# Analysis of the Use of Online Tutorial [*]

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UT (Universitas Terbuka), the open university in Indonesia, is one of the large universities in Indonesia that has more than 300,000 students. UT, as a distance learning education, has conducted online tutorial since 2001. The implementation of an effective and efficient online tutorial depends on three components: students, tutors, and supporting facilities. The low interaction between students and tutors in the online tutorial of UT can be expectedly anticipated by giving additonal features. Thus, when the students and tutors log in, it will be simultaneously visible and the students can interact directly.

*Keywords:* tutorial, online, distance education

## Introduction

The number of students of the distance education universities in Southeast Asia has risen dramatically from year to year. UT (Universitas Terbuka), the open university in Indonesia, is one of the large universities in Indonesia that has more than 300,000 students. It is caused by the distance education that gives the public easier access to studing in the university, as stated by Belawati (2010), "Open education or open learning is a vision of an educational system accessible to every individual with minimal restrictions".

Distance education is a concept of distance learning that requires students to study independently. Knowles (1975) said that it included self-directed learning, self-planned learning, independent learning, self-education, self-instruction, self-teaching, self-study, and autonomous learning.

UT provides tutorial services to facilitate the distance between lecturers and students. Tutorial aims at assisting students in solving various learning problems (Warsita, 2011). Students can join one or all kinds of tutorial which are offered by UT.

Tutorial is classified into two kinds, they are: f2f (face-to-face) tutorial and electronic tutorial. F2f tutorial is a meeting between the students and the tutor in a closed or an open room. Electronic tutorial should use supporting media in order that learning between the students and tutor runs well. The electronic tutorial utilizes technological and electronical advances, such as radio, television, compact disc, Website, and others.

## Online Tutorial System

Online tutorial is an Internet-based tutorial. It aims at optimizing the process of distance learning. Consequently, hardly-reachable area and students who cannot meet f2f can still study well. Online learning can

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also help in situations where the students are spread out over a vast geographic region (Bong, 2009).

UT has carried out online tutorial since 2001. Online tutorial is a virtual class. In other words, it is a class in the virtual world. Virtual classrooms are a special application of computer and Network technologies to the task of education (Horton, 2006).

Online tutorial service is an additional service for assisting students in the learning process, but not all of the courses in UT have the online tutorial (see Table 1). E-learning is the use of information and computer technologies to create learning experiences (Horton, 2006). Students are not obligated to take the online tutorial, except for the students of the graduate program. The students who take tutorial and are active in it will get scores that contribute to the final scores.

Table 1

*Recapitulation of Courses of Online Tutorial February,2011*

| No. | Faculty/Program | Course |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences | 157 |
| 2 | Faculty of Economy | 175 |
| 3 | Faculty of Social and Political Sciences | 314 |
| 4 | Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences | 172 |
| 5 | Master Degree in Fisheries Management | 14 |
| 6 | Master Degree in Public Administration | 45 |
| 7 | Master Degree in Management | 38 |
| 8 | Master Degree in Mathematics Education | 16 |
| 9 | Final Paper of Non-basic Education Program | 21 |
| 10 | Final Paper of Basic Education Program | 36 |
| Total | | 988 |

*Note*. Source: UT's syncmonitor, February, 2011.

Table 2

*Recapitulation of the Number of Students Accessing the Online Tutorial in February, 2011*

| No. | Faculty/Program | The number of students that accessed |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences | 4,066 |
| 2 | Faculty of Economy | 37,505 |
| 3 | Faculty of Social and Political Sciences | 57,269 |
| 4 | Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences | 10,454 |
| 5 | Master Degree in Fisheries Management | 79 |
| 6 | Master Degree in Public Administration | 1,787 |
| 7 | Master Degree in Management | 1,712 |
| 8 | Master Degree in Mathematics Education | 616 |
| 9 | Final Paper of Non-basic Education Program | 1,239 |
| 10 | Final Paper of Basic Education Program | 3,970 |
| Total | | 118,697 |

*Note*. Source: UT's syncmonitor, February, 2011.

Registration process of the online tutorial runs automatically, if the data of the students' registration are already saved in the database of UT center. Process of data synchronization is done until the fourth week of the online tutorial. As a consequence, the activation after the deadline cannot be processed. For new students, the activation process takes place about 3-14 days after the close of the registration period. This is caused by the

interval of the process of data transfer from Distance Learning Program Unit to the head office of UT. The grace period of the activation process is 6-8 hours. If the grace period is over, students must do the activation from the beginning.

Students must undertake the activation by registrating as members of UT online, as well as by submitting the correct email. Each member of the online tutorial will have an identity and a password after they finish the activation in the Website (http://student.ut.ac.id). Recapitulation of the number of the students that accessed the online tutorial in the registration period of 2011 can be seen in Table 2.

## Tutor of the Online Tutorial

Tutor of the online tutorial is the academic personnel from UT center, Distance Learning Program Unit, and the local universities. According to Belawati (1999), the tutor is a material expert who masters a particular course and has classification similar to teaching staffs in the conventional educational institutions. Ideally, the comparison of tutors of the online tutorial with students is 1:100. In some particular courses, there are more than 100 students in a class. This is caused by limitation of resources. The number of tutors of the online tutorial involved in the registration period of February, 2011 can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

*The Number of Tutors of the Online Tutorial February, 2011*

| No. | Faculty/Program | The number of tutors |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences | 190 |
| 2 | Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences | 258 |
| 3 | Faculty of Economy | 401 |
| 4 | Faculty of Social and Political Sciences | 243 |
| 5 | Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences | 17 |
| 6 | Master Degree in Fisheries Management | 45 |
| 7 | Master Degree in Public Administration | 43 |
| 8 | Master Degree in Management | 16 |
| 9 | Master Degree in Mathematics Education | 49 |
| 10 | Final Paper of Non-basic Education Program | 87 |
| Total | | 1,349 |

*Note*. Source: UT's syncmonitor, February, 2011.

Management of the online tutorial is not as easy as what was stated by Warsita (2011) who said that Web-based learning model was a simple learning model in which a tutor delivered instructional materials online and assigned the participants to obtain the learning materials by downloading them. In order to be communicative and interactive, online tutorial requires a special handling either in the supporting facilities or in the tutors' skills. When a skilled online facilitator teaches a well-written online course, the opportunities for learning are incredible, even better than traditional learning, are also known as a f2f class (Lehmann & Chamberlin, 2009).

In accordance with the guidebook of Universitas Terbuka (2004), a tutor of the online tutorial has responsibility to make and upload eight initiation materials, three assignments, and eight discussion forums. The tutor is required to access the online tutorial of his/her courses everyday, to answer questions or give response to the students as soon as possible, to check their assignments, to give assessment, and to upload the

final scores no later than two weeks after the final semester test. In the virtual classroom, learners and instructors can use e-mail, discussion forums, chat, polls, whiteboards, application sharing, audio and video conferencing, and other tools to exchange messages (Horton, 2006).

## Materials

Materials of online tutorial are taken from the main material book of UT. Weekly meeting of the online tutorial is called initiation. Initiation is an online tutorial activity in which some reading texts are given to the students in order to enrich their knowledge and they do not need to give any feedback.

Initiation might contain important parts of the course materials, exercises, interactive simulations through Web facilities, summaries, and motivation and learning strategies for the students. Initial greetings of the tutorial could consist of welcome words to the newly-joined students, course descriptions, the roles that are expected of the students and information on assignments. The initiation is uploaded in some ways, they are text pages, Web pages, link to file or Web and showing a directory that contains some files.

Discussion forum is intended for students to have sessions of asking and answering questions and to do other discussions, and it is not realtime. In the discussion forum and tasks of the online tutorial, facilities are given in order that the students or tutors can give feedbacks. The three tasks are given in the third, fifth, and seventh initiations. These tasks are aimed at assessing the students' achievement and success in following and comprehending materials of the online tutorial.

The contribution of the online tutorial assessment to the final test score is 30% for the online tutorial of the course and 50% for final paper of the program. There are two kinds of participation considered by the tutor: active participation and passive participation. Students are called as "active participants", if they ask questions, make comments, or respond to the questions or issues made by the tutor in the tutorial activity and the comments or answers from other tutorial members. Meanwhile, students are called as "passive participants", if they read without giving any responses. Passive participation is assessed 20%, active participation is 30%, and assignment is 50%.

## Analysis of the Use of Online Tutorial

There are some factors influencing students to join the online tutorial. The factors are internal and external factors of the students. The internal factors are the students' ability in using the Internet, concern, and time allocation. The higher the students' assessment on their own ability in using the Internet, the higher their level of concerns in using e-learning (Padmo & Julaeha, 2007). The external factor includes the limitation of the Internet network.

Constraint faced in the online tutorial is that the students do not know how to access the online tutorial. Some researches in UT identified the students' difficulty in accessing the online tutorial (Afriani, 2007; Budiwati, 2007; Dewatisari, Suprijanto, & Sugiyanto, 2010). The students' low participation in the online tutorial deals with low ability in using the learning technology, activity level, and network disturbance (Andriani, 2005; Susanti, 2007). The constraints they faced are long duration of the new activation in the tutorial online and the limited Internet facilities.

A tutor plays an important role in the success of an online tutorial. The tutors' role include the design and the implementation of the online tutorial. The role in the design is a tutor's creativity in making initiation's

materials, choosing discussion sentences that are interesting and match the needs and the distribution of assignments with the clear explanation. These are influential since if the communication style and the topic are not exciting, the students' participation in accessing the online tutorial will decrease. Students will tend to search other sources in the Internet. It is in line with the result of the research conducted by Yuliana and Winata (2009) who concluded that the more capable the students used the Internet, the lower their perceptions to the questions of the online tutorial were.

The tutor's active role was his/her discipline in uploading the material, discussion, and the assignment on schedule. The tutor expectedly possessed quantity and quality in answering or responding to the students' questions or comments. The tutor's lateness in uploading the initiation materials and responding to the discussion made the students rather passive (Budiwati, 2007; Susanti, 2007). There were tutors who were rarely presented online and failed to respond to some of the important postings by their students (Abas & Fadzil, 2009). It was important for tutors to have excellent written communication skills, since they interacted with people coming from different cultures and language backgrounds (Gervacio, 2011). The effect of cultural diversity of learners was in fact prominent in several aspects in their online learning and interaction behaviors as observed in the synchronous chat sessions and asynchronous forum board discussions (Bing & Ping, 2008). The answer was that anyone could teach online, but not everyone could do it well—at least not, without pedagogical training and due diligence (Lehmann & Chamberlin, 2009).

## Conclusions

The accomplishment of effective and efficient online tutorial depends on three components: students, tutors, and the supporting facilities. Low interaction between students and tutors in the online tutorial of UT can be expectedly anticipated with giving additional features. Thus, when the stuents and the tutors log in, it will be simultaneously visible, and the students can directly interact.

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