

LESSONS LEARNT FROM TUTORS' PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE TUTORIAL'S POLICIES IN OPEN & DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Every institution has to develop, implement, and control its policies to ensure the effectiveness of the institution. In doing so, all related stakeholders have to be involved to maximize the benefit of the policies and minimize the potential constraints and resistances. Open and distance education (ODE) institution is no different. As an education institution, ODE institution has to focus their attention to fulfilling academic needs of their students through open and distance measures. One of them is quality learning support system. Significant stakeholders in learning support system are tutors since they are the ones who directly communicate with students. Nonetheless, tutors are rarely involved in developing policies in learning support. Tutors are commonly seen as objects whose main-responsibility is limited to implementing policies decided by management in ODE institutions. Nonetheless, the tutors' perceptions of tutorials are believed to influence the tutors' performances in facilitating learning support. It is therefore important to analyze tutors' perception on various aspects of learning support using Policy Analysis Framework (PAF) modified by King, Nugent, Russell, and Lacy. Focus of this paper is on on-line tutors, those who provide tutorials via Internet. On-line tutors were chosen to stress the increasingly important used of Internet in ODE system. The research was conducted in Universitas Terbuka (UT), Indonesia. UT is purposely selected because of its large number (1,234) of courses offered and large area coverage (6000 inhabited islands). Both, number of courses and area coverage, posed UT in a unique position where learning support system has, to some extent, to be standardized while at the same time it has to be able to cater the needs of different courses in different places for students with different backgrounds. All 598 listed on-line tutors were sent the research questionnaires. However, around 20% of the email addresses could not be reached. The tutors were asked to fill out open-ended questionnaires on their perception on definition of on-line tutorial, roles of tutors and students in on-line tutorials, requirement for on-line tutors, learning materials, and student evaluation in on-line tutorial. Data analyzed for this paper was gathered from 40 on-line tutors who sent back filled-out questionnaires. Data were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis from all responses from the 40 tutors. The results showed that using PAF as entry point in choosing learning support services as area of policy with delivery learning materials as the issue at UT has been able to provide new insights of aspects need to be consider in formulating policies in online tutorial as well as in learning support services. Involving tutors, one of stakeholders in online tutorial as a part of learning support services at UT, as source of information could be proven to be productive. In general, tutors had clear understanding about definition of online tutorial, roles of tutors and roles of students, and requirement of tutor. Tutors just need to be more involved in the policy formulation since they could provide data on students and problem faced in online tutorial. However, tutors need an adjustment in student evaluation which according tutors too focus on administrative aspects and subjective.

Key words: distance education, on-line tutorial, tutorial policy, tutors' perspectives

INTRODUCTION

King, Nugent, Russell, Eich, & Lacy (2000) defined policy in open and distance education (ODE) as a set of written regulation adopted by institutions to facilitate the development of ODE programs. The policy which build a set of regulations through common interests to describe roles and responsibilities of all related stakeholders, provide framework to operating of the ODE institution. Policy provides structure for unstructured situation and is a natural step to adopt innovation, like ODE. One important indicator from ODE development in order to move in parallel with face-to-face education is the need to poses policies which could be used as effective guidance for ODE development (Simonson, 2002). It is also necessary that learner support system in distance education must be integrated (Chatpakkarattana & Khlaisang, 2012).

Policies in Universitas Terbuka (UT) fit the King, Nugent, Russell, Eich, & Lacy (2000) definition of policy. As an ODE institution, UT makes policies to guide its operations. Concerning policies on maintaining and increasing quality of all academic and administrative aspects, UT has covered quality for students learning support. Aspects to be considered in relation to learning support are especially designed to suit ODE system and standardized according to regulations (Simintas UT 2012). As stated in the policy, one of learning supports is provided in the form of tutorial. In order to provide minimal standard of tutorial, UT needs to assigned competence tutors. One way to accommodate this need is by making policy to accredited tutors. In 2011 Annual Report UT's Rector, 64% from 7,598 tutors have been participated in tutor trainings and 64% of those participated have passed the trainings and therefore eligible to be accredited. From those eligible tutors, 70% were passed the accreditation process. Nonetheless, there are more tutors that have not been accredited than those who have been accredited. This in turn, affects the quality of tutorials.

UT has taken several policies to ensure that tutorial is conducted effectively. However, in order to be effective, the policies have to be adopted by related stakeholders. In term of tutorial, one of significant stakeholders is tutor. Tutors are the one who directly and regularly interact with students. Tutors are the ones who know firsthand students' problems and needs concerning, for example, learning materials. Therefore, it is important to ensure that tutors are well-informed of the policies.

Analysis of tutors perception of UT policies in tutorials using PAF (Policy Analysis Framework) is discussed in this paper. PAF first developed by Berge (1998) and Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) and later perfected by King, Nugent, Russell, and Lacy (1999). Analysis was done in UT policies in on-line tutorials to accommodate the increasing trend in utilizing Internet to facilitate students learning. With PAF, especially in the area of learning services, tutors' perception and evaluation on five aspects of facilitating learning materials delivery was analyzed. The five aspects include definition of on-line tutorial, roles of tutors and students in online tutorial, requirements for online tutors, learning materials for online tutorial, and student evaluation mechanism in online tutorial.

Online Tutorial at UT & Policy in ODE

Tutorial is a form of learning support provided to facilitate students' learning. In tutorial, learning is conducting under tutors' guidance. Aware of the importance of tutors' roles in tutorials, UT has a policy to accredited tutors. In order to be included in the accreditation process, tutors have to participate in tutor training prior to the accreditation process. Only those who show satisfying results in the training could be included in the accreditation process which was started in 2010. Until 2011, a number of 7,598 tutors have participated in Tutor Trainings and 64% of them have been evaluated. From those who were evaluated, 70% passed the evaluation and get accreditation (Laporan Kerja tahunan Rektor Universitas Terbuka 2011, 2012). According to the Revise UT Operational Plan 2010-2013, by the year 2012 it is targeted that 60% of all tutors are accredited.

In tutorial, students and tutors discuss important topics perceived to be difficult by students. Learning materials discuss in tutorial consist of:

- (1) Essential competencies and concepts in the course,
- (2) Problems students faced in mastering the competencies and or concepts,
- (3) Problems related to students' performance in and out class, and
- (4) Problems related to implementation of the course in daily activities.

(Katalog UT 2013).

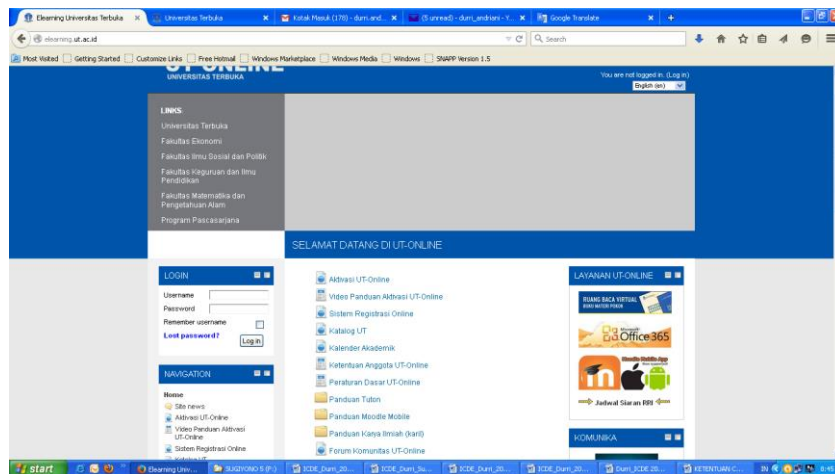
One of tutorial forms is online tutorial which is divided into online tutorial for courses and for Final Assignment Program. Online tutorial, for both type, consists of eight initial materials and three assignments which lasted in eight week period of time. Students are required to actively engage in discussions during online tutorial duration. Discussions and assignments are uploaded directly to the website address (<http://www.ut.ac.id>).

Prior to students and tutors engagement in online tutorial, students and tutors are required to read and comprehend regulation and procedure used in the online tutorial. Picture 1 shows first page of UT online. The page consists of list of regulation and guidance necessary for students and tutors registered in online tutorial. In 2014, when the data collection for this paper was carried out, the first page of UT online tutorial was depicted in Picture 1. In 2015, UT modifies the first page (Picture 2). However, there are no differences in term of information provided in the prior and later versions of the UT online's first page.

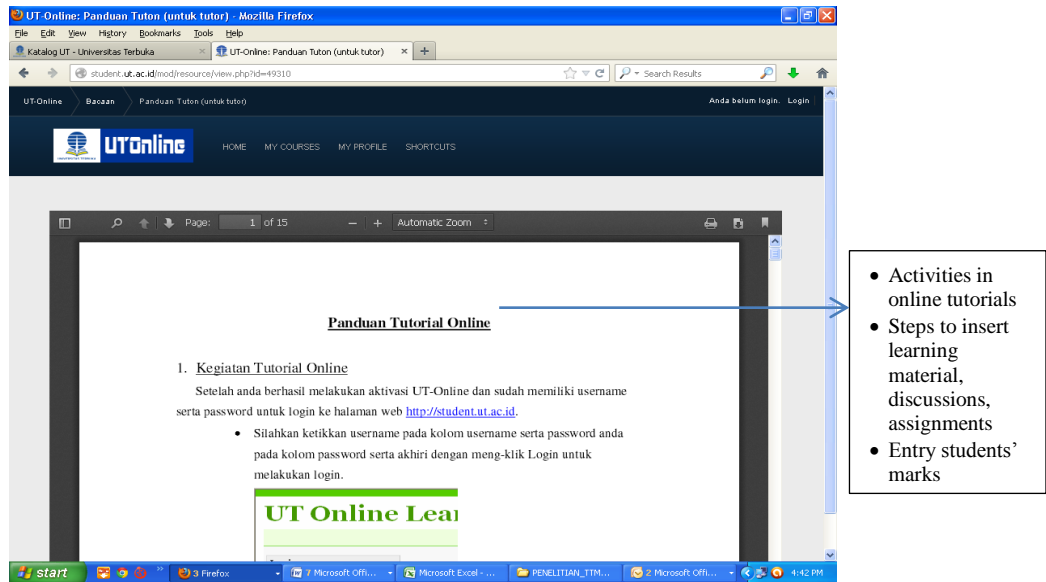
Nevertheless, there is differences in term of information provided in the tutor's section. While in the prior version it only described limited technicality in online tutorial (Picture 3), the later version provides a more complete information (Picture 4). However, in both versions, the information is focussed on the technical aspects to conduct tutorial online such as ways to add learning resources and activities including grading. There is limited information about five aspects that according to PAF is important to evaluate the effectiveness of a policy, namely definition, roles and requirements of people involved, as well as resources used and evaluation process.



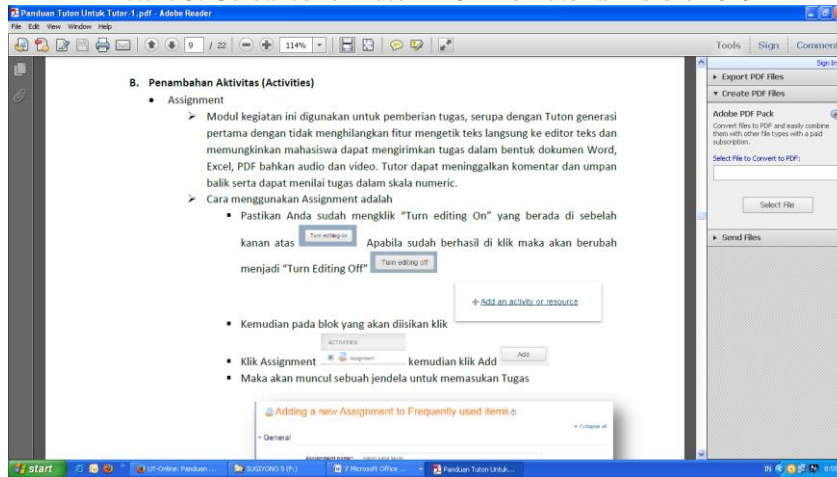
Picture 1. Homepage of UT Online on the Time of Data Collection



Picture 2. Homepage of UT Online in 2015



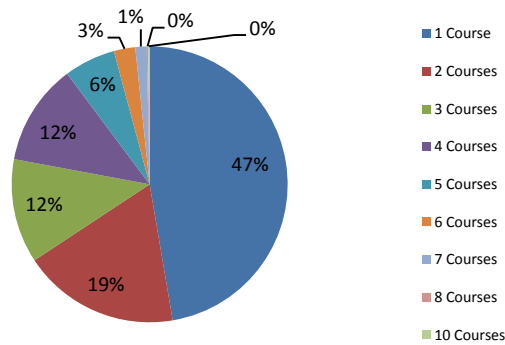
Picture 3. Guidance for Tutor in Online Tutorial Before 2015



Picture 4. Guidance for Tutor in Online Tutorial in 2015

UT also provides steps necessary for student and tutors before they engage in online tutorial. In general, the steps for students include step to activate student account which also consists of regulation for all member, personal information, and brief description in online activities, log-in and password for the student, and step to log in online tutorial sessions along with description of initial materials, assignments, and discussion. Meanwhile, for tutors UT provides steps to facilitate online tutorial. In the guidelines, tutors are provided with information related to activities in online tutorial, procedure to upload materials in online tutorial and communicate with students. It also describes procedure to entry student score/grade from the online tutorial.

Data from UT Centre for Computer shows that up till 15 June 2013, UT has 598 online tutors. Most of the online tutors (47%) have been assigned to one course. However, there are some online tutors who experienced being assigned to more than one course. The largest number of courses assigned to one tutor is seven courses (1 tutor).



Graph 1. Number of Courses Assigned to One Tutor (N=598, in %)

UT has four faculties, namely (1) faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Political and Political Sciences, and Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, it is not impossible for one tutor to be assigned to more than one faculties. Looking at faculties where courses belong to, most of tutors (86%) have been assigned a course from one faculty. However, there is one tutor who assign to three faculties. In term of students' evaluation in online tutorial, UT regulates that student achievement in online tutorial is evaluated by quality of students' assignments and student's activities in discussions which then contributed 30% to student's overall final score. However, to be eligible for this treatment, a student has to get at least 30% of his final exam right.

Gellman-Danley and Fetzner (1998) developed policy model for ODE which consists of seven groups namely (1) academic, (2) fiscal, (3) geography, (4) management, (5) human management, (6) law, and (7) learning support services. Berge (1998) added two aspects, technical and culture. This model has been used in several research (King, et al., 2000; King et al., 1998) and proven as effective framework to evaluate ODE policies. King et al (1998) demanded ODE policy to be integrated. In other words, policies which used as guidance for educational system have to include distance concept in delivery learning materials. This is where online tutorial, and policies in online tutorial, fit in place.

King, Nugent, Russell, and Lacy (1999) adapted Gellman-Danley & Fetzner and Berge Models on policy in ODE into Policy Analysis Framework (PAF) and differentiate seven elements in the Model (academic, administration/financial, academic staff, law, learning support services, technical, and culture) as the most appeared elements in ODE policies. PAF combines policy areas and groups issues into a relevant issue. Policy area in student learning services consists of issues such as material guidance and counseling, library access, students' trainings, evaluation monitoring, laboratories, and material delivery. Online tutorial falls into learning material delivery.

METHODS

In order to analyze online tutors perceptions towards UT policies in online tutorial, there is a need to gather data from online tutors on their knowledge and perceptions of UT policies related to online tutorial. Aspects in the policies that need to be analyzed include definition of online tutorial, roles of online tutorial, tutors and students in the online tutorial, requirements to be online tutors, and learning materials as well as students' evaluation mechanism in online tutorial. To serve its objective, online tutors were purposely chosen as respondents in this research. In 2014, all 598 online tutors listed in UT Center for Computer were sent the research questionnaires via the tutors' email addresses. The number of email which could not get through was 18%. Due to a small number of tutors who sent back filled-out questionnaires, the questionnaires were sent back to tutors who had not responded to the first and second attempts. After three times emailing the questionnaires, 40 filled-out questionnaires were sent back and analyzed qualitatively using content analysis.

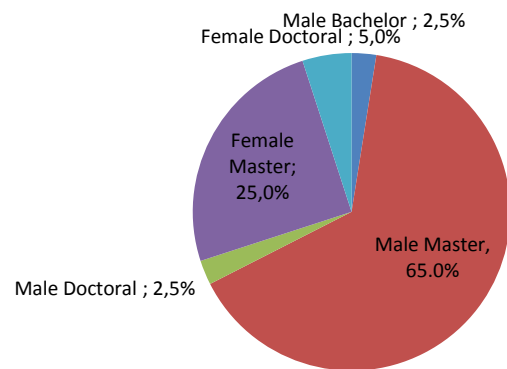
Even though the number of respondents was small, information provided in the open-ended questionnaires were rich and covered all important issues related to policies in online tutorial. To get a more full picture of tutors' perception on UT policy on online tutorial, interviews were conducted with 12 respondents from three different parts of Indonesia, namely Kupang, Ambon, and Jakarta. Based on the results of the questionnaires, follow-up questions were asked to the interviewees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

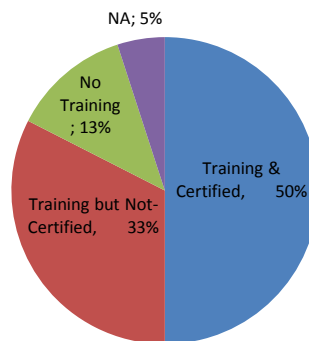
Most respondents in this research were male with master degree (65%, Graph 3), had attended one tutor training (88%, Graph 4), and first assigned as online tutors in 2010 (10%, Table 1). One course in online tutorial for one tutor was also majority in the duration of tutor's assignment (50%, Graph 5) which last between 1-13 years. However, there was one online tutor who in 13 years acting as online tutors has been assigned to eight courses. Nevertheless, the assignment for one tutor in semester was never more than five courses (Graph 6).

Table1. Year of First Assignment as Online Tutor (N=40, in %)

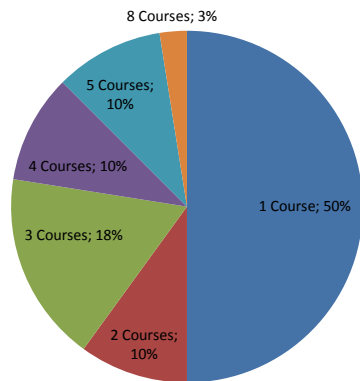
Year of First Assigned as Online Tutor	Total Courses				
	1	2	3	4	Total
1996	5	-	-	-	5
1999	2.5	-	-	-	2.5
2003	-	2.5	-	-	2.5
2005	5	-	-	-	5
2006	-	2.5	-	-	2.5
2008	5	-	-	-	5
2009	2.5	-	2.5	-	5
2010	10	-	5	5	20
2011	7.5	2.5	-	-	10
2012	7.5	-	2.5	-	10
2013	20	7.5	-0	-	27.5
NA	-	-	5	-	5
Total	65	15	15	5	100



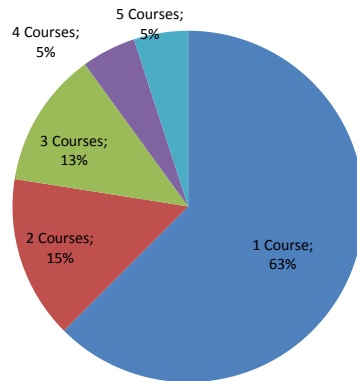
Graph 3. Educational Level & Sex (N=40)



Graph 4. Tutors' Training & Certification (N=40)



Graph 5. Total Courses Assigned for One Online Tutor (N=40)



Graph 6. Total Courses Assigned for One Online Tutor in One Semester (N=40)

Data from the questionnaires were grouped according to their similarities in each issue and analyzed three domains: tutors' knowledge of the policy, tutors' evaluation of the policy, and tutors' needs to be included in the policy. The results are reported below in five sections: online tutors knowledge and perceptions of online tutorial definition; roles of online tutorial, tutors, and students; and learning materials and student' evaluation mechanism in online tutorial.

Definition of Online Tutorial

UT defines online tutorial as additional learning service to facilitate students in their learning process for some courses using the Internet, started 2-3 weeks after the last day of registration period, last in 8 weeks which consists of 8 initiations, three tasks, and a series of discussions. One class has a maximum of 200 students and one tutor can only be assigned to maximum 5 classes.

Most of the respondents were aware of the definition although there were respondents who mentioned that online tutorial was provided for all courses and compulsory for all students. In addition, respondents believed that limited each tutor to 4-6 course-class in one semester would benefit not only the tutors but also students. In case a tutor is assigned to 3 courses, then each class should not be more than 2 classes.

Tutors' assessment of the definition of online tutorials was varied, from not too good into very good. The not too-satisfied respondents mentioned several factors: too many students in one class that practically limit the tutors' interactions with students, late information on number of classes assigned to tutors, lack of IT support form UT, and lack of control during the online tutorial sessions. Meanwhile, satisfied respondents mentioned the benefit of online tutorials for students otherwise could not master learning materials since they do not have time to attend face-to-face tutorials, additional references for students, and interaction between tutor-students and students-students. In spite their differences in online tutorial definition, the respondents agreed on one thing: limit number of students to 30-50 in one class.

Roles of online Tutorials

UT states that online tutorial is aiming at facilitating students' learning process and most of the respondents agreed with this role. Some respondents even mentioned the benefit of online tutorials for students as motivating students to keep on studying. Therefore, students could master targeted learning materials and pass final examination. Some of the respondents also believed that implementing online tutorials could help developing on-line learning community. However, they suggested that online tutorial could be more benefited if it utilized other gadget like Smartphone.

Roles of Tutors

Tutors play great roles in online tutorials. Tutors are responsible to develop initiation materials, assignments, and discussion topics. Tutors have to upload all the materials into the system while at the same time facilitate students' learning by moderating discussions, encouraging students' participations, and making sure students

uploaded the assignments. In addition, tutors have to provide feedback and scores for students' works. Tutors also have responsibilities to entry students' final score and reporting all the activities to UT.

The respondents know their responsibilities and they tried to do it according to the regulation. However, some respondents did not know that they were responsible to upload learning materials for online tutorials. They were waited for the UT, in this case course manager, to upload the materials for them. In some cases, the materials are already there because other tutors have uploaded them. However, some courses have to be passive for several weeks due to no materials uploaded.

Despite of the respondents' agreement on the roles of online tutors, some aspects need to be improved. Respondents mentioned their needs to have online tutorial guidance or manual. The one provided in the website was too technical and did not cover academic aspects of online tutorials. In addition, the respondents need training on how to use Internet for facilitating learning in online tutorials. In term of academic aspects, other than manual, the respondents also needed all relevant references to the course, including course blue print, modules, materials used in face-to-face tutors, and evaluation blue print. Moreover, to increase roles of the online tutors, they needed to regularly meet with other tutors from similar courses to discuss development in the courses and to agree on how to conduct the online tutorials.

Roles of Students

Every student registers in certain courses are automatically registered in the online tutorial of the courses given the courses have online tutorial. In online tutorial, students have to be actively involved in accessing the online tutorial facilities, learning all initiation materials, uploading all tasks, and engaging in discussions. Therefore, the student has to have access to the Internet, has an email address, and familiar with the online tutorial system.

All respondents, to some degree, agreed to these roles of students in online tutorials. However, some respondents argued on students' awareness of the facilities. One respondent mentioned his apprehension because out of four classes initially assigned to him, only one class finally active. The other three classes, set up based on registration database, has no students log in the class. "I've prepared myself for four classes but until the end only one class active. And mind me, from 76 registered students in the class, only around 40's active", mentioned a tutor from Jakarta.

Therefore, respondents mentioned the necessary to socialize the existence and benefit of online tutorial to students in any occasions such as new students welcoming activities and examination. For students who have utilized the online tutorials, they need to be reminded to follow procedures set up in the online tutorials. In some occasions, students send assignments to tutors' email. While this action did not necessarily wrong in term of academic engagement between tutors and students, the assignments would not be stored in the online tutorial system which could inflict the student. As a consequence, the student may not get score for the assignment. In some cases, students faced difficulties interacting using Internet. UT has the responsibilities to make sure that students are familiar with the Internet and accustomed with the online tutorial system. In addition, to increase students' roles in online tutorials, some respondents suggested the availability of limited synchronous communication between tutors-students. In the occasions, students could show their works and directly get comments from tutors and other students.

Requirements to be an Online Tutor

To be assigned as online tutors, one has to possess master degree in relevant field. Since the tutorial uses Internet, tutors are also required to have access to Internet, have email address, and familiar with the Internet. All respondents know the requirements to be tutors and all, except one, comply. Some respondents added the requirements with professional, committed, and able to motivate students. Nevertheless, the respondents mentioned the necessity for online tutors to attend training on how to provide effective online tutorials and to familiarized tutors with the technical aspects of the system. Some respondents took it to the next level where they wanted tutors to be accredited. UT has started accrediting face-to-face tutors but the regulation is not yet implemented for online tutors. In addition, to increase the effectiveness of the online tutorials, respondents suggested that UT facilitate tutors with Internet facilities in their home so that tutors could be more easily engaged in the online tutorials, "UT could provide us Internet access to make it easier for us to communicate with the students" a tutor from Kupang said.

Online Tutorial Initiation Materials

Materials for online tutorials are developed from difficult topics on the course module and the respondents know the policy. However, some respondents worried about the content of the modules. According to the respondents, learning materials in some modules were outdated. As a consequence, it was impossible to use the modules as reference to be used in online tutorial.

The respondents voiced their needs for learning materials in online tutorials to be more accountable and reliable. UT needs to allow tutors to use other materials which more relevant and updated to enriched the course. To provide effective learning experience for students, materials in online tutorials have also need to be synchronized with materials used in face-to-face tutorials and examination blueprints. Tutors also needed to attend trainings on how to write effective initiation materials. Other input to perfecting policy in online tutorial was the need to supervise the online tutorial. Due to heavy workload of online tutors, especially those with more than 100 students in one class, supervision is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of online tutorials.

Students' Evaluation Mechanism

The respondents knew the policy that students' evaluation in online tutorial is based on student's activities and quality of assignment and contribute to 30% of final score. However, the respondent did not quite happy with the policy since the evaluation mechanism was too focused on administrative activities (frequency of log in) and too subjective. The indicators were too loose.

Students' evaluation was one topic which received rich comments from the respondents. All of the respondents saw the importance to revise the evaluation mechanism. At least there were five aspects that need to be revised including:

1. Evaluation process needs to reflect academic reasons not just administrative justification,
2. Evaluation mechanism has to be objective and measurable,
3. Evaluation mechanism needs to be standardized,
4. Relation between students' achievement in online tutorial and in final examination need to be analyzed, and
5. Mechanism for student evaluation should be reliable which also include level of difficulty while at the same time easily to use.

In addition, tutors' roles in determining students' score should be increased to around 50%, not just 30% like presents time. Moreover, due to Internet difficulties students in some areas faced, proportions between discussion and assignments have to be reconsidered. Alternative assessment, such as portfolio, could also be considered to be used.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, using PAF as entry point in choosing learning support services as area of policy with delivery learning materials as the issue, analysis of the policy in online tutorial at UT has been able to provide new insights of aspects need to be consider in formulating policies in online tutorial as well as in learning support services. Involving tutors, one of stakeholders in online tutorial as a part of learning support services at UT, as sources of information have proven to be productive.

In general there was no confusion about definition of online tutorial, roles of tutors and roles of students, and requirement of tutor. Tutors just need to be more involved in the policy formulation since they could provide data on students and problem faced in online tutorial. However, tutors need an adjustment in student evaluation which according tutors too focus on administrative aspects and subjective. Moreover, in order to gain a more integrated and complete analysis of online tutorial, further research involving students need to be conducted.

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