

# ENHANCING STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH ENTERPRISE INCUBATION PLATFORMS: THE UMK CHILL'X EXPERIENCE

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**Abstract:** *The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant rise in unemployment in Malaysia, with the unemployment rate reaching 4.8% by December 2020, as reported by the Malaysian Statistics Department. The Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented during the pandemic exacerbated this issue, leading to an influx of unemployed individuals, including recent graduates who lack the entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses. Established small-scale businesses in Malaysia are also facing challenges, as they often fail to capitalize on available resources, contributing to business failures. This highlights a broader issue within Malaysia's education system, which does not sufficiently equip students with the skills needed to address unemployment challenges. In response, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), known as Malaysia's leading entrepreneurship university, has established the Chill'X Business Incubator facility through its Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship. Chill'X aims to foster entrepreneurial mindsets among students and provide the necessary experience, networks, and tools to support new business development, particularly in the retail sector. This study evaluates the role of Chill'X as a University Business Incubator (UBI) and examines its effectiveness in supporting the growth of student-led businesses, addressing the challenges of unemployment and business failure in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** *University Business Incubator, Student Enterprise, Job Creator*

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## Introduction

Malaysia's unemployment rate has increased significantly since February 2020, according to reports. This figure is increasing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected the majority of the world's countries. As a result of the pandemic, the Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented, resulting in an increase in the number of unemployed. Malaysia's unemployment rate increased to 4.8 percent, or 772,900 people, in December 2020, according to the Malaysian Statistics Department (2020). This increase in the percentage, which was previously less than 4%, is due to the fact that the majority of Malaysians are currently unemployed, either temporarily or permanently.

To compound matters, Malaysia continues to face an influx of unemployed undergraduates each year due to a lack of job opportunities and entrepreneurial skills necessary to start a business or work for themselves. On the other hand, established entrepreneurs often lack the necessary skills to capitalise on potentially available resources. These underperforming organisations, primarily small-scale businesses, account for the majority of Malaysia's business failures.

This issue has increased awareness of Malaysia's current education system's inadequacy to address the problems and challenges associated with unemployment. As a result, it demonstrates the university's need to offer and provide a more advanced curriculum in order to combat student unemployment. As a result, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), Malaysia's leading entrepreneurship university, seeks to address this issue by shifting students' mindsets and attitudes away from job hunting and toward job creation. To address these rising unemployment challenges, UMK established the Chill'X Business Incubator Facility through the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship. Chill's X's primary objective is to catalyse the process of business selection and expansion by providing students with the experience, networks, and tools necessary to succeed in their businesses, particularly in the retail market. The purpose of this research is to determine Chill 'X's role as a UBI and its effectiveness in assisting new business development. As a result, this article will evaluate Chill X's status as a University Business Incubator (UBI) and its effectiveness in fostering the development of new businesses.

## Literature Review

### Business Incubators (BIs)

Since the 1950s, business incubators (BIs) have evolved to keep up with technological and societal advancements. The majority of these incubators are not-for-profit organisations that support government initiatives aimed at stimulating economic development through projects and job creation (Robles, 2017). According to Sanyal and Hisam (2018), business incubators (BIs) originated in the United States during the 1960s. It has spread rapidly throughout the United Kingdom and Europe in a variety of forms, including technopoles, innovation centres, and scientific parks. They are described as a means of addressing a variety of economic and socioeconomic policy needs, including wealth creation, support for high-potential small business growth, technology transfer, innovation promotion, and strengthening ties between universities, research institutions, and business communities.

Business incubator terminology has been extensively discussed in previous studies. These definitions focus on two primary facets of this business concept: service and resource provision and implications. When researchers define business incubators, they frequently assert the four primary components associated with the first aspect. The following are the four primary

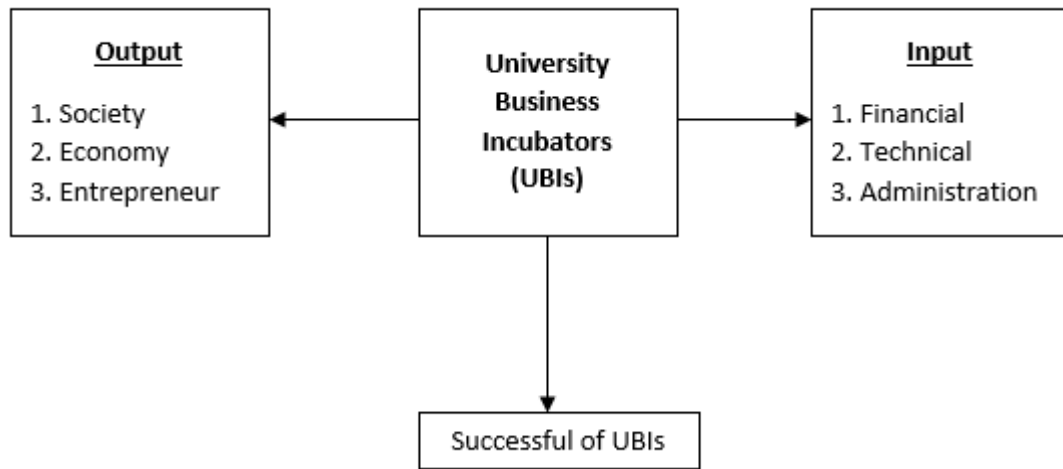
components. (1) providing shared office space and equipment in good condition for incubatees; (2) financial services; (3) professional business support such as mentoring, training, and coaching; and (4) networking (Cantu, 2015; Artun et al., 2021). The second aspect typically demonstrates that BIs are capable of fostering an entrepreneurial environment and accelerating the growth and development of these start-ups and fledgling businesses.

While early definitions of business incubators placed a premium on physical facilities, more recent research has highlighted the additional services provided by these incubators (Lai & Lin 2015). Harima et al. (2020) define a business incubator as an organisation that accelerates and systematizes the process of establishing profitable entrepreneurs by providing a comprehensive and integrated range of support services, including incubator space, business support services, and clustering and networking opportunities.

### **Universities Business Incubators (UBIs)**

UBIs are a subcategory of BIs Numerous typologies have been described and evaluated on this subject. Incubators are classified as public, private, or university-based. The current study examines a broad definition proposed by Barbero et al. (2012) and Redondo et al. (2013). (2013). (2021). A university-based institution that provides tangible and intangible support to young business start-ups is defined as a UBI. Guerrero et al. (2020) provided a similar definition for university incubators, stating that a university with an incubation system provides a physical space within the institution dedicated to the promotion of university spinoffs. Robles (2017) estimates that roughly one-third of BIs are located on university and college campuses. These BIs are an effective method of identifying potential collaborators and establishing value-adding networks. According to Roura (2015) and Kiani et al. (2019), collaborations between businesses and universities benefit entrepreneurs, students, universities, and incubators. Entrepreneurs can take advantage of well-equipped laboratories equipped with university-supplied computer systems, as well as highly trained human resources and subject-matter specialists.

On the other hand, students have the opportunity to apply newly acquired knowledge in real-world business situations, thereby fostering entrepreneurialism. Strengthening ties between the university and the business community benefits the university significantly. This relationship is established by commercialising technological advancements and research findings. To better understand the relationship between universities, business incubators, and entrepreneurship, the following section will discuss the connection between business incubators and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship and universities, and BIs and universities. To determine the extent to which Chill'X as a retail incubator has been implemented at UMK, this study was guided by Hassan's UBIs model (Figure 1). The UBI model is made up of six major components: financial, technical, administrative, social, economic, and entrepreneurial.



**Figure 1: University Business Incubator Model (Hassan, 2020)**

### **Chill'X - A Retail Incubator**

Chill'X is a retail incubator founded in September 2011 as part of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan's Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business's retail programme (SAR) (FEB). Chill'X's mission is to provide an opportunity for all FKP students, especially those pursuing a Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Retail), to gain real-world experience in business operations management, specifically in retail.

Chill'X is a convenience store concept located in the heart of the City Campus of Pengkalanchepa. It is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Chill 'X measures 24' in length and 65' in width. It automates its sales operations through the use of retail software. Its target market is university students and staff at the City Campus, which has a population of approximately 4,000 people. Chill's business operations are entirely managed by supervisors appointed from various FEB programmes, who report to a lecturer who is ultimately responsible for the store's operation, profit, and loss.

Additionally, managers are tasked with the responsibility of instructing and mentoring prospective supervisors and students. Supervisors are unlimited in number, and the most recent appointment included 22 supervisors. Chill'X has served as a laboratory for retail-related courses offered as part of the SAR program's curriculum.

While Chill'X is a not-for-profit incubator, profit-loss control is an essential component of the incubator's mission of training students through hands-on experience planning and managing business resources for profit. Additionally, the incubator seeks to instil a lifelong passion for business ownership in students. The Faculty Trust Fund is used to raise capital for the purchase of assets, machinery, equipment, and inventory.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this paper is to assess the University Business Incubator (UBIs) at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Chill'X, as a university incubator, as well as its function and effectiveness in assisting new enterprise development. The variables that govern this process, however,

remain unknown. As a result, qualitative research was chosen as the most appropriate method for conducting these exploratory inquiries (Cresswell, 2007). The advantage of qualitative research is that the researcher can collect data directly from participants (face to face) in their natural environment (Cresswell, 2007). This approach incorporates a variety of data sources, both written and visual, revealing the context's richness and providing a holistic view of all social phenomena. This study utilises a case study methodology. 'Case study research entails examining an issue through the lens of one or more specific cases within a defined system' (Cresswell, 2007). Unlike ethnography, which examines an entire cultural group as a unit of study, a case study examines a single individual or case, with additional instances increasing generalizability. Stake (1995) defines case study research as the investigation and analysis of specific or collective examples in order to capture the object of study's complexity. Merriam (2009:46) adds that the case study technique is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic in nature (Hyett et al., 2014, Merriam 2009).

### **Single Case Study**

Qualitative research does not specify the number of cases to be examined. However, researchers advise against exceeding four to five (Cresswell, 2007). As a result, we followed the lead of previous researchers and employed the single case technique. According to Singgelkow (2007) and Hyett et al. (2014), each case study should be directed toward a specific inquiry and examined holistically in its entirety, with the case study tailored to the case and research questions. Stake (1995) noted that single case studies provide compelling evidence for testing hypotheses if the single firm possesses the required unique characteristics or traits. Easterby et al. (2009) also recommend concentrating an in-depth examination on a single distinct firm, such as a high- or low-performing one. The empirical object being a single firm is reinforced by previous research (Clulow et al. 2007), which examined only single, consistently high-performing enterprises in Australia's financial services industry. Rouse and Daellenbach (2002) ascribe to the centralised firm concept. As a result, Chill'X was chosen as the subject of the study in order to assess its implementation as a university business incubator, as well as its role and effectiveness in fostering the growth of new enterprises, particularly among graduate students.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The researchers developed eight open-ended questions to guide and monitor the interview session in accordance with Hassan's (2020) model of University Business Incubators (UBIs). The researchers created a form for data collection. The first section was created to chronicle the people who worked on and established Chill'X. The following section is intended to record in chronological order the informants' responses to the questions. Additionally, interviewers used sub-questions to elicit additional data. Informants were scheduled prior to data collection. Two researchers conducted separate sessions via an online platform with four informants. With the consent of informants, interviews were taped. It is a useful technique for improving the accuracy of data collection. The scheduled interviews would last between 60 and 90 minutes. Two of the study's authors conducted interviews in Malay and translated them into English.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the experts' recommendations, the researchers conducted a descriptive study of the cases (Cresswell, 2007). To begin, the researchers conducted a within-case analysis in which they sequenced each case's responses and identified keywords and themes from each question separately. Second, the researchers used cross-case analysis to compare responses to each

question across four distinct cases. Finally, the researcher created a matrix based on the thematic analysis in order to demonstrate Chill'X's status as UBIs at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan.

## Results and Analysis

### Demographic information

This study gathered data from four informants, whose involvement in Chill'X is detailed in Table 1. Four criteria were used to categorise each respondent: their designation, Chill 'X roles, years of involvement, and outcomes. Informants 1 and 2 worked in the retail industry as senior lecturers. Three and four informants are UMK students. Informant 1 has advised Chill 'X for five years. Informant 2 was a former Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Retail) coordinator who spent eight years working closely with Chill'X. Informants 3 and 4 were both trainees who worked for Chill 'X on a part-time basis. Respondents 3 and 4 had earned their degrees and started their own businesses, respectively, grocery stores and snack bars.

**Table 1: Research Respondents**

|                         | Informant 1 | Informant 2 | Informant 3 | Informant 4 |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Designation</b>      | Lecturer    | Lecturer    | Student     | Student     |
| <b>Chill'X Roles</b>    | Advisor     | Coordinator | Trainee     | Trainee     |
| <b>Duration (years)</b> | 5           | 8           | 4           | 4           |
| <b>Outcome</b>          | Mentor      | Mentor      | Mini Mart   | Own Product |

The age, gender, marital status, number of children, and level of education of each informant are listed in Table 2. Informant 4 is the sole informant. Each informant possesses at least a bachelor's degree. Informant 1 is significantly older than the other informants, whereas male and female informants are comparable in age.

**Table 2. Personal information**

|                       | Informant 1    | Informant 2 | Informant 3 | Informant 4 |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Name</b>           | -              | -           | -           | -           |
| <b>Age</b>            | 53             | 37          | 28          | 25          |
| <b>Gender</b>         | Male           | Female      | Female      | Male        |
| <b>Marital Status</b> | Married        | Married     | Married     | Single      |
| <b>Children</b>       | 5              | 3           | 3           | 0           |
| <b>Education</b>      | Masters Degree | PhD         | Degree      | Degree      |

### Within Case Analysis

In case study research, a within-case analysis is the in-depth examination of a single case as a distinct entity. A within-case analysis is used to develop a thorough understanding and description of the phenomenon under investigation. Within-case analysis enables researchers to devote significant time and effort to analysing the data contained within a single case. This section summarises the responses to the questions from four respondents. According to Hassan's (2020) concept of University Business Incubators (UBIs), all four respondents are members of a single group of stakeholders who were directly involved in the establishment of the UBIs.

#### Informant 1

Informant 1 has over 30 years of retail experience. He was instrumental in Chill 'X's transformation. As an advisor and manager, he is accountable for the overall operation of Chill 'X. According to Informant 1 (I1), the enterprise's management concerns and challenges revolve

around a lack of financial resources for the purchase of commodities such as stock and hardware. Apart from that, he is constrained by a lack of available space and business amenities. R1 does not have management issues because he is assisted by support staff and part-time faculty employees. Additionally, the faculty made significant contributions to the success of Chill 'X as a retail laboratory for students. He believes Chill 'X has enormous growth potential as both a student incubator and a retailer.

*"Chill'X, I believe, may become a major name in Malaysia if it is well-managed and receives support from all stakeholders. I do not mind devoting a lot of time and effort to Chill 'X's development. I am happy to see that former students can open their own business."*

From R1, a successful UBI requires multi-stakeholder support. Apart from that, he paved the way for future industry collaboration. As a result, a memorandum of understanding was drafted with a well-known Malaysian brand that recognised the potential of Chill 'X. However, due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, the intended purpose had to be postponed.

### **Informant 2**

Informant 2 (I2) is a senior lecturer with retail and marketing experience. He played a critical role in establishing Chill 'X as a retail incubator. As Chill 'X's coordinator, he will ensure that all plans are carried out efficiently. Each allocation made by the faculty and university is appropriately managed. Chill 'X began with extremely limited facilities, including a room, a table, and chairs. As a result of the manager and advisor's initiatives, Chill 'X now has a more comprehensive facility. The new workspace is more strategic because it is located in the heart of campus and includes amenities such as retail simulation space. The faculty and university continue to support Chill 'X in its efforts to maintain its reputation as a one-stop shop for training students, particularly in the retailing sector. Additionally, R2 stated his intention to promote Chill 'X and to share his enthusiasm and expertise with other students interested in pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours. Additionally, he wishes for Chill 'X to become a household name in the future. This initiative was sparked by discussions with key stakeholders, including the MFA.

### **Informant 3**

Informant 3 (I3) earned a bachelor's degree in banking from Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. Despite having pursued different majors, the informant's interest in the business world, particularly retail, was sparked by the mentoring provided by Chill 'X mentors. The Chill 'X programme exposes this informant to both real-world and theoretical situations. Among them are how to manage inventory and money, the cashier's responsibilities, and customer and supplier interactions. The informant opened a grocery store successfully shortly after graduating, owing to mentor guidance and instruction.

### **Informant 4**

Informant 4 (I4) is a former trade (majoring) student at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. Despite the fact that he was running a business while a student, he maintained a high academic aggregate each semester. Additionally, he was selected as a student icon due to his academic and business success. He joined Chill 'X in order to continue growing and improving. Chill's 'X' business, according to R4, is now flourishing as a result of his mentor's ongoing guidance.

*"I have amazing mentors who help me learn how to deal if there is a problem. Entrepreneurs are confronted with a real-life scenario. I will refer to them from time to time. They will still entertain me at all hours of the day and night."*

Informant 4 also expressed gratitude for the university's supportive environment and guidance and advice for students interested in entrepreneurship.

*"Thankfully, Chill'X proposed trying to obtain funding from the Institut Keusahawanan. At least I have managed to accumulate my business capital."*

He was also invited to speak to students and community members about his entrepreneurial experiences. Additionally, he received press coverage for his accomplishments. He continued to expand the business he began during his time at university following graduation.

### **Cross-case Analysis**

The cross-case analysis enables us to look beyond our initial impressions of within-case analysis and to view the evidence through a variety of different lenses (Eisenhardt, 1989). The researchers analysed the responses to each question concurrently (Table 3) for themes pertaining to Chill 'X's role and effectiveness as a UBI.

### **Financial Support**

In response to the question about financial support, one recurring theme was that all informants agreed that economic factors are critical to ensuring the success of UBIs. Chill'X operations can be initiated with sufficient allocation.

### **Facilities**

All informants agreed that having all necessary facilities enables UBI to provide the highest quality services to its students. Chill'X begins with the fundamentals. After several years of operation, Chill'X, on the other hand, was able to develop a fully functional facility. Chill'X initially operated out of another department's space before successfully relocating to a larger, air-conditioned office space and establishing a grocery store in a strategic campus area.

### **Management**

The interviews revealed the critical nature of having an experienced and highly motivated management team. The results of meticulous planning and faculty support ensure that each plan is successfully implemented. Chill'X's advisor is Informant 1, while the incubator's coordinator is Informant 2.

### **Program**

The interviews revealed a recurring theme: the critical nature of having an experienced and highly motivated management team. Each plan will be successfully implemented as a result of meticulous planning and faculty support. Chill'X is advised by Informant 1, while the incubator is coordinated by Informant 2.

### **Society**

According to Informants 1 and 4, they are frequently invited to share entrepreneurial knowledge with the community. Among the programmes involved are TUBE, which is organised by SMECORP, and TEKUN Nasional. They are occasionally interviewed by the press.



### Economy

Chill'X is more than a laboratory or incubator; it is also a source of revenue for the faculty. Following that, it helps students supplement their income by offering part-time employment opportunities, such as Informants 3 and 4.

**Table 3: Cross-Case Analysis**

| # | Questions         | Informant 1          | Informant 2          | Informant 3    | Informant 4                   |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Financial Support | Budget for operation | Budget for operation | Start-up       | Start-up                      |
| 2 | Facilities        | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes            | Yes                           |
| 3 | Management        | Centralised          | Centralised          |                |                               |
| 4 | Programme         | Mentoring            | Mentoring            |                | Mentoring                     |
| 5 | Society           | Consultation         | Speaker              |                | Speaker                       |
| 6 | Economy           |                      |                      | Business Owner | Part-Timer/<br>Business Owner |

### Analysis

Following within- and cross-case analyses, several patterns emerged indicating two critical aspects of Chill'X's effectiveness as a UBI. To begin, Chill 'X requires organisational support in order to operate as a retail incubator effectively. Second, the degree of motivation for business expansion varied considerably. The informants were divided into two quadrants, as illustrated in Figure 2. Respondent 1 demonstrated a strong motivation to see students succeed as entrepreneurs. His experience in the retail industry influenced him significantly as well. Additionally, faculty support aided Chill'X in becoming successful UBIs in terms of developing student entrepreneurs. Following that, Informants 2 and 4 demonstrated an elevated level of motivation and organisational support.

Informant 3 exhibited a comparable level of motivation. Despite a banking major, I3 opened a grocery store following graduation. The grocery store has performed admirably under the guidance of Chill'X mentors. Informant 3 encountered a number of issues that impacted his motivation as a result of certain environmental factors. Nonetheless, I3 remains committed to achieving entrepreneurial success.

|                        |      | Growth Motivation |     |
|------------------------|------|-------------------|-----|
|                        |      | High              | Low |
| Organisational Support | High | R1<br>R2<br>R4    | R3  |
|                        | Low  |                   |     |

**Figure 2. Effectiveness of Chill'X as UBIsn**

### Chill'x Success Formula

The incubator acts as a central location for both internal and external training. Prior to focusing on external skills, the first phase examines the trainee's internal characteristics. Students will enrol in a variety of courses related to retail entrepreneurship, including management, marketing, accounting, customer behaviour, retail strategy, and information technology. Students' mastery of their courses will be developed while working in the incubator. They will

experience the reality of the collaborative effort required to achieve their business objectives. Mastery of soft skills is also critical for fostering a collaborative culture.

Students will recognise their role in achieving the organization's goals when they have a thorough understanding of the organization's business concept, objectives, vision, and mission. The division of work is intended to heighten students' awareness of job specialisation and instil a sense of responsibility. Shared responsibility can assist students in developing the soft skills required to start a business or find work.

The integrated soft skills enable students to gain a holistic understanding of the incubator's business environment. The incubator environment will help students improve their ability to carry out assigned responsibilities. Because incubators are not-for-profit organisations, they allow students to make mistakes. They do, however, provide an opportunity for students to learn how to overcome obstacles created by their errors. Additionally, students will create new concepts and strategies with the assistance of the provided assets, technology, and equipment. After students develop and embed soft skills, business skills can be introduced more easily via incubators. Understanding customer profiles enables the ability to formulate concepts and strategies. By analysing the wants and needs of customers, students will gain a better understanding of them. One could argue that business incubators expose students to critical customer characteristics such as age, earnings, status, and background that influence their desires and demands.

After determining customer needs and desires, the incubator environment enables students to develop their marketing strategy. They have autonomy in how they use the provided financial resources, subject to the manager's supervision. Additionally, students are free to design the exterior and interior appearances of their incubators to attract customers. Apart from the assets, technology, and equipment, students have access to third-party vendors and suppliers who support and purchase the inventory required to meet customer needs and demands. Failure to obtain necessary support and inventory will make meeting sales targets increasingly difficult.

Managing an incubator is not the same as studying management theory in a classroom, despite the fact that this fundamental aspect is the primary factor that attracts customers and thus increases sales targets. In this regard, Incubator Chill averaged daily sales of more than RM1000, earning the faculty a profit. This impressive daily profit is possible because the student who takes on the role of supervisor understands the business's objectives and successfully completes assigned tasks. By gaining a thorough understanding of the incubator's vision and mission, effective teamwork can be easily established, easing the process of developing business strategies.

Following graduation, these soft skills and retail strategy planning abilities have inspired students to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours in a variety of business fields. Retailing is the process of increasing the perceived value of products. Thus, regardless of the type of goods or services being sold, the retail strategy remains consistent. If students are interested in pursuing entrepreneurial careers, the Chill 'X' incubator can provide guidance and prepare them to create a business plan from scratch. Additionally, this incubator teaches aspiring entrepreneurs how to cultivate relationships and choose appropriate suppliers. Similarly, advisory services are provided regarding product selection and pricing.

Finally, this incubator can connect prospective entrepreneurs with lenders who can assist them in starting their businesses. This process begins with financial support from university-appointed centres of excellence, such as UMKEI. Similarly, some students have already begun to own or operate a business prior to graduation. They are hired as supervisors while also having access to the incubator's storage and display areas. Their products will become more affordable on the market in a roundabout way. The incubator now serves as a marketing and sales platform for their products. Students will gain knowledge about how to improve their products and develop strategies for increasing their sales in this manner. Additionally, with the assistance of incubator managers, they can learn how to expand their product sales to other stores or design their stores.

### Conclusion

Using the case study method, the Chill'X was evaluated as a University Business Incubator. According to a descriptive analysis of four respondents who were directly involved in the founding and management of Chill'X, the effectiveness of UBIs is largely dependent on organisational support and motivation growth. Continuous university support can have a significant impact on the UBI's success. As a result, a high level of motivation among stakeholders will contribute to UBIs' effectiveness. On the other hand, if there is insufficient support and motivation, it will be difficult for all parties to fully utilise the UBI. In conclusion, our findings corroborate prior research, indicating that the success of a UBI requires the commitment of all organisational stakeholders (Games et al. 2021 & Hassan, 2020).

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