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Paper Abstracts

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Prof. Dr. Pham Minh Viet

Welcome Message

from the President of Hanoi Open University

Dear colleagues and friends!

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, I would like to welcome all of you to the 24th AAOU Annual Conference. Hanoi Open University (HOU), feels very honoured to host such an important Conference, 26 - 28 October 2010 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The theme of the Conference "Open Distance Learning Towards Building Sustainable Global Learning Communities" reflects the development trend, cooperative and sharing movement in sustaining open educational resources. Open distance learning, an innovative approach to education, is becoming more popular in the Asian region and the world, building and sustaining ODL communities. In taking these thoughts further, the 24th Asian Association of Open University Annual Conference aims (i) to find the solutions for building sustainable learning communities through ODL, (ii) to provide a forum for education co-operations and knowledge transfer, (iii) to bring into full play the effectiveness of implementation of ODL.

I believe that the AAOU-2010 Conference will be meaningful for all participants from Asian region as well as from other parts of the world. October is also of significant time when Hanoi is celebrating its 1000th anniversary of foundation. We hope our participants and guests enjoy their trips to Vietnam with a better understanding of our beautiful country, friendly people, diversified culture, long history, and peaceful atmosphere.

It is my great honor to welcome you all to the memorable conference.

Best regards,



Prof. Dr. Pham Minh Viet

President of Hanoi Open University,

Chairman of the Conference Organizing Committee

“Open Distance Learning Towards Building Sustainable Global Learning Communities”

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Supporting Distance Education Student's Interaction through Online Learning

Rahmat Budiman and Tri Darmayanti

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Universitas Terbuka

Jl. Cabe Raya Pondok Cabe, Tangerang 15418 Indonesia

Telp. +61 21 7490941 Ext. 1909

budiman@mail.ut.ac.id and yanti@mail.ut.ac.id

Abstract

Distance education institution is primarily dependent on printed learning material to fill out the teacher absence. The separation between teachers and students becomes the main distinction of distance education system. Information and communication technologies (ICT) nowadays, however, is experiencing rapid development and plays a far greater role in distance education compared to what it did a decade ago. Since distance education mode in actual fact is different from face-to-face mode, the presence of technology is undeniable even a must. In distance education, ICT enables interactions between the students and teachers (tutors) and among the students in online learning asynchronously or synchronously.

Universitas Terbuka realizes the important of ICT. Continuous improvement in providing the best learning process and learning support for its students. This paper discusses the experience of the writers in supporting distance education students of the Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka residing in Indonesia and in some countries such as Saudi Arabia, Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore to learn through online learning. This paper also tries to discuss the impact of the interaction of human and computer, in individual term, and also in distance education social context. This discussion is expected to provide better understanding for the distance education institution in supporting student's interaction through online learning. Furthermore, it is also expected that the discussion will be able to make continuous improvement within the use of ICT context.

Keywords: student's interaction, online learning

Introduction

Distance education system is mainly characterized by the separation between teachers and students. In Indonesia, Universitas Terbuka (UT), the biggest distance education institution, is primarily dependent on printed learning material to fill out the teacher absence. The printed learning material is a representative of the teacher. Consequently, it differs from common text books used in traditional education institutions. The difference is mainly in the learning design and manner of delivery. However, since the rapid changes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) occur in all fields of human activities and in all parts of the world, UT realizes that it must adopt and apply ICT in its learning process and learning support.

Universitas Terbuka realizes the important of ICT. Continuous improvement in providing the best learning process and learning support for its students. This paper discusses the experience of the writers in supporting distance education students of the Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka. This paper also tries to discuss the impact of the interaction of human and computer, in individual term, and also in distance education social context. This discussion is expected to provide better understanding for the distance education institution in supporting student's interaction through online learning. Furthermore, it is also expected that the discussion will be able to make continuous improvement within the use of ICT context.

Student Support

Student support in distance education context is mainly divided into two categories; academic aspects and administrative aspects. Academic aspects cover academic matters such as learning material development, test item development, examination, tutorials both face-to-face tutorial and online tutorial, practicum, counseling, learning supplement provision, and online library service. On the other hand, administrative aspects include information about registration process, credit transfer, and examination process. One aspect that also important in online student support is hidden curriculum where students can discuss academic matters with UT staff or tutor and among themselves. In other words, students have access to communicate with their colleagues and with their tutor as students and lecturers in traditional education institutions.

As in traditional education institution, students of distance education need learning support during their studies. Although distance education students are demanded to be independent, it does not mean that the institution minimizes its roles. The role of the institution is very significant because the students are coming from various geographic areas, educational backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and communication and information problems. Darmayanti's longitudinal research (Darmayanti, 2008) shows that distance education students need support to enhance their readiness for self-directed learning by providing them with information of how to learn. It explains that intervention is able to increase students' readiness for self-directed learning in distance education, especially learning skills interventions. The findings of Darmayanti's research also show that distance education students have similar characteristics with the traditional education institution students; they need psychological support to enhance their learning. However, psychological intervention applied in distance education should adapt the intervention into distance education conditions. In addition, Darmayanti's research was conducted by

sending the intervention booklet to the students, while in the traditional education was provided in the classroom

UT provides student support in various ways. Since 1999, UT has been extending its student support through online media. The followings are UT student support particularly in academic aspects.

Supporting Distance Education Student through Online Learning

One of learning supports provided at the beginning of the online service development at UT is online tutorial in 1999, previously called electronic tutorial. Some problem occurs during the development. Some of them as showed by Darmayanti (2002) are as follows:

▪ Problem appeared in 1999:

1. Tutors do not perform their duties.
2. Technical problems.
3. Limited computer facilities.
4. Managerial problems appear in the faculty.
5. Problems appear within the tutorial participants.
6. Problems in selecting the courses offered in tutorial.

In the following year, problems also appeared (Darmayanti, 2004). They are:

1. Tutorial schedule was not accurate so that tutorial process did not run well.
2. Administrative staff to record tutorial participant was not ready.
3. Tutors did not respond tutorial activities.

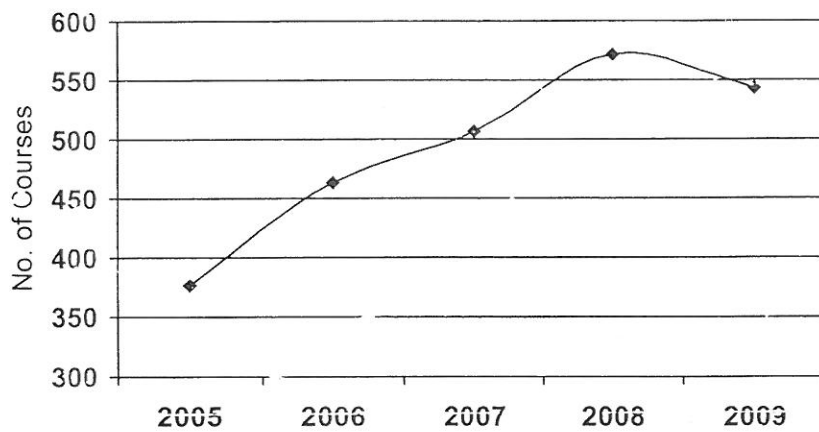
Student's Interaction through Online Learning

Traditionally, education is viewed as the meeting between teachers and learners in a face-to-face educational meeting (Darmayanti, 1994). In fact, according to Moore (1986), the meeting between the teachers and the learners can be in a form of "meeting of minds", which can occur even where there are no physical meetings.

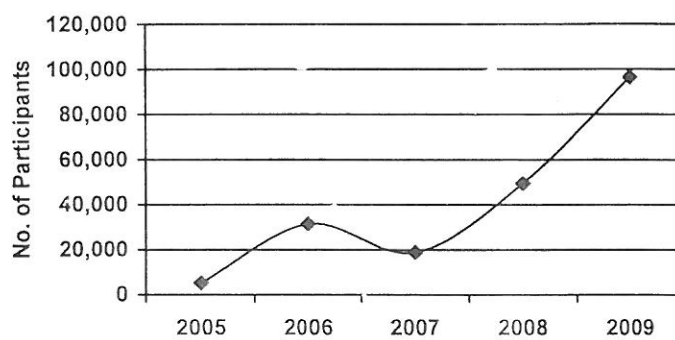
The distance education system that is different from traditional, face-to-face education has interaction consequences, those are the possibility of synchronous and asynchronous interactions. Based on the explanations from Darmayanti dan Moore, therefore, it could be concluded that learning can occur even the interaction between teachers and learners occurs synchronously and asynchronously.

Online tutorial in UT is conducted to help students to master the knowledge in the modules. There are eight (8) online tutorial meeting that is called "initiation". There are 8 initiations which 3 of them involve tasks that should be done by the students. The students would get 30 % of scores out of overall score which involve final exam or (Ujian Akhir Semester/UAS). Since students tend to be familiar with the face-to-face tutorial, therefore, in the online tutorial the students interaction tend to be low or inhibited. It seems that the students are not familiar to express their opinions in the written communication. However, this interaction problems are not only for the students but also for the tutors. There are still many tutors that could not involved in the online tutorials for many reasons, such as difficulties in changing the online interaction habit.

The number of courses and students participating in the online tutorial from 2005 to 2008 increased extensively. In 2007, courses offered in online tutorials increased 23.1%, and increased 12.6% in 2008. In other words, the courses increased 15% in 4 years. In 2009, there was a decrease because online tutorials for some practical courses were not offered through online but in the form of face-to-face tutorials. In the meantime, the rate of student participation in online tutorials rose and fell. The number of students who has participated in the online tutorials rose 500.1% in 2006, but decreased to 40% in 2007. An increase appeared again to 162.8% in 2008, and continued to slightly increase to 95% in 2009. The trend of online tutorial can be seen in the following figures (Zuhairi and Rahmat (Ed), 2009).



Online Tutorial: Coursed offered by UT



Online Tutorial: Participants

The data above show that the number of students utilizing online tutorial is emerging and promising considering Indonesian geographic condition as well as the student learning experience especially in using current Information Communication Technology gadgets. The phenomena result in two things, the first is that UT needs to improve and vary its student learning services so that the students will be able to utilize them at the greatest benefit. The second, UT needs to encourage its students to be ICT literate by doing socialization through seminars, radio and television, printed leaflets, and online information.

Conclusion

The changing of paradigms from face to face teaching-learning in the classroom into teaching-learning in the virtual classroom or online learning in Indonesia shows a great effect. The number of students participating in online tutorial increases annually. Besides, the number of courses offered through online tutorial increase as well. Consequently, UT has to improve the quality of online tutorial as well as the quantity of the participants and the courses offered.

The data presented show that students' interaction through online learning is unquestionable. UT needs to be able to utilize the facility to provide better service to its students by improving its online tutorial and other learning support services. The students who are moving to virtual ICT world progressively need to be supported in terms of facility, training, as well as the best service.

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