

# **Using ISO 9001 quality management system to improve the quality of open and distance learning at Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia**

(Best practices and conditions associated with Open Distance Learning System)

Sri Yuniati Putri Koes Hardini, Aminudin Zuhairi & Rahmat Budiman

Universitas Terbuka

Jalan Cabe Raya, Pamulang, Tangerang 15417, Tangerang, Indonesia

[yuniati@mail.ut.ac.id](mailto:yuniati@mail.ut.ac.id) , [aminz@mail.ut.ac.id](mailto:aminz@mail.ut.ac.id)

Telephone: +62 21 7490941, extension 2420 and 1214

Fax: + 62 21 7403585 Fax: + 62 21 7403585

**Subtheme: 4. Sustainability, Access, Equity, and Quality**

## 1. The Importance of Quality Assurance in Open Distance Learning (ODL)

In this globalization era, every organization needs quality standards to ensure that the products and services meet the expectations and needs of the public. The organization also has to maintain its sustainability by continuously improving the quality of its products and services.

The ODL has been implemented differently in different contexts by different countries and it has its own uniqueness since many factors influence its practice, such as social condition, culture, economy, technology development, and access to the higher education institutions. Development and educational performance management system for higher education institutions particularly for ODL must cogitate and possess quality assurance system. Universitas Terbuka (UT) as a part of ODL institutions in the world realizes the importance of Quality Assurance (QA) System and has been consistently implementing the system to meet users' expectations.

In Asia and the world, UT has become a mega university because the number of students reaches more than 600,000. Although UT is an alternative of a mass education system for those who have difficulties in continuing their studies to higher education institutions, UT needs to possess more value than merely an alternative. UT needs to show that ODL system, that so far many doubt its quality, possesses at least equal quality with other traditional higher institutions in Indonesia and the world, and it should meet certain qualities in ODL system management.

The huge number of students reside in all over Indonesia with various geographic conditions **and facilities such as transportation and information technology which are not yet able to reach all the place equally. It will be the challenge for UT to maintain its service quality especially for students in remote places to have excellent service given by Regional Office (RO) in 37 locations. Education services given to students are usually related to registration, learning material distribution, tutorial, practice and practicum, examination and examination result.**

## 2. Why ISO?

To reach an expected quality, a certain standard is needed. The service quality given by UT can be used to measure whether the costumers' expectation in this case they are students and stake holders have been fulfilled following the standards stated by UT. UT as an ODL has possessed Quality Assurance System i.e. an internal mechanism to ensure the quality of services, products, processes, and philosophy of ODL institution. One of the tools to improve UT quality assurance system is ISO 9001 quality management system that is used as a standard quality in providing services for the students and other stake holders.

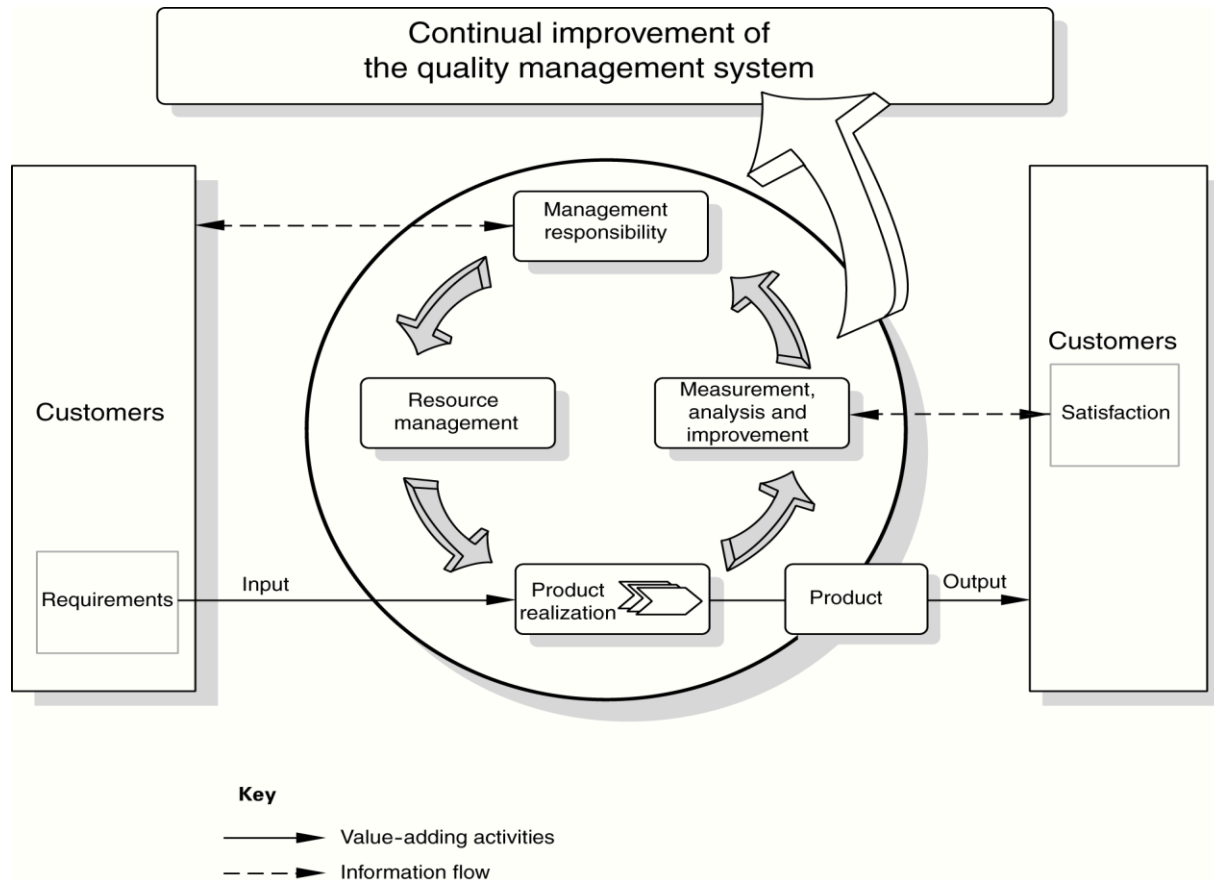
With the determined standard, so when products and services meet our expectations, we tend to take this for granted and be unaware of the role of standards. However, when standards are absent, we soon notice. We soon care when products turn out to be of poor quality, do not fit, are incompatible with equipment that we already have, are unreliable or dangerous.

### **ISO standards provide technological, economic and societal benefits (ISO, 2010)**

- a. For **businesses**, the widespread adoption of International Standards means that suppliers can develop and offer products and services meeting specifications that have wide international acceptance in their sectors.

- b. For **customers**, the worldwide compatibility of technology which is achieved when products and services are based on International Standards gives them a **broad choice** of offers. They also benefit from the **effects of competition** among suppliers.
- c. For **consumers**, conformity of products and services to International Standards provides assurance about their quality, safety and reliability.

### ISO 9001 Principles



ISO 9001 is a standard ISO that is used for quality management system. With ISO 9001 that has four principles i.e Plan, Do, Check, Act (P, D, C, A), UT are expecting that the developed procedures will conform to the condition in each RO so that all students will be able to get equal services during their studies.

### 3. ISO 9001 Implementation at UT

#### a. Preparation and Socialization

In UT 2005–2010 Operational Plan, the target to be reach in 2010 is the implementation of a comprehensive system and working procedure by means of the assisted accountable information communication technology.

In 2003, adopted the Asian Association of Open University QA framework, UT began to make procedure for all existed activities. The total numbers of procedures were 107. In the following year, revision was conducted and new procedures were made. Consequently, the numbers of procedures increased up to 193 procedures.

From 2004 to 2007, socialization of procedures practice was continuously carried out and in every semester each unit was obliged to make a report regarding the conformity of the procedures and the implementation.

In 2005, UT QA System began to develop procedures adopting ISO 9001 format to be implemented in UT Learning Material Service Center (LMSC). Procedure development in LMSC which is the main supporting unit in distributing learning material helped the manager more focus on unit performance in serving and monitoring the working partners' performance. In addition, UT collaborates with some working partners in distributing the learning materials to the students.

Up to 2010, the new and revised procedures are continuously carried out in order to meet the real need. Here are the procedures used in units:

1. 12 standard procedures for the process of Learning and Examination Material Development.
2. 6 procedures for the process of academic administration service.
3. 25 procedures for distance learning service management.
4. 18 procedures for supporting processes carried out by all units.

In those procedures, there are also record formats and working directions functioning to simplify the implementation of activities in each process.

Certification carried out after internal audit, in fact, cannot be obtained according to the determined target because there are some items needed to be synchronized. From the experience of ISO suspended for LMSC, UT QA Center are more open to the processes existed in UT that cannot work by independently. In other words, many are processes are interconnected. Unites engaging in one process need to be prepared as well both with the procedures and the targets so that the process will run in accordance with the procedures and determined quality targets.

In 2006, ISO 9001 was also developed for Learning and Examination material development as well as for RO management. This procedures development in fact did not catch up the determined target due to many procedures relating to many related units. Procedure for distributing learning material to the students, for example, involved many units in predicting the student buying the learning materials (Bureau of Administrative Academic and Student Affair or BAASA), developing new and revised learning material (faculty and graduate programs), deciding printing companies, making cooperation with Indonesian Postal Services and excellent cargo companies that could ensure the quality of learning material being sent and received by students on time. In developing learning and examination material, the related units are Faculties, Printed and Non-Printed Learning Material Development Center as well as learning material writers coming from various universities. Meanwhile, for the RO management, the related units

are BAASA/Registration, Examination Center, Computer Center, LMSC, and Bureau of General Affairs and Finance or BGAF. The whole activities are interrelated so that they need to be carried out carefully in order not to disturb other activities. Inappropriate measures such as delay in learning material writing will affect the subsequent activities such as late production, late distribution to the ROs and late delivery to the students.

By carrying out P, D, C, A, all activities can be carried out starting from planning, executing, monitoring, and evaluating. The outcome can be used for continuous improvement. Procedures for all activities are continuously revised based on the input during audit or when they do not conform to the implementation. Revision can also be carried out when there is a management policy that changes the technical implementation such as the policy of using e-book store for students of non basic education program. However, too much revision often becomes problematic because withdrawing the old procedures and substituting them with the new ones often take time due to distance between the Head Office and ROs.

In 2007, Quality Assurance Center prepared for receiving the ISO 9001 Certification for Academic Administration Service which in the implementation involved all staff at BAASA, Faculties as well as the ROs. Promotion and Collaboration management were also prepared targeted to receive the ISO 9001 in 2008. UT has also developed work instruction on remuneration. Although it is not targeted to receive ISO 9001 Certificate, it utilizes P, D, C, A principal to maintain continuous improvement.

Internal audit began to be carried out since 2006 when LMSC received ISO Certificate. Internal audit is carried out every 6 months by UT staffs who have pass lead auditor training or have passed the internal audit training. External audit is carried out every 6 months by two selected of International Certification Bodies to ensure that all determined activities work well and to see some processes that may be improved. Internal and external audit are carried out in processes performed in all units in UT Head Office and 37 ROs

## **b. Results**

ISO 9001 Certificate that received by LMSC was suspended due to the major finding. After it was resolved, in May 2006 LMSC finally received the certificate.

In 2007, UT received certificates for Learning and examination material development and certificate for management of ODL given to 11 ROs. In the same year, UT was preparing 14 ROs to receive ISO 9001.

In 2008, UT received other ISO Certificates for academic administration service and 4 of 14 ROs received ISO 9001. In 2009, 6 other ROs received ISO 9001. Up to 2010, only one of 37 ROs has not received ISO 9001 Certificate.

Certification in each RO is carried out in order that each RO understands and carries out the procedures correctly according to its condition. Condition adjustment is used to supply inputs for procedure revision so that the existed procedures are truly applicable in 37 ROs that spread in all Indonesian provinces. After the procedures are appropriate and need minor and insignificant revision and are understood by all user units, the following plan is to unite certification that currently in 25 ROs into one certification. The unification begins in 2010. It does not only happen to the 25 ROs but also to units in Head Office which are united into ISO Academic

Administration Service. By doing so, it is hope that the representation of inter-unit connection becomes clearer. Interconnected units which are critical points in activities layout can be observed closely. If there a potency or probable potency happens to a unit that the strength and weakness have been recognized, the revised procedures are hope to help it improve its performance so that there will not be the same mistakes.

### **c. Problem and Solutions**

The use of ISO 9001 as a tool to improve quality management system at UT is still new. It takes time to implement it. Many staff are of the opinion that procedures as working direction only up their existed tasks. Regular socialization in every event is carried out to make it knowledgeable. The staff's tasks indeed increase since they have to write down what they do and do what they write. Such condition requires the staff to change their working habits; they have to be accustomed to writing or documenting what they have done by using the form of ISO 9001 as the evidence that all carried out activities conform to the procedures.

The following problem is that the procedures are not carried out completely using PDCA. Planning is often not documented and the foundation of planning is not clear and not based on certain data.

After being implemented for some certain tasks repeatedly, the beneficial of the procedure can be seen. The problem, however, are in the matters of infrastructures, human resources, IT facilities that frequently do not support ODL management whose geographic condition varies.

Geographic condition becomes problem as well in monitoring the implementation of a program which has been supported by good procedure, for example, the weather. In some certain times, high waves hamper tutorial and examination monitoring. Transportation even by vehicles becomes problematic. Inadequate motorway hampers tutorial and examination. Consequently, the process is out of management's expectation.

Although IT experiences a rapid progress, it cannot be enjoy by students residing in some remote areas. Some adjustments need to be done so that those who do not have access to IT will get the same service as those who have access to IT.

After the procedures are implemented and the outcomes in target achieved are obtained, analysis is carried out. However, the results are commonly not used as bases to make the forthcoming planning and strategic development. The analysis of target achieved even is not used as a base to make planning and the forthcoming preventive actions. Units audited by internal and external auditors have set out preventive actions, but they have not been used as monitoring tools to assure that the same mistakes will occur repeatedly.

Not only does the top management but also the coordinators in the field have not utilized the result of Management Review Meeting because they have not considered it as a decision or an official policy.

### **d. Planning to be done**

At this moment, UT has 36 ISO 9001 certificates for 37 ROs. 25 of 36 ROs are in the process of merger. Later on there will be one certificate for 25 ROs. In 2–3 years from now UT is planning to merge ROs to be recertified so that there will be only one ISO 9001 Certificate for

Distance Learning Management. It is undertaken to mature the implementation of ISO in each RO primarily before being merged into one interconnected running unit ODL system that reaches the wide range of working areas and various conditions.

#### **e. Conclusion**

Although it is not easy to be implemented in units having different geographic conditions, the use of ISO 9001 is effective in ensuring the activities carried out at the Head Office and at the ROs run well. By having specific procedures, it is hoped that problems appearing due to various geographic conditions can be anticipated. Consequently, the service will be equally received by students coming from different areas.

The key point of the use ISO 9001 in UT's QA are : 1). Focus on continues improvement. 2). Assurance of consistency through internal audit. 3). Accreditation and certification by external and credible agencies to strengthen public image and recognition. 4). Process of improvement is the main objective, the certification is more as the tool. 5). The ultimate goal is to meet customers' requirements and satisfaction

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