





Analyzing the Lived Experiences of Faculty Members on Barriers and Drivers in University-industry Relations

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyze the lived experiences of faculty members about the barriers and drivers of the university-industry relationship. The research method was phenomenology a form of qualitative research. The study population includes 600 faculty members of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. The intended sample consisting 15 people were purposefully selected according to the theoretical saturation. Data collection procedure in the qualitative part was a semi-structured interview. Review by members and inter-coder agreement have been used to evaluate the validity and reliability of the study, respectively. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis method. The findings indicated that from the point of view of the faculty members 81 primary themes, 13 sub-themes, and 3 main themes (academic, structural, and environmental barriers and financial and regulatory barriers) and 70 primary themes, 13 sub-themes, and 6 main themes (revision of the structures, relevant rules and codes, financing, observing the scientific and doctrinaire process to obtain research projects, recruiting expert and competent managers to facilitate communication and changing beliefs) are achievable in part of barriers and drivers, respectively. According to the findings obtained, there are barriers to university-industry relationship that are both university and industry-related; both must try to remove the barriers and they can enjoy the drivers provided in this article to optimize the university-industry relationship.

Keywords: University; Industry; University-Industry Relationship; Third Generation University.



Introduction

Universities serve as the epicenter of intellectual advancement, addressing contemporary challenges and contributing to attaining long-term national development objectives. Universities play a fundamental role in driving socio-economic progress by providing strategic consultation to managerial sectors and shaping their external ecosystems (Geiger, 2020). By generating new knowledge and fostering innovation, universities deliver unparalleled education to students, entrepreneurs, business professionals, and future organizational leaders. Recognizing that organizations cannot thrive in isolation, collaboration between academia and industry is vital for economic growth and the creation of novel innovations. Joint efforts in research and development between universities and industries are pivotal for exploring new opportunities and expanding innovation horizons (Rossoni et al., 2024). University-industry partnerships are instrumental in advancing knowledge production, enhancing market competitiveness, fostering innovation, and promoting economic growth and societal welfare (Fernandes & O'Sullivan, 2021). Effective knowledge transfer from academia to industry drives productivity and economic progress (Pereira et al., 2021). The intensifying global competition, entry into new markets, and deployment of advanced technologies underscore the necessity of strengthening university-industry relations (Manarbek et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore lived experiences. The research, conducted in 2021, employed purposive sampling to select participants, continuing until data saturation was achieved, ensuring no emergence of new themes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz faculty members to collect data. To ensure validity, a member-checking method was implemented. After the interviews, the extracted codes from the transcripts were revisited and reviewed with participants, who provided feedback on aligning the codes with the interview content. Certain codes related to specific components were revised during this process, clarifying and refining findings demonstrating an acceptable validity level. For reliability, the study applied the inter-coder agreement method to evaluate the consistency of interview analyses. Thematic analysis was employed to process and interpret the data collected through the interviews.

Research Findings

The findings revealed 81 initial themes, 13 sub-themes, and 3 main themes related to barriers in university-industry collaboration. Academic barriers included challenges such as inefficient administrative systems, restrictive institutional and financial regulations, lack of motivation, and cognitive obstacles among faculty members. Legal barriers, highlighted by participants, encompassed the dependency of research budgets on the national economy, mismanagement of research funding, centralization and state control over universities and industries, and the prevalence of favoritism and nepotism in research project allocation. Structural and environmental barriers were also identified, including structural inefficiencies, redundancies and overlaps between universities and industries, an externalized perspective within industries, immaturity in both sectors, lack of trust from industry toward universities, and inadequacies in needs assessment and planning processes. Regarding drivers for university-industry collaboration, the analysis identified 70 initial themes, 13 sub-themes, and 6 main themes. Key drivers included revising organizational structures to enhance alignment between universities and industries, updating laws and regulations to support collaboration, ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources, implementing systematic and scientific processes for securing research projects, employing



qualified and competent managers to streamline communication and operations, and fostering a cultural shift to promote collaboration. These drivers were recognized as critical prerequisites for facilitating effective partnerships between universities and industries.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored faculty members' experiences concerning barriers and drivers in university-industry collaboration. The findings categorized barriers into three main themes: academic barriers, financial-regulatory barriers, and structural-environmental barriers. **Organizational factors and restrictive regulations strongly influenced academic barriers**, consistent with previous studies. Nguyen, & Nguyen (2020) identified similar issues, while Safary and Saeed Arsi (2018) highlighted restrictive policies. Additional findings from Fasihi (2016), Dolati et al. (2019), and Hessian et al. (2021) reinforced the role of institutional and financial regulations as obstacles. Faculty demotivation also emerged as a critical challenge, stemming from heavy academic workloads that hinder engagement with external sectors and the lack of recognition for industry-relevant research in professional advancement. These findings align with prior studies, such as those by Nikounejad et al. (2020) and Erfanmanesh et al. (2018), which emphasized the absence of motivational factors as a barrier. **The dependency of research budgets on national economic conditions marked financial regulatory barriers**. Faculty members noted that economic fluctuations directly impact research funding, with favorable allocations during growth periods and significant constraints during downturns. This dependency delays resource distribution, impeding universities' capacity to fulfill their societal and market-related roles. **Structural-environmental barriers** included reliance on imported industrial products, managerial inefficiencies, and the appointment of non-specialized or transient managers. Such managers often prioritize external solutions through expensive foreign consulting firms, neglecting cost-effective domestic alternatives. Industries also tended to outsource primary needs to external providers, relegating secondary and tertiary needs to universities, further complicating collaboration. Six main themes emerged in examining the drivers of university-industry collaboration: structural reforms, regulatory revisions, financial support, adherence to scientific and systematic processes, skilled and qualified management, and attitudinal change. **Structural reforms** were deemed critical, emphasizing promoting university independence from governmental influence and fostering localized industrial capabilities. Participants suggested creating university-owned companies to commercialize academic research and products as a viable approach. **Regulatory revisions** were highlighted as essential for simplifying administrative and legal processes that hinder collaboration. Establishing streamlined university-industry offices with reduced bureaucratic hurdles was identified as a means to attract industry managers and facilitate smoother partnerships. **Financial support** emerged as a prerequisite, particularly the revision or removal of high research overhead costs imposed by universities. Excessive overhead expenses were a significant deterrent to faculty engagement with external organizations.

Adherence to scientific and systematic processes was crucial for aligning academic research with industry needs. Establishing specialized committees to prioritize, assess, and plan research activities based on industrial demands was recommended. **Skilled and qualified management** was recognized as a key facilitator. Appointing visionary and system-oriented managers, particularly at the provincial level, was suggested to bridge gaps and foster effective collaborations between academia and industry. **The attitudinal change** was identified as a pivotal driver. Industry leaders must shift their perception of universities from luxurious entities to strategic partners capable of addressing industrial challenges. By acknowledging the value of academic institutions, industries can enhance innovation and achieve mutual benefits.



Addressing the identified barriers and implementing the suggested drivers can strengthen university-industry relationships, benefiting both sectors and contributing to national development. These partnerships can unlock innovation and drive economic progress by overcoming structural, regulatory, and financial challenges and fostering a collaborative culture.

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