

Development of Entrepreneurial Leadership at the Sakon Nakhon Patanasilpa Vocational College: A Participatory Action Research

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ABSTRACT

Thailand is soon going to be part of the ASEAN Economics Community (AEC) which will result in labor transfer and high competition with employees from other countries. The country therefore should shift her strategy from emphasizing on producing laborers to human resources development for creative economy. The Ministry of Education, in foreseeing this issue, assigned the Vocational Education Commission to support the vocational college students to become entrepreneurs as an alternative option for their employment. This is in accordance to the current problem at the Sakon Nakhon Patanasilpa Vocational College that 17% of the students drop out from the school and travel to work as laborers in the industrial districts in other provinces. Further, when the students return to Sakon Nakhon, there is a tendency to be a social problem in the future, particularly that the children are left with elders in the families (Nipan, 2013). On the side of the state's policy, there has been supports for the vocational college students to earn income during their study and to become an entrepreneurs since 2008. However, there were on 16% of results reported success. It is found that the processes of the projects undertaken were different from the entrepreneur development in the EU that emphasizes on developing entrepreneurial leadership for the students.

Based on the literature review and interviews with the experts, it is found that the development of entrepreneurial leadership for the students should cover ten important characteristics. These are creative thinking, opportunity searching, risk taking, innovation establishment, social skill, self-confidence, initiative, responsibility, patience, and positive attitude towards self-employment.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sakon Nakhon Patanasipa Vocational College is a private college facing problem in dropouts of the students of around 17% per year. This is due to increasing pull factors for students to leave to other provinces for employment and the need of laborers for agricultural activities of the families. Through the investigation of this study, it is found that the students had perceptions that after the graduation, they could only apply for employment as laborers. This was also accompanied by the supports of their families that encouraged them to enter the low-rank labor market employing physical labor rather than other skills and work in low-paid, under-standard firms. This problem has continued occurring every year.

The above problem was partly a result of lacking of the entrepreneurial leadership characteristics. The Sakon Nakhon Patanasipa Vocational College therefore needed to develop curriculum supporting development of entrepreneurial leadership for the students. Having entrepreneurial leadership characteristics would be an advantage and enhance opportunities for the students under the changing context of employment movement in AEC. The researcher, an administrator of the college, was therefore interested to develop entrepreneurial

leadership to administrators and students in the college through a participatory action research.

Research Objectives:

- 1) To examine entrepreneurial leadership of administrators, teachers and students at the Sakon Nakhon Patanasilpa Vocational College;
- 2) To develop entrepreneurial leadership of administrators, teachers and students at the Sakon Nakhon Patanasilpa Vocational College; and
- 3) To monitor the effects from the implementation of entrepreneurial leadership development at individual, group, and organizational level.

Research Process:

- 1) There were 30 research participants including the researcher who is the director, administrators, teachers and students of the college.
- 2) The research process comprised of two rounds of participatory action research. Each with four steps.

Step 1: Planning

Step 2: Action

Step 3: Observation

Step 4: Reflection

The research also employed the concept of participatory action research of Phil Crane & Leanne Richardson (2000). The scope of the activities and objectives in the second round was expanded as a result of the

analysis of the first round. After the second round was completed, the researcher analyzed and synthesized the overall research results into knowledge and lessons learnt.

- 3) The research instruments comprised of manual for entrepreneurial leadership development, and characteristics assessment form that had been adjusted based on the comments of the research adviser and 5 experts.

Research Activities:

The Design Program: After the meeting, the students presented a proposal of business model on “souvenir from wax molding project”.

1st round PAR

- 1) Designed and developed souvenir from wax molding by learning from the local wax molding craftsmen. The teachers supported of inspiration, data, and initial fund and tried to involve least in decision making.
- 2) The students brought their products to sell in the local festivals of the province.

2nd round PAR

- 1) The students developed media promoting the project and was aired through a TV program entitled ‘Design to save the nation’
- 2) The students could present and sell their products in the local festivals.

- 3) The students adopted the knowledge learnt from the basic accounting and selling class into their activities.
- 4) Presented the products in the IICF 2014 at BITEC.

As a result of the first round PAR, the students found to have obvious development, particularly in opportunity searching, creative thinking and innovation establishment. There were still other characteristics to be supported and thus the research enhanced the scope of the development in the second round. This then resulted in enhancement of risk taking, self-confidence and inspiration leading to positive attitude towards self-employment.

The Automotive Application Program: the students brainstormed. The researcher attended as a participant observation. They concluded to develop a business model on “automotive repair shop project”

1st round PAR

- 1) There were 9 students applied for the project with positive attitude to self-employment.
- 2) The students studied and were trained on motorcycle maintenance every Tuesday.
- 3) The students requested for a class on personality development to prepare for the business model.

2nd round PAR

- 1) The students launched the automotive repair shop serving the locals around the college.

- 2) The students proposed their need to take a basic accounting course to apply to the activity.

As a result of the first round, the students developed opportunity searching and innovation establishment. In the second round, it is found that the students enhanced the characteristics on self-confidence and risk-taking. The social skill activities resulted in development of responsibility and patience leading to positive attitude towards self-employment.

Conclusion and Discussion of the Research

Results:

1. The state of entrepreneurial leadership of the administrators, teachers and students affected the teaching and learning.

- 1.1) Teachers and administrators were unaware of importance of entrepreneurial leadership. There was no clear approach to entrepreneurial leadership development. Teaching was emphasized on skills in respond to the labor market only.

- 1.2) students lacked of creativity and innovation development and thus affected their positive attitude towards self-employment and their study goal were to become merely lower-rank employees or agriculturalists.

2. The approaches of the college to develop entrepreneurial leadership were:

- 2.1) organizing workshops among teachers and administrators to develop teaching approaches integrating entrepreneurial leadership concept;

- 2.2) developing curriculums integrating entrepreneurial leadership concept;

- 2.3) bringing the teaching and curriculums into practice through project-based learning.

3. The results of the entrepreneurial leadership development at individual, group and college levels:

- 3.1) At the individual level, the administrators had become aware of the importance and approach to develop entrepreneurial leadership characteristics. They opened up to changes in teaching approaches, supportive roles, and evaluation. The teachers were able to develop curriculum integrating the concept and applied project-based learning. The students learnt from experiences through participating in the projects. They presented development in the ten entrepreneurial leadership characteristics. The students in the Design Program were found to have obvious development, specifically in creative thinking and innovation establishment. This then resulted in enhancement of risk-taking and patience leading to positive attitude towards self-employment. The students in the Automotive Program developed most in opportunity searching and self-confidence resulted in enhancement of risk taking and positive attitude to self-employment.

Under the program, the students illustrated changes through decreasing leaves and dropouts. They tended also to apply jobs in the industry of their studies and chose to work in positions that can apply their knowledge and skills, rather than physical labor.

3.2) At the group level, the administrators and teachers learned participatory working approach. They were able to apply knowledge in team work and learned how to employ KJ Method in the brainstorming meetings.

3.3) At the college level, it was found that the knowledge generated through this study could be developed to be the identity of the college. These are the college's philosophy, missions, and the college's songs incorporating the supports for students to become entrepreneurs.

Discussion of the Research Results

1) The state of the entrepreneurial leadership of the administrators, teachers and students

1.1) The college's administrators and teachers lacked of knowledge and understanding and were unaware of importance of the entrepreneurial leadership development. There were also lack of curricular development and teaching integrating entrepreneurial leadership development to the students. These were due to the past context of the college that had no support for the students

to become entrepreneurs but instead emphasized on encouraging them to enter to the labor market only. However, after the teachers exchanged their opinions and information through workshops, they became aware of the development within the province and the policy of the Vocational Education Commission of the Ministry of Education that encourages students to develop skill on entrepreneurial leadership in order to help solving the local problems [1][3][5].

1.2) The state of the entrepreneurial leadership of the students from the results of the assessment form before the research found that the students had very low level of entrepreneurial leadership characteristics on creativity, innovation establishment and positive attitude towards self-employment. The students had perceptions that after graduation, they could only apply for employment as low-rank employees, labors or agriculturalists which was in accordance with the research findings of [11][13]. Nevertheless, the students had high level of the characteristics on social skill and inspiration encouragement which was in accordance with the research findings of [9][10]. This showed that the students were ready to be developed of entrepreneurial leadership.

2) Approaches in entrepreneurial leadership development comprised of:

1.3) Approach applied to the administrators and teachers was to organize participatory workshops [7][8][9] to enhance their awareness in entrepreneurial leadership concept.

1.4) Develop curriculums integrating entrepreneurial leadership concept. This is in accordance with [5] and the suggestions of [6][7] that aimed to provide the students experiences through activities such as business models. Any interventions were based on the assessment of the teachers. Arrangement of the teaching programs was made according to the students' needs. In the second round of participatory action research, the students were interested to learn a basic accounting, sale techniques, and personality development. The teachers proposed these needs to the administrators and thereafter the study program were changed to add the requested courses for the students.

1.5) Bringing the teaching and curriculums into practice through project-based learning [7][11]. However, this could not be developed into the individual projects [8] since it would need high investment cost which was not in line with the students' capacities.

2) Results of the entrepreneurial leadership development and learning at individual, group and college levels.

At the individual level, after the workshops among the administrators and teachers, the results were different from [7][8]. The teachers proposing the teaching approach had no entrepreneurial experiences but had high level of characteristics in opportunity searching. The teachers proposed a student development project through project-based learning. The administrators supported through arrangement of the study program according to the proposed project. In the second round of the research, the administrators and teachers showed more supportive in the project. For example, the teachers in the Accounting Program offered to teach accounting skill to the students from the Design Program and the Automotive Application Program; the teachers jointly proposed the college's philosophy, missions and songs supporting development of entrepreneurial leadership.

The students from the Design Program and the Automotive Application Program presented different development in the entrepreneurial leadership characteristics. The students in the Design Program were found to have obvious development, specifically in opportunity searching which was in accordance with [7][9][10]. The participated students illustrated this characteristic continually as they would like to open up alternative employment for themselves beyond being only agriculturalists or low-rank laborers. When creative thinking

and innovation establishment were developed, there were enhancement of risk taking and responsibility. Development of inspiration enhancement resulted in development of social skill and patience. Yet, there was still low level of self-confidence.

Through learning from the projects, the students presented positive attitude towards self-employment. Based on the assessment after the second round completed, the students showed their interests to apply jobs in the industry of their studies and chose to work in positions that can apply their knowledge and skills, rather than physical labor. This was in line with [1][2][3][8] and the teaching process for entrepreneurial leadership in the European Union that proposes development of teaching and learning through real-life experiences, emphasizing creative thinking and innovation establishment [6]. A result of this study found that creativity and innovation affected teaching and learning. They made the students attached to their long-term objectives. The students became patient to create and develop their products. The participated students had high level of characteristics on inspiration encouragement and social skill which were in accordance with [9][10].

Regarding the learning at the group level, the researcher found that the results were in line with [7][8][11], particularly re awareness enhancement on the importance of entrepreneurial leadership through workshops and understandings of the administrators and

teachers in the economic development of Sakon Nakhon Province that has more supports for the students to become entrepreneurs, compared to the past.

For the supporting approach, the research results were different from [5]. On the budget, it was found that payment for teachers did not boost the entrepreneurial leadership development. There needed to be inspiration enhancement that showed the potential opportunities when the projects undertaken such as presentation of the project outputs on the television program or the national conferences. It was also found that the teachers learnt to organize group meetings and brainstorming employing Kj Method which resulted in the development of the teaching and learning throughout the research process.

For the learning at the group level among the participated students, it was found that the profit from the business models alone was not adequate to make students continue undertaking the activities, but there must be development of characteristic on opportunity searching also. The students needed supports from the administrators and teachers in terms of proper study plan balancing time for study and running of the business models [3][5][6]. During the implementation of the second round, the researcher and research participants expanded the activities and objectives of the program according to the concept of Phil Crane & Richardson (2000).

From the first round of the research that emphasized on innovation establishment, creativity [16] and sale test, the second round of the research added public relations, airing on television program, and presenting the products in the national events.

The students from the Design Program illustrated the characteristic on opportunity searching throughout the project period. For the positive attitude towards self-employment, this characteristic varied depending on the experiences each student received. This was probably due to the fact that both 'the souvenir from wax molding project' and 'automotive repair shop project' was not owned by any individual student. This was in line with the studies of [6][7][10] that proposed establishment of a project per one student which would result in self-confidence to develop the project run during their study into a real business after graduation. However, this approach would need huge investment. On the other hand, the study of [12][13][14][15] stated that the development of entrepreneurial leadership characteristics may show effects when the trained students become part of organizations. They would employ opportunity searching and creativity to push themselves into better positions of employment. And it was found that the participated students in this research who nearly graduated showed their interests to apply in the firms of their study programs and would like to be in positions that could

employ their learning skills rather than physical labor.

For the learning at the college level, it was found that the knowledge generated through the study could be developed into the identity of the college regarding the entrepreneurial leadership characteristics which were in accordance with [13][19]. This included the college's song stating '...creating employment, source of learning, support entrepreneurs to success, earning income after graduation...' Moreover, the project operation rooms and the established projects that the students initiated could be handed on to the new students and used to develop the entrepreneurial leadership characteristics for these next generations.

Knowledge Generated from the Research:

Knowledge generated through undertaking the projects and analyzed through the participated administrators, teachers and students.

1. 80 percent of the participated students demonstrated active learning to become entrepreneurs despite their lack of experiences and supports from their families
2. The students participated in the projects throughout the period as they were aware that the ongoing projects were the real business, not only for studying.

3. The teachers undertaking the projects needed full supports from the administrators in order to make the project success.
4. The slow progress of the projects was partly due to involvement of the administrators in decision-making.

Suggestions from the Research:

1. There should be development of projects that enhance creative thinking and innovation. The business model should be in accordance to the local contexts.
2. The administrators and teachers should play only supporting and evaluating roles throughout the project period. Decision-making should be done by the students only.

Suggestions for the Further Research:

1. There should be a mutual plan in collaboration with the business firms how to undertaking the project's activities.
2. To develop entrepreneurial leadership for students, the teachers and administrators would have to shoulder more tasks than the general teaching. The researcher should therefore arrange agreements and understandings with the research participants before undertaking the projects.

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