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STUDENTS SUPPORT

The Implementation of Face to Face Tutorial to Support Student's Learning: The Experience of Universitas Terbuka (UT)

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Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a State University that employs long distance learning system in its instruction. With its more than 20 years experience in serving distance education, it has a unique experience in supporting student's learning through face to face tutorial (TTM). As an institution that applies distance learning system, UT's primary students come from those who already work. They make the best of the opportunity that UT offers for them, they make UT as a place for them to continue their study while they work. Therefore, UT provides modules and other long distance learning kits such as recorded lectures and computerized modules for its students. Besides that, to motivate students, there are also various kinds of tutorials offered such as face to face tutorial (TTM), correspondence tutorial, broadcast tutorial (via radio and television), recorded tutorial (audio/video), and web-based tutorial. Every student is free to choose which kind of tutorials is best for him/her. However, TTM is the one that mostly chosen by the students.

This article will discuss about UT's experience in implementing face to face tutorial. The discussion will cover the development of the tutorial and UT efforts to improve the implementation of face to face tutorial to meet students' satisfaction.

Key Words

Long distance learning system

Face to Face Tutorial

Recorded tutorial

Implementation

Student's learning

Broadcast Tutorial

Web-based Tutorial

Students' satisfaction

Since 1984 Universitas Terbuka (UT) has been practicing its role as the only State University in Indonesia that employs long distance learning system in its instruction. Since it started to open, UT is consistence to apply this single mode learning system. One of the purposes of UT's establishment is to give opportunity to high school graduates who unable to attend campus-based face to face higher education institutions get education in university level to improve their knowledge and skills (Wahyono & Setijadi, 2004). Therefore, UT's primary students come from those who already work.

They chose UT because UT offers education they need without having to leave their work or change their work schedule. This can be done because in UT, students can set up their own schedule to study; they do not need to attend a class as student of face to face institutions do. UT students are required to be autonomous students who have self initiative and discipline to study. To empower the autonomous students, UT provides learning materials needed by its students in the printed and non-printed form. The printed one is called modules, and the non-printed one can be audio or video cassettes or computerized modules. The learning materials are developed in such a way that students can use them with minimum help from others.

To develop modules and other learning kits, UT involves many subject matter specialists from some universities in Indonesia. They work in teams to write modules in certain format that set up by UT. The modules should contain all of the course material written in syllabus and should be self instruction so that students can use it by themselves. Using the comprehensive modules the students are expected to be able to set up schedule and place for their study. They are also encouraged to make study group if they need. In the study group they can help each other in learning and solving their learning problem.

Although the students are persuaded to be autonomous learners, UT still provides them with learning supports to assist the students master the knowledge. Various kinds of learning supports provided are for increasing students' perception and help them to solve their learning problems. Learning supports, which are called tutorials, are given face to face or long distance by tutors in regional offices or central office. UT, now, has 37 regional offices around the country. Long distance tutorials provided by UT are correspondence tutorial, broadcast tutorial (via radio and television), recorded tutorial (audio/video), and web-based tutorial. Every student is free to choose which kind of tutorials is best for him/her.

UT also provides face to face tutorial (TTM) for its students. According to *Suparman (1992)* face to face tutorial is not a taboo to be provided by long distance education. Face to face tutorial is needed since the students mostly studying by themselves, therefore, sometimes they need to meet each other or with someone that can help them to solve their problems in learning the modules. In fact, face to face tutorial is the most tutorial chosen by the students. In relation with its name, face to face tutorial is held in a classroom with one tutor as a facilitator for a group of students that take the same course. From the beginning of its establishment, UT had

implemented face to face tutorial at central office as well as at regional offices. However this tutorial has its ups and downs experience. This article discusses UT's experience in implementing face to face tutorial.

Face to Face Tutorial (TTM) at the Beginning Years

Becoming an autonomous learner is not easy; it needs discipline and persistence. This can be more difficult for those who used to be learners of face to face institutions. Besides that, in studying the learning material in the modules, students sometimes face some difficulty that they cannot solve by themselves. Considering this problem, UT provides students with face to face tutorial (TTM) in which students can meet friends and tutors to discuss and share their problems.

At the beginning, UT provided free face to face tutorial service for its students for each course offered within a semester. It received good response from the students. Many students participated in this tutorial. *Setijadi (2004)* stated that in the first year when UT started to operate, about 80% of students that enrolled in one course attended face to face tutorial. This happened because a lot of students were not used to study autonomously which were demanded in long distance learning system. Many students used TTM as a place not only for discussing the course material and problems, but also a place for socializing. Through TTM, students knew more about long distance learning system.

The students' enthusiasm to attend TTM did not last long. It was the same with what happened in England and Thailand, two countries that have practiced TTM earlier (*Setijadi, 2004*). In the second

year of UT, the amount of students that attended TTM started to decrease. Many reasons caused the decreasing of students' participation. According to *Belawati (2001)* one of the reasons that made the decreasing number of students' participation to TTM was the locations of tutorials. The tutorials were usually held in the city where the regional office is located and it was considered too far from where the students lived. Moreover, the decreasing participation of TTM was also caused by the quality of the tutors. A lot of tutors were unable to execute TTM well, while UT could not give appropriate training for them; they were only provided with tutorial guidelines (*Setijadi, 2004*). As a result, there were favorite and not favorite tutors. Favorite tutors were still attended by some students, while no students came to the class with not favorite tutor. Another reason that caused the decreasing number of students who came to tutorial was that tutorial activity did not give any contribution to the final grade of the course (*Yunus, 2004*). Many students who did not attend tutorial could pass the course, while those who attended tutorial could not pass the exam. On the other hand, getting good tutors was not an easy task. At the end of the fourth year, UT decided to stop providing the free TTM classes.

Face to Face Tutorial of 1990-2001 Period

Although UT did not administer TTM, it did not mean that UT did not provide students' learning support. UT still provided TTM, however it was under students' demand and they had to pay for it. Therefore, students were encouraged to set up study groups with maximum of 30 students per group in order to share the tutorial fees.

At the beginning of this period, learning support services that organized by private institutions started to appear since the fees for

tutorials went into effect. The private institutions that organized TTM were called “UT Campus”. Later, UT Campus did not only serve the students for TTM, but also they tried to help them to register and to provide places for final examination. Many students took benefit of this opportunity by joining the UT Campus. Afterwards, Some UT Campuses began to abuse their role as a learning support institution. They give students a promise that they could help them pass the exam using the inappropriate manners (*Yunus, 2004*). This promise, of course, must not happen because there was not any networking between UT and any UT Campus. Moreover, UT has its own grading system that was designed perfectly that no one could abuse it. Then, students began to leave UT Campus, and TTM, again, organized by UT through Central and Regional Offices.

Meanwhile, in this period UT began to accept fellowship students. The biggest fellowship students that accepted by UT in the beginning of 90s was from Directorate of Basic and Secondary Education of Ministry of National Education. UT was appointed to upgrade primary teacher qualifications. The program is called PGSD. For the fellowship students, UT provide face to face tutorial that was compulsory for the students. It meant that all PGSD students had to attend the tutorial and Regional Offices organized the tutorials. Although the tutorials were compulsory, students’ participation was not accounted to the grade of the course.

Face to Face Tutorial after 2001

The attendance of TMM continued to decrease and this made UT think a way to develop a tutorial system that can help students in learning as well as in passing the course. In early 2001, UT built up a team under the coordination of Vice Rector of Student Affairs to develop an effective and efficient tutorial design. The design is called

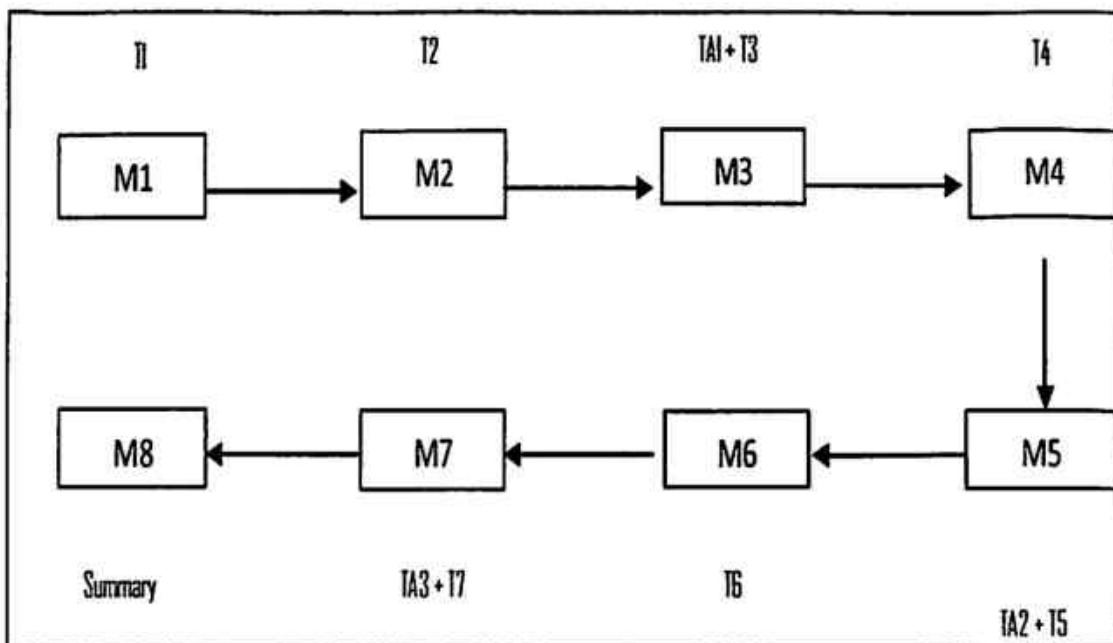
face to face tutorial with special design (TTMRK). TTMRK is a new model of face to face tutorial that has specific characteristics such as in administering, recruiting tutors, the amount of the meeting, assignments, and the contribution of assignment for the final grade of the course (*UT, 2001*).

Like the former TTM, TTMRK is held based on students' demand. When a group of students request a TTMRK for a certain course, Faculty provides tutor that relevant with the course and comply with the requirement for students who live close to Central Office, or Regional Offices, for students who live far from Central Office. Then, the Office has to determine the place for TTM. Maximum 30 students can be in one tutorial class and every student should pay a certain amount of money for tutorial fees. Because it is not compulsory to attend or join a tutorial class, Faculty or Regional Office has to register the students who join the tutorial to the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs. The registration should be done not later than one week after the tutorial begun. This registration is important so that the Examination Centre is able to include the score from tutorial assignments to the final grade of the course.

Differ from former TTM that the amount of the meetings is about 4 – 6 meetings in one semester for one course, TTMRK requires 8 times in class meetings in one semester for one course with duration of 120 minutes or 2 hours for one meeting. Every meeting should consist of discussion, ask and answer activity, giving information, exercises, and doing the assignment. For that purpose, tutors ask students to prepare themselves for the tutorial by reading the modules, looking for more additional resources, or writing the summary from the module they read. This assignment should be done before they come to the class. Besides assignment for reading the module, students are also given assignments that used to measure their achievement in mastering the course materials.

This kind of assignments are given for three times during the tutorial period and given at the third, the fifth and the seventh meetings. The assignments are in the form of objective and/or essay form, and they are done in one hour during the tutorial time. After finishing the assignment, the tutorial is continued to discuss the material from module. The three assignment, then, are graded by the tutor and the grade is sent to Central Office which will contribute to the final grade of the course as much as 30%. To illustrate the activity of TTMRK the following chart is presented to show the activity of each tutorial meeting and assignments.

The Chart of TTMRK Activity



T = Assignment to prepare for the tutorial
 TA = Assignment to measure the achievement
 M = Tutorial Meeting
 (Source: UT, 2001)

In terms of the process of the tutorial activity, TTRMK is better than the former TTM in which TTMRK has assignments that are given to measure students' achievement toward the materials they learned. Through those assignments tutors will know the level of students' achievement, therefore, they can give immediate remedial when it is needed. Furthermore, students will be more ready to have the final examination for the course.

Since TTMRK is employed for helping students mastering the course materials, its benefit has been received by the students. Research conducted by a team from UT Research Center in 2005 about the implementation of TTMRK in eleven Regional Offices shows that after the implementation of TTMRK, 91.78% students passed the course taken. This is a good achievement that UT reaches, because before this, the level of students passed the exam usually reached up no more than 70%. Although the benefit of TTMRK has been experienced by many students, to maintain the quality of tutorial, evaluation, supervising, and monitoring should be continued to do by the Regional Offices as well as the Central Office.

Considering the benefit of this kind of tutorial, many students attend TTMRK, because the former TTM does not exist anymore. Since the former TTM is not used anymore, TTMRK is called TTM now.

Concluding Remark

Face to face tutorial is one of learning support services that is given to the UT students in order to help them solve the problems they face during their studying the course materials. Since the first year of its establishment, UT had provided face to face tutorial. With its ups and downs and the change in the way it was organized, UT continues to set up the face to face tutorial. Nowadays, UT has found the

form of TTM which conform the students' needs. The new TTM is called TTMRK means face to face tutorial with specific design. Through TTMRK the number of students who passed the exam increases. However, to keep the quality of TTMRK, UT should continue to monitor and evaluate the activity.

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