# Teaching Presence in Online Tutorials at Distance Education

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## Abstract

*This study examines teaching presence in online tutorials at a graduate program in a distance teaching university. The method of the research uses content analysis and in-depth interviews. Data will be collected from the transcript of the discussion activities and interactions between student and tutor in an online tutorial of six courses of the graduate program and interviews with tutors. The transcripts of online tutorial activities will be analyzed by using a message unit; meanwhile the interviews will be analyzed with code and grouped into theme.*

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a distance teaching university in Indonesia where the students learn independently. Independent learning is not easy for some people. In order to facilitate students in their independent learning process and to enhance their learning achievement, it is important for the distance education institution to provide learning support with an affordable and accessible system for its students [1]. Among the learning support services offered by UT is a tutorial via internet, which is called online tutorial.

The online tutorial at UT is a learning support for students to gain a better understanding of the materials in their courses. This kind of tutorial also helps students who wish to achieve higher grades, since it contributes additional marks to the final grade. Activities in the online tutorial at UT consist of initiation, discussions, and assignments. In order to obtain meaningful learning experiences in the online tutorial, students are expected to be active in the tutorial activities, read the initiation material, actively participate in discussions, and do the assignments. Students are also expected to interact and collaborate actively in discussions with fellow students and tutors. By following the tutorial actively, meaning students can interact with tutors and other students, helping students to develop a critical thinking, and be able to apply the skills acquired from the assignments given by the tutor.

The tutor in an online learning or online tutorials has an important role in helping students learn. However, teaching in an online environment is not easy. The role of the tutor in an online learning is quite complex and challenging [2]. The instructor does not only provide a course subject, but also acts as a facilitator in the learning process.

The role of tutors in an online learning may influence the level of student satisfaction in learning. Students expect the tutor can interact with them, giving responses and responses in discussions, and provide feedback to the assignment they do. Some studies found that sometime there was a lack of interactions between students and tutors and among students in the online learning. Students sometime only posted their own contributions without referring to other students' opinions. This would make the discussion forum only like a set of serial monologues [8]; [9]. A study at UT also reported that students felt that they did not have enough motivation to be active in the discussions in the online learning because there was a lack of interaction among students or between students and tutors [12].

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer identified the role of tutor in an online learning is as instructional designer course, facilitators, and providers of direct instruction. This role is known as teaching presence in online learning [5]. This study is intended to determine whether there is a teaching presence on tutorial online in a graduate program at UT.

## 2. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:
a. To what extent is the teaching presence in the online tutorial in a graduate program existed?
b. What factors constrain the teaching presence in the online tutorial in a graduate program?

## 3. Literature Review

The concept of teaching presence in this study is part of the framework of the Community of Inquiry [5]. Community of Inquiry framework is used as a

concept and tools to support the learning experience in online learning through computer mediated communication (CMC) (p. 87). Community of inquiry is defined as "a cohesive and interactive community of learners whose purpose is to critically analyze, construct, and confirm worthwhile knowledge" [3], (p. 9). The model of *Community of Inquiry* assumes that learning occurs within the community through the interaction of three core elements, include: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.

Teaching presence is defined as "the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personality meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" [6], (p. 5). In this educational experience, teachers and learners have important, complimentary responsibilities; they both are part of process of learning [4]. The use of term of 'teaching presence' rather than 'teacher presence' is to recognize the fact that the role of teacher may also be assumed by learners.

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer identified teaching roles as: (1) design and organization; (2) facilitating discourse; and (3) direct instruction. Facilitating discourse is defined as a critical element to "maintaining interest, motivation and engagement of students in effective learning" [2], (p. 7). As a facilitator in online learning, the teacher encourages participation of students by modelling, commenting on posts, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, keeping the discourse focused on learning objectives, and trying to draw in inactive students [13].

Direct instruction, refers to teachers providing intellectual and scholarly leadership through in-depth understanding of their subject matter knowledge [2]. This role is similar to that of a subject-matter expert. Using subject and pedagogical expertise, the instructor directs learners, provides feedback, and injects knowledge from several resources [2].

## 4. Design of the Study

The method of the research uses content analysis and in-depth interviews. According Kanuka and Anderson, content analysis is defined as a research methodology that uses a set of procedures to the make valid inferences from the text [7]. The procedures in the content analysis include identifying and interpret variables, collect a sample of the text, and establish the rule of reliability and validity in determining the categorization of the segment or section of text. The process of selecting a segment or portion of a transcript requires researchers to define the unit of analysis. Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer identified five units of analysis that has been used in the study of computer conferencing, namely: proportion unit, sentence units, paragraph units,

thematic units, and message unit. This research will use message unit [11].

Data source of this study is the sample text of the discussion activity and interaction between student and tutor in an online tutorial of six courses of graduate program in the first semester of 2015. Data also will be collected through interview with online tutors.

The transcripts of online tutorial activities will be analyzed by using a message unit. By using the message unit as the unit of analysis, code makers generally see the message that emerges from the interaction between students and tutors in the initiation, discussion and assignments, to determine the category [2].

In analyzing data interview the researcher will assign codes to items of the text. A code is a word or phrase as a label for categorizing, compiling, organizing, and comparing data [10]. In this study, it will be used coding with a bottom-up coding approach, or open coding [10]. That is, the researcher will read and re-read interview transcripts, letting the codes emerge from the words in the text. After that, the researcher will identify patterns that emerged from initial coding. This could be described as axial coding or focus coding [10]. Through this process of reading, coding, and focus coding, the researcher will create categories that could be used to responses into particular characterizations or themes, and answer the research questions.

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