

How Does Vocational Upper Secondary School (VUSS) Influence The Learning Experience Of Students In Workplace?

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ABSTRAK

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In Indonesian vocational education system, Vocational Upper Secondary School (VUSS) plays an institutional influence on the learning experiences of students. The influence of the institution can be seen in numerous policies and practices. This article was aimed to examine the influence of VUSS as an institution on the learning experience of students in the workplace. It was examined through how its institutional policies affected the implementation of the apprenticeship programme. In particular, it is aimed to look at the position of VUSS from structural point of view in the light of the Indonesian Education Law, 2003, whether their policies were put into practices, and to what extent their policies (e.g. the SBC, entry requirement, teaching and learning activities, assessments, and the apprenticeship programme) influenced the learning experience of students in the workplace during the apprenticeship program. This research employed a library research-based design. The data and information were derived from different journal articles, books, chapter books, proceedings, handbooks, and other relevant resource. The data was analysed by mapping out the information obtained from the resource and then aligning the information with the issues investigated. The findings of the research suggest that the institutional roles of VUSS and its pedagogical framework and practices in Indonesian VUSSs strongly contributed to the knowledge and skills development of students in the workplace. In addition, it was important for VUSSs to contextualize the skills the students learned by integrating these skills and their context.

1. Introduction

In Indonesian vocational education system, Vocational Upper Secondary School (VUSS) plays an institutional influence on the learning experiences of students. The influence of the institution can be seen in numerous policies and practices. The development of School-Based Curriculum (SBC) in 2004 until 2013, the implementation of the new curriculum so called K 13, the teaching and learning activities and assessment predominantly based on vocational-based knowledge and skills, and the provision of vocational-based subject learning facilities, and the entry requirements relevant to vocational skills orientation are some of the examples. Moreover, as a vocational education institution, VUSS offers the apprenticeship (on the job training) program as a part of the dual-based education system (Pendidikan Sistem Ganda – PSG) adopted in Indonesian VET system. This practice is the main agenda in VUSS apart from the learning and teaching activities at school. Like the importance of other subjects, VUSS students will not be given a certificate as a VUSS graduate until they complete and pass the apprenticeship program. In addition, the atmosphere or physical spaces that students engage in everyday school life need to be one of the practices in VUSS if the effective vocational education and training (VET) is to be achieved.

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A number of studies have examined institutional influences of VET on the learning experiences of students in the workplace. Biemanns et al (2004), drawing on the development of competence-based education in Dutch VET especially examined qualifications and competencies curriculum approaches. They argued that these approaches have raised challenges for both teachers and policy makers in relation to how to effectively integrate learning programme in schools and learning activities in the workplace. The finding of the study suggests that there was a paradox within competence-based education movement. In one hand, VET with Competence-based Curriculum (CBC) expects flexibility at the level of learning process of students which means that self-directive learning is emphasised. On the other hand, there was no guarantee from the government regarding the exchange values of qualifications. Therefore, it is contradictory to the idea of flexibility developed in the competence-based VET.

The introduction of SBC in the Indonesian VUSS system has a quite similar mission as that of in the Dutch competence-based VET. Here, self-directive learning of students are emphasised through the introduction of generic skills development (Descy and Tessaring, 2001) that is reformulated in broad range of competences (Depdiknas, 2006). BSNP (2006) highlights six vital characteristics of learning and teaching required in the SBC (learner-oriented, emphasis on the development of creativity, conducive but challenging learning atmosphere, contextual, emphasis on diversified learning experience, and learning by doing).

Currently, VET provides broad learning access to students to develop their practical knowledge and skills (e.g. provision of access to the workplace for practical exposure). Within the VET – competence-based system, the concept of generic skills is believed to enable students to develop their employability. The underlying idea of this concept is to prepare students with skills that are needed in their future professions and in society as a whole (Depdiknas, 2007; Biemans et al, 2004). To realise this intention, the government locates VUSS to provide an effective integration between school learning experience of students and learning in the workplace. However, there is a problem regarding this view. Griffith and Guile (2004: 115) noted that policymakers assume that generic skill is the property of an individual and therefore it should be developed in the way the school wants. In fact, they argued that the development and the demonstration of skill of students are shaped by opportunities to participate in different social practices or activity system (Griffith and Guile, 2004: 115). The skills that students have are not solely products of their individual potential but of interrelated factors including institutional influences.

In the context of the current study, the influence of VUSS as an institution on the learning experience of students in the workplace is examined through how its institutional policies affect the implementation of the apprenticeship programme. These influences are analysed by looking at the position of VUSS from structural point of view in the light of the Indonesian Education Law, 2003, whether their policies are put into practices, and to what extent their policies (e.g. the SBC, entry requirement, teaching and learning activities, assessments, and the apprenticeship programme) influence the learning experience of students in the workplace.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Institutional roles of VUSS/VET for skill development

Griffith and Guile (2004) argued that one of limitations of macro-systemic approach as discussed previously (an approach that views VET and its institutional roles for skills development in relation to current knowledge-based economy), VET is lack of attention to a question of how individuals actually learn through their work experience. They pointed out two educational challenges to prepare students to work and learn in the current knowledge-based economy. First, educational institution need to help students learn generic skills in specific context. The skills the students learn at school should be contextualised by integrating skills and its context. Second, there is a need for VET to design a curriculum that helps students connect their learning in educational and workplace contexts (p. 116). Green et al (1999) added that there is also a need for VET to prepare students with awareness about changes in the world of work.

The current study of Sandal et al. (2014) on vocational students' experiences with assessment in the workplace learning revealed that there are differences between the culture of school assessment practice and workplace assessment. The cultural differences of the two assessment practices are derived from perspectives of students about the assessment in the two institutions, criteria and tools of the assessment, vocational knowledge resulted from the two types of assessment. Sandal et al. (2014) describe that in students' perspective, all types of assessment during the course at school lead to final grading at the end of the term (p. 249). This shows that the students understand the purpose of the assessment they undertake. By contrast, as Sandal et al. (2014) describe, the purpose of assessment in the workplace is not always clear to all

students. For example, they found that several students did not fully understand how portfolio (containing reflective logs of students and documentation of their work tasks during work placement) could improve their skills (p. 250).

2.2. Pedagogical framework and practices in VET

Drawing on the contemporary theory of learning in adult education and curriculum theory, Guile and Griffith (2001) highlights the urgent need of pedagogic framework to explain learning through work experience. They suggest that a greater thought is needed to develop students' in-school knowledge and skills (vertical development) in order to be ready for their workplace knowledge and skill development (horizontal development) (Beach and Vyas, 1998 cited in Guile and Griffiths, 2001: 115). Currently, as Guile and Griffith (2001) noted, there is a tendency of contemporary policy literature to view relationship between education and work with a narrow functional view. In other words, work context is stable and is therefore assumed to be easy for students to transfer their skills in that environment. As such, schools and workplace develop a model of work experience delivery based on management/school arrangement (Guile and Griffith, 2001: op.cit. 115 – 116) that is purely based on institutional aims. In that perspective, Guile and Griffith (2001) argued that policy makers do not realise unprecedented pace of global economic pressure and rapid advancement in communication and technology.

Other studies focused on the implications of the context of work for skill formation of students (e.g. Eraut, 1999; Billet, 1993 and Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 1996). Eraut (1999), for example, suggested that there is a need for learners to make use of their prior knowledge while constantly looking at its relevance to the situation in the workplace. Here, learners are required to adjust the concept of knowledge that they have learned at school and integrate it to the new situation to bring new knowledge. With regard to this matter, school as an institution is required to support learners to appropriate the concepts which are external to the context (Guile and Griffith, 2001).

Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) questioned about the adequacy of traditional approaches used to promote competent practice. They viewed that the traditional approaches typically considered competence in terms of attribute, such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For example, pointing knowing-in-action of Schon (1987), they argued that the integration between knowing and doing of a particular task is not adequate only at the level of presenting information and explanation to students (Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 1996: 431). Rather, experience of doing the task is needed to bring understanding. Therefore, they suggested an alternative view in which the competence development is seen to have involved a change in meaning structure for practice. They argued that for the educational institution, a shift is needed from simply viewing competence development from ways of experiencing practice to enriching experience of practice.

In VET system, there is an existing practice where knowledge and skills are viewed as separate entities and can be taught independently (Engestrom and Gronin in Guile and Griffiths, 2001) that means context is not of important aspect in knowledge transfer. This practice also happens in SMK1GT despite the concept of learning by doing is officially adopted. It can be seen in separation between theories and practical experience in vocational subject delivery where learning activities of the two are alienated. Knowledge and skills taught to students are mainly theory because learning facilities do not adequately support for practical application and thereby the knowledge are merely predictive for workplace engagement. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no clear skill framework used to prepare students for workplace engagement. In the case of entry requirement, for example, there have been different practices taking place in the VUSS practices throughout the country.

3. Research Method

This paper employed a library-based research design. Library research is a method of gathering data through studying and comprehending information from textbooks, journals, articles, virtual resources, and documents (see Rowley and Slack, 2004). In this type of study, contextual methods are commonly used by researchers. This design reflects priority made for a research process. The framework was developed to provide a systematic direction for making priorities throughout the research process (Bryman, 2004; 2008).

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This paper was aimed to examine and elaborate data descriptively and analytically by integrating and connecting concepts, thoughts and rules regarding the issues of learning experiences of VUSS students in the workplace. It was also designed to help the researchers to identify the institutional influences of VUSS during the workplace learning (apprenticeship program).

Zed (2004), Juntunen et al (2005), and Gorman (2000) argued that the use of library resources for collecting data and these resources allowed rich data and information. In particular, Gorman (2000) made mention that it is important for the researchers to ensure what data were required of the research and be informed about how these data were used for the research. In the context of this research, the issues about how VUSS as an institution influenced the ways knowledge and skills transferred from which students obtained experiences useful for the apprenticeship program in the workplace. As the data and information were derived from different resources such as books, journal articles, proceedings, chapter books and handbooks, it is important for the researchers to ensure that the data and information were relevant to the issues being examined and elaborated. Data collection was carried out through a process of observing and conceptualizing two issues related to the learning experiences of students in the workplace: *Institutional roles of VUSS/VET for skill development and Pedagogical framework and practices in VET*. These data was mapped out, analyzed and interactively triangulated to ensure its robustness and accountability. In addition, the questions raised up for the research in the realm of learning experiences of VET students in the workplace were appropriately addressed.

4. Results and Discussions

Currently, VET provides broad learning access to students to develop their practical knowledge and skills (e.g. provision of access to the workplace for practical exposure). Within the VUSS – competence-based system, the concept of generic skills is believed to enable students to develop their employability. The underlying idea of this concept is to prepare students with skills that are needed in their future professions and in society as a whole (Depdiknas, 2007; Biemans et al, 2004). To realize this intention, the government locates VUSS to provide an effective integration between school learning experience of students and learning in the workplace. However, very few studies are found on the learning experience of students in Indonesian VUSS especially in relation to the position of the institution that links to workplace learning.

In the context of this paper-based research, there were two issues addressed to better understand the institutional influences on the learning experience of students in Indonesian VUSSs. First, it is the issue of the position of VUSS from structural point of view in the light of the Indonesian Education Law, 2003. This issue clarifies how educational policies were put into practices and to what extent these policies were implemented in Indonesian VUSSs. In VET which is more or less similar to the Indonesian VUSS system, as noted by Engestrom and Gronin in Guile and Griffiths (2001), there is an existing practice where knowledge and skills are viewed as separate entities and can be taught independently. These practices can be seen in the separation between theories and practical experiences of students in vocational subject deliveries where learning activities of the two are alienated. In other words, knowledge and skills taught to students are mainly theories. Moreover, learning facilities do not adequately support for practical applications and thereby the knowledge is merely predictive for workplace engagement during the apprenticeship program.

Second, Guile and Griffith (2001) noted that the provision of pedagogic framework to explain learning through work experience is urgently required today. This is true as many observed that there were a number of noted mismatches between the provided learning experiences at VUSS and those offered in workplaces under the partnerships (Ruslin, 2017). In this context, pointing knowing-in-action of Schon (1987), the integration between *knowing* and *doing* of a particular task is not adequate only at the level of presenting information and explanation to students (Dall Alba and Sandberg, 1996: 431). Rather, there are a lot of concrete experimentation (Kolb, 1984) or similar practices as in the workplace which implies the requirements of representative infrastructures in VUSS. This suggests that greater thoughts and efforts are needed to help students develop their in-school knowledge and skills (vertical development) in order to be ready for transferring these knowledge and skills and develop them along with their apprenticeship attendances (horizontal development) (Beach and Vyas, 1998 cited in Guile and Griffiths, 2001: 115). In addition, the role of VUSS as an institution to provide clear skills framework which can be adapted from OECD skills framework must be deemed as a long term plan in Indonesian VUSS. The aim of such framework is to prepare students for an effective workplace engagement.

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the research findings, it was identified that learning experience of VUSS students in Indonesia and across the globe is bound to a complex inter-relationship between many factors. In the context of the current research, the institutional roles of VUSS and its pedagogical framework and practices which implies skills framework strongly contributed to the knowledge and skills development of students in the workplace during their attendances in the apprenticeship program. The main role of VUSS as an institution is to contextualize the skills the students learned by providing lots of concrete experimentations and practices where the students are able to integrate their knowledge and skills with the contexts. If these opportunities of learning were fully planned, provided and continuously developed in VUSS, the integration of knowledge and skills of VUSS students during their services in the apprenticeship program would flourish as targeted in the K13 curriculum. In addition, this research-based paper informed VET educational stakeholders to provide a set of well-prepared concepts for relevant knowledge and skills needed in today's workplace and adequate time allotments for concrete experimentations at school from which fruitful and beneficial learning experiences of VUSS students could be achieved in the future.

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