

MONASH UNIVERSITY'S Q-MANUAL : AN EXAMPLE OF LEARNING GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Oleh : Asdi Aulia

Abstract

Pendidikan adalah proses mengubah perilaku manusia, dimana dalam konteks universitas adalah mahasiswa. Perubahan perilaku itu misalnya dari yang tidak mampu mengaplikasikan ilmunya menjadi mampu mengaplikasikan ilmunya. Agar pendidikan dapat berhasil, maka mahasiswa harus mengalami pengalaman belajar (learning experience) yang relevan. Mengingat bahwa pengalaman belajar ini sangat dipengaruhi oleh aktivitas yang dilakukan mahasiswa, maka adalah sangat penting bahwa mahasiswa melakukan aktivitas pembelajaran yang tepat. Akan tetapi, banyak mahasiswa yang tidak mengetahui seperti apa aktivitas pembelajaran yang tepat untuk tingkat universitas. Di Monash University (Australia), permasalahan ini diatasi dengan menerbitkan student's learning guide bagi para mahasiswanya.

Introduction

Education can be defined as a process of changing the behavior patterns of people (Tyler 1949, p. 5), or specifically, students. Thus, in general the objective of an education is to change the behavior of students, such as their way of thinking or doing something. The Economic Faculty of Parahyangan Catholic University (2005, p.3) provides specific examples of its educational objectives for its student: possess managerial skill to organize and transform ideas to real products/services, have comprehensive basic knowledge and able to apply or develop the knowledge, and able to communicate his/her ideas clearly through oral or written medium. These objectives changes the behavior of its students: for example, when they enter the university, they are unable to do communicate their ideas clearly, but when they graduated, they are able to do so.

In order to achieve these objectives, the students require learning experiences (Tyler 1949, p.63). Tyler also stated that learning experience is: ... the interaction between the learner and the external conditions in the environment to which he can react. Learning takes place through the active behavior of the students; it is what *he* does that he learns, not what the teacher does. It is possible for two students to be in the same class and for them to be having two different experiences.

Therefore, it is extremely important that the students actively participate in education activity, such as attending the class and doing the assignments. Tyler further emphasizes that:

... the essential means of education are the experiences provided, not the things to which the student is exposed.

The implication of these statements are although the students are the main actor, the education institutions still have responsibilities to create an environment that promote and stimulate students' desired behavior (Tyler 1949). Thus, the students have to know and understand what kind of activities, and how to do those activities, in order to get the expected learning experiences.

There are several ways to let students know and understand the important activities for their learning. One popular way is through orientation program for new students. It is a very important process which allows a person to reduce anxiety and increase his effectiveness in the new environment (Werther and Davis 1996, p. 255). This ability to respond effectively in his new environment is the key factor which will determine the chance of success and survival.

Similar situation also apply for high school students who had just admitted in universities. The students have to know what activities are required to get the desired learning experiences in university, and there are many differences between learning in high schools and in universities. If the new students fail to adapt to the new learning environment, it is more likely that they will get unsatisfactory results.

For example, in university, the materials are more specialized, deeper and difficult. The students are expected to be more independent and self-reliant, for the lecturers may teach a large numbers of students. (Monash University 2005, p.6). They may have to find their own books and materials from the library or internet. Students also have to manage their own time (Monash University 2005, p.6) as there are not many exams in university compared to high school. Furthermore, in some universities in Indonesia, the students have further challenge: most of the reading materials are in English.

In this paper, the author would like to study how Monash University deal with the orientation problem faced by the new students, especially the academic adjustment. Monash University is a large state university in Australia; it is located in Melbourne with more than 50,000 students coming from more than 100 countries (Monash University 2005, p.3). Its new students have very diverse background, mother language and living experience.

Thus, Monash has a big challenge. As a university, Monash has mission of education, which are “cultivating the mind” and “transmission of basic ideas” (Cabal 1993, p.22). It has to develop an orientation program which will help these new students to adapt with Australian environment and higher education environment. And Monash did; to help students settling in higher education environment, understand what activities have to be performed, and how to perform them, Monash published a student manual titled “Monash Qmanual”, which basically teaches the students how to learn in university.

The author divided the Qmanual into five sections, which are (1) study orientation, (2) writing skill, (3) plagiarism & referencing, (4) presentation skill, and (5) exam strategies. The next part of this paper is explaining each section in greater detail.

Q-Manual: Study Orientation

This is the first part of the Q Manual, encompasses the first three chapters. In general, this part dealing with study orientation, where the students are given information about how to study in university.

Chapter 1 of the Q-Manual is a general introduction about Monash University, the Faculty of Business & Economics, and the assessment system. It also tells about subject structure and role of lecturers/tutors.

Chapter 2 is actually where the guide of learning starts. It begins with “study mindset”, in which telling the students to adjust their way of thinking. It stated that “merely describe the concept and knowledge will not give good marks”. It also stated that for independent study, critical and analytical thinking is very important. Furthermore, the Q Manual explains what does it mean by ‘critical and analytical thinking’. This explanation helps clarify specific terms and jargon, which is very important for its readers.

In this chapter the students also being introduced to the concept of knowledge relativity, where there is no absolutes and knowledge is ever evolving. In other words, there can be multiple viewpoints for a particular topic. Again, Q Manual provides examples and diagram to help clarify this concept.

The next section talking about lectures: before, during, and after. Before lecture, Q Manual suggests that the students should prepare for the lecture, such as reading the materials, thinking about the materials, discussing with friends, etc. During lecture, it focuses on taking notes and getting the main points. After the lecture, it promotes to write summary or do mind-mapping.

Finally, in the last section in this chapter, it describes in detail about two types of reading: to comprehend and to critically comment the reading. It discusses the distinction and examples of both.

The last chapter in this part is chapter 3. It deals with research process. This is a very good topic where the students were introduced to research process as early as possible, since this is the key of learning. The research process here is customized for university students doing assignment, not the research process for thesis. However, there are many similarities between the two research processes, especially the logical process. It starts with understanding the topic, then looking for information and finally presenting the result. In general, this is also the same procedure performed by research process for thesis. Thus, if the student follows this procedure again and again during his study, it is very likely that his research skill will be very good at the end of his study in university.

Q-Manual: Writing Skill

The second part of Monash's Q Manual discusses the academic writing skill and different style of writing for different types of assignment. This part includes chapter 4 to 8, and each one focuses on different aspects of academic writing.

Chapter 4 provides the basics of academic writing. It explains what does it mean by 'successful writing'. It tells about how to analyze assignment and exam question, like identifying *direction* and *context*. The structure of writing also covered in depth, complete with examples. In the later section in this chapter, the manual emphasizes the importance of flow between each part of the writing. Lastly, this chapter provides information on characteristics and examples of academic writing.

Chapter 5 describes a specific writing style for essay-type assignment. Basically an essay requires the same processes of writing as explained in chapter 4, only given further information regarding the structure and length of each part of the essay.

Chapter 6 is dealing with literature review-type writing. It explains the nature of a literature review and the procedures on how to do it. It also covers on how to structure and write a literature review.

In chapter 7, the Q Manual explains about report writing in business environment. This chapter has two sections, the first is the process of creating report, which includes identifying the report purpose, the reader, researching the topic, writing outline and draft, editing, and ends with writing the finished report. The next section covers about the structure and layout of a report.

The last chapter in this section, chapter 8, is dealing with responding to a case study. Case study is "a widely accepted method to bring theoretical concepts and practical situations together". Q Manual recognized two methods of how to deal with case study: analytical and problem-oriented. The first method is analyzing what has happened and why; however this approach is not covered in detail.

The second method is basically trying to figure out how to solve the problem as explained in the case study. Q Manual stated there is no 'one best way' to solve a particular problem, especially in business environment. Thus, it is more important to integrate the solution with relevant theories.

Finally, in every chapter in this part, there are checklists of what to do in each type of assignment. These checklists form the conclusion of the chapter content and quite easy to follow.

Q-Manual: Plagiarism & Referencing

The third part of Monash's Q Manual refers to plagiarism issue and referencing. Plagiarism is covered in chapter 9 and the technical aspects of referencing in chapter 10. As defined in Q Manual, plagiarism happens when "writers claim ownership of written words or ideas which are not their own". This is considered as an offence in academic world and thus not allowed. The Q Manual also stated that such action will face disciplinary action. Based on the author's own experience while studying in Monash, plagiarism was a very important issue and the lecturers always warned the student about it.

There are many examples of plagiarism shown in Q Manual, such as paraphrasing another person's work, copying other's work (which includes other student's work), and some others. The Q Manual also cited Monash's policy on cheating and plagiarism. Cheating in Monash usually was dealt very harshly, with possibility of exclusion from the university.

To avoid plagiarism while citing ideas from other writer is through proper citation and referencing. The Q Manual showed examples on how to integrate views from references to writer's own work, also how to do paraphrasing or writing in writer's own word. It also gives example of unsuitable use of references.

Chapter 10 explains in details about the technical aspect of referencing. It tells about different referencing systems, and how to do in-text citation and how to create a reference list. There are many examples on several types of materials referenced, including electronic sources such as internet.

Q-Manual: Presentation Skill

Presentation is a very important part of the study in university and also in working environment. Hence, acquiring good presentation skill is essential. Q Manual addresses this requirement by allocating one chapter which covers basic presentation skill.

Q Manual explains about the steps in presentation: planning & preparation, design, visual support, delivery, and evaluation. Planning & preparation is dealing with the audience: who they are, what are their expectations and so on.

Design is mostly about the content of the presentation, such as objective and structure. Visual support is about slides and handout, plus any other visual aids for presentation. Delivery explains about how to deliver the presentation. Included in this section are methods of delivery, rehearsal, nerve control, voice and non-verbal communication. Finally, there is an evaluation part, which gives examples of evaluative questions regarding presentation.

There is also one more topic covered in this chapter: group presentation. In a group presentation, additional aspects have to be considered, such as transition between speakers, dividing the presentation, and supporting each other while during presentation.

Q-Manual: Exam Strategies

This is the final part of Monash's Q Manual. This chapter covers topics on how to prepare for exams, which encompasses understanding of exam types and practicing past exams questions. It also gives examples on how to deal with each type of questions, such as multiple choice, short answers, essay questions and calculating questions.

Furthermore, the Q Manual also gives practical advice on how to reduce stress and anxiety during exam, such as getting there early and taking a few deep breaths. And finally, there are also some advices on how to gain confidence and to use time in exam efficiently and effectively.

Conclusion

The existence of a student manual such as the Q Manual allows all students to familiarize themselves with the challenges, and how to deal with them, in the university. The students will have similar mindset and skills in learning. This will enable the students to get the expected learning experiences as they know what to do and how to do it.

For example, in university the students have to be independent and read many materials. The Q Manual explains these requirement clearly; it also discusses how to be independent and how to read properly. Furthermore, to be successful in study, students frequently have to do assignment and exams. Q Manual explains in details how to understand the questions, how to answer questions properly, how to find references, how to write well and clear, and many other aspects.

In conclusion, it is better for a university to have a student manual for its students. The manual will help to students to perform better and allow the university to achieve its objectives regarding the students. The manual may also become the standard for lectures, assignment and exams throughout the university, thus improving the overall quality.

References

Cabal, A. B. (1993). The University as an Institution Today. Paris, UNESCO Publishing.

FE-Unpar (2005). Petunjuk Pelaksanaan Kegiatan Akademik Fakultas Ekonomi (S1). Bandung, Fakultas Ekonomi Universitas Katolik Parahyangan.

Monash-University (2005). The Q Manual. Melbourne, Monash University.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Werther, W. B. and K. Davis (1996). Human Resources and Personnel Management, McGraw-Hill, Inc.