

Theoretical and practical dilemma of distance learning: The case of Universitas Terbuka Indonesia

Hanif Nurcholis

Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

Ace Sriati Rachman

Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

Abstract

Universitas Terbuka (UT) was founded in 1984. It utilised the same learning mode as any other distance learning institutions. However, since 1987, UT has changed its mode to the certification model of learning with: 1) no admission test; 2) no course books given to students; 3) no tutorials and academic counselling; and 4) no mid-term tests. UT only requires students to perform three tasks: 1) register and pay tuition fees; 2) complete Tasks Independently (TI); and 3) take exams at the end of semester. With the certification model in place, UT transformed itself into a distance learning institution that provides limited support to aid students' learning process. In the early 1990s, the government urged UT to hold an in-service training programme for elementary school teachers (PGSD) nationwide with provisions to manage the student learning process. In 2004, the government provided UT with a license to conduct a postgraduate programme of studies (PPS) based on conventional distance learning standards. Since 1987, UT has developed the institution and its employees as a certifying agency according to the needs of the government as stipulated in the law. Considering the new initiatives implemented by the government, UT faces both theoretical and practical dilemma in implementing the initiatives set by the government in line with the change in its learning mode to the certification model since 1987. UT faces a series of challenges in its learning management system, institutional development and career planning for lecturers to successfully implement the stipulated provision by the government and at the same time abide by the law.

Introduction

From its launch on 4 September 1984, Universitas Terbuka (UT) has been implementing the same learning methodology as other distance learning institutions. However, two years after its inception, UT changed its learning methodology to a certification model. In 1994, the government instructed UT to organise an equivalency education programme via the PGSD programme. The government urged UT to organise the PGSD based to the conventional distance learning model which requires full involvement of the institution in the step-by-step learning process of students. In 2004, the government licensed UT to organise a postgraduate programme (PPS) based on the conventional model of distance learning as well.

UT which is established based on the certification model must conform with the laws and regulations of the country. Law Number 20 Year 2003 on the national education system; Law Number 14 Year 2005 related to teachers and lecturers; and Law Number 12 Year 2012 on higher education and other relevant regulations do not allow institutions of higher learning to be organised under the certification model.

Learning model of UT in the beginning

Since its inception in 1984, UT organised its distance learning system using the standard model. Students, who have been accepted, have to register at the Regional Student Services Unit (UPBJJ) by paying tuition fees. About two weeks after the registration, the students will receive by post a package containing core course books (BMP), catalogues, independent study hand books, distance learning schedule, audio tapes and workbooks. UPBJJ then invites all students to be briefed about the model of distance learning, the obligation to work on Unit Test I and II, the schedule of face-to-face tutorials (four times), and a final examination of the semester (UAS).

Time Activity	Week																
	0 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th	
Selection Test	*																UAS
Registration	*																
Study Orientation		*															
Read BMP		Chapter 1	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8	Chapter 9		
Face to face tutorial					*					*			*	*			
Unit Test						I					II						
Discussion with friends and tutors																	

Table 1 A learning plan for students by semester

UT transforms into a certification model

In 1986, UT replaced the conventional mode of distance learning with a learning model similar to the one used by certification institutions such as TOEFL or IELTS. Since then, UT did not manage the student learning process anymore: giving BMP, providing direction to distance learning, conducting Unit Test I and II, providing face-to-face tutorials, and providing learning guidance and counseling. UT only requires students to register by paying the tuition fees, complete Independent Tasks (TM), and take end-semester exams. To register, students were not required to register at the beginning of the semester, but they may register from the early week of the semester until six weeks before the final exam of the semester (UAS). Students are not required to buy BMP and non-printed materials (e.g., audio cassettes). Students are not asked to work on Unit Tests I and II. Instead, they are asked to do Independent Task (TM). Students are also not given face-to-face tutorial.

Time Activity	Week															
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th	
Registration																UAS
Read BMP									?	?	?	?	?	?		
Submit Independent Task												.				

Table 2 Student activities in the current semester

Description:

1. Student registration is not done before the current semester week, but it is opened from the beginning of the semester until six weeks before the final exam of the semester;
2. The column of reading BMP is labeled by asking mark because UT did not give it to students after registration. Students must pay tuition only and it does not include the BMP. Students must find it themselves. Most students do not have the BMP. Most of them took the final exam of the semester without reading BMP;
3. If the students get the BMP, learning opportunities is just six weeks.

With the chosen model of certification, UT developed its organisation and human resources different from other universities. In the non-UT colleges, the faculty is the organiser of teaching, research and community services. At UT, a faculty does not function as organiser of teaching, research, and community services, but as a developer of instructional materials and assessment instruments. Thus, the task of lecturers in the faculty is to develop teaching materials and test items written by authors and reviewers from other universities. Lecturers

do not perform the task of teaching/tutorial, research and community service. The real task of lecturers in the faculty is to find authors and reviewers of the teaching materials and edit them. The edited materials are submitted to the Media Production Centre to be printed as BMP, while the test items that have been edited are submitted to the Examination Centre to be developed into final exam of the semester. As UT did not function as a faculty i.e., UT also did not develop the lecturers to be subject matter experts. UT developed the lecturers to become a learning media manager, learning design experts, educational technology experts, and assessment experts. As a learning manager, the main task of the lecturer is finding authors and reviewers for the course material and test items, edit them, submit the results to the unit which will develop them further, and make test items for the final exam of the semester. As learning design experts, the main task of lecturers is developing learning materials which is in accordance with the principles of learning design. As the education technology experts, the main task of lecturers is developing information technology to support database systems that are connected inter-unit. As assessment experts, the main task of the lecturers is developing the trial test items into standardised tests through testing, calibration, and validation.

As UT only requires learning managers, learning design experts, educational technology experts and assessment experts, it recruits lecturers from various disciplines. At the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, for example, UT recruits lecturers from several disciplines: political science, administration, agriculture, dentistry, law, economics, anthropology, general practitioners, and others. The three other faculties also have lecturers from various disciplines. UT leader argues that the lecturers of UT do not need to have an educational background in accordance with existing courses in the faculty because the lecturers do not teach/give tutorial but act as learning managers, learning design experts, educational technology experts and assessment experts. In order for the teaching staff or lecturers to develop competency in the relevant field, UT sends its staff to Simon Fraser University and University of Victoria Canada to study management of distance learning, learning design, educational technology and assessment.

Similar to other certification institutions, the unit which is strengthened is the Examination Centre. It is developed into a reliable and safe examination institution. Reliable in terms of the development of assessment instruments: valid, reliable and safe in terms of management of planning, execution, result processing, until the announcement of student results. For that, UT uses assessment experts, information technology experts as well as processing and data analysis experts.

With regard to Framework of Aspects of Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning (The Commonwealth of Learning and Asian Development Bank, 1999) the learning praxis of UT is not qualified. According to the indicators of quality assurance of distance or open learning:

The products/outputs: the courses and materials (printed texts, audio, video, and so on), number of graduates or successful completers, examination pass rates of achievement of intended competencies or practical skills, equivalent results in public examinations.

The processes: learning and teaching processes such as tutoring; assessing written work and providing learner feedback; monitoring field workers and tutors; training group leaders; advising learners and keeping track of them; record keeping; co-ordinating groups of external writers.

Production and delivery: course production systems; print production; scheduling and progress chasing; warehousing and stock control; getting materials to learners; transmission of radio programmes.

As a general philosophy: policy statements or ethos; attitudes of staff; management and training of staff; motto or slogan (for example, 'Only the best'); images and messages presented to the public (publicity leaflets, brochures, press reports).

By applying the model of certification, the learning process in UT is far from the quality standards for the following reasons. *Firstly*, UT does not send its learning materials and the complete assessment instruments to its students. *Secondly*, UT does not guarantee that the students have the learning materials delivered in time alongside a schedule of planned learning. *Thirdly*, UT does not manage the student learning process that includes tutorials, task assessment, academic counselling and feedback.

PGSD and PPS model

In 1994, the government gave UT the task to offer the PGSD programme. In this programme, students have to register no later than the sixth week in the semester by paying the tuition fee. UT has determined that the course package consists of five courses that must be taken by students per semester. Then, UT submits the course package to the students consisting of BMP, catalogues and leaflets. After the students receive the course package, UT will ask the students to master the BMP through independent reading, discussion with tutors and friends in the face-to-face tutorial forum (eight times) as well as working on three tasks. At the 15 week, students have to sit for the final exam of the semester.

Time Activities	Week																
	0 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th	
Registration																	UAS
Orientation of Study		•															
Read BMP owned							Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8	Chapter 9		
Face-to-face Tutorial							I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII			
Submit the Tasks										•		•		•			
Discussion with friends and tutors																	

Table 3 The learning process of PGSD student by semester
Source: Academic Calendar 2012 of Universitas Terbuka

In 2004, UT offered a postgraduate programme (PPS). When giving its approval, the government set a condition that the university must use the conventional distance learning mode in delivering the PPS programme. Therefore, UT developed the PPS programme learning model with the following learning process.

Time Activities	Week																
	0 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th	
Selection Test	•																UAS
Registration	•																
Orientation of the Study		•															
Read BMP Owned		Chapter 1	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8	Chapter 9		
Face-to-face Tutorial						•		•		•			•				
Online Tutorial		I	I	II	II	III	IV	IV	V	VI	VI	VII	VIII	VIII			
Submit the Task								I		II			III				
Discuss with Friends and tutor																	

Table 4 Learning process of PPS student by semester
Source: Academic calendar 2012 of Universitas Terbuka

The PPS model refers to the quality standards of distance learning because all the learning activities are developed in accordance to the indicators of quality assurance. The PGSD model approaches slightly differ from the distance learning quality standards because the design of learning refers to the indicators of assurance quality but the practice is different from the standards because the learning activities are designed just for nine weeks since the last registration so that students only have eight weeks of study time in the current semester. In addition, lesson plans are not organised by the faculty but the UPBJJ.

Certification model plus voluntary tutorial

UT used the certification model until 2002. However, in accordance with Law Number 20 Year 2003 regarding National Education System, Law Number 14 Year 2005 regarding Teachers and Lecturers, and Law Number 12 Year 2012 regarding Higher Education, UT should be using the standard model of distance learning. As a result, from 2004, UT began to provide voluntary assistance in the form of tutorial learning: face-to-face and online. It is called voluntary because UT only encourages students to attend tutorials. As for face-to-face tutorials, UT only encouraged students to form study groups.

This model is essentially a certification model with additional tutorial sessions: face-to-face and online. Nevertheless, students are still not given the BMP and tutorial kit. Students who require the BMP have to buy them at UT store, bookstores, borrow from seniors or read in the library. Students who require face-to-face tutorial services must send their requests to UPBJJ for approval so that the tutorials can be organised accordingly if accepted. As for online tutorials, even though UT provides this service, attendance is not compulsory.

Time Activities	Week																
	0 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th	
Registration																	UAS
Read BMP							?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?		
Face-to-face Tutorial									vol	vol	vol	vol	vol	vol	vol		
Online Tutorial									vol	vol	vol	vol	vol	vol	vol		
Submit the Task										vol		vol		vol			

Table 5 Learning process of non PGSD and non PPS Student by Semester
Source: Academic calendar 2012 of Universitas Terbuka

Description:

1. Read BMP column is labeled asking mark because UT does not obligate students to buy it so that there is no guarantee that the students have the BMP. Eventhough, the students get BMP, the time available to learn it is only nine weeks.
2. Face-to-Face Tutorial column is labeled vol (voluntary) because UT only helps students who want the face-to-face tutorials.
3. Online tutorial column is labeled vol (voluntary) because UT only provide this facility. Students may use it or not.
4. Submit the Task column is labeled vol (voluntary) because UT only facilitate students who want the tutorial online and submit the tasks assigned.

As much as 81.2% of the programmes in UT use the plus certification model, i.e. all nine programmes under the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences; all three programmes under the Faculty of Economics; all six programmes under the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, and eight programmes under the Faculty of Teacher's Training and Education. A total of 6.23% of the programmes use the PGSD model. A total of 12.55% use the PPS model.

Based on the Commonwealth of Learning and Asian Development Bank (1999), the organisation of learning at UT for 81.2% of its programmes using the plus certification model is far from the quality of distance learning standards. This model is similar to the certification model that UT adheres to, whereby there is no control in the learning process of students: providing learning materials, discussions via tutorials, answering students' queries, evaluating students' progress of learning, remedial teaching and conducting academic guidance. UT provides these facilities but students are not compelled to use them.

Organisational structure, operational management and development of human resources

Minzberg (1983) explains that there are five parts of the organisation: 1) strategic apex; 2) middle line, 3) operating core, 4) support staff; and 5) techno structure. Strategic apex is the unit that makes the policy, middle line is the policy executor at the middle level, and operating core is the policy executor in the field. The support staff and the techno structure are support units involved in carrying out the organisation's activities to achieve the organisational objectives.

The support staff support the administrative and resources while the techno structure supports the experts for standardisation, formalisation, procedures and organisational health. These five parts are the parts which determine the design and organisational structure. In general, the design and organisation structure emphasise on the operating core. However, certain organisations focus on support staff or techno structure. It depends on the nature, type and the workload handled.

In accordance with the law on the National Education System, UT is a college performing three functions: 1) education and teaching; 2) research; and 3) community service with education and research is core bussines. In accordance with the Statuta of UT Year 2007, UT's organisational structure is as follows.

1. Rektorat;
2. Faculty;
3. Post Graduate Program (PPS);
4. Centre for Instructional Materials Development, Testing, and Information Systems (LPBAUSI)
5. Bureau of General Administration and Finance (BAUK);
6. Quality Assurance Center;
7. Library Service Center;
8. Human Resource Development Center;
9. Regional Student Services Unit (UPBJJ).

If the organisational structure of UT is associated with Minzberg's explanation (1983), then the five parts of the organisation in the context of UT are: 1) rectorate functions as a strategic appex, 2) the faculty functions as midle line; 3) departments and study programmes as the operating core at the centre while the UPBJJ functions as the operating core in the local area, 4) BAAPM and BAUK function as support staff, and 5) LPPM and LPBAUSI as techno structure. Academic executor at the centre is the faculty. In the local area, there is an executor unit office that organises academic and administrative functions (UPBJJ).

UT's Statuta arranges that the executor of academic is the faculty and PPS. However, in practice, it is not so. In the early model, executor of academic is the faculty, similar to other universities in Indonesia. However, when UT changed its learning model to the certification model, the faculty functions as support staff. UT placed the Examination Centre as the executor

of academic which is actually the support staff. In this model, the tasks of lecturers are just looking for authors of the learning materials and test items, review the learning materials and test items and arrange the test. Lecturers are not involved in students' learning process: tutorial, academic advice, assessment and providing feedback. Lecturers were also discouraged from providing face-to-face tutorials and assessing students' paper. In the PGSD model, the faculty also does not carry out the functions of the academic even though there are face-to-face tutorials, tasks coordination, and preparing the final report. A lecturer in the PGSD model does not plan learning but look for authors of BMP, test items, review, arrange and assemble the test items. The unit which plans, implements and evaluates learning is UPBJJ. Other units are classified as support staff. In the certification plus voluntary tutorials model, UT organisational work procedures are basically the same as the certification and PGSD models. However, in the certification plus voluntary tutorial model, lecturers in the faculty receive additional tasks: creating test items, developing online tutorial material, developing non-printed learning materials, and handling the subject matter. On the contrary, the PGSD and certification plus tutorial voluntary models discourage permanent lecturers from providing face-to-face tutorials and assessing the final task of the programme.

The PPS model of learning organisation has substantial differences with the three other models: pure certification, PGSD and tutorial plus voluntary certification. In the PPS model, the lesson plans are designed by PPS from the selection, schedule of lectures from the first week until the fifteenth week, learning activities for students since registration before the effective week, during the effective week (15 weeks), and final exam at the end of the semester. In teaching, PPS uses UT both lecturers in the faculty and from outside the university. To the UT lecturers, PPS assigns them the task to set questions for the semester exam, develop and handle subjects for online tutorials, assess exam results, and guide students' research. Like other models, PPS also discourages UT lecturers to conduct face-to-face tutorials. PPS assigns lecturers outside UT with the tasks to develop test items of the semester exam, check exam results, provide face-to-face tutorials, and guide students' research. The difference between the lecturers from UT and outsiders is that UT lecturers are discouraged from providing face-to-face tutorials, while lecturers from outside the university can do so.

With these characteristics, UT faces theoretical and practical dilemmas. Theoretically, the certification plus model implies self-learning. Self-learning in the distance education context is a complex way of learning because it involves the design of curriculum, delivery of learning materials, students' interaction with tutors and colleagues, monitoring the learning process, feedback, student counselling, handling complaints and assessment. UT's high student number and resource limitations are not relevant justifications for choosing certification plus model based on the autodidac learning models.

The practical dilemma can be seen from the organisational structure and functions of UT. UT Statuta places PPS and the faculty as the operating core/academic executor, while the other units as support staff and techno structure. However, in practice, UT uses the certification plus model, and the operating core unit/academic executor functions as support staff instead. The faculty does not carry out the duties in accordance with its core business. Core businesses are carried out by support staff/the Examination Centre of LPBAUSI and UPBJJ with outsourcing.

With this change of functions, the faculty cannot control the implementation of the core businesses from planning, implementation and evaluation. PPS is the only programme that can function effectively according to the UT Statuta.

Besides internal management issues, UT also has issues related to the policies implemented by the Ministry of Education. This ministry functions as the executor of the government responsibilities in education subject to the legislation. The various laws related to education do not permit distance learning institutions to operate using the certification model. Therefore, the Ministry of Education continuously queries on UT's certification model.

The certification model also hinders career development of UT lecturers. In accordance with Law No. 14/2005 regarding Teachers and Lecturers and UT Statuta Year 2007 Article 1 point 19, lecturers are professional educators and scientists whose main tasks are transforming, developing and disseminating sciences, technology, and/or art using distance learning mode via education, scientific research and community services. This is difficult to implement because UT lecturers function as support staff. Lecturers' daily tasks do not include planning, implementing, evaluating, researching and performing community services, but helping LPBAUSI in preparing, validating and finalising test items; preparing draft of the printed/non-printed learning materials; and helping UPBJJ to organise online tutorials.

In order to assist LPBAUSI and UPBJJ, lecturers do not act as subject matter experts, but just as managers of the subject matter which may not be related to their field of study. Therefore, lecturers face difficulty in fulfilling tasks in various subjects because they function as support staff and not academic executors.

Consequently, UT's study programmes receive poor ratings from the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education. UT obtained rank C (for the period of 2005 – 2010) and B (for the period of 2010 – 2015). The rank result from the Directorate General of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education on research skills of UT lecturers is lowest. Since its establishment in 1984 until 2012 three faculties — Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences — did not have professors.

Conclusion

Currently, UT conducts distance learning education using three models simultaneously: 1) standard distance learning model, 2) minus distance learning model, and 3) plus certification model. Standard distance learning model is conducted by the PPS, minus distance learning model is conducted by PGSD, and plus certification models is conducted by all programmes excluding PPS and PGSD. However, the dominant model is the plus certification model (81.2%). The implementation of distance learning using the certification model has placed the university in a theoretical, practical and legal dilemma. In the theoretical dimension, this model does not conform to international quality assurance standards. From the legal viewpoint, this model is not legal because Indonesian legislations do not allow the learning institution to operate using the certification model.

UT should organise its learning processes using the PPS model for all programme of studies even though it might be difficult. The PPS model is more justified than the certification model from the theoretical, practical and legal aspects. The PGSD model that is similar to the PPS model can be transformed into the PPS model. The other programmes can be temporarily modified according to the PGSD model. When proper infrastructure is in place, all programmes using the certification model should be upgraded to the PPS model.

HanifNurcholis (email: hanif@ut.ac.id) and Ace Sriati Rachman (email: acesr@ut.ac.id) are with the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia.

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