WEAVING PEARLS INTO NECKLACES: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT IN EDUCATION QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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Abstract

Very often education quality management activities end up with just piles of certificates. The increase of the number of the certificates of accreditation is not accompanied with the increase of the system quality. This is, among others, the writer argues, due to the lack of constructive alignment in the quality management system components, particularly between the teaching-learning activities and assessment and the learning outcomes. This paper is presenting the results of a retrospective study to five-year endeavors on implementing a constructive alignment approach to the three aforementioned components in an attempt of sustaining a continual quality improvement of a program in an Indonesian university. The data were collected through document analyses, interviews, and participant observations, and it is found that in the research context, constructive alignment needed a prolonged time, and yet up to the time this paper is written it still needs a long way to go. This is due to the slow-growing of quality concern, supportive mindset and commitment, effective academic traditions, productive quality management system and quality support and facilities. Based on the findings, a hypothesis was then formulated that “the more effective and comprehensive a constructive alignment is, the more effective a program will be.” At the end of the paper, some recommendations are presented.

Keywords: constructive alignment, quality management system, continual quality improvement.

1 INTRODUCTION

The ideas underlying Constructive Alignment (CA) is by no means new. It may be traced back to Tyler [1] ideas that it is what students do that they learn, not what the teachers do. However, it has got its popularity when John Biggs [2] put it in a more detailed and extended work, as the interweaving connection of the teaching-learning activities (TLA) and assessment tasks (AT) and the intended learning outcomes (ILO); and course intended learning outcomes (CLO), program intended learning outcomes (PLO), and the faculty and university vision and missions (VM) [3-4]. In this perspective, CA is right at the heart of a quality management system (QMS) enterprise in education [5]. Therefore, serious efforts on establishing CA are of high demands in any programs, especially in the context of developing countries, especially in today's world, where certificates of quality assurance (CQA) are often connected to the prestige and the ranking of higher education institutions. Failures in CA may lead the program to serious faults and failures.

The significance of CA lies in its emphasis on students’ active involvement and control on their own learning, and teachers’ responsibility in providing supportive environment for students’ optimum success [6]. Therefore, CA development needs to involve both students and teachers [7]. Otherwise, QMS will only leave piles of certificates. The increase of the number of the certificates of accreditation is not accompanied with the increase of the system quality. Involving relevant stakeholders in a QMS is, however, not easy in many QMS implementation, especially in the contexts in which QA is in its initial stages. Understanding how teachers and course developers involve in CA development and how their concern, commitment, and mind-set influence the success of CA is imperative if successful CA is being targeted. This paper is intended to present a retrospective study of a five-year endeavour in establishing CA in a study program in a university in Indonesia. This study is important in the way how CA is to be established in a paternalistic, yet less-authoritarian setting. On the one hand, the stakeholders are always in the waiting-for-direction position; but, on the other hand, they are not fully observant of the decisions agreed upon. To a great extent, this attitude is by no means supportive to the CLO, PLO, and VM achievement. In this conjunction, this study is not only interesting, but also enlightening.
2 METHODOLOGY

This study is a case study, involving a group of academic staff in a study program participating in the program quality assurance activities, regularly accredited by internal and external auditors, in the last five years (2015-2019). The data were collected through participant observations, interviews, document analysis, and field notes. The obtained data were then analysed qualitatively through coding, classification, pattern-identification, and interpretation. The result of the analysis is to be presented in the following section.

3 RESULTS

The result of data analysis will be presented in terms of the emerging issues from the whole data collected. Concern for quality, mindset and commitment, academic traditions, quality management system and support and facilities

3.1 The CA in BEEP

The adoption of outcome-based education in the program was triggered by the university intention to join ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) in 2014. As the first step towards international accreditation program, the university selected six programs to be parts of the program, and Bachelor in English Education Program (BEEP) was one of them. For the purpose, the program started to develop a Self-assessment Report (Hence, SAR 14), in which formulating learning outcomes is the first of the whole fifteen criteria in the document. However, for some reasons, the SAR was not completed. In 2015, the SAR (Hence, SAR 15) was re-written and completed; however, due to overcrowded schedule of assessment in the AUNQA secretariat, the team did not manage to send it to the secretariat. In 2016, three programs (Bachelor in Mathematics Education, Bachelor in Biology Education, and Masters in Science Education) were assessed. In 2017, the SAR was re-written for the second time (Hence, SAR 17) and chapter one of which was sent to the secretariat. To sum up, the data that were collected for this paper were based on these three documents of BEEP SARs, i.e. SAR 14, SAR 15, and SAR 17.

3.1.1 CA in the BEEP SARs

There have been a gradual increase in the level of CA in BEEP SARs. This is indicated by the intensity, coverage, and the interrelationship existing between the CLO and PLO in the SARs. All the data on the CA have been summarized and presented in Table 1.

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<th>SAR 14</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLO and TLA</td>
<td>000</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>222</td>
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<td>CLO and AT</td>
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Legend:
0 = no information,
1 = lowly aligned,
2 = fairly aligned, and
3 = well-aligned

As indicated in the table, in SAR 14 there was no information on both CA between CLO and TLA and CLO and AT. This seemed to happen because the formulation of CLO was motivated by the urge for completing the SAR than by the intention for establishing a good QMS [Cf. 8]. In addition, the limited time available for the team to manage the CA between CLO and TLA or AT counts for this missing point. As a result, there was a discrepancy between the SAR and the syllabuses run in the classroom. The CLOs presented in the SAR were not properly addressed in the syllabuses. The program still used the existing syllabuses, because the aligned syllabuses were not yet developed. For the purpose of the discussion of the data analysis results in this paper, this condition has been labelled as no alignment, symbolized by 0. Using intensity of the depth of the level of alignment, the coverage of the aligned element in the syllabus, and the interrelationship between CLOs, TLA, and AT, SAR 14 has
been categorized as 000, SAR 15 as 112, and SAR 17 as 222. To illustrate the situations, see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

At the end of the program, graduates will be able to:

1. Show good command of productive and receptive English language skills.
2. Demonstrate EFL pedagogic-related knowledge (including students' characteristics, lesson planning, approaches and strategies in EFL teaching, assessment).
3. Apply the knowledge and understanding of lesson planning, teaching and learning strategies and assessment in English classroom
4. Utilize an appropriate research methodology to approach an issue related to the teaching of English.
5. Communicate the results of a study effectively in both oral and written modes.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of different linguistic theories.
7. Demonstrate knowledge of literature theories.
8. Show responsibility in conducting their learning and professional tasks.

Figure 1. The BEEP PLO in SAR 14

2. Basic Competencies:

2.1. understand basic concepts in course design;
2.2. identify and compare approaches to ESP course design;
2.3. identify and analyze principles and practices of ESP Course design in Vocational Schools;
2.4. understand and identify national standards (content, process, and assessment standards) as the basis for developing English syllabus of Vocational Schools;
2.5. understand and identify stages of English syllabus design for Vocational Schools;
2.6. identify and compare different types of syllabi for teaching English in vocational schools;
2.7. identify and discuss stages of need assessment;
2.8. conduct need assessment; and
2.9. develop syllabus based on need assessment and the national standards as suggested in the guidelines of School-Based Curriculum.

Figure 2. The Basic Competence of IG330

As indicated in the figures, though PLOs had been formulated in SAR 14 (Fig. 1), the formulations of outcomes in the syllabus and course unit documents were not yet changed. They used the term ‘basic competence’ instead of ‘course learning outcomes’. The verbs used were rather general for learning outcome formulations. In fact, all elements of the syllabuses were not yet rewritten in to conform to OBE principles [9-10]. To give readers more comprehensive picture, see the formulation of the learning activities for the course (IG330) in Fig. 3.

4. Learning Activities include
(a) Lecture and classroom discussion based on reading assignments; and
(b) Group presentation based on the chosen topics and group projects on analyzing and designing ESP course for vocational schools and other educational institutions.

Figure 3. The Learning Activities of IG330

In the meantime, SAR 15 began to adopt partial consideration of taking the interrelationship of CLO with TLA. The forms of evaluation, however, was still in a one-form-for-all-session form. The AT had not been aligned with the CLOs. This was, of course, inconsistent with the decision to adopt OBE in the curriculum development policy. In fact, although the OBE terms such as LO and ELO were already in the stakeholders’ discussions and conversations, OBE and its important related topics were by no means included. Hence, the writer put 112 on SAR 15. Again, to illustrate, see Fig. 4.
Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)
At the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:
1. Have a strong understanding of the structure and linguistic features of descriptive, recount, and procedure texts (ELO#1);
2. Write descriptive, recount and procedure texts with an appropriate structure and linguistic features (ELO#1);
3. Use features for marking in the computer (ELO#7);
4. Search information in the internet responsibly (ELO#7);
5. Search resources related to information descriptive, recount and procedure texts (ELO#9).

Figure 4. CLO of IG243

Better level of CA was indicated in SAR 17. Steps to interrelate TLA, AT and CLO were more evident in the document. However, the lack of OBE-principled features were also clear. The statement of the teaching and learning approach was explicit, but the application of the approach was not appropriately indicated in the syllabuses and lesson plans. To help readers understand the claim, the statement is presented here.

Likewise, in alignment with the ELOs, teaching and learning processes are carried out in a social constructivist, collaborative, learner centered way. This approach is established to guarantee that students develop independence, ability to work in team, and to think critically as well as deep understanding and high standard of excellence in the application of English language system into their professional work. In the meantime, the assessment of the courses have been aligned to guarantee that the achievement of the learning outcomes is authentic, systematic, comprehensive, and holistic embracing all students learning behaviour domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor).

Figure 5. BEEP Teaching and Learning and Assessment Approach in SAR 17

Reading the paragraph, which is part of SAR 17 Executive Summary, it is clear that the approach used in the program was 'social constructivist, collaborative, learner centred one', and the assessment approach was authentic, systematic, comprehensive, and holistic one. However, this has not been properly addressed in the syllabuses used in the program.

3.1.2 CA Between BEEP CLO and PLO
The CA between BEEP CLO and PLO took a rather different patterns. No alignment in SAR 14, and fairly aligned in SAR15 and SAR 17. In SAR 14, there was no evidence that CLO and PLO were interrelated, for the development of LOs was not accompanied with appropriate CA activities. In the meantime, initial steps were taken in developing CA in SAR 15 and SAR 17. Along with these two SARs, the interrelationship between CLO and PLO were indicated in the syllabuses. The pattern of the changes in the level of CA may be represented in Table 2.

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In the meantime, to illustrate the interrelationship between PLOs and CLOs, see Fig. 6.
3.2 The Lessons

From the results of the data analysis, some important lessons can be taken. First, the fact that the CA has not reached the quality level of 333 is interesting to note. There seemed to need a long time to overcome the lacks of CA throughout BEEP SAR. This is not consistent with the nature of a system that serves as an organizer of all the elements in accomplishing tasks. It is very possible that these stem from the stakeholders' lacks of understanding of OBE principles and procedures; undeveloped quality concern, less supportive mind-set and commitment, low quality management system performance as well as less adequate resources and facilities. As a result, second, strong leadership and supportive policies are imperative for successful implementation of QMS and pursuit of excellence in students’ learning as well as university standing. Strong leadership and supportive policy will lead the program to more effective, efficient, and excellent performance. Third, local wisdom might be of great help in inviting the stakeholders to participate in CA development and QMS implementation in general. The incorporation of local wisdom is critical as far as Indonesia is concerned. It will lead the program not only to further develop, but also sustain its attainment. This is important, because continuous and sustainable improvement of the QMS performance is key to the success.
4 CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been successful in showing how CA was developed, and how many factors may influence a program’s success in developing good CA. It has also been discussed the importance of understanding the underlying principles in CA development, the lack of which may prolong the process of CA, and above all that successful CA needs a developed quality concern, supportive mind-set and commitment, quality management system performance as well as adequate resources and facilities. Strong leadership and supportive policy as well as local wisdom might help develop all the aforementioned attitudes and qualities. All need skills, patience, and consistency so that we can get more precious and more valuable results, more or less, like weaving pearls into necklaces.

Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that:

1 A series of training in understanding, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating OBE be carried out to help all the stakeholders take productive parts in the QMS, and CA development in particular.

2 A series of quality-assurance-oriented leadership and policy making be conducted to help top university managers take productive actions in continually improving and sustaining quality and its QMS performance.

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REFERENCES