THE NEEDS OF COLLABORATION IN OPERATING AN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTION: UT CASE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of building collaboration among agencies in managing student support service for the distance student in Universitas Terbuka/UT (Indonesia Open University/IOU). As a mass-scale university with the number of students more than 600 thousand scattered in 37 provinces in Indonesia and overseas, heterogeneous socio-cultural background, offering more than 200 study program, and semester test held simultaneously, UT should be able to recruit thousands of tutors, invigilator, and executive personnel to conduct academic activities in those region. UT should manage course development team (curriculum developers, modules developers, content experts, media specialists, and art designers, linguists, and also graphics developers). UT should also provide classrooms for academic activities, lab and computer to facilitate student support service. This condition implies that the availability of human resources and infrastructure, including a computer lab connected to the internet in each unit of study is a necessity. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of distance learning and to accelerate change of learning style from traditional-based to e-learning-based, collaboration between UT with local agencies is a must to ensure the availability of human resources and e-learning facilities.

Keywords: collaboration, distance education, UT

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas tentang peranan kolaborasi antar lembaga dalam upaya meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan bagi mahasiswa peserta program pendidikan jarak jauh di Universitas Terbuka (UT). Model perkuliahan sistem jarak jauh mengharuskan pesertanya mempraktekkan belajar mandiri, menggunakan modul sebagai bahan belajar utama, dan memanfaatkan ICT sebagai media dalam proses pembelajaran. Bahan ajar dalam bentuk cetak dan non-cetak dikembangkan oleh tim pengembang yang meliputi pengembang kurikulum, pengembang modul, ahli materi, ahli media, ahli bahasa, dan ahli grafik. Bantuan belajar disediakan dalam bentuk tutorial secara tatap muka dan online bagi mahasiswa di setiap unit belajar di dalam dan luar negeri. Sebagai sebuah perguruan tinggi berskala massal dengan jumlah mahasiswa lebih dari 600 ribu, mahasiswanya tersebar di 37 propinsi di Indonesia dan luar negeri, menawarkan lebih dari 100 program studi, serta ujian semester dilaksanakan secara serentak, maka UT harus mampu merekrut ribuan tenaga akademik (tutor), pengawas ujian, dan tenaga pelaksana ujian semester di setiap wilayah unit belajar. Untuk melaksanakan ujian semester dan memberikan layanan bantuan belajar, UT juga harus mampu menyediakan pusat unit belajar di daerah (regional center), ribuan ruang ujian, ruang untuk tutorial serta fasilitas lab computer. Karena itu, kolaborasi antara UT dengan instansi pemerintah dan non-pemerintah di daerah harus dilakukan untuk menjamin kelangsungan kegiatan akademik di daerah. Demikian pula, ketersediaan SDM berbasis ICT yang berkualitas dan infrastruktur termasuk lab komputer yang terkoneksi dengan internet di setiap unit belajar harus menjadi prioritas demi terciptanya pembelajaran berbasis e-learning bagi mahasiswa UT di daerah.

Kata kunci: *collaboration, distance education,* UT

The booming of information and computer technology (ICT) led educators to think seriously in how to make use of ICT products in education. Recently, the use of internet in education is able to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of learning significantly. It can make the process of learning becomes more interesting and enjoyable for the learners.

An Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has its own characteristics which are different from the conventional ones. In the conventional system, lecturers may have different learning materials under one/similar study program. Teaching and learning activities such as assignments and examinations can be easily controlled by the lecturers under a class-room setting with minor number of students. In ODL system, "lecturers" have to provide the same learning materials from one study program that will be used by all participants. The learning materials used by the participants are called "modules".

Organizing ODL institution is also complicated. ODL has to accommodate a large number of students that live from urban to rural and remote areas.

Course materials for ODL are designed to accommodate the needs of its participants. They are developed in the form of modules. Module is the most important instrument used by participants in practicing self-learning. The course materials in form of module is developed by a group of experts such as content experts, course designer, module developer, digital art designer and lay-outer and many more. Since module is an open learning resource, meaning that anyone can learn from it, module should be prepared and written carefully.

As a mass education, ODL can accommodate a large number of students. Because of this, the large number of tutors and content experts should be provided by the ODL institution to back up learning support for its students. Administering written examination for thousands of students spread out over the archipelago requires professional handling. This includes delivering the test materials, providing classroom for exam/test, organizing proctors, and processing answer sheets. All of these activities will be arranged through establishing collaboration with local government and nongovernment agencies since it is almost impossible to develop its own facilities and infrastructures.

Open and Distance Education

Distance education is a generic term and includes wide variety of teaching and learning strategies (Kumar & Rao, 1998). There is no unique definition. Holmberg (1977) stated that the term of distance education covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization. Moore (1977) stated that distance education may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviors, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learners' presence.

Keegan (1986) proposed a synthesis through bringing together and analyzed a number of most distance education definitions by identifying six (6) elements of distance education. First element is quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process. This distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education. Second is the influence of an educational organization both in planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of students support service. This distinguishes it from private study and teach yourself program. Third is the use of media, such as printed materials, audio materials, video materials, or web materials; to connect the teacher and the learner and to deliver the content of the course. Fourth is the provision of

two way communication, so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue. Students are usually taught as individuals and not in groups. Fifth is the presence of more industrialized features than in conventional oral education. Sixth is the privatization of institutional learning.

Keegan's definition (1986) indicates the middle ground. It is between the extremes that define distance education so narrowly that it becomes an abstraction which does not correspond to existing reality and those that define distance education so broadly that it becomes meaningless (Kumar & Rao, 1998).

According to Kumar and Rao (1998), formal education is usually offered in the class rooms of schools, colleges, and universities where students and teachers meet regularly at scheduled time. The assumption about education is that there is someone who needs it and there is someone to offer it. If teaching and learning are to take place, both sides must regularly meet. This is not the only way of imparting education. Knowledge, attitudes, and skills can be effectively imparted without forcing the learner and the teacher to meet in the classroom at fixed hours.

There are ways to achieve such interaction. One of the most practical and effective methods used for this purpose is distance education. With the advents of the new and faster means of communication, the method of imparting education through non-traditional means gained momentum. With the developments in communication and information technologies, various non-print media such as radio, television, telephone, computer, internet, etc, came to be used as instructional media.

Students in distance education differ from students in face-to-face education. ODL students are usually older and working people or part time students. According to Peters (2004) these students usually have a much greater experience of life. Most of them bring considerable experience of working life to academic courses. This has an effect on the ways in which they study. Studying at relatively late age has in general a completely different function than studying at early age. All of these show that distance education institutions deal with students who differ from campus base students.

Teaching and Learning in Distance Education

As assumed that teachers are center of learning. However, it has proven clearly from daily experiences and many studies that many learning activities recently occur without teachers. As an example is learning of initial language in childhood. Much adult learning is without teachers (Bork & Gunnarsdottir, 2001).

Distance education can be adult-oriented when some of the principles of adult education pedagogic are taken into account that places the participants in the foreground from the very start. They can show the degree of activation, application, and empathy on the part of teachers that is regarded as desirable. The important part is played by the subjectivity, identity, and autonomy of adult students - who are the crucial element in the process (Peters, 2004).

The problem of adult-oriented learning is familiar. Students' psycho-social situation is taken into account. Identity-supporting forms of learning are preferred. Also teaching contents are derived from existing vocational experience (Lipsmeir, 1991). For some time, experts have referred to a "change learning culture" in which students in employment receive not only knowledge but "methodological and social competence" (Peters, 2004). In addition, a great deal of value is placed on the development of the students personalities. These aims cannot be achieved only through the method of the presentation and reception of neutral knowledge (Peters, 2004). With distance education-oriented teaching, students must be continuously motivated, guided during studies they have planned and organized themselves. They need to be stimulated to communicate and cooperate

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formally with fellow students and with the help of a differentiating counseling system, must be observed, addressed individually, and taken seriously (Peters, 2004).

There are three types of operating mode in distance education (single mode, dual mode, and mixed mode). Single mode is used by an institution which offers distance education only. Dual mode is used by face-to-face institution which also offers distance education. Mixed mode is used by an institution which offers several forms of studying parallel to one another and leaves it up to students to use these forms in accordance with their own needs and opportunities.

Many students take part in single-mode distance education, as practiced in the larger distance and open universities. Some of these universities have hundred thousand students. Students are more or less left to their own devices because the counseling systems are not sufficient. The type of distance students who work through their courses at home, separated from university and isolated from teachers and fellow students is the norm here. Guided-self-study is characteristic of this type of learning and teaching (Peters, 2004).

Teaching and learning behavior at dual mode university is totally different. Only limited students are admitted to courses in face-to-face classes. Their contact with the teachers who are responsible for them and with the university is closer and less likely to be broken off because they have to attend teaching events at the university on a regular basis. According to this concept, external students also "attend" classes at the university, but at arm's length by making use of lecture notes, tapes and other teaching materials. The device pattern here is indirect attendance at teaching events in a traditional university. From the point of view of pedagogic, this is a fundamentally different concept (Peters, 2004).

Mixed mode University provides both face-to-face and distance teaching. This mode will maximize the use of networked electronic information and communications media. This university will be able to react extremely flexibly to the requirements of students, including adult's students of any age. The dominant pedagogic pattern here will be autonomous, self-guided learning, in which students will decide whether they wish to make use of teaching offers available through various media and will use the considerable autonomy on the basis of their own strategies (Peters, 2004).

Preparing Course Materials

Course materials are developed by writers who are expert in their field of study. However, since writing course materials for distance education is not the same as writing learning materials in face-to-face education, the writers need to be trained as distance education course writers. Typically, new course writers have considerable experience of teaching in class but will know little about distance education and have little or no experience of writing learning materials (Nigam and Kaushik, 1996).

According to Nigam and Kaushik (1996), there are at least 6 (six) topics that need to be covered in the training. They are: (i) what it is like to learn at the distance, (ii) planning and writing by objectives, (iii) relating activities to objectives, (iv) providing constant feedback, (v) writing clearly, and (vi) how the course will work?

Distance education institutions such as British Open University develop courses for very big number of students (Nigam and Kaushik, 1996). Since the number of courses is quite big, the numbers of experts who will write the modules are also big. Distance education institution could ask lecturers from conventional universities. They are experts in the content of course materials.

New writers assume that there are a few simple rules to be learned. They will be shocked and surprised when they are presented with a challenge to their assumption about teaching. They are

forced to rethink on how they should present their subject. This process contains an implicit questioning of the effectiveness of all their teaching. What they want is a quick guide to the theory and practice of distance teaching. They also need to learn to think very carefully about what they teach and how they do it (Nigam & Kaushik, 1996).

In Universitas Terbuka (UT)'s case, most of the writers are coming from reputable universities in Indonesia. From the planning stage, it was designed that there would be a lot of collaboration among UT with other conventional universities in terms of developing course materials. Through these steps, the cost effectiveness in course development could be maintained

Tutors-Students Communication

Instructors/teachers and students in distance education are at a distance to each other (Bufford, 2005). This is considered as one of disadvantages of distance education. Because of it, the first pedagogic approaches specific to distance education aimed immediately at finding ways by which the spatial distance could be bridged, reduced or even eliminated. Up to the present, the effort have been compressed in five models, namely the correspondence, conversation, teacher, tutor and technological-extension models (Nigam & Kaushik, 1996).

Correspondence model still work by e-mail or regular mail. Nowadays, with the growth of information and communication technology (ICT), this mode becomes much easier to be used. Communication between instructors and students, written or oral works well by using technology. Communication whether personally or mass, becomes cheaper when ICT is used. The speed of written communication is also much faster. Therefore written feedback from instructors is also easy to be sent to the students. All of these activities are possible by using ICT.

In teaching-learning process, e-learning is one of the uses of technology. Internet technology, electronic mail and simulation are some features that are available in ICT. However, there must be lecturers/tutors who are responsible in this process. A model for interaction is interaction between a skilled teacher and a small group of students. A good tutor, with some students can provide an excellent interactive learning environment (Bork & Gunnarsdottir, 2001). Since there are so many students, distance education institutions also need a lot of tutors. These skilled tutors can be found in face-to-face educational institutions. Distance education institution could ask them to help students whether for face-to-face tutorials or for online tutorials, professionally and institutionally.

Face-to-face tutorial is also applicable in distance education. However, the frequency of activities in a class is usually less than the regular class. The target of face-to-face tutorial in UT is students who live in urban areas or who have access to the nearest face-to-face tutorial location. These tutorials are fees based and are provided according to demand (Belawati, 2001). Tutors for face-to-face tutorials mostly come from local universities close to UT regional centers. UT has 37 regional centers in Indonesia. The students who live close to the regional center can follow face-to-face tutorial easier than other students who live far from regional center. It showed that tutorials at UT could only be conducted by means of collaboration. Tutors are hired part timely for the activity.

Course Examinations

All students at schools or universities receive a grade for each registered course. Several grading systems are available, spread over a range from bad to good. These grades are determined primarily by examinations. However, other methods such as portfolios are also available. In courses where large numbers of students are involved, the examination is usually in multiple choices. These

grades are taken as an indication of how good the students learned the course materials. Many distance education institutions use this grading strategy (Bork & Gunnarsdottir, 2001).

Administering examination for distance education is not easy, especially for institutions which have huge number of students, such as Universitas Terbuka. In 2010, UT has more than 600,000 active students. They spread across many places all over Indonesia. These students have to take their final examinations twice a year. In general, each student will take 2 days exam (paper and pencil test) for each semester.

Right now, UT uses local school classrooms to conduct the examinations. UT, local schools, and local government work together in arranging examination activities. The arrangement includes preparing the proctors for each room. UT now also offers online examination for limited number of students. This online test can only be taken in 37 regional offices. The students' response to the online exam is very positive. For the time being, UT's online exam is limited for hundreds of students only. Meanwhile, UT's students are almost 600.000. In the future, UT needs to think on how to provide online test for all of its students. However, since most of the high schools in Indonesia have already had computer labs connected to the internet, UT can make a new collaboration with them in using those facilities related to UT online examinations.

CONCLUSION

ODL has been initiated to augment opportunities for higher education. The flexibility and innovativeness of open learning system are particularly suited to the diverse requirements of people who need education. The growth of ICT can help distance education institutions to give better service and access for their students during teaching learning process.

Developing courses materials need collaboration among experts. Teaching and learning process also needs to be supported by lot of tutors/lecturers to help students mastering the courses content. This process needs to be supported by qualified human resources. These qualified human resources are mostly lecturers in conventional education. This is one of the reasons why ODL institution needs to collaborate with the conventional educations. Administering examination for students in distance education is not easy since the number of students is huge. Collaboration between local agencies/institutions is important to ensure the success of examinations process, paper-and-pencil test or online test.

ICT that is growing rapidly should be used as learning media, so that it can make the teaching and learning process become more effective and efficient. Since managing an ODL institution still facing many problems, collaboration with local educational institution/agencies could be the best solution.

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