The Improvement of Online Tutorial Implementation at Universitas Terbuka
(Based on SWOT Analysis)

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ABSTRACT

The provision of online tutorial, as an instructional media, is an important need of a distance education since it is the implementation of one of the distance education characteristics that is an instructional process takes place any time and any where. By provision of quality online tutorial, it is expected that students can get quality learning support services. In Universitas Terbuka (UT) cases, there is still inappropriate implementation of online tutorial that effects the decrease of its quality. This paper describes in detail the results of SWOT analysis on research findings in and study of the implementation of online tutorial at UT, especially in terms of a tutor component. In general, the weaknesses in internal aspects of the online tutorial implementation are an unthorough planning of human resource development which results in: not all tutors have adequately subject matter, pedagogic, and technologic competencies; tutors' abilities to manage online tutorial classes are not proportional to the size of class which they have to manage; and tutors have low self-belonging to the task that they have to conduct. This internal weaknesses can make worse the quality of online tutorial when those face external threats, those are, the velocity of instructional technology development and paradigm changes in science and pedagogy. On the other side, the increase of the number of UT tutors who are young and technology literate can become an asset in improving the quality of online tutorial process. Making efficient use of the internal assest should be accompanied by making use of external assests, those are, the provision of human resources from other educational institutions that can become competent tutor through competency development program as well as the development of technology in order to facilitate tutor in administering online tutorial. Based on the results of SWOT analysis, it is recommended that UT should make online tutorial planning that takes into account the tutor competencies as the essential criteria in recruiting tutors, tutor competency development through evaluation and supervision of onlinne tutorial process, as well as the development of friendly-use technology of online tutorial by cooperation with other institution, if needed.

Keywords: Online Tutorial, tutor competencies, supervision

Introduction

Universitas Terbuka (UT) as an open and distance education institution applies a concept of self-directed learning in its instructional processes. The implementation of a self-directed learning approach requires students to explore by themselves learning resources that are related to the learned courses. Therefore, students' success in their study is affected by their initiative, discipline, creativity, and perseverance in their learning process.

In order to facilitate students' success in and improve the quality of their learning process, UT provides student learning support services, such as tutorial and academic counseling, which can assist students in solving their learning problems and motivating them to be independent students. Tutorials in various modes, such as face-to-face and mediated tutorials, are conducted to help students to master their learning materials and solving their learning problem. Meanwhile, the academic counseling provides opportunities for students to ask for assisting in handling their faced problems that are related to their study so that they can finish their study in accordance with their plan.

Online tutorial is one of mediated tutorials that UT provides for students who have access to internet, either by using their personal computer or a computer at their office, or at the public facilities (internet kiosks). The provision of online tutorial, as an instructional media, is an important need of a distance education since it implements one of the distance education characteristics that is an instructional process takes place any time and any where. Holmbreg, 1995 (Warnadi, 2000) distance tutorial is a most important component in distance education. By provision of quality online tutorials, it is expected that students can get quality learning support services. In addition, by participating in online tutorial, students will have experiences in using the technology in their learning process. However, UT students are not obligatory to get involve in online tutorials.

UT has developed online tutorial since 1999 with the name of electronic tutorial. As mentioned before, tutorial online is provided for students who have access to internet. There are eight initiations and three tutorial assignmnents in tutorial online that students have to accomplish for each course. In addition, online tutorial provides a discussion forum for students to give their ideas, submit or answer questions, and share experiences. The online tutorial takes place in 8 weeks for each registration periode. Students' participation and the results of tutorial assignments have contribution to the course final grade.

Since the 1999 to 2012, the number of courses that were provided by online tutorial and the number of students who participate in the online tutorial increase in every semester, as shows at Figure 1 and 2 (UT, 2013).
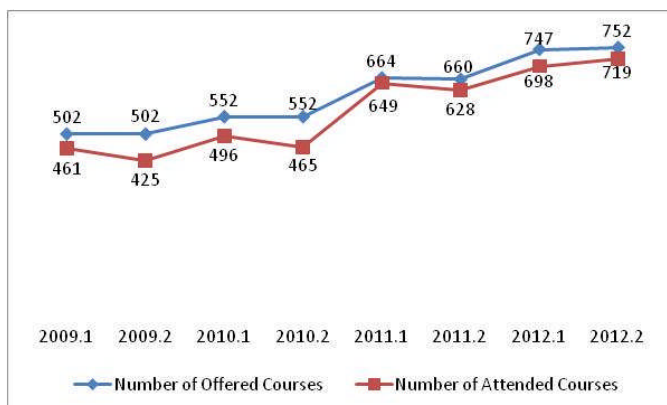
Figure 1
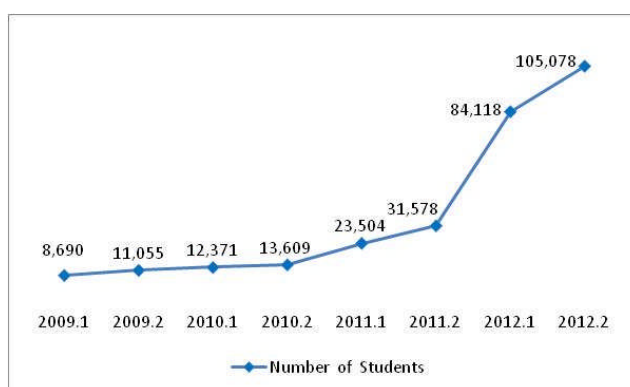The Number of Courses that are Provided Online Tutorial

Figure 2
The Number of Students Who Participate in Online Tutorial

The picture shows that the numbers of courses that UT provides with online tutorial increase in every semester. The increase of the availability of online tutorial in accordance with the fullfilment of UT's policy that all course should be provided by online tutorial. Along with the increase of the number of courses that are provided by online tutorial, the number of students who participate in online tutorial also increases. The highest increase takes place at the regisstration periode of 2012.2, thai is, 166%. The increase of student numbers in online tutorial is related to the students' awareness of benefit of participation in online tutorial, as well as the increase of students' literacy on information and communication technology.

SWOT Analysis of the Implementation of Online Tutorial at UT

The history of the online tutorial implementation at UT that has persisted for 13 years forms a journey from the wory to become the relief. Online tutorial, that at the beginning of its implementation, was to be worried about facing many barries because of various limitations, but now it shows its existence. As mentioned by Soekartawi (2004), that instructional problems at higher distance education were (1) student's limitation on access to instructional technology, (2) unavailability of support facilities for using instructional technology, and (3) high cost, including the cost of instructional technology use, both by students and the institution, However, Figure 2 shows the increase ofstudents who get involve in online tutorials.

Along with the development of online tutorials at UT, in order to increase the quality of the learning support services that UT provides, UT always conducts continuous improvement. This paper describes in detail the results of SWOT analysis on research findings in and study of the implementation of online tutorial at UT, especially in terms of a tutor component. The analysis was carried out to identify the strengths and weaknesses that UT has done as well as the opportunities and challenges that UT encounters in implementing online tutorial. Based on analysis results, UT can improve or increase the quality of online tutorial, especially that is related to tutor competencies in facilitating students' learning process.

Tutor: The Activator of Tutorial

It is stated in any references that the success of tutorials is depended on students' activities as independent learners (Darmayanti, 2011; Wardani, 2000; Yunus, 2004). Nevertheles, there is no doubt that tutor is a key person of successfull tutorial process. It is true because being active as independence learners that is required for successful tutorial process has to build dan develop since and during tutorial proceses take place. The person who incharges to play that role is tutor. This condition prevails upon any modes of tutorials. Especially online tutorial, in which there is no direct or indirect face-to-face interaction between students and tutors so that human touch and interpersonal communication are not always well contructed.

The uncontrolled condition that tutors face in online tutorial as they conduct intructions, seems not to be considered as challenges. It can be showed on tutor selection that not properly use criteria,   tutor trainings that are not comprehensive, as well as monitoring and evaluation of tutor that are not thoroughly conducted. Since online tutorial has been implemented at the first time until 2012, online tutorials has been conducted by UT lectures, both of the center office and the regional offices, without selection. They has been assigned as online tutor because the courses that are provided by online tutorial are their resposibility. Accordingly, not all tutors can optimally perform as online tutor.

Among other complaints that are addressed to tutors are related to the tutor performance which are not optimal. In her research, Budiwati (2007) stated that students were often disappointed because tutor did not follow the defined

tutorial scedule, such as tutor was late to begin the first tutorial session, or tutor was not in time in opening tutorial menu at each weekly session. Students objected when they had to open online tutorial every day because of their personal bussiness and no internet access. Accordingly, students asked for a definite schedule of tutorial and punishment for tutor who not well perform in online tutorial.

Another complaint that is related to tutor performance is that tutor did not optimally conduct their job. Budiwati (2007) declared that the management of online tutorial, that is Regional Offices, apparised that tutor did their duties in online tutorial in minimum portion. Tutor just uploaded the materials for initiation and discussion, as well as tutorial assignments. Beside that, tutor did not always reply to students' responses. When tutor replied to the students' responses, students appraised that their responses were not sufficient. Budiwati's research is accordance with Anggoro's research (2001) that showed the results of test case of 98 tutors in which 81% of tutors never opened their email that was used as one of media of online tutorial. According to Anggoro, most tutors never tried to contact every student who was not active and motivated them to be active.

A minimal role of tutor is a facilitator, that is a person who helps students in their learning process (Wardani, 2000). It appears that tutor do not always conduct such role properly. Meanwhile, tutor, actually, do not only play a role of facilitator but also as a counselor, a motivator, and a resource person. Those roles, that can not be get rid of the role of tutor as a facilitator, almost never played by a tutor. The management of online tutorial, that is the Regional Offices, appraised that tutor can not encourage students' motivation to actively participate in online tutorial process (Budiwati, 2007).

The lowness of being active in participating in online tutorial is described in some researches as follows. The research done by Anggoro (2001) showed the lowness of students of being active in online tutorial at the first time of implementation through the number of transaction between tutor and students (Figure 3).
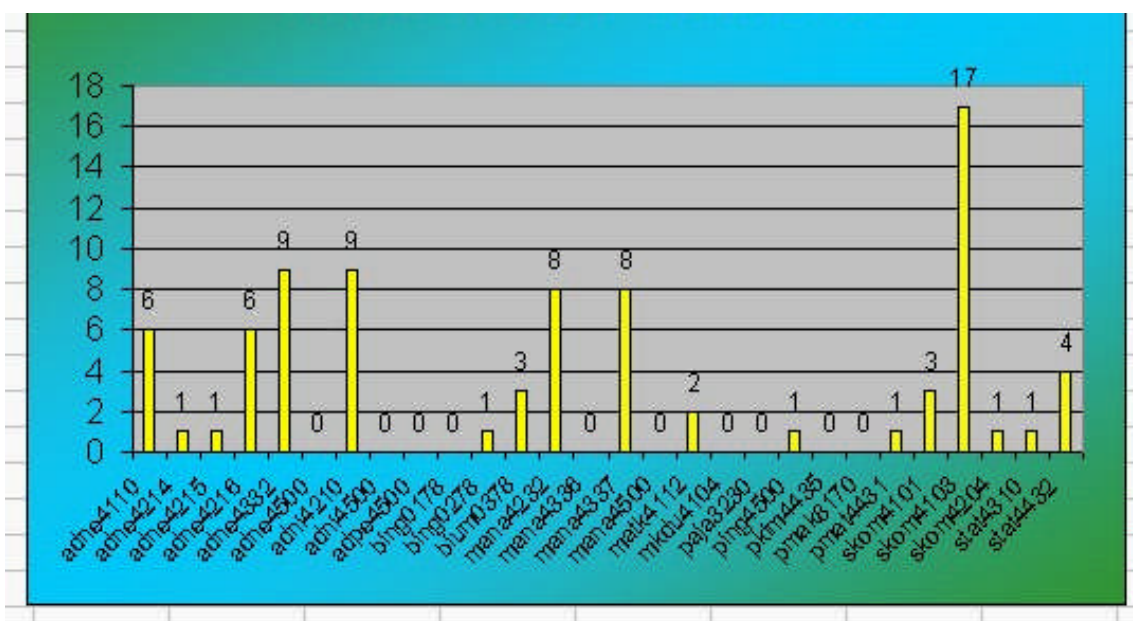
Source: Anggoro, et al., 2001

Figure 3
The Number of Transactions between Tutor and Students in Online Tutorial

It can be seen from the Figure 3 that out of those numbers of transactions in online tutorial, there are 18 courses in which transactions took place in online tutorial. And, from those 18 courses, the number of transactions in most of online is under 5 transactions. Besides that, Anggoro also stated that out of all courses in which students partcipated in online tutorail, there are online tutorials of 10 courses that had no transaction. It means that students in online tutorial for those 10 corses pasively participated. Meanwhile, six years later, the research done by Susanti (2001) still showed the lowness of being active for students in online tutorial process, that is, the mean of the number of days in online tutorial process less than 50% of the requirement. In fact, even, there are courses with those online tutorial had the number of days of students access per semester only 5% and the highest number of days per semester students access is only around 55%.

Tutor's incompetencies in encouraging students' motivation are related to the tutor recruitment and training aspects. Since the first time of online tutorial implementation until 2012., UT did not administer the recruitment of tutor. Tutors of online tutorial are all UT's lecturers who work both at the center office and the regional offices. They has been recruited based on the courses for which they are responsible and that are provided by online tutorial. But, since the beginning of 2013, by putting UT's policy into effect that all courses have to be provided by online tutorials, UT has administered tutor recruitmen from other higher educations because UT's human resources are not sufficient. This tutor recruitment was only based on education backgrounds that are relevant to the cources they will be tutored.

Tutor's competencies in designing and conducting online tutorial are expected to be accomplished by tutor through tutor training. But, so far, the training is only focused on achieving technical competencies, rather than on the achievement of pedagogical competencies. Thus, tutors do not have sufficient knowledge about how to present learning material in distance, as well as how to manage the class and students. Lack of tutor's knowledge and abilities led tutorial activities assessed boring by students as stated in the Budiwati's research (2007).

Unattractiveness of online tutorial for students as well dues to low mastery of tutor for learning materials which they have to be discussed in the tutorial process. In her research, Budiwati (2007) suggested that students assess the tutor often incomplete in giving explanations. Low mastery of tutors in course learning materials which they have to discuss in the online tutorial is caused by all tutors who are UT lecturers who are responsible for a course that is not not necessarily correspond with their educational backgroud that they possesed.   Criteria that lectures can become tutors for the courses that suit educational background owned, seems to be reviewed, especially for online tutorials. This is because most of the tutors are not quite mastered the subjects that they discuss in online tutorial process, although their field of study is same as courses thet they discuss in the online tutorial process.

Meanwhile, the tutors' inability to manage the class is not just because they do not have knowledge of how to manage the class, but also because the amount of classes that must be managed by the tutor. Provisions of the number of participants per class 300 students, for classes of courses that are cross-department or cross-faculty, is considered too big since since the number of active participants can achieve more than 50%. In the last few years, the number of students who take advantage of online tutorials increases, as shown in the Annual Report of the Rector of UT. It means that the number of students who actively participate in the online tutorial is also increasing. Class size that must be managed makes it difficult to tutors to carry out their work with having the certain quality.

The low quality of the tutor to do the job would result in a lower quality of the online tutorial process because tutors as an activator of online tutorial activity, could not perform their duties optimally. With the tutor's weaknesses, it appears that the implementation of online tutorials in UT   still more focused on the feasibility of rather than the quality of implementation.

Challenges of and Effort to Improve the Quliaty of Online Tutorial

Not maximal role of tutors in online tutorial process will increasingly become a burden when dealing with an increasing number of young students who are aware of the media of communication, the development of technology, and changes in scientific paradigm. The table below shows that the number of UT students in 2012 was dominated by the young students.
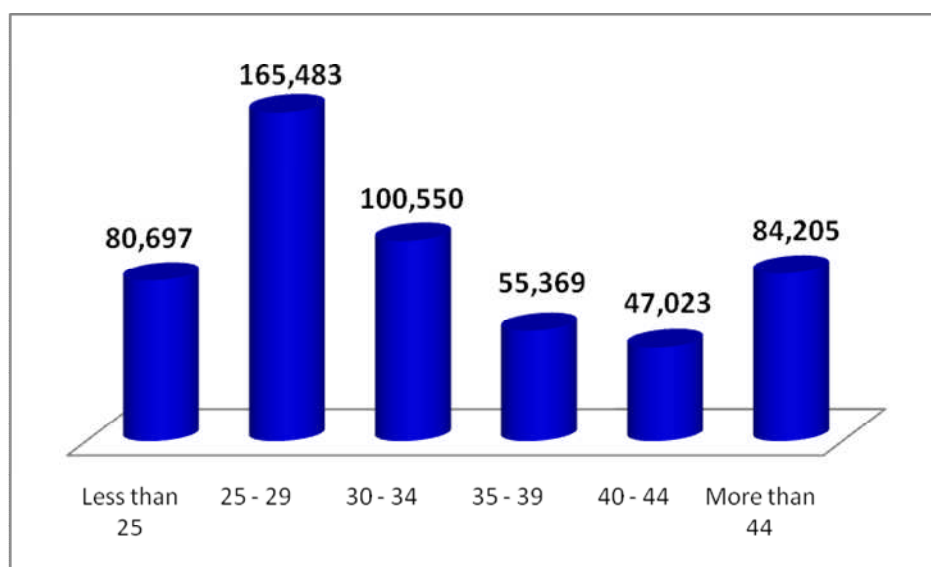
Source: UT in Numbers, 30 April 2013, www.ut.ac.id

Figure 4
The Number of UT Students in 2012

        The figure above shows that UT students were dominated by students with the age of less than 30 years. Young students are of course very aware of the media of communication because the communication media commonly used in the social intercourse. As written in Kompas.com that the growth rate of Internet users in Indonesia is still dominated by young people from the age group of 15-30 years. In each of the cities surveyed by MarkPlus Insight, about 50% to 80% of Internet users are young people. Although there are no data on what percentage of the media literacy of UT students but by using data from the compass, it can be assumed that UT students are dominated by the young students who are aware of the media, including instructional media. Thus, if the tutor does not upgrade the technical capability associated with instructional process through online tutorial so the student complaints on the quality of tutors will continue to happen.

        Efforts to upgrade the skills of tutors can be done through the instituional intervention on two aspects, namely human resources and technological aspects. Related to human resources, tutor recruitment then no longer has to prioritize the use of UT's tutors disregarding the substance subject mastery and technical capabilities to implement an online tutorial. The number of lecturers from other universities is a resource that can be utilized, while UT continues to make efforts to upgrade the technical skills of inadequate lecturers. Therefore, tutor recruitment based solely on the suitability of courses, that are tutored and related to the tutors educational background, can be more strick. Recruitment can be based on adequate technical ability and suitability of courses that will be tutored with tutor' educational background. This would not be hampered by the availability of tutors in a region, as an online tutorial can be done by the tutor and students are in different

locations at the different place. With reference to the subject matter, so that the tutor's mastery of subjet matters can be guaranteed.

While the technical capability requirements can be linked to tutors training. Tutors who have a high proficiency in the use of communication media have the priority of being totors, while they who have still low capability should take the training until they can comprehensive operate the applications of an online tutorial when given the task as a tutor.

In addition, all tutors must receive adequate training about pedagogy so that tutors are able to manage class and student well. The importance of pedagogical training is in line with the thinking of that the pedagogical training includes the introduction of tutor to the student needs to be given to tutors before they carry out their work (Lowman & Mathie, 1993; Marincovich, 1998 in Retna, 2009). Pedagogy training is given in the form of workshops with the contents of such as basic teaching skills, concepts of learning, and classroom management.

The development of technologies also becomes an important capital for UT in improving the quality of the tutorial process. The development of technologies usually leads to one of those on the ease of use that is of course critically required by for tutors. Therefore the application of the latest instructional technologies that is more friendly used have to be done.

Efforts to improve the quality of online tutorials, in particular in terms of tutor side, is not an impossible problem for UT. This is because UT own quite adequate facilities of instructional technology. In addition, up-grading the technical ability of tutors is not too hard to do regarding most UT lecturers have long been familiar with the instructional technology. In addition, since UT owned many partners, both partners from universities and other institutions, they will make the UT no shortage of tutors and had no difficulty in instructional technology upgrading.

Conclusion:

The challenges on on-line tutorials ahead are increasingly demanding tutors' mastery of the subject matters of the course that they tutor, pedagogical skills, and technical skills. Characteristics of young students need media literate tutors who are technically capable and pedagogy in conducting interesting online tutorials so that the activity of students in the online tutorial can be improved. In addition, the mastery of the subject matters has to be improved in order to having online tutorial that has a highly significant influence on student mastery of the learning materials that have an impact on increasing the students' grade of the course.

UT should make online tutorial planning that takes into account the tutor competencies as the essential criteria in recruiting tutors, tutor competency development through evaluation and supervision of onlinne tutorial process, as well as the development of friendly-use technology of online tutorial by cooperation with other institution, if needed. For the needs of monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up then UT needs to develop an ideal reference but

measurable guidance so that the efforts that are made are more focused. In addition, tutor training for online tutorials must also be designed to lead to the formation of pedagogical and technical skills tutors in implementing the tutorial process.

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