THE ROLE OF THE INDONESIAN OPEN UNIVERSITY (UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA) TO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS

IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

UT has been established since 1984 and since then UT has helped educate thousands of Indonesians who want to improve their knowledge after they graduate from high school. UT has many graduates, but most of them are teachers. This article will discuss how UT has helped to change the way teachers, especially early childhood education (ECE) teachers learn in Indonesia, from being the passive students who just listening to the teacher in the class to be people who can learn actively and independently both face to face and learning online. The rapid changes in technology helps UT to improve its academic service to students from only giving face to face tutorial as the academic student support service to also providing online tutorial to help UT students learn at a distance. By its curriculum, UT makes early childhood education teachers in Indonesia to know and to learn to use the internet to help them learning. A qualitative case study was used to explore how the UT students who are ECE teachers perceive their experiences in learning online at UT. The research has conducted in 2018 and 2019 by sending some open questions via online and by interviewing some ECE student teachers. The research also used the data from 2013 as a comparison data. The data has been analyzed descriptively. The results showed that it is proven that UT has a role as an agent of change for the ECE teachers in Indonesia since by studying at UT the ECE student teachers learn to study actively and independently. Moreover, UT has helped them to experience how to learn online. By participating in online tutorial at UT, the ECE student teachers learn to use internet for learning such as by reading the learning materials via online, by expressing their knowledge and by posting their questions via online. Thus, in UT they learn to know and to learn how to be the professional ECE teachers. However, because the number of subjects is not many, the generalizability of the findings is limited.

**Keywords:** *distance education, online tutorial, learning online, the changes of the way students learn, Universitas Terbuka*

**INTRODUCTION**

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is established with Presidential Decree Number 41 of 1984 on 4 September 1984 as the 45th state university. UT is entirely using distance education mode of learning. As a distance education university, UT implements an open distance learning system. The meaning of *open* in UT is everyone who has a high school or its equivalent certificate, can be UT students without any limitation on age, years of diplomas, of study, time registration, and the frequency of exams (http://www.ut.ac.id/tentang-ut.html).The term *distance education* means that the learning process is not mainly done by face to face, instead, UT students can learn at a distance by many means. Being UT students mean that the students have to learn the learning courses by reading the module. The module is the printed media and non-printed media such as audio / video, computer / Internet, radio and television broadcasts. Theoretically, UT printed and non printed learning materials are intended to be learned independently. In addition to using learning materials provided by UT, students can also take the initiative to utilize the library (anywhere) and or enroll in the face to face tutorial or via the Internet, radio, and television, and using other learning resources such as programs audio / video (Chandrawati, 2015).

UT students are suggested to be independent learners that are determined by the ability to learn efficiently. To be able to learn efficiently, UT students are required to have self-discipline, initiative, and strong motivation to learn. Therefore, in order to successfully study at UT, prospective students must be prepared to learn independently which mean students should be able to manage their time effectively, and efficiently. However, independent learning can be done alone or in groups, either in study groups or in group tutorials. Since 2018, to help its students, UT has conducted some trainings for UT’s new students and the tutors. In the training the new students are given some knowledge and skills to be UT students by learning how to be independent learners. But, if UT students have some difficulties in their learning, they can request any information or tutorial assistance from UT’s regional centers or UPBJJ-UT in more than 39 regional offices in all Indonesian provinces (Chandrawati, 2015).

UT has many students by using distance education (DE) system. From 1984 to 2018, UT has been passed 1.7 million people. From the many alumni, the teachers dominated (<https://www.jpnn.com/news/universitas-terbuka-jadi-favorit-guru-pns-dan-honorer>) since it was recorded that from the many alumni, there were 650 thousand people comes from the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training (FKIP). Even, in this registration year (2019.1) UT has **292.465 students and** 162.670 or 55,62% of the number of the students are the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training’s (FKIP’s) students (<https://www.ut.ac.id/ut-dalam-angka>). FKIP is designed to improve the in-service teacher professional skills, including the abilities, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The faculty has eleven undergraduate study programs including the early childhood education (ECE) study program or S1 PGPAUD.

The existence of UT with its Faculty of Education and Teacher Training (FKIP-UT) have helped the Indonesian government specifically in improving teacher qualifications. FKIP-UT has helped many teachers get their S1 degree following the Indonesian government policy. The government believes that UT with its FKIP can help in preparing the Indonesian future generation to improve their skills and to utilize the industrial revolution 4.0 in their life. A teacher is a facilitator who drives the young generation to utilize the era of this industrial revolution 4.0 wisely.

Various reports from both national and international, both government and non-governmental organizations (Non-Governmental Organizations), show that the index of reading interest and literacy levels of the Indonesian people are still very low. One reason of the many factors that cause low reading interest and the level of literacy of Indonesian people, both among children and adults is the culture of Indonesian people who tend to be cultured and talk (verbally) (liputan6.com, 2017).It means reading is not the Indonesian people habit. Moreover, Indonesian students are used to memorize all the learning content, since usually the teachers are often lead the students to memorize many learning materials of man courses (<https://www.brilio.net/news/ini-beda-pendidikan-di-indonesia-dan-as-beda-pendidikan-di-as-dan-indonesia-150407t.html>.).

With the distance learning system, UT request the students to be active learners by always reading the course modules, learning alone or learning with the group, also UT students’ should participate in the discussions, by giving comments or questions or perceptions, and do the exercising or the tests . Being independent learners mean that the students should do all the job. Thus, this paper aims to explain and discuss how UT with its online tutorials has helped to change the way Indonesian teachers, especially early childhood education (ECE) teachers learn to active learners who can be independents learners.

**UT’s EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION UNDERGADUATE STUDY PROGRAM**

In UT, Early childhood education (ECE) study program has been offered for ECE teachers since 2004 with the main purpose is to help ECE student-teachers to be professional ECE teachers. This ECE study program has 45 courses and 26 of the courses are provided by face to face tutorial (2009 Basic Education Catalogue, pp.13-17). For the ECE courses that have no face-to-face tutorial, UT has provided an online learning tutorial as the learning support for the students who need that. However, participating in both face to face and online learning tutorials is not an obligation for UT students since the tutorial in UT is provided as a learning support for UT students who felt they needed it.

The UT’s ECE undergraduate study program or Program S1 PGPAUD has been established since 2007. The curriculum of the UT's ECE (S1 PG-PAUD) Study Program is aiming to help the ECE student teachers to learn:

1. Educational science is related to student development, development of teaching materials, educational research methodologies, school-based management.
2. The foundation of the teaching profession includes the development and innovation of curricula, learning strategies, evaluation of learning, classroom action research, teacher professionalism, and teacher training practices.
3. Conceptual knowledge in the field of study in elementary schools includes Indonesian Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences, Civics, and Cultural and Craft Arts (<http://fkip.ut.ac.id/program-studi/s1-pendidikan-anak-usia-dini>).

The curriculum also aims to helpthe S1 PG-PAUD Study Program graduates to be able to demonstrate the attitude of God believers, uphold human values, have nationalism, respect social cultural diversity, respect the opinions of others, have sensitivity and social care, obey the law, and be responsible for work in their area of ​​expertise independently. In addition, the graduates are hoped to be able to internalize values ​​and norms in academic ethics, develop positive attitudes towards learning independence and lifelong learning, and create opportunities to improve the quality of personal and community life (<http://fkip.ut.ac.id/program-studi/s1-pendidikan-anak-usia-dini>).

**HOW UT CHANGES THE WAY THE ECE STUDENTS’ TEACHERS LEARN BY ITS DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

UT with its distance education system has used the technology as the main mean to improve UT’s teaching and learning process and management. Even the ministry of research and technology and higher education explained that technology is the main mean to improve its teaching and learning process and also to help its management system (Darojat et al, 2018).

In order to help the Indonesian teachers especially the ECE student teachers to welcome and to adapt with the digital era, FKIP-UT has introduced and used online tutorial as one of its academic service.

**ONLINE LEARNING AT UT**

To accelerate the completion of the government mission, the top management of UT plans to use the online learning program as an additional form for its print-based instructional process (Luschei, Dimyati, & Padmo, 2008, pp.165-166). The online learning program in UT, which was started in 1995, now seems to be widely used to serve its students, either for its undergraduates but also for its Masters degree program. This kind of teaching learning process is a shift from only providing a face to face tutorial system. And UT’s online tutorial program is an example of UT’s effort to adapt to technological developments and to meet the needs of students. By using the online tutorials, UT expects the instructors can help and reach their students who live in areas that are difficult to achieve by face to face. Accordingly, UT then developed and implemented many online tutorials, which are supplemented as well with the printed learning materials. This online tutorial program is expected to maintain a good interaction with students, and it is also developing academic dialogue among students, tutors, and UT as the main curriculum providers.

As stated in the S1 PGPAUD-UT undergraduate curriculum, FKIP-UT put an effort to make students know, learn and use the internet to help them learn in UT. Even though Indonesians culturally have a low reading habit, but by studying at UT that requires its students to learn independently, UT students learn to get used to read the module and learn actively by discussing some topics, giving their opinions or perceptions towards the topics being discussed in the online tutorials. Moreover, studying online made the students being active students, this is in line with the results of the research done by Chandrawati (2018), it showed that joining the online tutorial made the students learn how to be online learners by using computer and internet.

The results of this study showed that it is proven that UT can play a role as an agent of change for the ECE teachers in Indonesia. The ECE teachers while they are studying at UT, they are forced to study actively and independently. Moreover, with the distance education system of learning, UT has helped the ECE student teachers to experience how to learn at a distance by learning how to read effectively, to manage their study time, to write their perceptions related with a topic discussion, or to discuss some learning content with other students via online when they are participating in online tutorial at UT. Some ECE student teachers felt that participating in online tutorial; made them proud of being UT students (Chandrawati, 2015) because the ECE student teachers had to learn to use internet for learning. Thus, in UT they learn to know and to learn how to be the professional ECE teachers which is fit with the goals of the S1 PGPAUD-UT to help ECE teachers being professional ECE teachers.

In 2013 UT there were few UT’s ECE student Teachers who joined online tutorial (tuton) (Chandrawati, 2015), but now the number of students learning with tuton has greatly increased The number of ECE UT student teachers who join and participated in online tutorial also tend to increase as the table below.

Table 1.

Data of UT’s ECE Student teachers who took online tutorials

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2015.1 | 2015.2 | 2016.1 | 2016.2 | 2017.1 | 2017.2 | 2018.1 | 2018.2 | 2019.1 |
| - | 2666 | 3632 | 3486 | 3457 | 3457 | 3423 | 2924 | 6881 |

From Table 1 we can see that the number of students who took online tutorials in 2016.1 is higher than that in 2016.2 to 2018.2. In fact, the number of students who took online tutorial decreased in 20182 but the number has increased more higher in 20191. UT has given some trainings to guide UT’s new students to learn at UT. The new students learned some knowledge and skills to be independent learners including how to participate in online tutorial. There are some reasons why the students did not participate in online tutorials such as they felt that they still did not understand how to get access to participate in online tutorial, even though there is an information about the procedure to join the online tutorial. The data stated in this table.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Tabel 2.  UT’s ECE student teachers’ perception about the information about the easiness in joining the online tutorial in UT’s web | | | |
| number of statement | Alternatif answer | Skor | |
| number | % |
| 41 | Agree | 3 | 18 |
| somewhat agree | 10 | 59 |
| not agree | 4 | 24 |
| Total | | 17 | 100% |

From Table 2 we can see that may UT’s ECE students still did not understand the procedure to join the online tutorial. It means UT should give more guidance and information and motivation for the students to make them participate in online tutorials. Further, the UT’s ECE graduates informed that only 46% of them felt that their skills in dealing with computers are good (Novita et al, 2018). It means UT has to give more trainings about computer literacy to the students.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Tabel 3.  The UT’s new students choose to be UT’s students because they know  about UT learning system | | | |
| number of statement | Alternatif answer | Skor | |
| number | % |
| 2 | Agree | 8 | 47 |
| somewhat agree | 9 | 53 |
| not agree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 17 | 100% |

From the Table 3 we can see that 47% respondents who were UT’s ECE new student teachers perceive that they registered to UT they have known about UT, and 53% respondents felt that they knew few facts about UT. It means many new students registered to UT because they already know UT and its learning system.

**METHOD**

A descriptive qualitative case study was used to explore how the UT students who are ECE teachers perceive their experiences in learning online at UT. The research has conducted in 2018 and 2019 by sending some open questions via online and by interviewing some ECE student teachers who participated in Tangerang. The research also used the data from 2013 as a comparison data. The data has been analyzed descriptively. However, because the number of subjects is not many, the generalizability of the findings is limited.

In applying the qualitative approach, the researcher decided to use the case study research method because the research was conducted in a certain time, in a certain program, and with a certain group of people. Rossman and Rallis (2011 in Chandrawati, 2015) explain that in doing case studies, the researchers try to understand the larger phenomenon through close examination of a specific case and therefore focus on the particular case. This qualitative was used since the researchers tried to know and to understand how the respondents felt about learning at UT. Moreover, the researchers also tried to helped the ECE student teachers learned about what is online tutorial and experienced learning online.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study supported the other research did by Chandrawati (2018) in 2017/2018 that participating in online tutorial helped to make UT’s ECE student teachers learned actively by discussing some topics, giving their opinions or perceptions towards the topics being discussed in the online tutorials. Further, the research by Chandrawati (2018) also found that joining the online tutorial made the students to get used in using computer and internet. The results of this study showed that it is proven that UT has a role as an agent of change for the ECE teachers in Indonesia since by studying at UT the ECE student teachers learn to study actively and independently. Moreover, UT has helped them to experience how to learn online. By participating in online tutorial at UT, the ECE student teachers learn to use internet for learning such as by reading the learning materials via online, by expressing their knowledge and by posting their questions via online. Thus, in UT they learn to know and to learn how to be the professional ECE teachers. The findings also shows that participating in an online tutorial can enhance students’ involvement in their learning by stating their needs to others, sharing their experiences.

The results showed that dialogue in online tutorial could help students to be engaged and connected with their tutor and their peers. The structure of online tutorial and the discussion topic given by the tutor seemed encourage the students to have dialogue among themselves.

**CONCLUSION**

UT as an institution has successfully carried out its mission in widening access to higher education, for both practicing teachers and general society. By any means, UT represents one of the significant contributions to innovation in modern Indonesian higher education system. Nevertheless, there are still many challenges to overcome to establish itself as one on of the center of excellence in open and distance education in the world.

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Tentang UT, <http://www.ut.ac.id/tentang-ut.html>