

# What good teaching is

By Hendra Gunawan<sup>1</sup>

In our country, schools as well as universities are often viewed as factories or industries that produce graduates. With this concept, however, many problems arise, especially when we talk about the quality of the “products”. To produce good products that meet certain criteria, we need good “raw materials” and “machinery”.

Thus, for schools and universities, it would be very difficult to produce graduates that meet certain criteria with a rate of success as high as 90%, say, where the 10% are considered “defects”, unless all the students and the teachers meet certain criteria too. The reason is that we are here dealing with human beings.

According to Lynton Gray, in his foreword to *Total Quality Management* (Sallis et.al., 1992), “*Human beings are notoriously non-standard, and they bring into educational situations a range of experiences, emotions and opinions which cannot be kept in the background of the operation. Judging quality is very different from inspecting the output of a factory, or judging the service provided by a retail outlet.*” In short, human beings cannot be treated as “things”.

Using business terminology, schools and universities are better viewed as industries that offer services rather than those producing graduates. Teaching is certainly the main service. Other services include supervision, counselling, provided facilities (such as library, laboratoria, sport centre), *et cetera*.

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<sup>1</sup> A lecturer at Department of Mathematics, ITB, Bandung

The quality of a school or a university is then judged by the quality of these services. Students (and their parents), viewed as customers, have the rights to choose which school they want to go to. Enrolling to a school or a university means they “buy” the services offered by the school or the university.

But now what is meant by “good quality”? Particularly, what is good teaching? This is not an easy question. Before we can answer it, we need to ask: who determines the criteria? Is it the school/university, the teachers, the students (and their parents), or others (such as employers)?

To answer the later question, we need to understand well what is meant by “quality”. Quality, in its absolute sense, is perceived as something ideal, as we often hear in a daily conversation. A car like Rolls Royce, for instance, is a quality car, as most people would say.

But something ideal is usually costly and hard to achieve, and can only be approached. And thus people define quality in a relative sense. Here something simple and inexpensive may be of good quality as long as it satisfies certain criteria. The problem is: who determines the criteria? The producers or the customers?

In *Total Quality Management*, the criteria are determined by the customers for without customers no single industry will survive. Besides, the producers must realize that it is the customers who finally decide which products are of good quality and which are not.

By viewing schools and universities as service industries whose main service is teaching, students, parents and employers are the main, secondary and tertiary external customers, respectively. Meanwhile, all staff (the principal, teachers, and administrators) are the producers and, at the same time, internal customers —since the service may also be enjoyed by each other.

Thus, to define what good teaching is, it is very important to ask the students — the main customers. Of course parents, employers and all the staff should also be heard. This can be done, for instance, through questionnaires or interviews.

By doing so, a list of criteria for good teaching may be obtained. Moses (1985), for example, found from student questionnaires that good teaching can be resulted from teachers' competence in subject matter, communication skills, commitment to facilitating student learning, and concern for individual students.

Of course, this list can be extended to give a better description of good teaching. But the main point here is that we should ask the students, as well as the other “stake holders”, to define what good teaching is.

Hearing their complaints about current practice of teaching would also be useful. In other words, schools or universities, and not to forget the ministry of national education, should find out what is lacking now and then try to overcome the problem. Otherwise, don't ask why many parents send their children to study abroad and at the same time employers seek graduates from overseas universities.

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