DOI: 10.20472/EFC.2021.015.004

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READINESS OF SAUDI YOUTHS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF VISION 2030.

Abstract:

Saudi Arabia is passing a complicated path from a factor-driven economy to an efficiency-driven economy through various programs, policies, and initiatives to pursue sustainable economic growth which is the ambitious aim outlined in its Vision 2030. Utilizing the potential talent and dedication of the young has been considered one of the driving forces in this process. The culture of environmental awareness is one of the essential forces for sustainable growth. Therefore, we conducted a study to examine the existent level of knowledge, awareness, beliefs, and actions that comprise the environmental attitudes of university students in Saudi Arabia. This study is based on surveys conducted to over 200 students at King Abdulaziz University and draws inferences based on using the descriptive analysis. From the preliminary results, it is evident that Saudi Arabian university students have a narrow and limited range of knowledge, attitudes, actions, and skills in the area of sustainability. The findings of this study suggested that the educational institutions should incorporate environmental issues in every level of educational curriculum, the government should deliver some practical programs and arrange short-term training sessions to develop youths' skills to support sustainable economic growth. At the same time, social, electronic, and print media should disseminate the knowledge of sustainability effectively as they have a strong influence over young students. So that young and potential students would be able to explore the many possible ways in which their own actions can contribute to a sustainable future.

Keywords:

Environmental awareness, Sustainable growth, Readiness, Youths, Saudi vision 2030

JEL Classification: O44, I25, A13

Introduction

Recently, global warming has become a concern for the world's population, and some developed countries have begun to spread a culture of environmental awareness among their community members. In all countries around the world, youth are the source of progress and development (Borojević, 2017). The important role of youth citizens in a country's sustainable economic development are widely acknowledged; regardless of national, regional, ethnic, social class, religious, gender, and language variations. The participation of youth stands out as a significant factor in achieving the goals of sustainable development set out in Agenda 21 (UNSD, 1992). Because, youth have the capacity to identify and challenge existing power structures and barriers to change, to expose contradictions and biases, have the power to act and mobilize others, they contribute to the development of civic leadership skills among young people, often have direct knowledge of and insights into issues that are not accessible to adults, best understand the problems they face and can offer new ideas and alternative solutions (UN, 2019). In addition, young people can be partners in communicating the development agenda to their peers and communities at the local level, as well as across countries and regions. When young people are empowered with the knowledge of their rights and equipped with leadership skills, they can drive change in their communities and countries. However, the rate of contribution of youths are differs widely across country on the bases of the levels environmental knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and actions of youths (UN, 2020). Moreover, the participation of young people must be one of the key approaches in the development of sustainability, as their involvement in the solution of sustainable development is not only important for their healthy growth, but also for more successful and better functioning of any society and country (Borojević, Petrović, & Vuk, 2015).

Saudi Arabia is no exception. Fifty percent of Saudi Arabia's population is below 25 years and expected to grow further in the future (Arab news, 2020), while youth population in other parts of the world shrinks. Saudi Arabia is considered a factor-driven economy and recently its economy is transitioning from factor-driven into efficiency-driven economy through various programs, policies and initiatives to pursue the ambitious aims outlined in its Vision 2030. How it can engage in productive activities in order to accelerate equitable economic growth and structural changes to move to the next level of economic development and use its rapidly increasing young population remains a major challenge. To overcome this challenge, utilizing the potential talent and dedication of the young population has been considered one of the driving forces in this process (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030). Saudi Arabia has taken into consideration many precautions such as disciplined policies, effective strategies and reliable programs for unleashing the potential talent and dedication of the young population in order to achieve Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. So, it is important to understand whether Saudi youth are ready in terms of environmental knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and actions to achieve sustainable economic growth that is the main goal of the ambitious vision 2030. If they are not ready, how can Saudi Arabia encourage young people acquire necessary knowledge and skills to become an important contributor of the achievement of country's sustainable economic growth. However, the literature review indicates that no study has been carried out to address these gaps in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study is an attempt to examine the existent level of knowledge, awareness, beliefs and actions that comprise the environmental attitudes of university students in Saudi Arabia. In addition, to provide

some recommendations for policymakers to develop youths' skills to support sustainable economic growth which is the main goal of vision 2030.

Methodology

The data for this research were collected using a comprehensive questionnaire developed based on the in-depth literature review and analysis. The format was confirmed as being appropriate with language levels understood as the survey was conducted in both English and Arabic, using the back-to-back translation approach. After getting the ethical clearance, a survey was conducted where the questionnaire was administered to a systematic random sample of 300 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) who had completed at least one year of their program, because these students would be able to adequately evaluate their experiences about their study program. Questionnaires were distributed in classrooms. It is well-known that one of the main limitations of respondent-driven sampling strategies is the difficulty encountered in evaluating the size of the population being studied. There were 200 usable responses. The survey provides insights into the collective opinions of the respondents on a wide range of topics and their perceptions. We measured readiness of youth by the levels of awareness, knowledge, actions, beliefs and attitudes towards environmental issues.

Result Analysis

The results of the study are presented below. They are illustrated by data from the questionnaire surveys and are organized around the three major themes explored: environmental awareness and knowledge, environmental concern, and environmental actions.

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics pertaining to the study sample. This table indicates that most of the participants are from business and arts related departments (54.5%) followed by science related departments (40%) while only 5.55 from medical related departments.

Table 1: Demographic information as indicated by the percentage of students

Department	Number of students	Percentage
Economics and Business related	62	31.0
Arts and Humanities related	47	23.5
Science related	45	22.5
Engineering related	35	17.5
Medicine related	11	5.5

Source: Author's survey 2020

The respondents were asked to rate the current level of familiarity with environmental concepts and level of discussion in their class. The findings revealed that the participating students claimed low level of familiarities of each of the environmental concepts in the survey questionnaire (Table 2). They reported greater awareness of the traditional science and geography than the relatively

recent concepts environment. For example, the respondents averaged a relatively high score 39.8% have awareness of the concepts of traditional sciences and geography than only 22.2% were aware of the recent concepts of environment. The table also shows that students averaged a relatively very low score of only 24.4% when asked to report whether there was class discussion on environmental concepts. About 31.1% class discussion was about the concepts of traditional science and geography while only 16.2% discussion was on recent environmental concepts.

Table 2: Awareness of environmental concepts as indicated by the percentage of students

	Concept	Heard of it	Discussed in the class
Traditional Science and Geography	Ozone layer	40	31
	Greenhouse effect	44	38
	Carbon cycle	35	24
	Renewable resources	60	53
	Ecology	30	20
	Interdependence	30	21
Recent concepts of Environment	Carrying capacity	10	4
	Precautionary principle	9	2
	Sustainable development	49	43
	Biodiversity	35	30
	Intergenerational equity	8	2

Source: Author's survey 2020

Table 3 shows that on average only 23% respondents have correctly defined the concepts of environment which indicates the student's lower level of knowledge of the concepts of environment. The concepts of renewable resources, sustainable development, greenhouse effects, and biodiversity were more commonly correctly defined while the concepts of intergenerational equity, carrying capacity and precautionary principle were the least well known. It is clear from the compares of Table 2 and Table 3 that students were correctly defined environmental concepts that were discussed in the class. So, we can draw a conclusion that there is a positive relationship between in-class discussion of a concept and student ability to define it correctly.

Table 3: The correct knowledge of environmental concepts as indicated by the percentage of students

	Concept	Correct knowledge
Traditional Science and Geography	Ozone layer	20
	Greenhouse effect	40
	Carbon cycle	15
	Renewable resources	55
	Ecology	12
	Interdependence	18
Recent concepts of Environment	Carrying capacity	6
	Precautionary principle	8
	Sustainable development	45
	Biodiversity	29
	Intergenerational equity	5

Source: Author's survey 2020

Most of the respondents reported that school was the important source of environmental information followed by social media, newspapers, and television while NGOs, radio, and family & friends were the least sources. Overall the mass media (including TV, newspapers, radio, and social media) was ranked as the most important (58.6%) source of environmental information compare to other sources. However, TV and newspaper were ranked by respondents as the main two reliable sources followed by school and government environment bodies (Table 4). Most of the respondents reported that providing live video broadcasting and a wider picture of the whole story by TV and newspaper was the potential reason for reliability.

Table 4: Sources of environmental knowledge and their perceived reliability as indicated by the percentage of students

Concept	Main source	Reliability
Television	11	22
Newspapers	12	20
Radio	4.6	2
School	24.4	16
Friends and family	5	9
Government	10	12
Non-government organizations (NGOs)	2	5
Social Media	31	14

Source: Author's survey 2020

As school was identified as one of the important sources of environmental information and there is significant recognition for departments that dealt with it such as science, engineering, and medical. More than 80% students from these related departments reported that they were having class discussion on environmental issues while more than 60% of student's response from business and arts related departments was just opposite. In addition, vast majority respondents felt that school only provided the basics and that this was not sufficient in terms of relevancy and practicalities.

Table 5: Frequency of class teaching of environmental topics as indicated by the percentage of students

Department	Often/Regular	Sometimes	Never
Economics and Business related	5	30	65
Arts and Humanities related	9	38	53
Science related	40	55	5
Engineering related	35	63	2
Medicine related	21	49	30

Source: Author's survey 2020

To identify the concerns, views and feelings of the students about environmental and other issues, students were asked about the relative importance of the environment compared with the economy. For example, one of the questions asked students to identify the most important goals for their country as well as the world. Vast majority students agreed that our country as well as world goal must be protecting environmental even if it means some reduction of economic growth. It is about four times more support than economic growth. Similarly, a large majority of students (80%) believed that it is quite possible to have sustainable economic growth.

Table 6: Attitudes to economic growth and environmental protection as indicated by the percentage of students

Concept	Response
Concentrate on economic growth	20
Concentrate on protecting the environment even it means some reduction of economic growth	72
Not sure	8
Economic growth must be at the expense of the environment	15
It is quite possible to have both a prosperous economy and a healthy environment	80
Not sure	5

Source: Author's survey 2020

Finally, students were asked to rank on the given statement to identify the level of actions for better environment. For example, one of the questions asked students whether they have done or would or would not considered to re-use or recycle something environmental reason instead of throwing it away. Table 7 represent the existing levels of student desire and willingness to take positive actions for the environmental improvement. Less actions to improve the environment were reported by the university students with the exceptions of reducing water use. Table 7 shows that the most common actions were personal lifestyle actions such as water conservation, recycling, and green consumerism.

Table 7: Actions for the environment taken by students in the last 12 months as indicated by the percentage of students

Concept	Response
Recycling	30
Choosing environmental household products	28
Reducing water use	73
Encouraging someone to change their behavior	25
Writing letter, signing petition going to meeting	10
Tree planting	1
Taking part in cleanup campaign	3
Trying to get information for own interest	21
Making a report or complaint	4

Source: Author's survey 2020

Conclusion

Saudi Arabian youths demonstrated very low degrees of environmental awareness and levels and types of conceptual knowledge. Results also demonstrated low levels of actions to improve environment and expressed unwillingness to extend the range of their environmental actions beyond minor domestic activities. Is indicates that are not ready to contribute to pursue the ambitious aim for sustainable economic growth which is outlined in its Vision 2030. Though, Utilizing the potential talent and dedication of the young population has been considered one of the driving forces in this process to achieve sustainable economic growth. Interestingly, they expressed high level of concerns for protecting environmental even if it means some reduction of economic growth of their own country and the world and held strong beliefs that it is quite possible to have sustainable economic growth. The results of this study identified a significant gaps and blind spots and serious deficiencies of young Saudis in term of awareness, knowledge, actions, and concern for environmental improvement. So, much more effort therefore needs to prepare young people ready to contribute to achieve the goal of vision 2030. The research has a number of implications c, educational curriculum planners, teachers and textbook writers. The findings in this study provide following recommendations. The study suggest that educational institutions should incorporate environmental issues in every levels of educational curriculum, the government should deliver some practical programs and arrange short-term training sessions to develop youths' skills to support sustainable economic growth which is the main goal of vision 2030.

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