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## PROCEEDINGS Quality Assurance in Open University



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# THE EVALUATION OF THESIS DEFENCE IMPLEMENTATION AT GRADUATE PROGRAM OF UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA

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## Abstract

In terms of the implementation of learning process, graduate program of Universitas Terbuka (UT) has similarities with other universities. For example, each graduate program student is required to take a number of course credits per semester that have been determined by each study program. The final stage of the study completion for graduate program students is thesis defence. Thesis defence is an academic requirement for a master candidate at the end of the program. Thesis defence is a direct communication activity between the examiner committee consisting of five individuals: chair and secretary of the committee from UT's graduate program, expert examiner (external), first examiner (first supervisor) and second examiner (second supervisor) and the master candidate to defend his/her thesis. If the master candidate succeeds in maintaining his/her thesis in front of the examiner committee and is declared to be graduated, then he/she will be eligible to use academic title. This study was aimed at evaluating the implementation of thesis defence at UT's graduate program. Descriptive evaluative method with qualitative approach was employed to conduct this study. The results show that according to the head of UT's distance learning program unit (UPBJJ-UT), supervisors, expert examiner, and master candidates, the implementation of thesis defence at UT's graduate program has been run effectively. However, the results also show that there are things that have not worked effectively, including the directions given to the candidate to revise his/her thesis (introduction, literature review, methods, results, conclusions, bibliography).

Keywords: evaluation, thesis defence, UT's graduate program

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In terms of the implementation of learning process, graduate program of Universitas Terbuka (UT) has similarities with other universities. For example, each regular graduate program student is required to: take a number of course credits per semester that have been determined by each study program, actively participate in 8 (eight) online tutorial initiations and 4 (four) face-to-face tutorial meetings, do the tasks, and do the final examination each semester. For non-regular students, they do not have the face to face tutorial, which means that the whole learning process is conducted through online tutorial initiations.

In the end of third semester, students of regular and non-regular program are required to register for Residential Thesis Supervision I as a seminar of their thesis proposal and register for Residential Thesis Supervision II as an activity to report their research in front of their supervisors. After their thesis is signed by the first and second supervisors and after fulfilling both administration and academic requirements, it means that they are eligible to register for thesis defence.

Thesis defence is an academic requirement for a master candidate at the end of the program. Thesis defence is a direct communication activity between the examiner committee consisting of five individuals: chair and secretary of the committee from UT's graduate program, expert examiner (external), first examiner (first supervisor) and second examiner (second supervisor) and the master candidate to defend his/her thesis. If the master candidate succeeds in maintaining his/her thesis in front of the examiner committee and is declared to be graduated then he/she will be eligible to use academic title (Rosita, Dewiki, Susanti, Sudarmo, Supartomo, 2007).

Based on data released by Graduate Program of UT in March 2016, the students of UT's Graduate Program registered in 2016.1 are 2254 students and the students who have graduated until 2016.1 are 2169 students. While those who take the test session in the semester 2016.1 and 2016.2 are 690

students. In 2014 and 2015, students who can take the thesis defence are only about 59% of the total number of students. In the implementation, the thesis defence needs to have stages and requirements that must be met by students both administration and academic requirements. In relation to the issues, it is necessary to conduct evaluation on the implementation of the thesis defence examination at Graduate Program of UT in order to obtain information on the effectiveness of its implementation, which includes: pre-, during, and post-thesis defence examination.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Definition of Evaluation**

The concept of evaluation according to Ralph Tyler (in Arikunto 2009, p. 3) is a data collection process to determine the extent to which the objectives of a program are actually attained. Furthermore, Arikunto (2009) also explains that evaluation covers two steps, which are to measure and to asses. In line with Arikunto, Subali (2014) defines evaluation as a process to establish a program; to find out the effectivity of a plan.

Wirawan (2011, p. 7) defines evaluation as “a research to: collect, analyse and present useful information on evaluation object; asses and compare it with evaluation index and, furthermore, use the result to make a decision based on the evaluation.” In general, the term evaluation can be perceived as a procedure to appraise, rate, and assess, which is done based on its unit value. Therefore, one of the aims of evaluation program as stated by Stufflebeam (1971, in Arikunto and Jabar, 2008) is to present data to the decision maker.

### **2.2 Evaluation Models**

There are several models that can be used to gauge education program. However, they basically have the same interest, i.e., to collect information that is related to evaluated research problems. As proposed by Stephen Isaac (1986, cited in Tulung, 2014), the evaluation program models are labelled based on their focus, which are:

- a. Good oriented (the object of the research is the purpose of the program. Evaluation is carried out continuously to find out the accomplishment of a program)
- b. Decision oriented
- c. Transactional oriented
- d. Research oriented

Referring to Simbolon’s statement, (2003, in Handayani and Trisna, 2013, p. 198), evaluation should be able to measure these four indicators:

- a. Input
- b. Process
- c. Output
- d. Outcome

Evaluation of program activities is a mean to measure the success of programs implementation.

### **2.3 Education Services Quality**

The performance of good education depends on its purpose. Therefore, a good education should envelope any kind of education into its scheme. A fine quality of education should be well preserved because one little flaw can ruin the system as a whole.

The definition of service quality revolves around the idea of answering the costumer’s needs and also its distribution efficiency. In this case, service quality is the expected excellence rate and the control on customer demand fulfilment (Tjiptono and Diana, 2003). The quality of service can be measured by comparing costumers’ ideal to the service given.

Ariani (2003) proposes that quality is the overall characteristic of product or service to meet the costumer’s needs and hope. In this case, quality is major force that can affect the success of organizations and the growth of institutions, which also can be applied to the implementation of

education services. Act as the cornerstone for this matter is Act number 20, 2003 about National Educational System and Government Regulation number 19, 2005 about National Educational Standard which state that quality assurance in education is an obligation for both internal and external parties.

There are few possible scenarios to the education services. If the service is beyond costumers' expectation, then it is perceived as ideal. Meanwhile, the service is satisfying if it is in accordance with costumers' expectation. Lower than that, however, can raise a negative perception on education. Thus, the merit of service providers holds a very important position to satisfy costumers' demand consistently.

Essentially, humans always seek more. In this context, customer satisfaction cannot be used as an absolute standard; however, stand as it is, the method may provide useful information (derived from academic literature and interview, which are validated individually or in group). According to Giese and Cote (2000), there are three important components used to measure customer satisfaction: (1) summary of varied effective response; (2) satisfaction focus on product selection, purchase and consumption; (3) time to response adjusted to situation and limited by duration.

### **3 METHOD**

This research was conducted using evaluative method. According to Destianingtyas (2013) evaluative research is a procedure in collecting and analysing data systematically to determine the merit and worth of education services using certain criteria that are used as absolute or relative standard.

The place where the research was done is UT's Distance Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ-UT) that have graduate program. To narrow the research population, there were only nine programs chosen out of 28 programs by considering the number of students taking the test in 2016.1 and 2016.2 in Bengkulu, Jakarta, Kupang, Mejene, Mataram, Padang, Palangkaraya, Pontianak, and Samarinda.

The source of data in the research were all 690 graduate students at UT's Graduate Program who were registered in the thesis defence (Table 3.1). Also included in this research were the Head of UPBJJ, examiners and supervisors who were academically related to those students.

### **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Use as many sections and subsections as you need (e.g. Introduction, Methodology, Results, Conclusions, etc.) and end the paper with the list of references.

#### **4.1 Overview of Academic Information System at Universitas Terbuka**

The academic information system is established by utilizing hierarchical system and is supported by distinct divisions focusing on different functions. Those divisions are:

- a. Administrator as the main organizer of the system performs several functions:
  - 1) Data Master: managing profile data of university, chairman and study program, lecturer and the other employee's data.
  - 2) Academic Transaction: organizing students' admission and students' Study Plan Card (KRS)/Study Result Card (KHS) manual.
  - 3) System Management: Controlling access to each system and the administrator password, also optimizing database.
  - 4) Report: Printing Reports of Self Evaluation and Accreditation Support.
  - 5) Converting database to Data Centre of Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia.
- b. Study program which acts as the organizer of academic activities including lectures, research and community services according to their respective study. To fulfil these purposes, they cover several roles:
  - 1) Arranging the courses and printing the list of courses per semester.
  - 2) Managing the class or study program displacement.
  - 3) Directing academic supervisor assignment.
  - 4) Managing students' final project (thesis).
  - 5) Changing administrative password of the study program.



- c. Administrative affair division, which manages the teaching and learning activities so that the lecture schedules between departments do not overlap. This division is responsible for various tasks, such as:
  - 1) Choosing a study program that will be managed.
  - 2) Managing academic activities: Setting the active semester, lecture and exam schedule, managing alphabetical score value including the numerical to alphabetical conversion value, managing curriculum conversion, and printing curriculum conversion data.
  - 3) Students' affairs: managing new students' data capacity and students' biographical data, printing info and students' status.
  - 4) Lecture: Managing Grade Point Average (IPK)/Grade Point (IP) data and cumulative Students' University Credit Unit (SKS) per year and cross-program joint classes, setting the lecture and room schedule, reporting class activities (lecturers' attendance, total students per class, printing exam attendance sheet, printing score list), printing subject list, management of thesis defence, generating temporary score, and printing students' Study Result Card (KHS).
  - 5) Changing administrative affair master password.
- d. Lecturers, which are in charge of conducting the teaching activity and directly interacting with students, have several functions:
  - 1) Lecture: providing academic schedule and e-learning activity (providing subjects, tasks, Q & A session, and designing class curriculum) for students.
  - 2) Managing student academic final score: analysing score (competency, attendance, mid-semester exam, and final semester exam), score input, calculating the students' final academic score, and printing the Participant List and Final Score (DPNA).
  - 3) Supervision: supervising Student Study Services (KKN) or Student Internship (PKN), and thesis if appointed to be.
  - 4) Biodata: inquiring lecturers' biographical data, adjusting biographical data, and changing password
- e. Students, which function to monitor academic activities, and to perform interaction with lectures, has several roles:
  - 1) Lectures: inquiring lectures schedule info, study plan card, attending e-learning activities (study subjects, exercise, Q & A session/Quiz, and info on lecture unit).
  - 2) Study Result: receiving information about study result card and temporary score transcript.
  - 3) Financial (if the Financial Information System is activated): Payment bill info and cumulative payment recap.
  - 4) Supervision: Acquiring Student Study Service (KKN) or Student Internship (PKN), and thesis supervision with appointed supervisors.
  - 5) Biodata: Inquiring biographical data, changing personal biographical data and password.

The implementation of academic information system at UT should be improved. As evaluated in this research, the distribution of the academic information which is related to thesis defence should be improved. This matter is vital, considering the high number of the candidates who were not aware of the detail of the test. In this case, the score of this information distribution is only 25% to 50% in overall. The growth of those percentages is important since the delivery of this information from Universitas Terbuka to the supervisors, examiners, and candidates is crucial.

## **4.2 Overview of The Preparation of Thesis Defence Implementation at Graduate Program of Universitas Terbuka**

Based on the data processed from the research result, the overview of thesis defence implementation at Graduate Program of Universitas Terbuka are as follow:

- a. The Preparation of Thesis Defence Implementation According to The Head of UT's Distance Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ-UT)

The Head of UPBJJ states that, in overall, the preparation of thesis defence implementation at Graduate Program of UT has been run well. However, the process itself was not managed fully efficient. The information of thesis defence schedule and the test requirement submission, for example, was often delivered via the students' and supervisors' e-mail, short message, and WhatsApp; and unfortunately, the distribution was not yet utilizing UT's website. Then, the students sent the documents required for thesis defence by mail, but not yet collected directly by the UT staffs. Also, the duration needed to hold the test session, started from the last date of thesis defence requirement submission, was affected by the number of candidates and UT staffs; however, the duration itself did not correspond with the

Standard Operating Procedures of the test. Moreover, the time and location detail of the test session were announced on website and on the second Residential Thesis Supervision; however, none of the lecturers and students receive it through e-mail, short message, or WhatsApp.

b. Preparation of Thesis Defence Implementation According to Supervisors

In general, according to the Supervisors, the thesis defence implementation has been run smoothly. Nevertheless, there were still some components which did not run as it must. One of them was the distribution of information about supervisors' appointment which was often conducted via e-mail and short message, phone call, or WhatsApp, whereas, effectively this information could also be delivered by costumer service. Also, the supervision technical guidance was often distributed via e-mail and directly to the supervisors or students, not by costumer service or other media. Furthermore, the thesis defence schedule was delivered through e-mail and short message, phone call, or WhatsApp; hardly utilizing costumer service. Likewise, utilities needed for thesis defence were often announced via e-mail and short message, phone call, or WhatsApp, but this information was rarely delivered through customer service.

c. Preparation of Thesis Defence Implementation According to Examiners

The Examiners point out that the preparation of thesis defence at graduate program was well managed. However, there were few components that do not run effectively. One of the most noticeable one was the assignment of expert examiners via e-mail and short message, phone call, or WhatsApp, whereas such information was rarely delivered through website or other media. Then, the thesis draft submission guidance was often delivered to home/workplace near exam time (at UT). However, there was rarely any link included in this guidance or in other forms of similar information. Lastly, further instruction given to the expert examiners was hardly announced on website, as it was usually distributed in the form of short message, phone call, and WhatsApp, or explained by costumer service.

d. Preparation of Thesis Defence Implementation According to Candidates

According to the candidates, the preparation of thesis defence implementation at Graduate Program of UT was generally effective. However, they believed that some aspects can be improved. For instance, the information about supervisors was often delivered by e-mail and short message, phone call, or WhatsApp. In addition, the data about expert examiner often included his/her e-mail, phone number, and institution. No other supporting info such as home address seems to be added. Meanwhile, the supervision with first and second supervisors was usually run by direct meeting and e-mail, not by video call.

### **4.3 Overview of Thesis Defence Implementation at Graduate Program of Universitas Terbuka**

a. The implementation of Thesis Defence According to The Head of UT's Distance Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ-UT)

The implementation of Thesis Defence According to The Head of UT's Distance Learning Program Unit was generally effective. This fact is proven by the achievement of candidates in the thesis defence, both in term of performance and ability, the service given during the test, and provision of suggestion for Final Task of Graduate Program (TAPM).

b. Implementation of Thesis Defence According to Supervisors

The supervisors agree that the thesis defence at UT was well implemented. However, there were several issues to be noticed. It was found out that most of difficulty experienced by candidates during the defence was their lack of understanding on the research methodology. They were also not adept enough to present the research result. Fortunately, there was no other problem occurred during the thesis defence.

c. Implementation of Thesis Defence According to Examiners

The UT's thesis defence was effectively managed as seen from the readiness of facilities (information, test room, LCD projector, sound system, and others) provided by UPBJJ-UT for the test session.

d. Implementation of Thesis Defence According to Candidates

The implementation of thesis defence was generally effective according to the candidates. This testimony is supported availability of tools such as information, test room, LCD projector, sound system, and others provided by UPBJJ-UT for thesis defence. Moreover, the instructions given by expert examiner, first and second examiner about how to improve background, conceptual foundation, methodology, findings discussion and recommendation, and others also contributed to this positive result. In addition, the candidates were also helped by the instruction from the chair commission about presentation technique, thesis defence code of conduct, thesis draft correction time management and its deadline, and schedule and requirement of final assessment.

#### **4.4 Overview of Thesis Defence Implementation Result at Graduate Program of Universitas Terbuka**

a. Result of Thesis Defence Implementation at Graduate Program of UT According to the Head of UT's Distance Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ-UT)

The Head of UPBJJ explains that the result thesis defence implementation was generally effective. However, there are several points to note, one of them is the follow-up information after the test session which was often delivered by the committee, but was rarely done by expert examiner, first and second examiner, and chairman of the commission. Subsequently, the post-test action was often taken in form of coordination of the Head of UPBJJ-UT with the chairman of the commission. However, this process rarely involved expert examiner, first and second examiners, and the students.

b. Result of Thesis Defence Implementation at Graduate Program of UT According to Supervisors

The supervisors state that the result of the UT's thesis defence was largely effective. Nonetheless, there are some aspects needed to be evaluated, especially the follow-up action after the test session which was often in the form of draft correction including its further guidance, communication with students and committee from UPBJJ-UT. There was no additional action taken other than that.

c. Result of Thesis Defence Implementation at Graduate Program of UT According to Examiners

The examiners affirm that result of thesis defence implementation at Graduate Program of UT was effective in general. This finding can be proven from the supervision given to the candidates, which included reinforcement of research background, methodology, findings and discussion, and recommendation. In addition, the candidates were also given more direction about preliminary study, the preliminary data reinforcement, information about previous research, and the importance of research. Regarding to conceptual foundation, the candidates were provided with further direction about identification of theory relevance to the research, the relevance of present research to previous research, the mind frame, and citation technique; followed by direction about methodology (research design, operationalization of variables, research models, data collection and data analysis).

Subsequently, the direction related to the research results presentation was given in form of explanations about identification of data analysing accuracy, technique to explain the context of research result, technique to discuss research result, technique to utilize the result of interview, theories, and information about previous research to discuss the research results. Afterwards, candidates were given explanation and suggestion of how to write conclusion and recommendation which was mainly about effective way to describe conclusion, to explain the context of conclusion, to give recommendation, and how to utilize case study in explaining recommendation. Lastly, they received the information about the presentation of bibliography (bibliography writing, how to avoid plagiarism, citation compatibility with bibliography, and increasing the accuracy of bibliography).

d. Result of Thesis Defence Implementation at Graduate Program of UT According to Candidates

According to the candidates, the result of thesis defence implementation at Graduate Program was generally effective. Nonetheless, there are several points to be noticed, one of them is the notification of post-test information from the thesis defence implementation which was dominantly in form of note from expert examiner, and head of commission.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that the implementation of thesis defence at UT's graduate program is considered effective in general according to the Head of UT's Distance Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ-UT), supervisors, examiners, and candidates. However, there are several elements that have not worked effectively, which are post-test information, follow-up action conducted after the test, given direction to the master candidates, guidance on conceptual foundation and methodology, method of research results presentation, direction on suggestion and conclusion presentation, bibliography, and difficulties during the test session.

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