



ENHANCING SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMMES: STUDENT PERCEPTION ON HERBALHUT CHIA SEED PRODUCT SALES PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This working paper discusses the perception or views of students who are undertaking the Forms of Writing course, regarding the Chia Seed by Herbalhut sales project. Aspects of research include understanding the students' perception on the effectiveness of the Chia Seed sales project towards enhancing their social and communication skills, as well as how effective the Chia Seed sales project has been towards enhancing their inherent skills. This study was conducted using three methods, namely data collection through online Google form questionnaires, random interviews with selected respondents and library research. The results of this study has found that the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project has been able to enhance the students' communication and social skills in an effort to strengthen the soft skills of university graduates. In addition, students are also able to build their self-esteem, creativity, leadership skills, critical and creative thinking and more. The students' self-confidence was also found to have increased, as they are more open to the world of business and creatively market products online through social media. In conclusion, students feel more confident to market the products they represent, more prepared to get involved in the business world, though they are not students of this field and more ready to face challenges in the working world.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Entrepreneurship Programme, Chia Seed Herbalhut, Skillful Graduates, Challenges of Unemployed Graduates

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia has announced that interpersonal skills must be introduced to students in Malaysian institutions of higher learning. Human resource development is one of the main fields in the nation's development agenda, under the 9th Malaysian Plan from 2006 to 2010. It needs to be upgraded and considered one of the nation's main agendas if Malaysia wishes to become a developed nation (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). Public universities in Malaysia must introduce soft skills such as communication, leadership, creativity and others, as well as combine all related elements in the bachelor's degree syllabus.

There are two main critical reasons that support the need for interpersonal skills among students of Higher Learning Institutions. Firstly, there is criticism among employers that state graduates, in general, excel academically but not in interpersonal skills such as communication and analytical skills. Secondly, it is to enhance the globalisation of the work force and producing graduates that can compete to gain employment. The revolution that has occurred in developed and developing nations has caused many big companies to change their status into international companies. Therefore, they continuously look for staff who are not only technically qualified, but also have good leadership and communication skills. In response, the learning pattern in education must be developed in line with current needs (Hamdzun, et al 2018).

2. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

This research seeks to understand the perception or view of students who are undertaking the Forms of Writing course regarding the Chia Seed Herbalhut product sales project from the angle of;

1. enhancement in communication and social skills among students after selling products,
2. effectiveness of the project in enhancing the students' communication skills, and,
3. perception of students on the business world after undergoing the Chia Seed Herbalhut product sales project.

2.1. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This research involves students undertaking in the Forms of Writing course session 2017/2018 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. This course is offered at Pusat Citra Universiti, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and undertaken by students of various faculties. A total of 123 students undertook this course during the semester that this research was conducted, but only 62 were involved as respondents.

2.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a questionnaire in the format of an online Google form, student interviews and library research. In addition, 5 students from the Forms of Writing course were interviewed to gain information on the Chia Seed sales project. Library research was

conducted to find information on past studies. Students of the Forms of Writing course were required to complete a task in the Chia Seed Herbalhut product sales. At the same time, students conducted research on products, completed literature reviews, designed a questionnaire, obtained research data, conducted interviews, analysed data, completed academic writing and presented their findings in a presentation session. All assignments were conducted in small groups consisting of 4 to 6 students.

2.3. LIBRARY RESEARCH

Soft skills are a main “weapon” for graduates in facing the working world, which is full of challenges. Graduates with higher soft skills have more potential to succeed and even thrive in the working world (Adi-Irfan, et al. 2014; Maharam et al., 2018). Emphasis on the expansion and diversity of teaching and learning methods is in principle in line with the aspirations of education and the UKM's philosophy since its establishment, which is to produce graduated who have broad and balanced minds. According to Norazila Mat, et al. (2015), today's academic planning suggests that teaching and learning courses should contain elements of communication skills, thinking skills, team spirit and life-long learning. Adi-Irfan, et al. (2014), in an observation on the challenges of implementing soft skills at UKM through the Kemahiran Insaniah (Individual Skills) course, stated that this form of learning needed a new framework to address various problems that lead to challenges for students and lecturers alike. It is also important to look at the impact of “experiential learning” and “service learning” on UKM students, as well as how new teaching and learning methods are implemented in courses with generic skills. The level of mastery of soft skills among students is at a high level for all elements of soft skills, as the students realise the importance of soft skills by getting involved in uniformed curriculum activities (Juliza Ezaida, 2014; Maharam et al., 2018).

According to Shaharuddin Ahmad, Noraziah Ali & Mohd Fauzi Hamzah (2011) the marketability of UKM graduates are relatively good, but there is still room for improvement through career development programmes and industry training at UKM. In addition, students must be encouraged to run businesses by enhancing the entrepreneurship programme, so that graduates do not depend solely on the job market. Shaharuddin Ahmad, et al. (2014) states that graduates need various skills besides academics, social and communication, as current situations require graduates to have additional knowledge in business and project management which are said to be important for graduates seeking to enter the business world. This research recommends that graduates are supplied with knowledge on entrepreneurship to fulfil current demands in the working world. Although entrepreneurship education has succeeded in raising awareness, changing attitudes and altering student perception to a more positive light towards entrepreneurship, however the teachers themselves have not fully embraced its purpose, content and implementation methods, which are specifically for entrepreneurship education. (Sarimah Che Hassan, Norlizah Che Hassan & Nor Aisyah Buang, 2010).

The entrepreneurship field has long existed as a career choice, but programmes for instilling entrepreneurship in universities around the world are still in their early stages. In Malaysia, the government started an entrepreneurship programme during the introduction of the New Economic Policy in the early 1970s, with the purpose of rearranging the community by creating an indigenous society based on commerce and industry. The problem of unemployment among graduates can also be addressed by making entrepreneurship a potential career path to be explored. The culture of entrepreneurship can be instilled through entrepreneurship education in Institutions of Higher Learning for the purpose of giving awareness, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills (Ministry of Education 2001). However, research by Norashidah Hashim, Nor Aishah Buang, Norasmah Othman (2008) found that

only 46.7 % of students want to be entrepreneurs due to reasons such as interest, wanting rewards and others. On the whole, students of public institutions of higher learning are found to have a medium to high preparedness level in entrepreneurship. The same findings were obtained in a study by Yusrizal Yusof (2012), Norfadhilah Nasharudin & Halimah Harun (2010), and Mohd Hafeez Al-Amin (2013). In fact, research by Ibrahim Mamat, et al. (2009), which measured the value, attitudes and practices of senior officers at Institutions of Higher Learning, towards the Student Entrepreneurial Development Programme (PPUS) also obtained similar results. It was found that even senior officers at these institutions have a medium to high perception of entrepreneurship as a career of choice. However, according to Siti Hawa Mohamed Idris (2009), the likelihood of a student becoming an entrepreneur after graduating is much higher if they are given a lot of encouragement and exposure to this field.

In a study by Muhammad Haron Husaini and Khairul Anuar Ahmad (2008), they studies the generic skills possessed by entrepreneurs in Malaysia through Content Analysis of Arabic text books used by students at the Faculty of Management and Muamalat, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS). The study suggested that several amendments be made to the content of those books especially the addition of vocabulary, phrases and sentences related to the field of entrepreneurship or business. The integration of entrepreneurship with various other fields, such as engineering education, should refer to the practices done abroad so that understanding for the entrepreneurship field can be much deeper (Abdul Talib Bon, 2010). According to Nawawi Jusoh, et al. (2012), efforts must be done to foster a culture of entrepreneurship among students to develop Soft Skills. It is instrumental to successful entrepreneurship, promoting awareness, changing attitudes and student perception to be more positive towards entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, this implementation must be conducted by a trainer that understands Soft Skills, Learning and Teaching. Assessment and Measurement should be based on rubrics and Outcome Based Education. Trainers must undergo training courses to ensure the quality of the results obtained.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

After analysis, it was found that from the 62 respondents in this study, 82.3 percent of them are female and only 17.7 percent are male. The majority of respondents are Malay at 87.1%, followed by Bumiputera of Sabah at 6.5%, as well as Chinese and Bumiputera of Sarawak at 4.8% and 1.6% respectively. There were no Indian respondents. The highest percentage of students are those residing in Kolej Pendeta Za'ba (23%), followed by Kolej Ungku Omar (14%), Kolej Ibrahim Yaakob (13%) and Kolej Ibu Zain at 10%. Kolej Burhanuddin Helmi, Keris Mas, Dato' Onn, Tun Hussien Onn, Kolej Aminuddin Baki and Kolej Rahim Kajai have a total of respondents that are less than 10%.

Observed from the angle of business experience, there were three categories of respondents; online business, offline business and those with no business experience. The highest percentage comprises of those with no business experience at 38.7%, followed by offline business at 32.3%. The lowest number is online business at 29.0%. Although those with no business experience represented the highest percentage, the majority of students do have some business experience offline and online, at 61.3%.

3.1. Perception of students on the improvement of communication and social skills through the entrepreneurship programme.

The following are research findings for questions relating to the enhancement of communication and social skills among students through entrepreneurship programmes using the scale; 1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Unsure, 4- Agree, and 5- Strongly agree.

Table 1 Perception of students on the enhancement of communication and social skills (percentage)

No	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	I am more confident when facing the public after selling Chia Seed Herbalhut.	0	3.2	32.3	58.1	6.5
2	I am more confident in communicating with the public.	0	1.6	19.4	66.1	12.9
3	I have learnt to interact with a variety of customers	0	0	3.2	75.8	21
4	I communicate more after the Chia Seed Herbalhut project compared to before.	1.6	4.8	37.1	51.6	4.8
5	I am able to heighten my patience with people's temperament	0	3.2	6.5	69.4	21
6	I can heighten my patience for the temperament of my team members	0	4.8	4.8	67.7	22.6
7	I can enhance my leadership skills.	1.6	1.6	12.9	59.7	24.2

A total of 58.1% of respondents agree that after selling Chia Seed Herbalhut products, they are more confident when facing the public, however 32.3% of the respondents are unsure of this statement. A total of 66.1% of the respondents also agree that they are more confident to communicate with the public. Through the chia seed sales project, respondents must meet the public to sell their products. They must also explain the Chia Seed Herbalhut product and convince customers to buy the products. For this, they really need to know about the products sold. It requires them to conduct research and find information. The confidence to face the public is forged when dealing with many customers.

Throughout the product sales process, interactions and communication occurred. A total of 75.8% of respondents agree that they learn to interact with customers, learn how to understand what customers want and endeavour to interact more effectively. After selling Chia Seed Herbalhut products, it was found that 51.6% of the respondents agree that they are more communicative now, compared to before. However, a total of 1.6% of the respondents strongly disagree with this statement, which conveys that although they have taken part in selling Chia Seed products, the programme was still incapable of encouraging them to communicate more.

Through the Chia Seed product sales project, 69.4% of respondents agreed and 21% of respondents strongly agreed that they are able to improve their patience in dealing with the whims of different people, meanwhile 67.7% of respondents agree and 22.6% strongly agree that they can be patient with the temperament of their own team members. This illustrates that they have learned to be tolerant with others, communicate effectively and find solutions to tackle situations that have arisen.

A total of 59.7% of respondents agree that they were able to enhance leadership skills, followed by 24.2% of respondents who strongly agree. However, a total of 12.9% of respondents were unsure and 1.6% of respondents disagreed and highly disagreed with this statement. Although most of the respondents (83.9%) agree they can enhance leadership skills, a small percentage of respondents (3.2%) had not mastered the skill.

3.2. Perception of students on the effectiveness of the product sales programme in enhancing students' skills

The following are the findings of the inquiry regarding the effectiveness of the product sales programme in enhancing students' skills using the scale; 1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Unsure, 4- Agree, and 5- Highly agree.

Table 2 Effectiveness in Chia Seed sales programme in enhancing students' skills (percentage)

No	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	I was able to enhance my teamwork skills.	0	1.6	11.3	56.5	30.6
2	I developed skills on finding product information before selling the Chia Seed Herbalhut product.	3.2	6.5	6.5	53.2	30.6
3	I learned how to look for information and write a Literature Review.	3.3	1.6	13.1	59	23
4	I was able to enhance my writing skills when compiling the report for this project.	0	4.9	6.6	60.7	27.9
5	I learned how to follow the UKM style properly.	3.2	1.6	6.5	58.1	30.6
6	I learned how to analyse data.	1.6	1.6	4.9	68.9	23
7	I learned how to write references properly.	1.6	4.8	4.8	56.5	32.3
8	I learned how to create a questionnaire.	1.6	4.8	4.8	54.8	33.9
9	I enhanced my skills in creating promotions to promote the product.	1.6	3.2	17.7	45.2	32.3
10	I learned to create advertisements that can attract customers.	0	1.6	14.5	54.5	27.4
11	I learned to interview respondents.	0	4.8	17.7	54.8	22.6
12	I learned decision-making skills through this project.	1.6	1.6	9.8	59	27.9
13	I learned critical thinking skills through this project.	1.6	1.6	16.4	50.8	29.5

A significant number of the respondents admit that they obtained various skills in conducting the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales programme. A total of 56.5% of respondents agree and 30.6% highly agree that the programme succeeded in enhancing their skills in teamwork. Throughout the programme, students must conduct sales in teams, whether to sell products, find information, conducting interviews, collecting data, analysing data, writing reports or presenting the research. Each working component and assignment drove them to always interact and assist one another so that the programme conducted can obtain satisfactory results.

The Chia Seed product sales project also trained students to look for correct and accurate information (53.2% of respondents agree, followed by 30.6% of respondents highly agree). They must discern the validity of information before spreading it to the public. They were able to learn skills in finding product information before selling the product. Each information obtained must be verified first.

Students attending the Forms of Writing Course must undertake the Chia Seed sales project and complete a written report relating to the programme. Indirectly, the Chia Seed sales programme required the students to understand the requirements of preparing a report,

such as to find information, doing a literature review, analysing data, writing a report and others. Based on this research, it is found that 59% of respondents agree that they are able to learn to find information and write a literature review. However, 3.3% of respondents highly disagree and 1.6% disagree with this statement.

The majority of the respondents in this study are from the Faculty of Economy and Management, and the Faculty of Science and Technology. Respondents from both faculties are rarely involved in project paper writing but through this programme, they are able to enhance their writing skills by compiling a report. A total of 60.7% of the respondents agree and 27.9% of the respondents strongly agree that this programme can enhance their writing skills. A total of 58.1% of respondents agree and 30.6% of respondents strongly agree that they can learn to create reports following the correct UKM style. Through project report writing, respondents are exposed to report formats in the UKM style and this helps them in their academic writing for the final year. Students also learn to write references properly (56.5% of respondents agree and 32.3% of respondents highly agree). Through the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project, 54.8% of respondents agree and 33.9% highly agree that they were able to learn how to create questionnaires. The majority of respondents agree, because to conduct the project research, they needed to disseminate questionnaires. Therefore respondents could learn how to create questionnaires in the format required. In fact, 54.8% of the respondents agree and 22.6% strongly agree that they learned to interview research respondents. This study also found that 68.9% of respondents agree and 23% strongly agree that they learned to analyse data through this chia Seed sales project.

The Chia Seed sales programme also enhanced skills in creating promotions (45.2% of respondents agree, 32.3% respondents highly agree), learn to create advertisements (56.5% agree), learn to make decisions (59% agree, 27.9% strongly agree). In fact, respondents agree that they were able to learn critical thinking skills through this project with 50.8% agreeing, 29.5% strongly agreeing and 16.4% of respondents unsure. However, the Chia Seed Herbalhut product sales has entrepreneurial characteristics that exposed the students to soft skills and academic writing skills that can be applied to other courses.

3.3. Students' views on the business world after selling Chia Seed Herbalhut products

The following are the views of students on the world of business after taking part in the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project as stated in Table 3;

Table 3 Perception of students towards the world of business (percentage)

No.	Item	Yes	No
1	The Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project gave me experience.	91.9	8.1
2	I know how to effectively do business through this project.	90.3	9.7
3	I learned how to get customers.	93.5	6.5
4	I learned how to convince customers to buy Chia Seed Herbalhut.	83.9	16.1
5	I have more confidence to do business in the future.	80.6	19.4
6	I know how to advertise the products I sell.	90.3	9.7
7	I use Facebook to promote Chia Seed Herbalhut products.	75.8	24.2
8	I use Instagram to promote Chia Seed Herbalhut products.	72.6	27.4
9	I use WhatsApp to promote Chia Seed Herbalhut products.	91.9	8.1
10	I used Twitter to promote Chia Seed Herbalhut products.	43.5	56.5

A total of 91.9% of the respondents agree that the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project has given them business experience, while 8.1% of the respondents disagree. Although there are respondents with experience in business, either online or offline, the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project was still able to give the respondents experience in selling a product that they were not so familiar with. A total of 90.3% of the respondents agree that the Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project also teaches them to do business effectively. The majority of them admit that they learn how to approach and gain potential customers and to convince customers to buy the product. In addition, this experience improved their confidence to become involved in business in the future. The Chia Seed Herbalhut sales project also gave the respondents a chance to become involved in a business.

After getting involved in this programme, 90.3% of respondents agree that the project helped them to know how to advertise the product being sold. Based on analysis, it was found that 75.8% of respondents used Facebook, 72.6% used Instagram, 91.9% used WhatsApp, and 43.5% of the respondents used Twitter to advertise their products. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp are often used to promote products and attract the interest of customers as it is accessed several times daily, especially through smart phones. This criteria has led to the frequent use of social media in promoting products. Based on this research, the majority of respondents used WhatsApp to promote their products as it is easier to access compared to other social media platforms. Furthermore, WhatsApp is the main social media platform used among UKM students.

4. CONCLUSION

Students who are undertaking the Forms of Writing course and conducted the Chia Seed Herbalhut product sales project agree in stating that the project succeeded in enhancing their communication and social skills in both verbal and written form. This project can also enhance the students' confidence in facing the public. In addition, students were also able to improve inherent skills such as writing skills, thinking skills, working in groups, decision making skills and product marketing skills. These skills are beneficial to graduates facing real-life situations in the working world. After undergoing the product sales programme and completing their written assignments, the majority of respondents are of the opinion that they can obtain valuable experience in conducting a business and are able to convince customers to buy the product sold. In fact, they also found that social media is a gold mine that is crucial for promoting products. Project-based learning, such as the Chia Seed Herbalhut product sales project is one of the initiatives that can be conducted continuously to help produce graduates that possess criteria that can fulfil the demands of the job market in the future.

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Enhancing Social and Communication Skills Through Entrepreneurship Programmes: Student Perception on Herbalhut Chia Seed Product Sales Project

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