

The leadership effectiveness of the minister mentor program to develop the students' community in the public universities in Malaysia

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to identify the contributing factors to the leadership effectiveness of the Minister Mentor Program to develop the students' community in the public universities in Malaysia. This program which has been launched about seven years ago is also helped to bridge the relationship between the universities and the ministers involved. The program is also help the ministers involved to interact with students and explain all the current government policies to the students. This research was conducted by using both qualitative and quantitative method. The mixed method is used in this research because it will help generate more accurate findings. This research was conducted in five research universities which are Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. This findings of the research were being analysed qualitatively due to many perceptions and opinions from the respondents involved in this research. The findings showed that, there were few factors contributed to the effectiveness of Minister Mentor Program to help developing the students. Three of the main factors are physical infrastructure, social support of the university, and the personality of the Minister Mentor himself. The contributing factors to the effectiveness of Minister Mentor program may also become the constraints of the program to achieve the objective of this program in the university with successfully. Thus in order to improve the effectiveness of this program both the contributing and constraints factors must be taken into serious consideration in the future.

Keywords: mentor minister, leadership effectiveness, development of students' community

Introduction

Nowadays, the government has always been concerned with the holistic development among graduates in university. The urgency is due to the aspiration of building a fully-equipped human capital as they will be the next generation who would be ruling the country in the future. The holistic development of university students has been focusing on the personality development of the local university's students in order to produce more balanced graduates or role model in all aspects, including the development of self-skill and nurturing the sense of patriotism, notably in comprehending the policies and aspirations of the country. Back in 2009 during the Meeting of the Cabinets, the members had agreed to introduce a new program entitled "Menteri Mentor: 1 Universiti Awam (UA) 1 Menteri" in order to be in line with the aspiration. Every public university is provided with one minister at least that acts as a mentor or a foster to the university that has been appointed to them. The main objective of this program is to build a stronger bond and relationship between a university and the Cabinet Ministers. The Minister Mentor Program is one of the initiatives taken by the government in allowing the cabinet members to have a direct interaction with the students of the public universities in giving further explanations regarding the policies of the government.

This program is identified as a positive and effective mechanism to maximize the potential of an individual as emphasized in the National Philosophy of Education (NPE). This system will also act as a medium to enhance or

strengthen the relationship between the students and the minister through any of the programs held by the university. It has been clearly explained by the government to both parties (the minister and the university) regarding the rules, and they are reminded to always prioritize the effort of improving the cooperation from time to time. Through the implementation of the program, the ministers are encouraged to explore and learn about the life inside the campus as well as getting closed to the students by scheduling a meet-up with the community and university members every so often, either during the formal or informal activities. It is very much hoped that students and the members of the public universities will keep in mind that they are always being given the attention and taken care of by the ministers and the government leaders from this program.

Besides, university students will get to fathom the policies of the government as well as the rationales of all actions taken by the government, as well as its position towards certain issues. In other words, students are able to avoid the wrong understanding and navigate away from negative impressions due to the gap in communication between them and the rulers of the nation. Students will be more aware and responsible especially in every action that is taken by prioritizing the issues of security, prosperity and harmony for the progress and the development of the nation. Those with strong leadership or certain skills will use this program as a platform to lead systematically, in order to promote the leadership ability and competency through a well-planned program.

Research Problem Statement

After 8 years of implementation, the effectiveness of the minister mentor in developing the community of the students as well as fulfilling the objective that has been set is still unknown. According to the yearly report by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in 2011, the lack of involvement of the mentor minister with the community inside the respective campus was significantly recorded. In regard with this report, it shows that the effectiveness and the success of the program implementation towards the university students around Malaysia have not yet reached the objective and goals of the program. This statement is supported by a study that was conducted in 2015 regarding the effectiveness of the Minister Mentor Program. In the study, the findings show that almost 82% of university students did not realize the implementation of the program on the university level. However, this study will answer few questions that arise in relation to the success of the minister mentor leadership in helping the development of students' community in various aspects, either in shaping their characters or their academic achievements in university.

Literature Review

Leadership can be defined as a complex process in which the person (minister mentor) is able to influence other people (students) in performing and executing a mission, task or an objective and eventually it leads to a successful and integrated program (Robiah, 2002). According to Kamus Dewan (1993 in Salizan, 2006), leadership is defined as a driver or a guide to a certain place in which the driver is the one who walks in the front. Hendry Pratt Fairchild (2006) proposed that leadership in a wider definition is a person who leads by showing a good social behavior in organizing, displaying or controlling other people's effort through the performance, power and position.

Based on the leadership system in the context of a minister mentor, it functions as a medium to unite the campus community so they will live in a secured and harmonious life inside the campus, as well as realizing the government's policies in developing the nation under the leadership of a minister mentor (Louis, 2003). However, leadership is also a process in which the leader is not being seen as an individual chose by the followers but as a member of the community (Drath and Palus, 1994). This shows that a minister mentor need to share the same feelings, values and beliefs, as well as working together with the community. Usually, a minister mentor is associated with the attitude, the quality and the behavior of leadership. According to Zenger (1985 in Shatar, 2004) ^[14], a leader is the person who drives or brings the humans to aim for the goals or objectives and other values in which they find useful.

One of the roles of a leader that has to be focused is the ability to directing tasks, decision-making and problem-solving (Mohd Yusri *et al.*, 2013). A minister mentor will perform a variety of leadership roles which lead to the targeted excellence, effectiveness and efficiency of the program that has been conducted. According to Sashkin and Rosenbach (1985 in Shatar, 2010) ^[16], the role of a leader does not only revolve in creating a relationship and influence with the followers, but requires the teaching, and leading to constant changes to the followers and the led organization. An innovation or a growth should be nurtured through certain

specific methods so that the members could realize and accept with positive attitude (Shatar, 2010) ^[16]. In the context of the Minister Mentor Program, the clarification and the presentation of information to the university's community will help to widen the perspective of the members towards the current issues, as well as acknowledging the needs and the importance of the changes that need to be achieved.

An effective minister mentor will apply certain particular style of leadership by acknowledging beforehand who are the individuals or groups that he or she will be leading, and also to learn about the strengths and the weaknesses of the followers. Meanwhile in the context of an efficient minister mentor, he or she should have a style of leadership that needs to be applied in the university. Rex Campbell (1997) ^[3] explained that leaders that are able to adapt themselves according to the situation and the importance of their duties and responsibilities held are called as the 'expressive leaders' or 'instrumental leaders'. Besides, the efficiency of the style of leadership can be seen through the commitment given by the students towards the leadership of the minister mentor in the university. Ryska (2002) ^[19] stated that the leadership style gives a great influence towards the attitude of an individual. This statement is supported by Fiedler (1996) ^[7] which proposed that the leadership style of a leader is one of the main attraction that attracts other people to keep working with the leader in order to achieve the goals that have been set. This clearly shows that the leadership styles are very vital and important in determining the success or the failure of the students' community development in the public universities in Malaysia.

Leadership is considered as an art of controlling and strengthening those who are being led and also the society in order to achieve variety of desired goals or the goals of their struggle (Omarin, 1997). The main factor of a success is driven by the attitude of the leader. A positive minded leader will drive the other leaders to always be ready and brave in adapting the action for the benefits of the whole community in the university (Shatar, 2004) ^[14]. This kind of leader will create a bond between the community inside of the campus and the community outside of the campus. This relationship needs to be secured so that many resources can be synergized to a maximum level for the benefits of the community in the university (Shatar, 2004) ^[14]. According to Omarin (1997), in order to become a leader that is efficient and influential, the objectives and goals for the leader must trigger his or her consciousness about the leadership in all aspects. To shape a leader in becoming the effective minister mentor, the three main aspects that should be taken into consideration are in terms of social, physical and individual (Che Zuina, 2004).

Research Methodology

The study has been conducted using the mixed-method approach which is an approach in a research that combines or links between two approaches, the qualitative and quantitative methods. Case studies was conducted with the research universities (RU) in Malaysia since the universities allow the researchers to explore unique issues through various kinds of studies. The universities that were involved in this study are Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). However, this study specifically chose the students within the

age range of 19 to 36 years old, and only for those who are furthering their studies in the Degree level. The type of sampling used in this study was the convenience sampling by using two methods, which are the questionnaires and in-depth interviews in order to gain the data regarding the effectiveness of the minister mentor’s leadership. Meanwhile, this study used the descriptive analysis method in the process of analyzing the data, in which all the data and findings that were obtained through the questionnaires and the in-depth interview had been analyzed thoroughly in order to gather a valid and clear results.

Research Findings

Objective 1: To determine the role played through the leadership of the minister mentor in developing the students’ community in Malaysia’s public universities.

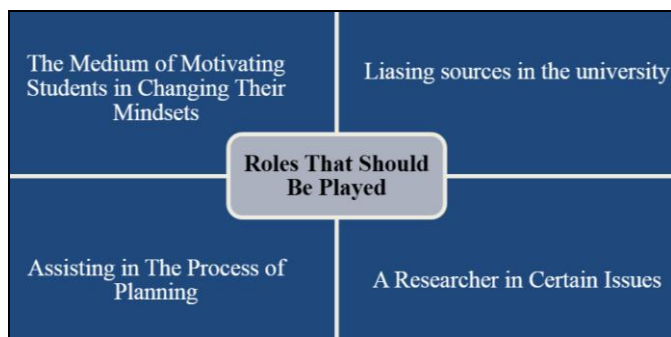


Fig 1: The Role of the Minister Mentor inside the University’s Atmosphere

For the first objective, it has been identified that there are certain roles that need to be played by the leader in developing the students’ community in Malaysia’s public universities. The effectiveness of the role played through the leadership of the minister mentor towards the student’s community could be observed from their ability to empower students and the community inside the university and encouraging them to work efficiently in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the program. According to the results obtained from the study, all minister mentors that have been appointed should embrace the role of motivating the students to change their mindsets. It is vital for every leader to raise the awareness among the students regarding the needs and the importance of changes that need to be done, and that students should have the realization within their own self. This role is crucial in favour of alerting the students’ community that is being led so that they will realize the importance of changes that brings a lot of benefits. Indirectly, this will nonetheless contribute to the effectiveness of the program in line with the objectives and the goals that have been set.

In order to develop a continuous students’ community, the leadership of the minister mentor should embrace the role of liaising the sources. This role is very important in building a networking for both inside and outside of the university through various kinds of ways. It is crucial to have this networking since it will create a strong cooperation, especially in designing or conducting any programs that require the involvement of the students and the development of institutions for both inside or outside of the university. Besides, this role will help in spreading and clarifying all the

progress and feedbacks that arise among the students’ community towards the appointed minister mentor so that a scrutinized analysis can be done and the right actions can be taken in order to ensure the success of the program implementation can be observed by everyone, especially in developing the students’ community in the university. The minister mentor should also play the role in assisting the process so that a good relationship can be build and a strong support from the students can be acquired through all the programs conducted. Besides, it is also a must for the minister mentor to become the advisor and the educator that will assist the students’ community in identifying and solving the problems.

In general, this role gives a lot of emphasis in terms of guiding and facilitating so that the university is able work on any action plan in realizing the process of changes and renewal that are able to move, and increase the involvement, as well as to produce a new ability and productivity among the students’ community in the university. Other than that, the leadership of the minister mentor should have the role of a researcher which is one of the most important qualities of an effective leader. This role is needed in order to overcome all sorts of issues in the university, especially the ones that are closely related to the development of the students’ community as they are the major backbones in the development of the future, as well as becoming the future leaders, so that their mind would not be tarnished with the negative cultures that may disrupt their development. If the minister mentor managed to apply, appreciate and practice all the roles that have been discussed, he or she without any doubt would be a favourable leader among the society inside the campus, especially the students.

Objective 2: To identify the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the minister mentor’s leadership in developing the students’ community in public universities.

Through this study, the researcher had tried to identify the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the minister mentor’s leadership. From this study, it has been identified that there are three factors which lead to the effectiveness of the leadership of the minister mentor in developing the students’ community in Malaysia’s public universities that excel in the academic field, and the quality of the students will not be fully equipped without the support element as stated in Figure 2 below.

Factors that Contribute to the Effectiveness of the Minister Mentor's Leadership		
Physical Facilities Factor * Location @ distance * Infrastructure facility * Financial support	Social Support Factor *Full support from the students *Support from the administration of the university	Individual Factor * Concern *Having the knowledge of mentor-mentee * Thinking forward * Always joining the crowd

Fig 2: Factors That Contribute to the Effectiveness of the Minister Mentor’s Leadership

The findings of the research show that, the physical facilities that are able to influence a leader, are the location or the distance between the office to the university, the

infrastructure of the facility inside the campus that are well-equipped, and the financial support allocated for each university annually. These factors are considered to be one of the most important factors in carrying out the duty of a minister mentor which has been entrusted to the respective members of the cabinet in ensuring the achievement of the program implementation. Other than that, the social support is also one of the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the minister mentor's leadership in favour of executing the role as a mentor inside the campus. The research findings show that the moral support and the commitment given by the people from the surroundings as well as fully supporting the leader, are most vital in achieving the goals and objectives of the program. The overall involvement of the university members is very much needed, beginning from the earlier process until the analyzing process without distinguishing the level and social status. The effort put in the development of the students' community through the execution of such program will not be completed without the insertion of social support in all programs organized by the leader.

The last factor would be the individual factor in influencing the knowledge of the students regarding the program conducted on the university level. Through this factor, it is important for the leader to always concern and curious about the development of the university or the foster family, as well as having little knowledge about the role of the minister mentor. The leader must also own the ability to guide the university to the targeted vision, to always look beyond than what is visible to the eyes and most importantly, to always join the crowd and be part of the community. All of the factors that have been listed based on the research findings are the contributing factors or the backbones to the effectiveness of their leadership in aiming for the goals and objectives of the program to produce graduates with better qualities, more competitive and capable of facing the obstacles in life while living in this globalization era.

Objective 3: To look at the main factors that hinder the leadership of minister mentor in achieving the objectives and goals of the implementation of the Minister Mentor Program in public universities.

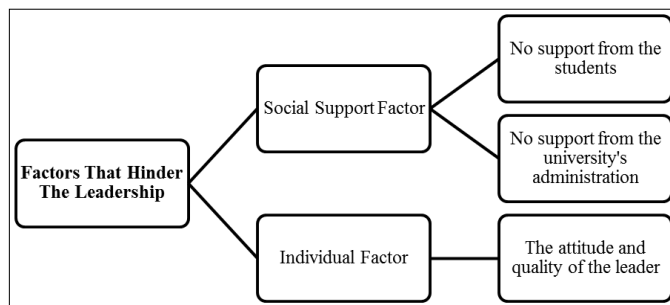


Fig 3: The Main Factors That Hinder The Leadership of Minister Mentor

According to the research findings, there are two factors that became the barrier to the effectiveness of the minister mentor's leadership in executing their role of developing the students' community, which are the social support factor and the individual factor. As what has been previously explained, these two factors are also contributing to the effectiveness of the program but slightly different in terms of the context or

approach which will eventually become the barrier of their leadership in the university. The social support may become the barrier if the students are not giving any support by not joining the program or showing no interest towards the event organized by the minister mentor, as well as receiving no interest or support from the administration of the university while carrying out their duty efficiently around the campus. A weak social support from the community of the university will contribute to the complication of the minister mentor's leadership in executing any plans perfectly, especially without the support and help from the surroundings.

Other than that, the individual factor may also become the barrier in the leadership that will disrupt the role of the minister mentor in the university. Lacking the skills of communicating, hardly joining any events, and not paying attention to what is happening around the campus are few of the characteristics of a leader that will lead to the in effectiveness of the program, and eventually their leadership may no longer become effective while playing their roles around the campus. There are some of the leadership of the ministers which focus more on the effort and personal agenda, rather than the objectives and goals of the program. Therefore, the two factors that have been mentioned previously play the very important role in indicating the effectiveness of the Minister Mentor Program in developing the students' community in Malaysia's public universities. If the problems and barriers can be avoided, the objectives and goals of the program will be achieved successfully.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the Minister Mentor Program which has been implemented is a smart move in developing the students' community and that it should be getting the supports from everyone in the community so that it can still be done in the future. To turn these things into a reality, the leadership of minister mentor should take proactive measures, for examples shifting the paradigms or approach in playing the roles around the campus. To be able to play the roles effectively, the leaders should always join the crowd and blend in with the community of the university, as well as trying to improve on his or her own quality of a leader. This includes a good communicating skills and understanding the norms and cultures of the society inside the campus. If these two things are able to be achieved by the minister mentor, the objectives and goals of the program will be achieved without any doubts. This program should also cover the private universities since the program will give great impacts for the development of the nation in the future.

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