

Fair Share Smart Business Start-ups for Job Seekers in Oman - Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Jobs and employments have always been the main engine spinning the economy's wheel in all countries since ages. Oman has been recently suffering an exceptional rate of unemployment and an economical atmosphere that resulted in increased rate of jobseekers. The Research aims to analyze the impact of unemployment with respect to Sultanate's economy, in society and in families. It is going to view the contribution of fair-share business and group startup to the nation's GDP. Also, it is going to analyze how these activities are going to make a sustainable cyclic economy. This study also proposes an innovative self-employment method "Fair-Share Business" to motivate young graduates to become emerging entrepreneurs. It is more evident that when more entrepreneurs emerge, the rate of unemployment will come down and obviously, the economy of the country will also improve. If the economy hikes, it will have positive impact on the society and the families.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a world that is changing rapidly with the growth of the population resulting in a higher compete towards jobs and improved economy, it became a hard task for an individual to gain a proper job or a traditional economy to keep up. It is the case that countries – along with citizens- suffer of the issue of unemployment. In the last 10 years, Oman's unemployment rate increased significantly which rised the challenges to provide jobs for jobseekers. Innovative initiatives and solutions from out of the box are demanded to overcome the situation. Since the majority of the unemployed in Oman are fresh graduates and laid-off laborers, it will be possible for them to start a new business by creating groups that serve in a specific field and thus to achieve a self-employment ground. The research is proposing a prototype web-based platform through which a person of interest in a business such as people who are job seeker, business ideas owners and investors can contribute through the proposed portal. Also, it can be a person who have the financial liquidity to start a business, yet his only problem is the lack of experienced or skilled people. In the other side of this point of view, a person with an idea which might needs sponsors or funders can be found, assessed, and studied by those over the portal's utility.

The core is represented on that the owner of the idea will be able to review, interview and discuss the entire frame -the business plan, tasks, goals, and shares- through the platform. This will open wide options for all interested and they will always have the chance to get a job or to join the business. Mentioning that this process is a cyclic process where all of those depends on each other to complete the circle and start a business. This will also help people who are willing to gain a second job -additional wages- to find a suitable job that fits with their initial job conditions especially during the current economic conditions.

On the other hand, such idea will help the economy to improve in both personal and public perspectives. As expressed earlier, this is going to be a cyclic process in which it is expected to increase the power of purchase and will encourage other small to mid-sized businesses to grow and expand. Thus, circulating financial liquidity within the country will be more effective and will prevent it from flowing outside the country. According to a news item published in Al Roya newspaper in September 2020 the external remittances were USD 9.2 billion – around OMR 3.54 billion. This process as being expected by the decision makers in Oman is the main target to achieve as they will contribute the overall GDP of Oman. From the social perspective, families will have more chances of their members to get a job, hence the financial responsibilities will be reduced from the families' shoulders. Moreover, a young person will be able to build his life by being able to get married and work a home for his new family.

As the proposal suggest implementing a platform, this study will work on implementing an initial prototype that will provide the infrastructure for this purpose. The portal will consist of a webserver – Apache webserver- along with MySQL database server to provide an accessibility over internet. The overall structure will be simply to ask the person to register and from it, all other options will be available. This portal will enable any of the targeted personnel such as jobseekers or investors to sign in and join the business startup process.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Problem: The increasing rate of the unemployees in Oman is reaching a dangerous level that requires an immediate but sustainable solution to overcome it.

Background: The official statistics in retrieved from Oman Open Data shows the job seekers rate has increased that in 2018, 2019, 2020 the rates were 1.8%, 2.77% and 2.90% respectively (Oman Open Data – 2022). According to an investigation conducted by Alroya electronic newspaper that there are 65.4 thousand Omani job seekers and 72% of them are youth ages between 18-29. All the temporarily solutions for accommodating the unemployees are a major problem requires more sustainable solutions.

Relevance: Public sector has been accommodating the majority of the Omani job seekers which were able to do so for a period, yet the increment of the Omani population and the unsolved rate of unemployees with the decreased economy growth resulted in the government's inability to absorb more. While the unemployment issue remains unsolved and due to the country's heading to divers the income resources, it make it clear that the need for small to mid-ranged businesses to achive that goal. Addressing the problem is not in finding jobs opportunities for people while the main solution stands on more businesses and start-ups which can elastically grow and accommodate others.

Objectives: The purpose of this research is to utilize the technology and the connected world over the internet to provide the jobs and business startup opportunities for all interested right to their place. It will provide an interactive portal in which all jobseekers, business starters and investors to meet up in one place, seek for different opportunities and discuss them make agreements of responsibilities and shares ending up with starting businesses. The portal would also provide consultant for people with business ideas or business startup by officials and experts whom openly and freely join and contribute the work.

1.2 Conceptual Framework:

The below conceptual framework figure 1 describes how the employment, and the economic growth can be affected by the SMEs in Oman. The economic growth is highly related to the amount of successful small to medium-sized enterprises which in return increase the GDP contribution. The process as it seems is more as a cyclic process in which the more entrepreneurs and SMEs the better economy and in return the increased demand for employees. The users as illustrated clearly in the framework are those who will use the portal to get benefited of the services by finding job, proposing business idea to get sponsored or even to find proper employees, the investors who are willing to find good business opportunities and finally the interested parties from government agencies and the private sectors. As the interested surfing the portal, they will come across different sections which represent their interests. After finding the desired, a negotiation or further talk can be established by which the process goes on or stops according to the agreement between these parties. As more stakeholders join, the chances for all parties increase to find the desired, hence a one place that accommodate them all reveling an increased number of successful SMEs and cyclic economy driven by the related process of those. The officials will be able to real-time analyze the process going on and the majority of the business interest going on and accordingly to make the proper support and decision making to boost up these businesses.

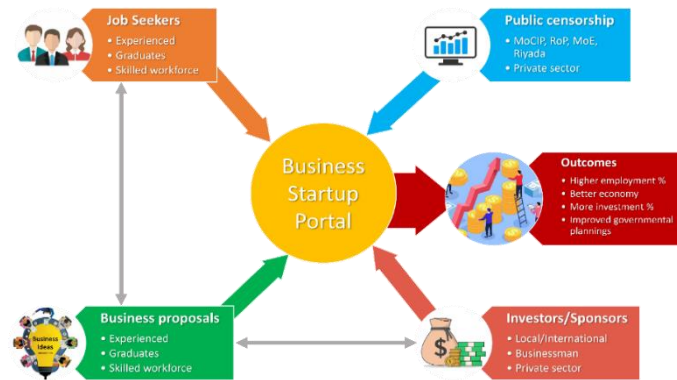


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.
Source: Prepared by the authors.

1.3 Assumptions:

- A web portal is accessible because it is online
- Because it is a web based it will be easy to use.
- A central portal for business start-up will make more entrepreneurs.
- A central portal for business start-up will provide a cyclic economical process.
- Local and international investors will find more business opportunities to join.
- More business startups cause unemployment reduction.
- The higher employment rate the better the economy is.
- Technological solutions are more attractive to young people.
- Society and families will suffer less burden.

1.4 Hypotheses:

- If a person could start a business, then he will be able to employ other Omani people, because he will be able to pay their salaries.
- If more members in a family are employed, then they will help the family and reduce the burden on them, because more people are going to contribute to the family expenses.
- If more Omani people get jobs, then the purchase power in the Omani market will increase, because there are more people able to buy.
- If small to mid-sized businesses expanded and developed, then the more people can be employed, because the expansion will mean more branches to be opened and hence more employees will be required.
- If a person has an idea but with no budget, then it is now easier to get funded or sponsored, because funders and sponsors will be always looking for such ideas in such easy to reach platform.
- If more people could start-up a group business, then the burden on the government will be reduced, because it will now pay more effort to support these businesses rather than paying it for finding jobs.
- If job opportunities are available openly in a website, then more local and international investors will join, because it will be easier for them to analyze the business models remotely with less time and effort.

1.5 Significance of the Study:

- It will provide more jobs for Omani people.
- It will provide more chance to an idea to come true and start a business.
- It will reduce the responsibility of the government to provide jobs.
- It will empower the private sector.
- It will improve the economy.
- It will increase the purchase power.
- Seeking for funders and sponsors will be easier.
- It will be a user-friendly platform as it will be web-based.

1.6 Scope and Limitation:

Scope: The Omani jobseekers who are willing to gain a job or start a business as a group of individuals looking for opportunities to utilize their scientific knowledge and working experience. The expected duration for this study is from June 2022 to June 2023 in which it will covers the geographical location of Oman through the implemented platform through the internet.

Limitations: The section to cover in this study regarding the relation between SMEs and economy is very huge and is hard to reach and cover from all angles for making a complete investigation. The study is only limited to the Omani youth who are aged between 18 and 29 and are in the educational level of below graduate up to the higher education levels. It cannot be assured the commitment and the accuracy of the participants during answering the questioner. As the data required from the officials are outdated the recent of them is for the year 2020 it will be that much of freshness as it may conflict the accuracy of this study as the government have employed huge number in 2021/2022 after Sohar protest actions. The official data provided by the government are unavailable or most of the time are outdated.

1.7 Definition terms:

- **Entrepreneur:** a person who makes money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks (“Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries”, n.d.).
- **Unemployment:** “the term refers to a situation when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work” (Hayes, 2022).
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration is a method by which different parties share various resources including data, information, tasks, and responsibilities equally or on a pre-defined agreement in order to accomplish a common goal (Camarinha, et al, 2008).
- **Job seekers:** A job seeker is an unemployed person who is trying to get a job.
- **SME:** “Small to medium-sized enterprises are businesses that maintain revenues, assets or a number of employees below a certain threshold” (Liberto, 2020).
- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** “GDP is the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country’s borders in a specific time period” (Fernando, 2022).
- **Self-employment:** “earning income directly from one’s own business, trade, or profession rather than as a specified salary or wages from an employer” (“Merriam-Webster”, n.d.).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decade, there were many research and studies conducted to analyze and solve the issues of the unemployment in Oman. As there were many other researchers conducted, it can be observed that the problem is critical, and the circle is getting tighter to urgently, but sustainably, find proper solutions for employing Omanis and improving the economy.

Al-Abri Yahya and his team made research in 2018 to illustrate the challenges facing the business startups and the effect of these challenges in the progress and growth in Oman. They have mentioned that according to the statistics in 2017, the SME contribution to the Omani GDP was only 20% which is below the expectations. The researchers are proposing to make a persistent framework for the business startups economical systems taking in count the important variables the Omani SME must work on to improve the growth and sustainability. The study used a qualitative approach built up from the inductive logic method. They made interviews with the two main questions which are 1) “what are the obstacles for beginning a business which makes the task hard and slow down the growth and sustainability?” 2) “what are the most important things which attract people to start a business and success in the path of entrepreneurship?” and they were asked to ten entrepreneurs during interviews. The team found that Oman business starters need a reference model which includes the variables that have a linear and positive impact on entrepreneurship and for that they have proposed an SME supporting Ecosystem Model for Oman.

Ravikumar Anitha has conducted research in 2018 to reason the importance supporting the small and medium-sized enterprises in Oman due to their ability to solve Oman’s economy strike and the unemployment issues. In her research, she mentioned that the current economy which relies on Oil and Gas is unsustainable and is not generating enough jobs opportunities. The paper analyzed the governmental efforts to improve and support the SMEs and business starters and what has been provided for them in different fields. Here research is based on reviewing other researches as a primary data source and the data collected from other sources as secondary data. According to her search, SMEs classifications varies in size and incomes starting from micro

enterprise (1-5 workers) with sales rates under OMR 100,000. The Small enterprise (6-25 workers) incomes ranges between OMR 100,000 to 500,000. Finally, the medium-sized businesses (26-99 workers) make returns in the range of OMR 500,000 to 3,000,000. In the other hand, she has also mentioned the sources of funding which are the commercial banks, Al Raffd funds and other sources varying between private and public sector. On the other hand, the expectations of the SMEs to contribute more as the government planning and hence more sustainable economy and higher employment rate. The findings were that the biggest problem for the business starters is the budget, yet the Omani government is pumping various shapes of support to encourage these SMEs and the business starters. It is very important to identify the successful investment sectors to start with is the key of success when starting a business.

In 2019 Dr. Thomas Basil and his colleague made a study to assess how convenient is the business startup environment in Oman, how the governmental efforts would effectively capitalize the number of SMEs in Oman and the way they are contributing to the overall economy. According to the, their research will provide a scientific analysis of the current systems and how the other parties, entrepreneurs, will be affected and benefited by it. The researchers used empirical evidence gathering approach using a quantitative market research and is made on the business starters in Oman. The sample was made from a non-probability sampling technique and has covered the business starters in different sectors such as food, beverages, tourism, etc. The number of participants was 150 by making questioners for them and has been distributed to several governates. The team used the PLS and SPSS software to analyze the collected data. Data analysis revealed that the earnings per month in OMR for 9% of the sample was less than 1,000, 31% earn between 1,000-2,000, 23% earn between 2,000-3,000 and finally 37% are earning 3,000. The most successful sectors of investment were in the food and beverages businesses with monthly earnings of OMR 3,000 or more. The study found that the males are the most dominant in entrepreneurship thus the participation of females in the sector will revels more contribution to nation and hence accelerate the economic and employment status. Also, the statistics showed that these governments support along with the internal and the external financial boosters makes the entrepreneurship atmosphere very attractive and successful in Oman.

Khalid Adil made research in 2018 in which he investigated the obstacles facing the graduate Omani people in the presence of the unemployment issues. The difficulties are mostly related to the complications and challenges which are driven by the lack of resources and experience according to the researcher. The study used questioner using Likert-scale questions to address the obstacles and the barriers standing behind young starting a business distributed to student of 2529 students from Oman universities. He used SPSS software to test the data and evaluate them. Khalid found that the students don't tend to get a loan and they are lack in technology background making it hard to start a business. Also, he found that they are not self-confident to start a business. However, the study showed that 50% of the sample have got a good education to form a business. There were conflicting opinions regarding the amount of support in terms of providing the proper advisement and guidance from the higher educational institutes. The study also showed that the government's support and effort is not enough for these students. The researcher suggests that there is a need to enhance the students' attitude to adopt the idea of starting a business.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is based on making a questionnaire as primary data and from the official statistics and data released by the Omani government as a secondary data. According to the reviewed studies, the best sample age for this questionnaire is the youth with ages range between 18 to 29 and classify them according to the educational level starting from General Diploma, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor, and higher education. The sample has been selected as the main target of this research is to accommodate the needs of youth job seekers and to make a cyclic economic that relies on the supply and demand between these parties. As we have obtained from the reviewed studies, we found the best questionnaire approach for this purpose is the Likert-scale questions. Likert-scale questions are used for researches which needs to understand and analyze the different opinions and expectations of the engaged sample related with one variable which can be a phenomenon of interest. So, this variable, unemployment, is then expressed by several other relevant sub-variables through the questionnaire yet each one is measuring a specific dimension of the phenomenon. At the end, the overall result of all questions scores within the questionnaire will be summed to find the overall score, by which, the score, can drive the direction of measuring the logical relation of the dimensions. In our approach we will use the five-point Likert scale and to identify the educational background and the gender of the participants a key relation to the dimensions we are building regarding understanding the unemployment. For data interpretation and visualization we have used MS Excel to create the charts and graphs.

On the other hand, the studies also showed that the best investment is the one which start by youth while in fact the highest rate of job seekers in Oman are them. Although the statistics and data from officials depends on the annual reports of MoL, MoE and others, we should highlight that some of the provided data are not sufficient or not updated in Some cases. For that reason, the possibility of gathering the important information was still not possible.



Gender		Male 			Female 	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age		18-20	21-22	23-24	25-26	27-28
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education level		General Diploma	Diploma	Advanced Diploma	Bachelor	Higher Education
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	You want to start your own business after graduation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	You are willing to start a business as group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	You prefer to start business with group of experts rather than friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	You agree to negotiate the shares among the group members of the business.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	There are enough financial resources for business starters.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	You have good knowledge about Riyadh.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	There is sufficient advertising regarding the types of support to SMEs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Sponsors/investors for business are easy to find.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	There are many sources from which you can search for jobs or join business.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	You prefer to search and apply for jobs/business opportunities over internet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 1: Proposed Questionnaire.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In order of making the analysis of the research, a questioner has been distributed among youth Omanis aged between 18-28 years. The responses were driven by selecting one of 5 options of answers corresponding each question in the Likert questions style. There were 41 participants in the questioner. Based on the data collected and the interpretation of the data, the following analysis are presented.

Initially, the first part of the questioner is to understand the demographics of the participants by measuring gender, age, and the educational level. The gender of the participants which showed that the majority were females with 26 representing $\approx 63.5\%$ and the male were the least participants with 15 participants representing $\approx 36.5\%$ as shown in figure 2. The second demographical measure was to identify the participants ages and the data showed that most of the participants aged between 18-24 representing 68.3% of the sample and 31.7% was from sample aged between 25-28 as showed in figure 3. The educational level of the participants was found that the bachelor graduates represent 65% of the sample as shown in figure 4.

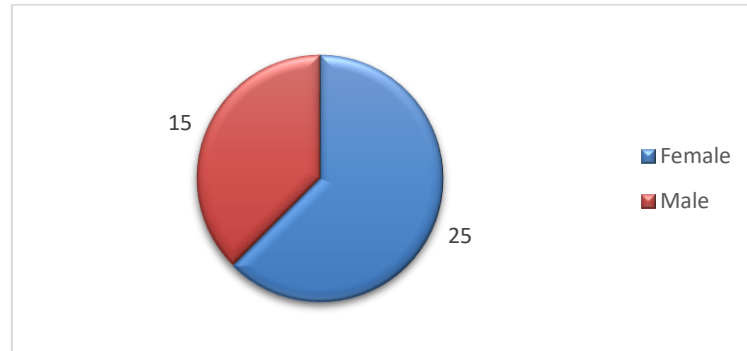


Figure 2: Participants Gender.

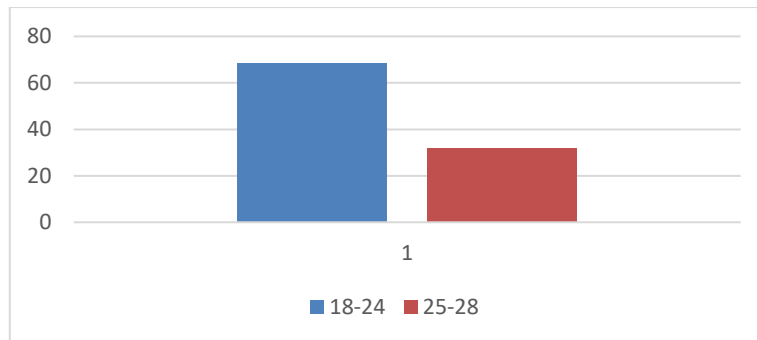


Figure 3: Participants Age.

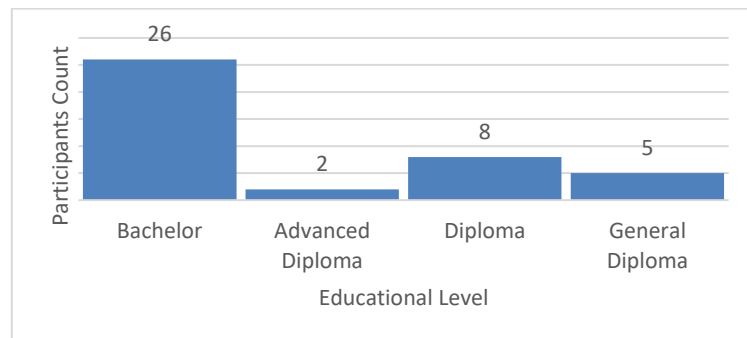


Figure 4: Participants Educational Level.

Secondly, the questions which are designed to measure the self-employment and group-startups as the main variable derived by other sub-questions are interpreted as following. For the first question that quires the wish of starting a business, around 83% are agreeing to start their own business after graduation and 56.1% agree to start a business as a group. Figure 5 presents the analyzed statistics of this part. In the other hand to measure the care of starting a business with group of experts or with good knowledge backgrounds showed that they are agree with a percentage of 70.7% as shown in figure 6.

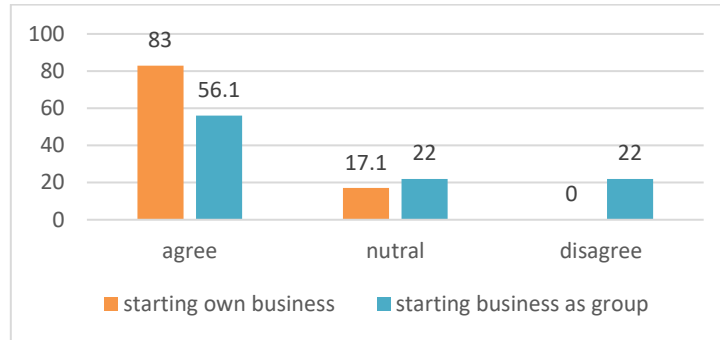


Figure 5: Business Startup Acceptance.



Figure 6: Business startup with expert's acceptance chart.

Third category of the questions were related on measuring the financial capabilities and the knowledge background of the sources of supports from the government of Oman. It was found that they participants are lacking on the financial resources as the data shows that about 56% of the sample are not having the budget to start their own businesses. The knowledge of Riyadh and the advertisement about it is weak. Figure 7 represents the financial abilities of those to start business, the knowledge of Ryada, and the advertising size of it.

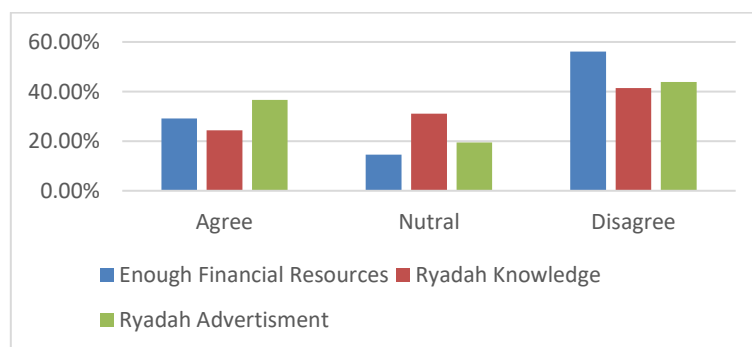


Figure 7: Supports resources & Riyadh.

The final section of the questioner is to measure the financial resources available in Oman. About 19.5% of the participants disagreed to the question related to the availability of sponsors or investors. In the

other hand, there is a conflict opinion regarding the availability of the various resources for a person to find a job or to join a business. At the end, the majority represented in 63.4% agree the fact that they are preferring to apply for jobs through internet. Figure 8 shows the discussed analysis interpreted from the collected data in this regard.

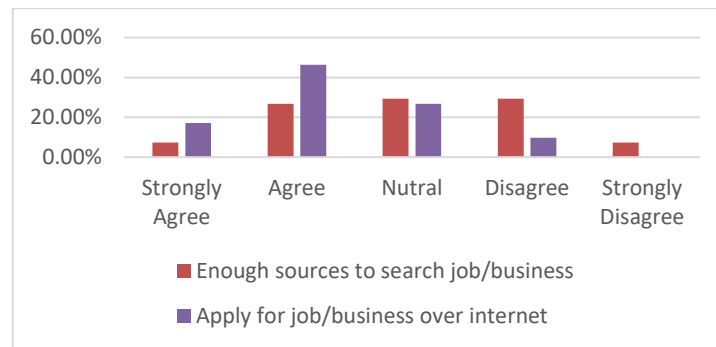


Figure 8: Job search and Business applications over internet.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:

Summary:

In order to understand the consequences of unemployment to Oman’s economy and the society the research was held in one phase as the second phase to be completed after getting TRC-URG fund. Phase 1 was about making a questioner to measure the unemployment factors with respect to national economy, society, and families. According to the study, the main relationship between unemployment rate, SMEs and group business startups were identified.

Conclusion:

It was found that the main issue for graduates to start a business is the budget. The acceptance of starting a business with groups is well accepted yet 70.7% are willing to start their group business with experts. It was also observed that there is not enough background regarding the different financial resources available such as Riyadh. The participants expressed their wish to apply for jobs and businesses over the internet.

Recommendation:

The youth confidence to start business especially as groups should be enhanced. There should be enough education of the SMEs, entrepreneurship, and the sources of support in Oman. There should be a portal to accommodate the job applications, business ideas, sponsors, and the government.


The Research aims to analyze the impact of unemployment with respect to Sultanate’s economy, in society and in families.

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