TEACHING LANGUAGE IN DISTANCE LEARNING CONTEXT:
INDONESIAN EXPERIENCES
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ABSTRACT

Distance learning is a popular learning approach arises due to the need of people to improve their knowledge but could not sit in the face to face class meeting. This paper discusses the teaching of language in Universitas Terbuka (UT). It describes teaching language in distance context, some disadvantages and advantages, some constraints in running the learning process and the provision of various students. Support services as a means to facilitate students learning. The aim of UT efforts in giving many kinds of tutorial in the process of learning is to help students to understand the material which is printed in the module as the main resources for them to study. The students can choose any kinds of tutorial which they think suitable to them.

Teaching language through distance learning context is still in doubt. Some people say: "It is impossible to study language through distance learning." "How can we communicate?" "Who will be my peer to interact in the language that I study?" "How to practice it since I am far in the rural area and it is difficult for me to meet people." Many questions arise from them who do not have any idea about teaching language through distance learning.

English as an international language has been learned by people all over the world through correspondence method and the audio lingual as the media. Therefore teaching language through distance context is not a new approach but it is an old. Correspondence nowadays is not only correspondence through postal services but lots of communicative technologies are used.

Distance learning is an approach and aims to provide chance to anybody in the world to get education in any level. This approach never recognizes any difficulties of barriers in space and time. People can study anywhere they want and any time they will.

Distance learning is exactly conducting through media. Media is the main supporting of running distance learning. This approach is similar to run teaching language since teaching language supports by the use of media too. They can not separate each other. They have to go along while teaching language and running distance learning with the main tool of interaction and communication through communication media.

Implementing both distance learning and teaching language, UT has provided many kinds of tutorials which most of them are running through media such as audio/video cassette, radio programs, TV programs, telephones, e-mail or internet, web-based, printed materials.

In conducting the distance learning and teaching language UT faces many advantages and disadvantages, constraints, and efforts has been done to support the students need. Not only to support the students need but also how to improve the services

that UT has provided to the students are also still make UT do some other efforts to increase the services especially in the process of teaching and learning.

This paper discusses the teaching of language in Universitas Terbuka (UT). It describes teaching language in distance context, some disadvantages and advantages, some constraints in running the learning process and the provision of various students.

Distance learning

Distance learning as an approach is an alternative approach to solve the service of education to people who have problems in attending the face to face class meeting. Distance learning system has used a mix of printed materials, television broadcasts, radio broadcasts, audio and video materials, e-mail, in doing the process of teaching and learning. Jegede (2000) points out that distance education is never complete without any reference to the practical alliance between technology and teaching.

Distance learning means a process of learning indicates the use of technology. Technology in its broad definition according to Jegede (2000) is the art and science of instructional design of instruction, the development and use of software and hardware, and the use of information and communication technologies in delivering instruction (Jegede, 2000). Jegede adds that distance learning is applicable to interactive learning environments, a more organic and iterative approach to instructional systems design and the need to empower the learner to own the process of the construction of knowledge.

Peters (2000), Garrison and Anderson (2000), Wills and Alexander (2000), Wah (2000), indicate that as an alternative learning system, distance learning has to go along with the technology or communicative technology.

Teaching language

Technology is the media in teaching language. As stated by the experts of language teaching that teaching language need to support by media. In the passed time tape recorder used for audio especially in teaching listening and speaking as the language skills. Video or visual aids and language laboratory used for listening and speaking.

Nowadays as the development of the technology then teaching language are freely used many kinds of it. In face to face class meeting the teacher uses audio, video, internet, film, and others as a variation of teaching or as the teaching aids. However, in distance learning context they are used to communicate and interact with the students who are spread out all over the country.

Candlin (2002), Cook (2002), and Hall (2002), Breen (2001) state that communicative approach is the popular approach applied in teaching language nowadays. The purpose of this approach is to credit the learner with a highly relevant initial competence of communicative knowledge and abilities (Breen and Candlin, 2002).

As the point of view of teaching language communication specifies that communication and learning how to communicate involve the participants in the sharing and negotiating of meanings and conventions. The sharing and negotiating implies the existence of particular communicative abilities as an essential part of competence. There fore the communicative abilities of interpretation, expressions and others are essential abilities within any target competence. These essential abilities have to be manifested in communicative performance (Hall and Hewing, 2002).

Communicative performance has to be done through a set of language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It implies that the teaching language needs to apply through a communicative curriculum. The below graph shown the communicative curriculum according to Breen and Candlin (2001).

The curriculum

1 communication	4 the classroom process
2 demands on the learner	5 teacher/learner
3 learner's initial	6 role of content
contributions	7 of learner of curriculum

The point of view of distance learning and teaching language shows that the marriage of distance learning or education and technology have changed the pedagogical goals for instruction, new taxonomies of learning applicable to interactive learning environments, and to own the process of the construction knowledge. Therefore, teaching language can be run through distance learning due to the interactive learning environment which support the process of teaching and learning language in using the communicative technology.

The process of teaching language.

The process of teaching in UT is usually called tutorial. UT has offered many kinds of tutorial such as correspondence tutorial, face to face tutorial, tutorial through radio, tutorial through telephone-conference, tutorial through e-mail. The details of each tutorial will be discussed as follow.

Correspondence tutorial

The most accessible tutorials to all students are correspondence tutorial. Basically it is written tutorials through postal service. This kind of tutorial is actually timed consuming because of the long way of sending and receiving the letter. But most students are faced this tutorial is the suitable service for them due to intend of reaching the students who are isolated areas. Even they face the constraints of a long turn around times but most of the students still prefer to attend correspondence tutorial. Most of the students raised their reasons why they choose correspondence tutorial. Some of them say that it provides advantages especially in writing subjects. They can improve their writing skill through this tutorial. They also say that they get many information, questions and

discussion in a long letter for many subjects they face difficult. The tutor explained the topics in detailed and they also give many examples and practices while they answer the letter in the correspondence tutorial.

The tutor is actually faced some problems in implementing this tutorial since this tutorial has to be done individually. The tutor has to be checked many letters and send back the feedback to the students individually. The tutor has to comment and revise the letter that the students send to him/her to answer. The very frustrated is to wait the turn around times of the letter or postal services. Not only to wait the turn around times is making the tutor frustrated but the very important one is the students ask questions not about one subject but some times more than three subjects. Tutors are not to initiate contact but rather response to students' initiatives. Therefore, the substance of tutorials depends on what is raised by student's questions.

UT has provided correspondence tutorial through komunika magazine. The tutor writes an article about one topic of the module and discusses the topic in details. The students do not ask to buy the magazine but some of them buy it as a reference to understand module.

Face to face tutorial

UT has provided this model of tutorial at the beginning of the two years. This model of tutorial is not popular since students face problems to attend because of the center of study is far from their house and the tight schedule that they have to follow. Therefore, UT has asked the students to choose other models of tutorial if this model is difficult for them to attend.

This model of tutorial is actually aims to enhance the students' understanding of the material in the module. The students have to come to the tutorial with some questions or materials of what they face difficult. The tutor will lead the group in this model of tutorial to discuss the problems that the students face. They will ask questions and answer by themselves in discussions and the tutor is the facilitator.

Most students face problems to attend this model of tutorial since they do not have time to attend the tight schedule. Some face that the center of study is too far to reach since some of them need sometimes two days by bus to reach the center of study. Some of them cannot attend this model of tutorial because of the transportation to go is not available everyday. They need to wait the boat which come to their place once in a week. Attending this model of tutorial means that the students have to leave their job.

Tutorial through radio

Radio is the popular medium for students to attend tutorial since it is easy to access and use. Radio has a very specific characteristic since it enables to reach remote areas in spite of difficult geographical situation. Therefore radio is an effective medium for distance learning approach since people who live in the very remote areas still access

the radio and the students can bring it anywhere they go to. They do not need to sit in the special place to hear it. They can hear it while they are in the sea to fish or in the farm and any other places and time when the tutorial runs they can access.

It seems that this model of tutorial is easy and not many problems arise in attending this tutorial both the tutor and the students. The difficulties that students' sometimes face are the broadcasting system. Students who live far from the radio stations and the places are hills than the students access to the broadcasting program are difficult.

UT itself until now still have problems in conducting this model of tutorial due to the own broadcasting station has not got the requirement to run. However, the students and tutor have prepared the program of tutorial through radio interactive. This model of tutorial radio will not run if UT does not have its own radio broadcasting station. Thus UT need to focus seriously to build the radio interactive tutorial in future.

Tutorial through telephone-conference

Model of this tutorial is actually an interactive tutorial since one tutor may discuss in the same time with two until thirty students and the locations of the students are different maybe they are in 30 different places. The students can interact to the tutor and also to their peers who are in line. The feedback can be given directly to all of the students who are participated in this tutorial. It seems this model is very ideal one since the face to face tutorial handling the same thing but this model of tutorial without meet each other but they can interact as they are in the classroom.

The problems that face in running this model is the time schedule that the students have meet. They need real time in doing the interaction that this model conducts. Furthermore, it is an expensive tutorial since the students have to pay the telephone bills. In Indonesia telephone bills are a big problems since the students need to pay other bill beside the modules and other thing such as examination, supplement material and so on.

Tutorial through e-mail

This model of tutorial needs computer and access to the internet. Students who want to attend this model of tutorial need a special skill of operating computer. Beside it they also have computer to access this model of tutorial. They can hire the computer in warung internet (warnet) which are available in all over Indonesia especially in the big cities.

This model of tutorial is actually a correspondence tutorial through writing a message to the tutor and the tutor will give some comments or answer the students' questions. Although it seems like a correspondence tutorial but the medium uses in this tutorial is different from the correspondence tutorial above. Correspondence tutorial as discuss above use the postal services to send the letter or message you write but the correspondence in this model of tutorial uses the internet as the medium. This medium is a very modern technology nowadays which it can send a message as you click the word

send in your mail. You can send a message in a second and the receiver who is in United States can read it in a second too.

The students can interact to their peer and their tutor anytime they want. The students can receive the reply message soon they send and soon they read the message. This is a very good interaction because you can send messages anytime you want and you can receive answers or information soon. There are no boundaries of places and time for you to use this model of tutorial.

This model of tutorial is not so popular to the students since they are not familiar with the medium. Most of the students say that it make frustrated to learn many things in the same time. First I have to learn the language, the second I have to study the computer, the third I have to study how to operate computer and the last one this medium is very luxuries medium for them." Beside it is very expensive for them to hire the computer and to pay the transportation to go to the warnet. Most of the warnet in Indonesia are available in ibukota kecamatan or district areas.

Each model of tutorial has its own advantages and disadvantages as stated above. Tutor and students are also face problems in attending and running each tutorial. However, UT still have to help the students to get the appropriate model of tutorial for them. Therefore UT has provided some choices to them. They can choose which tutorial is the appropriate to them. The students can choose the best services for them to enhance their knowledge while studying in UT.

Some research show that the students in UT are mostly do not aware that while study in UT they have to choose which medium of tutorial they need to attend. They did not aware that distance learning system means learning through media. The media are audio, video, radio, TV, surat, e-mail, telephone, printed material such as module, and so on. Therefore UT needs to promote and recall the students that learning in distance learning means they have to understand about how and what is media used in deistance learning. They have to know the function of each media for them. Thus they can prepare themselves as distance learning students they have skill of operating media while they are studying.

The discussion above shows that the models of tutorial are actually indicating the process of teaching language through distance learning is the same as through face to face. The differences are the use of the media themselves. Teaching language in face to face model do not need the telephone while the process is conducted but how to telephone and what conversation is usual talk in telephone is still discuss in face to face classroom meeting. However in distance learning the function of the telephone conference is a tool for the tutor and the students who are far each other and they can not see each other to discuss. They can interact through the medium as they do in face to face meeting. The students can directly get the feedback from they peers and tutor together.

The process of teaching language through telephone conference can answer the questions of *how can I practice the language that I study.* This model of tutorial can give

you lots of chance to practice your language with your peers and tutor. They can help you to correct the incorrect pronunciation or other thing in the discussion. This model of tutorial can improve your speaking skill while you choose this tutorial for speaking subjects.

Improving your writing skill you can choose the correspondence and e-mail tutorial. Both of these tutorials help you to revise and correct your writing text. Through these tutorials you can get the feedback from the tutor and also the peers especially through e-mail. E-mail can also give you chance to improve your vocabulary problems in studying English. The students can get many privileges while you studying through e-mail since you can read many articles as reading skill the students can improve. The students can also use the spelling and grammar checkers while writing through e-mail.

Teaching language through distance context is possible. Since distance learning runs together with the media. The media is the tools to interact or communicate with tutor and students. The learning process in distance learning is the same as the process of face to face. The difference is only the face to face used the media as teaching aids however distance learning used the media as the main tools of communication and interaction from tutor to students and vice versa.