

Developing Student Learning Support for Graduates Employability Through Entrepreneurial Clinic

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Subtheme: Research and innovative ODL practices in the following areas
(*Student learning support*)

Improving the educational system is a key step towards creating graduates who possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to participate in the economic area, locally and globally. Recently, developing graduates employability is one of the concerned issues for ensuring their successful transition to the labour market and their access to career oriented employment and furthermore to create jobs. Graduates need to acquire the competencies that will allow them to find work and cope with unpredictable labour market changes. Therefore, Indonesia Open University (Universitas Terbuka/UT) with large potential of 579.261 students (2014) spread out from Sumatera Island to Irian Jaya Island, seeks approaches and strategies to prepare its graduates for the labour market continuously. However, efforts in improving the distance learning system have encountered various obstacles such as limitations in learning facilities, curriculum content, and competency of graduates.

In addressing this issue, survey shows that majority students of UT who are small medium entrepreneurs, employees and job seekers need to have concrete learning facility to support them having certain competencies and skills to compete in labour market. This experimental research aims to discover the prospective of university entrepreneurial clinic which intends to develop the entrepreneur spirit and graduates employability. The study case in Bogor regional office investigates the enthusiasm of the students from all faculties to join entrepreneurial clinic, and addresses top three majors which show enthusiasm for entrepreneurship from management, communication and accounting by 33%, 20% and 18% respectively. The result shows that the students urgently need to be encouraged to develop their confidence, to focus on their high performance, to have good persuasive, communication and negotiation skills in informal curricula. The entrepreneurial clinic succeeds to motivate 53% of students to create their own business after they graduate. However, the others choose to be employed as government officers or private employees. This research includes a discussion of student learning support which will help UT and other education institutions to gain an insight to develop graduates employability through entrepreneurial clinic and a discussion of the changes that could be made to improve the quality of teaching.

Key words: Entrepreneurial clinic, Student Learning Support, Informal curricula.

Introduction

One of the university's roles in teaching and developing knowledge is for preparing its graduates to adapt actively to innovation and knowledge creation as well as to respond to the requirements of labour market. Thus, improving the educational system is a key step towards creating graduates who possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to participate in the economic area, locally and globally.

It is essential for higher education to recognise the global change and not resistant to its influences while develop university governance (Teodorescu 2006). In doing so, universities are encouraged to utilise knowledge to improve competitive advantage (Cutcher-Gershenfeld 1998; Nonaka, Toyama and Nagata 2000). Some higher education literature support the role of universities as creators of new knowledge through emphasising and managing education and research (Scott 1997; Sizer 2001; Blackman & Kennedy, 2007).

Recently, developing graduates employability is one of the concerned issues for ensuring their successful transition to the labour market and their access to career oriented employment and furthermore to create jobs. Graduates need to acquire the competencies that will allow them to find work and cope with unpredictable labour market changes. However, there is a little evidence that the Indonesian education system is graduating students with specific knowledge and certain skills required to work in highly competitive industry. There is a fundamental gap between what university offer and what employers really need.

This research proposes to define students' characteristics due to graduates' employability in order to compete and gain the employment opportunities. This research also addresses a concrete model of student learning support which will help Indonesia Open University and other education institutions to gain an insight to develop graduates employability through entrepreneurial clinic. Furthermore, the findings discuss the changes that could be made to improve the quality of teaching.

Research Methodology

This research proceeds within a single case of the Indonesia Open University specifically in one of the branches that initiates this project as a prospective model to be applied across nation. The success of its contribution could be applied for other open university around the world. Some literature on study case methodology support a single case study (Yin 1994; Tellis 1997) which in line with this research that is not to generalise from this single case however to understand its contribution to develop understanding in broader theoretical perspectives.

Indonesia Open University (Universitas Terbuka / UT) is an Open and Distance Higher Education that has a lot of potential to be empowered. One of them is subject to the large number of UT students of 579.261 students (2014) spread out from Sumatera Island to Irian Jaya Island. UT serves the higher education for 39 regional offices throughout the demographic island within 34 provinces across nation.

This research conducts experimental study which collects data from a survey, interviews, and academic literature. Questionnaires carried out in order to obtain primary data. The sample is 120 UT students who intake semester two in 2013. In order to explore the students' employability, researchers also interview ten alumni and ten SMEs professionals as the external stakeholders of UT.

This experimental study explores students in preference to study Small Medium Enterprises (SME) and to write it into the scientific work. In this case, UT facilitates and supports the contribution of knowledge to the community. This fits with the current mandate of compulsory scientific publications by the policy from Director General of Higher Education No. 152 / E / T / 2012 regarding compulsory scientific publications and UT Rector's Decree No. 7592 / UN31 / KEP / 2012 regarding the application of scientific writing and scientific publications. Furthermore this research explores the employability criteria as well as the enthusiasm of entrepreneurship.

The experimental is conducted in several stages which adopted from research by Moekijat (1991). First, students who would take the scientific work are grouped based on students' major. Second, students are encouraged to investigate the issues related to accounting management, production, marketing or communication. Students focus on solving the problems of SMEs around these issues. Third, students are equipped with an understanding of SMEs and Indonesian National Standard (Standard Nasional Indonesia/SNI) before commencing to do field work. The level of students' understanding of SMEs and SNI will be measured through a questionnaire right before and after receiving the material of SMEs and SNI. Fourth, the scientific papers made by students can be used as a reference for the development of SMEs in Indonesia. Furthermore, the scientific work can be developed further as their thesis as one of the requirements of graduation.

Findings and Discussions

According to some literatures, efforts in improving the distance learning system have encountered various obstacles such as limitations in learning facilities, curriculum content, and competency of graduates (Webster & Hackley, 1997; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999; Bates, 2005). However, UT continuously seeks approaches and strategies to prepare its graduates to pursue their career oriented employment as well as to create their own business. Figure 1 explains one of the concerns of UT in order to develop graduates employability.

It is crucial for UT to highlight some competencies needed by industries as the requirements for a successful employee or entrepreneur in the coming years will be very competitive. Students who are well prepared with suitable skills will have great opportunities. In doing so, student learning support may develop employability skills through some intensive exercises in the entrepreneurial clinic and encompass the passion of students and academics to actively involve.

The university entrepreneurial clinic bridges the synergy of partnership between small medium entrepreneurs and banking services to conduct trainings & internship and to

provide good practices on entrepreneurship & credit monitoring. This program involves all the relevant stakeholders including regional governments, banking, SMEs, universities and alumni. University entrepreneurial clinic is such a business incubator for UT students in their last semester. On the other hand, SMEs can support tutors and lectures to understand the industry standard competencies as well as to improve informal curricula.

This university entrepreneurial clinic is an essential program of employability preparation for students, furthermore, to facilitate the transition from UT distance learning system to the labour market in which certain soft skills and capacity are required. In addition, the knowledge can motivate students to further create their own business after they graduate. Job creation is a significant effort to provide more job opportunities. This university entrepreneurial clinic framework can be developed and disseminated to generate student learning support across the nation.

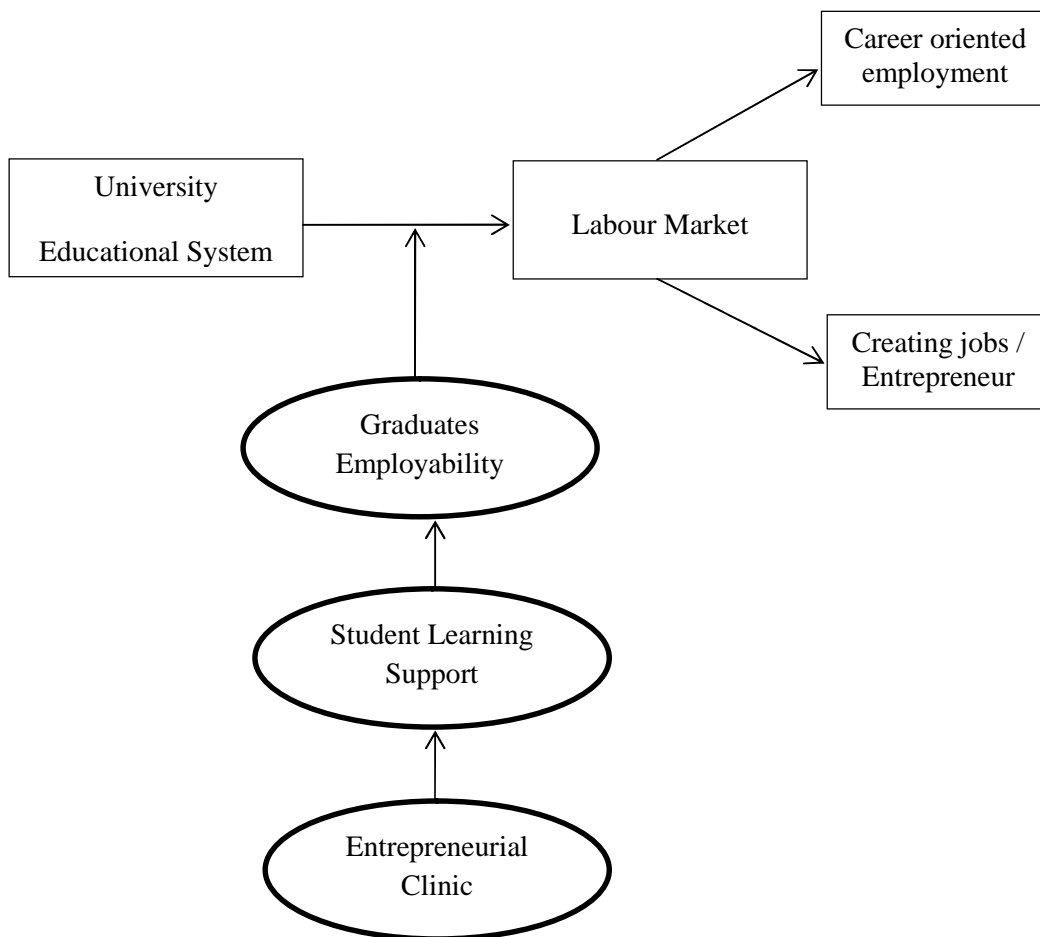


Figure 1. Framework

The case study in UT Bogor regional office investigates the enthusiasm of students from all faculties to join entrepreneurial clinic. All 120 students are from the faculty of economics, faculty of mathematics and natural science, faculty of sociology and

political science, faculty of teacher training and education science. The findings address top three majors which show enthusiasm for entrepreneurship as follows management, communication and accounting by 33%, 20% and 18% respectively. It shows that the rest of faculties were not really into the entrepreneurship topic due to personal interest of the students although they have attended the clinic activities in order to start knowing the entrepreneurship. Therefore, the socialization about the importance of this activity is very challenging but is worth encouraging students to be successful in any path they choose after they graduate.

The entrepreneurial clinic succeeds to motivate 53% of students to create their own business after they graduate. However, the remained 47% choose to be employed as government officers or private employees. In this case, lower interest to be entrepreneur relates to the background of respondents who the majority is 80% employees, SME professionals (10%) and job seekers (10%). The majority has permanent or temporary job at the moment; however, they consider creating SMEs after gaining adequate capital from saving. Job market for employment in Indonesia is really demanding and highly competitive. At the moment, seeking job is the first priority. Based on some interviews, people shift to create a small business if they have plenty of capital, or because they suffer from work stress as a subordinate, moreover, suffer from a long period of unemployment. It is not common understanding that entrepreneurship is as an independent choice and even more a countless spirit to manage independent life. In addition, some students expressed that they are not confident yet to starting their own business due to lack of knowledge, skills and experience on SME.

The survey also shows that the students urgently need to be encouraged to develop their confidence (82%), to focus on their high performance (76%), to have good persuasive (76%), communication and negotiation skills as influencing skills (76%) in informal curricula (Figure 2).

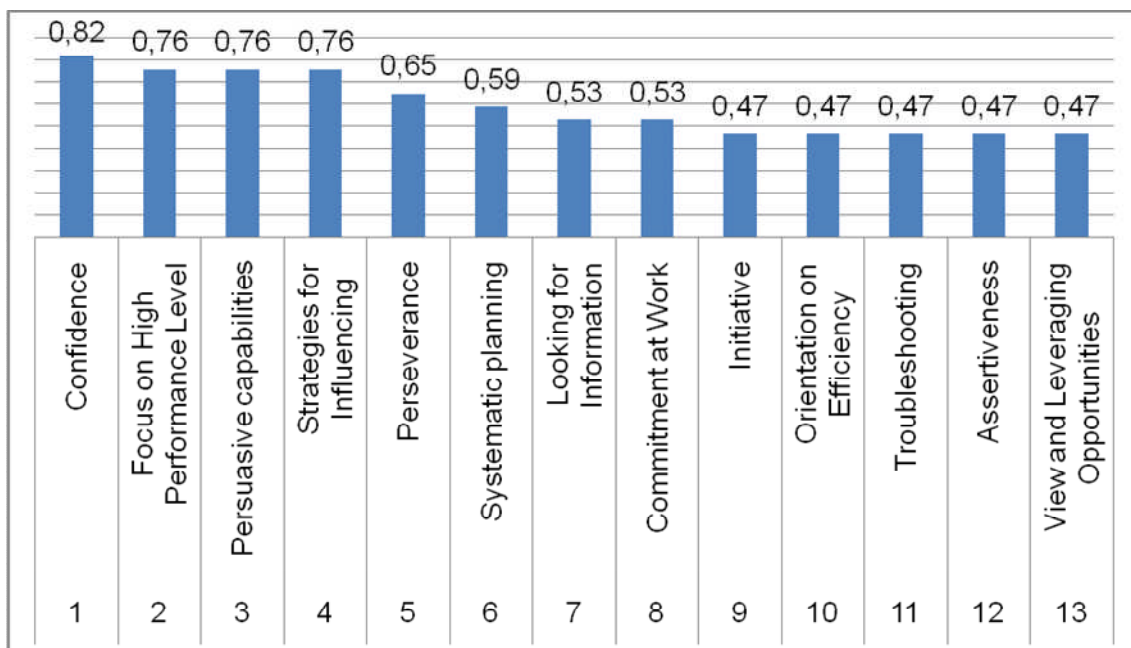


Figure 2. Distribution of participants by most preferred employability factors

Ten alumni and ten SME professionals as the external stakeholders of UT has been confirmed the result and interviewed regarding those employability traits for the successful of new graduates to cope with and compete in the labour market. The interviews address the urgency to help students improving their capacity for those four crucial characteristics.

Those employability traits are critical to be developed in the curricula of further activities for students. Self-confidence is essential to make them believe about themselves. Higher self-confidence may lead to higher performance in a way that students can take smart risks, be innovative and creative to complete tasks. Students are encouraged to understand some strategies to influence others. In other words, they should have persuasive ability to communicate their ideas and furthermore have good negotiation skills to influence others. Those essential characteristics are fundamental to be prioritised for UT in disseminating approaches through informal curricula. Lecturers should encourage the same attitudes among students and provide the best atmosphere for learning.

However, distance learning has a typical online education with less interaction face to face between lecturers and students. To some extent, this condition may affect students ability to communicate their ideas, to make a solid argument and moreover to have critical thinking. The entrepreneurial clinic may overcome this circumstance by providing a supportive environment for learning within intensive meetings in a clinic with teams and mentors, encouraging students to solve the case problem, expressing ideas & solid arguments, focusing on good process & results, and exercising on writing a report.

Another important agenda is exercising through an internship under monitoring of SMEs. Students are encouraged to write a report not only to produce a mandatory thesis but also to sharpen their analytical thinking on problem solving for SME cases. They also can relate some lecture they receive from tutors to a learning process in which theory and practice can support or contradict each other. This approach can develop students' critical thinking.

In order to improve the understanding of industry standard competencies, this research suggests that UT should strengthen the partnership with SMEs professionals, big company practitioners and alumni to discuss further about the complexity of graduates' employability. Furthermore, UT alumni should be given a periodically survey as a tracer study to let them inform their successful story or give some feedbacks to UT regarding their experiences.

Another service offered by the clinic that help students to learn and start their own business is an interactive website on <http://entrepreneurialcampus.com/>. This is an online platform which showcases some small business created by students and some entrepreneurial creative ideas. As the scope of the site also encompasses specific issues on ways to start up some small business, there is an online forum for discussion on entrepreneurial questions and answers hosted by some SME professionals and tutors. Furthermore, this site is expected to be an official forum for UT alumni to share their entrepreneurial experience.

Online education requires interactive media in which tutors are encouraged to maintain communication with students by giving immediate responses to students' questions, ideas or problems. In such supportive atmosphere students learn to be more confident in both expressing their ideas and performing good actions.

Conclusions

This research contributes to developing student learning support through entrepreneurial clinic in a university scope. This clinic has been piloting programs that cultivate some attitude of self-confidence, high performance oriented, effective communication, and influencing strategies to students. Writing skills can be developed through intensive exercise in internship under the clinic scheme. This student learning support has created a partnership of educators, SME professionals and alumni to refine the employability traits and adapt it into informal curricula. In order to improve the distance learning system regarding graduates employability, university has to strengthen the supportive learning condition and encourage educators to improve two way communications both in class rooms and online teaching media.

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