ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE STUDY OF "ACTIVE CITIZENS" PROGRAM BY BRITISH COUNCIL IN A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The paper will provide the overview and practices of embedding social innovation into higher education through extra-curriculum activities in Vietnamese universities. The paper argues that the educational experiences provided by "Active Citizens" program can provide the youth necessary global skills, mindset and hand-on experiences to engage youth to social innovation through their social action projects. The study also recognizes that most challenging issue in carrying out this kind of program is to sustain students' engagement and their active investment in their initiatives. The study also sees great potentials for enhanced partnerships among university-community in terms of both professional and financial support for student's projects. Finally, there are discussions on embedding social innovation into Vietnamese universities to serve for higher education's third mission.

Keywords: *Social innovation, active citizens, higher education, social engagement, global citizenship education.*

1. Higher education and their third mission

There is an increasing interest in how universities will meet the needs of society and regional contribution alongside their traditional teaching and research missions (Sánchez-Barrioluengo & Benneworth, 2018). The university's third mission of community services are widely referred as tech-transfer and for tackling various sustainability challenges through the emerging partnerships and collaboration between academia, industry, government and civil society (Trencher et al, 2013). In this paper, we will focus on the different ways university perform their third mission, concentrating on embedding social innovation into higher education institutions by examining the case study of "Active Citizens" program conducted in one university in Vietnam in 2019 and 2021. The paper argues that the educational experiences by "Active Citizens" program can provide the youth necessary global skills, mindset and hand-on experiences to engage into social innovation through their social action projects. Then, there are discussions on embedding social innovation into university's training activities.

First of all, the concept "social innovation" in this paper is defined as a socially innovative practices that delivers socially just outcomes (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015, p.514). To some extent, this can challenge universities in terms of the desirable outcomes which are socially desirable, not universities' core missions, nor necessarily things that universities do very well. Hence, there exists the tensions from increasing pressures on universities to prioritize individual institutional success (private benefits) over wider public benefits (Robinson & Green, 2011).

Second, the paper argues that social innovation can be examined through university's social engagement activities. Melody Barnes & Paul Schmitz (2016) claims that the university's social engagement is less visible as a government policy and different universities have various program to perform this role such as programs aiming at reducing inequality in society in Chilean universities, support activities for vulnerable students in South African or at Ontario university programs in terms of support programs for indigenous students (Maassen et al, 2019). University's community engagement is not as strongly institutionalized as their knowledge transfer and is organized in a more scattered and fragmented ways. Consequently, universities have a limited capacity for further developing and professionalizing their third mission strategies and activities. There is a gap between the activities that universities undertake to strengthen their relationship with society, and the visibility, understanding and recognition of these activities among the wider audience (Melody Barnes & Paul Schmitz, 2016). Further, due to the lack of funding opportunities for the universities to social engagement both at national funding policy, there is continuous criticism on universities that their 'third mission' strategies and activities are insufficient until now (Melody Barnes & Paul Schmitz, 2016).

However, the common characteristic among in performing university's social engagement is the focus on student engagement, stimulating students to engage in community development and environmental protection. Universities have become increasingly interested in incorporating civic engagement into educational experiences at university life. for enhancing leadership skills and creating socially responsible global citizens in which extra-curricular civic engagement has the most impact (Whitley & Yoder, 2015). Accordingly, Global Citizenship Education can be seen as dominant type of educational experiences to enhance the youth's participation local and global issues. The "World-class Teaching" project funded by European Aid, has identified the importance of youth-led learning is to encourage the young people's participation and engagement in global themes and issues and youth-lead learning can be conducted at schools/universities through both formal and non-formal academic activities. Addressing the university's embedding social innovation into their training activities, in this paper, we will focus on the educational experiences provided by the partnership between university-community through extra-curriculum activities.

2. Practices of embedding social innovation into higher education institutions

The partnerships of university-industry-community range from research& social engagement paradigms such as participatory research & action research, technology transfer, transdisciplinary, cooperative extension programs for local and community development, service learning (application of educational programs to extra-curriculum activities to tackle localized real-real problems), regional development, living laboratories (evaluating real-life experiments and social intervention) (Trencher et al, 2013). In some Asia contexts presented in the table 1 below, we can also see the different ways social innovation are being embedded into higher education institutions (HEIs):

Table 1. Country higher education ecosystems for social innovation (SIHE, 2020, p. 35).

Country	Publications	Modules/ Courses	Community engagement	Key features
Vietnam	148	77	42	•Moderate government support • Strong research & curricula • Moderate international collaboration • Poor corporate social responsibility (CSR) engagement
Malaysia	55	64	47	•Moderate government support • Moderate research • Strong curricula • Moderate international collaboration • Moderate CSR engagement
Indonesia	89	15	22	• Low-level of government support • Moderate research • Poor curricula • Poor international collaboration • Strong CSR engagement
Philippines	50	73	62	• Low-level of government support • Poor research • Strong curricula • Poor international collaboration • Poor CSR engagement
Korea	70	40	24	• High-level of government support • Very strong research & curricula • Strong international collaboration • Strong CSR engagement

This regional study shows that teaching social innovation is mainly embedded into undergraduate and non-accredited courses with strong focus on research & curricula. However, this study does not provide analysis of social innovation embedded to non-credited training programs and of the bottom-up initiatives at Vietnamese universities. Consequently, "Active Citizens- Start-up Ring" program, conducted by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh city (USSH) in 2019 and 2021, will be examined to support the argument that such extra-curriculum activities can be considered as one of alternative educational activities to enhance youth's participation in social innovation in through their activities in higher education.

3. Social innovation in higher education institutions in Vietnam

The country report of Social Innovation and Higher Education Landscape (SIHE, 2020) states that higher education sector in Vietnam is in the early stage of supporting social innovation through their focus on social innovation and social entrepreneurship research, teaching, community engagement activities and the emergence research centers and hubs/incubators within universities to support the growth of the innovation ecosystem. Programs and competitions are organized to raise awareness and provide training to young people interested in social innovation and social entrepreneurship by research centers (most notably are the Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CSIE); and the Centre for Economic Development Studies at Vietnam National University, Saigon Innovation Hub) and by international organizations like the British Council (Vietnam Youth for Social Innovation), and UNDP (Social Innovation Camp and Summit). Importantly, social innovation and entrepreneurship are integrated into academic curriculum and other extracurricular activities in which experiential learning and service learning are used to design teaching and learning activities. The main goals of these activities are involving students on real-life cases/experiences for raising students' awareness on social issues, social responsibility and entrepreneurial inspiration, as a means of building socially entrepreneurial behavior and the sustainability agenda (Tran and Doan, 2015).

In addition, social innovation at HEIs in Vietnam is strongly guided by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and national government agenda, namely Project 1665 and Project 844. Upon the implementation of Project 1665 (which lasts until 2025, aiming to encourage/support youth entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship), universities have quickly introduced social innovation and entrepreneurship into university's activities. Other key project related to building ecosystem to support more university's engagement into social innovation and entrepreneurship is Project 844 which is introduced to (1) Promoting and supporting the formation and development of fast-growing businesses based on exploitation of intellectual property, technology, and new business models, (2) Providing the legal system to support innovative start-ups, (3) Setting up the National Innovation Startup Portal, (4) Supporting 800 projects, 200 start-up businesses with a total value of about VND 2,000 billion.

4. The case study of "Active Citizens" program at the university of social sciences and humanities, Vietnam National University (USSH)

Being guided by national agenda by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Project 1665 and supported by two donors (AUF and British Council), the USSH conducted the project "*Building ecosystem to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship and social innovation among students at Vietnamese universities*" and organized the program *"Active Citizens –Start-up Ring"*. The selected students of this program are expected to be equipped with necessary knowledge, interpersonal/professional skills, experiences towards addressing current social needs/problems through their social projects or start-up project. The program aims to provide the training for young social leaders and identify necessary conditions to promote the support system of entrepreneurship and social innovation at university.

Using the framework of the global program "Active Citizens" (a program connecting 1,408 partner organizations in 78 countries who have trained 10,960 facilitators who have empowered 323,719 Active Citizens to launch 13,586 social action projects since 2009), the USSH's program is also dedicated to promote community-led social development through building trust within and between communities and across key stakeholders, motivating community members to take responsibility for their social needs whilst training them the knowledge, skill (strategic thinking and increased employability, communication skill), real-life experiences and networks needed to be able to address 21st century challenges effectively (Active Citizens Toolkit, 202, p.11). The participants are expected to generate confidence, value for fairness, social justice, difference, understanding of local and broader communities and to have a strong sense of local culture and identity in established local network (social, professional, religious).

Upon the program *"Active Citizens –Start-up Ring"* launched (we named it differently to match it with the university's strategic plan on promoting social innovation and entrepreneurship*),* there are 198 participants (133 in 2019 and 65 in 2021) and 99 students (77 in 2019 and 21 in 2021) from 17 universities located in Ho Chi Minh city were selected to enter to the 4-day training program "Active Citizens – Start-up Ring" organized at our campus. After 4-day intensive training program, students are offered mentoring and coaching to support them in implementing their projects. Other training courses, talk shows, seminars, start-up camps (offline camp in 2021 in Bidoup, Dalat and online camp in 2022) to provide them more exposure to social/start-up projects. Based on the survey (as mandatory part of the students' applications), majority of participants are first-year year students (33.1%) and second-year students (33.8%) in which 80% of them have had volunteering experiences. With regards to the reasons why they participate in our program and what they have learnt and would apply in their study and projects, the study gets the following key responses from 198 participants and 99 selected students. Here are the ones with highest votes:

Table 2. Student's feedback on their motivation of participating to Active Citizens –Start-up Ring" Program.

What kind of changes they want to see in their community	What do they expect from the program	What do they learn most and will apply into their study and projects (selected students)
Quality of environment	Personal development (To understand their identity and improve their knowledge, skills and experiences)	Design thinking and Lean Canvas
Quality education and equal access to education for all	Skills development	Learning Journey
Young people's lifestyle	To connect with friends, coach and mentor to turn their ideas into projects	Me and identity (Module 1)
Social responsibility	Understanding of entrepreneurship and social action projects	Listening at three levels and asking questions (Module 2)
Safe food	To be a good citizen with social responsibility and high spirit of community engagement	Talk shows with invited guest speakers
The social recognition of gender equality and LGBT community	To be able to change their mindset and views on the social issues in the community	What they have learnt through group discussions and educational experiences (experiential learning)
Other social issues such as: mental health care, sustainable tourism development.	To be able to get grants/funding for their projects (start-up projects and social action projects).	Project planning and how to write action plan

With post-training surveys, students agree that the program provide the students with necessary global skills, mindset and hand-on experiences to engage them into social action and fully be aware of social issues/problems, active citizens and social responsibility. Majority of student's suggestions post training focuses on the following issues: (1) how to get grants for their projects, (2) to have more intensive trainings on project management and other interested topics, (3) to have more mentoring and coaching for project implementation phase.

In our sharing sessions of "Start-up Ring" camp in January, 2021 and "Start-up Ring" online camp in October, 2021, students show their dedications to successfully carry out the proposed social projects/start-up projects and claim that they have got confidence and adequate understandings and skills in working with people from different communities. They also claim that learning experiences, supportive learning environment and great classmates are their main motivations to sustain their engagement in their challenging and demanding journey. In addition, in 2021, we used diary as part of reflection activities (the program was organized in online format due to pandemic Covid 19 in Ho Chi Minh city), students are requested to reflect on what they learned after each week by using 3-2-1 principle (3 things they have learnt, 2 things they like most and 1 thing they will apply into their study/work/project). To some extent, the data collected in 2019 and 2021 shares the strong consistence on students' feedback on their educational experiences and suggestions as analyzed above.

Experiential learning and service learning are also translated into teaching and learning activities of this 4-day intensive training program, and service learning are more concentrated on post-training activities when students are in the stage turning their ideas into action projects. From our conducted surveys and sharing sessions, students claim that experiential learning and service learning is likely to provide them trust, safe environment to raise their voices and to find the knowledge/skills more practical and related to their projects' implementation. However, we did not get the whole story of students' perceptions on differences between traditional teaching methods and experiential learning in delivering such knowledge related to social issues, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

5. Discussion

In this paper, the practices of embedding social innovation into higher education are examined through extra-curriculum activities by analyzing the case of "Active Citizens – Start-up Ring" program carried at the USSH. The paper argues that this kind of educational experiences can provide the students with necessary global skills, mindset and hand-on experiences to engage youth to social innovation through their action projects.

From our observations, surveys and sharing session, the study also recognizes that most challenging issue in carrying out this kind of program is to sustain students' engagement and their active investment in their initiatives, the activity, place, group, organization, or outcome at the initial stage after they complete the training phase. True youth engagement harnesses youth's interests and energy for a larger purpose and community development offers a definitive platform for youth engagement (Robinson & Green, 2011). Hence, university-community partnerships, the strong partnership of university, NGOs, civil society and industry will create flatform to support students during their first steps in social engagement right at the time they are at university. In this aspect, we have seen great potentials for enhanced partnerships among university-community in terms of both professional and financial support of Head of Start-up companies, Founders of Social Projects, NGOs and other civil agents in boosting youth's social responsibility and contribution to sustainable development through community-engaged actions.

As for the implications for enhancing the effectiveness of this kind of educational practices, we suggest that there is more focus on mentoring and coaching phase once student's action projects submitted. Not all selected students can submit their action projects after completing the training, around 30% of students claims that they find their interests in addressing social issues or embracing start-up ideas but they were not ready to take action after training or even after sending their action plans for getting seed funding and approval. Consequently, it is argued here that mentoring and coaching phase is a crucial stage to sustain the ready-to-take action students to complete certain parts of their proposed action plans. From the initial success of "Active Citizens- Start-up Ring" program organized at our university and at 16 other universities around Vietnam, we find that this kind of education experience is very significant to get student engage to social innovation and entrepreneurship right at the first years of their university life, resulting in profound understanding of their personal interest, career path and social responsibility. For these reasons, our teams plan to turn this extra-curriculum program into compulsory/selective courses for students at General Education (mostly for first year students) to have more investments from HEIs and from university's academic strengths in promoting university-industry-community partnerships. More importantly, the larger number of students who are well trained and dedicated to the likelihood of and

sustainable growth of their hometown through their innovation and actions will become quality human resources for Vietnam growth socially and economically.

Further, based on the feedback of students it is advisable to apply service learning, experiential learning into university courses because students understand more about the outcomes of each teaching session by experiencing the real situations (through toolkits) and applying what they learn through community activities post training sessions and during the project implementation. At the first step, our study suggests that modules of internships can be upgraded and updated learning outcomes through the application of service learning and experiential learning. Learning with active engagement can be alternative educational practices for work-based courses, extra-curriculum activities and volunteering programs to integrate social innovation and social engagement across disciplines offered at university.

As presented in the Table 1 above, different countries have different interpretations and implementations of the way they are embedding social innovation and social engagement into university's formal and non-formal activities to effectively perform their third mission. Being a bottom-up initiative and a pilot project, we do not have systematically support network within the university Faculty/Department in embedding social innovation and social engagement into courses and non-formal activities, eventually the outcomes of this program are not well communicated to all leaders of Faculty/Department. That is because social innovation and entrepreneurship are mainly seen from the lens of university' knowledge and technology transfer activities while rich sources of students with great potentials of innovation, entrepreneurship and social responsibility are not being explored yet. Hence, we also suggest that social engagement activities should be addressed at universities' formal management, governance and organization structures and at Faculty/Department's strategic plan as part of the university's training activities for the sake of more engaged actions by students.

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