

Capacity Building of Knowledge through Quality Management of Education and Institutions of Higher Learning

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Abstract—Information and knowledge globalization is multidirectional. It only makes sense when the provider and recipient of the knowledge or information are capable of both providing and receiving. The fact currently is that this is not the case, especially when it involves developing countries. While the expectations are that developing countries should at least be able to receive, if not provide, the education infrastructure is normally not present to allow that to happen. This paper proposes an exploration into effective learning, a move away from current pedagogical thinking and delivery and instilling innovative management of institutions of higher learning, so that we could catch up with the rest of the world and hence join them in globalizing knowledge and information.

In particular, this paper discusses the demise of rote learning in this technological and globalised world and challenges the Asian values concept of acceptance. In combating these educational drawbacks, this paper advocates a fundamental change in the requirements of teachers in the broadest sense of the word (i.e. including lecturers and professors). At the same time this paper also discusses the need for a conducive environment to allow the above to occur. This leads to a quality-based management of higher education institutions. This requirement has become a given in many developed countries.

Index Terms—Multidirectional, effective learning, pedagogical thinking, innovative management, rote learning, quality-base management

I. THE GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is inevitable. Will we be able to catch up? The answer is very simple. We absolutely will not if we don't start doing something now. Since this century is the knowledge century, it is also inevitable that education must figure prominently in our preparation for globalization.

With globalization, sharing is fundamental. Sharing of experience, sharing of different resources, sharing of expertise and so on. However, the most appropriate sharing of course is where the partners are equal. However, we know that no two countries anywhere in the world are equal.

In similar ways, countries that would like to be involved in globalization will also need to raise their standards so that they could play with other countries from whom they may gain something. This paper is an attempt to make us aware of this need to prepare ourselves in terms of education development in order to allow us to become an active player

in the globalization of knowledge and information.

II. ROTE LEARNING

Rote learning has been discussed at many fora pointing mainly to its disadvantages in our modern and technological world (Schoenfield, 1987, 1991; Reusser&Stebler, 1997; Harvey, 2002; Idrus, 2003; Pangulangan, 2005). Arguments for its efficacy have also been equally expounded (Bartolli, 1989; Dixon, 1994; Blumenfeld, 2000; Heward, 2003). What we could derive from these arguments is simply that rote-learning and non-rote-learning (for want of a better description at this stage) have got their respective places in learning.

In both knowledge and information development we need to be able to think, to experiment, to seek new knowledge, to logically expound it, to disseminate it and to continually enhance it. Even superficial assessment of these requirements could only point to the misfit of rote-learning. The common definitions of *rote* range from *fix in memory by means of frequent repetition, use of memory usually with little intelligence, repetition carried out mechanically or unthinkingly* (Webster's Dictionaries, 1850, 2002) to *learning that avoids grasping the complexities...* (Wikipedia, 2005).

III. QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Literature shows that quality in higher education is here to stay (Barnett, 1992; Green, 1994; Gordon, 1997, 2005; Idrus, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004(a, b), 2005; Woodhouse, 2001). Quality, however defined, is in the higher education vocabulary and searches through university websites inevitably found the word quality prominently displayed in their visions, mission statements and their management plans.

The understanding of quality shown by academics above is what is known as quality control shown in Fig. 1 below. Essentially, the output of the learning process is put through an assessment process or examination where the results could only be a pass or a fail. Those who passed would be considered successful while those who failed are not. Some of those who failed may be given another chance by repeating the learning process, even though this learning process had failed them in the first place.

While examinations still rule high in many higher education institutions everywhere in the world, the freedom of assessing students is very limited in many Asian and developing countries (Wijaya, 2005; Idrus, 2003; Hazman

2004 (a), 2004(b)). The *trinity of rote learning, Asian values* and QC must therefore be addressed if we wish to catch up with the lost time and to allow us to participate actively in globalization.

IV. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

At the same time we should move from acceptance where by definition lacks critical analysis, to reconceptualisation where by definition requires deep critical analysis which in turn demands an ability to synthesize.

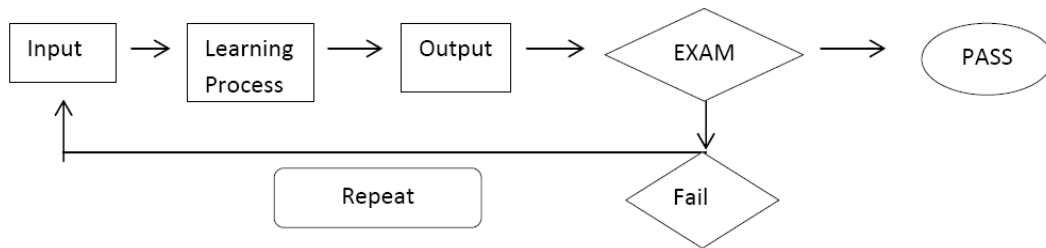


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic description of quality control

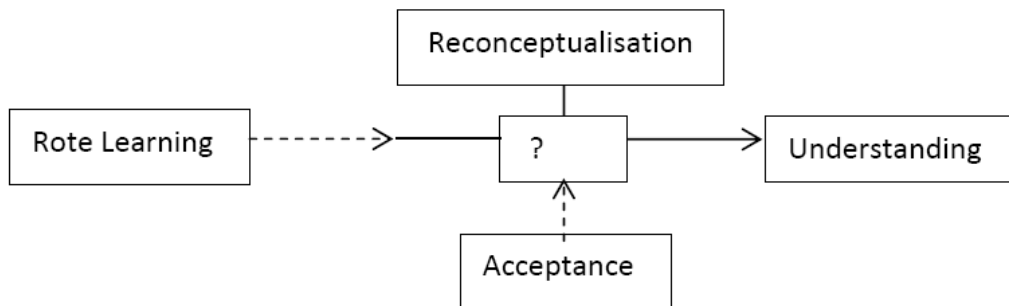


Fig. 2. Diagrammatic view of transformative learning

The box with the question mark is instructive in its appearance. The question posed is obviously what we should do in moving from rote learning to *understanding* and simultaneously from *acceptance* to *reconceptualisation*.

One definition of empowerment (Kinlaw, 2002) is “...the process of achieving continuous improvement in an organizations’ performance by developing and extending the competent influence of individuals and teams over the areas and functions which affect their performance and that of the total organization...”

Simply, empowerment is the sharing of competence and the ability to influence others in order to improve their performance. Empowered learning is therefore an essential and necessary part of *transformative learning*. This therefore is the *student engagement* that should fill the box with the question mark in Fig. 2. The transformation, however, is still unfinished until the learning system moves from QC to something else that makes more sense.

V. QUALITY ASSURANCE

QC can be described as a system by which we separate the good from the bad products. We cannot do much about improving the products because they have been processed and manufactured.

Is it not simpler if the process can be tuned to ensure that all the products at the output end meet the requirements? Firstly, we eliminate one element in the process, namely Inspection. Remembering that quality or efficiency is the product of the elemental quality or efficiency, reducing one element in the system will also definitely improve the overall quality of the system. Secondly, if we can tune the

process in order to ensure perfect outputs, then we would have saved a lot of unnecessary costs which arise from manufacturing products that would be rejected. We call this system Quality Assurance or QA for short. Taking the parallel in education, much savings will also accrue from reducing failures without reducing the quality of the process or outputs. Imagine if the average full-fee of a course is Rp 9 Million per annum per student, the failure of only 5 students in a class would therefore waste some Rp 45 Million.

VI. CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT

Every improvement must start with an environment that is conducive to creating that improvement. Environment is itself created by physical site as well as mental and psychological conditions. It is therefore not enough to have a new organizational structure alone. The people sitting in each of the boxes of the organizational chart must also have the predilections towards providing the mental and psychological environment essential to encourage the doers practice both *transformative learning* and *QA*.

VII. CONCLUSION

Transformative Learning which moves us from *rote learning* to *understanding* and simultaneously move us from passive *acceptance* to *reconceptualisation* is suggested here as an alternative to current learning method in most Asian countries that had stagnated knowledge development capacity.

This paper complemented the suggested change in

learning methodology with the *democratization* of management style, the introduction of real and substantial empowerment of both staff and students, all of which are mandatory to create the appropriate environment for *transformative learning*.

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