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Using the action research process to design entrepreneurship education at Cenderawasih University

Beth L. Goldstein[a]*, Mesak Ick[b], Westim Ratang[b], Halomoan Hutajulu[b],Jhon Urasti Blesia[b]

[a]University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0001, USA
[b]University of Cenderawasih, Faculty of Economics, Jayapura, Indonesia

Abstract

In 2013, as part of US AID's Higher Education Leadership and Management initiative in Indonesia, Universitas Cenderawasih began an action research project to address the under-employment of UNCEN graduates through purposeful entrepreneurship education. Although entrepreneurship education had been introduced previously, it had not integrated theory and practice appropriate to Papua. Core principles of the action research process (ARP) were used to develop and implement a locally effective curriculum for students enrolled in UNCEN's Faculty of Economics. A central commitment underlying the project was to design a curriculum that could address social inequalities in Papua, specifically the significant under-representation of Papuan native peoples in the entrepreneurship sector. Through a mixed methods approach that used demographic, attitudinal and outcome data as well as observational, interview and focus group data, the ARP team designed an experientially-based learning module, documented implementation of the pilot learning module, evaluated its effectiveness, and developed proposals for improvement and institutionalization. Based on outcomes that showed persistent gender and ethnic differences, future iterations of UNCEN's entrepreneurship curriculum will adopt a culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) that addresses the disparities in cultural and social capital shown to be significant to entrepreneurship education.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education; action research; social equity.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-859-257-2705; fax: +1-859-257-4243.
  E-mail address: bethg@uky.edu

1. Introduction

Universitas Cenderawasih is charged in this era of Papua Special Autonomy to graduate students who are able to lead the region to sustainable economic and job growth through creative and responsible entrepreneurship. Yet, to date, students continue to aspire to the secure employment afforded by the civil service. Young Papuan graduates are most likely to queue for the chance to become civil servants despite increasingly limited jobs in this sector. To interrupt this aspiration pattern and encourage student entrepreneurship, UNCEN in collaboration with U.S. A.I.D.'s Higher Education Leadership and Management program in Indonesia (HELM) undertook an Action Research Project (ARP) that piloted an integrated, experientially-based curriculum in entrepreneurship, attentive to the cultural and social conditions significant to its Papuan students.

2. Core principles of the Action Research Process used at UNCEN

Action research engages people in a systematic, data-driven research process targeted to solve local problems. Key principles are that the purpose of the research is for action on a specific local issue, and that the issue is best addressed if those engaged in the applied research process are the people who will be affected by the action's implementation, outcomes and subsequent revision. The process is a consensus-building, circular one beginning with identification of the issue and people, followed by research to determine action, implementation of action, and then evaluation and revision of the action (McNiff, 2013; McNiff and Whitehead, 2001; McTaggart, 1991). This data-informed cycle constitutes the ARP practices of inquiry, intervention, development and change with communities and institutions. Through its collaborative process, action research can lead to self-transformation and consensus on the change undertaken.

The US AID Indonesia Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) initiative funded twenty-five higher education institutions to undertake an 18-month ARP pilot project. The overall goal was to demonstrate the potential of ARP for innovative change management and leadership development within the Indonesian higher education context (Lomax, 1991; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). UNCEN's project to address the under-employment of UNCEN graduates intended on one level to increase students' understandings and skills in entrepreneurship, and hence over time to contribute to economic diversification in the region. Within the goal to orient UNCEN students to careers outside the civil service, the team also sought to address social inequalities in Papua, specifically the significant under-representation of Papuan native peoples in the entrepreneurship sector of the economy. On another level, they modelled an ARP approach to curriculum development as a way of introducing institutional change management from the middle, in contrast to the more common top-down practices of change extant at the university. Following completion of one academic cycle, outcomes and processes would be evaluated and shared with academic leadership from across the university, with the intention of scaling up to the full Faculty of Economics and potentially to Faculties across Universitas Cenderawasih.

2.1. Project Design

In its strategic plan, UNCEN had determined that entrepreneurship should be a compulsory subject across the curriculum. However, to date, fewer than one third of students had any formal instruction in entrepreneurship, limited to conceptual introductions. The ARP team of four Economics lecturers identified one core subject in which to integrate a semester-long experiential entrepreneurship unit within an existing theoretical entrepreneurship course. Within this unit, students worked in groups to create small start-up businesses (Burchell, 2000; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Following development of a business plan, the groups received start-up funds (intended as a