Integrated Approach as a Way of Overcoming Entrepreneurship Education Challenges in Elementary Schools in MENA Countries: Evidence from Iran

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Abstract Since entrepreneurship and its outcomes, especially in the private sector, lead to a considerable increase in quantity and quality of businesses and new products in society, it is considered as the key to solving economic and social problems. Due to the social and cultural achievements of society, the benefits of non-economic entrepreneurship (social entrepreneurship), have really increased which per se implies that improvement of entrepreneurial mind and culture becomes crucially important. Entrepreneurship education in both formal and informal educational systems is one of the most effective ways to institutionalize entrepreneurship. However, due to its wide range of purposes, the philosophy and importance of entrepreneurship education in the community could be complicated and challenging. In this regard, one must develop the concept for education and training in the community, along with other planned activities. In any case, there are a number of challenges and obstacles in designing and executing these programs in MENA countries like Iran. In this study, via qualitative research, the authors identified and investigated these obstacles and then provided guidelines for tackling the challenges. The key determinants in this study were curriculum development researchers and entrepreneurship education experts. In the end, findings showed that in order to promote entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitude in elementary school students, we could integrate entrepreneurship concepts in courses like mathematics, sciences, social sciences, Persian language, work and technology.

Keywords Entrepreneurship · Elementary education · Educational system · Integrated curriculum · MENA · Iran

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1 Introduction

In recent decades, entrepreneurship has been of great interest among the researchers and policy makers as an emerging scientific field. During these years, there has been extensive research on entrepreneurship in many countries and parts of them were to introduce and educate this concept. An entrepreneur is a person who starts a new venture, taking the initiative and risk associated with it and does so by creating something innovative to provide value to society. Entrepreneurs are the main drivers of economic growth and social development (Holt 1992; Hatten 1997). Many studies have been developed about the factors which influence making the decision to start a business (Littunen 2000; de Pillis and Reardon 2007) and subsequently, the question arises; whether these factors can be taught and learned (Henry et al. 2005; Klein and Bullock 2006; Kantor 2013). Or what makes a person accept all the psychological, social and financial risks associated with starting entrepreneurial activities. Related studies show that entrepreneurs have certain personality traits that distinguish them from non-entrepreneurs. As an example, McClelland (1961) has identified three indicators for entrepreneurs: competitiveness, personal responsibility for results, and innovation. On the other hand, studies show that entrepreneurship is an *educable* skill, and creativity and innovation can be encouraged (Fayolle 2005). By studying entrepreneurial traits, we can figure out creation and enhancement of such traits at an early age is possible. Children are, by nature, curious about the world around them. Providing opportunities for them to inquire and explore will, therefore, engage their interest. In fact, entrepreneurship education can build and strengthen personality traits that lead one to become an entrepreneur such as self-efficiency, need for achievement, risk-taking, and creativity (Rosendahl Huber et al. 2012). For this purpose, entrepreneurship education programs are conducted at different levels in many countries (EACEA European Commission 2012). Entrepreneurship education has been started by teaching entrepreneurship knowledge at university; however, most of the entrepreneurial traits are related to attitudes and skills that are shaped in early childhood. The best age to learn the basics of entrepreneurship and to create entrepreneurial traits is childhood and adolescence because children in their early years have specific physical, mental, emotional, psychological and social traits and their attitudes are shaped generally in this period and learning entrepreneurship skills in middle childhood (9–11 years old) is more effective (Cunha and Schennach 2010). As a recent experience, a sub-program named "My first enterprise: Entrepreneurship by playing" was designed in Mexican education system in order to promote entrepreneurship in elementary schools and the results show that it led to the creation of 1327 mini companies from 2009 to 2014 and the role of teachers is of great importance to influence the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills of students (Cárcamo-Solís et al. 2017).

Developing entrepreneurship can be a separate module in the curriculum, or can be integrated into the usual subjects of the curriculum and indirectly lead students to become entrepreneurs. According to recent researches, the best and effective

learning method for childhood is integrated curriculum (Vars and Beane 2000; Audet and Jordan 2005).

For the reasons mentioned, considering entrepreneurship education for children is essential, but often neglected in the educational system. Integration of entrepreneurship education in school curricula would enrich the learning experiences of students, increase the possibility of creating new businesses by students, improve job skills and business management abilities, enhance communication between schools and industry, and give an opportunity for testing the content and teaching methods of entrepreneurship education. And although the ideal time for learning the basics of entrepreneurship and developing a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship is childhood and adolescence, there is a lack of entrepreneurship education in primary schools, especially in developing countries (Gasse 1985; Filion 1994). In order to expand entrepreneurship in elementary schools, we should consider school books, because school books are one of the most useful educational resources that both teachers and students use on a daily basis. However, organizing the material and content of the curriculum is one of the most critical stages of curriculum development not only because it improves the educational performance but also because the achievement of important goals of the plan depends on it. Studies have further shown that different kinds of integrated methods have more effectiveness and efficiency than the subject-centered curriculum (discipline) and educational goals are reached better by this approach (Drake and Burns 2004). Therefore, educating creativity and entrepreneurship in childhood and adolescence, both in the family and at schools, is vital. In an integrated approach, instead of seeing entrepreneurship as a specific topic, it is considered a part of a longitudinal, transverse and interdisciplinary program. Fortunately, in most countries, entrepreneurship is taught as parts of the social sciences, which may include history, geography, government, and politics or civics as well as other related areas such as community studies (EACEA European Commission 2012).

Entrepreneurship education in Iran goes back to 1990; therefore, when compared with higher education, one can say it is older and more experienced. However, only in one major, named Working Knowledge, an optional entrepreneurship course was planned for students and the curriculum preparation, including textbooks and teacher training, was designed with this one course only. Today after more than two decades of experiences in the educational system it is required that educational system as one of the most important and coherent institutions contain a comprehensive, unified, and consonant entrepreneurship education program at all levels (Azizi et al. 2008).

Due to the necessity and importance of entrepreneurship education at all academic levels, different countries have attempted to teach entrepreneurship through formal programs in the educational system and so Iran has initiated the subject two decades ago in high schools and college entrepreneurship courses. According to the nature of entrepreneurship, presenting the content and methods of the subject in different periods of education, especially in primary school, is a challenge arising from lack of experience. So how to face and overcome the challenges of entrepreneurship education is a critical issue.

In this study based on Bloom's taxonomy, we classify learning objectives of entrepreneurship into three main areas: the cognitive domain (knowledge), the psychomotor domain (skill), the affective domain (attitudes). Then according to Heinonen and Poikkijoki model (2006), these areas are broken down into various concepts which are considered as learning outcomes:

1. Knowledge: knowledge of career opportunities and world of work; economic and financial literacy; knowledge of business organization and process
2. Skill: communication, presentation, and planning skill as well as teamwork; practical exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities
3. Attitude: self-awareness and self-confidence; taking the initiative and risk-taking, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving finally, using the interdisciplinary approach of Drake and Burns (2004), which is one of the integration methods for organizing curriculum; we identify the content and teaching methods for integrating with current disciplines in primary schools.

2 The Status of Entrepreneurship Education in Iran

2.1 Primary School Level

In Iran the subject of entrepreneurship was mentioned in the National Curriculum Document as "the field of education and learning of work and technology" which aims at acquisition of practical skills for an efficient and productive life; attainment of related competencies to technology and related fields, especially information and communication technology for technological education and healthy life in cyberspace; and preparation to enter occupations in different economic sectors of social life. However, no specific integrated research has been conducted on the development of entrepreneurship curriculum. In fact, achieving economic growth requires entrepreneurial citizens, and achieving entrepreneurial citizens lie in the education and proper infrastructure which are originated in primary education. On the other hand, aiming at entrepreneurship education for enhancing children's creativity, entrepreneurial attitude and modified thinking, will require that the curriculum include these goals as an integrated subject and the content of existing textbooks encourage traits such as self-esteem, creativity, problem-solving, innovation, and communication in children. We already are aware that integrated approach in modern educational planning acts more efficiently. Also, given a large number of courses at this level of education, there is no need to add a new course as entrepreneurship. In addition, in spite of the emphasis of National Curriculum and the Evolution of Education Document and the goals of the primary level education, conditions of teaching entrepreneurship subjects in this period are not clear. Seeing the importance of entrepreneurship, mentioned in the National Curriculum and the Evolution of Education Document, and also regarding the fact that entrepreneurship education in primary schools has just recently been proposed, entrepreneurship

curriculum should be developed quite scientifically in this area. Otherwise, it will face many problems in practice.

Already at primary level education—first to sixth grade—entrepreneurship is not directly addressed and only in the sixth-grade curriculum, there is a course called "work and technology" which has some subjects related to business and entrepreneurship.

2.2 High School Level

The education system of high school is divided into the first three years of secondary school education (first, second and third) and second three years (fourth, fifth, sixth) and after the first three years of secondary school, students are allowed to choose their future educational discipline. Henceforth, the second high school education system is structured in the following fields: (1) Technical and Vocational, (2) Work and knowledge, (3) Theoretical [(a) Mathematics, (b) Natural, (c) The humanities, (d) Religious studies]. In the first period a book called "work and technology" is taught. In the second-period entrepreneurship course is presented (Ahmadpour Dariani and Azizi 2007).

2.3 Higher Education

Entrepreneurship education in universities has started in Iran since 2000 by KARAD program. Development of entrepreneurship at universities (KARAD) is a program which was carried out as a part of the Third Plan of Development (2000–2004) in 13 state universities by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran. Creating entrepreneurial culture and mindset, building supportive and welfare institutions such as entrepreneurship center, sciences and technology incubators, and interface facilities were the main objectives of this program. In the Fourth Plan of Development (2005–2009) however, there was more direct and indirect support for expanding entrepreneurship. In recent years, business and entrepreneurship are presented at most of the universities at graduate and post graduate levels. We also have faculty of entrepreneurship on university of Tehran. In addition, other academic programs have also some optional courses related to entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the greatest challenge of higher education is that the number of universities has unusually increased in Iran and this has led to a reduction of the quality in both the old educational system and the new entrepreneurial system.

2.4 Investment and Entrepreneurship Funds

In U.S.A., top training centers belong to the private sector or are sponsored by the private sector. Nonetheless in most countries, such as Iran, a majority of school and university budget is funded by the government. Unfortunately, in Iran, most public investments start long after the apparent need has emerged and end long before the results appear. To access the funds scattered in different types of organizations throughout the country, students and graduates must pass a complex bureaucratic path which by itself leads to an increase in the price of fundraising. Banks that can provide capital for small businesses make applicants face a long and complicated process and graduates cannot provide the necessary documents to receive loans. In addition, the interest rates on loans are immoderately high.

2.5 Rules and Regulations

According to the 2017 World Bank Report, Iran was ranked 121st among the 183 countries on the Ease of Doing Business. This indicates that the process of doing business is governed by strict rules. One of the most basic reasons for such a rank is having a system of bureaucracy with too many laws and regulations. Bureaucracy in Iran is a complicated process with endless stages. In Iran, governmental intervention in the market and existence of parallel regulatory bodies have led to a high risk of doing business. Planners in this area consist of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Parliament, Ministry of Industry, and other organizations. Consequently, increased layers of responsibility reduce transparency, raise management's doubts and put pressure on them.

2.6 Gaps Between World of Business and Education

The education system comprises three functions: knowledge production (research), transfer of knowledge (education), and distribution of knowledge (services). Iran's educational system is based on knowledge transfer; and according to law of budget allocating to research (half percent of the total country's GDP) the importance of research or services has been marginalized. A simple glance at the situation indicates that universities and the business environment operate in two distinct worlds. One (Business) is seeking for survival and the other (university) concerns a long-term plan for transfer of knowledge. Lack of cooperation between these two parts makes higher education neglect the changing business and society's needs.

2.7 Unemployment

Ministry of Education officials in Iran are unfamiliar with the industry and service sectors and therefore are not able to design and offer courses tailored to job opportunities in the labor market. The main cause of unemployment among graduates is incompatibility of disciplines with labor market needs. But the impacts of external factors outside the educational environments are also hugely effective. These external factors may include lack of entrepreneurial culture, lack of private sector development, lack of jobs, an organizational defect in the labor market, and employment discrimination against women who constitute more than half of Iranian students.

2.8 Entrepreneurial Culture

As an example of the culture of eastern societies, Iranian culture is also pluralist and the form of collective identity like the form of family, for instance, is widely accepted in Iranian culture. General population tends to do ordinary jobs and seek government employment. On the contrary, the developed countries' cultures encourage individualism along with teamwork and investment in ideas that are likely to be more successful.

3 Methodology

In this study, qualitative data were collected by semi-structured interviews. In the interviews, the interviewees were asked about integrating entrepreneurship education content in lessons of elementary education including mathematics, Persian language, sciences, social studies, thinking and research, work and technology. The target population consisted of three groups: (1) Curriculum planning experts, (2) Entrepreneurship Teaching experts, and (3) Pedagogical experts. Therefore, the number of interviews conducted on 14 participants, helped the adequacy of the data and theoretical saturation. The method of analysis in this research was open and axial coding process was based on the reaction, comments and opinions and written records of interviews. These concepts formed the study statements. Then, in coded statements, that are pivotal related around an axis formed categories. Each sub-category was one of the aspects of the conceptual model. These dimensions are the same "syllabus" involved in the interview-based on research design that gives the hybrid concept. These dimensions include size and content of entrepreneurship education that sub-dimensions explain.

4 Findings

The model of developing curriculum of entrepreneurship in primary education with integrated approach are displayed in Table 1. The components of the model are knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial attitude, as well as courses in primary schools (including 6 lessons: math, Persian language, science, social studies, thinking and research, and work and technology) have been integrated. Data from the interviews were clustered for each content of lessons and emerged suitable teaching methods indirectly to make the concepts to be taught. The results for the matrix entrepreneurship education were integrated into the curriculum at elementary levels.

For instance, the introduction of money to the children and doing the mathematical operations with the concept of money can make the students familiar with and attract them to the world of business. Or in the course of Persian language describing different kinds of jobs and businesses can make students think of different businesses and formation of them. This could be performed by telling and writing stories and proverb contest about different kinds of jobs.

As shown in Table 1, entrepreneurship education materials in the course of work and technology are identified as a prelude to new technologies as well as educational content. Discussing new methods and solutions to the problems relating to job opportunities are crucial too. To improve financial literacy skills, investigating the economy and the world's richest companies, producing domestic food such as popcorn or fruit juice, marketing and providing services or goods in order to sell products to parents of students and exhibiting are identified as the content of entrepreneurship education.

Visiting the exhibitions and local shops and talking about their jobs, creating groups and teams that share a common interest to set up business relationship, working with programs and software for planning, imagination and ideation of products and technologies could be considered along with the content of entrepreneurship education to strengthen self-awareness and self-confidence in the students' attitude.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of education together with developing entrepreneurial skills in primary schools is enabling students to be creative, innovative, future planners and communicative. Having this purpose in mind, at the end of the course, students are expected to be able to provide new ideas for various problems and communicate effectively with others. In this regard, in the mathematics, course problems that can be solved in different ways have been assigned to students' groups. After teaching new topics the following tasks were to be solved by group brainstorming instead of teacher delivering.

Table 1 Integrated entrepreneurship content and teaching methods at elementary schools

Educational objectives						
	Entrepreneurial knowledge (career opportunities and world of work economic and financial literacy business organization and process)		Entrepreneurial skills (communication, presentation, planning, team work practical exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities)		Entrepreneurial attitude (self-awareness, self-confidence; taking the initiative, risk taking, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving)	
Courses	Content	Teaching methods	Content	Teaching methods	Content	Teaching methods
Mathematics	The definition of money Value of money in the community Basic economic concepts such as price, cost, revenue, and profit tax on math problems	Discussion about ways to solve financial problems Calculate the class as a group about the price of the product, costs, income, and profit	Mathematical and financial issues are solved in several different ways	Forming a group to solve difficult mathematical problems Problem-solving or group brainstorming	Definition of risk How to calculate risk	Group problem solving Intelligence test.
Persian language	Define the types of jobs Define the types of businesses	Storytelling Proverb competition Story writing	Fostering imagination through writing future career or business Complete Story How to write a business letter	Business story demonstration Strengthening exercises and improvisation in rehearsal	Poetry about business Entrepreneurs biography	Playing different job roles in group activities Watching cartoons Writing stories
Sciences	The benefits of plants The benefits of animals	Case Study Individual research	Creatures living and solve problems in a creative way at odds with the issues	Talks about the evolution of products	Stages of fruit ripening Organic evolution	Video Playback Visiting museums Visiting the farms
Social studies	• History of new jobs Old jobs and businesses	• Play demos about various business	Risks and achievements of entrepreneurs in start-up businesses	• Provide posters and advertisements about the products	Social and profit entrepreneurs for community	Case study about entrepreneurs

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Educational objectives						
	Entrepreneurial knowledge (career opportunities and world of work economic and financial literacy business organization and process)		Entrepreneurial skills (communication, presentation, planning, team work practical exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities)		Entrepreneurial attitude (self-awareness, self-confidence; taking the initiative, risk taking, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving)	
Courses	Content	Teaching methods	Content	Teaching methods	Content	Teaching methods
Thinking and research	Why people are doing business Reasons of various businesses emerging Reasons of jobs	Discuss the lifestyle of people List the duties of employees of a business	• Methods of effective communication with classmates • Procedures for project planning in schools	•Finding ideas for solving business issues • Brainstorming for new products or service ideas	Understanding the causes of failure or success Understanding the traits of entrepreneurs	Invite entrepreneurs Invited speaker
Work and technology	• History of new technologies • Emerging technologies	• Talk about new solutions to existing problems • The ability to use business software applications	• Create a mobile app • How to use e-mail • Launch weblog for economic news and business school students	• Understanding technologies • Business related software	• Exhibition of new technologies such as Elecomp • Formation of business groups with shared interests to set up a temporary business	• Design a Logo for Business • Design business cards • Video Playback

Given that the purpose of teaching entrepreneurship in elementary schools is becoming familiar with the world of economy and business and job opportunities, in mathematics, course concepts such as money, value of money in the community, economic concepts that require mathematical calculations such as price, cost, revenue, tax, profit can be used to achieve higher financial skills and prepare children for the financial transactions and better calculation in their daily tasks. Also, effective teaching methods are discussed about methods of financing and solving practical financial problems in class. Furthermore, development of the ability to calculate the cost price, cost, revenue, and profit are discovered.

In the Persian language course, students can become familiar with a variety of business and types of jobs, stories and proverbs and stories about work and its value to society.

Talking about history of new jobs in the social studies course can be useful. In order to achieve this objective, role playing methods of businesses and jobs can be used. Discussing the lifestyle of entrepreneurs and listing the tasks that a business staff should be familiar with could be important too. Students should also know about the ideals of certain prominent individuals as well as creation of businesses and jobs. Technology in history lessons and evolution of technology and its impact on the economy should also be discovered. Solutions for business problems by using computational software should be provided and discussed.

The risks and gains of business entrepreneurs in the start-up phase could be integrated into the content of social studies courses. Also presenting posters about the products or services will boost students' creativity.

In the Persian language, the students' creative capacities and communication skills will be strengthened by writing stories about their future career or explaining their favorite business and completing the incomplete stories about entrepreneurs and practicing principles of writing official letters. By using business games and business poetries as well as improvising plays, students can plan their activities and gain innovation in different sectors.

Also in science class, the ways which animals are used to solve their problems could be explained through innovative methods. Also the evolution of plants and animals on the Earth and turning them into products to meet the diverse needs of humans will be discussed.

In thinking and research courses, methods of effective communication with others will be taught to students. They must practice these methods to gain skill in connection with their fellow classmates. Furthermore, planning methods for carrying out different projects will be explained to them. Exhibitions to sell products will be held in schools and then the ways of problem solving will be investigated and used by the students' own ideas. Brainstorming sessions are one of the best methods that can be used to provide new goods or services in the annual exhibition booths.

In the work and technology course, students can learn how technology works and how innovative mobile applications are designed and how technology is used to earn income. How to use Email to send and receive messages could be taught in this course as well. Launching weblogs and websites for breaking economic and business news to school students as well as other interested parties could be weighty. In

this regard exhibition of new technologies such as Elecomp can also be useful. It is important that students, who only have certain business interests, develop different role skills in various groups.

The aim of strengthening entrepreneurial insights in primary school students is boosting confidence and risk-taking power. Consequently, attitude is linked with knowledge and skills and is even more complex than the two. The definition of risk and how to calculate risk in financial transactions and solving intelligence issues in mathematics, as well as playing different roles in group activities and showing related cartoons in Persian lessons can partially reinforce this attitude in them. Moreover, the role and value of entrepreneurs in society, economy, family, and entrepreneurs' talks with students in social studies course could be helpful. And in the course of work and technology, logo designing and printing business cards can be an effective way to promote an entrepreneurial attitude.

Research in the field of entrepreneurship education is novel and at a very elementary stage. Different countries are developing and expanding programs to promote entrepreneurial traits in students. Review of past research shows that many researchers believe that entrepreneurship should be entered in the educational system. In fact, entering the themes of entrepreneurship in textbooks can fertilize the seeds of motivation for entrepreneurship in children. According to the European Commission, incorporating some entrepreneurship concepts in some European countries in experimental education in schools has been started. But implications of practical and organized research showing entrepreneurial curriculums suitable for each education level have not been clearly detected (Eurydice 2016). Accordingly, for the development of entrepreneurship in elementary schools, some functional implications are represented. For example, the Mexican experiment shows that the persons who participated in entrepreneurship sub-programs showed significant changes in their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Also, the aim of this research is to find out the contents and methods to improve entrepreneurial traits based on the expert's viewpoint.

6 Practical Implications

According to the findings of this research, the following implications are recommended:

1. Developing entrepreneurship and formulating a general policy of entrepreneurship education programs in the education system with the potential of local and regional business specifics should be the key driving factor of the Ministry of Education at all levels, especially in primary schools. Certainly, in all subjects, including geography, sociology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics, entrepreneurship content could be implemented.
2. In order to execute the entrepreneurial policies all education officials and executive staff especially teachers should be familiar with the role and importance of entrepreneurship education in the community.

3. In preparing more attractive contents for children, development of entrepreneurship materials in the form of multimedia, electronic, games and cartoons is necessary.
4. Entrepreneurship programs should be held in schools by inviting former students who work as entrepreneurs in society and transferring their experiences to the current students and putting such invitation process on a regular basis.
5. Special entrepreneurial training courses should be set up for students who want to become entrepreneurs.
6. Students' learning by doing and engaging in entrepreneurship education courses definitely should be practical and activity-based rather than teacher-centered.
7. All stakeholders like teachers and business leaders should participate in curriculum planning of integrated entrepreneurship, preparing educational materials, and designing learning activities, teaching-learning strategies, and evaluation approaches.

7 Recommendations for Further Research

1. According to the findings, this study clearly affirms that an approach to combining entrepreneurship education and curriculum development is the best possible approach. However, the use of integrated methods for organizing curriculum in terms of education levels (from primary school to university level) and different types of integration are subjects that require further study.
2. Methods of learning and teaching in an integrated approach in primary schools are extremely important and need adequate attention and scientific research.
3. It should be pointed out that the objective of entrepreneurship education is not only business start-ups and entrepreneurial profit for entrepreneurs, but also entrepreneurship is affecting life in all dimensions, with social, organizational and individual applications. Thus Students as future employees, managers, executives, and entrepreneurs of the country, if familiar with the issues, will be most effective in deciding about their lives and careers for themselves.
4. There are different kinds of integration methods such as multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. Further integration methods could be used for identifying the learning concepts and methods.
5. Students could be addressed in researches for finding out about methods which will lead to fostering entrepreneurial traits.
6. Entrepreneurship education could be considered as a separate module in the education system and providing concepts is of a significant importance.
7. As the researches indicate children learn much from their family environment. It is important to understand whether teaching entrepreneurship to parents could influence the attitudes and skills of children.
8. Distinctive kinds of researches could be implemented on the children who are in their early childhood in order to identify whether learning concepts are more important and effective or learning methods.

9. Further research is required to determine the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of each concept and method of the current research with a quantitative approach.

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