THE ROLE OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING TO PREPARE ACTIVELY INDEPENDENT LEARNERS: A BRIDGING PROGRAM CASE STUDY IN THE ECONOMICS FACULTY OF THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the research is to examine the process of student-centered learning (SCL) approach as a step for improving the quality in the Bridging Program (BP) at the Economics Faculty of Islamic University of Indonesia. The BP is held in 100 minutes of four meetings a week for the freshmen at the Departments of Management and Economics, designed to bridge the gap between student’s life in secondary schools and the higher learning education, and to facilitate students in developing their soft skills being active independent learners. Examination is focused on primary data obtained form documentation, interview, observation and focus group discussion (FGD) involving students and lecturers of the Program, using qualitative method that is a case study.

The results show that (1) the SCL approach employing a number of learning tools such as computer, projector, colorful paper and marker, bottle, water and so on has significant impact in various learning activities such as small group and class discussion, debate, role play, simulation, and project. The approach also encourages students to be more active and joyful to learn as compared to another approach namely teacher-centered learning approach. (2) As a consequence of the approach use, the class facilities such as chairs, sound systems, computers facilities are unable to accommodate the demand for the students who are more active, whereas the classes are unable to be conducted optimally due to lecturer-to-student ratio which is very small. (3) The SCL approach provides more satsisfaction to the students as they can express their desire, capacity and ability to analyze the subject.

**Keywords:** Student-centered learning, bridging program, independent learners

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of student-centered learning (SCL) needs to talk about because of two reasons. Firstly, it is a central and important topic in education discourse.[1] Secondly, it is widely used in the teaching and learning literature.[2] It is so for SCL is considered as a recent concept which much supports to gain the educational objectives.

SCL is also practiced in the Bridging Program (BP) of the Economics Faculty of the Islamic University of Indonesia. BP has started earlier in International Program before it is implemented in regular program. Since 2007 BP has been run and result many alumnae. Some of the alumnae have been a lecturer also in BP and also in regular program. Some of students have been member of intra and extra organization in important position. They tend to be more active and very happy and feeling satisfied with the BP even they have unsatisfied feeling when they join regular classes or non BP classes.

The BP is held in 100 minutes of four meetings a week for the freshmen at the Department of Management and Economics, designed to bridge the gap between student’s life in secondary schools and the higher learning education, and to facilitate students in developing their soft skills being active independent learners.

The objective of the research is to examine the process of student-centered learning (SCL) approach as a step for improving the quality in the Bridging Program (BP) at the Economics Faculty of Islamic University of Indonesia, and to understand the result of this program in facilitating students to develop their soft skills being active independent learners.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Student-Centered Learning

The idea of student-centered learning as opposed to teacher-centered learning is associated with Dewey, Hayward, Rogers, Piaget and Knowles. According to Fay (in Ref. [1]), SCL "is a concentration of the ideas of humanist philosophy and psychology which recognizes the integrity and freedom of the individual and attempts to convert the teaching/learning process accordingly—running from Socratic method through Dewey to Rogers". The idea is driven by a need for a change in traditional education where students are passive, apathetic and bored. SCL encourages students to be active and teachers to share their power to learners in the learning process.

SCL is related to many terms such as flexible learning, experiential learning and self-directed learning. It is also synonymous with active learning and participatory learning. Ref. [3] prefers the term learner-centered teaching to student-centered teaching and learning-centered teaching.

Ref. [3] then makes a distinction between student-centered and learner-centered teaching approach. Being student-centered means its focus on students’ needs. It “gives rise the idea of education as product”, the student as the customer and the faculty as the producer to serve and satisfy the customer. Being learner-centered focuses on the learning: what students learn, how they learn, the conditions under which they learn, whether they understand and apply the learning, and how they current learning set them for future learning.

The article employs SCL and its use implies that education or learning is a product as well as a process. By SCL, it, as ref. [3], “keeps the focus on learners, on students, not as customers to be satisfied but as the direct recipients of efforts aimed at promoting learning”. For learning is the relatively permanent changing of behavior or potent behavior, not temporary body states, as the direct or indirect result of reinforced experience, practice or training. The changing depends much on the process of experience, practice or training or, as ref. [3], on learning.

Ref. [2] summarizes many opinions on SCL in the literature as follows:

- the concept of the student’s choice in their education; others see it as the being about the student doing more than the lecturer (active versus passive learning); while others have a much broader definition which includes both of these concepts but, in addition, describes the shift in the power relationship between the student and the teacher.

SCL consists of five key changes, namely (1) the balance of power; (2) the function of content, (3) the role of the teacher, (4) the responsibility for learning, and (5) the purpose and the processes of evaluation (Weimer, 2002). Firstly, the power in the class is reallocated and shared to both lecturers and students in balance. Decisions are not only made by lecturers but students are involved to make them on learning activities and assignments, classroom policies, learning content, and evaluation activities. The power sharing benefits lecturers, students, learning, and learning institution.

Secondly, content in SCL has two functions that are to establish a knowledge base and to promote learning. It means that the content functions as a means and an end of instruction. As a means of instruction, content is firstly used to develop students’ knowledge base, secondly to develop their learning skills and thirdly to create learners’ awareness. As an end, it is learned by students to grasp.

Thirdly, in SCL teachers or lecturers guide and facilitate the learning. They put themselves in a position alongside the learner and keep their attention, focus and spotlight on the learning process. Their role is metaphorically described as a gardener who prepares the ground, tills and cultivates but lets the plants grow by themselves.

Fourthly, students are responsible for learning while lecturers create a climate conducive to learn and establish an environment that positively affects how much and how well students learn. Lecturers are also responsible for creating “environments where without (or with fewer) rules and requirements, students do what they need to learn effectively, develop themselves further as learners, and act in ways that support the learning efforts of others”.

Fifthly, educational evaluation is used to generate grades and promote learning. Evaluation is carried out to enhance students’ already inherent potential to promote learning. Evaluation processes are opened to students to give them opportunities to develop self- and peer-assessment skills.

Carl Rogers (in Ref. [5] Knowles, Holton III and Swanson, 2005, p. 46) writes that the student-centered approach to education based on five “basic hypotheses”:

1. We cannot teach another person directly, we can only facilitate his learning; (2) A person learns significantly only those things which he perceives as being involved in the maintenance of, or enhancement of, the structure of self; (3) Experience which, if assimilated would involve a change in the organization of self appears to become more rigid under threat and to relax its boundaries when completely free from threat; experience which is perceived as inconsistent with the self can only be assimilated if the current organization of self is relaxed and expanded to include it; (5) The educational situation which most effectively promotes significant learning is one in which (a) threat to the self of the learner is reduced to a minimum, and (b) differentiated perception of the field is facilitated.

Donna Brandes and Paul Ginnis (in Ref. [2] O’Neill and McMahon, 2005) propose that in SCL “students are encouraged to participate fully in, and take responsibility for, their own learning; each individual is valued and trusted”. Accordingly they convey the principles of SCL:

1. The learner has full responsibility for their own learning; (2) Subject matter must have relevance and meaning for the learner; (3) Involvement and participation are necessary for learning; (4) relationship between learners are important; (5) The teacher should be a facilitator and resource person; (6)
The learner experiences confluence in his education (affective and cognitive domains flow together); (6) The learner sees himself differently as a result of the learning experience.”

The University of Glasgow notes four main strategies to practice SCL in universities. [2] The first strategy is to make the student more active in acquiring knowledge and skills and might include exercises in class, fieldwork, use of computer. The second one is to make the student more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it. The third one is a focus on interaction, such as the use of tutorials and other discussion groups. The fourth one is the focus on transferable skills.

Ref. [2] gives an example of SCL methods in a table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outside of the Lecture Format</th>
<th>In the Lecture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent projects</td>
<td>Buzz groups (short discussion in twos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion</td>
<td>Pyramids/snowballing (Buzz groups continuing the discussion into larger groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mentoring of other students</td>
<td>Cross-overs (mixing students into groups by letter/number allocations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>Rounds (giving turns to individual students to talk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-trips</td>
<td>Quizzes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicals</td>
<td>Writing reflections on learning (3/4 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective diaries, learning journals</td>
<td>Student class presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer assisted learning</td>
<td>Role play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice in subjects for study/projects</td>
<td>Poster presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing newspaper article</td>
<td>Students producing mind maps in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio development</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. SCL Example Methods

In short, the literature describes SCL in terms of student, lecturer, relationship between student and lecturer, content, learning process, and evaluation. A student is the subject of learning that is responsible for learning and involved in making decisions concerning with learning. A student may have different perceptions and opinions with other students’ and his lecturers’ ones. A lecturer shares his power to students to make the decisions and plays a role as facilitator to create a climate and environment conducive to learning. The relationship between student and teacher is relative equal. The content of subject matter is relevant and meaningful for student. The learning process is relaxing and free of threat in order to learn to a maximum. In the process a student gets experiences to achieve the learning objectives. Finally evaluation is practiced to determine grades as well as promote learning.

Strategies to practice SCL are to make students more active in and outside of the classroom, make them more aware of what and why they are doing, focus on the interaction among them and between students and lecturer, and focus on the transferable skills. The learning methods in and outside of the classroom are independent project, group discussion, peer mentoring, debate, field-trip, presentation, role play, quiz, practical, reflective diary, learning journal, computerizing, writing learning log, choice in subject, and portfolio.

2.2. Preview Research

Ref. [1] uncovered the similarities and differences in the way student-centered learning functions in higher education and adult education. He finally comes to the conclusion that it “will be fewer and fewer reasons in future to oppose the enterprises of adult education and higher education”. Hence the similarities and differences are irrelevant because SCL would function as the common center for both sectors.

Ref. [9] had a research on “Implementing a Student-Centered Learning Approach in Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions: Barriers under Layers of Casual Layered Analysis (CLA)”. The results proved that changing the students’ present learning approach to student-centered learning does not need new principles to be imposed on learners. Rather, there needs to be changes in university infrastructures and people’s perceptions.

Ref. [10] investigated the role of teachers in the Learning Lab at the University of Melbourne. The Learning Lab was designed for numerous teaching and learning activities, within an educational framework of collaborative learning in groups of four or eight students. Classroom observations and interviews with tutorial teachers were conducted to reveal the positive and negative consequences of teaching in SCL environment. The issues highlighted warrant further consideration when planning to teach in collaborative learning environments.

Ref. [11] examined ref. [3]. Ref. [11] underlined that Weimer’s five specifications are possible to identify from the pedagogical literature several examples where college teachers are seeking to move toward more student-centered classrooms.

Ref. [12] investigated “Exploring Students’ Styles and Regulating Strategy of Learning Supporting Student-Centered Learning”. The research shows that active learning styles significantly correlates to the efficacy of learning regulation and the successfulness of learning in term of the Index of Learning Style and the Learning Style Inventory. They conclude that active-oriented student learning styles support student’s learning successfulness in the student-centered learning classes.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This research was done in Bridging Program (BP) of Economics Faculty of Indonesian Islamic University in Yogyakarta. This program has been run in regular program since 2007. This program has been designed to help the new students that come from high school to be more effective in their study in university. The teaching process has been designed in student center learning in order this program can build the student character to be independent learners. Formally this BP uses the program using the subject of Business communication, English I that are writing and English II that is writing.

The student joined this BP 4 times a week that is 100 every meeting along 2 semesters or one year. In the process of this program development, the subject content has been changed many times for increasing the effective of this BP. This program is managed by contract lecturers.
that have been changed many times because some of them can not continue the contract in order to look for better job. In this research, it focuses on the academic year of 2012-2013 as a case research.

The research uses a case study methodology which includes in qualitative research methodology. Ref. [6] writes a definition of case study as follows:

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.

This case study in this research take one year of BP 2012/2013 that practicing use of student center learning (SCL) in BP class and then comparing to non-BP class in the same year and also after they join regular program. To treasure the depth the SCL, this research also take 4 best students in 2 year academic in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013.

This research focuses on how high the student of BP’s program make them satisfy with the tool and all physical facilities in class room, how active the student, how student develop their desire, how the student express their capacity, how the student express their ability in their university life. The time frame that be used in this research is three parts: in BP class of 2012/2013, in non BP Class of 2012/2013 and 2013/2014.

Methods to collect data are focus group discussion (FGD), interview, observation, and documentation. The FGD involved 2012/2013-academic-year 19 students of the Management Department and Economics Department of the Economics Faculty of Islamic University of Indonesia. There were 759 students of the 2012/2013-academic-year Bridging Program distributed into 21 classes. The 19 students involved in the FGD are selected representatives of each best of the 21 classes. The researchers interview the four best students of the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013-academic year Bridging Program. The observation is done by the Bridging Program lecturers in the classrooms. Documents collected are the all 2012/2013-academic-year students’ final grades of Bridging Program.

Data Credibility Test. Verification for assessing the validity of the theories that have been made based on the case studies or studies that have been obtained. Verification is done in a way to validate date obtained through cross-checks and re-check, performing a variety of necessary confirmation for both personal and group, as well as digging it back together with relevant experts. [7]

Data Analysis Method: Interpreting the data, or to see relationships and patterns that exist and ultimately done naturally generalization. [8] It uses the relationship (correspondences) and pattern (patterns) between the internal and external elements in the organizational innovation. In reference to Lincoln dan Guba (inRef. [8]) the goodness is based on the type of trustworthiness and authenticity. Seward (in Ref. [8]) said that in research, authenticity can be found if the researchers do emphatic identification that is an action for making a living psyche of an actor to understand the motive, belief, will and the actor thought.

IV. RESULTS

The data collected through focus group discussion, interview, observation and documentation show (1) students’ or learners’ activeness, (2) the availableness of learning facilities and tools, (3) lecturers’ use of learning facilities and tools and teaching methods, (4) how students express their desire, capacity and ability in classes, (5) learning outputs and outcomes. The data are on the Bridging Program which in some parts is compared to regular lectures or non-BP classes that are taught by non-BP lecturers.

4.1. Students’ Activeness

Students said that they found two main benefits from the BP. Firstly they knew what learning activities of higher education are and how to learn in a new setting which is different from the senior high school setting. When they came first to the university, even when they joined the non-BP classes, they did not know anything about higher education setting. From the BP they understood how to be active independent learners.

Secondly they were encouraged by the BP lecturers to be active independent learners. The lecturers encouraged them by explaining higher education setting and stimulating them to actively convey their opinions. As the lecturers said, higher education calls for students to be active in and outside of the classes and to be independent to make their own decisions especially concerning with learning activities. The lecturers always gave stimuli to students to communicate what they have in their minds.

The stimuli move students to be active also in the non-BP classes and after finishing the one-year BP. In the first academic year they actively asked questions to the non-BP lecturers and gave their views on topics. Having finished the BP students stated that they are alive to discuss in the classes and to find out resources of subject matters and to join student organization to get more experiences.

4.2. The availableness of learning facilities and tools

In every classroom of the Economics Faculty there are learning facilities such as a computer, LCD projector, screen, ACs, chairs, a table, a board, and markers. But some facilities do not work well so the BP lecturers get obstacles to teach in optimum and unfortunately every class of the Economics Department in the first semester consist of more than forty students. On learning tools such as colorful paper, straws, and balls, the BP lecturers bought them by themselves.

4.3. Lecturers’ Use of Learning Facilities and Tools, and Teaching Methods

The BP lecturers use all available learning facilities and learning tools they provided by themselves to teach in the classes particularly in the first semester. In the second semester the BP lecturers less frequently employ them. The facilities and tools are very helpful for students to learn and the use of both gets students interested and not bored in the
lectures. The non-BP lecturers often do not employ the facilities and tools to teach so students get bored. The non-BP lecturers frequently focus on the textbook and sometimes present their slideshows. In other words the BP lecturers apply student-centered learning while the non-BP lecturers apply teacher-centered learning.

The BP lecturers apply in the classes various teaching methods such as group and class discussions, debate, role play, game, and student presentation. Outside of the class students take field trips and hold small parties and several BP lecturers join them. Students are asked to write every week diaries which are collected on Thursday and the BP lecturers read and give comments. In the ends of the learning phases students write learning logs as reflective journals. The numerous methods get students actively involved in the BP classes while in the non-BP classes students complain that the lecturers often deliver speech and students listen and write what the lecturers say.

4.4. How Students Express Their Desire, Capacity and Ability in Classes

The BP lecturers give many opportunities to students to express their desire, capacity and ability in classrooms. Students enjoy learning in the BP classes for they make known their opinions and feeling. The BP offer to students to counsel with them about students personal and academic problems out of the class. Students are satisfied with the BP.

Table 2 shows the tendency to left positive distributions. It means that the SCL has good effects to make the BP students more independent as independent learners while some students in minority still in low mark. The roles of SCL that use personal approaches give high impact in their ability to become independent learners.

4.5. Learning Outcomes

Most of the students passed the BP subjects and they got good marks. These indicate the outputs of the BP while the outcomes are indicated in their acknowledgment that they become active independent learners as seen in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>ES 1</th>
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</table>

Source: Secondary Data from the BP Document (2012)

Note:

Table 2 shows the tendency to left positive distributions. It means that the SCL has good effects to make the BP students more independent as independent learners while some students in minority still in low mark. The roles of SCL that use personal approaches give high impact in their ability to become independent learners.

4.6. Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes of the BP are graduates of the BP in terms of 3, 15 and 27 months after they joined and passed the BP. They now are in the semester 3, 5 and 7 of the Management and Economics Departments. Having passed the BP, they said that they are aware to study subjects they take. They motivate themselves to search references of the subjects in libraries, book shops and internet, to read and to discuss them with their friends. They do tasks of subjects they take. In short they become active independent learners.

4.7. Analysis

This program has been run since 2007 in regular program of Economics Faculty of Indonesian Islamic University. In one side this is a formal name for this program this is Bridging Program or BP but in another side there is another name of the BP content that is different with the formal cover. The formal name cover is business communication in Semester 1, English 1 and English 2 that are consisted of writing and reading skill. The content of BP in semester 1 which Program that focuses on character building but in semester 2 the BP consists of 2 subjects that is writing and reading. There is very different content and context between semester 1 and semester 2.

In semester two the BP consists of two subjects namely Writing (Bahasa Inggris 1 or English 1) and Reading (Bahasa Inggris 2 or English 2). The content of the Writing subject is learning in Bahasa Indonesia to write in Bahasa Indonesia and the subject is delivered in Bahasa Indonesia. The difference of the name and the content of the subject is questioned by students. Some of them hope to learn English writing in English.

The Reading subject is to teach how to read English texts and is delivered both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. Some students that have high ability to read want the lecturers to teach in English but some that have low ability do not agree with their friends. The problem is that the two groups of the different abilities are in the same class to learn reading English texts.

The BP spirit is to develop the students to be independent learners using student center learning (SCL) approach rather than teacher center learning (TCL). The program has been succeed to make student more active and have happiness in the way they study. Especially in semester 1 the BP is felt good by the student that was signed by their mark while in semester 2 some student said that the teacher is more important than the subject. Most of
the students have trauma with their English subject in their high school.

The head of the department of management and economics that use this program have high hope that student can achieve higher ability in English as it be ordered by the users. They tend to force the BP lecturers and BP can success to make students in all subject of BP parts. In Semester 1 the order of the department member can be managed very well by the BP lecturers but it becomes lower achievement in semester 2 when English 1 and 2 becomes main subject not only in cover but also in content then becomes context.

While the students achieve good mark in semester 1 but then they have feeling unsatisfied in semester 2 that the name of English 1 and 2 which do not use only the cover but also the content of English knowledge and no English skill. All the process in BP have been SCL oriented and the students also feel worse when they joined

V. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Conclusions

The research comes to five conclusions. (1) The BP successfully prepared students to be active independent learners in and out of the classes. Students got benefits from the BP. (2) The faculty provides learning facilities but some of them do not work so the BP lecturers get obstacles to teach in optimum. The BP lecturers bought learning tools by themselves. (3) The BP lecturers use all learning facilities and tools especially in the first semester but in the second one they less frequently use them. The non-BP lecturers often do not employ the facilities and tools. (4) In the BP classes students joyfully express their desire, capacity and ability while in the non-BP classes they often do not. (5) The outputs and outcomes of the BP indicate that students become active independent learners. (6) The faculty lecturers member need to consider the status of BP lecturers in order to have effective process in teaching.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the results and analysis, the research recommends that:

(1) The lecturers of the BP improve the teaching methods and develop the program to take more parts to achieve the visions and missions of the departments, faculty and university.

(2) The faculty (a) makes sure that all learning facilities in the class work well and provide learning tools that are needed by the BP to achieve the objectives of the BP in optimum; (b) makes a policy to discuss the status BP lecturers in the Economics Faculty of Islamic University of Indonesia; (c) discuss with the BP lecturers about raw inputs of students, the objectives of the BP, interests of the departments and the vision and mission of the Islamic University of Indonesia to accommodate the all interests and to maximize the BP.

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gaya+dan+strategi+belajar+mahasiswa+alsa+asحادyi+pdf.