Assessment fairness in freedom of learning in open and distance education

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze or obtain a comprehensive overview of fairness in independent campus programs in open and distance education by looking at the conformity of the concept of assessment fairness themes in the practice of assessment on the program. This research was conducted using a qualitative research design, and the data obtained were analyzed descriptively. Data collection was carried out by conducting in-depth interviews with seven sources with competencies related to independent campus programs and their policies at the Universitas Terbuka as organizers of open and distance education systems, using interview guides and documentation studies. Data were transcribed and encoded according to their category. The results show that the conformity of the concept of assessment fairness in assessment practices on independent campus programs in open and distance education has largely been met. The theme of transparency, consistency, and justification, doing no harm to and constructive classroom environment, and avoiding score pollution is the most prominent in the fulfillment of indicators.

INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the Ministry of Education enacted a new policy in higher education through the program of "*Merdeka Belajar - Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM)," which is translated as Freedom of Learning – Independent Campus. Ki Hajar Dewantara's (the father of Indonesian education) philosophy inspired the philosophy of the word of two inseparable concepts, namely independence and freedom. The *Kampus Merdeka* (Independent Campus) is a form of learning in an autonomous and flexible college to create an innovative learning culture, not curbing, and by the needs of students. Through this program, students have vast opportunities to enrich and improve their insights and competencies in the real world through their passions and ideals.

Therefore, currently, all universities at the academic college level are making curriculum adjustments and improving the quality of the learning process by SN-Dikti while supporting the program, including Universitas Terbuka. As an open and distance education system organizer, Universitas Terbuka certainly has characteristics of other campuses. The diversity of socio-economic backgrounds and the wideness of student domicile must be considered. Thus, it takes a draft rule to implement the program. The purpose of implementing this policy is (1) to provide opportunities and fulfillment of the right of students to choose meaningful learning experiences based on their interests and their need to master the learning achievement of one or a group of courses through the participation of students in lecture programs or non-academic programs (2)

to gain experience contextualization of science in the world of work and/or community life that allows students to get added value in strengthening and improving their abilities or quality learning achievements. In the hope that it can, in turn, produce graduates who are ready to win the increasingly complex challenges of life in the 21st century (Junaidi, 2020). The practicality of learning in this program at the Universitas Terbuka can be carried out in the same or different study programs, with the following organizers (1) learning in other study programs in the internal environment of the Universitas Terbuka (2) learning in study programs at other colleges outside the Universitas Terbuka (3) learning on institutions other than colleges. Because the learning concepts underlying curriculum development will affect the learning environment formed (Susani et al., 2020).

Learning in an independent campus provides challenges and opportunities to develop independence in finding knowledge through the reality and dynamics of the field. Learning how to learn will be achieved by the learners with self-directed learning skills. The learner's ability to guide and direct his or her learning; in other words, self-directed learning (Hartley & Bendixen, 2001), is essential in online learning. It is generally believed that online learning gives more control of the instruction to the learners (Garrison, 2003; Gunawardena & McIssac, 2003). Some scholars consider self-directed learning critical in distance education settings with its unique characteristics of the physical and also social separation of the learner from the instructor or expert and other learners (Long, 1998). Research in online distance education indicates that students need to have a high level of self-direction to succeed in the online learning environment (Shapley, 2000). Not only does an online learning context influence the amount of control that is given to (or expected of) learners, it also impacts a learner's perception of his or her level of self-direction.

They are then finding out that the learning experience with this program requires an assessment of students. Because assessment has a significant role in determining the success of education, sound judgment impacts the learning process (Popham, 2009) and becomes a reference for the following policy (Mardapi, 2008). By the national standard of higher education (*Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi* or SN-Dikti), the principle of assessment must be educative, authentic, objective, accountable, and transparent. Assessment fairness is one of the themes contained in-class assessment standards where fairness assessment involves the growth of fair assessment conditions for all learners with sensitivity to the diversity of learners because fairness is considered a key component of classroom assessment theory and practice (Tierney, 2014) and a significant component in the educator assessment literacy model (DeLuca et al., 2015). Several empirical studies have shown that educators' practice of fairness is associated with positive learning effects for learners (Rasooli et al., 2018). Thus, the concept of Assessment fairness is needed in the design of independent campus programs and open and distance education organizers. Because as Peters (2007) reveals, distance education is a mass education system that involves teaching as a "process of objectification," including planning, preparation, formalization, standardization, mechanization, automation, digitization, rationalization, division of labor, mass production, repetition, centralization. Some previous studies have tried to conceptualize fairness for assessment classes by finding six themes as Rasooli et al. (2018): (a) opportunity for learning and access to demonstrate learning; (b) transparency, consistency, and justification; (c) accommodations; (d) do no harm and constructive classroom environment; (e) avoid score pollution; and (f) group work and peer assessment.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyze or obtain a comprehensive overview of fairness in the independent campus program in open and distance education. It includes specific objectives in the form of exposure to the conformity of the concept of assessment fairness theme in the assessment practice of the program. The exposure results are needed to sharpen further student achievement goals in implementing this program and support independent campus programs for open and distance education organizers.

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METHOD

This research is a descriptive study that uses a qualitative approach. The purpose of descriptive methods is to systematically create descriptions, images, or paintings and the relationships between the phenomena investigated. This qualitative study was started by an assumption and an interpretation that could influence the studied matter (Creswell, 2015). In this study, the researchers focused on knowing the specificities (particularities) of assessment fairness in the independent campus program in open and distance education.

Referring to the locality of the case is to the organizers of open and distance education, then this research was conducted in a place setting at the Universitas Terbuka from August 2021 to October 2021. Universitas Terbuka is a pioneer and innovator of distance universities in Indonesia with a Unit of Distance Learning Program (*Unit Program Belajar Jarak Jauh* or UPBJJ) service spread throughout Indonesia. Therefore, Universitas Terbuka contributes to meeting the needs of higher education for all levels throughout the country.

To get a clear picture and information about the suitability of the concept of assessment fairness in assessment practice on the design of independent campus programs at Universitas Terbuka, we determined the sources about the understanding of the program design. Therefore, we chose specific sources to obtain reflection on the issues studied. Such considerations are choosing a sample-specific research subject and strategy (Creswell, 2015). Therefore, we involved seven subjects as sources based on the criteria (1) two experts in independent campus programs at the Universitas Terbuka, which are men who are 53 years old and 50 years old with a background in doctoral education, (2) two a team of independent campus program policymakers at the Universitas Terbuka, which are women who are 50 years old and 45 years old with a background in doctoral and master's education, and (3) three of the implementer of the policy of independent campus programs at the Universitas Terbuka are one male and two women, each aged 49 years, 55 years, and 56 years with a background in doctoral and master's education. Previously, subjects who met the criteria had been contacted by the researchers and those who expressed willingness then were involved to be a source in this study.

The study gathered different types of data and spent time effectively (Creswell, 2016). The data collection procedures carried out in this study are interviews and documentation studies, where the interview conducted was a structured interview of seven sources at Universitas Terbuka. Approximately one hour of interview session was conducted on each source. An instrument in 20 question items was developed based on indicators on six themes of the concept of Assessment Fairness that Rasooli et al. (2018) describe. The results of interview recordings, both conducted virtually and directly, were stored and collected for conclusions/outlines. These data were called primary data obtained from sources, while documentation studies were employed to support and supplement primary data. The documented study was taken from data and records related to research issues, such as the rector's regulation file and guidebook of the "freedom of learning–independent campus" program in Universitas Terbuka. The files were obtained with the permission of the staff vice-chancellor of the academic affairs of the Universitas Terbuka.

The data analysis technique used was an interactive model analysis consisting of three components of analysis, namely "data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion withdrawal." In analyzing the data, this study referred to the theory put forward by Miles and Huberman (1994). In data reduction, the researchers conducted attention centering or focusing on the six themes in assessment fairness so that theory-based analysis was used, where the results of the primary data were made into summary to be grouped according to the indicators on each theme. The summary was presented to be juxtaposed with complementary data. Then, its conformity was analyzed so that conclusions can be drawn based on the fulfillment of each theme in the assessment fairness. Invalidating the data, researchers used a triangulation of sources involving different information that could coherently build thematic justification (Creswell, 2016). That way, it can compare the perspectives of the various criteria of selected sources and compare the interview results with the contents of supporting documents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Opportunity for Learning and Access to Demonstrate Learning

The first assessment fairness concept is divided into two parts, where the learning opportunity has three interpretations. The first interpretation is whether the student has access to quality resources to study the content and prepare assessments. The second interpretation is the summative assessment, whether the student has access to the content and testing material before the assessment. Then the third interpretation is in line with formative instruction and assessment, namely the need for various learning opportunities in response to students' differential learning abilities, styles, and peculiarities. The conclusion obtained from the expert's view is that as a distance education organizing college, Universitas Terbuka opens the opportunity for students who follow an independent campus program to the Universitas Terbuka to feel the benefits of online learning.

> *This MBKM provides students with access to sources of knowledge and competencies outside their study programs/universities so that they can provide strengthening and self-enrichment. The access provided by Universitas Terbuka certainly opens up opportunities for outside students to feel the advantages of Universitas Terbuka's online learning.* (An interview with A on September 7, 2021)

However, because the take-off of this program is a partnership, the cooperation needs to be improved to provide access to this program service for all students scattered in different regions; as stated in the rector's regulations related to this program, the participation of students in independent campus programs outside Universitas Terbuka.

> *Student participation in independent campus programs outside Universitas Terbuka can only be recognized whether the college or institution organizing the independent campus program has been bound in cooperation with the Universitas Terbuka or has received recommendations/approval of faculty/graduate programs from the Universitas Terbuka.* (Chapter 7 verse 3, Universitas Terbuka rector's regulations)

While the additional conclusions of the program's policy-making team explain that in the independent campus program, students are given access to several facilities such as printed and digital teaching materials in the hope that students can learn teaching materials independently. Universitas Terbuka provides learning assistance in asynchronous online tutorials known as tutorials online as a form of student self-study support services. Students can participate in discussion activities and tasks that contribute to their assessment in the tutorial. In line with this, the speakers' views as implementers of the program's policy say that by participating in online tutorial activities, students have an overview and understanding of the material to be tested.

The rector's regulations mentioned that learning in this program can be carried out in lectures and non-academic. Learning activities in independent campus programs organized by universities and other institutions that students participate in can be carried out online, offline, or both, including assessment of learning outcomes in an independent campus program organized by the Universitas Terbuka for students of other universities, implemented online with interaction asynchronous or synchronic. At the same time, the program's policy-making team added that until now, the draft exam used is a web-based online exam system (website).

Then in the second part, access to demonstrate learning, compared to opportunity for learning, considers fairness before assessment and closely aligned with instruction. Access to demonstrate learning provides students with "diverse" opportunity, varied, fair, and meaningful to demonstrate their learning" (Tierney, 2016) has usually been marked in terms of assessment opportunities given to students to show what they know or can do (Rasooli et al., 2018). However, based on the information explained earlier, the assessment used in the course is a web-based online exam with multiple choice forms only.

Transparency, Consistency, and Justification

In the second theme of assessment fairness, information focuses on three aspects of the assessment: transparency, consistency, and clarification/justification. Experts give their view that the Universitas Terbuka is known to have reasonably good transparency in terms of transparency.

Universitas Terbuka is famous for its reasonably good transparency. With standardized tests. Universitas Terbuka has a pretty good testing center, so the standardization for its consistency is good. Universitas Terbuka has a basis for assigning values and items. So it is perfect for justification. Therefore, Universitas Terbuka has an edge point in this second point. (An interview with K on September 3, 2021)

That is supported by the justification of the program's policy-making team, that students will know the composition of the assessment informed to the PIC (partner study program) and at the time provide student debriefing on how to study at the Universitas Terbuka. When they enter the system, they will get the same learning help and assessment process as other students. While the information obtained from the implementation of the program policy, most of the information is also listed on the website and catalog and in the Universitas Terbuka Remote Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ), which is spread in 39 cities/regencies in Indonesia. Then in the online tutorial class, information about the assessment composition was always included at the beginning of the session. Meanwhile, all implementation of independent campus programs held by other universities or institutions other than universities will be monitored and evaluated by lecturers or officers appointed and applied by the Universitas Terbuka. The rector's regulations explain that the acquisition of student learning outcomes in learning outside the Universitas Terbuka will be transferred and recognized by the Universitas Terbuka by the provisions of the systematic assessment of functional study outcomes at the Universitas Terbuka.

Accommodations

In terms of accommodation, facilitating students with different backgrounds becomes the focus researchers observe. Experts assess that this point may not be critical to the program because international students will not forever join, so only given the equalization of perception and the provision of hold packs given after the student registration. However, the program's policy-making team said that it is possible in the future to build student exchanges with the provision of foreign language teaching materials or the availability of bilingual MBKM classes. That is based on the existence of a relationship with OU5 (Open University 5).

We are collaborating with OU5 (Open Universities 5), namely Open University Malaysia (OUM), University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU), Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), and Hanoi Open University (HOU). However, it is still exploring student exchange cooperation/taking courses between these universities. So that the hope is that in the future, the Open University can provide teaching materials using English, tutorials and exams can also use English which will be processed gradually. (An interview with E on September 2, 2021)

Thus, the hope is that Universitas Terbuka can provide access to international students who want to join, then the implementation of this program policy said because so far, the source introduction is still in Indonesian, so arrangement or alignment is needed. "So far, no unique materials have been provided using foreign languages. International students who take MBKM at Universitas Terbuka must be those who can speak Indonesian" (An interview with R on September 2, 2021). Therefore, if there are international students who take the program at Universitas Terbuka must be masters of Indonesian.

Do No Harm and Constructive Classroom Environment

This fourth theme focuses on how to provide comfort for students during the learning and assessment process. The conclusion of experts considers that plagiarism is one form to provide comfort for students who are very concerned with creativity.

How do students feel comfortable during learning/care? This case can be described as plagiarism prevention in Learning Management System (LMS) to provide comfort for students who pay excellent attention to originality. In addition to supporting the creation of a comfortable atmosphere in the learning process, Tutors can use the LMS page for individual guidance. However, the challenge is how tutors can understand to provide such services in online tutorials. (An interview with K on September 3, 2021)

Thus, it must always be instilled and reminded in learning. For this reason, in implementing the assessment, Universitas Terbuka provides an assessment of learning outcomes in various models, namely paper-pencil-based supervised with strict discipline and a web-based *online* exam system equipped with online-based applications *proctoring* independently with the randomized matter, so the hope is to build an honest student character. Honesty is a fundamental value that students in self-study must own since, in self-study, self-control is done by students themselves.

While implementing the policy of this program, one form of respect for students in the assessment process is to allow students to apply for dissatisfaction with the services of Universitas Terbuka or against the results of grades obtained. Where complaints will be processed to the root can even provide data that can be accessed directly by the study program to the testing center. While the policy-making team of the independent campus program views giving responses in chats to serve students, providing feedback to students and providing opportunities for students to increase value in online tutorials as a form of respect for students.

Avoid Score Pollution

According to experts who are the sources of this study, the term pollution for scores should be used with caution because learning is a process. In the classroom, there is a natural development of students, so in the learning process, we must be able to provoke students' creativity. In addition, in the context of undergraduate education, it is seen as dynamic to develop the advantage side of students. The program's policymaking team explained that value in online tutorials could be conditioned by tutors who usually pay attention to several aspects such as whether the answer contains plagiarism, student attitudes, and speed of answers. However, for test scores, that does not apply.

Universitas Terbuka is famous for its objectivity which is the conclusion of the view of the source as implementers of program policies. In that case, the assessor and the judge do not know each other, so the possibility is enormous to avoid the subjectiveness of values. Therefore, for the acquisition of test scores, there are no other factors that affect the value of students.

At Universitas Terbuka, this assessment is fair (based on the process), so it is improbable that there is an intervention that is a moral hazard. A web-based online exam system equipped with online-based proctoring applications makes it impossible for other factors to influence assessment. Furthermore, what distinguishes the score is only the intelligence and readiness of students in doing the exam. (An interview with A on September 7, 2021)

Group Work and Peer Assessment

This theme describes fairness in peer assessments that provide additional information on how tutors can enforce fair peer assessment practices in classroom assessment. This theme aims to focus on the perception and satisfaction of fairness for students concerning the value they receive. Peer assessment is the latest trend in the assessment system, where students are directly involved in assessing other students. Interviewees as implementers of program policies view that, so far, the implementation of group tasks is still rarely done because online tutorial classes focus more on independent tasks. "There should be a group work session because the e-learning system is available, but it has become less because LMS uses independent tasks" (An interview with H on August 31, 2021).

Meanwhile, experts said that group work and peer assessment are very likely to occur in the learning process. Although it is not currently developed in online tutorial classes. It is just that the

availability of features in the system allows interactions such as discussions or tasks that can be done together. In essence, the opportunity to do this is open to students, so it does not mean that students in online learning are asocial. In addition, this can happen because the MBKM program provides a student learning experience from various places. Thus, group work and peer assessment must be built in the context of Universitas Terbuka's independent campus program as well as possible so outside students who follow this program can feel the atmosphere and peculiarities of Universitas Terbuka. The policy-making team said that group work and peer assessment is vital because student learning is currently unable to use group work facilities, although, in online tutorial applications, the facility already exists but has not been explored to its fullest.

Discussion

One of the advantages of distance education is that students can start, stop and adjust individual learning as needed (Diehl & Cano, 2019). One component of distance education is autonomy, where students participate in deciding what is learned, how to learn it, and how much is learned (Moore, 2019). Therefore, an independent campus will further strengthen the learning independence of Universitas Terbuka students by strengthening IT-based services and application development that support students both in the future academic aspects and academic administration. Because the characteristic of distance education is where teaching behavior is carried out separately from learning behavior, communication between students and tutors must be facilitated with print, electronic, mechanical, or other media (Moore, 2019). At the same time, various activities in online tutorial learning assistance services such as discussions and assignments can be used as an opportunity for students to show their ability in the self-study process. Empirical studies also show that learners feel treated fair when given multiple assessment opportunities (Duffield & Spencer, 2002; Mauldin, 2009). From an ethical perspective, learning cannot be fully recognized or judged by insufficient opportunity to demonstrate it (Tierney, 2014). Furthermore, the assessment procedure provided applies equally to all students. The thing to note is that students must have a solid motivation to show their abilities because one of the factors that affect the success of the curriculum is student motivation (Andrian, 2019).

Then, Universitas Terbuka has advantage points in transparency, consistency, and justification, that the advantage of the Universitas Terbuka is process accountability. With high justice, no intervention is a moral hazard. The importance of three aspects in this theme is because transparency can improve students' access to opportunities for learning and access to demonstrate learning by giving them explicit learning and assessment expectations (Tierney, 2013). Transportation without consistent application across students or sorority groups can adversely affect fairness, especially in graded assessments (Rasooli et al., 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to justify what happens during the communication of criteria and assessment decisions. It is supported that the Distance Education Syllabus must contain assessment information that contains assessment instructions, evaluation criteria, precourse and postcourse assessment (Simonson et al., 2015).

Accommodation in a fair assessment system illustrates that tutors must provide different accommodations for bilingual and special needs students concerning learning needs specific to them (Rasooli et al., 2018). In some studies, the provision of written assessment tasks modified according to language background needs shows significant performance improvements (Siegel, 2007; Siegel, 2014), of course, without giving them the advantage of other students who do not receive such accommodation. In line with this, because online distance education is global, learning design must pay attention to the needs and expectations of all students, so the learning design process must pay attention to the condition of students with different backgrounds, skills, knowledge, cultural norms, accessibility of resources, potential disabilities (Heiser & Ralston-Berg, 2019). The state of distance education learning resources that use Indonesian is not without reason since distance education must provide access for various students in various conditions that are not only digital or online but geographical and cultural (Shearer and Park, 2019).

In providing comfort to students during the learning and assessment process, the student must proactively maintain a constructive learning environment as a regulatory strategy for fair assessment (Tierney, 2014). In the context of assessment, the theme does not harm, and a constructive classroom environment conveys the meaning that students should be treated with respect and care (Cowie, 2015; Green et al., 2007). Because one of the problems in the assessment is plagiarism, there should be a clear policy on plagiarism (Simonson et al., 2015). In distance education, personal empathy and personal relationships between students and tutors support learning and improve learning outcomes (Holmberg, 1983). Thus, it must present empathy and a friendly atmosphere in distance education, where the interaction of tutors and students can be done in terms of guidance, explanation, example, and assessment (Holmberg, 1983).

In addition, to prevent other factors that affect the assessment of the system's objectives implemented by the Universitas, Terbuka has supported this. This discussion is supported by the idea that the value of students should exclude factors that are not relevant to their achievements (Downing & Haladyna, 2004; Green et al., 2007). For example, the contribution of nonachievement-related factors is considered unfair based on avoiding score pollution (Rasooli et al., 2018). Therefore, in distance education, planning plays an important role where every activity must be determined from the beginning. The size is apparent and set from start to finish (Peters, 2007). While the justice part in the assessment of colleagues and group work is still used as development and support for system improvement for agencies, students can be more involved in the assessment system, of course, to eliminate concerns about its validity and reliability, preparation is needed to ensure the assessment criteria are clearly understood (Simonson et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

The learning process in an independent campus program is one of the essential manifestations of student-centered learning. Learning in an independent campus program provides challenges and opportunities for the development of innovation, creativity, capacity, personality, and student needs, as well as developing independence in seeking and finding knowledge through reality and field dynamics such as ability requirements, real problems, social interaction, collaboration, self-management, performance demands, targets, and achievements. This concept is a continuation of the previous concept of Freedom of Learning (*Merdeka Belajar*). Planning the concept of an independent campus program is a learning innovation to obtain quality learning.

Based on the six concepts of assessment fairness theme, namely: (a) opportunity for learning and access to demonstrate learning; (b) transparency, consistency, and justification; (c) accommodations; (d) do no harm and constructive classroom environment; (e) avoid score pollution; and (f) group work and peer assessment (Rasooli et al., 2018), the conformity of the concept in the practice of assessment on the independent campus program in open and distance education has largely been fulfilled. The most prominent power is in three themes: transparency, consistency, and justification; do no harm and constructive classroom environment, and avoid score pollution. The assessment process applied by the Universitas Terbuka as an organizer of open and distance education has shown the indicators of the three themes described in the discussion. Through the independent campus program that is designed and implemented correctly, students' hard skills and soft skills will be formed strongly (Director General of The Ministry of Education, 2020). Independent campus has become a new concept that allows students to gain independence to study in college (Leuwol et al., 2020; Muhsin, 2021; Wijayanto, 2021).

Opportunity for learning and access to demonstrate learning is another theme that indicators almost fulfill. It is just that the program provided learning assistance in the form of asynchronous online tutorials only, so the opportunity to get various learning assistance services is reduced. While in the learning system generally, students can use learning assistance services in online tutorials (asynchronous) and webinar tutorials (synchronous), and various other assessments. Where this service is a peculiarity and mainstay of open and distance education, the hope

is that the independent Campus program can be autonomous and flexible learning to create an innovative learning culture for the needs of students (Rodiyah, 2021; Rohiyatussakinah, 2021).

The other two themes, namely accommodations and group work and peer assessment, are still developing a system that requires arrangement or alignment. Thus, it can be an input and reference material for further development of the institution; that way, the indicators in these themes can be fully fulfilled. Moreover, fair assessment practices can be encouraged by students in the learning process carried out. Because basically, the system has allowed these things to be done in open and distance education.

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