

STUDY GROUPS AT UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA: PEER
INTERACTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

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Sarjana Politik, University of Indonesia, 1985

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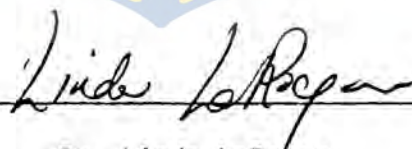
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ABSTRACT

From its inception, the Open University of Indonesia (UT) has encouraged and motivated students in learning together in groups. UT hopes that study groups will emphasize active interaction and establish good communication among students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the behaviours of distance education students studying in a group. The primary aims of this investigation were to identify student activities in a study group, to describe student interactions among peers, and to assess the cooperative learning taking place within the group.

The data in this study were obtained during 20 weeks of observation during the period, January to August 1987. I became a participating observer in a study group, MELAWAI, which met two or three times a week. I recorded all activities and group interaction. I also collected information from ten students in August, 1987 using a structured interview.

This study tries to identify patterns of behaviour

students learning in a group. Results indicate that learning together motivates and encourages the learners' process of learning in a distance system. Furthermore, learning together requires them to discuss, describe, and reflect on their skill in order to improve their learning performance. The group agreed that their learning activities not only assisted them in sharing information, materials and ideas but also helped them to master difficult subject-matter. In addition, a group goal became one of achieving individual goals.

This study provides a fresh insight into activities occurring in a study group. Students engaged in study groups were seeking external assistance, and they need continuous guidance. It suggests that study groups are necessary and valuable in a distance education system. UT's arrangement of suggesting qualified tutors for study groups is acceptable both by the students and by the institution. Thus the integration or combination of tutorial sessions and study groups is an alternative solution for supporting students' learning process.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Distance education places strong emphasis on self-instructional techniques. Students must learn on their own and hence they teach themselves. On the other hand, distance education requires good guided didactic instruction.

Ideally, a distance system should be supplemented with face-to-face sessions. It is important to realize that "students need help not only in getting to grips with course content but also in developing skills necessary for university level study" (Cole et al., 1986, p. 19).

In addition, the combination of self-instruction and face-to-face interaction performs a more effective service to learners. Harris (1975) stated that

Distance education has become a shorthand term for systems of teaching which are intended mainly or entirely for learners at some distance from the teaching, but which are supplemented by face-to-face teaching for a small minority or else for all candidates during a very limited period. (p. 54)

Face-to-face teaching attempts to alleviate some students' academic weaknesses in dealing with the course material, and to assist students to absorb new and often complex matter.

In some institutions, face-to-face tutorial services make up an area of substantial instruction in distance education. In some instances, distance students have been affected by a feeling of isolation (Melton, 1981, p. 416). At the British Open University, face-to-face sessions are an essential element for facilitating effective study skills and for assessing the students' work (Lewis, 1980).

From its inception, the Indonesian Open University or Universitas Terbuka (UT) has provided students with face-to-face tutorial services. A student enrolled in one course at UT gets two to three hours of tutorial help in a semester. These limited amounts of tutorial sessions add a challenge for UT to provide effective support, because the condition of studying alone without a continuous assistance from teachers is considered to be a new approach for most UT students.

Research and evaluation of the tutorial system has been conducted at UT. The results have led to a

fundamental concern that both tutors and students do not take advantage of the tutorial session in a way that is both effective and efficient. Students sometimes perceive that tutorials are boring and often tutors have not mastered the course materials being discussed (Universitas Terbuka, 1985). Students fail to prepare themselves before attending tutorial sessions. Tutorial activities often do not meet students' expectation for mastering the course materials.

In addition, the research studies suggest that the condition of studying alone motivates students to undertake peer tutoring in study groups (Universitas Terbuka, 1985). The forming of study groups is strongly encouraged by UT, as part of the students' learning conditions.

From the beginning, UT believes that learning processes taking place in groups organized by students could be effective in facilitating their motivation and academic performance (Universitas Terbuka, 1985, p. 31).

At UT, generally, study groups formed by students themselves are conducted "after the students know each other when attending tutorials" (Universitas Terbuka,

1985). However, informal notice can be arranged also through local newspapers, radio or any informal circulated information that is available in the area.

Currently, the basic difficulty of conducting study groups for distance education students is not knowing other fellow students in the area. The sense of remoteness is a problem for some students in setting up study groups, but study groups are beneficial for students who cannot engage in fixed-schedule tutorials. Students enrolled at UT may be working adults, housewives, and high school graduates. Thus, fixed-schedule tutorials are often inconvenient for them to attend, and a study group may be a reasonable place to clarify their learning difficulties.

Brandwein and DiVittis (1985) indicate in their observation of peer tutoring for Mathematics and English courses, that in the peer tutor program, students perceived self-improvement in their skills. Students learning together require good interaction among student. Johnson et al. (1984) points out "cooperative learning experiences tend to promote higher achievement than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences" (p.15). Further,

they add that cooperative learning conditions tend to motivate students to achieve and encourage each other in the learning process.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was to describe the activities which occur within a study group of distance education students. The following issues were probed:

1. What happens in study groups?
2. What sorts of students comprise study groups?
3. How do students interact with peers to achieve their learning expectation?
4. How do students discuss problem-solving?
5. How do they manage the activities of studying in groups?
6. What benefits do they get from studying in groups?

The advantage for students of taking part in a study group lies in the flexibility in forming and maintaining study groups. Students can establish study groups in their own residence and at their own convenience. This is more convenient than attending a

regularly-scheduled tutorial session. In the initial three semesters of UT's operation, attendance rates in UT-sponsored tutorials have declined, but at the same time study groups arranged by UT students themselves and at their own expense have become more evident (Universitas Terbuka, 1985, p. 31-34). As attention is drawn toward study groups, the question remains whether tutorial services are needed at UT.

Significance of the Study

I believe that both tutorials and study groups are essential elements in the development of distance education. In this case, it is not my intention to emphasize what an effective study group is, or that study groups are more important than tutorials. The most reasonable course of action for UT is to continue encouraging students to find available learning conditions that are suitable for them.

Study groups are very important, it is necessary that the UT headquarters outlines guidance concerning these groups so that the Regional Unit can make use of it in case of building up their academic as well as non academic activities. (Universitas Terbuka, 1985, p. 34)

Students at UT form study groups on their own

initiative, and UT does not have any formal influence in this area of support services. Recently, however, UT has made new arrangements for tutorial systems; through study groups UT has been offering tutorial services for courses that are difficult to master without tutorial assistance. Study groups can officially contact UT or a Regional Center with a list of the number of students taking part in the study group, and a list of the priority courses for which they need a tutor's help. UT then will suggest qualified tutors for the said study groups.

Some students have taken advantage of study groups, but little is known of what activities students undertake in these study groups. How do students interact with peers to achieve their learning expectations? How do students discuss problem-solving? How do they manage the activities of studying in groups? Finally, what benefits do they get from studying in groups?

The work described in this study is intended to give fresh insights into the requirements for student support services in UT. As an alternative strategy in the area of student services, study groups can be

influential for the students, both in their learning and in the condition of being recognized as UT's students. Study groups can be used to help manage and organize the activities of student services, thus both the students and the institution would benefit.

Definition of Terms

Study group-- a condition of learning together, engaging in sharing knowledge, insights and opinions.

Study groups typically involve three to four students who meet weekly, and sometimes more often, to share information, knowledge, and expertise about a course in which they are all enrolled. The study group environment offers students an opportunity to engage in intense dialogue about course material (Ender, 1985, p. 469)

Cooperative learning

Learning which occurs through social interaction between peers, directed towards the accomplishment of a common task. (Magin, 1982, p.105)



Methodology

The lack of a suitable quantitative methodology for research on study groups in distance education encouraged me to utilize the approach of an

ethnographic study in this investigation. Baath in Morgan (1984) has stated that

On the whole there is a severe lack of scientifically validated knowledge-someone would perform a very great service indeed if he/she would carry out a major empirical research study on the learning strategies of distance students - if possible including incentive studies by means of interview and even observations of actual learner behaviour (p. 252).

In addition, this research approach offers an opportunity for the investigator to make direct observations of what actually happens in the natural setting from the subject's point of view (Morgan, 1984, p. 253). However, the observer cannot "become intimately involved in the 'to and fro' of the observation situation; the observer's role is to interpret and explain events" (McNamara, 1980, p. 114). Typically, before conducting the observation, ideas about the selected observation must be conceptualized and should be based upon the theoretical context of the issues the researcher wishes to address (p. 115).

The ethnographic method is an approach that contributes to a 'thick description' of human behavior studies, derived from a complete body of data that

describes the social phenomenon being studied. From this thick description, Geertz in Lutz has pointed to a situation in which the observer attempts "to build a model of the important and recurring variables and the relationship among these variables, that describes and accounts for the phenomenon" (p. 55). Further, ethnographers "hope to find a theory that explains their data"; thus the approach generally avoids assuming a priori constructs or relationships (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p.34).

In education, the ethnographic approach offers observers a way of investigating the natural setting in studying problems and processes in education. Goetz, points to the fact that educational ethnographies "provide rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p.17). The approach of educational ethnography will result in "a contribution of improvement in educational and school practice setting" (p. 31).

Structure of the study

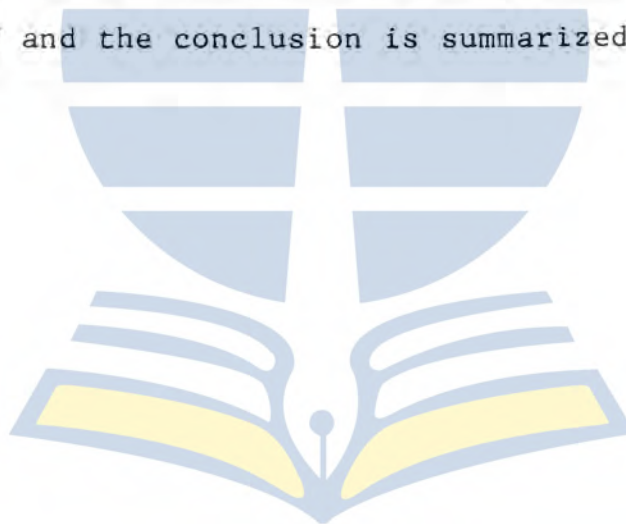
Chapter I, contains the introductory review the

purpose of carrying out this study, the significance of the study, definition of terms, and the methodology being used.

Chapter II describes the concept of distance education, examines Indonesia's Open University, and describes UT's study groups within which activities of cooperative learning occurred.

The methodology of this study is discussed in Chapter III. This chapter adds also the description of the observation setting, selection of study group, and the procedure of collecting data.

Results and findings of the study are discussed in Chapter IV and the conclusion is summarized in Chapter V.



CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The theoretical framework within which the procedures in this study were applied are set out in this chapter under the following headings:

- A. Concepts of Distance Education
- B. The Open University of Indonesia
- C. Study Groups
- D. Cooperative Learning

Concepts of Distance Education

Distance education has increased during the last two decades, and has been a worldwide phenomenon of developing educational systems. The term 'distance education' is synonymous with correspondence education, independent study, or home study, but basically distance education is learning supported by:

...those teaching methods in which, because of the physical separateness of learners and teachers, the interactive, as well as the

pre-active, phase of teaching conducted through print, mechanical or electronic devices (Holmberg, 1977, p.9)

Some of these considerations denote that distance education expressly demands learners to be self-instructional and "to be accessible for individual study without the support of a teacher" (Holmberg, 1981, p.11) during the learning process. Thus, learners have freedom and responsibility in initiating and carrying out the activities that lead to learning (p.15). Although the separation of teachers and learners is fundamental to all forms of distance education, the opportunity to communicate with tutors is provided through face-to-face tutoring, correspondence, telephone, television, and radio.

The trend to distance education has influenced the development of education systems in many developing countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The reason seems to be fairly general, as many people could not otherwise get education at a higher level. Distance education provides a chance for them to educate themselves with the advantages of fewer constraints in time and space. Holmberg (1977) sees

within distance education:

- the possibilities for individualization of study pace and - to some extent - of study content.
- the student's habit forming experience of work on his/her own which is felt to develop independence and lead to greater autonomy than other types of study (p. 18).

Characteristically, distant learners take on the responsibility to continue learning on their own.

Wedemeyer claims that distant learners should "develop the capacity to carry out self-directed learning which is the ultimate maturity of educated persons"

(Seward, et al., 1983, p.28). Holmberg points out that learning by distance education is a self-study but not a private reading, for the student is not alone.

Courses are developed for him or her and he or she benefits for having interaction with tutors and support from the institution. Another important point made by Holmberg (1981) is that personal interaction promotes pleasure in studying and motivation to study, which can be fostered by "well-developed self-instructional material and a suitable two-way communication at a distance" (p. 31).

Establishing a pattern of contact between learners

and the supporting organization is an important element for a distance education system. Encouragement and support for students in any kind of educational system are essential.

The Open University of Indonesia

Universitas Terbuka or UT was inaugurated by the President of Indonesia in 1984. UT is a higher educational institution using the method of learning at a distance through a non-permanent in-house faculty. Universitas Terbuka is a nationwide program serving as an alternative solution in providing higher education for the increasing number of senior high school graduates. UT "serves relatively dispersed populations; that would lead to help assist the nation live an intelligent life" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1984). UT is hoped to be beneficial for the people in providing "tertiary education so that the need for more manpower with higher education qualifications for national development can be met" (p.ix).

Atwi Suparman (1985) has stated that in the year 1988/1989, one million high school graduates in

Indonesia will not have the opportunity to achieve a higher level of education. Student enrolment in the first semester of UT's operation in 1985 was 60 000 students. For the academic year 1986/1987, UT enrolment is 125 000 students. Approximately half the registered students are actively taking courses (Universitas Terbuka, 1987, p. 21). UT serves not only high school graduates, but also teachers, workers, and housewives.

In applying concepts of open learning, the UT distance learning system covers a wide range of innovations and reforms in the educational sector, including instructional aids and support of students. UT's students are required to undertake learning and teaching activities as follows:

- a. To study the written materials which have been programmed as their main activity.
- b. To interact with their tutors.
- c. To interact within their study groups.
- d. To listen and watch the audio and audio-visual programs which are intended to supplement or support the written materials.
- e. To practice and conduct laboratory activities.
- f. To take unit tests and the semester final examinations.
- g. To conduct research and prepare a thesis (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1984, p.4-5).

In reality, these learning and teaching activities

result in students who are largely alone in their study, and who may face anxiety and problems. UT's support is limited and students must facilitate and encourage learning activities on their own.

UT has four faculties; The Faculty of Social Science and Political Science, The Faculty of Economics, The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, and The Faculty of Teacher Education and Pedagogy. The instructional method uses printed materials primarily, with very limited use of audio-cassette or audio-video. UT endeavours to enhance the quality of the printed materials in a meaningful way so that the subject matter may be incorporated into the learners' existing cognitive structure. Hudgins in Holmberg maintains that

Text materials should be written so as to stimulate the active, critical, reflective, and analytic involvement of the learners (Holmberg, 1981, p. 28).

To a very limited extent, UT also provides students with communications technology such as television and radio programs. The limited usage of such communications technology is due to constraints of time, space, and budget.

As to the educational structure itself, UT offers a flexible system. Students can register any time and the length of one semester is four months. UT's program consists of various degrees, and thus the students' degree completion will depend on the number of courses that the student has taken, and his or her standard of achievement.

UT is different from other Indonesian universities. But, in keeping with other Open Universities,

Its main duty is to design the overall system of distance learning which includes the designing of the curriculum, the determination of subjects given to the students, the supplying of learning materials, and the administering of the evaluation (Universitas Terbuka, 1985, p.2).

The measurement of student achievement relies heavily on multiple-choice assessment techniques. The evaluation of student learning is through an end-of-semester final examination.

The process of learning alone is considered by some students to be difficult due to the limited amount of face-to-face communication. Thus tutorial sessions may not be enough to support students in their learning process. One feasible way of providing sufficient

support is that students engage in their own tutorial sessions or attend tutorials organized by private commercial organizations.

At the present time only 15% of UT's students attend or take advantage of tutorial sessions. In previous years 80% of students attended tutorials. Certain tutorial session have high attendance, and others consistently show poor attendance or no attendance. Because of increasing enrolment, UT is seeking other forms of student support besides tutorial sessions. Research indicates that tutorial sessions might be successful because of the skill and personal style of individual tutor that is, the tutor may be an expert in content area and in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, students may attend tutorial sessions because of the subject-matter, despite the tutor's qualifications. The geographic location of the tutorial, or the distance which students have to travel to attend tutorials also influence student attendance. Whenever possible, other methods such as correspondence tuition are also being fully developed to support students; but face-to-face interaction is still required for distance learners,

especially for newcomers in a distance learning environment who must learn to cope with university level study.

Study Groups at UT

Holmberg (1977) states that "all learning is basically an individual activity". Nevertheless, learning in co-operative groups is vital in any learning situation. At UT, studying in groups has been very important in supporting individual learning. This is especially so because the provision of tutorial sessions by UT in Regional Centres is inadequate.

Zainul Ittihad Amin, a member of the staff of the Research Center at UT has stated that the term "study group" is also included in the term "extra tutorial" that is, tutorial sessions that are attended by UT's students and organized by the students themselves, but not related to the institution (UT). Amin has categorized four types of these extra tutorials, referred to as types A, B, C and D (Paket C, 1986.).

- Type A: This study group of pure UT students, free of charge, the students act as proctor.
- Type B: The study group of UT students, call in

- tutors; this type is dominant. Among the group they collect fees to pay the tutors.
- Type C: Similar to type B study group, but this type of study group is conducted by what UT identifies as a "hidden persuader". Generally, this hidden persuader is the tutor and each student pays a fee.
 - Type D: This type of study group is considered not popular. Organized by an established educational institution. When UT began its operation, this type is popular enough, but now there are almost no UT students involved. Tutors are provided by the organization (p. 11).

For the purpose of this study I will investigate study group type B.

Regional centers throughout Indonesia are the first channel of information for students wanting to participate in study groups. One of the first tasks undertaken by the Regional Centers or UPBJJ was to be responsible in giving guidance to reinforce students' learning in groups, that is, in providing qualified tutors, learning facilities, course-materials, and so on. In May 1987, UT estimates that there were approximately 1000 study groups established throughout Indonesia and about 15 000 students engaged in these various groups (Irwansyah, 1987). He added that in Jakarta itself, there are about 30 study groups. But not all study groups reported their formation to UT.

UT's attention is now directed toward assessing the effectiveness of study groups. According to UT's terms, a study group is a group of 5 to 20 students attempting to study together to facilitate their learning and academic performance. Group members are advised to take the same courses in the same semester. Logistically, students need to live close to each other so that the groups will have no trouble in meeting frequently.

Cooperative Learning

In simple terms, cooperative learning indicates students working in a collaborative learning situation to accomplish shared goals. Essentially, cooperative learning characterizes interaction among students, with an emphasis on establishing good communication that will lead towards problem-solving in the learning process. Peer interaction ensures "students working together to achieve a joint learning goal" (Skon, Johnson & Johnson, 1981, p.83).

Although researchers in cooperative learning have focused mainly on conventional classroom settings, the definition and structure of cooperative learning is

relevant in any educational environment. Johnson et al. (1984) have conducted various studies in cooperative learning situations. They conclude that cooperative learning does not primarily emphasize academic matters, but the ability to interact socially enhances the effectiveness of learning together within a group.

In cooperative learning groups, responsibility for each other's learning is shared. Group members are expected to provide help and encouragement to each other in order to ensure that all members do the assigned work.

In cooperative learning groups, the goals focus on bringing each member's learning to the maximum and on maintaining good working relationship among members (pp. 9-10).

Further, Johnson in his review of cooperative learning in the classroom stated four basic elements of cooperative learning; only two elements are considered relevant in this study:

Positive interdependence - this may be achieved through mutual goals (goals interdependence; divisions of labor (task interdependence); dividing materials, resources, or information among group members (resource interdependence)

Face-to-face interaction among students. It is the interaction patterns and verbal interchange among

students promoted by the positive interdependence that affect education outcomes. (p.8)

Sharan in Webb (1982) pointed out that not all interaction is beneficial for learning, nevertheless, it is "through the medium of this interaction and communication within small groups cooperating on academic tasks that these team-learning methods strive to influence pupils' cognitive learning" (p.422). Webb found that students actively engaged in group interaction showed higher achievement (p. 425).

Much of spontaneous cooperative learning has been identified with giving help and receiving help within the peer group. Webb identifies this term as "help behaviour". He questions "whether giving help or receiving are beneficial for achievement" (p. 424). In his review he found that in four out of five studies on interaction and achievement there was a positive relationship between giving help and achievement (p. 424). Further, research suggests that "help consisting of explanation has a greater chance of eliminating confusion than does help consisting only of a correct answer" (p. 426).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a discussion of a number of concerns which are directly related to ethnographic research. The selection of a study group and a description of the group itself is discussed in this section. Following this is a description of the observation setting. The procedures for data collection and analysis of the data are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Ethnographic Approach

The primary aim of the study was to directly observe student interaction and student activities which occur in study groups. The purposes of the study were: (1) to collect descriptive data about student behaviour during various times and in various settings in the study group, and (2) to identify patterns of behaviour through continual analysis of this data. In carrying out the study I followed on the procedure described by Ahola (1978), who used an ethnographic approach to investigate students' life in a school setting. She identified an ethnographic approach as

the best research approach in observing student behaviour.

It can be strongly argued that a qualitative approach to the study of student life in the high school provides a useful research alternative. It permits and even encourages the discovery of unanticipated influences. It permits the examination of student life within the actual school context. It describes what "is" through the actions and perceptions of its participants (p.5).

She points out that ethnographic study is not intended "to test hypotheses nor to reach conclusion, but its goal is to identify notions that would warrant further study by other methodologies" (p.8).

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explain that ethnographic approaches admit "subjective experiences of both investigator and participants into a research frame" (p.9). This type of practice involves social relationships, "ethnographers must work in settings where behaviour occurs naturally" (p.96). Thus, constant participation over a period of time becomes the most reliable activity in the ethnographic approach.

In this study, participant observation is used as the major field technique. Participant observation is defined as a "method in which the observer participates

in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people over some length of time" (Becker & Geer in Ahola, 1978, p.6). Similar, Dobbert (1982) suggests as a participant observer "it is necessary to be accepted as an observer and be permitted to participate to some degree"(p.106).

Selection of Study Group

I talked to some friends about my project paper and this led me to a person by the name of Supartomo. He is deeply active in giving tutorials to some study groups and is also active in writing correspondence tutorials in UT's monthly magazine. His major area of study is economics, and he is also a staff member in UT's Faculty of Economics. Having discussed my project with him, I became interested in investigating one of his study groups. I decided to choose one of his groups because it had existed for some time, and seemed to be a good group for peer-interaction behaviour to be observed. All of the students were registered in the Faculty of Economics, majoring in a program of

Economics and Development Study.

The ethical aspects of conducting this type of research must be carefully thought out. In Indonesia, observation for a period of time is still uncommon, especially for outsiders. I personally thought that it would be wise for me to know one "key" person who would be acceptable by the subjects, their favourite tutor.

The study group itself consisted of students from the first cohort of UT's students. In this case, each member of the group had known each other since their first enrolment at UT and had maintained the same formation as a group for every semester for more than two years.

I was introduced to the group in the middle of January, the first month of the new semester. They had started meeting three weeks before and had decided in the previous semester to choose two courses to be discussed in the group.

I tried to ensure that the participants were provided with sufficient explanation of my presence. At first I introduced myself and explained why I was there. The group received me with warmth and in time they often complained about their difficulties as UT

students.

The Group

I observed only one group. The selected study group consisted of students majoring in the same program, Economics and Development Study. Thus it was possible for most students to always take the same courses.

The group varied in sex and age. Their ages, ranged from 20 to 48. Most of the students worked and were married. At the time of my observation there was a newcomer, Linda, who had just graduated from high school and had just moved to Jakarta. The older students appeared to be more active in the learning activities. The older students would sit in the front rows and as the tutorial proceeded, these students were actively involved.

Group attendance varied from time to time, often only four to five students came to the meeting. Officially, there were about 22 members in the group and the highest attendance rate was never more than 17 students. They told me that all members do not always take part in the study group for each semester, it

really depends on the courses they all registered in for that semester. At UT each student can take courses up to 18 SCU (Semester Credit Units).

Observation Setting

The study group was held in a classroom of a Junior High School called the SMP 56, approximately 15 km from UT headquarters. One student in the group was a teacher in that high school, and he had permission to use the classroom. The group met every Wednesday and Thursday but sometimes on Friday as well, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm with a 15 to 30 minute break for Magrib prayer. Meetings became more frequent near the end of the semester as they prepared for their examinations. They called in tutors for the two courses they judged difficult to learn without the help of external assistance.

The school was located close to a night market (Blok M), thus outside interruption could be clearly heard. The classroom itself had very poor lighting, and the learning facilities consisted of chairs, tables and a blackboard. The tables were used in pairs and the chairs were more like benches. The tables and

chairs, as shown in Figure 1, were situated in rows with very little space to stretch one's body.

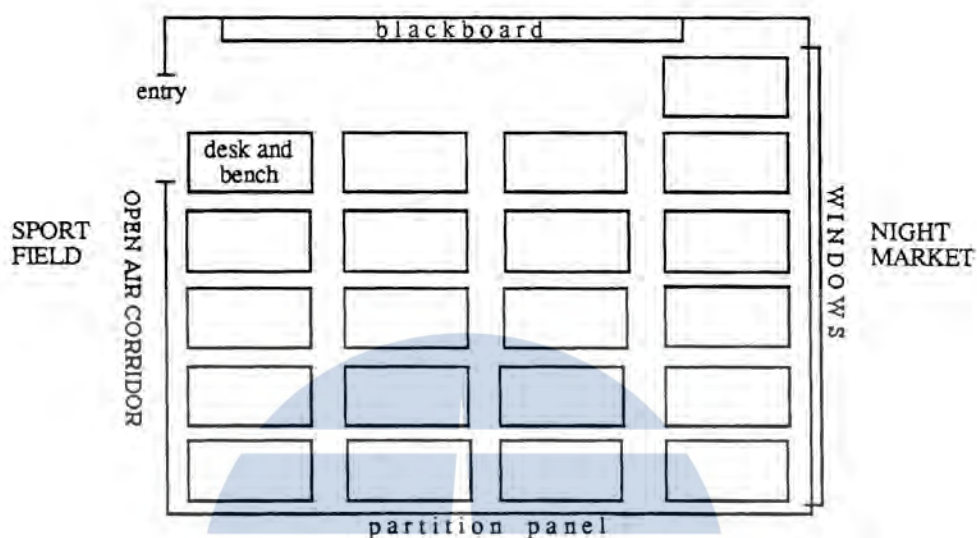


Figure 1. The physical layout of the classroom.

Every Wednesday after school, other activities, such as judo lessons and basketball occurred in the school. But in spite of the inconvenient facilities and environment, the study group went on and the students ignored outside interferences and the inconvenience.

Data Collection Procedure

In this study, I participated as an observer for a

period of 20 weeks, involving one academic semester of 15 weeks and, an additional five weeks of observation in July and August. From January to April I participated continuously two or three times a week. After the final examination on May 3rd and 10th, I met the group again in June. The meeting was a get together meeting; they chatted and talked about their last examination. They also discussed academic matters, such as when to register for the new courses, what courses should be discussed in the next semester, when to get the final grades, and so on. They agreed again to meet on July 6th for the first activities in the new semester. At the end of July, I came again for two weeks and discussed possible ways to carry out individual interviews. Before that, I had talked to Supartomo about conducting interviews without disturbing the group classes and I suggested that the interviews should not be influenced by others. He agreed to asked the group first, and they suggested that the interview will be conducted in a separate room. The interview activities were carried out in August for two days. Each person was interviewed for 10 to 15 minutes using a structured questionnaire. Only

10 students were interviewed, and the interviewees were representative according to age, sex, educational background, and employment status. All interviews were tape-recorded. Indonesian language was used as the media of communication.

The interviews were carried out using a "nonscheduled standardized interview" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 119). In this form of interview "the same questions and probes are used for all respondents, but the order in which they are posed may be changed according to how individuals react" (p.119). (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire)

Each day I recorded the activities of the group and engaged in conversation with students. At the end of the day I consulted my notes and assessed the events of the day. Data collection procedures were done by both written notes and tape-recorder. Not all events were taped, only events that reflected group discussion. Most often the study group meetings were activities where the tutor gave a lecture and students took notes without discussion.

Analysis of Data

The process of data analysis was sometimes done at the time of the observation. The tape-recorder was also used, thus natural conversation can be detected. I also tried to detect direct oral communication among members during the activities. Problems occurred when translating the actual conversation into English. So, translation is based on the meaning according to the observer's subjective interpretation.

The process of data analysis was based on relating it to questions probed. The observational data was categorized according to researcher subjective perpectives by referring to the questions outlined, thus the questions were the guideline in analysing the data.

The categorized data were organized into patterns of information as a result of the notes that was taken from the field and supplemented by the researcher interpretation during the observation. In this case, the process of achieving both explanation and meaning was through the process of analysing the data and be supported by specific examples taken from the data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this study I set out to investigate distance education students studying in groups. The primary aims of this investigation were to describe (1) student activities in a study group, (2) student interaction among peers, and (3) cooperative learning among the group. I observed and participated in a study group for a period of 20 weeks. As a result of my experience, I feel confident that I have clearly identified the activities of the group.

My field study began on January 15, 1987. Here I learned my first lesson in participant observation. I came with one of the group's tutors, Supartomo, a friend at the institution. He introduced me to the group: "Friends, this is a friend of mine who needs your participation in her research. I'll let her introduce herself". I stood in front of the class and as I began the introduction, I wrote my name on the blackboard. Then I explained about the purpose of my study and why I wanted to join the group. I also explained that these observations were needed to

accumulate credits toward my master's degree. It was hard for me to gauge their reaction, but I assumed they all agreed and wanted to help. For two weeks of observation I sat at the back of the classroom, listening and observing. At the fifth meeting, the students start asking questions about my personal life, educational background and my responsibility at UT. At the next meeting they asked my help to deliver their take-home test directly to UT.

What happens in study group

Before I joined the group, the students had chosen two courses that they considered difficult to learn without the help of external assistance. The courses were Theory of Macroeconomics II and Statistics Economic II. The invited tutors are two tutors that they knew before; Supartomo teaches Macroeconomic and Totok teaches Statistics. They had known these two tutors when they were a members of another group. The process of learning in group occurs when tutors start giving lectures. Both tutors would suggest additional references to supplement the modules, and they

explained the incorrect editing and unclear explanation in those modules.

Sometime when tutors could not attend the class they would cancel the meeting. But whether the meeting was held or not depended on the students themselves; they would cancel it if only a few students attended or there was no one to organize the meeting. One day Totok could not make it and Djuned, one of the students, who was well prepared in Statistics gave peer-tutoring. He was very concerned, and he often used the words, "Everybody understand! If not we could always go back...." after explaining the subject matter. Djuned understood courses such as Mathematics and Statistics. Of the other students, Mas'ud knew about Accounting and Simamora knew English. Those that had better knowledge of such subjects would share their knowledge with others.

The learning activities would often start a little bit after 5:30 and end at 7:30 or sometimes 8 o'clock. During the activities, there was a 15 to 30 minutes break, hot tea (sweet) was served, often with a little snack. For drinks and janitorial services or for "administrative matters" such as photocopying the

course materials and paying the tutors, each person paid a fee of 10 000 rupiah a month. This is a reasonable amount, because previously they had all participated in another study group, and they had to pay 85 000 rupiah for one semester of three and a half months. That group was administered by an established educational institution (professional or type D study group).

The study group was called the "MELAWAI" study group, because it was held at Melawai Street. The group chose Pak Mas'ud (Pak meaning Mr.) to be responsible for handling the group finances, such as paying the tutors, janitor, and photocopying. Every month he would list and hand out a chart of the group's financial incomes and expenses. (See Appendix 2)

The process of learning often began when the invited tutors started the learning activities. Supartomo, "Let's start now! Today we'll discuss Unit I of Theory of Macroeconomics" (January 15, 1987). Students would automatically open their learning materials and listen to the tutor's lecture. Students asked questions spontaneously, but this particular tutor would not immediately answer. He would ask other

students to answer and they responded actively. The tutors wanted the group to think together before answering his particular questions. He would give clues in answering the question such as drawing a graphic in the blackboard or ordering the group to open their modules and reviewed it. This kind of activities stimulate the group of peer interaction, where group discussion spontaneously emerged.

"If S increased would IS increase?"... This question was asked by Djuned, who always sat in the front row, enthusiastically listening to every explanation given by the tutors. The students often sat at the same desk in each meeting. The group's major activity in learning together consisted of discussing the subject matter from the module, that is, the course materials. Most students would have read the materials at home before coming to class. Furthermore, they would discuss and solve the exercise test, and Djuned would criticize the items as being poor items. Criticism about the modules did not come just from Djuned; other students would also complain about the typographical errors, unclear explanations, and so on. Studying in a group was beneficial in clarifying

such errors.

Take-home tests were also thoroughly discussed in the group. Near the end of the semester, students would list the courses that they all took in that semester on the blackboard. Djuned organized the activity and, with the agreement of other members, he would choose one or two persons to be responsible for reviewing one course and doing the test. All students were expected to review the material and do the tests as well. At the next meeting they would discuss the course and the person responsible for that course would stand in front of the class, and list his or her answers on the blackboard. The rule was that the responsible person would have to list the page number referring to the subject matter in the modules. Often for one test item, there were various opinions about the correct answer. Sometimes, consensus could not be reached and individuals chose the answer according to their own logical analysis. Student who were not prepared also benefitted from those activities, as they noted the answer that other students chose the most. But, their friends did not seem to mind, because to some extent, the group wanted all members to pass the course. In

this case, each members tried to help one another to obtain the same results.

I considered social interaction among peers to be good. They chatted and teased among themselves every so often. Beside discussing course materials, they discussed "hot issues" such as politics, the election, football matches, and other social gatherings. At the end of the semester, they held a little blessing party in preparation for their examination on May 3rd and 10th 1987.

In August 1987, at the time when I was doing my individual interviews they were planning for a social gathering somewhere outside the city. This social gathering party was not merely for the group but also for their families.



The students in the study group

A UT survey on extra-tutorials found that UT students participating in study groups were "generally married and working students with an average income between Rp 70.000 - Rp 200.000 per month". Their ages

ranged from 20 to 50 years. The educational backgrounds were "66.6% high school graduates, 8.3% from vocational high schools, 16.6% have got Diploma II and PGSLP (teachers' education) and 8.3% have got a B.A" (Universitas Terbuka, 1985, p.63).

In the table below, the average age of the MELAWAI study group was similar to that given in the research study.

Age	Female	Male
20-24	4	2
25-29	-	1
30-34	1	3
35-39	1	4
40-44	-	2
45-49	-	2
	Female	Male
Employed	-	14
Unemployed	6	-

Most of the members were high school graduates, only one had a Diploma I degree.

Earlier, it was mentioned that the group consisted of 22 students, but the average attendance rate was never more than 17 students. In this case, not all

students were taking the same courses and a few did not register during the semester. There was one student who knew that he could not take the examination in May, because he had to go on a business trip. He told me that he needed to come to the study group regularly, just to keep up with the courses. "I had to come to the classes, so at the next semester I could just study alone in preparation for the next examination" (Sardjono, March, 1987).

The younger students looked upon their elders as "a chaperone"; giving guidance and motivating them academically. "I realized that the young friends do not actively involve in class discussion, perhaps because they are too shy". (Djuned, age 44, August 1987)

During my observation, I realized that the young students respected their older friends not only because of the difference in age but also because of their ability to cope with academic materials was supported by their work experience and maturity. " I have a feeling that I ought to help my friends who are weak in certain courses, and motivate them to participate in group discussion" (Koes, age 37, August 1987). All

members agreed that studying in a group helped them in absorbing subject matter.

The students perceived, learning in group is functioning as an effective learning condition. The strong students would feel that they had the responsibility to help and encourage the weak students. The responsibility was also considered, providing adequate information, materials and ideas. In this case, it does not mean that the weak students depend entirely on the strong students, they also search other sources to eliminate their difficulty in absorbing the course materials. "My working condition enable me to continue studying at UT, every free time are used to review the modules... my boss permitted me in doing so and most often my colleagues who is a graduated economist would help me in reviewing the materials (Bambang, August 1987).



Students' interaction with peers

The group's learning expectation included a full awareness of attempting to learn together and achieve

the shared goals. Interaction does not only mean learning and working together with others but a commitment to accomplish the same goals. This is in line with Johnson and Johnson's (1975, p. 5) opinion, where "the process of interaction contributed to sharing information, materials, ideas and helpful hints concerning the best procedure to use."

The MELAWAI study group showed a high tendency toward such interaction. Students indicated satisfaction when the desirable goals were achieved together. When interviewed privately about their opinion toward the study group, all students spontaneously replied that "the sense of togetherness" was the group's major element. "I joined this group because togetherness was the group motto...we are all family (Rajiman, Bambang, Erida, Koes, and Linda, August 1987). Simamora, one of the five founders of the group explained that they had split out from a study group called RAGUNA, because this group was too commercial and individualistic, and the sense of togetherness was low. They identified togetherness ("kompak" in Indonesian) as not only learning together or sharing information and materials in group classes

but also important at the time of the examination period. In the actual examination, they tried to be in the same examination room, seated close together. The strong students led the poor students and the older students continuously motivated the younger students.

Djuned, who has a good background of Mathematics and Statistics, often shared his knowledge with the group. Simamora in English, and Mas'ud in Accounting, did so also. The group would also seek outside informants in absorbing complex subject-matter. Bambang explained that his friend at work who had graduated as an economist would often be a valuable source. Djuned who works at the New Zealand Embassy also had a good knowledge of English and so did Simamora who is an English teacher. Working students, particularly the older generation, said that some of their working environment had potential for contributing to their mastery of UT modules.

They all agreed also that the tutors' handouts contained helpful hints for understanding certain definitions, graphic and formulas. Students would add new information from other references and sometimes photocopy those materials just so they could feel

comfort in possessing information other than what was stated in the course material.

The group shared information not only during the learning process, but also during the registration period and in finding out students' final grades. All members have each others' identification number, address, and telephone number. Students who had time to go to the Regional Center (UPBJJ) or UT headquarters looked up their peers' grade. At the next meeting they would share those grades with others and congratulate the person who got the best grade.

Students' discussion on problem-solving

Before the group starts meeting in class each semester, they identify courses that need more attention for external assistance. The courses chosen to be discussed in the group always refer to subjects that need extensive thinking, such as understanding graphics, applying formulas and other computational activities.

Totok, who teaches Statistics on Economic II, always gave a 30 minute exercise at the end of every

section in the module. Students worked together and shared information as to deciding the best instrument to solve certain exercises. Often for this little exercise, students would broke into pairs and discussed it thoroughly. Totok went around making sure that students applied the correct solution. He also joined the students and they did the exercise together. Especially in Statistics, Totok also demonstrated to the group the use of the calculator for statistical purposes. "This calculator, the fx-3600p is suitable for statistics computation". He was referring to the Casio scientific calculator..."It can be applied for more than two variables...all you have to do is press this (pressing the little button on the calculator), after entering the data". He was not suggesting that students buy the fx-3600p, but that it would be handy at the time of examination. Then, at the next class meeting, I noticed that Koes had bought the wrong calculator. Her friends comforted her by teasing .."Koes, your calculator can be used if ever you intend to open a business" (Simamora, March 1987). Koes traded it back for the right calculator.

The discussion of the modules was often

unsatisfactory, because the materials did not contain enough information. For the two courses, Statistics Economics II and Theory of Macroeconomics II, tutors enhanced materials by referring also to other references. Most students did the same; Puji told me that he always prepared himself by buying other references to supplement the modules. "I don't entirely depend on these materials", pointing to the module in front of him. Obviously, the modules contained insufficient information in explaining concepts or ideas.

The Activities of Studying in Groups

The group was formed in the third semester and the five founders were Simamora, Fachruddin, Sutoyo, Djuned and Mas'ud. They told me that at first they contacted their friends individually, then agreed to meet regularly each semester. The location at SMP 56 was chosen not because it was near students' homes but it was available and suitable in a sense that the charge was reasonable and it is near a bus station. The students also agreed to pay fee of Rp 10 000 a month,

this including the tutors' fee. The tutors were paid Rp 20 000 for every meeting for two hours classes. The amount of fee to be collected should not be a burden; members could sometimes pay less or more. "This depends on the members' financial problem ...because we are all family we should discuss everything openly". (Djuned, 1987)

Most often they met twice a week but sometimes they met more than twice a week depending on the materials being discussed. "Not everybody in group can meet regularly, sometimes they are on a business trip or work at night...it is our responsibility to notify them of changes in meeting or other valuable information" (Simamora, 1987). I often saw new faces in the group but originally they membered about 22.

It seemed clear that Djuned was always the organizer of activities."...I don't really need to come regularly, because I don't really have a lot of problems in mastering the materials but I feel that I have the responsibility to come to every meeting just to motivate others"(Djuned, August 1987). Djuned's positive attitude toward me made my observations easier. He was also the first person to volunteer for

an interview, and others followed. The other students recognized his ability not only in academic matters but also in organizing social interaction. It became clear that members of the group chose Djuned to be the organizer of the group. "I think Mr. Djuned has the ability to organize us,.. besides he mastered many courses."(Erida, August 1987).

Benefits from Studying in a Groups

Students admitted that learning in the classroom is more beneficial than learning individually. Learning together requires them to discuss, describe, and reflect on their skills in order to improve their learning performance. Linda and Enni were the youngest members of the group, having just graduated from High School before entering UT. "I never dreamt of studying alone, especially when this is my first entry to university environment" (Enni, August 1987). Both of them agreed that they needed someone to guide them in the learning process, and stated that understanding the materials alone was just a waste of time.

Koes and Erida are both housewives who have little time for studying at home. They felt confident in attending and learning in study group. "Attending classes motivates me to continue studying at UT and I feel that I am not all alone as UT's student" (Erida). Simamora feels the same thing.. "I have to teach all day and hardly had time to learn the materials, so attending study group means a great deal to me because I could improve my knowledge by just sitting and listening to the group discussion and the tutor's explanation".

From my observations, Koes was the only woman active in the group. She said that before attending classes she would force herself to study the materials. But then, all students in the group tried also to prepare the materials before attending classes. The weaker students seemed to depend more on the information they got from classes.

Attending classes regularly stimulated the group learning behaviours. Most students admitted that only by being in the class had they the motivation to reinforce their learning. Thus, studying together added a challenge for them to continue mastering the

materials, even though they had many difficulties in doing so.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Previously, it was mentioned that this study focused on students' activities and student interaction which occur in study groups. In attempting to ascertain students' activities in study groups, I became a participant observer for 20 weeks. I also used a structured interview to obtain reliable data. In this chapter I identify patterns of behaviour of students learning in a group. In many ways, the process of learning together in the study group appeared to reflect an individual need to interact with others; each person realized the need for good communication with peers in learning. They admitted that interaction means sharing information, that is, giving and receiving help. In this case, an active interaction would help illuminate their difficulty in mastering the course materials.

Results indicated that the group has a positive attitude toward accomplishing the group goals. They wanted to work together in order to obtain the same results. This attitude was represented by the

students' behaviour of togetherness (kompak). In class activities, students would discuss not only academic matters, but also social affairs. There is a strong feeling within the group to influence students who are weak in certain courses for the purpose of accomplishing the same goals. In this case, making the decision of which courses should be discussed with external assistance is the result of group consensus. They emphasized the group's needs. This was clearly stated by Djuned, who admitted that he did not really need to participate in classes, he needed to come to motivate his friends to attend diligently the group meetings.

Although the division of tasks was not clearly defined, the group members were conscious about their responsibility as members. They discussed take-home tests together by asking a certain person to review the course and present the materials in class. They gathered valuable sources from outside for the benefit of the group.

Learning together enhanced the students' learning condition, especially in a distance education system. I found that some students looked upon learning as a

"need" to exercise their "thinking". Thus, mastering the materials by themselves was still difficult both by the new high school graduate and for the working students. In addition, students have positive attitude toward accomplishing the group goals. In this case, students feel that they are part of a particular educational institution; they tried to reinforce each other to keep on studying in a distance system.

It was mentioned before that this research was intended to identify patterns of behaviour of students in a study group. It was not the intention to test hypotheses or to reach clear conclusions. This study tried to identify notions that would be useful for UT in providing improved support services for students. Students need continuous assistance in both academic and social matters.

The very fact that students are physically separated from his/her instructor and from the institution. Thus, UT as the institution should take advantage of providing qualified tutors for study groups, as well as presenting the study groups with tutors' identification. Ideally, a list of qualified tutors for various courses should be attached in UT's

catalogue, including tutors' contacted address. Then, contacting the tutors and paying the tutors' fees would be the groups' responsibility.



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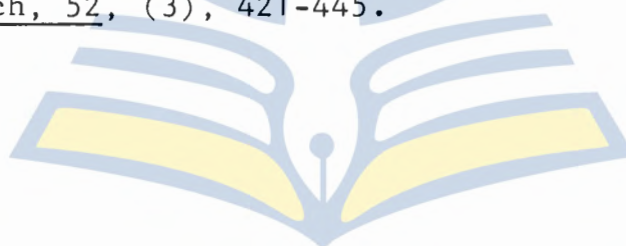
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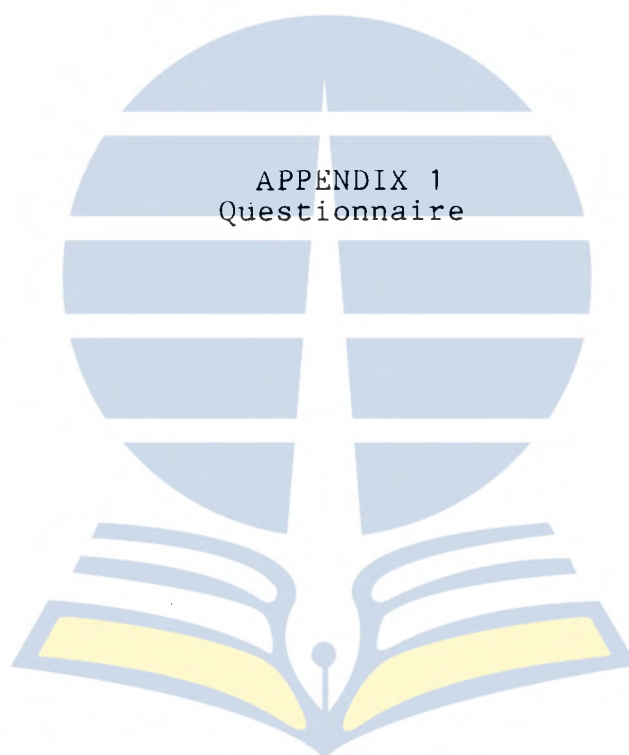
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PERSONAL IDENTITY

- 1. N a m e : _____
 - 2. Place/Date of Birth : _____
 - 3. Address : _____
 - 4. Occupation : _____
 - 5. Marital Status : _____
-

1. What motivates your joining this study group ?

2. What are your expectations by joining this study group ?
(please explain).

3. Please give an account on your experiences during the study group activities.

4. How would you describe yourself in this study group ?
(Are you active, passive, etc.?). Please explain.

5. Would you describe your activities before, during, and after the group sessions ? (e.g. preparing the materials, etc.).

6. How is your relationship with your peers in this study group ?
Please explain.

7. Do you often have contacts with your peers outside the study group's activities ? Please explain.

8. If you were asked to choose a leader for this study group, who, among your peers, would be your choice ? Please explain your choice.

9. In case of facing difficulties to understand the contents of a modul, who would you turn to ? Explain your answer.

10. Whenever problems or questions are raised by any member, does the solution come from consent by all the member of this Group ?
Please elaborate your answer.

11. While being a member of this study group, have you ever had any important or interesting experiences in connection with the activities of this group ?. Please explain.

12. Do you have any comments for those experiences ?
Explain your answer.

13. How you have benefited from joining this study group ?.
Please explain.

14. Do you still see any shortcomings in this study group ?, and how would you propose a solution ?. Please explain.



APPENDIX 2
Group Financial Expenses

