

THE QUALITY OF ACCOUNTING EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT'S INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES IN FACING THE ACCOUNTING EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN THE FUTURE (Case Study at Widyatama University)

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ABSTRACT. Accounting education has an obligation to adapt its environment nationally as well as globally. Such an adaptation is also required in order to survive as well as stay relevant and competitive. Without adaptation ability, accounting education will lose its relevancy and even lose its own existence. Widyatama University as a higher education institution which conducts accounting education is aware of this situation and challenges. This university has taken several initiatives to develop Quality of Accounting Education Improvement (QUANTUM) initiatives and activities in facing the global environment challenges especially those that influence the field of accounting education. The paper explores the initiatives and efforts made by the university. It also discusses the effects of such initiatives, especially in improving the quality of accounting education. This paper was written based on literature review, interview with various managers in different levels and review on the activity reports and activity observation. The findings are expected to be useful to other institutions which are willing to improve the quality of accounting education practices in facing the changes and challenges in the future.

Keyword: quality, improvement, accounting education, future changes, future challenge

INTRODUCTION

An accountant as a profession is derived from business activities because the objective and the role of accounting profession is primarily to serve business actors by providing information in financial dimension. Accounting profession will grow only if business environment grow as well. Thus, changes in business environment will influence the accounting profession.

At the present time, business environment experienced very intense, radical and pervasive changes that require accounting profession to adjust to this condition. Without the capabilities of self adjustment, accountancy profession will lose its relevancy and be unable to maintain its existence in business. This situation also occurred in accounting education since its demand depends on the accounting services needed by the business. Due to this condition, accounting education institutions need to be able to adjust themselves to the requirement of accounting profession.

Koesbandijah (2005) argues that reformation in accounting education should be conducted continuously as accounting education cannot remain on traditional teaching and learning process. The requirement and challenges from business environment demand the changes in accounting education to minimize the mismatch between accounting education and accounting profession. Accounting educators should follow the development in business and enhance their knowledge in accounting and teaching methodology especially in accounting curriculum so that their teaching learning process will match with the need of industry.

Widyatama University takes the initiatives to establish Widyatama Quality Accounting Education Improvement (QUANTUM) ACTIVITIES to improve the quality of accounting teaching and learning process. This paper will explain the role of WIDYATAMA QUANTUM activities and its influence on the program effectiveness and the quality of accounting education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's environment, adaptation to national and global environment is compulsory for accounting education in order to survive, and maintain its relevancy and stay competitive. Without adaptation ability the higher education will lose its existence. Economics Faculty of Widyatama University as

one of higher education institutions that provides accounting education should have awareness of this condition. Economics Faculty should take an initiative to develop programs to overcome these problems.

In higher education long term strategy, Indonesian government established three pillars as the foundation of education transformation. The first pillar is increasing educational relevancy and competitiveness, the second is strengthening educational accessibility, and the third, improving good government and public image of education management. Recently, enhancement of education relevancy becomes the most important issue among others. Education relevancy is a vital variable that determines the education quality.

A crucial program in developing education quality is enhancing Quality Management systems. Through this program education institution can get quality assurance on education program that is implemented by the institution.

Evans (2002) stated that Quality assurance was informal; every effort was made to ensure that quality was built into the final product by the people who produced it. These themes, which were lost with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, are important foundations of modern quality assurance efforts. Bazargan (2002) suggests that quality assurance is the whole process whereby a particular organization is managed to achieve and hence be able to assure quality.

For the purpose of the quality assurance, an organization or institution should implement quality management systems. The quality management system is required when an organization (a) needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customers demand and is applicable to regulatory requirements, and (b) aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable regulatory requirements (ISO 9001:2000).

In order to maintain its relevancy, accounting education institution is required to face various challenges. Center for Accountant and Appraisal Service, Finance Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia (2009) stated that various challenges in accounting education are:

1. ASEAN will adopt Liberalization in accounting service soon.
2. There is an intense *barrier to entry* due to length of education and expensive cost in accounting education.
3. *Global crisis* which influences financial report risk and law.
4. The increase of financial report complexity.
5. The dynamics of audit in global environment.
6. The increase of on time and interactive corporate financial transparency which can be provided by public accountant.
7. The increase of industry specialist auditor
8. The increase of Human resource quality to serve global capital market.
9. Lack of Large accounting office.
10. The increase of the need for on time audit.

In Indonesia, accounting education should pay more attention and do more efforts in several factors:

1. Weakness in English proficiency compare to other ASEAN countries.
2. Weakness in IT capability.
3. Lack of adaption capability to the changes in business environment.
4. Profession certification is not comparable to the other countries.

Accounting educators are expected to optimize their role in enhancing competitive advantage of Indonesian accountants. Some programs can be taken to improve the quality of accounting education such as:

1. Conducting benchmark program of national accounting education with international standard determined by IFAC Committee.
2. Encouraging lecturers to update the teaching material which reflects the development of international accounting education.

3. Encouraging the students to learn more the use of technology on financial report and audit such as: eXtensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL) and Electronic Audit.

The Activities of the Quality of Accounting Education Improvement (QUANTUM) at Widyatama University

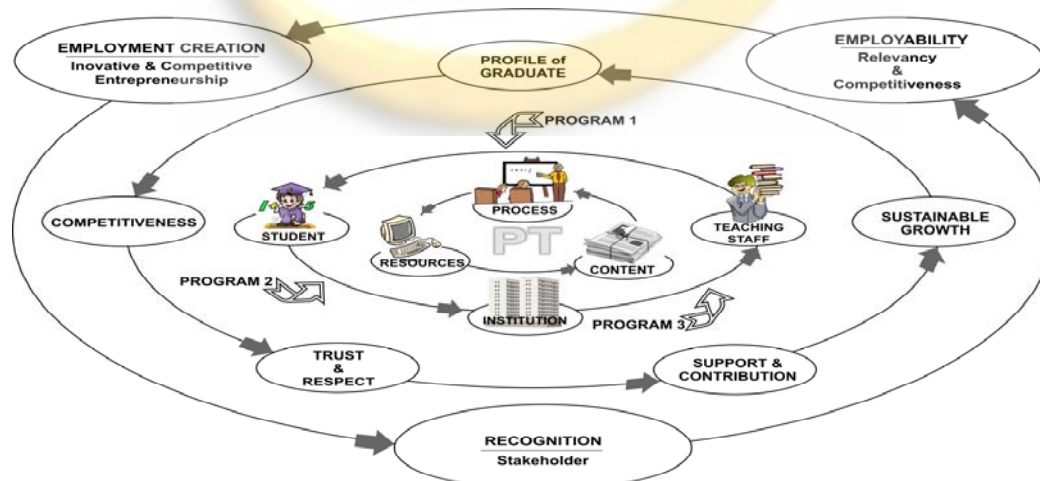
The Quality of accounting Education (QUANTUM) programs started with the development of quality management at University level. The initial plan to implement the quality management at Widyatama University was first formulated in 2002. A series of meeting, workshops, and seminars were organized from management to faculty level to plan, prepare, and produce the document required for the program. The university established Widyatama Quality Assurance Center. Since 2003, Widyatama has been accredited ISO 9001:2000, and certified by TUV International German. This certification has proven the university's concern to satisfy not only the wishes and the needs of the customers but also the continuous quality improvement.

The implementation of quality assurance at Widyatama University is the actualization of management commitment to quality and quality assurance. The policy of university therefore is designed to focus on quality improvement. It causes a comprehensive change in university management compared to previous approach in managing university. The management of quality assurance at Widyatama University represents a completely new approach to enhance various aspects of quality at the institution.

Serious efforts in developing education quality have been taken since 2003. The quality improvement is conducted base on Widyatama Strategic Plan 2003 – 2013 and Widyatama Development Program. In Widyatama Strategic Plan the holistic idealism of university and foundation is described in the form of the graduates attributes. In line with Widyatama history as School of economy, economics and management disciplines served as core competency for the graduates in “business and commerce” which are reflected in the content and process of learning.

In facing future market economy condition, nationally as well as globally, Widyatama university direct the students to have *competitive behavior* which becomes requirement in employment whether to be an *entrepreneur* or an *employee* in a *private enterprise*.

Competitive advantage and study relevance will create *recognition*, trust and *respect* from *stakeholder*, and then will finally make Widyatama sustainable. The concept of Widyatama growth can be illustrated as follow:

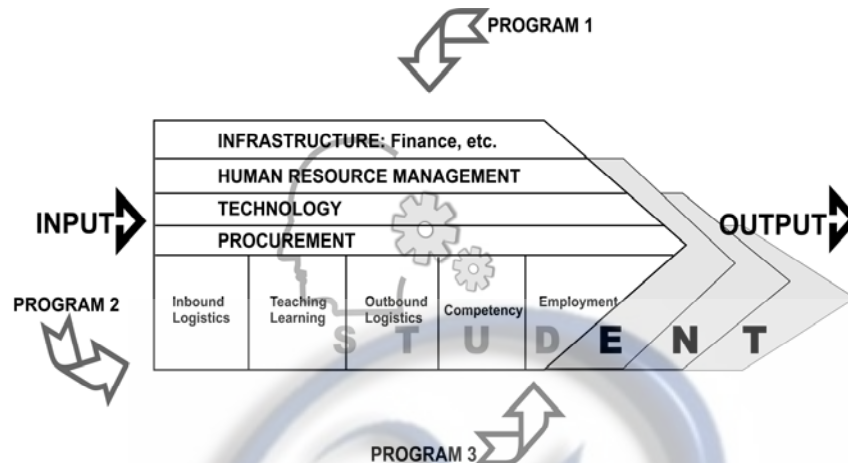


Spiral of Widyatama Growth

Graduate competencies at Widyatama University consist of two main domains which are: Generic and specific competences. Generic competences are the one that support competitive ability of the graduate such as English proficiency and Information Technology capability. The specific

competencies are the one that relate to their study areas and professional requirements. This competence will increase competitive advantage for Widyatama graduates.

Education system at Widyatama is conducted in order to provide value and competitive advantage to the graduates as well as to the institution itself. In line with its characteristic, education system requires active involvement of the students as the consumers in value creation process which is illustrated as follow



The demands for active student's involvement in value creation force Widyatama to reoriented its learning system which was teacher-centered and content-oriented to student centered learning and competence-based curriculum.

Therefore, the central issue in teaching and learning process (value creation) at Widyatama is the development of student's competence which is the four education pillars: "*learning to know, to do, to live together & long life learning*".

In this context, Widyatama consider that professional skill (hard skill) and personal skill (soft skills) are not two separated matters but as one unity in teaching and learning process. Thus, the vision and mission of Widyatama are characterized by this consideration.

Quality Improvement Program

Quality improvement program at Widyatama University is divided into 2 levels: institutional level and study program level. The institutional level facilitates improvement at study program level. At study program level, improvement programs are designed in specific way depending on the study program needs.

Institutional program covers various activities such as:

1. Human Resource development activities especially human capabilities improvement
2. Digital campus development which covers management information system development, teaching and learning information system development and business community information system.
3. Widyatama Business community development.
4. Quality Assurance System in term of academic audit which include institutional accreditation, improvement of quality management system towards ISO 9004:2008, academic quality audit activities.

This paper is focused on the activities in the development of education quality in Accounting Department called Quality Accounting Education Improvement (QUANTUM). The main activities in QUANTUM are:

1. Academic Relevance improvement to industries.

2. Quality improvement on teaching and learning process and lecturers and students quality.

The objectives of academic relevance improvement to industries are:

1. To produce competence-based curriculum oriented to employment market through improving entrepreneur capabilities, soft skills and professional certification.
2. To improve graduates quality according to employment needs nationally as well as globally.
3. To facilitate study program in enhancing curriculum relevancy to industrial needs.
4. To support student-centered learning.
5. To provide procedures and written guidance in teaching and learning system for the institution based on the national accreditation standard, which are:
 - Continuous curriculum improvement.
 - Involvement in academic forum among students, teaching staff and administrative staff.
 - The development of lesson plan, academic consulting guidance, research and public service, and thesis writing procedures.
 - Monitoring the implementation of the program
6. To formulate graduate competence through the implementation of soft skill based teaching and learning methods which encourage students to gain the adaptation ability in global environment.
7. To fulfill Institutional Accreditation Standard.
8. To implement continuous quality improvement process

In achieving these objectives, there are 4 phases of implementation:

1. Benchmarking to professional association and similar study programs with other university, nationally and internationally.
2. External survey involving academic consultant to study market requirement on hard skills, soft skills and the industrial demands for graduates.
3. Developing competence based curriculum.
4. Implementing certification program for lecturers and students.

The objectives of Teaching and Learning Activities improvement are:

1. To improve the quantity and quality of teaching media, teaching methods which are more creative and innovative and based on student-centered learning.
2. To implement soft skills in teaching and learning methods (Soft skills based teaching and learning methods).
3. To increase students' participation in teaching and learning process, increasing the quantity of graduates, shortened the study duration, and increasing students GPA.
4. To improve quality and competences of the lecturers.
5. To facilitate conducive collaboration activities between lecturers and students through study center.
6. To increase study program achievement in national level as well as international level.
7. To increase the graduate quantity and shortened the length of study time.
8. To develop cooperation with the industry and other higher education institutions.
9. To create conducive relationship between students and lecturers.

There 4 implementation phases in achieving those objectives:

1. Providing teaching grants in order to improve teaching and learning system focusing on student-oriented learning.
2. Developing soft skill-based teaching and learning method.
3. Providing academic writing for lecturers and students.
4. Establishing Quality of Accounting Education Improvement Center (QUANTUM CENTER).

Key indicators to measure the impact of the activities are:

1. Improvement of study length (studying period)

2. Improvement of graduates GPA.
3. Improvement of IT capabilities.
4. Improvement of graduates' first salary.
5. Improvement of the quantity of graduate employment in national companies.
6. Increase of the number of graduates who become entrepreneur.
7. Increase of the number of lecturers' publication.
8. Increase of the number of public service activities.
9. Increase of the number of students' participation in research and public service activities.

QUANTUM initiatives and efforts have not significantly effect the key indicators mentioned above as the systematic effort has only been done recently. The University aware that to be effective the program needs more time and various supporting program, intensive and continuous monitoring still needed. Recently, the effects of QUANTUM initiatives and efforts or activities are still concerning improvement of teaching and learning processes. The results of program implementation can be described as follow:

No.	Activities	Output	Impact
1	Benchmarking to the professional association and study program with other institutions nationally and internationally	Various input and ideas on developing teaching and learning process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in the teaching and learning process. • New curriculum relevant to industrial needs.
2	Conducting external survey involving academic consultant.	Market requirement knowledge on hard skills, soft skills, industrial demands for the graduates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in teaching and learning process. • New curriculum that more relevant to industries
3.	Developing competence-based curriculum in cooperation with academic consulting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised curriculum • Revised lesson plan for Accounting Management, Auditing, Taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in teaching and learning process. • New curriculum that is more relevant to industries
4	Providing teaching grants for developing teaching and learning system focusing student oriented learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised curriculum. • Revised Lesson plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in teaching and learning process. • New curriculum that more relevant to industry
5	Soft skill based teaching and learning Method.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Curriculum. • Revised lesson plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in teaching and learning process. • New curriculum that is more relevant to industries
6	Applying the implementation of Professional Certification	Certified Lecturers in qualified internal audit, SAP trainer, Accurate	Innovation in teaching and learning process
7	Applying the implementation of student certification	Graduates having professional certification.	Improvement on competitive advantage of the graduates.
8	Holding academic writing workshops	Consulting service for academic writing especially for lecturers and students.	Improvement on the quality and quantity of publication.
9	Developing Quality of Accounting Improvement Center.	The development a unit to conduct research and public service and other supporting activities.	Improvement on the quantity and quality of research, public service and other supporting

			activities.
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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Various efforts and activities of QUANTUM at Widyatama University have been done and will continuously be conducted. Direct impacts of the activities are:

1. The creation of various education innovations starting from teaching and learning process in accounting education: Financial Accounting, Auditing and Taxes.
2. The increase the number of researches and publications of Accounting Department lecturers.
3. The improvement of public service activities.

However, there are still a lot of works to be taken care of in some areas such as: study time, IT competences, the students' waiting time for the first job, first salary, graduates employment in national and international companies, and students involvement in academic researches and community services.

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