

Incorporating ‘Ahmad Dahlan Values’ in the Curriculum of Higher Education: Case study at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

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Abstract

In 2012 the Directorate General of Higher Education of Indonesia required all higher education institutions (HEI) to implement the Curriculum of Higher Education (CHE). As a part of HEI, English Education Department of UMY (EED of UMY) has been implementing the CHE for five years. CHE has shifted the old paradigm of teacher-centered learning (TCL) to the new pedagogical approach called student-centered learning. In TCL students were regarded as the passive recipients of knowledge. On the other hand, teachers were considered as the purveyor of knowledge who had to transfer their knowledge to students’ mind. In SCL, by contrast, students become active participants and teachers are the facilitators of the learning process. The implementation of the CHE necessitates all study programs in HEI to alter their curriculum oriented to produce competent graduates. EED of UMY has also been making attempts to incorporate the Muhammadiyah values proposed by its founder, KH. Ahmad Dahlan. The research is aimed at exploring how the Ahmad Dahlan’s’ values are implemented in the CHE setting at the EED of UMY. The data were collected by means of interviews with the head of department, two lecturers. The two lecturers’ teaching methods were also observed. The document analysis was deployed. In addition, focus group discussion with 33 students was incorporated. The research found that the principles proposed by Ahmad Dahlan including the curriculum structure, pedagogical techniques, and character education had been successfully incorporated in the implementation of CHE and the Ahmad’s Dahlan values’ correspond to the CHE principles.

Keywords: *Curriculum of Higher Education, Ahmad Dahlan Values, Muhammadiyah, Student-centered learning*

1. Introduction

The emerging Competency-based Curriculum (CBC) in Indonesian higher education institutions (HEI) has caused radical changes in the teaching and learning process. The CBC implemented in HEI has been formulated since 2004 (Directorate General Higher Education/DGHE, 2008), although there was only 60 per cent of 372 universities which has implemented it. The main reason for the introduction of HEI was to provide education with outcomes which were relevant for entry into specific jobs.

According to Richards-Wilson (2002), one of the challenging tasks for educators is designing the curricula which are relevant to the world of works. In order that HEI can produce human

resources which meet the needs of the job market, the existing curriculum should be revisited by identifying the gaps. The Indonesian HEI used to implement the content-based curriculum in which the focus was on the mastery of knowledge. This curriculum model places lecturers at the centre of the teaching and learning process while students became the passive knowledge recipients. The Indonesian government learnt the weaknesses of the content-based curriculum and the launching of CBC demonstrated the government's effort to produce more employable graduates of the HEI.

The government's initiative for the introduction of the CBC allows educators to realize that their task was not only to equip their students with knowledge, but also to prepare them with the competencies which are useful for their professional life. As a result, teachers are expected to enhance teaching and learning practice which supports the development of students' competencies. In fact, this has become an integral part of teachers' job since for teachers curriculum is not only a matter of formulating a curriculum structure but also a responsibility for equipping students with knowledge and competencies.

In 2012, Indonesian government initiated the new curriculum called the Curriculum of Higher Education (CHE). The impetus for launching the CHE is twofold. Firstly, while CBC is instrumental in developing students' competencies, it fails to identify and distinguish the level of competencies of the graduates in each level of their study program, such as the graduate and post graduate levels (DGHE, 2012). Secondly, the Indonesian government has been actively involved in the international agreement including AFTA, WTO and GATTs. One of the consequences of its involvement, Indonesian government should encourage its higher education institutions to produce graduates who have international standard of competency levels, so that they can compete in the global competition.

As one of study programs in higher education in Indonesia, the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (EED of UMY) should apply the CHE. The implementation is challenging in this department since it has unique organizational values, namely 'Ahmad Dahlan Values' (ADV).

This research is aimed at exploring the approach used by the EED of UMY in implementing the ADV in the CHE setting. Specifically, the research is interested in finding out: "What aspects of the Curriculum are shaped by the ADV in the EED of UMY?" and "How does the ADV comply with the CHE principles?"

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Curriculum of Higher Education (CHE) and the Competency Based Education (CBE)

According to Teitlebaum (2007), there are more than 120 definitions of curriculum in the educational literature. Bobbitt (1918 p. 42, as cited in Teitlebaum, 2007) might provide one of the earliest definitions of curriculum saying that curriculum is “That series of things which children and youth must do and experience by way of developing abilities to do the things well that make up the affairs of adult life”. Later, Kelly (1999) mentions Kerr’s (1968) general definition of curriculum as: All school’s planned and guided learning which is conducted individually or collaboratively, inside and outside the school. Similar definition is given by Print (1993) suggesting that curriculum refers to learning opportunities and learning experiences provided and planned by an organization to learners. Wojtczak (2002) has related the definition of curriculum with the technical approach defining that curriculum is the education plans including learning objectives to be achieved, topics to be discussed, and methods to be employed for teaching, learning and assessment. For the purpose of this study, curriculum is referred to learning programs and plans to provide students with opportunities to operate in their environment and to help them to function within their future environment.

Unlike the curriculum in secondary schools in Indonesia the idea and practices of curriculum in higher education have not been seriously debated and are not yet a properly practice. This might be caused by the common perception that higher education has been viewed as the final stage of formal education. The Directorate General of Higher Education's (DGHE) initiative to introduce the Competency-based Education (CBC) in higher education in 2008 has given new understanding that curriculum in HE should cater for the learners' lifetime learning and their ability to cope with ongoing educational requirements.

The Competency-based Education is sometimes called Competency-based Training. The term education and training are usually used interchangeably. However, both terms have different meanings and their definitions imply different implications. While the term 'education' is usually equated with secondary and tertiary education, the term training is usually related to vocational instruction aimed at equipping learners with task-oriented competencies with limited cognitive components.

In 2012, the DGHE introduced a new curriculum called the Curriculum of Higher Education (CHE). Although the CHE is associated with the notion of CBE, it obliges the higher education institutions (HEI) to incorporate the Indonesian Qualification Framework which has not been known in the CBC. Indonesian Qualification Framework (IQF) is a qualification leveling of Indonesian human resources that pair, equalize, and integrate educational and training sectors as well as working experiences in a framework of working recognitions that is in accordance with structures of various working sectors. IQF that comprises the manifestation of Indonesians’

Qualification and characters which is associated with national educational and training systems in Indonesia has nine levels. These qualification levels not only refer to the qualifications obtained in formal educations, but they also include the qualifications that are achieved from informal educations, autodidact, and working experiences.

IQF has formulated nine education levels that are based on a comprehensive mapping of employment conditions in Indonesia from the point of view of supply push and demand pull of Indonesian labours. Level 1- 3 constitutes a classification as operators, level 4-6 are qualifications for technicians or analyst, and level 7-9 comprises qualification for experts. Graduates of elementary education are equal to level 1. Graduates of high schools are comparable to Level 2. Diploma 1 Graduates are minimally paired with level 3. Diploma 4 or applied bachelor and bachelor degree graduates are at least equivalent to level 6. Graduates that take professional education are comparable to level 7. Master and Applied Master degree graduates are at level 8. Doctor, Professional Doctor, and specialist are at level 9.

The development of CHE as the transformation of the CBC fulfills the demand of the stakeholders and as it is still based on the CBE, it should be based on the application of the recent studies on competencies (Choudaha in Kouwenhoven, 2011). Borrowing the description of CBE from a number of authors, Kouwenhoven (2011) identifies some attributes of CBE. With regard to learning environment, the CBE attempts to develop students' competencies. Hence, the principle of curriculum arrangement is not the disciplinary content, but competencies that should be acquired by the end of the course program (Kirschner et al, 1997). In terms of curriculum content, CBE is directed toward preparing the graduates with the required occupational practices. Hence since the CBE is oriented to professional practices, the profession becomes an integral part in the curriculum (Kouwenhoven, 2011). In terms of the teaching approach, CBE employs constructivist approaches. Motsching-Pitrik and Holzinger (2002) claim that the chief goal of constructivism is competence. This view distinguishes perspectives put forward by cognitivism and behaviorism maintaining that the goals of learning are knowledge acquisition and achievement respectively.

2.2 Ahmad Dahlan Values

Literally, the term Muhammadiyah means the followers of Muhammad. Founded in the city of Yogyakarta in 1912 by an Islamic cleric named Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah is the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia with 29 million members (Burhani, 2010). Ahmad Dahlan was known as a reformist of a socio-religious movement which advocated the 'ijtihad' or the individual interpretation of Qur'an and Sunnah or the teaching of the prophet Muhammad, as opposed to 'taqlid', the blind acceptance of the traditional interpretations proposed by the 'ulama' (ibid, 2010).

The root of Dahlan's ideas on education was a reformist movement which struggled for a return to the precepts of the Qur'an and Hadith. Emerging in the Middle East and being pioneered by Jamal al-din al-Afghani, the reformist movement was further developed by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida (Ruswan, 1997). The birth of reformist movements such as Muhammadiyah was given an impetus by the intention to revitalize Muslim society. According to Wertheim (1986), to these reformers Muslim backwardness was caused by the negligence of the guidance provided by the Qur'an and hadith. Proponents of this movement argued that Islam was a religion of progress. Hence, it allowed Muslims to embrace new developments and to become the agents for progress and development.

Dahlan, like other Muslim reformers, found Indonesian Muslim society to be alienated from the precepts of the Qur'an and the Hadith or the teaching of the prophet. According to Wirjosukarto (1962), Dahlan identified five issues to be tackled in Muslim religious practice: firstly, without understanding that they were un-Islamic, Muslims were trapped in foreign values such as practicing traditions rooted in Buddhism, Hinduism or animism; secondly, Muslims were saturated with religious conservatism by the interpretations of the 'ulama' (religious scholars) which were wrongly considered as inviolable. At the same time, it was generally believed that Muslims were not entitled to make new interpretations given the belief that the gate of 'ijtihad' (an independent judgment on a legal or theological question, based on the interpretation that the application of the Qur'an and hadith) was already closed; thirdly, Muslim intellectuals were divided into two groups considered as having juxtaposing views, namely the 'intelligentsia' or Western educated scholars and 'ulama', each of which viewed itself as superior to the other; fourthly, Muslims were insensitive to their social responsibilities and permitted the poor to stumble in poverty; finally, Muslim education was deficient because of the Dutch colonial government policy which reserved its best educational programs for the aristocrats and Christians.

Concerned with the pedagogical approach, Ahmad Dahlan held that education should be directed toward inculcating independent thinking (Ruswan, 1997). Ahmad Dahlan (as cited in Ruswan, 1997) argued that no single person could claim the absolute truth of her or his opinion. Therefore, it was compulsory for Muslims to revisit the reliability of conveyed opinion. Ahmad Dahlan criticized the traditional view which maintained that the door of 'ijtihad' was closed and following one's opinion without critical thinking was an obligation (ibid, 1997). Hence, the burden of producing independent thinkers was reinvigorated in Muhammadiyah educational system.

With regard to pedagogical techniques, as pointed out by Wirjosukarto (1962), Muhammadiyah adopted the system of progressive grades and more students' participation in the learning process. Bradjanagara maintained that Muhammadiyah has shifted the teaching systems from individual to group instruction and students were encouraged to ask questions, to argue and to disagree with their teachers.

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative, hence naturalist and interpretative. It is called naturalist, in the sense that it studies the participant real life setting without the researcher intrusion or manipulation. Thus the data emerge from natural context (Bodan and Biklen, 2003). It is interpretative since the researcher should interpret the data from the participants' perspective and experience. Some scholars also argue that qualitative research is constructivist since the researcher should build the understanding and meaning through the participant's story and experience.

The design of the research is a case study. According to Stake in Creswell (2003) in case study, the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, activity and a process. The term case study is also related with 'some unit or set of units, in relation to which data are re-collected or analyzed; it is a specific form of inquiry that investigates a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000).

My research setting took place in the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. The data is taken through the interview with a head of English department, 2 lecturers, 33 students in the focus group discussion and observation. The interview was transcribed and analyzed. In addition to the data taken from interview, the documents concerned with the implementation of CBC will also be analyzed leading to the use of document analysis technique.

The sampling used is purposeful sampling as it is selected by purpose. The sampling used was not intended as the representation of the population rather to be used as the attempt to view different perspective to present wholeness in gaining sound description (Holliday, 2007). In reporting the finding, this research used descriptive and narrative writing. I observed and explored human behavior in particular context and then weaved a narrative that accurately and honestly reflected the lives and voices of a group of people.

4. Finding and Discussion

The research found that the principles proposed by Ahmad Dahlan including the curriculum structure, pedagogical techniques, and character education had been successfully incorporated in the implementation of CHE. Additionally, 'Ahmad's Dahlan values' correspond to the CHE principles.

4.1 ADV were partially reflected in the Curriculum Structure

The research found that the pedagogical principles proposed by Ahmad Dahlan have been implemented in the curriculum in the areas of curriculum structure, pedagogical techniques and character education. In terms of curriculum structure, the skills-based subjects were focused,

demonstrated by the inclusions of subjects to develop competencies. According to the Head of Department (HoD), the subjects were not arranged subsequently based on the hierarchy of knowledge. Instead, they were based on the targeted competencies needed by the graduates. Hence, the curriculum structure, according to the HoD, implemented the serial parallel approach, not the serial one.

According to the HoD and two lecturers, as the subjects in the curriculum structure were arranged using parallel approach, the subjects at the earlier semesters were not prerequisite for taking subjects in the later semesters. The HoD said that different from the content-based curriculum, the subjects in the curriculum structure aimed to equip students with the occupational skills which were necessary to support their success in the world of work. The document of the curriculum structure confirmed that some names of the subjects did not indicate the hierarchy of knowledge such as listening and speaking for daily conversation in the first semester and listening and speaking for academic purposes in second semester and offline computer literacy in the first semester and online computer literacy in the second semester. However, several subjects indicated that they were prerequisite of the other subjects. For example, 'Capita Selecta on Grammar' 1 was taught in semester 2 while 'Capita Selecta on Grammar 2' was taught in semester 2. The HoD and most of the students in FGD confirmed that there was a gradation in difficulty from the former to the latter subject. This suggested that an element of serial approach of the curriculum structure was still implemented in shaping the curriculum structure.

Despite elements of the skill-based subjects incorporated in the curriculum structure may reflect Dahlan's vision about the importance of skills development in education. The HoD was convinced that the implementation of CBC would produce more competitive graduates because they were acquired with the occupational skills needed by the job market. For Dahlan, skill development in education was an important agenda in order to equip Muslims with the competencies required to fulfill their worldly needs (Salam, 1962). Consequently, depending on the skills needed in a certain community, the format of education could be different from one place to another. Hence, Dahlan had started introducing the concept of the educational specialization in which it was an obligation for every Muslim to acquire one or more skills in order to achieve worldly success. However, Dahlan gave the following advice to his followers, "Be a doctor or be an engineer ... but after that come back to the Muhammadiyah" (Ruswan, 1997. P.70). This suggested that after Muslims had attained worldly success, Muslims should contribute to the Muslim community.

4.2 ADV were manifested in the pedagogical techniques

With regard to the pedagogical techniques, the two lecturers observed in this research had demonstrated the use of the student-centered learning in their teaching. The first female lecturer teaching the subject the 'Curriculum Design' managed to use 'stand-up discussion' and 'round table discussion' which made the students participate actively in the class. The observation of the first lecturer indicated some classroom innovations using the context of student-centered

learning. Since the beginning of the class, first lecturer preferred asking questions to dominating the class with her lecturing style which made clear that the students were in charge. Her asking questions in English had also encouraged students to use their speaking skills in the learning process. She described her role as the facilitator of the students' learning, saying that as a facilitator her job was guiding students in learning.

Similarly, the second female lecturer teaching "Academic Reading and Writing 2" had successfully applied SCL in her teaching. The finding from the observation revealed that the second lecturer had managed to avoid the traditional classroom where "most of the learning activities for the class were carried out by the instructor and students' effort were focused on recording the information" (Wright, 2011). Instead, she had succeeded in facilitating the students' learning using interactive activities. In Weimer's (2002) phrases, in the student-centered classroom, the role of teacher changes from the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side" and views students not as empty vessels to be filled with information. For instance, to enable students to understand the paragraph, she did not lecture the students about its concept. Instead, she used interactive activities through small group discussion. Through small group discussions, students appeared active in interacting and collaborating with others in understanding about the paragraph as well as the concept of topic sentence and supporting sentences.

The finding reflects the concept of Ahmad Dahlan's pedagogy which focuses on SCL. According to Dahlan, education had to encourage Muslims to practice their religion consistent with Islamic principles (Ruswan, 1997). Furthermore, education should be able to explain sciences which could assist in the understanding of the sources of Islam. The most important thing, according to Dahlan, was that education should motivate Muslims to apply those teachings since understanding alone was not adequate as Islam condemns people who do not practice what they learn. To facilitate this process, Dahlan suggested that educators had to impart knowledge and wisdom in an interesting and simple way (Wirjosukarto, 1962).

4.3 The ADV strengthened the character education

In addition to the skill-based subjects incorporated in the curriculum structure and the SCL applied by lecturers in the teaching and learning process, the character education inspired by ADV had also been implemented in the EED of UMY. As Dahlan said, education had to be directed above all towards building character. Ahmad Dahlan regarded character building as an important target of educational objectives. No one, he argued, can achieve 'greatness' in this world or the hereafter except for those who possess good characters (Mulkhan, as cited in Ruswan, 1997). Good character is an aspect that complements the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Since the prophet Muhammad was believed to have exemplified the application of the two sources, the process of building character should be driven toward emulating his ideal.

Ahmad Dahlan's vision to build character through education had been translated by EED of UMY into the incorporation of some Islamic-based subjects into the curriculum including *Aqidah* or matters of faith and writing and reading the Qur'an in the first semester, *Fiqih* of *ibadah* or Islamic legal rules in the life of Muslims in the second semester, *Akhlak* or Islamic virtues and morality in the third semester, and *Kemuhammadiyah* or knowledge of Muhammadiyah organization and its principles in the fourth semester.

Asked if these subjects aimed to develop students' character, the HoD, the two lecturers and most of the students in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) expressed their agreement. The HoD, for instance said that *Aqidah* was the theological foundation on which students could develop their Islamic character while *akhlak* was considered by him as an Islamic morality that guide students' attitude. He added that through the subject *Kemuhammadiyah*, students learnt the moral message of the founder Ahmad Dahlan.

Asked about the challenges in inculcating Islamic characters through the Islamic-based subjects, the HoD of EED I and the two lecturers said that the teaching of *akhlak* or Islamic morality was the most challenging. In their opinion, the teaching of *akhlak* through a stand-alone subject might be problematic, since, according to him, the ultimate goal of *akhlak* was to enable students to behave in accordance with the principles of Islamic morality whereas the teaching of *akhlak* might emphasize the knowledge of Islamic morality transferred from lecturers to students. The HoDs and the lecturers' views were in line with most of the students in the FGD, saying that the subject *akhlak* focused on the memorization of the moral concepts taught in Islam. Few students expected that the teaching of this subject should have been more creative, involving them to carry out projects to contribute to society.

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4.4 The ADV is compatible with the principles of CHE

The curriculum of EED of UMY is developed within the framework of CHE and this curriculum necessitates the change of paradigm associated with the nature of knowledge and the teaching and learning process. The DGHE underlined that the CHE was the continuation of the CBC, hence the teaching and learning process advocates the use of the Competency-based Education (CBE).

Kouwenhoven (2009) had identified some attributes of CBE. With regard to learning environment, the CBE attempts to develop students' competencies. Hence, the principle of curriculum arrangement is not the disciplinary content, but competencies that should be acquired by the end of the program (Kirschner et al, 1997). In other words, the curriculum is designed backwardly in that knowledge and skills to be included in the curriculum are not determined by a

disciplinary body of knowledge, but competencies needed by a competent professional. In terms of curriculum content, CBE is directed toward preparing the graduates with the required occupational practices. Hence, since the CBE is oriented to professional practices, the profession becomes an integral part in the design of the curriculum (Kouwenhoven, 2009).

The principles of CBE proposed by Kouwenhoven (2009) concerning the aims of curriculum to achieve the competencies reflect the ADV's purposes. For Dahlan, skill development in education was instrumental in order to equip Muslims with the competencies required to fulfill their worldly needs (Salam, 1962). Hence, Dahlan had started introducing the concept of the educational specialization in which it was an obligation for every Muslim to acquire one or more skills in order to achieve worldly success. However, Dahlan gave the following advice to his followers, "Be a doctor or be an engineer ... but after that come back to the Muhammadiyah" (Ruswan, 1997).

Regarding the learning process, CBE is learner-centered in which the learning process becomes a central part of the curriculum. Such a learning format, according to Field and Drysdale (1991), results in flexible learning time, individualized materials and continuous feedback to the learners. Teachers in the CBE setting are also highly required to be facilitators of the learning process rather than knowledge transmitters. Teachers' responsibility is, therefore, to motivate students to engage in active inquiry and make students' tacit knowledge become explicit (Kerka, 1998, as cited in Kouwenhoven, 2009). To encourage lecturers to apply the SCL, the Directorate General of Higher Education in its guideline book provides information on ten learning models of SCL.

Ahmad Dahlan, in the same vein, advocated the use of the student-centered learning. He encouraged the students of Muhammadiyah schools to question and to debate the teachers. According to Wirjosukarto (1962), the application of such pedagogical techniques which were different from those implemented in more traditional institutions was an indication that Muslim had begun to question the efficiency of the instructional system inherited from their predecessors.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The EED of UMY has been relatively successful in translating the ADV into the curriculum. As has been encouraged by the educational philosophy of Ahmad Dahlan, the curriculum structure of EED of UMY has focused on the skills development instead of knowledge acquisition. Most of the subjects were arranged using parallel approach in the curriculum structure, although few subjects were still arranged serially. This suggests that an element of the content-based curriculum was still mirrored in the EED of UMY's curriculum. Hence, the department needs to alter the subjects which still reflected the content-based into the competency-based in the setting of the CHE.

The pedagogical techniques which were more student-centered as had been advocated by Ahmad Dahlan had also been implemented by EED of UMY. The two lecturers observed had

demonstrated the use of the student-centered learning models including small group discussions. This finding, however, could not be used to generalize that all lecturers in EED of UMY had implemented the SCL approaches in their teaching. Hence, another study is needed to explore the use of SCL of all lecturers at EED of UMY so that the extent to which the SCL has been applied among lecturers in the department can be described.

The character building as had been advocated in by Ahmad Dahlan had also been incorporated in the forms of the inclusion of the Islamic based-subjects including *aqidah* (matters of faith), *akhlak* (Islamic virtues and morality), *Fiqih of Ibadah* (Islamic legal rules in the life of Muslims) and *Kemuhammadiyah* (knowledge of Muhammadiyah Organization and its principles). Despite of the inclusion of these subjects which were intended to build the students' character, the approach was still the teaching stand-alone subjects which, according to students, still focus on memorization of knowledge rather than developing students' character. Therefore, the EED of UMY needs to find more effective strategies on how to build students' character through the application of knowledge, hence developing students' affective dimension.

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