Creativity and Innovation in Higher Education Research: Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Creativity and innovation are main sources of development leading to both: wealth generation and job creation. While creativity produces knowledge, innovation makes practical utilization of it to provide value. This paper questions the contribution of higher education (HE) research to creativity and to innovation. It provides a background that identifies the various issues concerned; and it emphasizes the different types of research versus HE research considerations. It recognizes the low share of HE in funding and in performing research; and it also stresses the opportunities enjoyed by HE to do better in both: creativity and innovation. It addresses various potential considerations including: HE-government and HE-business cooperation platforms; in addition to new research degrees and other potential arrangements. In this respect, it highlights experience from Saudi Arabia. The paper hopes to activate worldwide sharing of ideas on the future role of HE research in world development.

Keywords: Creativity, Development, Higher Education (HE) Research, Innovation, Types of Research

1. BACKGROUND

This introductory section is concerned with laying down the red-carpet toward presenting the work of this paper. The section begins by introducing the importance of HE for creativity, innovation and development. This is followed by addressing the integration and interaction between creativity that provides knowledge and innovation that gives value. The types of research identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are then introduced and correlated with creativity and innovation. Finally, the question that the paper attempts to address is raised.

1.1. Higher Education (HE)

HE is becoming increasingly important, as the role of knowledge in world development is on the increase (Bakry, 2005). In its declaration on HE for the 21st century, UNESCO emphasized

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the importance of HE for socio, cultural and economic development (UNESCO, 1998). In addition, the Association of American Universities summarized the impact of HE on society in eight main benefits, which include: increased innovation; stronger economy; higher employment; better health; enhanced rule of law; encouraged voluntarism; enriched cultural life; and supported global understanding (AAU online, 2008).

Increasing innovation, through HE research and through HE graduates working in different fields, transforms knowledge from classrooms, labs, papers and books to real life products and services that provide value. The resulting live knowledge supports wealth generation and enhances job creation leading to enhanced economic and social development (Alfantookh, 2011).

1.2. Creativity and Innovation

While innovation is concerned with knowledge utilization that is transforming knowledge into value, creativity is associated with knowledge generation that is contributing to the human intellectual scope. Therefore, innovation needs creativity to produce new value for society, and creativity requires support from such value in order to initiate new knowledge. The circular interaction between knowledge and creativity and innovations is illustrated in Figure 1.

Innovation has been defined by Oslo manual in 2005, and this definition was adopted, at the world level, by the Global Innovation Index (GII) of 2012 (Dutta, 2012); the dentition is given in the following:

An innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), a process, a marketing method, or a new organizational method, in business practices, workplace organization, or external relations.”

The innovation organization Nesta of the UK provided an argument on the appeal of innovation outcomes (Nesta online, 2012). In this respect, it came up with the term “soft innovation” which is distinguished from innovation by the following:

The primary impact of the produced soft innovation products and services is based upon sensory perception, such as aesthetic appeal or intellectual appeal, rather than functional performance.

This emphasizes that the target value of innovation outcomes is associated with the market and consequently with the customers who may be attracted not only by tangible benefits but also by intangible ones.

1.3. Research Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and innovation are usually based on research performed, not only by HE institutions, but also by business and other organizations.

Figure 1. Creativity and innovation: Toward development
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