

PARTNERSHIPS, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA ATTAINS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN ASIA BY 2010 AND THE WORLD BY 2020

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Abstract

Partnerships, public relations and institutional development at Universitas Terbuka were discussed thoroughly in this paper. The discussion was aimed at elucidating the way of Universitas Terbuka to approach its vision, i.e. to be one of center of excellence in distance higher education institutions in Asia by 2010 and the world by 2020.

Partnerships was designed to be the way of Universitas Terbuka to improve its instructional processes. Public relations was aimed at constructing institutional images not only in the national level but also in regional and global sense. Institutional development was intended to be a systematic and comprehensive ways to adopt the turbulence as a result of rapid change internally and externally.

Besides, historical development of Universitas Terbuka, which has 220.000 active students registered at four available faculties, was also explicated in relations to the need of discussions of the importance of partnerships, public relations and institutional development. The discussion on partnerships will be more elaborated on how to empower the 35 regional centers all over the country to initiate and maintain partnerships with local state universities with respect to the use of common available resources. The argument on public relations will be developed on how the central and regional offices build the institutional images in association with maintaining current student body as well as pursuing those prospective students. The discussion on institutional development will be further expanded specifically on how to develop strategic and operational documents in conjunction with maintaining and assuring academic and administrative quality at Universitas Terbuka.

The paper finally explains where partnerships, public relations and institutional development aspects were positioned in strategic and operational planning of Universitas Terbuka with its three main focuses, i.e. the improvement of academic quality, the expansion of students participation and service points, and the enhancement of internal management comprehensively.

INTRODUCTION Education is essential for all human beings as an effort for realizing their potentials through learning and other education activities which are socially recognizable. For Indonesia, to guarantee this condition happened, it is clearly stated in the Indonesia 1945 Constitution, Article 31, Verse (1), i.e., *every Indonesia citizens shall have the right to education*. At the same time, Verse (3) stated that *the government is responsible for the provision of a single national education system*. Such system would enable individuals to become faithful and pious to Almighty God and to possess morals and noble character, such that augments intellectual capacity and promotes character building (that is stipulated by an Act). For this purposes, the nation as a whole shall engage in intellectual capacity and character building as one of the goals of the Republic of Indonesia.

NATIONAL EDUCATION BACKGROUND Within the last five years, as a result of globalization and internal multi-dimensional crisis, both the nation and the state, are forced to consider and implement simultaneously the principles of democratization, decentralization, justice, and respect for human rights in the spirit in all aspect of life. Furthermore, the rapid change and development in science and technology have brought about new demands in all aspects of life, including a new system in education. These demands call for reforms not only in the education system in general but also, e.g., in the diversification of curriculum in order to serve diverse students and local potential; diversification of types of education conducted professionally; setting of graduated standards nationally and locally based needs; setting of minimum qualification for teachers to meet the professional requirement for teaching; setting the standard unit cost for each education unit based on the principles of equity and equality; the implementation of school-based management; autonomy of higher education; and the provision of open and polyvalence education system.

Reforms in education system also include the removal of discrimination in education organized by the Government and education organized by community, and the distinction between religious education and general education. The reforms in education system are intended to renew vision and missions of the national education. National education has a vision for bringing into being the education system as a strong and respected social institution to empower all citizens of Indonesia to become enlightened human beings who are able to keep abreast of the challenges of the time. With such a vision of education, national education system shall have missions as follows:

1. To strive for the broadening and even distribution of opportunities for quality education for all Indonesian citizens
2. To assist and facilitate the development of their potentials, from early childhood life, in order to bring onto being learning society
3. To improve quality of educational inputs and process to optimize the formation of moral character building
4. To enhance the professionalism and accountability of educational institutions as centers for acculturation of sciences, skills, experiences, attitudes, and values based on national and global standards; and
5. To empower community participation in the provision of education based on the principles of autonomy in the context of the unity of the Republic of Indonesia.

CHALLENGES & ISSUES Looking at the demands, vision and missions stated above in general, especially on autonomy of higher education and the provision open and polyvalence education system in relations to empower all citizens of Indonesia to become enlightened human beings who are able to keep abreast of the challenges of the time, follow on several challenges issues for policy makers. In higher educational level specifically, there are three strategic issues as stated in the HELTS 2003—2010 (Higher Education Long Term Strategy), published by DGHE (the Directorate General of higher Education), Ministry of National Education, the Republic of Indonesia. The strategic issues comprise: (i) The nation's competitiveness, (ii) Autonomy, and (iii) Organizational health.

The nation's competitiveness consists of national integration, globalization, research and education, mission differentiation, and access to knowledge. Autonomy embraces shifting roles of DGHE and social responsibility. Organizational health includes institutional capacity building, university governance, financing, human resources, and quality assurance. In dealing with those strategic issues, it is anticipated the needs for excellence, equity, and social responsibility to respond the nation's competitiveness. Legal reform and funding

structure are clearly relevant to conquer autonomy issues. Finally, capacity building and institutional cooperation are critically a must with respect to the organizational health problems.

HIGHER EDUCATION VISION Having considered those strategic issues, it is the right momentum for DGHE to make readjustment by introducing Vision 2010, i.e., having a healthy higher education system. This higher education system is considered to be effectively coordinated by the following features, they are: (i) Quality, (ii) Access and Equity, and (iii) Autonomy.

QUALITY is considered to exist when: (i) The education effectively link to student needs, develops students intellectual capability to become responsible citizens, and contributes to the nation's competitiveness, (ii) Research and graduate program serving as the incubator for the development of the capabilities to foster and adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy as well as integrating state of the art technology to maximize accessibility to and applicability of advanced knowledge, (iii) The system contributes to the development of democratic, civilized, inclusive society, meets the criteria of accountability and responsibility to the public, and (iv) comprehensive financial structure nourishes participation of stakeholders which directly linking new investment with recurrent budget in the subsequent years.

ACCESS AND EQUITY are defined a system that provide opportunities for all citizens to a seamless learning process, inspiring and enabling individuals to develop to the highest potentials level throughout life so that she/he can grow intellectually and emotionally, be well equipped for work, and contribute effectively to society as well as achieve personal fulfillment.

AUTONOMY is meant to: (i) Decentralize and give more authority from the central government and providing more autonomy that is coupled with accountability to institutions and (ii) Encourage the development of legal infrastructure, finance structure, and management processes through innovation and efficiency to accomplish excellence.

BASIC POLICIES Having examined those readjustment processes as state above, DGHE develops some basic policies. The policies consists of threefold, i.e., how to simultaneously: (i) Improve nation's competitiveness, (ii) Make happen autonomy, and (iii) Develop health organization. In conjunction with the effort of Universitas Terbuka to be one of educational institution to serve the nation in higher education level, it becomes critical and relevant to respond distinctively on equity and social responsibility aspects. In this regards, there are five main areas to be considered. The five areas are the role of private providers, the provision of continuing education program, the implementation of distance learning mode of delivery, the development of affirmative program, and the provision of scholarships program.

In relation to distance learning mode, it is worth to note that an effective distance education program, however, should have a well-designed delivery method suitable for a well-targeted segment of population. At the same time, the program should also utilize a rigorous quality assurance mechanism. The segment chosen should be obviously stated in the objective of the program. The materials should be adequately prepared and the methodology should be properly designed in its pedagogic and cognitive aspects. The advancement of information and communication technology (ICT), has brought a variety of new schemes in carrying out education process in distance education.

As a result, the Open University and other institutions, which possess adequate capacity to carry out such task, should be capitalized to meet the demand. In this regard, DGHE as well as individual institution should prioritize the provision of ICT infrastructures to develop such capacity.

ROLE & STATUS OF DE This explanation evidently implies that the utilization, development and dissemination of distance education mode of delivery will become outstanding phenomena in Indonesian higher education context. This condition is also strengthened by the Government through Ministry of National Education by issuing Decree 107/U/2001 on the Implementation of Distance Higher Education. This Decree clearly states that any higher education institution can offer distance education program after fulfilling set of requirements.

Looking at current trend of education and distance education in Indonesia as explained previously, it can be said that the role and status of distance education and open learning in higher education level will be prominent. It is also believed that by implementing distance education and open learning mode of delivery in higher education level will eventually eradicate the equity and social responsibility constraints as a result of social, economy, demographical and geographical constraints in Indonesia perspectives. This, ultimately, will answer the reform in Indonesia through education as it was aimed at the *new* National Education System Act (Act of Republic of Indonesia Number 20/2003).

The implication of implementing distance education and open learning in Indonesia, nevertheless, transpire some implication concerning how to maintain quality in one hand and how to provide resources on the other hands. Maintaining quality means how input—process—output—outcome cycle of the open and distance education institutions can be defensible to the cycle in the *traditional* one. Provision of resources refers to the prerequisite of information system and database in this field since without this there is no reason to defend that open and distance learning comparable to the traditional mode of teaching.

In short, it can be inferred that the two issues (maintaining quality and provision of resources) in Indonesian context should be wittingly taken into account. Quality assurance system in one hand and information system and database on the other hands should be available with ICT-based. Without having this condition, it is difficult to implement and develop high quality processes and outputs—outcomes through open and distance education systems. As a result, there will be more complexities and difficulties for decision maker to make decision concerning this field.

The situation for Indonesia is more complex and difficult. Higher education in Indonesia does not have yet a long history since it was just started at the end of 19th century with the establishment of medical education for indigenous doctor in Indonesia. Before 2nd World War, the number of students was merely around 200. After the independence in 1945, the system has been significantly expanded, particularly after the Education Act in 1961 was enacted. Currently the system enrolled more that 3.5 million students. Around 6—7% of these total numbers were registered Universitas Terbuka.

All the same, nowadays Indonesia is facing globalization and internal multi-crisis where most of the latest development educational technological demand huge investment. Unfortunately, both government and the society do not have optimal capacity to pursue those technological and other resources investment. This is a very big challenge for the nation as a whole especially for Universitas Terbuka.

UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA or **UT** (Indonesia Open University) is a state university in Indonesia established in 1984. It provides programs utilizing distance education systems with approximately 220.000 students who are currently registered in one of four available faculties. The main objective of UT mandate is to enlarge the opportunity for the high school graduates and teachers who are not accepted in the conventional universities throughout the country due to, for example, their time and domicile constraints.

In its latest strategic planning document (UT, 2004), it is stated that the vision of UT is *to be one of center of excellence amongst distance higher education institutions in Asia by 2010 and in the world by 2020*. To approach this vision, UT has focused its activities in three main areas, that is: (i) Enhancing academic quality, (ii) Expanding service points, and (iii) Improving internal management.

Considering the characteristic of UT, where its core operations mainly in managing available resources, it is impossible for UT to run the service by its own resources. Besides, the network of UT is also covering all the nations. This implies that UT should formulate and implement such policy, strategy and activities that can mobilize available resources not only from educational institutions (for academic resources) but also from others public and or private organizations (recruiting students and socializing the existence of UT).

By comprehending the above explanation, it is then relevant to state that partnerships, public relations and institutional development are extremely critical for UT. Partnerships are designed to be the way of UT to improve its instructional process. Public relations are aimed at constructing institutional images not only in the national level but also in regional and global level. Institutional development is intended to be the systematic and comprehensive ways to adopt turbulence as a result of rapid change internally and externally.

PARTNERSHIPS In general, partnerships program can be divided into three main areas. First, initiating and establishing partnerships with public and private sectors not only in Indonesia but also with foreign institutions. The aim is to have both academic resources to develop course materials and to recruit tutors to deliver the course. The main objective of this program is to improve academic quality especially on the learning process. Besides, partnerships with educational institutions are needed with respect to the development of human resources (academic and administrative staff) of UT. Second, partnerships are also needed to be established with national and international associations. This is important to the need of accreditation of UT programs. Third, partnerships are also important to be established with media communication institutions. Partnerships need to be pursued with radio and television stations. Apart from that, cooperation with internet café associations, newspaper and other printed publishers are critical to be initiated and maintained. The aim is to use these media communication to deliver course materials to as many students as possible due to demographic and geographical limitations.

PUBLIC RELATIONS In public relations areas, there are two programs should be maintained. The first is about promotion and marketing and the second is institutional image building. One of the major challenge of UT is to promote to the Indonesian society that the distance educational system that can be as good as traditional classroom-based one. With the long history of traditional classroom-based culture, it is quite hard task of UT to convince people about the opportunity of distance education. In the last several years, however, the society's perception about distance education has been remarkably better.

Marketing and promotion programs are great matters since the increasing the number of student has been depended on the programs. To do the promotion, UT has developed integrated programs on spreading information on UT by providing leaflets/booklet, conducting socialization to the society, visiting government and private institutions which are potential to send their employees to study in UT, and so on.

To build of UT's good image as education institution, UT works on two areas, i.e. physical and non-physical image. For physical UT ties to improve appearance all products and accessories at the center office either in branch offices. Whereas, in building non-physical image emphasizes on improving the student service, enhancing the learning process, providing better learning supports, and many more.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT In institutional development, there are three main activities should be anticipated. The first is about the need to develop strategic and operational document. The second is about the development of quality assurance guides. The third is concerning revitalization of regional office.

Developing strategic and operational documents is including writing university strategic planning based on the university vision of 2010 and 2020. This plan is, then, divided into several operational planning with 4-year period. Besides the planning documents, UT is also proposing a new organization structure that is more appropriate with the nature of distance education organization.

Different from the traditional face-to-face education organization, UT has similarities to industries in managerial matters which have to b maintain as 'multi-national company'. Meaning that UT has to be managed professionally. To maintain the quality learning process at UT need to be controlled tightly. Related to the need, UT is developing a set of quality assurance system. In the present time, UT has been developing guidebook to any activity process related to academic and administrative. There are, now, more than 100 guidebooks and many more to come.

The revitalization of UPBJJ-UT is actually present to the empowering of UPBJJ-UT at the local areas in Indonesia. UPBJJ-UT is design to be the first party who is directly in touch with the students taht live in all over Indonesia. UPBJJ-UT is assigned to provide all the services needed by students, start from registration, tutorials, counseling, examination, and giving all information. UPBJJ-UT, therefore, is expected capable to give 'one stop service' to their students