Constructivist Approach applied to Leadership Learning: Life Immersion Learning Model

Rania Ibrahim, Students Affairs, Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Akila Sarirete, Department of Computer Science, Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces student-initiated projects outside the classroom as an effective method for developing intended learning outcomes (ILOs) based on Effat university graduate characteristics and national accreditation standard for learning and teaching. The characteristics of the university graduate are based on the IQRA values (core values that stand for: adopting research for life, social values, responsible and creative leadership, and effective communication). Furthermore, the academic programs ILOs are designed according to National Qualification Framework (NQF) of the National Commission of Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA). Effat Ambassadors Program (EAP) is a co-extra-curricular program with ILOs that focus on developing Effat student as ambassadors of IQRA values. ILOs related to social and educational values and responsible leadership are the most difficult to achieve and assess; therefore a constructivist approach towards leadership learning is described as “Life Immersion Learning Learning Model” (LIM). This paper demonstrates LIM by focusing on one of the EAP projects initiated by the Student Government, which was to launch a TEDx EffatU chapter for Effat University in Saudi Arabia. This project, as a real life project, was found to yield excellent results in terms of meeting characteristics of Effat graduate, especially for social & educational values and responsible leadership. Another result is the optimum student and teacher satisfaction and involvement.

Keywords: Accreditation, Constructivist, Leadership, Learning, Immersion, Intended Learning Outcomes, Knowledge Management, National Commission of Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA), National Qualification Framework (NQF), Pattern Model for Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The Effat Ambassadors Program (EAP) is a co-extra-curricular program that strives to create leaders who will lead a meaningful life. The EAP derives its goals from the university’s vision for its graduates and derives it intended learning outcomes from the NQF specified in NCAAA. The NQF divide the ILOs into five divisions: knowledge, cognitive, personal and interpersonal skills, numerical and computer skills, psychomotor skills. ILOs specified under personal and interpersonal skills relate to leadership development, and according to the IQRA, the Q and R which stand for ethical and social values, and responsible and creative leadership (Jamal Al-Lail, 2009). The ultimate goal of EAP is to equip students with leadership

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qualities needed to lead a successful meaningful life. The EAP is divided into 10 seminars that students need to complete before graduation. In an attempt to increase its effectiveness and popularity among students, EAP instructors tend to use innovative pedagogies under the constructivist approach to learning, to engage students more and to achieve ILOs that are found difficult to assess. Approaches to teaching include project based learning and learning by design, and they are used to meet leadership ILOs (Gagnon & Collay, 2001; Han & Bhattacharya, 2001). The Student Government (SG), as part of year plan decided to initiate TEDx EffatU and they worked closely with the institution from the head of the institution to the bottom. They recruited many students from all departments across the university to participate in the project and work with them. The project was a manifestation of students taking the initiative and the lead.

The project based learning approach utilized in TEDx EffatU is quite different from any project that could be introduced by an instructor in a course because it is initiated by the students and run by the students themselves. The project was entirely led by the students and the whole administration was directed working for them. The whole team was working on realizing a real task in the real world that added to the record of the university. The value of the project resides in its importance to the community and its strategic value to the university. Students exercised many responsible and creative leadership roles by introducing an innovative idea that supported their project.

The project launching TEDxEffatU Chapter in Jeddah included various tasks: fundraising, identifying important speakers, preparing program, stage design and direction, marketing and selling tickets, registration of participants… etc. All these tasks required student committees and student leaders for each committee. Students recruited each other from the different departments according to need. Students from Architecture were invited to design the stage; students from marketing and business were invited to join in marketing for the event, and so on. In addition to all the experiences gained by students in all the areas listed above, so many incidents that were unplanned brought other types of problems to the table which involved conflict and resolution; rights and responsibilities; ethics and business, email etiquette …etc. All such learning experiences were unplanned, yet these difficulties yielded the opportunity for deeper learning and enhancement of leadership skills.

2. DEEP LEARNING IN LEADERSHIP

The importance of student personnel development, or what was later got to be known as student affairs started after a meeting back in 1937 when 19 prominent leaders attended the meeting of the American Council on Education, and followed that meeting with a “Student Personnel point of view” proposition that encouraged the holistic approach to education. They advocated that learning does not happen in vacuum, but rather in an environment of rich experiences that allows for their personal growth, and encourages them to reach their potential and discover their capabilities (Leon, 2005).

Since the beginning of the 21st Century, leadership education has gained more depth and greater importance, especially in the wake of all the global economic and political crises, and especially in America. Gonzalez in Leon (2005) explains that leadership has lately become the focus of attention “because of current events and scandals that have plagued corporate America.” Abuse, misdeeds and even fraud have increased with “seemingly very little acknowledgement or remorse for their [corporate and other leaders] roles in the demise or handling of their companies.” Gonzalez (2005) further contends that “higher education is at a critical juncture in its history. If it is to survive and thrive, the one thing it needs more than anything is the leadership that will take it to the next level of development.”
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