

UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA TOWARDS THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE: VIEWED FROM PARTNERSHIPS, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

Maximus Gorky Sembiring (gorky@mail.ut.ac.id)
Yan Haryanto (haryanto@mail.ut.ac.id)
Johanna BS. Pantow (Johanna@mail.ut.ac.id)
Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Partnerships, public relations and institutional development at Universitas Terbuka UT (Indonesia Open University) are discussed in this paper. The discussion is aimed at elucidating the way of Universitas Terbuka pursuing 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. Short history, development and the future of higher education system in general are also described; specifically the development, role and contribution of distance higher education, run by Universitas Terbuka, in Indonesia. Partnerships are designed to be the way Universitas Terbuka improves its delivery and instructional processes. Public relations are aimed at constructing institutional image not only in the national level but also in regional and even in the global context. Institutional development is intended to be the systematic and comprehensive ways to adopt the turbulence as a result of rapid change internally and externally. Besides, historical development of Universitas Terbuka, which now has more than 482.000 active students registered at the four faculties, is 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 37 regional centers, almost 3000 exam sites in 527 cities and more than 8000 study groups all over the country to initiate and maintain partnerships with local state and some selected private universities in the use of common resources. The argument on public relations will be developed on how the central and regional offices build the institutional image in association with maintaining current student body and pursuing larger prospective students. The discussion on institutional development will be expanded specifically on how to develop strategic and operational planning documents with respect to maintaining and assuring academic and administrative quality at Universitas Terbuka. The paper finally explains where partnerships, public relations and institutional development aspects are positioned in the strategic and operational planning of Universitas Terbuka within 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.

Keywords: institutional development, partnerships, public relations.

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 was 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 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 (Department of National Education, 2001). 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 (Department of National Education, 2003).

CHALLENGES AND 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, 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 comprised: (i) The nation's competitiveness, (ii) Autonomy, and (iii) Organizational health (Department of National Education, 2005).

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 be exists 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 consist 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. It 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 (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2005).

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 AND THE STATUS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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 than 3.5 million students; around 12% of these total numbers were registered Universitas Terbuka.

Universitas Terbuka

Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia Open University) is a state university in Indonesia established in 1984. It provides programs utilizing distance education systems with approximately 452.000 students who are currently registered in one of four available faculties. The main objective of Universitas Terbuka 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 (Universitas Terbuka, 2007). In its latest strategic planning document (Universitas Terbuka, 2004), it is stated that the vision of Universitas Terbuka 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, then the University has focused its activities in three main areas, that is: (i) Enhancing academic quality, (ii) Expanding service points, and (iii) Improving internal management (Universitas Terbuka, 2005a; 2005b).

Considering the characteristic of the University, 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 Universitas Terbuka 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 its existence).

By comprehending the above explanation, it is then relevant to state that partnerships, public relations and institutional development are extremely critical for the University. 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.

TOWARDS VISION 2010 AND 2020

Universitas Terbuka has been awarded the 'Quality Certificate' and 'International Accreditation' by the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) on 12 August 2005. The Certificate of Quality and International Accreditation were granted by ICDE to UT on 15 September 2005 at the Opening Ceremony of the 19th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) conducted in Jakarta. Moreover, the University has been awarded **ISO** (International Organization for Standardization) in several aspects of its management, operations and services. Up to the mid of 2009, there has been 27 ISO Certificates granted to the University awarded by SAI Global Australia and SGS United States of America. By the end of this year up to next year (2010) there will be 17 more ISOs being processed. Next year, 2009, there will be 17 (seventeen) more ISOs and now being prepared and processed. By having total 44 ISOs and one ICDE Certificate, implies that the management, operations, and services in all 37 Regional Offices and the Central Office will operate and run properly and standardized (Universitas Terbuka, 2006).

Three Main Activities

To make sure all these things happened and lasting for goods, then some strategic, tactical and operational activities need to done. In general, there are 3 (three) main activities, strategically, tactically and operationally should be considered comprehensively (Universitas Terbuka, 2008). Those three activities are Partnerships, Public Relations and Institutional Development. In Partnerships, there are 3 (three) main sub-activities should be done, they are Partnerships with: (i) Government and private enterprises, (ii) Domestic and overseas Associations and/or Institutions, and (iii) Mass media providers. In terms of Public Relations, there are 2 (two) sub-activities should be taking care of, they are: (i) Conducting promotion and marketing programs and (ii) Improving institutional image. In the view of Institutional Development, there are 2 (two) sub-activities should be reformulated, they are: (i) Developing (new) Strategic Planning Document and (ii) Elaborating the New Operational Planning Documents based on the New Strategic Planning.

Partnerships

To maintain the University operates sustainable and smoothly, there should be support from relevant Ministry Offices from central government. These supports can only be gained if there were a very closed relationship and they were mutually symbiosis between the University and the ministry offices. The support should be gained especially in the sense of strategic level. This means that the University should always get in touch with central government via relevant

ministry offices in terms of provision sufficient annual budget, facilities and political supports to make the operations of the University smoothly implemented in the provincials, districts and sub-districts level. Moreover, partnerships should be initiated and maintained with the provincials through governors and districts through the mayor to get financial support, i.e., scholarships for the students, especially for primary school teachers. At the same time, support for conducting tutorials and exams effectively and in accordance with the standard operating procedures, optimal collaborations should be develop in the provincials and districts level with local state and selected private universities and/or other relevant educational institutions.

Apart from that, collaborative activities should also be developed with overseas donor institutions to get financial support for upgrading the qualification of the University staff, both academic and administrative. Supports in the form of consultancy from experts of advanced distance education institutions all over the world are also critically important for the University to reach its vision. The provisions of experts as well as infrastructures facilities for information and communication technology (ICT) are also relevant to pursue from those overseas agencies.

Partnerships through active participation in relevant associations from regional and global level are indeed essential. The University had been very active as a founder and member of AAOU (Asian Association of Open Universities) and GMUNet (Global Mega University Network). Furthermore, the Rector of Universitas Terbuka is now the President of AAOU (2008 – 2010). Besides, Universitas Terbuka is also actively involved in SEAMEO – SEAMOLEC, and ICDE. This involvement, to certain extent is the way how the University tries to attain its vision. This kind of involvement will ultimately bring the University recognized globally.

The University also develops collaborative programs with several printed and electronic media not only in the central office level but also in the regional office level. The aims of these partnerships are mainly to improve access and two-way communication for the University to its students and vice versa as well as the media for students to interact amongst them. The interactions are both in academic perspectives and administrative affairs. Likewise, this model of partnerships is also intended to avoid the gap between students and/or society to the University (in the central and regional offices). Internet providers and other relevant association of ICT-based are also included in these activities. The aim is to provide more channels for students to have multi-way communication in pursuing their degree or program at Universitas Terbuka. The use of SMS (shorts message services and the use of email via internet café are some of examples to name).

Public Relations

Viewed from public relations perspectives, promotion and marketing actually have prominent roles to fulfill the University's vision. Developing agenda and other information concerning the university should be developed systematically such that can be easily adopted not only by the students but also for the whole nation. In Indonesian context, the role of open education system is very central as it consists of more than 13.000 islands and huge population with some constraint in transportation and communication supports. Therefore, promotion activities

by providing printed and/or electronic agenda and other important information disseminated through various media are very essential. Besides, attending exhibitions in educational sectors nationally and/or internationally as well as visiting relevant institutions (public and private) regularly and continuously are critically vital.

At the same time, designing appropriate system and strategy for the sake of marketing such that programs offered by the University utilized optimally by the nation are also fundamental. Having considered the geographical, transportation and communication conditions then it is crucial to design system and strategy for marketing activities. The most feasible one is by providing 'raw materials' by central offices and instruct all the regional offices to conduct marketing activities regionally and inline with the availability of resources needed in each Regional Office. In other words, Regional Office should be revitalized such none of them are left behind in doing marketing activities. This is necessary as the capacity and resources of regional offices are various one to another.

After awarded the quality certificate and international accreditation from ISA and some ISO certificates from SAI and SGS, it did not imply that the image of the University is established. To make the meaning of the awards inline with the reality, then the image will be built systematically by designing not only the physical appearance of the University but also all tangible and intangible products of the University. Physical appearance of all buildings, facilities and other supportive equipments should be rearranged not only the quantity but also its functionality as well as its model and endurance. The performance of the staff, especially for those whose position in the front lines, should be improved accordingly; including the uniform and the environment surrounding the office (central and regional offices). In terms of non-physical appearance, the behavior or attitude of the staff in delivering the services are also taken into consideration to be improved through intensive and continuous effective training.

Institutional Development

In this aspect, developing (new) strategic and operational planning document for the University is critically central. Within the last 5 (five) years, there are so many turbulence happened in Indonesia not only in terms of economy, social and cultural life but specifically regulation in educational sector. Initially, Universitas Terbuka is the only institution allowed by the government conducting distance education in the university level. Since 2001, other conventional (face to face) universities are also eligible to run distance education programs. This implies that Universitas Terbuka is no longer 'the one and only' in then market; the University now entering the new era, the era of open competition.

Having considered this new shifts, then the University sees that the existing strategic and operational plan is no longer valid. Therefore, there should be a new Strategic Planning and the new Operational Planning to substitute the previous one. The development of this document should be final by the end of this year such that start from 2009 and upward the program of the University to attain its vision will not be disturbed dramatically. Now the University is in the process of trying to adopt the turbulence slowly but surely. In the new

Strategic and Operational Planning Documents will be developed by considering the Total Quality Management (TQM) Concept and Good Corporate Governance (GCG) Principles.

CONCLUSION

Viewing the explanation above, it can be concluded that developing strategic and operational planning is critical for the University. This is to accommodate the turbulence as a result of new regulation on distance education system in Indonesia. At the same time, conducting collaborative activities with several parties domestically and internationally as well as conducting some public relations program comprehensively will enable the University fulfilling its vision, to be one of center of excellence distance education institutions in Asia (2010) and in the World (2020).

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