LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS IN FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES AT UNIKL: THE CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is said as a key driver of economic growth and development. The need to produce more graduates with entrepreneurial mindset from higher learning institutions is becoming vital. To ensure that this happens, it is critical for the institutions to have a correct infrastructure is in place to facilitate the developing of entrepreneurship culture. As an engineering technology university, fostering entrepreneurship culture at University Kuala Lumpur (UNIKL) is a challenge and it is especially hard to change these students' mindsets and attitudes towards entrepreneurship. This paper aims to present and discuss the challenges in fostering the entrepreneurship culture, in the forms of entrepreneurial activities, particularly at UNIKL from entrepreneurship lecturers' perceptions. Data are gathered through observations

and interviews. The results of the study showed that there challenges faced by lecturers and university in their mission in implementing entrepreneurial activities. Among the issues are financial aids, students' participation and interest in entrepreneurial activities, and support system. The findings of the study would be useful for the university to enhance and improve the current approach in embedding entrepreneurship culture in the university.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Culture, Entrepreneurial Activities, Lecturers' Perceptions

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1. Introduction

In the recent years, entrepreneurship has been considered as a key driver to economic growth, which contributes to increased creativity and innovation, strong job creation, personal wealth creation and financial independence, and a greater potential to compete globally (Khota & Pretorius, 2011). Many higher institutions worldwide are introducing entrepreneurship education to non-business students with the aim to develop students' entrepreneurial mindsets that promotes the creation of new business (Hannon, 2007).

Nowadays, universities or higher institutions are responsible to provide educational environment and system that can enhance the students' attitudes and skills to become successful entrepreneurs. It also plays an essential role in promoting entrepreneurial cultures and aspirations among students (Shariff & Saud, 2009). However, a study conducted on entrepreneurship education in Malaysia indicates that there are low levels of understanding on entrepreneurship among the students and their skill expectation does not match with skill acquisition (Ming et al., 2009). In addition et al., (2011) highlight that there are lack of entrepreneurship awareness and motivation among engineering students and pointed out that entrepreneurship education and industrial support play an important role to overcome this problem. Thus, fostering entrepreneurial culture at universities is vital because it can become a platform for students to exercise their interest in entrepreneurship and as a learning curve in exploring and identify entrepreneurial opportunities.

In line with its vision to be the leading entrepreneurial technical university, it is critical for University Kuala Lumpur (UNI KL) campuses to have a correct infrastructure in place to facilitate the developing of entrepreneurship culture. Bojovic (2012) assert that university should fostering entrepreneurial climate as it is recognized as fundamental policy instrument. Bojovic

(2012) also added that university has a significant influence in generating higher number of entrepreneurs among students, but only if proper entrepreneurial activities being implemented.

Yusoff & Lame (2012) in their study said in order to encourage entrepreneurial activities, university should do their best in creating an entrepreneurially supportive environment. Moreover, university can make substantial contribution in nurturing an entrepreneurial environment that leads to development of entrepreneurship by position them as an entrepreneurship hub.

As an engineering technology university, fostering entrepreneurship culture at University Kuala Lumpur (UNIKL) is a challenge and it is especially hard to change these students' mindsets and attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Yusoff & Lame (2012) revealed that non-business students were not keen in participating entrepreneurial activities organized by university although they have taken entrepreneurship subject. This situation is also similar with many UNIKL campuses.

This paper aims to present and discuss the challenges in fostering the entrepreneurship culture, in the forms of entrepreneurial activities, particularly at UNIKL from entrepreneurship lecturers' perceptions. Entrepreneurial activities here can be separated into two categories, namely academic-related activities that is subject, assessment based as well as non-academic related activities such as business activities, talks, competitions, and seminar.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Analysis

Business Management Lecturers / Technoputra Development Coordinator from UNIKL British Malaysian Institute (UNIKL BMI), UNIKL Malaysia France Institute (UNIKL MFI), UNIKL Malaysian Institute of Marine Engineering Technology (MIMET) and UNIKL Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology (UNIKL MITEC) were interviewed. These campuses were selected based on two criteria namely; engineering based campus and actively involved in entrepreneurial activities. Data were gathered from interviews, observations and experiences.

3. Challenges in Fostering Entrepreneurial Activities at UNI KL

3.1 Financial aids

Financial aid is one of most important requirements in conducting various entrepreneurial activities at UniKL campuses. This monetary support or funding normally comes from university's budget or external sources. For academic related activities, all the respondents agreed that there have no problem in getting fund for its entrepreneurial activities as there are allocation from academic and university's budget.

For non-academic related activities, all of them mention that there are budget allocated by the university. They were asked whether or not the fund is sufficient to conduct the activities. All of them come to an agreement that there was not enough fund to conduct entrepreneurship activities. Respondent one and two said that they need to do collaboration with other departments so that they can share the fund to conduct the activities. Respondent three stated that "most of the time I need to apply external funding from government agencies such as MARA or find sponsorship from external parties to ensure the activities run smoothly". Respondent four mentioned that "the management would always slash down the budget applied in the proposal". All the respondents strongly believe that lack of fund would affect the effectiveness of the activities implemented and may not achieve the objectives of the activities.

3.2 Students' Participation and Interest in Entrepreneurial Activities

In terms of student's participation, it is agreed by all the respondents that majority of the students will join the entrepreneurial activities if it is academic-related assessment. They may receive a fail grade or they will be panelized if they did not involve in the activity, thus the high involvement and participation in entrepreneurship activities. Respondents were asked whether or not they agree if high participation rate leads to high interest in entrepreneurial activities among students. All of them gave similar responses that it is hard to measure the students' interest based on their participation in the activities alone. One of the respondents said that "once in a while, at the end of the activities, one or two students will come and asked question related to entrepreneurship. I believe this is a breakthrough because it's really hard to capture interest from engineering students".

On the other hand, it is found out that students' participation rate in non-academic related activities are very low. Only students from entrepreneurship club (SEA) are actively participate in entrepreneurial activities. All of them mentioned that other students are not willing to join

entrepreneurial activities conducted. The second respondent comments that "in order to encourage students' participation, we usually provide meal coupon and conduct the activities outside of classroom and lecture hall". Another respondent said that "if the activities involved prominent figures like celebrities or successful entrepreneurs, then quite a number of students will turn up". They strongly believed that these engineering students are not interested to join the activities because they didn't have entrepreneurial mindset. It is quite a challenge when engineering students are firm in belief that entrepreneurial activity is not for them. Nevertheless, they totally agree with another that students with family who involve in business are more likely to participate and interested to join the activities.

When asked are there students who have their own initiative to organize entrepreneurship related activities in campus, they provide negative responses. They stated that some of the activities are initiated by entrepreneurship club (SEA). However, one of the respondents stated that "final year students who are interested to start a business usually like to organize entrepreneurship activities. I do believe this is because now we have a lot to offer to our final year students such as funding for business from MARA, business coaching and mentoring programs with government agencies".

3.3 Support System

In conducting any entrepreneurial activities, regardless of academic related or non-academic related, moral and practical support are needed to ensure the activities conducted become a success. The sources of support can came from top management, lecturers, technical and administrative staffs. There are various entrepreneurial activities organized at each campus such as business activities, talks, competitions, exhibitions, workshops, seminars and company visit.

Moral supports in forms of involvement can boost the students' morale and give positive impact to them. All the respondents agreed that top management really encourages lecturers in organizing entrepreneurial activities. However, degree of involvement and participation of top management in the activities is different from one campus to another. Some of them will show their support by attending the program or venue visit, while the others only attending large scale event. One respondent highlight "not only us, the students also look very happy and motivated when our top management come and support our activities". While another said "our top management rarely attends our events but at least we got the approval from them. We always

hope they will attend our next event".

Several responses gathered from them when asked about for technical lecturers and support staffs. Respondent one and two said that they can always rely on technical lecturers and support staffs as crowd. Respondent three argued that technical lecturers only involve if the activities will give them benefit and lastly, respondent four, agreed with respondent three mentioned that "it's really hard to get them to become judges and participants, unless it involve KPI". They really want to have the technical lecturer to involve in the activities because they believed technical lecturer can provide valuable inputs and ideas for improvements particularly related to technology-based business idea competition and exhibition. As for support staff, all respondents are aware of their limitation in participating entrepreneurial activities, unless if they are one of the organizing committees.

Besides that, practical supports are very important to make the activities possible. This covers logistics such as facilities, equipment and venue. Unavailability of the hall, other venue or equipment sometimes can disrupt the implementation of entrepreneurial activities. All respondents are in agreement that even though it is easy to get permission in using the facilities, many campuses have limited facilities. Thus, the probability for not securing the facilities is high. One of the respondents suggested the need to prepare the proposal and get approval as early as possible because most of the time, the facilities usage approval is in the form of first come first served basis. It can be said that without these supports, entrepreneurial activities could not be successfully implemented and therefore the overall objectives of the program or activities could not be achieved.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

The study presented in this paper has primarily reveal the main challenges faced in conducting entrepreneurial activities by some of UniKL lecturers. Based on the study, it can be said that in order to foster entrepreneurial culture in the institution, the implementation of entrepreneurial activities must be supported across the institution by all parties to ensure its success.

To ensure the effectiveness and the objective of entrepreneurial activities are being achieved, several actions can be taken. Firstly, financial constraints will give a big impact on entrepreneurial activities as it may not be implemented according to plan. It may deter the effort

of those who involve in the activities and may not attract students to involve in entrepreneurial activities. Based on a study conducted by Gillig et al., (2012), university should provide adequate long-term funding to support its entrepreneurial activities. Hence, the management should consider providing more financial support to those who would like to organize entrepreneurial activities.

Secondly, to inculcate students' participation and interest in entrepreneurial activities, lecturers need to encourage students to engage themselves in entrepreneurial activities. Rahman et al. (2011) highlight that students' interest in entrepreneurship can be created through exposure. This should be started as early as when they first registered in the university. These activities should be targeted at generating attitudes, behavior and competences so that entrepreneurial mindset is embedded in them (Weaver & Rayess, 2011). One of the ways is by having entrepreneurship corner where students can freely conduct business activities and conducting monthly pitching session where they can express their creative and innovative ideas.

Lastly, regarding the issue of support system, the management, lecturers, technical and administrative staffs should give full support on entrepreneurial activities. In order to promote entrepreneurship across the institution, the support of the university management is vital. Thus, it is suggested that for lecturers who share their research for entrepreneurial purposes with students, the university management should reward them with reduction of teaching hours. In addition, entrepreneurial week should be organized every semester that allows all staff to involve and participate in the activities.

Findings of this study indicate that student interest and inclination towards entrepreneurial activities in UniKL campuses are quite low and it can be said that efforts in fostering entrepreneurial culture at campuses are more at faculty level. Thus, it is crucial for the university to create an entrepreneurially supportive environment that could encourage entrepreneurial activity, whichin the long run would help to instill entrepreneurial culture among students.

It is important to cultivate entrepreneurial culture within the engineering community, starting with organizing various entrepreneurial activities at university and at the same time, should involve various parties; perhaps the government and corporate organization. It is hoped that the university will consider the proposed recommendation for future improvement to ensure the university's vision and mission to produce future technopreneurs and entrepreneurs could be

achieved.

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