Teaching Presence in Online Graduate Program Tutorials at Universitas Terbuka

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the existence of teaching presence in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration at Universitas Terbuka (UT), and the constraints that inhibit the presence of teaching presence in the online tutorial. The concept of teaching presence in this study is part of the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). The roles of the tutor in teaching presence are as: (1) instructional designers and organizers; (2) facilitators, and (3) direct instructor. This study used content analysis and interviews. Sample text of the initiation and discussion activities of 9 (nine) courses during the twelve-week period of online tutorials were analyzed using message unit to identify whether teaching presence occurred in the interaction between students and tutors in the online tutorials. Depth interviews were conducted with three (3) tutors of the courses being studied. The findings indicated that teaching presence occurred in the 9 (nine) courses of the Program. However, the roles of tutors in the online tutorial were dominated by the roles as instructional designers and direct instructor. The tutors did not do much role as the facilitator of discussion activities.

Keywords: Teaching Presence, Online Tutorial, Community of Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

As a distance education institution, Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka (UT) has to provide a learning support service to facilitate its students in the process of self-

learning and to improve their learning achievement. Among the learning support services offered by UT are face to face tutorial and electronic tutorial called online tutorial.

Online tutorial at UT is a learning support to assist students to have better understanding of the course subjects. Activities in the online tutorial consist of initiations, discussions and assignments. In order to obtain meaningful learning experiences in the online tutorial, students are expected to be active in tutorial activities, namely reading the initiation materials, participating in the discussions, and doing the assignments. Students are also expected to interact and collaborate in the discussions with other students and the tutor. Participating actively in the online tutorial would help students developing critical thinking.

Instructors or tutors in an online learning or online tutorial have an important role in helping students learn. However, teaching in an online environment is not easy. The role of the instructor in an online environment is quite complex and challenging (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). It is important to be known that online learning is different from face-to-face learning. Tutors not only provide course materials, but also act as a facilitator in the learning process. The role of tutors in online learning would determine the level of student satisfaction in learning. Students would expect tutors to interact with them, give response in discussions, and provide feedback.

At UT, online tutorials have been offered to students both for diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate program as a learning service. The online tutorial is not mandatory for students of diploma and bachelor degrees, but it is mandatory for graduate students, as one of the main components in the learning process. The learning process in the graduate program is conducted in the form of face-to-face and online tutorials. Since the second semester of 2013, UT offered a fully online program for Master programs. In the fully online program, almost all learning

process is done online without any face-to-face tutorials, except for thesis guidance and oral thesis examination.

In the fully online learning process, tutors at the graduate program are expected and required to do their roles well. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) identified the roles of tutors in the online learning as an instructional designer, facilitator and provider of direct instruction. These roles are known as teaching presence in the online learning. This paper is to determine whether teaching presence occurs in the fully online graduate program tutorials at UT. Specifically, the author would like to see the implementation of the teaching presence in the graduate program of the Master Program of Public Administration, and the obstacles in the development of teaching presence in the online tutorial of this program.

Literature Review

The concept of teaching presence in this study is part of the framework of the Community of Inquiry from Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). The Community of Inquiry framework is used as the concepts and tools to support learning experiences in online learning through computer-mediated communications (CMC) (p. 87). Community of inquiry is defined as "a cohesive and interactive community of learners whose purpose is to critically analyze, construct, and confirm worthwhile knowledge" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 9). The interaction in this learning community is combined in three elements, namely social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence.

Teaching presence is defined as "the design, facilitator and direction of cognitive and social process for the purpose of realizing personality meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p. 5). In this learning experience, tutors and students have an important responsibility; both parties are part of the learning process

(Garrison, 2011). The use of the term 'teaching presence' rather than 'teacher presence' is to recognize the fact that the role of tutors also be borne by students.

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001) identified the roles of instructors or tutors of an online learning as: (1) designer and organizer; (2) facilitators, and (3) direct instruction. It is important for tutors to create the overall planning process, evaluation, structure, and aspects of interaction in online learning before a course is available for students. Such plans should be explicit and transparent since the online learning expects different learning styles from students (Tolu & Evans, 2013).

The facilitator is an important element to "sustain interest, motivation and involvement of students in effective learning" (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 7). As a facilitator in online learning, tutor encourages students' participation with a role model, comment on posts, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, keep the discourse discussion focused, and strive to make students stay active in discussions (Tolu & Evans, 2013).

The role as provider of direct instruction refers to the tutor's role as intellectual and scientific leaders, where tutors have a deep understanding and knowledge of the subject matter (Anderson et al., 2001). This role is similar to the subject matter expert. By using their expertise in materials and pedagogy, instructors or tutors direct student, provide feedback, and inject knowledge from various sources (Anderson, et al., 2001).

Anderson, et al. (2001) found the essential functions of online tutors in higher education are as subject matter experts, and the ability to carry forward or transfer the knowledge that they have without dominating the discussion. They concluded:

... we believe that there are many fields of knowledge, as well as attitudes and

skills, that are best learned in forms of higher education that require the active

participation of a subject matter expert in the critical discourse. This subject matter expert is expected to provide direct instruction by interjecting comments, referring students to information resources, and organizing activities that allow the students to construct the content in their own minds and personal contexts (p. 9).

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001) created categories and indicators of teaching presence as follows:

Table 1. Categories and Indicators of Teaching Presence

Categories	Indicators	Examples
Instructional design	Setting curriculum	"This week we will be discussing. . ."
	Designing methods	"I am going to divide you into groups, and you will debate. . ."
	Establishing time parameters	"Please post a message by Friday. . ."
	Utilizing the medium effectively	"Try to address issues that others have raised when you post"
	Establishing netiquette	"Keep your messages short"
Direct instruction	Presenting content and questions	"Bates says…what do you think"
	Focusing the discussion	"I think that's a dead end. I would ask you to consider…"
	Summarizing the discussion	"The original question was …Joe said…Mary said…we concluded that…We still haven't addressed…"
	Confirming understanding	"You're close, but you didn't account for… …this is important because…
	Diagnosing misperceptions	"Remember, Bates is speaking from an administrative perspective, so be careful when you say…"
	Inject knowledge from diverse sources, e.g., textbook, articles, internet, personal experiences (includes pointers to resources)	"I was at a conference with Bates once, and he said…You can find the proceedings from the conference at http://www…."
	Responding to technical concerns	"If you want to include a hyperlink in your message, you have to . . ."
Facilitating discourse	Identifying areas of agreement and disagreement	"Joe, Mary has provided a compelling counterexample to your hypothesis. Would you care to respond?"
	Seeking to reach consensus and understanding	"I think Joe and Mary are saying essentially the same thing"

	Encouraging, acknowledging, and reinforcing students' contributions	"Thank you for your insightful comments"
	Setting the climate for learning	"Don't feel self-conscious about 'thinking out loud' on the forum. This is a place to try out ideas after all."
	Drawing in participants and prompting discussion	"Any thoughts on this issue?" "Anyone care to comment?"

Source: Anderson, Rourke, Garrison dan Archer (2001)

METHOD

This study used content analysis for its method. According to Kanuka and Anderson (1998), content analysis is defined as a research methodology that uses a set of procedures to the make valid inferences from the text. The procedures in the content analysis include identifying and interpret variables, collect a sample of the text, and establish the rule of reliability and validity in determining the categorization of the segment or section of text. The process of selecting a segment or portion of a transcript requires writers to define the unit of analysis. Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer (1999) identified five units of analysis that has been used in the study of computer conferencing, namely: proportion unit, sentence units, paragraph units, thematic units, and message unit.

Data sources of this study were the sample text of discussion activities and interactions between students and tutors of 9 (nine) courses in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration in the first semester of 2015 during 12 (twelve) week-period of online tutorial. In addition, the data sources were also derived from in-depth interviews with three tutors of the Master Program of Public Administration.

The transcripts of online tutorial activities were analyzed by using content analysis with the message unit. By using the message unit as the unit of analysis, code makers generally see the message that emerges from the interaction between students and tutors in the initiations,

discussions and assignments, to determine the category (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). Meanwhile, the interview data were analyzed using descriptive data analysis techniques. From the interview transcripts, the author created coding, using open coding. Then, the author created thematic categories based on the interpretative analysis of the texts (Quartaroli, 2009).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Garrison (2011), teaching presence would be impossible without the expertise and responsibilities of tutors who are experienced, who can identify the ideas and concepts of the material being studied, organize learning activities, direct the discussion, provide additional resources, diagnose if there are misconceptions, and provide input when required. From the analysis of the activities of 9 (nine) courses of the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration, using categories and indicators of teaching presence from Rourke et al (1999), the author found that teaching presence was present in the activity of initiations, discussions and assignments, although not all indicators of teaching presence appeared in such activities.

Table 2 showed the frequency of categories of teaching presence that were observed in the activities of initiations, discussions and assignments in nine (9) courses of the Master Program of Public Administration in the first semester of 2015.

Table 2. *Teaching Presence* in the Online Tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration in 2015.1
Posted by Tutors

Categories	Indicators	Frequency
Instructional Design	Setting curriculum	98
	Designing methods	0
	Establishing time parameters	8
	Utilizing the medium effectively	0
	Establishing netiquette	2

Direct instruction	Presenting content and questions	135
	Focusing the discussion	0
	Summarizing the discussion	0
	Confirming understanding	3
	Diagnosing misperceptions	1
	Inject knowledge from diverse sources, e.g., textbook, articles, internet, personal experiences (includes pointers to resources)	81
	Responding to technical concerns	2
Facilitating discourse	Identifying areas of agreement and disagreement	0
	Seeking to reach consensus and understanding	0
	Encouraging, acknowledging and reinforcing students' contributions	14
	Setting the climate for learning	11
	Drawing in participants and prompting discussion	5

Instructional Design and Direct Instruction were the categories that dominated the entire messages written by tutors of the online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration. In the category of Instructional Design and Direct Instruction, the most written messages associated with the indicators of curriculum setting, presenting content and questions, and inject knowledge from diverse sources. The messages in those indicators contained with initiation materials, discussion questions and assignments provided by tutors. In addition, some tutors also wrote messages in the indicators of the timing of completion of tasks or discussion. However, the author did not find any tutors who wrote messages in the indicators of designing method and utilizing the medium effectively.

As Instructional Designers and Direct Instruction in online learning, tutors have to create a customized curriculum, such as the need to enrich or reduce the material content (Garrison, 2011). The tutors also can provide links from websites to enrich the material that relevant to the subject of the course (Garrison, 2011). In the 9 (nine) courses in online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration, tutors designed a curriculum based on the material of the course's modules. The content of the initiation of the online tutorial served as enrichments of the modules. In developing the materials, some tutors also posted materials from other sources, such

as articles, books, and other sources from the internet. Tutors also provided links from these sources that corresponded to the topics covered in the modules. Most of these sources were in the form of Open Educational Resources (OER). Selection of topics within modules that would be covered in the online tutorial was part of the tutor's role as an Instructional Designer.

The Direct Instruction category also associated with the specific content of the subject matter, such as diagnosed misconceptions in the discussions. In the online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration, only one tutor who provided feedback on misconceptions and another tutor who confirmed understanding. The tutors only wrote one message on the indicator of diagnosing misconceptions and three messages on the indicators of confirming understanding, in the twelve week-period of online tutorial. Also, only one tutor who responded to technical concerns from the students. Meanwhile, there was no tutor who wrote messages in the focusing and inference discussion indicators.

The least frequency of messages written by tutor was in the Facilitating Discourse category. As a facilitator, tutors have responsibilities to motivate and retain the interest of students to participate in the online tutorial activities. Therefore, in an ideal discussion forum, tutors should provide feedback, provide comments on the discussions, identify areas of agreement and disagreement in discussions, and encourage student participation. In this category, only few tutors of the Master Program of Public Administration wrote notes to provide encouragement, recognition, and to reinforce students' contributions. The tutor encouraged students to participate, and gave appreciation to the students for their participation in answering and responding to the discussion. Few other tutors also wrote messages in creating a learning environment that encouraged students' participation. However, there was no tutor who wrote messages in order to identify agreement and disagreement in the discussion among students.

Similarly, no tutors were looking for ways to reach a consensus and understanding, when there were disagreements in the discussions. From these findings, it showed that the roles of tutors in the online tutorial mostly provided knowledge or information to students, and only a few tutors who did their role as a facilitator.

In this study, the author also interviewed three tutors who managed the online tutorials of the Master Program of Public Administration. The tutors were academic staff at the Open University environment. The author wanted to see their roles as tutors in the online tutorial. From the interviews and content analysis of online tutorial's activities, the author found that most tutors greeted students at the beginning of the tutorial. The greeting was very important in online learning environment. By greeting the students, the interaction did occur between students and the tutor, also among students and students. The usefulness of the greeting at the beginning of the online tutorials provided an opportunity for tutors and students to get to know one another, and to build an online community. The realization of the online community might be able to reduce the sense of isolation in the learning process. One tutor said that he introduced himself at the beginning of the meeting to give a personal touch for students, although he was not able to greet them routinely every week as idealized.

From the text analysis of the activities of online tutorials, all tutors of 9 (nine) courses of the Master Program of Public Administration introduced themselves at the beginning of the online tutorial. However, there were several tutors who did not provide a forum for students to introduce themselves to other students. The result also showed that the pattern of teaching presence in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration was not too different from one subject to another subject. Most of tutors in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration only wrote messages in the form of initiations,

discussion questions and assignments. Only a few tutors provided feedback to the students in the discussions. Tutors did not do much role as a facilitator.

The reasons that affected the frequency and content of teaching presence in the online learning could be in the form of teaching style of each tutor, class size, students and tutors knowledge of learning media being used, workload, and time availability of tutors (Anderson, et al., 2001). In the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration at UT, tutors faced some obstacles in managing the tutorial. The main obstacle was the lack of time of the tutors due to the workload of each tutors was a lot.

The tutorials activities, particularly in the instructional design category, teaching presence would begin before the tutorial took place. The tutors could revise the content of the tutorial activities that have been uploaded during the tutorial progresses. This process was not seen by the students as well as by the author in the transcript of the online tutorial activities, therefore, the author only checked for the activities that were written in the online tutorial. In addition, the teaching presence activities were also possible to be occurred outside the tutorial online forum, such as through email, voice mail, or telephone (Anderson, et al., 2001). Thus, the teaching presence activities through those media were not recorded in this study.

The process was also done by the tutors in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration. Tutors have conducted teaching presence before the activities of the online tutorial began. These tutors prepared the material, revised or enhanced the initiations and discussion questions outside the online tutorial activities. From the interviews, tutors suggested that these activities also took their times and could be categorized in teaching presence.

CONCLUSION

Teaching presence occurred in nine (9) courses of the fully online tutorial program of the Master of Public Administration. However, the roles of the tutors were dominated by the roles as instructional designer and direct instruction. The tutors did not do much role as a facilitator of discussion, where they were expected to provide response and feedback, or identify agreements and disagreements in the discussions, and to find a way to reach a consensus and understanding in a discussion. The tutors also did not provide much encouragement, recognition, and strengthen the contribution of students, organize learning climate, and encourage students' participation. The tutors, who did the role as a facilitator, only did it in one or two weeks of the twelve-week period of online tutorials.

The obstacles faced by tutors in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration were the issues of workload and time management. The tutors said that they had to manage over 5 online tutorial's courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level. With the number of courses and students in each class, many tutors found that it was challenging to pay adequate attention to the role as a facilitator in the online tutorial and to manage the time; they did not have enough time to respond to students in every week. The constraints mentioned by the tutors explained why they did not do much role as Facilitator in the fully online tutorial of the Master Program of Public Administration at UT.

The tutors' role as a facilitator is essential in online learning. However at UT, it is challenging for the tutors in the Master Program of Public Administration to fully apply teaching presence, especially in the role of facilitating discourse. The implementation of teaching presence has implications for tutors and UT as an institution (Setiani, 2014). For tutors, they may not be familiar with the roles in teaching presence. In this regard, tutors need to be trained how to

conduct an online tutorial with those roles. Tutors also may need to provide much of their time in managing the online tutorial, since they need to provide attentions, responses or feedback to students in the discussions. Thus, tutors may need to be able to manage their time wisely in order to deal with all of their academic and administrative responsibilities. For UT, the implications are that it may be necessary for UT to recruit more tutors to manage online tutorials, so, the tutors could reduce their workload in managing online tutorials. Moreover, UT may need to provide training for tutors in order to implement teaching presence, because tutors might not be familiar with this pedagogical approach and how to apply it in the online tutorial. UT may also need to recruit trainers who have knowledge and/or expertise in the Community of Inquiry framework for online tutorials.

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