Managing University-Community Engagement (UCE): The Case of UUM

Fathiyyah Abu Bakar, Zakiyah Sharif, Zaimah Abdullah

Abstract:Nowadays, the debate on university community engagement (UCE) has received a huge attention by many parties and can be considered as high profile issue over the academic world. The UCE is considered as one of the university's mechanisms in discharging its social responsibility to its nearby community. University is highly recommended to embed community engagement responsibility into the university's policy as part of theitscommitment to improve the well-being of society surrounding the campus. The objectives of this study are to describe the process of managing UCE activities at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and to identifyfactors, challenges and benefits of engaging in the activities. To achieve these objectives, twelve respondents have been interviewed and a number of UCE documents have been reviewed. The findings of this study reveal that the social activities at UUM excel beyond the philanthropic activities and have been progressed from short term program towards the long term engagement programs. The UCE activities have shown a good progress in term of its planning and implementation. However, UUM may need to take a consideration on how to overcome the challenges they may face such as lack of financial resources and inefficiency in managing UCE As such, the findings of this study provide a new insight of the management process for a highereducation institution to engage with the good UCE programs. However, one size does not fit all. Therefore, a future study could be conducted using multiple case studies that may help to gain more understanding of the university's commitment towards UCE programs.

Keywords:university-community engagement, case study, university, management process

I. INTRODUCTION

University as a higher education institution has a vital role in producing human capital and improving the socio-economy of the community surrounding the campus. The university is highly encouraged to involve in the university community engagement (UCE) andmould it asone of the university's functions around the globe (Mtawa, Fongwa, & Wangenge-Ouma, 2016; Shiel, Leal Filho, do Paco, & Brandli, 2016; Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2006).

The UCE is considered as one of the university's mechanisms in discharging its social responsibility to improve the well-being of society. It promotes community development in various aspects such as in economics, social and cultural (Shiel et al., 2016; Winter et al., 2006). Thus, in this study UCE is considered as part of university's social obligation to fulfil their responsibilities to various stakeholders particularly to the local societies.

University may engage with this commitment through the concept of quadruple helix. The quadruple helix is a reciprocal relationship that creates a mutual beneficial collaborationwith the industry, government, and community.As prescribed in the Guidelines for Assessing Community Engagement in Higher Education Institution there are four main elements in community engagement framework namely; research, teaching and learning; community advocacy and service and volunteerism. These elements need to be considered in managing a good UCE program.

Despite its crucial roles, very few studies have been conducted on the UCE and there are many important aspects surrounding the UCE management yet to be explored. There is a lack of empirical studies to explain the management of UCE program particularly the issue of managing financial resources or UCE funds that critically essential whenconducting the program. The budget allocation for the UCE program varies among universities and it needs proper management. Therefore, the study is conductedto describe the process of managing UCE activities at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and to identify the factors and benefits of engaging in the activities.

To achieve these objectives, twelve (12) respondents were interviewed and a number of UCE documents were reviewed. UUM is selected because it is a member of Asia-Pacific University-Community Engagement Network (APUCEN) and actively involved in community engagement projects. Findings ofthis study may offer a new insight on how should university manage its UCE program, the factors that may influence the process of managing the program and the impact of such activities could be comprehendedin order to enhance the well-being of society particularly to the participants of the program.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Managing University-Community Engagements

An ideal process of managing UCE may need several series of activitiessuch as designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating.

Fathiyyah Abu Bakar, TunkuPuteriIntanSafinaz School of Accountancy (TISSA-UUM),UUM College of Business,Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah

Zakiyah Sharif, TunkuPuteriIntanSafinaz School of Accountancy (TISSA-UUM),UUM College of Business,Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah

Zaimah Abdullah,TunkuPuteriIntanSafinaz School of Accountancy (TISSA-UUM),UUM College of Business,Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah

All these require human, financial and physical resources to fulfil the demand of society. In order for universities to manage these initiatives systematically, internal and external factors that may be influential need to be examined carefully. In a similar vein, challenges in conducting the activities also may need to be considered in maximizing the benefits that may yield from such activities. Prior studies claim that UCE activities are influenced by several factors such as leadership, organizational structure, faculty roles and reward and involvement of academic and professional staff (Shannon & Wang, 2010; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Specifically, Shannon and Wang (2010) identify nine steps that may enhance UCE, namely (i) make engagement a priority; (ii) develop strong facilitation skills; (iii) build the network and seek partnership, on and off campus; (iv) be ever mindful of opportunities to create linkages; (v) establish a reputation as a connector; (vi) convene stakeholders around shared issues; (vii) provide the unbiased space and leadership for different voices to be heard; (viii) seek overarching goals to build collaboration and encourage action; and (ix) share the initiatives to internal and external publications.

On top of that, financial resources are vital for continuity of the social responsibility activities. Social responsible oriented organizations always allocate some amount of money for such activities. Therefore, to conduct these activities, the universities need strong financial resources (Hollister et al., 2012). Usually, organization prepares a budget for the activities. The process of preparing the budget needs to be designed carefully in ensuring that the organizations have enough resources to finance the activities and enable the activities to be implemented successfully.

For instance, study by Abu Bakar and Md Yusof (2014) indicates that social responsibility activities at Bank Islam are funded from a few sources or funds such as *zakat*, donation or budget allocation, non-*Shariah* compliance income and also purification fund. These financial sources may help the bank to conduct various social responsibility activities for business sustainability as well as to be a good corporate citizen. All these funds establish a sum of money to execute the planned activities. Besides, the bank also tries to use several others financial resources to cater all stakeholders' need such providing homes to poor and needy people.

For this study, the stakeholder theory is used to explain the process of managing UCE activities particularly in designing the activities. The theory suggests that when organizations fulfil the expectations of various stakeholders such as employees, communities and customers, they are able to improve the performance of the organizations (Freeman, 1984) and obtain legitimacy (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). In this sense, management teams should identify the organizations' stakeholders and their issues, as well as the role of the team is to handle the stakeholders' expectations and demands (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Thus, in the context of this study, the responsibilities of management teams of universities are not only to their students and employees but also to the community and the environment.

Benefits of University-Community Engagements

To date, there is little empirical research on the relationship between UCE and their outcomes. One of the researches identified is the study done by Mc Nall et al. (2009) that analyzes the relationship between partnership dynamics and the perceived benefits of participation in partnerships facilitated by University-Community Partnerships. Their findings suggest that the perceived benefits from the relationship are the opportunities for the co-creation of knowledge that are worthy of deliberate cultivation within community-university partnerships for research. Specifically, the benefits are: (i) increase collaboration among community organizations around a community issue, problem and need; (ii) increase knowledge of a community issue, problem and need; (iii) increase research of a community issue, problem and need; (iv) improve service outcome for clients;(v) improvement of service delivery system; and (vi) increase resources for the service delivery system (McNall et al., 2009). It is found that, the expected benefits and actual benefits received are not consistent. While for the benefits received and benefits sustained, most of the cases, benefits sustained are less often than they were received.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative case study which concerns on understanding and describing process rather than behavioural outcomes (Merriam, 1988) and also allows researcher to get more explanation on certain issues particularly when the issues are not well explained and defined (Eisenhardt, 1989). As been mentioned earlier, UUM is chosen based on the following reasons: (1) UUM is the public university located in Sintok (a rural area) which has not been fully developed; (2) As a member of APUCEN, UUM should promote the culture of UCE in a proactive and holistic way; and (3) UUM is also a member of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Being a member of AACSB requires UUM to put an emphasis on the continuous quality improvement in management education through engagement, innovation, and impact (Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation, 2016).

In this study, twelve (12)respondents were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique. The respondents were divided into three groups: management team, operational officers, and beneficiaries. They are the main players in UUM who are responsible for planning and executing the UCE activities. Hence, their inputs and views are vital and meaningful to understand the process of managing UCE in UUM. Moreover, the purpose of interviewing the beneficiaries or participants of the program is to get their feedbacks and perspectives on the values and the impacts of the activities to them. Hence, their inputs and views are meaningful to illustrate the process.

The interview questions comprised of four main themes: (1) the concept of university-community engagements; (2) the objectives of university-community engagements; (3) managing the financial

resources for such activities; and (4) preparing the budget. In addition, the interview questions revolved around the respondents' practices and experiences of managing the activities. Therefore, three sets of questions were prepared for the three groups of respondents in order to reflect their roles and positions in the university-community engagements. In addition, documents obtained from the interviewees such as UCE Program Report, CSR Bulletin of UUM and APUCEN Bulletin were also reviewed. These documentation sources are very useful for cross-checking in order to reduce selectivity and reporting bias (Maon, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2009),and to understand behind-the-scenes processes and how those came into being (Patton, 1990). The interview data for this study was analysed according to the steps recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Creswell (2007) to capture the themes that emerged from the data.

IV.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Managing UCE at UUM

At UUM, UCE is managed by Northern Corridor Research Center (NCRC). NCRC is formerly known as the Kedah Development Unit and later changed to Northern Corridor Economic Region Research Center (NCER-RC). Starting on January 1, 2009 restructuring of Centers of Excellence, NCER-RC developed into NCER Research Institute (NCER-RI) as one of the main cluster. The re-branding is seen as an effort by UUM to help the government to conduct a study that will provide a positive impact on the planning and realization of the of the Northern Corridor development programs. The scope and functions of the existing NCER-RC is further amplified by involving four northern states involved in the NCER (Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak). NCRC is responsible to play a role in enhancing research, consulting and training in the three niche areas for development namely women, geopolitics and rural distribution (Respondent 1 and 3).

University Community Transformation Center (UCTC), a sub-unit of NCRCisdirectly accounted for to manage social activities. The objective of UCTC is to utilize physical sources and intellectual expertise in public universities to transform local community. In addition, UCTC is obligated to reduce gaps and barriers between public universities and local community and strengthen the relationship between campus residents and local community. There are five UCTC initiatives: (i) practical component in education program is implemented in community to get mutual benefits; (ii) to connect students and faculty with Rural Transformation Center (RTC) and Urban Transformation Center (UTC) through community transformation activities; (iii) to allow community to utilize university's facilities such as sport equipment, hall, field and many more; (iv) to help the community to involve in entrepreneurial activities through entrepreneurship incubator medium   in the university; and (v) to encourage experts from internal and external university to conduct short courses to local community and students. In managing UCE, there are several steps that have been identified, which are designing, implementing, reporting and communicating.

Designing

The university establishes a strategic alliance with the state government, government agencies and local authorities in designing the UCE activities as well as to get financial fund from these parties (Respondent 1, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 10). In addition, the university gives priority to conduct UCE programs to the local community surrounding the campus, specifically or in Kedah, generally. Most of the respondents claim that the programs should be designed to fulfil the needs of the community. Respondent 5 mentioned that *"...when university is being set up in certain area, we are supposed to develop the area. We make ourselves involved with the community and ask about their problems. We have to help them".* For instance, the relevant community service program that was conducted is Pro-Camp Program (English and Mathematics tuitions) to the primary school students at five schools located nearby the UUM campus (Respondent 5). The facilitators of this program were UUM students (as part of their co-curriculum activities under Community Services).

The process of designing UCE programs starts with preparing a proposal. The proposal states a content of the program and how it is expected to transform the community involved (Respondent 1, 2, 5, 7 and 10). Then, the proposal is presented to the fund provider for approval. The UCE programs that are organized by students also need to have a proposal and this proposal needs to be presented for approval and financial sponsorship. UUM gets financial supports from various sources such as: (i) grant from ministry particularly Higher Education Ministry; (ii) APUCEN; (iii) state government and state government agencies; (iv) local authorities; (v) NGOs; (vi) industry players; (vii) UUM allocation for UCE; (viii) zakat refund from companies such as Bank Islam and Affin Islamic Bank; (ix) special arrangement with Bank SimpananNasional (BSN) where 0.3% of what the cardholders of UUM BSN Credit Card-i spend will donate back to UUM; and (x) contributions from staffs (Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10).

The UCE fund is managed by the UUM Treasury. Some of this fund will be donated to the poor and needy students and staffs. In addition, the university also provides some allocation of money for students to start their business (in a form of loan) (Respondent 8). For social activities conducted by the students, they get the financial sponsorship from university's fund (student's activities account) (Respondent 8). This account is monitored by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs & Alumni) of UUM.

As a member of APUCEN, UUM needs to design activities that promote knowledge and resources sharing to support regional UCE projects ("About APUCEN," 2013). Every year, the university has to present program proposal at the Regional Council members to get their approval and financial support (Respondent 1, 3 and 5).

If the council members approve the proposal of the program, the university will get some allocation of financial resources to

conduct the UCE activities.

Implementing

Since the first day of its incorporation, UUM has engaged in a variety of social activities programs such as Program Pembangunan Modal Insan (PPMI), Rural Single Mothers Entrepreneurship Programme (RusMEP), 3 Kolej 3 Daerah (3K3D) and a few others. These programs were organized by various departments such as NCRC, Students Affair Departments, Student Accommodation Center, Co-curriculum Center, Colleges and Schools (Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10).

UCE implementation at UUM receivesimmense support from many parties (inside and outside the university);from the top management to approve the budget and activities, academic and support staffs who actively involve with the program, students to conduct the activities, as well as the recipients of the UCE activities. At UUM, the UCE culture resonates from the highest to lowest levels, and most staff members are willing to involve in the UCE programs. This scenario creates a positive UCE awareness in the campus to build sharing and caring community.

In conducting the UCE, the NCRC receives support and cooperation from several other departments or centers such as Students Affair Departments, Student Accommodation Center, Co-curriculum Center, Colleges and Schools (Respondent 1, 2, 3, 5 and 10). In addition, the university also welcomes the involvement of third parties such as federal government (ministry), state government, government agencies, local authorities, statutory bodies, schools and local communities in managing the UCE activities and provides sufficient amount of fund to conduct such activities. Therefore, consistent with the concept of quadruple helix, UCE in UUM is managed through the involvement of university, community, industry and government. According to Respondent 2 "In NCRC… we [conduct UCE] use quadruple helix which we involve industry to be with us".

One significant example of programs that involves many parties, for instance, Program Pembangunan Modal Insan (PPMI) that was funded by Assemblyman of Langkawi, YB. Dato' Haji MohdRawiAbd Hamid, Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA). The one year program was conducted in Langkawi with the objectives to improve students' academic achievement in Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) and also to enhance their soft skills and motivation (Respondent 2 and 3). These students were also invited to visit UUM campus to give them chances to feel the campus life in real. In addition, Respondent 1 claimed that "We have mentor mentee program… we conducted motivation program to improve these students'self-confident and also MUET preparation. Our UUM'sstudents became the facilitators to thesestudents".The programs in Langkawi have resulted the good impact whenthe Langkawi's STPM result has been announced as one of the best achievement in Kedah State (Respondent 1 and 2).

According to several respondents, UUM is actively involved in UCE at the global level after the university became a member of APUCEN in 2010. Members of APUCEN comprised of a few universities in Malaysia and the rest are universities from other countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and Australia. This is a good platform for UUM to learn further on how other universities conduct this UCE and how it benefits the community. For example, in 2015, the university conducted two big events on women entrepreneurship namely: (i) the Second International Conference on Asean Women; and (ii) Rural Single Mother Entrepreneurship Program (RusMEP) ("University-community engagement program: Rural single mother entrepreneurship program (RusMEP)," 2015). Among the objectives of RusMEP are to disseminate knowledge and information regarding entrepreneurship development, to increase their income and to overcome poverty among single mothers. These three phases program provides a positive impact not only tothe participated single mothers but also to the local socio-economic development ("University-community engagement program: Rural single mother entrepreneurship program (RusMEP)," 2015).

This program was organized under the APUCEN Driven University-Community Engagement Project and the first phase was conducted by NCRC with collaboration with the Cooperative and Entrepreneurship Development Institute (CEDI), UUM on 22 October 2015 ("University-community engagement programme: Rural single mothers entrepreneurship programme (RusMEP)," 2015). The aims of this one year program are to identify single mothers who have potential to become successful entrepreneurs, to examine the level of entrepreneurial readiness among single mothers, to disseminate knowledge and information regarding entrepreneurship development, to train and guide the single mothers with the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, and also to increase their income and to overcome the incident of poverty among single mothers. The program has three phases: (i) workshop; (ii) pre-and-post psychometric test; and (iii) coaching and mentoring the selected participants to become successful entrepreneur with knowledge and skill (Respondent 2 and 4). This program was sponsored by Ministry of Education and collaborated with other government agencies such as Unit Pembangunan UsahawanNegeri Kedah (UPEN).

Reporting and Communicating

In order to improve UCE awareness and effectiveness of the programs, continuous communication and reporting of such initiatives should be considered as an important priority. This study documents that the UCE reporting at UUM shows a positive improvement as compared to previous years. All the information and progress report of the activities may need to be reported to the Vice Chancellor of UUM. In addition, UUM has its own report on UCE, which is "Program TanggungjawabSosial (CSR) UUM" by NCRC to report all social activities in UUM.

Other than the report, the university uses various communication channels, such as the Corporate Communication Unit, the university website, university email and portal as well as newspapers to update the campus residents and community on such activities (Respondent 1). However, the university should

determine carefully the most effective communication channels to communicate the UCE activities to cater the various expectations and information needs of different people. All of these initiatives may need to be shared with all stakeholders, on and off campus (Shannon & Wang, 2010).

The findings of this study suggest that social activities at UUM excel beyond the philanthropic activities and have been progressed from short term program towards the long term engagement program. Previously, most of the social activities programs are one-day program like cleaning mosque, visiting welfare homes and conducting seminar and workshop. These programs were conducted far from the campus. However, now the programs are conducted for a series of time (for instance, one month, one semester or one year) where the intention is to improve the local community. This commitment and engagement programshelp the university to strengthen its relationships with various stakeholders such as the government agencies and the nearby community that is in line with the stakeholder theory in order to portray a good image in the society for the sustainability of the university (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The university is also committed to educate and create public awareness especially local society to have a positive vibes towards long-life learning.

In addition, the university also takes a proactive action in searching for fund from outside parties such as government agencies and corporate to finance the activities. This collaboration creates win-win situation to all parties involved. For example, the government agencies have some allocation of financial resources to conduct social activities in the community but maybe they lack of expertise or human resources. Thus, with the cost constraint as a limitation, the university may offer at its best the available human resources and experts to assist the agencies executing the UCE activities. Therefore, this finding may suggest that seeking partnerships or collaboration with outsiders may strengthen the UCE activities (Shannon & Wang, 2010).

The evolution of UCE at UUM has occurred at a number of points in time: (i) establishment of NCRC as a center to coordinate all UCE activities at university level; (ii) being a member of APUCEN; and (iii) when the awareness of UCE in campus is steadily increased year to year. Thus, the UCE at the university has improved significantly in several aspects such as the program itself, the philosophy and the management process particularly in the design and implementation of the programs, the involvement of top management and also the participation of all campus members. Hence, the UCE activities of the university show a positive improvement to become more structured and more proper in its design and planning.

Factors and Challenges of UCE

The successfulness of the UCE at UUM is influenced by both internal and external factors. . The internal factors refer to the strengths or advantages owns by the university, meanwhile the external factors refer to the strengths or advantages provided by the community. This study found three pillars to the UCE successfulness, and they are; the top management, staffs and students. Members in the top

management should initiate the passion in implementing the UCE, and then spread the spirit to the academic staff and students. This finding is supported by a study of Weerts and Sandmann (2008) when they claim that the campus leaders play an important role in promoting the UCE culture to the campus' citizen and they should able to manage the scarce resources in assuring the successful implementation of UCE.

Knowing the UCE mission underlined by the university, the academic staff who possess expertise and idea are critical ingredients in making the mission successful. The academic staff should put in place proper plans and guidelines that will later assist the manpower at the implementation stage to work it out as required. Students, who are the main manpower, then execute the plan. Good cooperation between these three pillars is necessity in making the UCE activities successful. In addition to the internal synergy between the three pillars, the cooperation from the community is also a key ingredient to the successfulness of the UCE activities. The UCE activities are various and the ultimate aim of the activities is to enhance social and economic development of the nearby community. Therefore, the community should support the UCE activities by joining the activities.

The main challenges faced by UUM in managing the UCE activities are lack of financial resources and inefficiency in the management of UCE activities. Respondent 1 and Respondent 6 claimed that UUM has lack financial resources for UCE activities. The economic downturn has caused difficulties to UUM in finding financial resources from state government, local authorities and government agencies. As mentioned previously, in UUM, the UCE activities are placed under NCRC. However, Respondent 1 claimed that not many staff in UUM aware of that fact. The lack of awareness has subsequently seen many UCE activities been conducted through different departments throughout UUM. Consequently, the implementation of these activities are varies since there are no proper standard operating procedures in place. This situation reflects the inefficiency and no integration of the UUM-UCE activities management.

According to Respondent 1, the NCRC is known as research activities center. The placement of the UCE activities under the NCRC may need to be reconsidered and may cause restriction on the progression of the UCE activities itself. Among the reasons is lack of expertise. This point has been raised up by a number of respondents. Respondent 1 further suggested that UUM should develop one department or center specializing for managing the UCE activities.

In addition, one of the respondents claimed that the volunteerism spirit among UUM staff is not consistent and prolong.

The involvement of staff in the UCE activities is not comprehensive and only a handful of staff involved and she named this as a challenge from personal dimension. According to the respondent, the personal dimension challenges could be due to advancement in the academic career over the

community engagement works, the recognition of the community works by the academic departments and recognition received by the community itself.

Two respondents suggested that UUM should consider establishing a UCTC (University Community Transformation Center) and assigned a new post of UCTC Deputy Vice Chancellor. The suggestion is parallel with the practice of Portland State University, Oregon that established a Center for Academic Excellence. The center's main focus is on the community-based learning and teaching. The center is led by a director of community/university partnership who is responsible to assist university in any works related to curricular innovations and community partnership activities The existence of the center and its deputy vice chancellor has seen by the respondents as essential in assisting a better management of UUM-UCE activities.

In addition, some respondents recommended that top management should consider to introduce a requirement for staff particularly academician to participate in UCE activities. In particular, the requirement could be introduced as one of the academician key performance indicator (KPI). In contrast, one respondent suggested that UUM should seriously think of the idea prior to its implementation due to the current heavy workload and high KPI bears by academician.

Most of the respondents claim that among the toughest challenges in the UCE programs at UUM are derived from the internal organizational factors such as limited internal (financial and human) resources to conduct the program. This finding is aligned with a study by Hollister et al. (2012) which claim that the universities need strong financial sources to conduct social responsibilities activities. Therefore, the university should carefully manage its resources by designing good and high impact UCE programs to fulfil the community needs.

Value and Benefits of UCE

Taking together, our findings indicate that, most of the respondents believed that the benefits derive from the UCE offer great advantages to many involved parties such as to: (i)UUM as an organization that needs outside recognition in order to sustain its reputation as an academic institution that should contribute to society; (ii) academicians in generating more grantsfor research and publication and delivering their expertise; (iii) students in order to enhance their soft skills that could not be learned in classrooms; and (iv) community that will benefit a lot from the collaboration in terms of their economic and social enhancement. However, Respondent 10 insisted that UUM should put more efforts for improvement of socio and economic to the nearby community because there are still many poor needy people that need to be helped. It is worth to note that, as indicated by Mc Nall et al. (2009) that the benefit of this engagement is the opportunities for the co-creation of knowledge among all parties that involved in the activities.

V. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the UCE is considered as one of the university's commitment in discharging its social responsibility to the local community. University should

continuously engage in these social activities to improve the quality of life of the nearby community they served and to contribute to the capacity building of society. In addition, this study suggests that the social activities at UUM excel beyond the philanthropic activities and have been progressed from short term program towards the long term engagement program. It seems that the UCE activities of the university have improved significantly to become more structured and proper planned. UUM may need to overcome the challenges they face in managing the UCE activities such as lack of financial resources and inefficiency in the management of UCE activities. As such, the findings of this study provide a new insight of the management process, the factors and the benefits a university engaging in the UCE programs.

However, this study is considered as a preliminary study on the UCE management process at Malaysian public university. It is highly recommended for future research to assess other universities' UCE management processes in their contextual setting. In addition, it would be worthwhile to conduct interviews with UCE players in other universities to get their views and perceptions in order to enhance the process. In addition, one size does not fit all. Conducting multiple case studies may help to gain more understanding of the commitment of UCE.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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