The approaches for the development of Rajabhat University towards entrepreneurial university

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Article Info

Abstract

This qualitative research explores how Rajabhat University (RU) defines and constructs the concept of an entrepreneurial university. Multi-site studies at four institutions in the RU system were conducted using in-depth interview. Key informants included policy-maker-level administrators, faculty-level administrators, faculty members, and administrators of the university's local partners, both public and private sectors. 30 key informants in total. Findings reveal four distinct interpretations of entrepreneurial universities: (1) commercial entrepreneurial university (CEU), emphasizing collaborations, income generation from commercial activities, and research outcomes; (2) local innovative entrepreneurial university (LIEU), focusing on joint ventures with local sectors for unique innovation; (3) social entrepreneurial university (SEU), integrating entrepreneurship education and social missions for community and economic betterment; and (4) holistic entrepreneurial university (HEU), combining income generation, human resource development, research patenting, and community quality enhancement. The study suggests empirical approaches aligned with these interpretations to establish entrepreneurial universities, enabling each institution to make informed decisions based on its strengths and contributions to social development. Key recommendations include the need for a clear understanding of the entrepreneurial university concept for effective planning.

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Introduction

The global economic transformation, societal shifts, and cross-border technological advancements persist relentlessly. Advanced technology is encroaching upon human employment, ushering in an era with an unprecedented variety of job types. However, the challenges faced by the unemployed underscore the urgent need to reform our educational system. This transformation is necessary to equip everyone with the essential skills to adapt to the constant and borderless changes affecting all aspects of life. Learners must cultivate unique abilities, fostering a practical mindset and the capacity to adapt swiftly. In today's swiftly evolving job market, individuals must seamlessly integrate diverse knowledge and proficiencies to effectively tackle unpredictable job-related tasks, thereby realizing their full potential in the fast-paced world of work (World Economic Forum, 2023). The Thailand Development Research Institute (2023) has underscored the country's deficient human resource development efforts. The current number of young graduates and their skill set do not align with the requirements of modern-day rapid development. This weakness is exacerbated by the outdated state of Thailand's industries and a lack of innovative products. Consequently, the country's prospects for the next two decades depend on substantial and immediate revitalization (Siamrath Online, 2017).

Efforts to transform educational policy into practical implementation have been evident since 2004, with collaboration between business sectors and various educational institutions. This initiative necessitated additional co-working spaces to facilitate discussions for student business incubation. Business enterprise courses in higher education programs were scarce, and efforts to promote entrepreneurship were sporadic. There was a noticeable deficiency in fostering an innovative environment. Recommendations were made for the Ministry of Education (MOE) to redirect its efforts and establish a learning community that fosters entrepreneurship among students. This required the incorporation of curriculum and integrative elements into the existing educational program, spanning from primary education through higher education and lifelong learning. Consequently, the Office of the Education Council (2018) emphasized the MOE's role in hosting events to promote entrepreneurship in educational institutions. These events included the creation of business incubation centers, innovation booster centers, and co-working spaces dedicated to nurturing creativity and innovation. The objective was to prepare new graduates with entrepreneurship skills to establish successful enterprises after their educational journey. The National Innovation Agency (2023) initiated a plan (2016–2021) to encourage educational reform cooperation and support the startup movement through a cooperative education mechanism, laying the groundwork for Thailand's startup movement. Curriculum development and the identification of resource professionals with startup expertise were essential components of this effort (The Office of the Education Council, 2018). A key driver of change was the Office of National Science, Technology, and Innovation, which has evolved into the Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy. This organization was tasked with establishing entrepreneurial universities and promoting the role of universities in nurturing innovative enterprises. It established an academic network linking Thai higher education institutions with global counterparts, fostering collaboration with prestigious universities abroad to develop entrepreneurship education and facilitate collaborative efforts between universities and businesses, forming "Business Brotherhood" partnerships to accelerate the progress of student startups. These endeavors have fostered an entrepreneurial ecosystem both within and outside universities, paving the way for the emergence of entrepreneurial universities. As universities continue to play a growing role in fostering innovation enterprises, these partnerships continue to expand.

The rapid pace of globalization and technological advancement poses a significant challenge to the potential participatory development of RU. This fast-paced, stable progress necessitates robust competitiveness, which, combined with the government's mandate to meet the standards of a 4.0 country, presents a formidable challenge for educational institutions (Bunyanuwat, 2017). The strategy to address this ambitious vision involves strong community ties and a focus on local, sustainable development. The first strategic policy involves the holistic integration of social, economic, and environmental development. The second strategy emphasizes the integration of community engagement and the economy into the development equation. The third strategy, focused on enhancing the quality of the educational process, guides the design of curricula and courses to ensure their integration and alignment with the contextual development of local areas. This educational reform act's structure facilitates long-term development projects. Collaboration on curriculum design and partnerships between businesses, professional organizations, and universities aim to equip students with entrepreneurial skills to support innovative startups upon graduation.

Another aspect of RU's transformation into a more entrepreneurial university involves cooperation with financial institutions. The collaboration between universities and the Government Savings Bank of Thailand aims to support a special university project for local youth committed to working for their community's betterment. Funding from the bank also supports career development initiatives to assist those in need. Empowering individuals and efforts to increase income and improve their quality of life are the central goals of this collaborative effort. The collaboration between RU and partner organizations to enhance local development programs aligns with findings from a study by Sirisumphand (2013), which elaborated on the crucial components necessary to unleash the potential of local organizations and community strength.

This study used a qualitative method to investigate how RU institutions could become entrepreneurial universities in order to get a full picture. This is similar to the way Pothisita (2019) suggests looking into complicated things. The study aimed to grasp the perceived significance of the entrepreneurial university and conducted a multi-site study to consolidate findings and establish a framework for RU's development into entrepreneurial universities (Buason, 2013). This study emphasizes how findings can be used to create extra inputs that turn strategic policies into real-world actions. This helps universities deal with the complicated social and economic changes that digital technology is causing. The missions of all universities and the opportunities to address modern challenges are integral to national humanistic development. The researchers identified two research questions: (1) How does RU define the phrase 'entrepreneurial universities'? and what approaches should be used for the development of RU toward entrepreneurial universities?

Hence, the objectives of this research were to investigate how the four RU institutions define the meaning of the "entrepreneurial university" concept and to construct suitable approaches for the development of RU toward entrepreneurial universities.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurial University Defined

Entrepreneurial universities at present are one of the most novel organizations that could make use of the transformation to reinforce knowledge economies and innovation accelerators for sustainable progress (Daniel et al., 2019). Another definition of the entrepreneurial university was provided by Chatmalathong (2017) in a study that concisely addressed that the university combined entrepreneurship in the management system and organizational culture to promote a collaborative education process with in-organization and external partners for their fellow bachelors to earn entrepreneurship, who then work for the country's socio-economic development.

Related Research

Păunescu et al. (2013) constructed another view on the entrepreneurial university, which portrayed a picture of a social entrepreneurial university. This definition shows that the university functions as a social enterprise educational institute. The university utilizes innovation for sustainable development for both the academic community and society, with an emphasis on the local community the university serves. The methodology for this ambitious vision is intertwined with strong communities and a local, sustainable development process. Considering the novel strategic plan to work for local development in the 20-year plan, interlaced with local area development, the universities need to be highly entrepreneurial. The structure of the Reform Education Act of RU facilitates long-term development projects. An example of the reform is a collaborative, integrative curriculum design and a collaboration between business firms, professional organizations, and universities. Such cooperation aims to arm students with entrepreneurial skills that support their innovative startups after graduation.

Matt and Schaeffer (2018) conducted research on the challenge of enhancing entrepreneurship in universities and found that the shortcomings of institutions and the ineffectiveness of policy mobilization stemmed from outdated development models among universities. The research also revealed that students exhibited more enthusiasm than university researchers when the startup movement was introduced, leading to student-led initiatives to put ideas into action. The level of involvement had a significant impact on reinforcing these initiatives. The development plan aimed to maintain local distinctiveness while responding to complex social and economic changes.

Chatmalathong (2017) proposed a strategy and mission model for the development of entrepreneurial universities, suggesting that additional players, including Rajabhat University, be incorporated into the transformation. This pioneering effort provides a model for higher education institutions to support the nation's transition to Thailand 4.0. By embracing an area-based and community-based approach to boost entrepreneurial transformation, enhance higher education efficiency, and blend cultural heritage with advanced technology, 38 RU institutions across the country are striving to

improve the Thai university educational system. These institutions are renowned for their dedication to supporting local communities, contributing to the nation's development. Collaboration between policymakers, community-based strategic implementation, and community involvement is essential for realizing sustainable development, in line with the guidance of His Majesty King Rama the Ninth, a guiding figure for Rajabhat University. The core concept is that university development is a fusion of local strength and modern technological progress, blending academic advancements with civic initiatives in local communities to enhance Thailand's future. However, based on the researcher's review of the literature on policies and current issues to drive Rajabhat University (RU) towards becoming an entrepreneurial university, it was found that there are four Rajabhat Universities that stand out in their own unique orientations. They are also the universities that can serve as models for other RUs to become entrepreneurial universities soon. However, the four RUs therefore need to investigate the in-depth meaning of an entrepreneurial university as well as the approaches that will develop them to be more strengthened entrepreneurial universities consistent with their identities and strategic policies. In addition, the results of the research will lead to recommendations for university development strategies to be strengthened further.

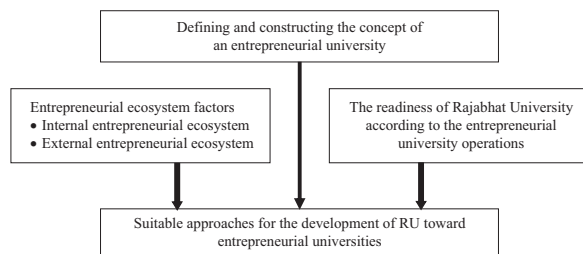The researcher created the conceptual framework illustrated in the Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the research

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was applied to accomplish the research objectives. The researcher designed multi-site studies to explore four research sites within a unified structure. Each study site included the following key informants: (1) policy-maker-level administrators; (2) faculty-level administrators; (3) faculty members; and (4) administrators of the university's local partners, both public and private sectors, 30 key informants in total. The selection criteria needed a minimum of five years of experience in entrepreneurial universities and a voluntary commitment to act as

key informants for this research. At each research site, key informants were included in the research process to develop a specific analysis in response to research questions (Buason, 2013). The research statement was examined through both secondary data analysis and fieldwork exploration. In-depth interview was utilized to unveil the complex and interrelated elements comprising the development of the entrepreneurial university. The research advisory committee and experts validated all research instruments.

Unit of Analysis and Site Selection

Four RU institutions were selected with four respective research codes: RU-A, RU-B, RU-C, and RU-D. Within the four selected institutes, key informants, including institution administrators, governmental policymakers, faculty administrators, university instructors, and executives of local agencies, were targeted for interview sessions. Purposive selection was applied to engage the units in this qualitative research. Besides the research units in the universities, governmental and local organizations, the business sector, the industrial sector, agricultural-related organizations, service firms collaborating with Rajabhat University, and experts in the development process toward entrepreneurial universities in Thailand were included in the units of analysis.

The study examines university development towards an entrepreneurial focus, influenced by its role in the university's inclusive growth program (UIGP). This program fosters community-engagement innovations that benefit the local economy and innovation ecosystem, with the aims of local empowerment, problem-solving, income generation, and sustainable development. A stronger community may be better able to adapt to sudden changes because of its confidence in its own ability to thrive economically and innovatively.

Among the four institutes, RU-A worked with the National Office of Science, Technology, and Innovation (NOSTI); RU-B was highly ranked in the progressive group, which performed well commercially, published a number of research articles, and had a good record in research-based intellectual property registration; RU-C was an Entrepreneurial University Development Project (EUDP) member of the NOSTI; and RU-D was mobilizing the integrative effort toward the entrepreneurial university.

Data Collection and Analysis

Documentary study
Using documents on entrepreneurial universities, the documentary study devised alternative methods

for Rajabhat University's entrepreneurial university development. Initial research informed the conceptual framework and field study tools. Secondary sources like books, journals, articles, and theoretical frameworks were used for a structured understanding of university progress. Content analysis revealed insights. Study results shaped the research's conceptual framework and guided fieldwork. The researchers explored the concept of "entrepreneurial university" across the four institutions, influencing the framework and field direction. This insight aided data analysis, merging fieldwork and secondary data for holistic comprehension. Content analysis categorized the data, linking it to the research framework.

Fieldwork study

Fieldwork at the four RU institutions was used to comprehend the development process of the universities, and to find data related to the research objectives. An in-depth interview was used to analyze how the universities define the entrepreneurial university concept. The tools facilitated qualitative data collection, which provided information for content analysis, thematic analysis, and analytic induction data processing. The data were prepared based on a conceptual framework composed after the initial document study on entrepreneurial universities, which explored interconnectivity among factors revealed within the research study. The next step was to finalize the proposed approaches for the institutes to develop toward entrepreneurial universities. The researcher developed a draft of the development approach for this development process. Information from the first phase was synthesized as the content analysis was used to identify complex interactivity between sets of information to construct a model and validate the constructed approaches of the development toward entrepreneurial universities. The process relied on the perspectives of entrepreneurial university development experts. The drafted approaches were presented to the experts, who examined the validity and practicality of the suggested approaches. The outputs of the process were the schemes of development, which were based on the unique strengths of each RU: commercial, community innovation, and social enterprise. The process was participatory and co-designed among experts and RU. The finalized approaches were submitted to the RU administrators at the study's final stage.

In summary, data from fieldwork were grouped and analyzed as guided by the research objectives. Categorized information was mined and synthesized in congruence with the conceptual framework. Regarding the creation of suggested alternative directions for the development of the four Rajabhat Universities toward entrepreneurial universities, the processed data were

synthesized according to the missions and authority of the universities and the Rajabhat University Acts as legitimated by the Higher Education Institution Act 2019. The synthesis results were tabulated to correlate with the unique nature of each of the four institutions. The results of the synthesis process were developed into approaches for developing the four institutes toward entrepreneurial universities – a process which could be practically applied to effectively reinforce the transformation of the universities.

Results

The research results related to approaches for the development of the four Rajabhat universities toward entrepreneurial universities are elaborated in the two topics listed below.

The meaning of the entrepreneurial university

The interpretation of an "entrepreneurial university," as understood by the selected institutions, centers on core concepts relating to university administration, the institutional role in promoting entrepreneurship within the university, educational offerings, and community development. These foundational concepts informed the process and implementation of infusing entrepreneurship into the university setting. Four distinct interpretations emerged, each embodying unique forms and functions:

Commercial Entrepreneurial University (CEU): In this model, the university combines the principles of an entrepreneurial university with entrepreneurship education. As a CEU, Rajabhat University leverages its resources to generate income for its development. The university operates as an enterprise, encouraging students and partners to participate in entrepreneurial courses linked to the university's commercial endeavors.

Local Innovative Entrepreneurial University (LIEU): The LIEU model blends the attributes of an engaged university with those of an entrepreneurial university. Instructors collaborate with local businesses and industrial sectors in joint ventures to create products or solutions that support businesses and community enterprises. This approach incorporates technology transfer methods.

Social Entrepreneurial University (SEU): This interpretation combines the concept of a community-engaged university with that of an entrepreneurial university. The SEU places a strong emphasis on collaborative engagement among students, instructors, and network members to foster initiative and an entrepreneurial mindset through the educational process. University stakeholders play pivotal roles in local development and problem-solving, utilizing local wisdom and resources to enhance the community.

Holistic Entrepreneurial University (HEU): The HEU model integrates all three entrepreneurial university approaches. It encompasses entrepreneurship education and university engagement efforts. While proposed as an additional alternative, none of the four Rajabhat Universities demonstrated evidence of achieving the status of an HEU during the study period.

The Higher Education Institution Act 2019 outlined the main missions of universities across five areas, providing a framework for the development of entrepreneurial universities at the four Rajabhat Universities. The duties and authority of these institutions laid the foundation for their transformation into entrepreneurial universities.

The research findings suggest pathways for the development of these four Rajabhat Universities into entrepreneurial universities. University leaders and educators delineated three key concepts related to entrepreneurial universities: engagement university, entrepreneurial university, and entrepreneurship education. The engagement university focused on building strong relationships and providing services to communities, fostering trust with local partners and stakeholders. The entrepreneurial university transformed existing missions into income-generating activities, commercializing research-based solutions in collaboration with local partners. Entrepreneurship education schemes prepared individuals to launch their enterprises, involving students in concise training programs and Work Integrated Education courses.

The interplay of these three concepts and their alignment with the meaning of entrepreneurial universities for the four Rajabhat Universities led to the emergence of four distinct interpretations: Commercial Entrepreneurial University (CEU), Local Innovative Entrepreneurial University (LIEU), Social Entrepreneurial University (SEU), and Holistic Entrepreneurial University (HEU) (see Figure 2).
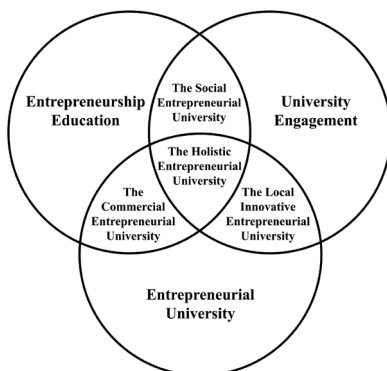

Figure 2 Synthesis of the meanings of the entrepreneurial university concept

The approach for development of the four Rajabhat universities towards entrepreneurial universities

Fieldwork, secondary data, and pertinent documentation were scrutinized and synthesized to gain insights into the development of entrepreneurial universities in compliance with the Higher Education Institution Act 2019 and the Rajabhat University Act 2004. These laws outlined shared missions and various approaches for the universities to harmonize their efforts. They detailed the main mission of providing effective education founded on the cooperative education concept, supported by practical education and cooperative education, as well as the enhancement of business clinic programs for student skill development. Additionally, universities were encouraged to collaborate with community enterprises in research projects, conduct research on commercial activities, and facilitate economic development activities. The development of entrepreneurial universities aimed to leverage social capital, such as local wisdom, cultural heritage, and historical background, for community-based commercial efforts. Combining these strengths with innovative policies, organizational structures, regulations, supportive ecosystems, tools, and ongoing financial support, Rajabhat University aspired to flourish as an entrepreneurial university.

For the development of RU into an entrepreneurial university, three alternative approaches were identified: the commercial entrepreneurial university (CEU), the local innovative entrepreneurial university (LIEU), and the social entrepreneurial university (SEU). The CEU integrated commercial activities into university operations, managing physical and intellectual property and fostering research efficiency to generate innovation. Collaboration with partner networks and local entities led to income-generating products, markets, and services under the university brand, often supported by joint projects with government and private sectors. The LIEU focused on generating innovation by partnering with enterprises, the agriculture sector, and the industrial sector through research and joint ventures, with funding from various sources. Collaborative efforts among instructors, students, researchers, and industrial and community networks added value to research and problem-solving initiatives. The SEU combined social engagement and entrepreneurial aspects, aligning with the university's mission. This approach emphasized income generation, local capital organization, and knowledge management to enhance local enterprise competency and the quality of life while contributing to local economic development. Here are some examples of key informants' statements from the findings that explain points of view towards a truly entrepreneurial and sustainable university.

"...being an entrepreneurial university means creating good things to happen to society. It doesn't mean making a big profit, but what can be done to help society and the country? What can be done to help people have a better life..."

(RU-C president).

"...universities should do everything to be self-supported and should also think about what to do so that the university personnel and students can support themselves as well. Universities will have to be less dependent on government support. If this can be done, then it can be called sustainable..."

(RU-C administrator).

Discussion

The perception of an "entrepreneurial university" relates to integrative development, organizational administration, task delegation, and support for community development. Key points are as follows:

In the early stages of becoming an entrepreneurial university, understanding and clarity among executives, instructors, staff, and partner networks regarding the mission are crucial. It involves program design, academic services, and innovation-oriented research. At Rajabhat University, advanced development towards entrepreneurship leads to a tangible understanding of the entrepreneurial university. Roles and responsibilities become well-defined, with strong mechanisms for local collaboration and networking. Internal and external connectivity aligns with the concept of an "entrepreneurial university' as defined (Clark, 1998: 2001; Hannon, 2013; Bayanbayeva et al., 2023).

The four meanings of "entrepreneurial universities" among the four RU institutions include Commercial Entrepreneurial University (CEU), Local Innovative Entrepreneurial University (LIEU), Social Entrepreneurial University (SEU), and Holistic Entrepreneurial University (HEU). CEU focuses on commercial endeavors and income generation through university property. LIEU combines an entrepreneurial and social engagement approach to promote community innovation. SEU emphasizes entrepreneurial education and community-focused initiatives. HEU integrates all three approaches. However, none of the four RU universities have fully realized the HEU status.

The five missions of RU, as outlined in the Higher Education Institution Act 2019 and the Rajabhat University Act 2004, provide a foundation for entrepreneurial university development. These missions include education, research, academic services, art and cultural heritage, and government missions. The early development stage follows a strategic approach to reorient the university,

increase income, and align with the framework by Etzkowitz (2016). Three alternative approaches for RU's mission include CEU, LIEU, and SEU. Each university may choose its approach based on its context. Commercialization and income generation are central to CEU's distinctive character. LIEU strengthens community capability through collaborative innovation with local partners. SEU focuses on entrepreneurial education and the mission of working for social benefit. Trust and relationships with local communities are essential for SEU's success. This aligns with the key informant's view on how universities may foster solid relationships, help local partners, and collaborate effectively (Morris et al., 2013).

The study revealed that the challenge of collaborating with distinct sectors hinders the achievement of establishing an entrepreneurial university as anticipated. This aligns with Karlsdottir et al. (2023) that indicated remaining challenges and obstacles related to cooperation with different sectors, such as teaching obligations, partner interest, resource constraints, academic freedom, and university resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study of various approaches to the development of Rajabhat University toward an entrepreneurial university found that the universities relied on learning experience from several sectors. The exploration and synthesis of the empirical findings suggest several recommendations.

Recommendation for Policy Makers and Administrators

In developing entrepreneurial universities, there is a need to clarify the meaning and characteristics of each university. Based on its uniqueness and expertise, policy makers and administrators should support the development toward entrepreneurial universities practically across all sectors, which would facilitate the development process immensely. The well-defined policy, mission, and direction of development should be communicated with well-selected significant issues highlighted and emphasized.

Recommendation for the Future Entrepreneurial University

The future entrepreneurial universities need to be prepared with broadened visions and acceptance of change for further development. Each university should carry out a number of enhancements in the transformation process: accelerate collaboration within the university and from outside, both in the country and abroad; provide authentic learning and working experience

on local community-based innovation generation; and mobilize research work for product development.

Recommendation for RU's General Development

Based on findings, RU institutions ought to encourage their instructors to conduct research work for knowledge generation and community innovation generation. The intertwined scheme for students' and instructors' development for community enterprise benefit would lead to more socially robust development toward an entrepreneurial university. Based on its identity and different orientations, each of the four Rajabhat Universities should establish the Entrepreneurship University Consortium to co-manage teaching and learning, research innovation, social activities, and venture capital in commercial activities. In addition, the institutes should consider solutions to disruption, creating a new normal, and establishing community archives online. Efforts should be made to enhance the outcomes in order to establish the four universities as a benchmark for other Rajabhat Universities.

Recommendation for Future Research

The direction presented as a result of this study should be trialed among other Rajabhat Universities with the intention of developing toward entrepreneurial universities for further comprehension and adaptation. Further research could encompass actual practice, systematic assessment, and recommendations for continual improvement. Findings from this study could be utilized in the process of curriculum design for entrepreneurial education. This would facilitate the design of scope and detail of how Rajabhat University could integrate essential factors into the arrangement of education sessions, research work, and entrepreneurial activities that would enhance the performance of students, community members, and partner networks.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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