

**Implementing Constructivism Approach in Residential  
Thesis Consultation Program for Distance Learning  
Student.**

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## Abstract

*In order to fulfil a high demand from society, Universitas Terbuka, which conducts distance learning system, opened a postgraduate program in some disciplines. The aim of the program is to create human resources who are able to implement innovative approach in their working environment. To attain this aim Universitas Terbuka has to find an instructional and learning approach which enable the students to develop their knowledge and skills. This paper will explore the possibilities of using constructivism approach in the residential thesis consultation program for post graduate students of Universitas Terbuka.*

**Keywords:** *Constructivism; Residential Consultation Program; Thesis Writing*

## Introduction

UT conducts a post graduate program to fulfill society needs of highly qualified human resources. The main goals of this postgraduate is to open a wide access to those who are not able to participate in regular postgraduate programs. In order to achieve predetermined competencies in UT's postgraduate program the students must be able implement the concept of *self directed learning*. In this case, the students have to use the provided and the available learning resources to achieve predetermined learning goals.

UT's post graduate program provide a chance for the students to participate in a series of *residential thesis consultation program*. This aim of the consultation program is to facilitate students' learning process. It is necessary for them to use the consultation programs optimally. The program provide a wide chance to discuss several issues and topics related to the learned materials.

This paper will elaborate the use of constructivism approach in order to facilitate UT's postgraduate students to achieve learning goal. Ideally, to participate in residential thesis consultation program the students must have an ability to elaborate the course substances. This will enable the students to widen their knowledge and implement their skills. Therefore, it is important for the students to have a constructive learning ability in order to make their learning process more effective and efficient.

## The Essence Of postgraduate program

The aims of conducting post graduate program to provide a highly qualified of human resources who are not only able to implement their knowledge but also to create innovation regarding their skills and knowledge. In order to achieve the necessary ability the UT's postgraduate students must learn both content of learning substances and snd also the strategy to explore the relevance knowledge and skills. The strategy used to master the skills and knowledge is related to the ability to implement the strategy of "learn how to learn". The ability to implement learning how to learn consists of several skull such as:

- The ability to make a study plan
- The skill to use available resources and relevant materials.
- The ability to finish given assignments.
- The Will to reflect its learning progress.

The ability to implement the strategy of learning how to learn is one of the characteristics of constructivism approach in learning. This approach believes that an an individual student basically is a keen constructor of their knowledge and skills. The individual students construct their competencies – knowledge and skill – through interacting with learning resources – printed, non-printed learning, and other individual.

## Learning process

UT established its postgraduate program in 2004 to serve Indonesian citizens to have a better educational qualification. The ultimate aim to open this program is to provide a wide access to those who in certain circumstances are not able to participate in available regular postgraduate programs. UT's postgraduate program applies a distance learning system. The system requires the students to implement a concept of self directed learning.

Until now there are ..... postgraduate student who enroll in available three study programs such as:



- Management
- Public policy,
- Maritime and fishery management,
- Mathematic education

The students are mostly reside in several provinces of Indonesia. In order to manage the student learning process, UT conducts a partnership with government state universities. The University provides some lecturers and professors to assist and guide students learning process.

Self directed learning is essential to be implemented by UT's postgraduate students. By conducting self directed learning, the student will be able to manage their own learning process effectively. Self directed learning requires the student s to determine time and pace of their learning process to achieve the predetermined learning goals or competencies. The students have to study available learning materials provide by UT.

In order to graduate the program the students have to participate in several learning activities such as:

1. Study orientation
2. Self directed learning
3. Online tutorial
4. Face –to-face tutorial
5. Course assignment
6. Examination.

The student have to conduct a research related to a thesis writing after completing some required courses. In order to be able write a thesis they have to select a problem to be developed as a research problem. In addition, they also have to choose research method related to the stated problem. It is necessary for the students to have a systematic assistance in finishing their thesis writing assignment.

UT provide residential consultation program or BTR for the students who are in the final stage of the program. In this stage they have to write a thesis to terminate their study programs. BTR is a program which is aimed to provide an academic guidance for UT's postgraduate students in conducting a research or writing their thesis.

UT selects a high qualified thesis advisors – those are mostly have doctoral degree or professors from reputable government or state universities in Indonesia. There are two stages of BTR which should be followed optimally by UT's postgraduate students. Those two stages of BTR are intended to facilitate the students to finish their study program timely.

There are several tasks that must be done by advisors in conducting the BTR. The advisors has to assist the student in developing their thesis proposal. Besides the advisors must collaborate with students to select research problem, to choose research method, to gather and analyze data.

The students have to participate actively in BTR sessions. They must explore research materials related to their research and thesis writing. The student have to develop their own knowledge and skills in conducting a research and thesis writing. The main function of the advisor in thus academic session is to facilitate the student to finish their final assignment – research and thesis writing. The advisors have to be able to activate students to participate in advisory learning process.

It is important for the advisors to implement constructivism learning approach while guiding and assisting the students to finish their final assignment. Implementing a constructivism approach in BTR requires the advisors to use the strategy to involve in their learning process.

### **Constructivism approach**

Constructivism is one of the approaches comes from the cognitive and humanistic learning theories. This approach basically believes that the student have an ability to

develop and to construct their own knowledge and skills. The essence of research and writing a thesis basically is an ability to construct knowledge and skills. This is done by interacting with several learning resources.

There are several types of learning resources that can be explored by the students to construct their own knowledge and skills. Those are classified as: printed and non-printed materials. Printed materials for example journals, text books, modules and multimedia instructional program. Video, multimedia, and web based programs are classified as non-printed materials.

UT's postgraduate programs provide those materials to be learned by students. Cruickshank (2003) defines the constructive approach to learning as a method of learning aimed to maximize student' learning process. (p.255). Duffy and Cunningham in Jonassen (2003) noted the essence of constructive approach to learning as an active effort of the student to develop their own knowledge and skills.

Implementing this approach requires the instructor to facilitate students not only in gathering knowledge and skills but also to process them to be more meaningful. Gagnon and Collay in Cruickshank (2005) stated the form of constructive learning activities such as:

- Describing certain phenomena
- Probing question of specific issue or topic
- Critical thinking to a complex problem
- Solving the emerge problems

To implement constructivism learning theory the instructors have to create the learning situations which enable the students to share knowledge and skills. This activity provides the students to discuss the issues and topics related to course materials.

There are several important functions of teacher in implementing the constructive approach to learning activities. Those are:



- To motivate students to practice problem solving
- To aid student to integrate previous learned knowledge and skills with the new one
- To motivate students to create a new knowledge and skills

There are several characteristics of constructivistic learning approach that should be considered by instructors in designing constructive learning atmosphere. Those are:

- Active learning
- Authentic learning
- Learning must be an interesting situation for learners
- Learning must be a challenging activities for learners
- Learning process involves the concepts of bridging and reflection
- Teacher and instructors play a facilitator role rather than a presenter
- Content or learning materials must be learned systematically by learners.

There are several factors that influence the process constructing knowledge and skill such as:

- Internal process
- External process
- Combination of both internal and external process.

### **Implementing Constructivism Approach**

The implementation of constructivism approach requires the postgraduate students to be active to develop their knowledge and skills. Those who involve in residential thesis consultation program have to actively elaborate learning resources related to their thesis topic. The main function of the advisor in this sense is to provide a guidance and information that facilitate the students to terminate their thesis writing.

The lecturers assigned to be thesis writing advisors have to work as full time consultant in guiding the students work systematically. They have to work step-by-step from selecting their topic until evaluating progress in writing their thesis.

The main elements of constructivism approach which include active learning; concepts bridging; interactive dialog; reflection; and scaffolding should be applied in order to facilitate the students to write their final thesis. Thesis writing is considered as a rigor academic assignment which requires the students to work systematically to select their thesis topic, to determine background and research questions, to state working hypotheses; to gather supporting data; and to make a comprehensive conclusion.

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