



The Contribution of Saudi Public Universities to the Promotion of their Students' Lifelong Learning Culture

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has revitalized the concept of lifelong learning and re-linked it to its human origins, especially Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) which calls for ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong education opportunities for all”. Motivated by this goal, this study explored the contribution of Saudi public universities to the promotion of their students’ lifelong learning culture (hereafter LLC). To this end, the perceptions of 252 senior students and 168 postgraduate students on the contribution of their universities to the promotion of their LLC, the obstacles to the promotion of this culture in universities, and ways to enhance the universities’ potential to promote students’ LLC were surveyed. The study used a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire administered to 420 students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs in theoretical and applied colleges at three Saudi public universities. There were also follow-up interviews with 15 students to elaborate on their perceptions. The results revealed that the participants’ rating of Saudi universities’ contribution to the promotion of their students’ LLC was high with a total mean of 4.17 out of 5. However, the participants reported several obstacles to the promotion of LLC in Saudi universities. These included, lack of academic courses addressing LLC, separation between the majors available to the students and the requirements of the labor market, and poor communication between the university and the private sector to finance lifelong learning programs.

Keywords: lifelong learning culture, sustainable development goals 2030, quality education, labor market, Saudi universities

INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, the world has achieved remarkable progress in education after the six goals of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals were set. However, these goals have not been achieved by the deadline set for them in 2015. Therefore, it is necessary to continue working to achieve the target achievement goals. With the formulation of the SDG4 - Education by 2030 - which calls for ensuring “inclusive and

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equitable quality education and promoting lifelong education opportunities for all”, the world has developed a more ambitious Global Agenda for Education for the period from 2015 to 2030 (UNESCO & SDG, 2017).

These efforts culminated in the issuance by UNESCO of the Incheon Declaration, which was adopted in May 2015 at the World Education Conference held in Incheon, Republic of Korea. This declaration constitutes the commitment of the education community to SDG4 - Education by 2030 - and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Incheon Declaration recognizes that education is a common good, a fundamental human right, a basis for ensuring the implementation of other rights, and a major drive of development within a lifelong learning approach (2015). In the context of the current study, the Incheon Declaration highlights the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all in all contexts and at all levels of education. This includes promoting opportunities for technical and vocational education and training, increasing equitable access to higher education, ensuring appropriate and recognized levels of proficiency in learning reading and arithmetic for young people and adults, learning life skills, providing education and training opportunities for adults, and promoting science, technology and innovation, including information and communication technologies in education (UNESCO, 2015).

To support and implement lifelong learning, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has established the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. The network bases its work on two main documents: the Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities and Key Features of Learning Cities. The Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities identifies the role of lifelong learning in promoting inclusion, prosperity, and sustainability in cities. The Key Features of Learning Cities sets out a framework for the main features of learning cities. Guided by these two documents, the UNESCO Network aims to help cities harness the power of lifelong learning to build a sustainable future (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015).

Realizing the role of learning cities in achieving SDG 4, Saudi Arabia has integrated the efforts of the Ministry of Education with the UNESCO Regional Center for Quality and Excellence and the National Committee for Education, Culture and Science to transform Jubail Industrial City into the first global learning city in the Kingdom that seeks to promote inclusive quality education, spread LLC within the Saudi society, facilitate learning within the work environment, and promote quality and excellence in learning (Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Ministry of Education, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2021).

In support of national and international efforts to achieve sustainable development in the cities of the Kingdom, the Ministry of Education launched the National Initiative for Lifelong Learning “Estidama”. The initiative aims to promote the values of lifelong learning and to equip young people outside education with necessary life skills and training opportunities to join the labor market. One of the most prominent projects of the initiative is the preparation and operation of the Learned Neighborhood Center, which is implemented under the supervision of education departments in all regions and governorates of the Kingdom (Ministry of Education, Vision Realization Office 2017).

In 2021, Saudi Arabia launched the “Human Capacity Development Program”, one of the programs to achieve the Kingdom’s 2030 Vision. The program aims to promote the competitiveness of national human capabilities locally and globally and meet the needs of all segments of society through the development of human capabilities from childhood until access to the labor market. One of the program’s pillars is to provide lifelong learning opportunities for every citizen in the Kingdom (Saudi Arabia, 2021), and accordingly the Ministry of Education cancelled the restriction that prevented secondary school graduates from joining universities after five years from their graduation.

The Saudi society is now witnessing rapid changes as a result of scientific and technological transformations in all fields, including culture and education. Coping with these changes and shaping the future require creative and innovative political responses. Promotion of lifelong learning to achieve a sustainable future is a goal in itself. It is also a condition for achieving many other sustainable development goals. To meet this challenge, it is important to mobilize higher education institutions (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2018).

The university sector in Saudi Arabia has tremendous potential to promote students’ lifelong learning due to its capacity to enhance knowledge and foster innovation and education. However, its actual contribution is still unclear, as many universities still give priority to academic excellence and research, with less attention being paid to teaching and providing opportunities for lifelong learning. Therefore, achieving the vision expressed in the sustainable development goals, especially in goal 4, requires a fundamental transformation in higher education institutions, especially universities.

In this regard, some academics and educators call for equipping students with lifelong learning skills, so they can assume responsibility for their learning and construct their knowledge and employ it in real life. They suggest that these skills can be enhanced through a mixture of attitudes, life experiences, social relations, and values, all of which shape students’ involvement in any available learning opportunity. Only students equipped with lifelong learning skills can adapt to and/or overcome challenges in future careers (Demirel & Akkoyunlu, 2017).

It is therefore important to develop in students’ positive dispositions towards lifelong learning and teach them the skills that can turn them into lifelong learners. This seems inevitable, so they can adapt to the ever-changing nature of the labor market. This provided the impetus for conducting this study to investigate the extent to which Saudi public universities in Riyadh promote LLC in their students. Such investigation can assess the reality of the promotion of students’ LLC in Saudi universities and offer suggestions to enhance the universities’ potential to achieve this significant goal.

Study Questions

1. What is the reality of the contribution of Saudi public universities to the promotion of students’ LLC from the perspective of students?
2. What are the obstacles to the promotion of students’ LLC in Saudi public universities from the perspective of students?

3. What are the ways for Saudi public universities to promote students' LLC from the perspective of students?

Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in assessing the extent to which Saudi universities contribute to the promotion of LLC in their students. Undoubtedly, the identification of weaknesses, if any, in universities' performance in this regard can shape the way for better future performance. It is of paramount importance to make sure that universities produce students who are capable of assuming learning on their own after graduation. This investigation therefore probes one of the main functions of universities.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to identify the reality of the contribution of Saudi public universities to the promotion of their students' LLC. It also aimed to identify the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi public universities from the perspective of students. Based on the results, the study would offer a set of recommendations for Saudi universities to enhance LLC among their students.

Previous Studies

Hidayat et al. (2022) indicated that half a century ago lifelong learning provided the philosophical and conceptual background in which education policies have been framed. Since then, learning has been conceived as part of a humanistic view of the world, intrinsically characterized by core values such as human dignity, equal rights, social justice, and respect for cultural diversity. Today these principles remain essential aspects of humanity and ideals of what learning can achieve. At the international level, Sue Webb et al. (2022) showed that the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development played an active role in promoting lifelong learning. The UNESCO formulated the vision and concept of "lifelong learning for all", especially through the reports of Edgard Fore (1972) and Jacques Delors (199). These two reports outlined the basic principles of such education. In the following decades, the terminology of lifelong learning and the metaphor of "cradle-to-grave education" have become recurring (Mejía-Manzano, et al., 2022). However, the economic motives for competitiveness and adaptation to the labor market have shifted attention from a human vision to a materialistic one driven by the market. In this way, the ambitious and comprehensive concepts expressed by Delors were compromised (Salleh, et al., 2019).

Al-Dosari (2016) explored the efforts of Saudi universities in applying continuing education models to achieve lifelong learning as an approach to achieving sustainable development in the Kingdom. The study used the descriptive-analytical method and concluded that Saudi universities could employ technology through continuing education models and different modes of distance education. The study recommended that the Kingdom benefit from the experiences of developed countries to achieve better levels in adult and continuing education. Al-Juhani and Abu Al-Fadl (2017) explored lifelong learning as a solution to the gap between the outcomes of higher education and

the needs of the labor market. They also identified the effects of globalization and economic and social factors on the needs of the labor market. The study confirmed the role of higher education institutions, represented by the community service deanships, in keeping pace with these ever-occurring changes. The study presented a proposal to activate the role of community service deanships through planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

Habil and Kurd study (2018) investigated the role of Palestinian universities in the follow-up of graduates and its impact on the effectiveness of their programs from the perspective of graduates through comparing the alumni units in three Palestine universities: the Islamic University, An-Najah National University, and the University College of Applied Sciences. The results revealed that the universities played a role in qualifying graduates through the various programs offered to them by alumni units and continuing education centers. The participants reported a difficulty in obtaining job opportunities after graduation. The study recommended following up on graduates by providing free training programs, providing supportive information infrastructure, and providing the necessary funding for these programs. Khotouf (2019) explored the university's contribution to activating sustainable development and the importance of lifelong learning in serving the community and achieving sustainable development. The results revealed that lifelong learning plays a key role in the development of society and is a requirement to achieve sustainable development. The study concluded that there was a need for a strategic policy to achieve compatibility between the outcomes of university education and the labor market. It also reported a need for a system that connects the university and community institutions through joint work programs

Alesamy (2020) investigated the role of the faculties of education in developing their students' attitudes towards lifelong learning. The descriptive research method was adopted. A questionnaire of four dimensions: the role of the university management, the role of the educational content, the role of the teaching staff members, and the role of activities was administered to a stratified random sample of 81 teaching staff members. The results showed that mean relative weights of the role of the university management, the role the educational content, and the role of the teaching staff members were moderate. The mean relative weight of the role of activities was weak. The study recommended that seminars and conferences be held for students to develop favorable attitudes towards lifelong learning. Al-Dosari (2020) explored the degree to which the deanships of community service and continuing education in Saudi universities assume social responsibility. Participants were deans and vice deans of the deanships of community service and continuing education in Saudi universities. The study concluded that the most important roles performed by the deanships of community service and continuing education were providing training and educational programs for community members, and implementing training programs that contribute to raising their competence. The study recommended developing an integrated strategy for social responsibility at the university and benefiting from successful international and local experiences in the field of community service.

Dabbab and Latsrah (2020) aimed to identify the extent to which teachers in Algeria are professionally prepared according to the lifelong learning benchmark. The study revealed that Algeria adopted lifelong learning to better train teachers in all educational stages, which contributes to increasing their professional growth and improving their performance in all aspects of knowledge, skill and behavior. The study recommended setting a clear vision for education and training based on the lifelong learning benchmark, preparing teachers professionally according to the culture of lifelong learning, and instilling in them awareness of the importance of lifelong learning. Housein (2021) sought to identify the importance of personal knowledge management represented in the lifelong learning skill. A questionnaire was administered to entrepreneurs to probe their lifelong learning skill and identify its relationship to supporting business performance and innovation as one of the competitive indicators in the labor market. The results revealed a correlation between the lifelong learning skill and innovation. The study recommended providing training courses in all fields, so everyone could obtain lifelong learning in a way that supports innovation in the labor market.

METHOD

Study design

The study used a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Quantitative data was collected by means of a questionnaire administered to 420 students. Qualitative data was also collected from follow-up interviews with 15 students to get them elaborate on the dimensions of the questionnaire, i.e., their perceptions of the universities' contribution to the promotion of their LLC, the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi universities, and ways for Saudi universities to promote LLC in their students. In the results section, the quantitative data would be presented first followed by qualitative data with reference to aspects of convergence or divergence.

Participants

A sample of 420 students ranging in age from 22 to 45 years from three Saudi public universities in Riyadh participated in this study. They were senior undergraduate students in the final study level (N=252) and postgraduate students (N=168) in theoretical and applied faculties. Those participants were recruited from Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University (N=140), Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University (N=168), and King Saud University (N=112). The questionnaire was administered electronically via social networking sites. Additionally, 15 randomly selected students from the three samples were individually interviewed via Google Meet where they elaborated more on their perceptions.

Instrumentations

The study instruments were a questionnaire and follow-up interviews.

The Questionnaire

The purpose of the survey was to assess students' perceptions on the universities' contribution to the promotion of their LLC, the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi universities, and ways for Saudi universities to promote students' LLC. Based on a review of relevant research and assessment tools, 5-point Likert scale items were developed to elicit participants' perceptions on the universities' contribution to the promotion of their LLC (10 items), the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi universities (8 items), and ways for Saudi universities to promote LLC in their students (9 items).

The original version of the questionnaire that included 32 items was content validated by five faculty members who were invited to judge the relevance of items to their respective dimensions and the clarity of wording. Items achieving agreement percentage of 70% were retained. This resulted in the deletion of some items and the rewording of others. This left the questionnaire with 27 items.

To establish its construct validity, the questionnaire was administered to a pilot sample (30 male and female students from Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh) from outside the study's main sample and correlations among items and their respective dimensions were calculated. Correlation coefficients ranged between 0.69 and 0.91, 0.40 and 0.91, and 0.45 and 0.86 for the three dimensions respectively. All correlations were significant at the 0.05 level, hence indicating that the questionnaire had good construct validity.

Table 1
Correlations among items and their respective dimensions

Dimension	Correlation coefficients
The universities' contribution to the promotion of their LLC	1) .69**, 2) .83**, 3) .83**, 4) .91**, 5) .71**, 6) .89**, 7) .78**, 8) .84**, 9) .83**, 10) .69**
The obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi universities	11) .40*, 12) .84**, 13) .80**, 14) .69**, 15) .87**, 16) .82**, 17) .91**, 18) .60**
Ways for Saudi universities to promote LLC in their students	19) .57**, 20) .45*, 21) .59**, 22) .74**, 23) .83**, 24) .86**, 25) .73**, 26) .74**, 27) .72**

** p = 0.01 * p = 0.05

To establish the questionnaire's reliability, alpha Cronbach reliability coefficients were calculated for the data of the pilot sample. The reliability coefficients of the three dimensions were found to be 0.82, 0.80, and 0.83 respectively. All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, the questionnaire was quite reliable.

The interview

Follow-up interviews with 15 students were conducted online. The students were asked three questions corresponding to the three dimensions of the questionnaire, i.e., "what is the reality of your university's contribution to the promotion of your LLC?", "What are the obstacles to the promotion of your LLC in your university", and "What are the ways you suggest for your university to promote your LLC?" The purpose of the interview was to get the students to elaborate more on their perceptions. The interview was

thought to elicit from students information, e.g., personal experiences that could not be elicited from the questionnaire.

Data analysis

Data from the questionnaire was quantitatively analyzed using the SPSS-22 program. Descriptive statistics, i.e., means, standard deviations, and percentages were used. Student's responses to the interview questions were qualitatively treated.

FINDINGS

RQ1: “What is the reality of the contribution of Saudi public universities to the promotion of students’ LLC from the perspective of students?”

Students’ perceptions from the questionnaire

Means and standard deviations of the universities’ contribution to the promotion of their students’ LLC were calculated. These data are shown in table 2.

Table 2

Means and standard deviations of the universities’ contribution to the promotion of their students’ LLC in descending order

Item	Mean	Std.	Level
The LLC is included in the university’s vision and mission.	4.27	0.85	High
Faculty members’ assignments address the promotion of the LLC.	4.27	0.93	High
The university has awareness announcements about lifelong learning programs.	4.23	0.84	High
The university provides students with training programs in lifelong learning.	4.20	0.95	High
The university supports research activities related to lifelong learning.	4.20	0.87	High
The university holds seminars, conferences and workshops on lifelong learning.	4.13	1.09	High
The university collaborates with the local community to support lifelong learning.	4.13	0.92	High
The strategic goals of the university highlight the LLC.	4.10	0.94	High
The university holds research competitions among students on lifelong learning.	4.10	0.94	High
Study courses include topics on lifelong learning.	4.03	0.95	High
Average	4.17	0.79	High

Data in table 2 shows that the participants’ ratings of Saudi public universities’ contribution to the promotion of students’ LLC were high with a total mean of 4.17. This indicates that students of Saudi public universities are apt to practice lifelong learning after graduation.

The data shows that means of the dimension’s items ranged between 4.03 and 4.27, with items 1 “The LLC is included in the university’s vision and mission” and item 6 “Faculty members’ assignments address the promotion of the LLC” achieving the highest means (M=4.27 for both items). Item 7 “The University has awareness announcements about lifelong learning programs” came third with a mean of 4.23. This is in line with the ESCWA Sustainable Development Report’s assertion (2020) that universities can harness the potential of lifelong education to produce innovative and critical-minded citizens, and that this new vision is essential to achieving sustainable development and spreading the values of equality, justice and peace. This result is

consistent with Khotouf's study (2019) which emphasized the university's contribution to activating lifelong learning to serve the community and achieve sustainable development.

Students' perceptions from the interview

Six students from King Saud University voiced their satisfaction regarding the efforts exerted by their university to promote their LLC. They mentioned their university's launching initiatives in partnership with several sectors to strengthen the links between graduates and these sectors. Among these were the initiatives of the Alumni Center with the public and private sectors. Example initiatives mentioned by the students were "Towards a Conscious Graduate", "Training for Employment in Cybersecurity", "Skills for Success", and "Skills for the Future". The students pointed out that those initiatives aimed to enhance their potential to engage in the labor market and raise their professional competence by providing them with appropriate support through training sessions delivered by prominent human resources specialists and consultants in the public and private sectors. Four students from Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University reported efforts exerted by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at their university to develop their skills, raise their professional competencies, train them on skills needed for the labor market and future professions, and monitor available job opportunities in the labor market. Five students from Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University expressed their satisfaction with the type of teaching offered to them which prepares them to be self-directed learners inside and outside the university. One student commented "Lifelong learning is an essential skill in a rapidly changing technological world. It makes us able to learn new skills and adapt to new situations". Another student commented "Many of our teachers are keen on teaching us how to learn on our own and train us on self-learning strategies". A third student mentioned that they develop the ability to self-learn through their university education by engaging in project-based and task-based activities.

RQ2: What are the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi public universities from the perspective of students?

Students' perceptions from the questionnaire

Means and standard deviations of the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi public universities were calculated. These results are presented in table 3.

Table 3
Means and standard deviations of the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi public universities in descending order

Item	Mean	Std.	level
Lack of courses concerned with the promotion of students' LLC.	2.77	1.20	Medium
The majors available to the students are not related to the requirements of the labor market.	2.63	1.17	Medium
Poor communication between the university and the private sector to fund lifelong learning programs.	2.60	1.14	Medium
Lack of programs spreading LLC among students.	2.53	1.15	Medium
Insufficient number of specialists in implementing lifelong learning programs at the university.	2.53	1.06	Medium
Low level of student conviction of the feasibility of lifelong learning programs.	2.50	1.21	Medium
Weak societal motivation for students' lifelong learning activities.	2.43	1.33	Medium
Weak students' confidence in their abilities and skills.	2.30	1.24	Low
Average	2.54	0.95	Medium

As listed in table 3, the total mean of the dimension was 2.54. This indicates that the participants' ratings of the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi public universities were moderate. This indicates that universities need to exert more efforts to remove any obstacles that deter the promotion of their students' LLC. It is clear from the table that the most prominent obstacles recognized by the participants were "Lack of courses concerned with the promotion of students' LLC", "The majors available to the students are not related to the requirements of the labor market" and "Poor communication between the university and the private sector to fund lifelong learning programs". Universities should be alert to these specific obstacles and address them to further the promotion of their students' LLC.

Students' perceptions from the interview

Nearly all students mentioned that despite the efforts made in their universities to promote their LLC, there are several aspects that need to be improved in their university education to equip students with the skills required for lifelong learning. Twelve of the fifteen students reported lack of academic courses addressing LLC. Ten students mentioned separation between the majors available to the students and the requirements of the labor market. Poor communication between the university and the private sector to finance lifelong learning programs was reported by seven students. Other weaknesses mentioned included shortage of programs targeting the dissemination of LLC in universities (i.e., there are programs of this type but they are not enough) and shortage of specialists for implementing lifelong learning programs. Nine students called for addressing lifelong learning in study programs and courses. One graduate student commented "the alumni center provides us with training on lifelong learning, but this is not enough. Study courses should also target the development of students' lifelong learning capacity". Seven students suggested that universities should introduce new majors that qualify students to future jobs. Five students asserted that collaboration between the university and the private sector needs to be furthered. Another postgraduate student commented "There should be more collaboration between the

university and the private sector which will provide employment for graduates. The university should consult people in private entities in the labor market about the qualifications and skills required for the labor market”.

RQ3: What are the ways for Saudi public universities in Riyadh to promote students' LLC?

Students' perceptions from the questionnaire

Means and standard deviations were extracted for ways that Saudi public universities can adopt to promote their students' LLC. These results are shown in table 4.

Table 4

Means and standard deviations of ways for Saudi public universities to promote their students' LLC in descending order

Item	Mean	Std.	level
Activating lifelong learning opportunities to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.	4.70	0.46	High
Establishing training partnerships between the university and the local community on lifelong learning.	4.37	0.71	High
Enhancing communication between the university and the private sector to provide opportunities for continuing learning and professional growth.	4.30	1.07	High
Including topics about lifelong learning and the needs of the labor market in courses.	4.23	0.88	High
Holding research and cultural competitions on lifelong learning programs.	4.23	0.76	High
Providing funding for students to participate in lifelong learning programs at the university.	4.23	0.96	High
Initiating student activities that promote LLC.	4.13	0.99	High
Motivating faculty members to address lifelong learning topics during lectures.	4.07	0.93	High
Introducing a course on lifelong learning as a university requirement.	3.97	1.28	High
Average	4.25	0.59	High

According to data in table 4, the participants' ratings of the ways that Saudi public universities in Riyadh can adopt to promote students' LLC were high with a total mean of 4.25. This result reveals that students of Saudi public universities understand the importance of practicing lifelong learning after graduation, especially in light of the Kingdom's 2030 vision and the structural changes it imposes in the structure of the Saudi economy, and its aim of providing community members with the tools that help them to positively contribute to the knowledge society.

The data shows that means of the dimension's items ranged between 3.97 and 4.70) with item 22 “Activating lifelong learning opportunities to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” achieving the first rank (M=4.70), followed by item 26 “Establishing training partnerships between the university and the local community on lifelong learning” (M=), item 27 “Enhancing communication between the university and the private sector to provide opportunities for continuing learning and professional growth” (M=), item 20 “Include in courses topics about lifelong learning and the needs of the labor market” (M=), item 21 “Holding research and cultural competitions on lifelong learning programs” (M=), and item 24 “Providing funding sources for students to participate in lifelong learning programs at the university” (M=). These results

indicate that the participants deemed the proposed ways effective for public universities in Riyadh to promote the LLC among their students. In this context, universities have been keen to build individual and collective awareness of the concept of lifelong learning by establishing a center for alumni at King Saud University, and a center for excellence in teaching and learning at Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman, in addition to establishing the deanships of community service and continuing education. Convinced with the importance of lifelong learning in building a sustainable future that keeps up with the requirements of the labor market, universities have also launched several lifelong learning initiatives that include a series of training and rehabilitation programs and have set community partnerships with the public and private sectors.

Students' perceptions from the interview

Students' responses to the question about ways to enhance the universities' potential to promote their students' LLC revealed several suggestions. The most prominent suggestions were (1) including topics on lifelong learning in courses, (2) holding research competitions on lifelong learning programs, (3) incorporating student activities that enhance their lifelong learning capacity, (4) encouraging teachers to address lifelong learning topics in their classes, and (5) introducing a course on lifelong learning as a university requirement.

DISCUSSION

Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that Saudi universities strongly enhance lifelong learning in their students. Students were found to be aware of the changes in the local and global labor market which imposed on Saudi public universities to open channels of communication with their graduates to enhance their knowledge and skills in cooperation with public and private sectors. It seems that the universities seek to keep up with the requirements of the labor market as advocated in the 2030 Vision that calls for promoting human capabilities and improving learning outcomes to fit future jobs. This result is consistent with Khotouf's study (2019), which concluded that sustainable development depends on the university's outcomes of qualified human resources. It also concurs with the study of Habil and Kurd (2018) which confirmed the role of universities in qualifying graduates and refining their personality through the various programs offered by alumni units and lifelong learning centers.

It is worth noting here that the alumni Center at King Saud University (1443) provides an example of public Saudi universities' contribution to the promotion of students' LLC. It launched several initiatives in partnership with a number of sectors to serve different segments of beneficiaries and to link of graduates with these sectors, e.g., "Towards a Conscious Graduate", "Skills for the Future", and "Skills for Success". The Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University (1443) has also been keen to develop the skills of university students and graduates, raise their professional competencies, train them in the skills necessary for the labor market and future professions, and monitor job opportunities available in the labor market.

Students' responses to the questionnaire and the comments they offered in the interview referred to some obstacles to the promotion of LLC in Saudi universities. This included lack of academic courses addressing LLC, separation between the majors available to the students and the requirements of the labor market, and poor communication between the university and the private sector to finance lifelong learning programs. This result is consistent with Housein's study (2021) that identified two prominent obstacles to lifelong learning programs, namely weakness in spreading the continuing learning culture and failure to equip students' with new skills. It also agrees with the findings of Al-Dosari's study (2020) regarding the existence of obstacles that deter deanships of community service and continuing education in Saudi public universities from assuming their social responsibility as a result of lack of qualified human cadres and lack of financial resources.

As to the ways to overcome the obstacles and achieve better lifelong learning in Saudi universities, the participants referred to the need to establish training partnerships between the university and the local community, enhance communication between the university and the private sector to provide opportunities for continuing learning and professional growth, include in courses topics about lifelong learning and the needs of the labor market, hold research and cultural competitions on lifelong learning programs, and provide funding sources for students to participate in lifelong learning programs at the university. This result is in line with the study of Al-Dosari (2016) whose results confirmed that Saudi universities could employ technology in the application of continuing education models to achieve lifelong learning as an approach to achieving sustainable development. It also concurs with the study of Al-Juhani and Abu Al-Fadl (2017), which confirmed the role of community service deanships in activating the concept of lifelong learning as a solution to the gap between higher education outcomes and the needs of the labor market.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to assess the promotion of students' LLC in three Saudi public universities, namely Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University, and King Saud University from the perspective of students (senior undergraduate and postgraduate students). More specifically, students' perceptions on the reality of the promotion of students' LLC in their universities, the obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in their universities, and the ways for universities to promote their students' LLC were surveyed by means of a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The results revealed that the contribution of Saudi public universities to the promotion of students' LLC is high. However, three main obstacles to the promotion of students' LLC in Saudi universities were reported by the students. These were lack of academic courses addressing LLC, separation between the majors available to the students and the requirements of the labor market, and poor communication between the university and the private sector to finance lifelong learning programs. The participants reported some obstacles to the promotion of LLC in universities. The most prominent of these were lack of academic courses addressing LLC, separation between the majors available to the students and the requirements of

the labor market, and poor communication between the university and the private sector to finance lifelong learning programs. Suggestions for universities to promote students' LLC were identified from the participants' responses to the questionnaire items and the interview questions. First, it is recommended that lifelong learning be included in intended learning outcomes (ILOs) in student programs and courses. Second, there is a need to adopt teaching and learning practices that develop in students positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. Third, courses should be restructured to base learning on meaningful tasks that reflect emergent requirements of the labor market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

- Saudi universities should adopt a clear philosophy and a specific strategic plan to promote LLC in their academic programs and student activities.
- Enhancing cooperation and establishing joint research and training partnerships with community institutions to achieve the future needs of the society.
- Developing ongoing training programs for students and graduates that focus on developing lifelong learning and adaptation to the labor market.
- Basing teaching on learner-centered approaches and providing teaching staff members with training on how to deliver this type of learner-centered teaching.

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