Accreditation of Study Program in Distance Learning in Indonesia

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Abstract:
Distance learning program as operated by Universitas Terbuka (the Open University) is unique in the sense that at the time being it is the one and the only distance learning institute, it has a national scale and coverage as well as the largest in the number of students enrolled. The first series of accreditation on several study programs were performed about seven years ago. For the coming accreditation process, the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) has developed a new set of standards and procedures for the distance learning programs. Basically there should be no difference in the sets of competence between the conventional programs and the distance learning programs. However there are differences, mainly in the paradigm, methods of learning, etc. There are wide ranges of diversity of the student conditions, such as their working and living environments: from the remote and isolated villages without electricity to the metropolitans having wide access to the information technology. In the accreditation process there are two documents to be prepared, i.e. the portfolio of the institute and the forms to be completed by each study program. A document of (internal) self-evaluation should be submitted prior to the (external) accreditation process. For these two documents there are new sets of standards to be employed. To verify the submitted documents BAN-PT will conduct a series of visits to the institute and each study program, as well as to the regional units. This paper will elaborate the standards and put highlights on some typical questions as examples. At this point of time, we are in a trial stage which will be followed by modifications as required.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia distance learning has been considered as an appropriate system for its geographical conditions with more than three thousand inhabited islands. Although there are improvements, transportation and communication are still major handicapped. There are densely populated islands (Java and Bali), but the rest of the archipelago are sparsely populated. Even in Java most of the people work and live in cities and town with better facilities. Besides that condition, there are wide variations in the social-economic conditions. Moreover, the government has a very limited budget. These factors lead the decision to establish distance learning as an alternative and complementary system to the conventional system. This is indeed inline with the life-long education and education for all principles.

Universitas Terbuka (the Open University) was established in 1984. Currently it has 17 study programs of S1 level and 13 Diploma programs. The number of students actively enrolled exceeds 200 thousands.

Currently Universitas Terbuka is the only institution in Indonesia conducting the distance learning programs. The government allows the opening of similar institutions provided

having a set of requirements, but yet no other institution is responding to the need. May be to their consideration it is not to economically feasible yet.

This paper describes briefly the accreditation process for the distance learning study programs in Indonesia. This paper is a merely highlights or excerpts of the Academic Text. BAN-PT (Badan Akreditasi Nasional-Perguruan Tinggi or National Accreditation Board for Higher Education) prepared a set of accreditation instruments which is currently at a "try-out" stage to be implemented at various programs in Universitas Terbuka.

2. ACCREDITATION PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

Accreditation which is an evaluation performed externally should be considered as one step in the spiraling processes towards improvement. Another important step is self-evaluation which is performed internally. In this respect BAN-PT encourages all study programs to perform self-evaluation prior to an accreditation process. This means that each study program is required to submit a self evaluation document as a prerequisite for the accreditation.

There are two documents to be prepared for the accreditation process, namely:
- A portfolio prepared by the managing institution
- A set of forms prepared by each study program

In distance learning the role of the institution is larger than conventional system. Therefore it was decided to put a higher proportion of score to the institution portfolio. The following table summarizes the comparison of scoring of a distance learning program vs. a conventional program.

Documents	Distance Learning Program	Conventional Program
Self evaluation	10%	10%
Portfolio of the institution	35%	15%
Forms of study program	55%	75%

To verify the documents, assessing teams of BAN-PT visit the institution and each study program to be accredited. These visits include also several regional units of the distance learning. Currently Universitas Terbuka has 35 regional units which are normally have a partnership with the nearest university in conducting tutorials, sharing facilities in performing laboratory sessions, etc.

3. ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

There are 14 standards to be used as accreditation criteria. The standards are listed as follows.

1	Eligibility, Integrity, Vision, Mission, Targets and Objectives
2	Students
3	Human Resources
4	Curriculum
5	Infrastructure and Facilities
6	Budget
7	Governance
8	Management
9	Learning Process
10	Academic Atmosphere
11	Information System
12	Quality Assurance
13	Graduates
14	Research and Service to the Community

The above mentioned set of standards is applied for the managing institution as well as for each study program to be accredited. The institution should prepare a portfolio describing the conditions in the past, current and in the future. The study program should describe the conditions by filling-in a set of forms.

The followings are highlights of several standards which might be interesting points for distance learning programs.

In the Standard on Students there are questions on the following matters:
- jobs prior enrollment
- place of residence
- availability in communication and information facility
- motivation

The questions which are related to the data base are actually should be used in the design of learning media. Previous data reveals that the availability of the communication facilities to the students are ranked as follows:
- mail /post office (for the whole country)
- radio and television (where electricity available)
- telephone and facsimile (down to small town)
- computer and internet (only in cities)

The use of telecommunication satellites in Indonesia is indeed very significant and effective communication system. However the availability of telephone set for most of the students is still a luxury. A similar (or even worse) situation is for the computer and internet facility. Nevertheless those are the promising means for the communications. Therefore besides the written and printed media which are sent by mail system, there are

other forms of learning media prepared in the audio and video cassettes. Interactive tutorials are at the development stage.

A large portion of the students has professional jobs before their enrollment. The motivation in joining the distance learning program is to improve their performance without leaving their daily jobs.

Concerning Standard on the Infrastructure and Facilities one of the important aspects is the possibility to access or to share the available facilities in the regions. Thus a cooperation or partnership with local universities is of prime importance. A similar situation is quite similar to the Standard on Human Resources, especially the availability of tutors in the region.

Further in the Standard of Human Resources there are questions on staff (including their competence) that developed the learning media, in the written form as well as in audio-visual forms and on-line method. Similar questions are raised on the staff that developed the examinations.

On the Learning Process we put emphasis that supports to the students is of prime importance. The first step in the process is the delivery of the learning media, followed by the interaction during the learning process: Questions and Answer. A prompt right answer should be delivered to the students in helping them to understand the subject matters. The use of on-line system is indeed an effective tool although for the time being it is still a dream of most students. This matter is also highlighted in the Standard of Information System.

Although in a distance learning program, the interaction among students is a great help for themselves, for instance in discussion and strengthening their motivation. Interaction through tutorial sessions at the regional units is also beneficial.

The access to the library is also questioned, although it is not necessarily in the conventional form, but access via the internet is also advisable. Since the computer and the internet facility is a luxury for most students, concise written materials should be made available.

On the Standard of Academic Atmosphere several items are to be elaborated in the efforts to enhance the teaching and learning quality, at the institutional level as well as in the regional units.

On the Standard of Quality Assurance there are items on the development of learning media, examination stuffs, and monitoring and evaluation activities. Benchmarking efforts to the conventional programs are should be elaborated.

4. SCORING

The scoring on the portfolio and forms is performed by a group of Assessing Team. First thing to do is a desk evaluation on the self evaluation report, portfolio and the forms. The desk evaluation should prepare items to be clarified and verified during the site visits. After obtaining the field verified data the team should provide scores for each item in the standards according to the expert judgment. Therefore the assessing team should consists of experts in the distance learning and in the subject matters in-line with the study program to be accredited.

The scores from the assessing team are further checked by the Verification Team of BAN-PT. The final grade is granted by the plenary meeting of BAN-PT.

In order to guide the assessing team in performing objective scoring, a general criteria has been developed by BAN-PT. The general criteria includes the concept of RAISE, which stands for R (relevance), A (academic atmosphere), I (institutional), S (sustainability), E (efficiency). This concept is subsequently developed in more detailed components as follows.

> 1. Relevance
> 2. Academic atmosphere
> 3. Institutional management:
>   - Appropriateness
>   - Leadership
> `   - Adequacy
> 4. Sustainability
>   - Sustainability
>   - Selectivity
>   - Equity
> 5. Efficiency

5. CLOSING REMARKS

As closing remarks BAN-PT has shared its views on the accreditation process of distance learning study programs. We would like to have exchange of information, views, etc, and invite comments on the developed accreditation process and procedures which is in a try-out stage at time we conduct the symposium.

Reference:

A set of accreditation instruments, prepared by BAN-PT, Jakarta, 2004. (in Indonesian)