well as at College level to consider the means of overcoming the current impediments. Furthermore, a recommendation is herein made for other researchers to replicate the study in the same context in the other Colleges of Applied Sciences and in other tertiary institutions in Oman and those in neighbouring countries.

Additionally, some suggestions have been made in this study—"vide infra" (see below respectively):

- To address parents as a whole at the time of new admission and later periodically until the students graduate.
- Awareness committees to be formed to arrange some activities to involve the community in the development of CAS and its mission and vision.
- To create partnership contracts with other industries where the students could be apprenticed.
- To improve students' talents and skills through workshops.
- To ask major stakeholders to conduct campus interviews for jobs and higher studies.
- To have more relations through workshops and through inviting people to come and share their ideas about their expectations of what they need from the College in terms of workplace applicability, and, more generally, how to serve the community in a better way.
- There should be a centre that has the responsibility of linking the staff, the College resources and the College with the social capital, as staff members already have responsibilities in the areas of instructional contact hours and various other administrative duties related to their academic activities.

For example, field trips are made for the interior design students to attend exhibitions. Such activities are carried out by personal endeavour rather than within the context of strategic planning.

- To activate the students' body which is responsible for the current cohort of students as well as the graduate ones who are now in the market. Besides tracking the companies, this body could offer a valuable service in the way of providing information to the companies about the College itself. The above-mentioned centre should be endowed with the ability to allocate places to students for training purposes. This body, though currently extant, needs to be activated in such a manner that it comes to know its goals and devise a plan to achieve them. The contributions can be made by following up the students' performance in industry.
- Clear policies that organize the relations between all six colleges and industry.
- To conduct a research on all universities and colleges in Oman where communication programs are offered. This research will encompass identifying the needs of the syllabi of the programs required for them to come up with results of importance and benefits for the departments. This suggestion should not be inclusive to the national level but extend to include other knowledge bodies on the international level too.
- There should be awareness among the society members that the job issue should be clarified by CAS-Nizwa and that it is not linked to the accepted number of intakes but to the quality of the graduate.
- A committee should be created whose members are drawn from society: parents, former students, industry lists, the banking sector, insurance companies, Oman Chamber of Commerce and hotels. Its function is to give feedback to improve on the department's performance. They will go through the process, courses, efforts that the department is providing. Of course, the textbooks and the power point slides cannot be changed. However, things can be added regarding the activities, talks, visits, etc.

5. Conclusion

The current study represents a published research to highlight the key impediments encountered in endeavours aimed at the attainment of quality in the programs offered at CAS-Nizwa. Since the social capital is one of the four forms of capital as the determinants of quality, this study is considered as the first of its type that explores the impediments encountered in the way of integrating tertiary education with industry; this study represents social capital within the context of its three broad categories: networks with other knowledge bodies, links with parents and other members of the community, and relationships with entrepreneurs.

It is concluded that the enhancement process faces ten impediments in developing community engagement. Apparently, there is a shortage of qualified staff as seen through the eyes of industrial bodies. Furthermore, there is absence of partnerships with business agencies. However, there are some calls for encouraging improvements that merit greater attention. Also, there is a persistent need to raise awareness among community members regarding CASs. Furthermore, lack of training opportunities for the students in industrial sites represents another key impediment; and even though they should undergo a period of training, this training is not academically credited to them. As a result, students do not feel motivated to go out and search for training opportunities. Additionally, lack of parental and industrial involvement represents another main impediment in addition to some other impediments as discussed herein.

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