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## Online Training To Enable Online Tutors: Experience of Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

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### Abstract

This study aims to look at the effectiveness of Open University online tutor training. The competencies that must be achieved by trainees are being able to plan, implement and evaluate student learning outcomes in online tutorials (administrative, learning design, facilitation, evaluation and technical aspects). Training participants are trained online for 1 week to achieve these competencies. The research data was obtained through analysis of the training participants' activities on the [etraining.ut.ac.id](http://etraining.ut.ac.id) website, tutors' self-perception questionnaire after carrying out online learning and tutor activity data on [elearning.ut.ac.id](http://elearning.ut.ac.id) website. The results of the data analysis of tutor activities during online training showed that the training helped tutors in implementing 3 aspects of online learning in the classroom (administrative, design and technical). While the other 2 aspects (facilitation and evaluation) are obtained after the participants have served in the real tutorial class. This research shows that tutors still need guidance, enrichment and strengthening as tutors to produce better performance in guiding students. The recommendations that emerged from this study were that there was a need to improve the Open University online tutoring training strategy in the future.

**Keywords:** Online Tutors, Tutors' Roles, E-Training, Tutors' Competencies, Online Training, Online Training Strategy, Staff Development, Tutor's Performance,

### Introduction

Nowadays, the Open University (UT), Indonesia has 292,465 students spread across 40 regional offices throughout the country and abroad, with the number of spreads varying from city to city. UT provides 2 types of learning support services namely face to face tutorials and online tutorials. Advances in information and communication technology (ICT), enable students to study online. Currently around 210,765 UT's students are online tutorial participants. The number of tutorial participants has increased from year to year, as shown in the following table.

**Table 1 Number of Students Participating in UT Online Tutorial.**

Tahun	Jumlah Peserta
2016	153861
2017	198968
2018	210765

With the number of students UT has now, more online tutors are needed to serve online tutorial participants. At present, UT manages 13,000 online tutorial classes each semester. The increasing number of students participating in online tutorials, requiring more teachers to serve them. Currently, UT has 632 UT lecturers who responsible for maximum of 4 courses / lecturer. This means, all lecturers can serve only 2500 online tutorial classes each semester. To that end, the policy adopted is to recruit instructors from outside UT to provide online learning support services to students. Part-time teachers who are used to help students learn are called tutors. In the online tutorial, the ratio used today is one tutor serving a maximum of 50 students in 1 online class. The data shows that as the number of online tutorial participants increases, there is an increase in the number of non-UT tutors from year to year as shown in the following table.

**Table 2 Jumlah Tutor Online UT.**

Tahun	Jumlah Tutor Online
2016	1285
2017	1908
2018	3444

The increasing demand for students to take online tutorials is explicitly stated in the UT targets. In the UT Strategic Plan, it has been mandated that in 2017, UT has 100% courses with online tutorial services. At present, the target has been reached with 1,131 courses already equipped with online tutorials with about 13.000 online classes. Therefore, it is very significant for UT to provide online training for tutors, as part of staff development. Using online training, UT can train many tutors from various locations at one time. The main reason for using

online training is that training participants can immediately get the feeling and apply online learning by themselves.

Up till now, UT has recruited tutors from face-to-face college lecturers or practitioners of certain professions/sciences. These tutors have no online teaching experience. The different backgrounds of work experience of tutors from outside UT require UT to train them in online learning. The training is aimed at making tutors able to manage their online classes according to the standards set by UT.

This research is intended to see the effectiveness of online tutorial training for Universitas Terbuka online tutors. The study was conducted on online tutorial training participants, linked to their performance after serving as tutors.

## **Literature Review**

### **Role of tutors in distance education system.**

In distance education, teaching materials are developed by a person or group of experts. These experts ultimately did not teach students directly. When the course is offered, there will be a group of other teachers (called by various names: tutor, facilitator, mediator) who will be directly responsible for a number of classes (Salmon, 2004). These tutors are part-time employees because they generally have the main task. Tutors can carry out their assignments in face-to-face or online classes.

Distance education which is currently developing rapidly is by the mode of online learning. Online learning brings out the different functions and roles of teachers in the teaching and learning process. The traditional role of the instructor in face-to-face education is now changing into a new role that requires a change in the teacher's knowledge, attitudes and skills. Online instructors who come from face to face educational institutions, do not yet have the knowledge, attitudes and skills required in online learning, which are based on information and communication technology. The transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching requires e-tutor adjustment through staff development activities (Ali, et.al, 2005).

Online instructors (hereinafter referred to as tutors) are one important component in assisting the learning process of students. In the literature, many names or terms are given to online teaching functions, such as e-tutors (Gerrard, 2002), facilitators (Collison et al. 2000, Marjanovic, 1999; Berge, 1992), teletutors (Jimenez, et.al.2017 ).

Various roles are performed by tutors in distance education. Berge (1995) mentions that there are 4 characteristics of tutors, namely 1) teaching (discussing subject matter, giving discussion topics, guiding discussion and giving feedback, summarizing the results of discussions; 2) creating socialization (friendly and comfortable atmosphere to communicate); 3) managing the tutorial process (setting learning goals, determining learning activities and schedules, setting rules and ethics, encouraging students to participate, being patient, monitoring the direction of discussion, and 4) technology guides (helping students' technical difficulties related to the tutorial page software online, providing navigation assistance and overcoming technical difficulties related to information and communication technology.

Bawane and Spector (2001) propose the role of online instructors with professional, pedagogical, social, evaluator, administrator, technology expert, counselor / supervisor and researcher abilities. Wheeler (2010) identified 6 skills that must be possessed by online tutors as follows, namely abilities:

- Encourage and motivate students
  - Accept the risks that arise from the use of new technology
  - Transferring teaching skills into the context of online learning
  - Become a communicator by using various media
  - To act decisively
  - Become an innovative person

Denis, et al (2004) divided the e-tutor role into 2 namely the central role and the peripheral role. The main role of the e-tutor is related to the role as 1). Facilitator of course material, 2). Metecognition facilitator, 3). Learning process facilitator, 4). Counselor, 5). Assessor, 6). Technologists and 7). Learning resource provider. While the role of peripheral tutors is as 1). Manager / administrator, 2). Designer, 3). Student friends in learning and 4). As a researcher.

Consider the importance of the position of tutors in online learning, requiring distance education institutions to equip tutors with a variety of roles and skills. Sulcic & Sulcic (2010) and Denis et.al (2004) suggest that distance education institutions select individual tutors with specific skills to develop their abilities as tutors through specially designed training programs. According to McPherson & Nunes (2004) because of the important role of tutors in conveying learning and guiding students, tutors must have special skills, in addition to mastering the field of science. Furthermore, students' acceptance of online learning is mainly determined by the quality of the online tutorial/learning process they experience (McPherson & Nunes, 2004).

### **Online tutorial as a learning support at universitas terbuka (ut) indonesia.**

Since 2004, UT has provided online study assistance services to students. This learning assistance service is known as "online tutorial / tuton". Tuton is a form of internet-based or web-based tutorial service. Students can choose online tutorial services or face to face tutorials, according to their conditions. UT carries out online tutorials with the aim of, 1) optimizing the use of the internet network to provide learning assistance services to students, 2). provide more communicative and interactive learning assistance services, including links to relevant sites and

learning resources, and 3). provide alternative choices for students who have access to the internet to obtain learning assistance services optimally.

As one form of learning assistance, online tutorials contribute 30% to the final grade of a course, while 70% of scores are obtained through the end of the semester exam. In online tutorials, students take 14 tutorial sessions, with 3 pre-session details, namely after students register their courses, 8 independent online tutorial sessions held for 8 weeks under the tutor's guidance, and 3 independent online tutorial sessions ahead of the final semester exams. UT uses the Loodle Moodle 3.5 platform for online tutorials. This LMS is regularly updated to answer various online learning needs.

In terms of learning design, each subject in an online tutorial is equipped with a set of tutorial components as follows:

1. One (1) course outline and 8 learning scenarios to guide tutors.
2. Attendance of participants
3. Eight (8) initiation materials, as triggers for learning in each session
4. Eight (8) discussion topics
5. Eight (8) formative tests
6. Three (3) mandatory tasks
7. The task of participation as needed
8. Other learning resources besides the Main Material Book
9. A minimum greeting video for the tutorial introduction
10. Summative test at the end of the tutorial period
11. Tutor evaluation questionnaire

The number of tutorial classes per subject varies. For example, there are courses that have less than 3 tutorial classes. However, there are very many courses that have more than 50 classes, even for university-level compulsory courses (Religious Education, Indonesian Language, Civic Education), having 250 classes in which each class consists of 50 students.

Considering that there are quite a lot of subjects that have many classes, UT applies the system for each subject to be made a master class. The master class is the parent class of a course that contains all the components that are considered important from an online learning process. The master class contains the ten components of the UT online tutorial mentioned above. In the master class the name of the tutor is not mentioned, because in each class, each tutor will make a preface for each class that is his responsibility. The class master will then be multiplied into a number of classes that are formed when students have registered for participation in an online tutorial. With this class master, each class (regardless of the number) will get the same and standardized tutorial components.

The application of this class master system has been carried out since 2018. In previous years, each tutor was tasked with making materials and assignments for each class and managing the class in their own way. Such conditions lead to differences in material, assignments and assessments between subjects that are not standardized, which in turn has an impact on differences in the achievement of student learning outcomes.

With the class master system, there are some tutor functions that are not performed by UT tutors when compared to the functions and roles of tutors discussed above. For example, tutors do not need to make learning plans, prepare materials, make formative and summative test instruments. The function of the UT tutor currently being applied is more directed at administrative functions, learning design, facilitation, evaluation and technical.

### **Open university online tutor training.**

Since 2011, UT annually conducts training for online tutors from outside UT. Initially the training was conducted face-to-face for 2 days, with simulations and practices using Moodle LMS. Evaluation of face-to-face training provides input that the training is less efficient because UT must bring tutors from various cities in Indonesia, with a high enough cost. In addition, the most important input is that participants should feel how the online learning process is carried out so that they can anticipate and reflect on students during the real class.

Based on this input, since 2016, UT has implemented online training for online tutors. This is intended so that the tutors get a real learning experience as an online tutor, so hopefully they can help the learning process of the tutorial participants to the fullest.

The Open University Online Tutorial Training begins with the open recruitment of tutors, announced through the Open University website. The applicants are then selected by the Chair of the Study Program who needs a tutor, according to the subject matter required. After being selected, applicants must process this log on to the Open University e-training page so that they can actively learn online. The following table 3 shows the number of applicants for UT 2018 and 2019 Online Tutor Training, the number of prospective participants who passed the

study program selection and the number of participants who passed the training. This data shows the number of applicants for 30 study programs at UT.

**Table 3 UT Prospective Online Tutor Recruitment Data**

<b>Number</b>	<b>2018.2</b>	<b>2019.1</b>
Registrant	1431	1927
Pass selection	777	837
Complete training	487	504

Participants, who pass the selection from the study program, then attend online training asynchronously for 1 week, so that the trainees can learn and interact anywhere at any time and anywhere with the trainers.

Training materials include Concepts, Strategies and Interactions in Online Tutorials, Utilization of Tutorial Designs, Utilization of Open Educational Resources/OER, Introduction to Moodle LMS, Assessing Students' Learning Processes and Results. The competencies that must be achieved by participants in the training have been adjusted to the task of the UT tutor. The material is presented according to schedule so participants learn in sequence, and the trainers can provide responses and guidance according to the topics discussed. The material provided in the training is based on tutor assignments applied at UT, in accordance with the current UT policy of implementing master classes.

The training was designed with a Workshop Approach, where participants were assigned to study the material, discuss in discussion forums and practice individually. The exercise that must be done by participants is uploading a tutor's greeting video to the tuton class, uploading learning resources from Open Educational Resources, assessing and responding to discussions and evaluating and giving assignment feedback. During this training period, participants will also attend synchronous training sessions through the Webinar for 1 day for 8 hours. In this training session via the Webinar, participants from various cities and countries discuss and share their experiences following the online session and ask about their difficulties.

The completion of trainees is determined based on the achievement of learning outcomes during the training period with the following main criteria.

- 1 Assess the discussion
- 2 Give discussion responses
- 3 Assessing Tasks
- 4 Provide task feedback
- 5 Uploading enrichment material
- 6 Following the e-Seminar

Additional criteria are the number of hits / activeness of the participants during the training. Participants are declared to pass if they meet at least 4 criteria out of 6 main criteria. Additional criteria are used if there are two participants getting the same score.

**Material/ Methodology**

This study was conducted using a document study approach through analysis of tutor activity data during training compared to data when tutors were on duty, obtained from Moodle LMS. In addition, the survey was conducted by giving questionnaires to tutors at the end of the semester after they were assigned. The survey was conducted to get tutors' perceptions of their performance after serving as UT tutors.

The population in this study were tutors in the field of Education who were declared to have passed the Online Tutorial training in 2018 and 2019 as many as 80 people. The study sample was 51 tutors in charge of managing tutorial classes in 2018 - 2019.

**Analysis and Results**

Data obtained during the training shows that tutors who passed the online training are tutors who have met at least 4 completion criteria, namely assessing and responding to discussions, assessing and giving feedback on assignments, uploading enrichment materials and participating in e-seminars. In addition, the participants' activeness in following the tutorial also became one of the important indicators, which was marked by the number of visits to their etraining pages during the training, as illustrated in table 4 below.

**Table 4 Access Tutor Data in Training and in Tutorial Classes.**

Range of Access (1 week training)	Number of tutor	Range of Access (8 week in class)	Jumlah tutor
100 - 200	10	801 - 900	10
201 - 400	10	901 - 1000	10
401 - 600	14	1001 - 2000	14
601 - 1000	11	2001 - 3000	11
1001 - 5000	6	3001 - 4000	6
	51		51

The effectiveness of online tutor training can be seen among others from the data on the number of tutor candidates accessing during training and when working in class. The access data in table 2 shows that tutors who have a high enough number of access during training show that the number of accesses is also high when serving as a tutor in the actual class. With a minimum number of accesses 100 times in one week, the number of accesses that occur in training shows a large range compared to the range in the actual class which lasts for 8 weeks.

Tutor performance is also shown when on duty also seen from the completion of assignments as a tutor starting from uploading greeting videos to tuton classes, uploading learning resources from Open Educational Resources, assessing and responding to discussions and assessing and giving feedback on assignments, including making reports on the implementation of tutor assignments.

In addition to data access, tutors are also asked to conduct a self-evaluation of their performance while carrying out assignments in the tutorial class. Data from tutors' perceptions about performance in carrying out assignments, shows that there are functions that they can apply in managing tutorial classes. The five functions measured are administrative functions, learning design, facilitation, evaluation and technical functions. Table 5 below shows the data from the tutor's self-perception questionnaire.

**Table 5 Self Perceptions of Performance as a Online Tutor.**

1. Administrative Function	(in %)			
	Very Good	Good	Fairly Good	Less
<i>Tutor skill in:</i>				
1. Provide a clear learning flow	58	42	0	0
2. Set clear learning goals and learning targets	49	47	4	0
3. Ensure the participation of each student in the tutorial	54	38	5	3
4. Respond immediately to student email / chat	45	49	6	0
<b>2. Learning Design Fuction</b>				
<i>Tutor skill in:</i>				
1. Plan learning activities so students understand the contents of the course	30	64	6	0
2. Provide an applicative example of the material discussed	27	61	10	2
3. Helping students to be able to assess the progress of their learning	27	71	2	0
4. Ensure that course material is easy for students to use	43	49	8	0
<b>3. Fasilitation Function</b>				
<i>Tutor skill in:</i>				
1. Establish rules for communicating in class	33	58	9	0
1. Providing opportunities for discussion, negotiation or debate in class	63	37	0	0
2. Become a moderator in the discussion	42	54	4	0
3. Encourage the sharing of opinions and knowledge between students	57	39	4	0

4. Provide additional lecture material / relevant enrichment	24	49	27	2
5. Respond to student discussions	53	47	0	0
6. Give praise to student suggestions	66	34	0	0
<b>4. Evaluasi Function</b>				
<i>Tutor skill in:</i>				
1. Set criteria for discussion and assignment answers	33	63	4	0
2. Helping students who have difficulty in doing assignments	47	47	6	0
3. Helping students explore their grades	35	58	7	0
4. Respond immediately to student discussions and assignments	39	55	6	0
5. Provide assessment and feedback on discussions and assignments	60	35	5	0
6. Contact students who have not been active in discussions and collect assignments	68	23	9	0
<b>5. Technical Function</b>				
<i>Tutor skill in:</i>				
1. Operate all features in the elearning.ut.ac.id LMS	41	51	6	2
2. Helping students who experience technical difficulties	32	57	9	2
3. Providing advice and solutions to technical problems faced by students	32	57	9	2

From the administrative function, tutors stated that they had excellent performance in terms of providing a clear learning flow (stated by 58% of tutors) and in ensuring the participation of students in the tutorial (stated by 54% of tutors). Furthermore, from the learning design function, tutors' performance in planning learning activities was perceived well by 65% of tutors, giving applicative examples of the material discussed perceived well by 63% tutors and helping students to be able to assess their learning progress perceived well by 63% tutors. From the facilitation aspect, tutors perceive that their best abilities are in terms of giving compliments to students' brainstorming suggestions (expressed by 66% of tutors) and encouraging students to share opinions among students, expressed by 57% of tutors. For the evaluation function, tutors are of the opinion that their best ability is in terms of contacting students who have not been active in discussions and sending assignments, stated by 68% of tutors. The next function of evaluation which is perceived very well is the ability to provide assessment and feedback on student discussions and assignments. Last is about technical functions. Tutors stated that their ability to operate features on the UT elearning page was in the good category, expressed by 51% of tutors, as well as the ability to help and provide suggestions and solutions for students who were experiencing technical difficulties, perceived well by 57% of tutors.

Some capabilities of the five functions above, the tutor believes that their abilities still need to be improved. Functions that need to be improved are 1) The learning design function, especially for the ability to plan learning activities, provides an applicative example of the material / concepts discussed and helps students assess their learning progress; 2). Facilitation function, especially the ability to provide enrichment lecture material; 3). The evaluation function, in terms of preparing discussion criteria and assignments and helping students explore grades; 4). Technical functions, in terms of providing advice and solutions for students who are experiencing technical difficulties using the LMS Moodle feature.

## Discussion

From the results of data analysis, it can be seen that the online training attended by tutors has a good influence on the ability of tutors to carry out their duties in online classes. Liu, et al (2014) proved that tutors who were trained with work readiness material as tutors showed satisfactory results when serving as tutors, despite psychological unpreparedness. Furthermore, Liu, et al also proved that online training sessions and sharing seminars on tutorial experience, really helped tutors when on duty. Lack of time in training will result in underperformance of tutors (Nemati, 2008).

Another opinion about the importance of quality tutors in managing online classes, was stated by Sulcic & Sulcic (2010), which stated that only well-trained tutors would be able to meet student expectations for learning assistance services. The training conducted by UT is an ongoing effort aimed at providing better services in helping students' learning processes.

On the other hand, online training also has an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of training at UT. This is in line with the opinion of Amara & Atia (2016) which states that information and communication technology contributes greatly to the efficiency and effectiveness of human resource development efforts.

Webinar sessions held for 1 day in online training also had a good impact on tutors' ability to manage classes. Webinar sessions that contain material on orientation and UT's online tutorial policy are useful to support the implementation of tutor assignments because in this session tutors can interact directly with UT trainers and leaders. This is in line with the results of a study by Nemati (2008) that one of the things that becomes an obstacle in the implementation of distance education is that the tutor does not understand the functions and duties.

## Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this study is that online tutor training has succeeded in providing the skills that tutors need in managing classes. The five tutor functions are generally covered in the design and strategy of online tutor training. The results of this study indicate that there are tutors' abilities from the five functions that have met the tutor's expectations after attending the training, such as the ability to provide a clear learning path, encourage student participation in discussions and make assignments. Even so, there are still some capabilities of the five tutor functions that still need to be improved, namely the ability to plan student learning activities, provide applicative examples of the concepts discussed, prepare criteria for discussion and assignment answers and help students who experience technical difficulties using various LMS Moodle features.

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