A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF IRAN'S ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITIES ON THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CITY OF AZADSHAHR

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Abstract

The Prominent role of the Islamic Azad Universities in development in general, and in economic, social and cultural development in particular, is placed in two major educational and scholarly activities; the educational role in the process of development is based on training human forces which are the key to development, and the scholarly role embodies in fundamental and applied researches, which are the essential conditions in achieving development.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role and effect of Iran's Islamic Azad universities which are a kind of investment on human resources in order to expedite the process of development that has a great role in the economy of the country.

This is a library research and is also based on the experiences of the authors, its result showing that founding the university in this area, has brought new discoveries, specialized knowledge, and made people more educated; Half of the economic development of the society is caused by academic improvement, and technical innovation which has led to great evolutions.

Keywords- Development, Islamic Azad University, Economic Development, Social Development, Cultural Development.

INTRODUCTION

Universities are among the main resources that a society has for improvement and development which mean extending the abilities, intellectual capacities, qualities, knowledge, technical skills, innovation and creativity, capability in solving economic, social, cultural and political problems, utilizing the resources, findings and facilities of the society, and generally improving the conditions of material and spiritual life for all people. As Michael Todaro defines development, first, it should be considered as a subject of high value, second, a multidimensional process, and thirds, in close relationship with the concept of improvement (Todaro, trans. 1977, p. 182).

Universities encourage intellectual independency, objective judgment and evaluation, and cultural creativity, and are in the current study seeks to answer the following question through the documentation and survey methods:
How has this young, newly-founded higher educational system been openly or hidden able to accomplish its mission in promoting the economic, social, and cultural aspects of the development of the country.

The results of this research show that:

In the economic development of the city of Azadshahr, economic prosperity in agriculture, industry and services (with regard to the foundation of technical, engineering and agricultural subject fields in the university) have been manifest. Cash flow in the town, activation of the inter-city and intra-city transportation system, consumption of food Products and utilization of dormitory facilities, employment of the citizens in different educational and service sectors, selling university building materials, and promotion of the knowledge level of different industrial and agricultural sectors are all among the achievements of the Islamic Azad university in this town.

In the social development, this system of higher education has raised the social status and public relation of the citizens, particularly the young, along with the elevation of their social wisdom and their power of decision-making in social and political affairs and also improvement of their social relationships.

Non-stop efforts to reach truth and true knowledge. Today, universities as a social institution are more influenced by the value system of societies, but if they maintain their dynamic role, they can also influence the societies’ value systems (Bakhtiyar, 2010, p. 291). Therefore, by developing the scientific realm, universities can substitute knowledge, insight, and human values which are the fruit of scientific discoveries, for wrong knowledge and superstitious customs and traditions, and through it create a dynamic culture which is always improving and enhancing.

Universities which cannot cultivate such cultures in their environment will fail fulfilling their main duty.

Undoubtedly, The Islamic Azad Universities have greatly helped the Islamic Republic government of Iran in overcoming the main crisis of the shortage of educated individuals and graduates, shortage in development of human resources as national capital, inequality in all people’s access to higher education, and limitation and constraints in financial resources. This university, in the few years after its foundation not only has extended higher education, but also has fulfilled UNESCO’s theme of higher education for all. Its impact as the biggest non-virtual university of the world with more than 1900000 graduates, more than eleven millions square meters of academic space, with 1500000 students, 340 university branches, more that 600 dependent schools (Sama Schools), five foreign centers in Emirate, Lebanon, England and Germany, and as the biggest and most all-inclusive center in the middle east, is well-acknowledged.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Today, no mighty country can be found which has achieved its mighty status without relying on large active universities. In a word, universities are the beating heart of pioneer dominant
civilizations. Considering universities as a main determining factor of development poses the question that how geographical distribution of the branches of Islamic Azad University has brought socio-economic and cultural development to cities? Social development entails creating solidarity and cooperation, providing freedom, sense of responsibility, and social security and justice. Economic development involves improving financial fields and entails the aims of raising the level of national income, fair distribution of the capital per capita, and providing financial comfort for all people. In cultural dimension, development leads to enhancing the culture of the society, enriching public culture for improving academic culture, maintaining, transferring and rethinking customs, traditions, cultural heritages, and revitalizing them (Ameri, 2006, p. 120).

The achievements of the Islamic Azad University can be explained in two objective and subjective scopes. Its objective achievement consist the concrete physical impact of establishing the university such as returning the migration flow, opening up new horizons to a great number of scholars, solving economic problems ,etc.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

As universities and development are two fundamental pillars in all societies and their cooperation is the necessary condition for accelerating the process of development, their cooperation is necessary also because of their mutual needs; universities are the suppliers of the scholarly, expert human forces at high level which is considered as a fundamental factor in achieving development. One of the main fundamental issues in development planning is setting up the priorities to respond the expectation level of society, and to establish the foundation body of development. Dr Jasbi, in his speech in 1983, considering the socio-economic and cultural development, counted the goals of The Islamic Azad University as follows:

- Raising the scientific level of individuals in all fields
- Extending the boundaries of knowledge through research and interaction with other scientific sources of the world
- Educating committed individuals to fulfill the legitimate needs of the society
- Encouraging the self-sufficiency of the society in economic and industrial fields
- Increasing talents, capabilities, and self-esteem in youth
- Preventing the immigration of the elite and the talented, and nurturing young talent in the country
- Developing religious, national, local education within the context of domestic culture (Hadith of Creation, 2000, p.49)

This research, aims at achieving a comprehensive development and encouraging the need of conducting scholarly researches to fulfill the goals of Islamic Azad University as a center of higher education with such functions as producing knowledge and scholarly research, enhancing the cultural level of the society mostly in deprived area, deepening the culture of Islamic ethics, extending the borders of the youth’s knowledge, generating creative, sober, innovative, committed human forces, and preventing the brain drain and raising self-esteem.
OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Two major and minor objectives have been pursued in this research; the main objective is investigating the impact of Islamic Azad University on the economical, social, and cultural development of the city of Azadshahr, and the minor objectives are investigating:

- the impact of Islamic Azad University on increasing the level of education of the residents of Azadshahr
- the impact of Islamic Azad University on employment of the residents of Azadshahr
- the impact of the Islamic Azad University on public health of Azadshahr
- the impact of Islamic Azad University on the social security of Azadshahr

DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

- Development: Improving all the people of a society and the social order toward a better and more humane life
- Economic indexes: High level of income, high employment rate, low unemployment rate, suitable consumption level, low inflation rate, high ratio of entrepreneurship, increase in urban area, increase in the number of transportation vehicles, renovating old buildings, improving the science of agriculturing and animal husbandry, producing more desirable products in more quantity for supplying to markets, and generating more revenue
- Social indexes: High social security, multiple social classes, low rate of corruption and crime, high level of health knowledge, low rate of death, low rate of natural population growth, established social justice, improved collective wisdom, participation in social, economical and political affairs.
- Cultural indexes: High level of education, diversity of ethnicities, existence of urbane culture, languages and dialects, increase in the number of cultural and religious places, increase in the number of the centers for education and research, diversity of higher education among the member of families, enriched cultural context, and artistic creativity, enjoying citizenship rights, protecting environment, observing the culture of living in apartments mostly in small cities.

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

Examples of researches carried out to study the impact of Islamic Azad University on economic, social and cultural conditions of the region are presented below:

Investigating the impact of Islamic Azad University on development of Marvdasht by Dr. Farzin Boustani, assistant professor at Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht branch:

This study argues that this branch of Islamic Azad University not only was effective and constructive in academic and cultural conditions of the city of Marvdasht, but also its positive outcomes has reached other surrounding areas of the city. Among these outcomes are improving higher education; improving sports; creating new job opportunities, city services (Transportation services, accelerated banking, posting, communication, computer, and internet services); availability of more food and coffee stands, more bookstores and markets.
A research by Nazanin Namazi, Abas Ghalbashi, and Moslem Salehi on the role of Islamic Azad University on establishing a stable development in Marvdasht (2006):

The conclusion of this research shows that this university has had an effective role in enhancing the level of the academic, economic and political participation of the city (Zarei, 2007, p. 156).

A research by Mostafa Vaezi (2006) entitled as “Islamic Azad University and Social, Cultural and Economic Development in The Province of Semnan”

This research portrays the important role of universities in improving the economic, social, and cultural development in the abovementioned area which has led to high growth.

The research, “The Role of University in Developing The Urbane Environment of Garmsar” by Akbar Ashuri, Mohammad Sadegh Saburi, and Parviz Mirahozli:

This is a library research and is also based on the experiences of the authors, its result showing that founding the university in this area, has brought new discoveries, specialized knowledge, and made people more educated; Half of the economic development of the society is caused by academic improvement, and technical innovation which has led to great evolutions.

**POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF THE ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY IN DEVELOPMENT**

**Increasing liquidity in banks and financial institutions and more flow of capital in the economy of cities:**

Paying university’s fees at banks; opening deposit accounts by faculty members, students and staffs of the university; transferring the amount needed by students through banks by families; making progress in urban and suburban transportation systems, housing, food and cloths shops; and establishing different service-providers companies as contracting companies, construction companies, production companies, and so many other companies and institutes, all have brought prosperity at the presence of different branches of Islamic Azad University all around the country and their development in turn led to economic growth and development.

**Creating more job opportunities**

Although Islamic Azad University aims beyond creating job opportunities, but so far has created about forty five thousands job opportunities and has provided the cost of living for and improved the economic conditions of many of urban families.

**Raising Material capital**

If development involves concentration of material capital, Islamic Azad University has been very successful in achieving that through founding about one hundred fifty university branches in ten regions all around the country, constructing new buildings, improving the environment, and
utilizing unutilized land far from cities. This university has utilized about eight thousand four hundred hectares of land for university campuses, nine million square meters for buildings, educational, medical, dormitory, praying and exercising sections.

**Educating experts and concentrating human capital**

Through educating expert human forces appropriate for the demands of economic, productive, and industrial agencies, this university has ended the dependency on foreign sources and decreased the need for importing foreign goods. On the other hand has done a great deal in concentrating human capital as a main factor in economic development.

**Educating working force**

This university holding 55% of the whole students all throughout the country has a very constructive role in growing expert working forces, particularly in the present situation when there is a close relationship between education and productivity; it is gaining an increasing importance in industrial, productive and administrative sectors.

**Decreasing migration**

Immigration has been a major problem in less developed villages and cities, making it in turn one of the problematic issues in big and cosmopolitan cities. The presence of different branches of Islamic Azad University in different areas, has provided the opportunities of appropriate jobs and facilities for people, and mostly the youth and decreased the flow of immigration.

**Increasing scholarly researches**

Diversity in the subject fields at different levels have paved the way for conducting different researches on different subjects at national and local levels in terms of economic, social, and cultural issues.

**Distributing knowledge**

This university’s role in distributing knowledge and science among people of different regions throughout the country has been considerable.

**Improving the conditions of living**

Great number of staffs and clerks in different organizations, deprived from higher education due to the far distance, occupation and family problems, have become able to pursue their education in this university branches and by enhancing their level of knowledge, and achieving a higher degree, have enjoyed a higher salaries which have improved the economic condition of their family life.
CONCLUSION

Universities are the beating heart of today’s powerful and dominant societies. The fact that universities have a determining role in training scientists, scholars, entrepreneurs, programmers, and managers, and directing the societies in a right and secure path toward a consistent development and growth should be endorsed by all governing systems. By a quick look at the city of Azadshahr and comparing it with the past, the multidimensional impact of the university, and its influence on the economic, social and cultural situation will be revealed; the existence of Islamic Azad University has provided more job opportunities, increased liquidity, encouraged competitiveness, and reduced poverty all throughout the country. (Malekiyan, 2006, p. 143).

According to the latest census, the population of the city of Azadshahr was 45000, out of which 450 people were chosen as sample using Cochran formula and simple random sampling; of these, 175 individuals (38.88%) have believed that Islamic Azad University has an average impact on increasing the level of education, 275 individuals (61.11%) believe that university has had a great role.

Regarding creating job opportunities, 22 individuals (4.88%) believe that this university has had a little role, and 310 individuals (68.88%) believe in an average role and 118 individuals believe in its great role.

In providing social security, 96 individuals (11.55%) state that it has a little role, 96 individuals state it has an average, and 259 individuals (57.55%) state its great role.

For regional health, 52 individuals (11.55%) have considered its having a little role, 147 individuals (32.67%) considered its having an average role and 251 individuals state (55.78%) its great role.

| TABLE I. THE FREQUENCY OF INDIVIDUALS IN TERMS OF THEIR VIEW TOWARD THE IMPACT OF THE ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY ON THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL INDEXES |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Variables                        | Little        | Average   | Great     | Total     |
| Level of Education               | 175           | 275       |            | 450       |
| Job Opportunity                  | 22            | 310       | 118       | 450       |
| Social Security                  | 96            | 96        | 259       | 450       |
| Regional Health                  | 52            | 147       | 251       | 450       |

Totally, Islamic Azad University taking in 55% of the whole university students of the country has had an important role in educating experts mostly in the present era when the factor of
productivity has been interwoven with education, therefore, increased the role of universities in the industrial, productive, and administrative sectors (Pasandideh, 2006, p.35).

SUGGESTIONS AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

- Contrary to the negative publicities against Islamic Azad University, the people of the city of Marvdasht hold a positive view toward the services the university has offered, and have approved the university as a center effective in achieving economic, social, scientific, and cultural developments; therefore, it is strongly recommended to clarify its achievement more in public communities.
- Those subject fields which have more practical implications and combine theory and practice together, have had a more positive effect on development and also people’s perspectives. It is suggested to improve more practical subject fields and other particular fields of study based on the needs of the region.
- Islamic Azad University has long-term and short-term goals. It has influenced the basis and foundation of societies and evolved the economic, social, industrial, and cultural process of the development in societies. It is strongly recommended to all branches of the Islamic Azad University to reconsider their performance and the received feedbacks over the last few years.
- As the impact of Islamic Azad University on economic and cultural development and growth has been proved, it is suggested to those authorities interested in developing the city, to pay a particular attention to a thorough improvement and development of the Islamic Azad University.

REFERENCES:


