

The Culture of Social Innovation among Students at Najran University

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Abstract

The vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2030 focuses on the importance of building a thriving economic and social community in which all institutions, especially higher education institutions, actively participate in developing and addressing societal issues. This study seeks to investigate the level of social innovation culture among students at Najran University, recognizing that it offers an opportunity to generate innovations, products, and new ideas that address societal needs. The study used a quantitative descriptive approach, and the researchers prepared a questionnaire consisting of (13) statements to assess the level of social innovation culture. It was administered to a sample of university students, totaling (319) male and female students. The study revealed several results, including that the overall social innovation culture averaged (2.51) at a high level. There were no significant differences in the level of social innovation culture based on gender, academic grade, and academic level. However, there were differences based on the specialization variable, favoring those with practical specialization.

Keywords: Social Innovation, University Students, Quantitative Descriptive Approach

INTRODUCTION

Social innovation has become a fundamental driving force to achieve technological progress, economic development, and social advancement. This necessitates the imperative to enhance innovative talents in higher education more effectively. Therefore, it is crucial to cultivate an innovation culture that highlights and promotes innovation, which plays a pivotal role in higher education development. Universities should integrate innovative education into all aspects of teaching, making innovation a driving force and objective for student learning. Innovative education should not be limited to specific courses or projects but should be ingrained in the entire learning process (Saito, 2023).

Social innovation addresses new social practices that are intentionally created collectively and directed towards achieving a specific goal, aiming to promote social change by reshaping how societal objectives are accomplished (Yarbrough, 2017). The concept of social innovation is defined as innovative activities and services driven by the goal of meeting social needs. These innovations are typically developed and disseminated through organizations whose primary purposes are social (Anderson et al., 2014). It is also seen as the development of social practices in response to societal challenges, aiming to improve outcomes for social well-being. This process necessarily involves the engagement of stakeholders in the community (Svetlana, 2015). Some view social innovation as a fresh approach to solving a social problem that is more effective, efficient, and sustainable than existing solutions. It generates value primarily for the community as a whole rather than individual actors (Jenson & Harrison, 2013).

Social innovation, through the creation of an innovative environment, aims to reach innovative solutions that help address social problems, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations, ensure their sustainability, optimize the efforts of community members, and benefit from their experiences, knowledge, and expertise in societal development. The significance of social innovation has been acknowledged for its success in addressing a broad array of social, economic, political, and environmental challenges (Westley et al., 2014). It is seen as a complex process involving the introduction of new products, processes, or programs that profoundly alter fundamental procedures, resources, and power dynamics. Social innovation is crucial in

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tackling issues related to global climate change, often termed environmental or green innovation, as social problems often stem from environmental challenges.

Although the term social innovation has become widely known, much is not known about the requirements that innovation must meet to be considered social and distinct from other types of innovation. The Vienna Declaration responds to the significant societal challenges identified in the Europe 2020 strategy, which require social innovation in areas such as unemployment, climate change, education, poverty, and social exclusion. For innovation to be considered social, it must be intentional and effective, and offer new solutions to social challenges with the intention and impact of achieving equality, justice, and empowerment (Tara, 2014).

To have meaningful significance, social innovation, as asserted by Platform (2013), must adhere to several key criteria. Firstly, it should demonstrate relevance by addressing new and unmet social needs, necessitating attention. In addition, the innovation process should involve user participation, incorporating their insights, promoting and respecting user rights, and engaging all pertinent stakeholders within a specific context.

Nicholls (2015) views social innovation as a loosely defined movement built on ideas that emphasize how, under the right conditions, people can create and shape their world. More specifically, individuals can innovate and develop new forms of social organization. This concept is not novel, as countries worldwide strive for social innovation, aiming to refine ideas, articulate them, and put them into practice. The key questions revolve around leveraging intelligence to maximize the benefits of tools such as crowdfunding platforms, awards, or accelerators. How can citizens engage in idea generation? How does social innovation influence the relationships among the state, the market, and civil society? What role do governments play in fostering innovation?

Statement of the Problem

Several studies, including those by García-Morales (2020), Suseno and Abbott (2021), Mair and Gegenhuber (2021), and Ozdemir and Gupta (2021), emphasize the significance of promoting social innovation in the context of higher education. There is a recognized need to encourage social entrepreneurship among students to create more opportunities for development, improvement, and economic and social growth. Social innovation is linked to diversity, access, and inclusion, influencing societal change. It should be explored further in the higher education context and student affairs. The studies call for examining the developmental process of social innovation initiatives and how the university community responds to them. Five key lessons for administrators regarding embedding social innovation in student affairs and higher education emerge, including enhancing means of identifying social needs on campus, fostering a collaborative culture, cultivating leadership at all university levels, recognizing that the process takes time, and generating and integrating scholarships for sustained practice (Yarbrough, 2017).

Due to various societal changes, educational institutions must implement teaching and learning methodologies that help students develop the competencies necessary for their academic and professional journeys. Kickul (2018) emphasizes that higher education can cultivate students' social entrepreneurship by incorporating design thinking. Design thinking is a methodology that harnesses the designer's empathy and techniques to align people's needs with what technology can achieve. Its goal is to translate a viable business strategy into customer value and market opportunities. A study by Sevillano-Monje (2022) revealed the effectiveness of the flipped classroom strategy in teaching social innovation skills and competencies. Moreover, Ojasalo and Kaartti (2021) investigated the learning outcomes of Challenge-Based Innovation (CBI) in higher education. Their research showed that engaging multidisciplinary students in challenge-based innovation can improve various dimensions of learning in higher education.

A study conducted by Parziale (2016) aimed to analyze the relationship between investment in education and economic development by critically testing the theory of human capital. The study compared this model with the social investment model, revealing that educational policies have positive effects on the economic system when directed toward reducing social and economic disparities. This, in turn, increases the rate of social integration, which can foster broader social innovation. In another study, Xu et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of linking higher education and economic growth, highlighting the significant role of innovation in

achieving regional sustainable development. In addition, a study by Castro-Arce and Vanclay (2020) emphasized the transformative role of social innovation in achieving sustainable rural development.

The widening gap between income and knowledge inequality has led to increased expectations for universities to integrate social innovation into their core missions as a response to societal issues. Empowering social innovation through teaching, research, and community service is recognized, as it acts as a driver for economic, social, and sustainable development (Bayuo et al., 2020). There is a widespread agreement that addressing major societal challenges, such as environmental crises, global climate change, health emergencies like COVID-19, environmental degradation, and unemployment, requires innovative solutions that extend beyond technological advancements. This necessitates exploring additional ideas, products, and social innovations that alleviate the tensions arising from these crises. New services and models are required to simultaneously address social needs and promote the creation of new social relationships or beneficial community collaborations, enhancing the community's ability to work towards finding more solutions to social problems (Mulgan, 2012).

Therefore, the discussion of the university's engagement in social innovation shifts to the point where universities must embed social innovation in their teaching and research missions. They must also undergo organizational transformations to invest in non-profit social innovations that benefit local communities. For universities to make a substantial contribution to promoting social innovation, policymakers must ensure that they do not create inhibitors through teaching and research activities within universities (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015). This requires identifying and disseminating best practices for organizational models in teaching and learning in public universities (de Pretelt & Hoyos, 2015).

Due to the growing interest in social innovation, universities have started to explore the motivating factors for sustainable teaching innovation among faculty members in higher education. However, the crucial role of faculty members and students in the higher education innovation process has been overlooked (Zhou et al., 2022). Students we educate today will have a significant impact on wealth and the ability to make decisions in the future. Empowering them to explore and develop their commitments to effecting change through critical and experimental learning equips them to work towards a more just and diverse world.

The study posits that the university's capacity to enhance its social responsibility and play a greater role in serving its community hinges on the presence of social innovation among its students. Furthermore, it relies on the university's effectiveness in instilling values that encourage students to positively engage in community service. Thus, the more the university can cultivate social innovation among its students, the more robust and impactful its community service role will become. Based on this, the study aims to answer the following questions:

What is the level of social innovation culture among the students of Najran University?

Does the level of social innovation culture vary based on different variables (gender, specialization, GPA, academic level)?

Study Objectives

The study seeks to evaluate the degree of social innovation culture among students at Najran University and analyze how this level varies based on different factors such as gender, field of study, academic performance, and academic level.

Significance of the Study

The study's significance can be divided into theoretical and practical aspects:

Theoretical Significance:

This study explores the modern concept of social innovation within the university setting, particularly focusing on students' social responsibility. It provides valuable insights for university administrators and leaders to strategically enhance the culture of social innovation among students.

The study offers guidance to faculty members on how to raise students' awareness about the relevance of social innovation.

It helps students grasp the importance of social innovation, contributing to their overall understanding of societal impact and innovation.

Applied significance:

The study's significance lies in its exploration of a crucial societal need: individuals who are deeply connected to their communities, possess a genuine desire to serve and advance them without expectation of reward, and feel a profound internal responsibility toward their society and nation.

This study can aid faculty members in inspiring students to participate in social creativity and innovation. It advocates for enriching the university environment through curriculum enhancement, modern teaching methods, student activities, and diverse assessment approaches that foster an innovative culture among students.

The study can enlighten university students about the value of an innovative culture and the university's role in nurturing it.

Delimitations of the Study

The study is designed to assess the level of social innovation culture among students at Najran University, utilizing a descriptive survey methodology. The research focuses on specific colleges within the university, and the data collection instrument employed is a questionnaire distributed to a sample of 319 male and female students. The delimitations of the study include its concentration on subjective matters related to social innovation culture, its spatial confinement to specific colleges at Najran University, its reliance on a questionnaire as the primary research instrument, and its temporal constraints, with data collection occurring during the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024.

METHODS

The study employed a descriptive survey approach, which aligns with its objectives by focusing on identifying conditions and relationships related to the phenomenon under investigation. This method goes beyond mere data collection and organization; it aims to analyze and interpret data to derive results that contribute to understanding and improving reality. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 319 male and female students at Najran University, providing the necessary information to address the research questions.

Participants

The study sample comprised 319 male and female students from Najran University. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the study sample, including variables such as academic level, major, GPA, and gender.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample

Major		GPA		Gender		Academic level	
Scientific	Theoretical	2-3	3-5	Male	Female	1-4	1-5
179	139	220	98	205	113	258	60

Tool of the Study

The research tool construction process involved several stages:

Reviewing the literature and previous studies, including specific references, to benefit from them in the theoretical framework and construction of the study tool.

Identifying the areas and dimensions of the questionnaire and formulating statements for each area.

Presenting the questionnaire in its initial form to a group of experts for evaluation.

Incorporating modifications and suggestions from the evaluators into the research tool.

Finalizing the tool, which consists of 13 items, ensuring that there are phrases related to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects.

Validity

The researchers ensured the reliability of the study tool through expert validity. They presented the initial questionnaire to five experts specializing in the study's subject area and requested them to evaluate its quality and suitability for the study's objectives. Based on the modifications and suggestions provided by the experts, necessary changes were implemented, with the majority of evaluators agreeing, resulting in an agreement rate of over 80%. This process involved modifying, deleting, or adding statements, ultimately leading to the final version of the questionnaire.

2. Internal Consistency (Internal Validity) was assessed by measuring the reliability of the study tool (the questionnaire). This was achieved by calculating the correlation coefficient between the score of each statement and the total score of its corresponding dimension (domain) within the questionnaire. This analysis was conducted on a sample of 30 individuals, as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficients for statements related to the dimensions of the questionnaire about social innovation culture

Social innovation	
Item	Correlation coefficient
1	**0.69
2	**0.83
3	**0.62
4	**0.86
5	**0.87
6	**0.86
7	**0.77
8	**0.76
9	**0.81
10	**0.79
11	**0.84
12	**0.73
13	**0.85

Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α) was used to confirm the reliability of the study tool. Table 3 presents the values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each domain of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for assessing the reliability of the study tool

Main domain	No. of items	Reliability
Culture of social innovation	13	0.89

Table 3 demonstrates that the reliability of the study tool, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, achieved a value of 0.89, indicating high reliability. This result suggests that the questionnaire is suitable for achieving the study's objectives and can provide stable and consistent results upon reapplication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1: What is the level of social innovation culture among the students of Najran University?

To answer the previous question, frequencies, percentages, and means were calculated for the responses of the study sample individuals regarding the statements related to the study. Table 4 illustrates the level of social innovation culture.

Table 4. The level of social innovation culture

No	Item	Degree of response						Degree of response	Level of response	Rank
		Agree		Neutral		Disagree				
		No.	%	No	%	No	%			
1	I am willing to participate with organizations that provide volunteer services to the community	211	66.4	74	23.3	33	10.4	2.56	High	4
2	I participate in preparing for national parties and events held by the college and university	188	59.1	91	28.6	39	12.3	2.48	High	8
3	I am ready to be a paramedic to rescue accident victims	243	76.4	52	16.4	23	7.2	2.69	High	2
4	I contribute to social projects that take place in the neighborhood where I live	187	58.8	87	27.4	44	13.8	2.43	High	11
5	I participate with my colleagues in activities aimed at beautifying and developing the college	211	66.4	74	23.3	33	10.4	2.56	High	5
6	I actively participate in organizing seminars, conferences, and scientific and intellectual meetings held by the college	190	59.7	83	26.1	45	14.2	2.45	High	9
7	I deduct a portion of my expenses to contribute to charitable organizations.	172	54.1	99	31.1	47	14.8	2.39	High	12
8	I make sure to visit some social institutions, such as children's and elderly care homes and hospitals.	171	53.8	65	20.4	82	25.8	2.28	Medium	13
9	Through my university major, I try to provide some solutions to societal problems	225	70.8	56	17.6	37	11.6	2.59	High	3
10	I have creative ideas that can contribute to the development of society	200	60.9	81	25.5	37	11.6	2.51	High	7
11	I present my creative ideas to develop society and solve its problems to responsible authorities	190	59.7	80	25.2	48	15.1	2.45	High	10
12	I am willing to offer my knowledge and experience to improve society	247	77.7	49	15.4	22	6.9	2.71	High	1
13	I constantly strive to participate actively in the activities offered by the university to serve the community	203	63.9	84	26.4	31	9.7	2.54	High	6
Total								2.51		

The data from Table 4 reveals that the overall level of social innovation culture has an average score of (2.51), indicating a substantial presence of this culture among the students of Najran University. This result could be attributed to students' belief in the significance of social innovation and its potential for societal development, considering the prevalent environmental, social, and economic challenges. The average scores ranged from (2.71) to (2.28), with the statement "I am willing to offer my knowledge and experience to improve society" obtaining the highest average. This underscores the students' willingness to provide services and innovations that contribute to community development and problem-solving. On the other hand, the statement " I make sure to visit some social institutions, such as children's and elderly care homes and hospitals." received a moderate score, suggesting a potential deficiency in this aspect, possibly due to weak connections between university education and social care institutions.

The overall results align with studies conducted by Otten et al. (2022), which indicated that students demonstrated transformative learning regarding the pursuit of social justice and engagement in proposing solutions to social problems. The results are also consistent with the research of Zhou et al. (2022), de Pretelt and Hoyos (2015), and Mulgan (2012).

Research question 2: Does the level of social innovation culture vary based on different variables (gender, specialization, GPA, academic level)?

To examine statistically significant differences among the study sample based on the gender variable (male-female), the means, "t" values, and significance levels were calculated, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The differences between the means of responses from the study participants, the "t" value, and their statistical significance for the dimensions of the questionnaire based on the gender variable (male-female)

No.	Item	Male (205)		Female (113)		t	Sig.
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation		
1	Social innovation	19.19	7.61	18.95	5.87	0.20	Insig.

Table 5 indicates the absence of statistically significant differences based on the gender variable (male-female). This result can be interpreted as social innovation culture gaining significant attention from various societal institutions, and it has received considerable appreciation within academic circles.

To assess the presence of statistically significant differences among the study sample based on the specialization variable (scientific/theoretical), the means, "t" values, and their statistical significance levels were calculated, as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6. The differences between the means of responses from the study participants, the "t" value, and their statistical significance for the dimensions of the questionnaire based on the "major" variable (scientific/theoretical)

No.	Item	scientific(179)		theoretical(139)		t	Sig.
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation		
1	Social innovation	20.5	8.03	18.42	5.88	2.01	0.05

The results from Table 6 indicate statistically significant differences according to the specialization variable (scientific/theoretical) in favor of those with practical specialization. It is a highly logical result, as practical specializations can offer diverse innovations that contribute to the advancement of society and address its problems, which may not be equally available to those with theoretical specializations.

Table 7 displays the computed averages, "t" values, and significance levels, indicating variations in responses concerning academic performance to identify statistically significant differences among individuals in the study sample based on the academic GPA variable (from 2 to 3 - from 3 to 5).

Table 7. The differences between the means of responses from the study participants, the "t" value, and their statistical significance for the dimensions of the questionnaire based on the GPA variable

No.	Item	2-3(220)		3-5(98)		t	Sig.
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation		
1	Social innovation	18.85	6.39	20.42	8.69	1.80	Insig.

Table 7 suggests that there were no statistically significant differences based on the GPA variable (from 2 to 3 - from 3 to 5). This result may indicate that students are equally willing to contribute services, products, and ideas that benefit society and address its problems, regardless of their academic performance.

To determine if there are statistically significant differences among the study sample based on the academic level variable (1-4/5-8), the means, "t" values, and significance levels were calculated, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. The differences between the means of responses from the study participants, the "t" value, and their statistical significance for the dimensions of the questionnaire based on the academic level variable

No.	Item	1-4(258)		5-8(60)		t	Sig.
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation		
1	Social innovation	19.50	7.61	18.6	5.12	0.81	Insig.

Table 8 confirms that there were no statistically significant differences based on the academic level variable (from the first to the fourth - from the fifth to the eighth). This result aligns with the previous findings regarding the GPA variable.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to evaluate the level of social innovation culture among students at Najran University and explore potential variations based on different variables such as gender, major, GPA, and academic level. Considering that social innovation has become a fundamental driving force in technological progress, economic

development, and social advancement, there is a need to promote a culture of social innovation in academic environments. Universities are relied upon by society to provide services, ideas, and products that contribute to the development and improvement of the community and address its challenges. The study found a high level of social innovation culture among students at Najran University. Despite this, social innovation still requires further exploration through studies that uncover how to integrate social innovation into teaching, research activities, and community service.

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