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# A Study of the Effectiveness of the Social Enterprise at Community (SE@C) Program in the Financial and Marketing Aspects of Small Entrepreneurs in Kulim, Kedah

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## Abstract

This study aims to see the effectiveness of the Social Enterprise at Community (SE@C) program in Kulim, Kedah. This program was introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2020 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and received cooperation from Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and small traders in Kulim. Politeknik Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah (PTSB) has implemented this program in 2020 until now. The aspects that are the focus of this study are the effectiveness of the SE@C program in helping small traders in Kulim from the financial and marketing aspects. The study sample consists of 20 respondents who are small entrepreneurs in Kulim who have participated in the SE@C program together with PTSB students. This study used a questionnaire as a data collection method. The data obtained was analyzed by using Microsoft Excel. The results of the study show that most of the small businessmen who have participated in the SE@C program can improve their knowledge in the field of finance and marketing. They can share knowledge with PTSB students who become their mentors for a period of one to three months. Therefore, the SE@C program should be continued in the future so that more small traders can share various branches of knowledge with their adopted children and further improve their identity as small and medium-sized industrial entrepreneurs (SMEs) in Malaysia.

**Keywords :** effectiveness, SE@C Program, small businessmen

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In connection with the awareness of the importance of the community's role in improving the country's development, especially in the economic field, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has introduced a social entrepreneurship program for higher education institutions known as Social Enterprise @ Community (SE@C) in 2020. The program that was held in Politeknik Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah (PTSB) with the cooperation of Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM), has involved small entrepreneurs in Kulim, Kedah that becoming adoptive families for selected students to carry out training together during the one to three months the activity is carried out. The program aims to ensure that students and teaching staff contribute their ideas and energy in community development in addition to applying entrepreneurial values to them. Through this program, students will be exposed to the real problems and challenges faced by entrepreneurs, who involved in small and medium industries (SMEs). Politeknik Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah

(PTSB) has involved in implementing this program starting from 2020 until now.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**A) Social Enterprise at Community (SE@C)**  
Social Enterprise @ Community (SE@C) is a social entrepreneurship program organized by the Department of Polytechnic Studies and Community College (JPPKK) which is designed to help and increase the income of the *asnaf* group, single mothers, unemployed young people and the urban poor or the B40 group [1].

Among the main objectives targeted for students who follow this program is to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem and help selected communities to generate income through business and skills. It is also to provide training and guidance in increasing the income of community households through business. The SE@C program also aims to help increase the income of the target group by at least 30% through business from the previous income.

Apart from that, the SE@C program is seen as an alternative to achieving the desire to produce holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced graduates by building entrepreneurial identity and attributes. It provides a medium to transform students' thinking in the field of entrepreneurship through the implementation of work in the field as a social entrepreneur. This program also focuses on creating entrepreneurs for the community through the involvement of students as agents of change.

The SE@C program has gone through 4 phases namely Phase 1: Project Implementation Planning, Phase 2: Implementation of the Training Process, Phase 3: Entering the Market and Phase 4: Project Presentation and Evaluation and this takes approximately 8 months. The SE@C program carried out at PTSB is based on the concept of a transfer and knowledge sharing program on business skills from PTSB to the small business community in Kulim, Kedah. Instructors and mentors will monitor the process and knowledge sharing and conduct case studies for small business in Kulim.

According to [2], SMEs are impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic on both the supply and demand sides. Shortages of intermediate goods and components arise from the disruption of production networks. A sudden and severe decline in sales and demand has a detrimental effect on SMEs' ability to survive on the demand side, leading to severe liquidity problems. Due to employee resistance to going back to work, stringent government lockdown regulations, dwindling consumer demand, and a shortage of disease control supplies, many SMEs were unable to resume operations. Due to the fact that they had to budget for various fixed costs despite seeing little to no sales, many SMEs were still facing cash flow issues until now. This might potentially lead to financial instability and a bankruptcy crisis. So, they need support from many aspects in order for them to survive in their business and SE@C is one way to help them.

## B) Financial Aspect

The financial records and accounting functions play a critical role in the company's financial management. Even so, there are still many entrepreneurs who do not focus on financial management. According to [3] a negative aspect that is often detected in the business of *bumiputera* entrepreneur is poor financial management such as sales and purchase records not being updated and not using the services of an auditor. This is in line with the results of the study by [4], [5] and [6] who found that among small *bumiputera* traders there is less skill in financial aspects.

[7] found that SME entrepreneurs do need business management knowledge. According to him again, these sciences are necessary as an effort to make the business of these small

entrepreneurs more stable and competitive. This knowledge of business management includes aspects of financial management.

The results of [8] study in relation to practices in business management, found that only a handful of small traders practice them such as preparing financial records. This shows that traders are still less concerned about the importance of recording all business dealings, especially the financial aspects. Many retail organizations whether large or small experience failure due to weaknesses in managing finances. [9] emphasizes the importance of financial aspects, especially to understand cash flow and analyze profit and loss.

## C) Marketing Aspect

Marketing knowledge is very important for SME entrepreneurs. Decisions made in the marketing aspect often affect their efforts in planning, running and managing the business. Marketing is a process of planning and implementing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of products, ideas and services to form exchanges to meet individual or company objectives.

According to [10] there are many companies that go bankrupt because the owners do not have enough knowledge to overcome the ever-changing market conditions. In addition to that, business today should be marketing oriented. Companies that want to create and manufacture goods without focusing on convenience and customer needs will face various problems.

According to Drucker in [11], the two main functions for a business are marketing and innovation. This view is also supported by Barnes, Pynn and Noonam in [11] that most firms fail every year because they are unable to determine their target customers. [9] stated that the importance of making decisions in marketing is very high for an entrepreneur.

Therefore, it can be seen that marketing is an important agenda in managing a business. Marketing is a long-term activity that involves from the beginning of the product being sold to the consumer. Every SME entrepreneur should think of the best idea to ensure that the product produced will be accepted by consumers. This is to ensure that the products sold are profitable for their business. Good marketing will have a positive impact on product sales and vice versa.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the method used to collect data. This method is used to obtain information from respondents through questionnaires that have been distributed. This questionnaire has been adapted from the WISE program effectiveness form used by [12]. This questionnaire consists of two parts, namely Part A and Part B. Part A contains information about the demographics of the

respondents including educational background, type of business, business operation method and business period. Part B is divided into two parts where the first part has 7 questions related to the respondents' expectations before participating in the SE@C program while the second part has 7 questions about the results obtained after participating in the SE@C program. Among the aspects studied include financial aspects and marketing aspects. Through this aspect, the researcher can make an assessment on the effectiveness of the SE@C program towards small business in Kulim in terms of finance and marketing. This questionnaire contains 5 Likert scales, namely 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree and 1 = strongly disagree. The data obtained was analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study have been stated in Table 2 and Table 3. Table 1 shows the mean value and level of effectiveness. Overall, the overall mean obtained for traders' expectations before joining the SE@C program was 4.38. The overall mean obtained after traders joined the SE@C program was 4.43. This represents an increase of 0.05.

In this study, a Likert measurement scale was used in part B of the questionnaire. The collected data has been interpreted into a mean score and the researcher will interpret the mean score as suggested by [12].

**Table 1: Mean and Level of Effectiveness**

Mean Score	Level of Effectiveness
1.00 - 2.34	Low
2.35 - 3.67	Medium
3.68 - 5.00	High

**Table 2: Expectations Before Joining the SE@C Program**

No	Item	Mean Score
1	Increase my sales.	4.33
2	Increasing my business income which was previously affected by the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the Covid-19 pandemic until now.	4.33
3	Giving me exposure on good business financial management.	4.33
4	Taught me the basics of accounting (e.g.: recording income and expenses; calculating profit or loss).	4.33

5	Helping me to further improve the quality of my products/services that are affected by the covid-19 pandemic and also economic instability.	4.33
6	Increase my creativity and innovation to improve my business progress.	4.56
7	Provide knowledge on the latest business marketing strategies (Facebook, Instagram, <i>TikTok</i> ).	4.33
	Overall Mean	4.36

**Table 3: Results After Joining the SE@C Program**

No	Item	Mean Score
1	My sales revenue increased compared to before.	4.33
2	My business income is higher than before.	4.44
3	I was exposed to good business financial management	4.56
4	I am able to apply good accounting principles (e.g.: recording income and expenses; calculating profit or loss).	4.56
5	The quality of my products/services improved.	4.33
6	I am more creative and innovative in improving my business progress.	4.44
7	My knowledge of the latest marketing strategies such as Facebook, Instagram and <i>TikTok</i> increased.	4.33
	Overall Mean	4.43

The findings of the study show that the SE@C program has a positive impact on the small traders who participate from the financial and marketing aspects. The most positive results are for items number 3 and 4, related to financial management where traders think that the SE@C program gives exposure to good financial management to them where the mean value for hope before participating in the program is 4.33 while the result after participating in the SE@C program is 4.56, up 0.23.

An increase also occurred for item number 2, which is that the program helps traders to improve their income which is from 4.33 to 4.44, an increase of 0.11. However, for item number 6, which is that this program can increase the creativity and innovation of traders to improve their business progress, the result is decrease from 4.56 to 4.44, a decrease of 0.12.

For the other item which is item number 1: the SE@C program can increase sales results for traders, item number 2: the SE@C program can increase traders' business income, item number 5: the SE@C program can help to improve the quality of products/services and item number 7: the program can provide knowledge about business marketing strategies to traders, the mean value is unchanged for before and after the program. Nevertheless, the level of effectiveness is still at a high level (4.33), which exceeds the value of 3.68.

These findings show that the SE@C program has successfully helped small entrepreneurs in Kulim from the financial and marketing aspects. This coincides with the needs of SMI entrepreneurs in both aspects to further improve the quality of their services. It is also in line with the opinion expressed by [7] and Drucker (1963) in [11].

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the SE@C program that has been conducted between PTSB students and small traders in Kulim district has had a lot of positive impact on traders from the financial and marketing aspects. Most of the small entrepreneurs who have participated in the SE@C program have been able to improve their knowledge in the field of finance and marketing. They have been able to share knowledge with PTSB students who became their adopted children for a period of one to three months. Therefore, the SE@C program should be continued in the future so that more small entrepreneurs can share various branches of knowledge with their adopted children and further improve their identity as small and medium-sized industrial entrepreneurs (SMEs) in Malaysia.

The time period for this program may also be extended to a period of 9-12 months compared to a period of one month as currently implemented. This is intended to further extend the period for the knowledge sharing space between the students and the entrepreneurs. When the time period is longer, more knowledge can be shared especially to further strengthen the entrepreneurs' knowledge about the preparation of income statements and recording the flow of income and expenses every day. In addition, students can also share knowledge about the latest marketing

strategies that can be used by entrepreneurs in running their business. This is because technology is very important in the marketing aspect nowadays especially after many are affected by the instability of the world economy. From the results of the study, it was found that there are still many small entrepreneurs who are not skilled in terms of using the latest technology in marketing such as Facebook, Instagram and *TikTok*. They need a long time to learn and apply it in their respective businesses.

This SE@C program is also seen as capable of becoming a prestigious program in the future. As such, the involvement of external organizations such as corporate companies in this program will also provide wider contributions and social services. This SE@C program also has the potential to be developed and multiplied. For example, if there is an entrepreneur who has the potential to be promoted, it needs to be given attention and appropriate action taken by the parties involved. In order to continue the efforts of IPT, especially PTSB in helping these small entrepreneurs, the PTSB can hold workshops, courses or business guidance that is socially responsible for small entrepreneurs who need those help.

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