

STUDY ON OBSTACLES IN IMPLEMENTING DISTANCE LEARNING SUCCESS SUPPORT SERVICES

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Abstract

Distance Learning Success Support Service or often mentioned as *Layanan Pendukung Kesuksesan Belajar Jarak Jauh (LPKBJJ)* is one of the services provided by new students of Universitas Terbuka (UT). This activity is intended for UT's new students in order for them to gain some information about the open and distance learning (ODL) system at UT. This service is considered unique and different from the conventional way of learning they experienced before becoming UT students. This paper aims to examine various obstacles in the implementation of distance learning success support services. The study was conducted by reviewing the results of activities of distance learning success support services during the registration of 2022.1 by reviewing the report on the implementation from UT compiled by the Center for Student Support Services of UT. The results show that generally the obstacles happen in the following aspects. First, obstacles in socializing activities, such as inaccurate students' cellphone numbers and emails, the distance of their domicile. Second, some technical constraints, such as unstable internet connection, lack of technical equipment. Third, obstacles in student readiness, such as students' difficulties in focusing on the programs due to joining other programs at the same time, unable to leave their work, and difficulties of controlling student attendance in online classes. Fourth, obstacles in material delivery, such as over material that needs to be delivered in a limited time. Based on the existing constraints mentioned above, various alternative solutions were prepared to improve the implementation of distance learning success support services in the future.

Keywords: distance learning success support services, learning success, distance learning

1 INTRODUCTION

Being engaged in campus activities is always something new and even strange for new students since they need self-adjustment to being adults with lots of individual activities. They have to consequently manage all campus activities themselves, both academic and non-academic. Therefore, a good higher institution must pay attention to students' readiness in facing new situations on their campus, so they are able to adapt easily. Self-adjustment is a process of involving a person's response, both physically and mentally, to align the needs, expectations and demands that exist in the new environment. With this self-adjustment, it is expected that students are able to overcome difficulties in different conditions while attending high school, such as different types of curriculum, disciplinary demands, relationships between lecturers and students, social relations, lifestyles, and most importantly, various learning styles Sasmita and Rustika, 2015). One of these self-adjustment activities is carried out by providing directions for students to take part in orientation activities for new students and student organizations (Wilani and Pratiwi, 2019).

The Indonesian government has also concerned about new students' problems in the process of self-adjustment. Regarding this matter, the Director General of Higher Education and Research and Technology (DGHERT), who is developing a guidelines to a campus program for the

Introduction to Campus Life for New Students that is called *Pengenalan Kehidupan Kampus bagi Mahasiswa Baru* or known as *PKKMB* in 2021. In 2022 the guide will be refined with the hope that students will be able to: (1) get to know the new environment, especially the organization and structure of higher education, learning and student systems; (2) increase awareness of the nation, state and love for the country; (3) understand the importance of the education that will be pursued, character education and competency development for nation building and be able to apply it in everyday life; (4) foster a sense of friendship and kinship between students, lecturers, and educational staff; (5) have an attitude as an intellectual; (6) understand tips for successful learning and self-development in tertiary institutions; (7) become a superior generation that is independent and responsible; and (8) become agile and resilient learners (DGHERT, 2022). Based on these goals, every higher education institution in Indonesia is encouraged to conduct a program of campus introduction for its new students.

For Universitas Terbuka (UT) as an open and distance education (ODE) institution, conducting a program of the introduction of learning is a must. This is because UT has a unique distance learning system that distinguishes it from conventional universities. Therefore, UT students who are generally graduated from conventional schools, certainly need introduction and guidance from the beginning of their study in order to be able to understand the concepts, principles and systems of ODE that students have not fully understood. Furthermore, students also need to be equipped with learning skills that are applied at UT with the purpose for students to gain convenience and success in the learning process until they complete their studies at UT. Consequently, UT has conducted a program of introducing UT learning system to its new students to accommodate their needs of the relevant information in the form of Distance Learning Success Support Services or known as *LPKBJJ*. This service is divided into four sessions, i.e. Study Orientation for New Student (OSMB), Distance Learning Skills Training (PKBJJ), Assignment Workshops (WT), and Examination Clinics (KU). These four activities are conducted by UT regional offices (ROs) that must be followed by new students throughout Indonesia and abroad.

LPKBJJ activities have been carried out in several ROs since 2021. However, *LPKBJJ* activities completed with all components, including WT and KU was started in 2022 semester 1 (2022.1). Furthermore, UT team under the coordination of the Center for Research and Innovation and Center for Student Learning Support developed *LPKBJJ* guidelines for implementing *LPKBJJ*. However, in its implementation, there are still obstacles that occur in some Ros. These obstacles can certainly hinder the achievement of *LPKBJJ*'s goals that resulted in the needs for evaluating as well as providing solutions for improving the process of *LPKBJJ*.

Based on the description above, it is necessary to study the constraints in implementing LPKBJJ in the field. Related to this, the purpose of this article is to present an overview of the implementation of LPKBJJ at UT in the 2022.1 semester and identify the obstacles that occur and find solutions to these obstacles.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out by conducting a descriptive analysis of the data from the LPKBJJ activity reports provided by ROs which was sent via Microsoft Teams to the Center for Student Learning Support. An explanatory research method was used to deliver a general description of the implementation of LPKBJJ and the constraints that occur during the process of LPKBJJ activities. The following is the data of the program and number of reports to be studied.

Table 1. Descriptions of the Reports

No	Components	Numbers of Reports (Ros)
1.	OSMB	32
2.	PKBJJ	32
3.	WT	19
4.	KU	14

From this report, some important information was traced regarding the number of participants, the mode of implementation, and the constraints that occurred in implementing the activities of the 4 LPKBJJ components.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 LPKBJJ Concept: A Good Practice in Serving New Students

The distance learning system is based on conditions where students and lecturers are in separate locations. Thus, media is needed to connect the two, as well as the various resources needed in it. Murphy et al (2006) revealed that “distance education allows a learner to study while physically separated from the institution at which you are enrolled, through the provision of learning materials and supports that enable students to study anywhere and at any time”. This separation of distances demands student learning independence, where students must be able to control or manage their own learning activities.

One responsibility of UT is to ensure all students can be directed in carrying out their independent learning. This briefing activity is intended so that students obtain high learning success. The process of directing remotely still requires interaction between new students and instructors, where this interaction can be bridged by the presence of media. This is in line with the opinion of Wedemeyer (1981) which states that one of the strategic components contained in the concept of distance learning is the use of media as a tool for communication.

LPKBJJ is the main program of UT held for new students and is considered mandatory. This means that all ROs are required to organize LPKBJJ and new students are required to take part in this program. The importance of LPKBJJ activities is based on the urgency of achieving student understanding of the distance learning system promoted by UT. For this reason, LPKBJJ activities are designed to be held in an interaction mode, both online and offline.

The purpose of providing LPKBJJ activities is for students to be able to (1) understand the concept of ODE and the learning system at UT, (2) have effective learning skills and strategies in studying at UT, (3) be able to take advantage of various learning services provided by UT and (4) be able to take education at UT properly including solve the various learning problems they experience (UT, 2021). The implementation of LPKBJJ shows that it is not enough for open universities to only provide various learning facilities, but also to provide interactive assistance. Furthermore, utilizing a two-way designed communication process can be provided more optimally. This is in accordance with Daniel's thoughts in Keagan (1996) that the interaction of learning participants with fellow friends and mentors is an important factor in supporting the success of distance learning. This interaction can take place synchronously or asynchronously by using the media.

The implementation of LPKBJJ in UT is carried out in a planned manner in every UT ROs throughout Indonesia under the coordination of the Center for Overseas Students Management. The materials for LPKBJJ were developed by the material authors according to their expertise, divided into OSMB, PKBJJ, WT and KU materials. The topics discussed in OSMB material include the formation of the character of Indonesian students, an explanation of the learning system in higher education institutions in general, as well as the learning system at UT in particular. PKBJJ materials contain effective learning methods along with training materials. WT material contains how to carry out tasks in the learning process at UT, while KU material contains about the exam system at UT and strategies to do the examination at UT. These materials are packaged in several forms of media, including text, video and powerpoint presentation materials.

The process of implementing PKBJJ is a systematic flow, which is contained in the procedures for implementing LPKBJJ. Figure 1 presents the flow of the LPKBJJ implementation process.

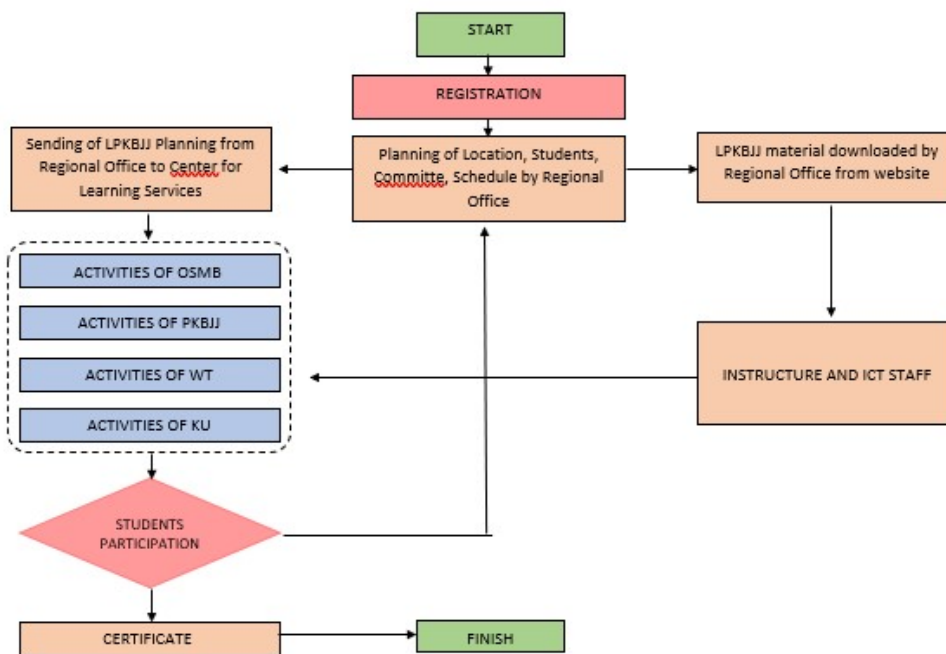


Figure 1. The Flowchart of LPKBJJ Implementation at UT (UT, 2021)

From Figure 1 it can be seen that LPKBJJ activities start from the new student registration process. The data of registered students forms the basis for planning LPKBJJ classes, which has an impact on collecting data on the HR needs of PKBJJ organizers in each RO, the need for instructors per class, determining locations and implementation schedules. In line with this, the ROs sent LPKBJJ plans to the Center for Student Learning Supports, as well as prepared materials that can be downloaded on the PBB website. Furthermore, the implementation of LPKBJJ is carried out in each region according to a predetermined schedule. The end result of this activity is that students get LPKBJJ participant certificates. This whole process shows the collaborative environment that supports learning activities initiated by Meyer et al. (2008). The environment consists of a tutor resource, namely instructors, LPKBJJ materials, the peer environment in the form of student fellow, the time span of study (the time environment), namely the time provided, and the environment. physical (the physical environment) such as a strong network system or a conducive facility. By fully participating in LPKBJJ activities, students are expected to be served the needs of supporting their learning success, familiar with the learning system at UT, so that they are able to complete the learning process well.

3.2 Implementation of LPKBJJ at UT in semester 2022.1

LPKBJJ implementation in semester 2022.2 will be held by all ROs and the Center for Overseas Student Management for new students in their respective regions. The series of LPKBJJ implementation began with the implementation of the OSMB coupled with PKBJJ, followed with the implementation of the WT and KU). OSMB and PKBJJ are carried out shortly before the learning process begins, while WT and KU are carried out along with the learning process or even for KU it is carried out just before the final semester exams. The timeline for implementing LPKBJJ refers to the academic calendar set by UT, which starts in December 2021 until April 2022.

From the available data, the implementation of OSMB, PKBJJ, WT and KU was carried out by ROs in two modes, namely online and offline. Online implementation is generally carried out centrally from the RO's office. Offline implementation utilizes strategic locations that can be reached by UT students, including at the ROs' office, schools, hotels, halls, or function rooms. The percentage between providers with online and offline modes is almost equal, as shown in Figure 2.

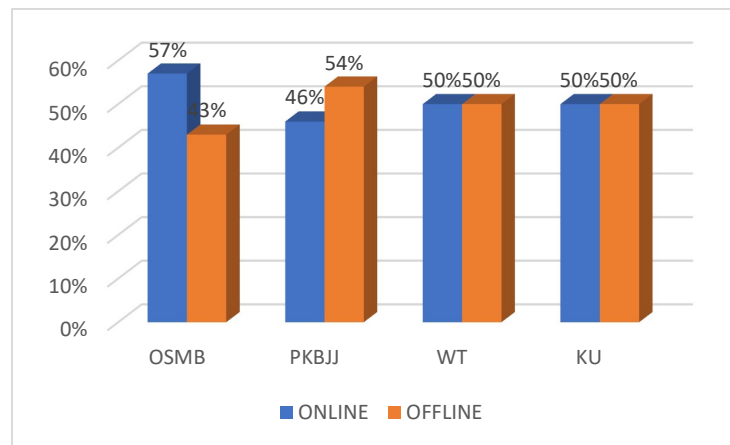


Figure 2. Comparison of the percentage of Conducting the LPKBJJ through Semester 2022

Figure 2 shows that most OSMB activities are held online by the ROs. OSMB material is more knowledge-based, so the delivery of material is only in the form of explanations. Providing explanatory material is considered quite effective delivered online, most ROs decide that OSMB will be carried out online. In contrast to LPKBJJ materials which also require students to work on worksheets, LPKBJJ is mostly held offline. Meanwhile, the implementation of WT and KU is carried out in the same percentage between online and offline. For new students, the materials presented in WT and KU activities is still about explaining important things that students need to

pay attention to when doing assignments or exams, so they are still considered effective if given online.

Regarding participants who attended LPKBJJ, the number of participants ranged between 62 and 75 percent (Figure 3). This condition indicates that new students have not fully taken advantages of learning support service opportunities. UT students are in a very dispersed area and many of them are also employed. This fact allows the aspect of student attendance in LPKBJJ activities not to be 100 percent worth.

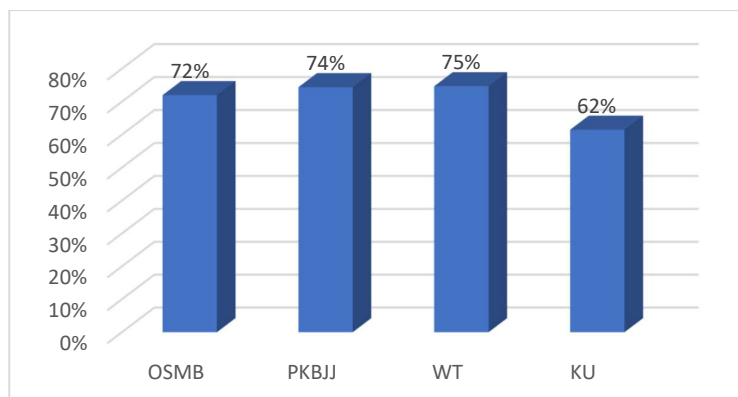


Figure 3. Percentage of student attendance in LPKBJJ Semester 2022.1 activities

In terms of instructor availability, most of the ROs involve all lecturers and teaching staff to become LPKBJJ instructors. If the number of instructors is insufficient, the RO divides the LPKBJJ implementation time into several terms. However, there were also ROs who asked lecturers from UT Head Office to become instructors for implementing LPKBJJ at the ROs.

3.3 Constraints in the Implementation of LPKBJJ

The results of a study of the collected LPKBJJ reports indicate indications of what constraints occurred in the implementation of LPKBJJ in general. The results of the study show that generally the constraints that occur in the implementation of LPKBJJ can be identified into 4 groups, namely constraints in: 1) socialization, 2) implementation technical, 3) student readiness, and 4) material delivery. The following is the details.

Constraints in Socialization of LPKBJJ

ROs in disseminating each of its programs utilizes various modes and media. Likewise in socializing LPKBJJ activities. In addition to the inaccuracy of student cell phone numbers and e-mails and the distance of student domiciles.

UPBJJ-UT in disseminating each of its programs utilizes various modes and media. Likewise in socializing LPKBJJ activities. According to the Coordinators for Learning Materials and Student Supports in a number of ROs, the socialization of LPKBJJ activities was given long before the activities were carried out. Notifications are distributed through social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. More effective outreach is notification via SMS and WA blasts. However, these efforts are not always smooth, because many students do not receive notifications. This is generally due to the inaccuracy of the cellphone number registered by students during registration. Sending emailblasts to students also experienced problems, it was suspected that students rarely opened emails.

Another obstacle in terms of the socialization aspect is that LPKBJJ information is not optimal for students in areas that are difficult to reach. For example, students who live in mountainous areas are late in receiving information on the implementation of LPKBJJ. Addresses of student domiciles are often not written clearly, so that notifications by mail are ineffective. These constraints had an impact on not all students receiving notification regarding LPKBJJ activities, so they were not present in this activity. As a result, they do not get important information about the learning system at UT. This condition is in line with the results of Nurdianti's research (2014) which suggests that there are ecological constraints in the socialization process, where information is difficult to receive in locations that do not support socialization.

Constraints in the Technical Implementation of LPKBJJ

The implementation of LPKBJJ is carried out in an online mode, offline and there are even ROs which organize it in a blended manner. Organizing online activities requires technical equipment such as a PC computer or laptop and an adequate internet network. A PC or laptop supported by an internet network is used to turn on online classes. At that time the instructor presented the material and was listened to by students who were connected to the internet for the LPKBJJ online class.

Several ROs reported problems that occurred in the implementation of LPKBJJ online, namely the internet network was less stable. Sometimes the network at the center is disconnected, so you need to wait to be connected again. However, network problems are more common in student locations. Another obstacle related to the technical implementation of offline and blended is the technical equipment available in locations that lack support. Some schools don't provide a wifi network, or their LCD players cannot be used anymore. This can slow down the start of the process of providing LPKBJJ materials. Regarding technical constraints, the problem that often occurs is

limited facilities and infrastructure, internet network, or low mastery of technology (Komalasari et al, 2020; Fitria and Suminah, 2020). In general, more technical problems with online implementation (in blended mode) occur at student locations than at the ROs' offices.

The technical obstacle in offline activities is the limited capacity of the hall, especially for OSMB activities which require space for a total of 200 participants. Sometimes UPBJJ does not find a suitable place, especially for UPBJJ-UT which has a large number of new students.

Constraints in Students' Readiness

Student readiness is an important factor in the learning process, including in participating in LPKBJJ activities. The readiness of students to become training participants will have an impact on satisfying results, namely the training material can be digested and understood properly.

Obstacles that occur related to student readiness are the lack of focus on students participating in LPKBJJ activities because they coincide with other activities. One of the characteristics of students studying at distance learning institutions is that they are working people. Not infrequently learning activities at UT clash with work schedules. This happened in the implementation of LPKBJJ. The RO does not fully guarantee student readiness to take part in LPKBJJ because it cannot control student attendance in online classes. It often happens in online classes, in the afternoon the number of participants is getting smaller, or in offline classes students don't come back after the break. This condition indicates that students are not ready to participate in LPKBJJ activities.

Constraints in Material Delivery

The next constraint in the implementation of LPKBJJ is the problem of material delivery. The amount of LPKBJJ material, especially OSMB, is too much and it is impossible to convey everything in this activity, both online and offline. Apart from time constraints, student boredom is also the cause.

All material presented in LPKBJJ activities is material that new students must accept. In addition to materials on UT's academic and non-academic processes, the Indonesian government through the ministry of education also stipulates several materials on national and state life, the higher education system in Indonesia, preventing violence and anti-corruption. UPBJJ-UT admitted that it would be difficult if all of the material was delivered in a limited time.

The implementation of LPKBJJ is carried out in an online mode, offline and there are even UPBJJ which organize it in a blended manner. Organizing online requires technical equipment such as a PC computer or laptop and an adequate internet network. A PC or laptop supported by an internet

network is used to turn on online classes. At that time the instructor presented the material and was listened to by students who were connected to the internet for the LPKBJJ online class.

3.4 Solutions to Overcome the Constraints in Implementing LPKBJJ

This part is discussing a number of things that can be taken as solutions to the constraints in implementing LPKBJJ. To overcome the constraints to socializing activities, it is necessary to create a student registration system with accurate data collection of cellphone numbers and e-mail addresses, accompanied by socialization that all notifications will be sent via telephone and e-mail. In addition, the domicile address must be stated in full, in order to convey the message correctly. Students can be encouraged to follow and diligently access all social media at UPBJJ-UT so that they are not late in obtaining important information.

The constraints in technical implementation can be overcome by maximizing UT's bandwidth, if necessary also increasing its capacity. Gensets need to be prepared in locations that are prone to power outages, so that the network is still available safely. To improve the smooth implementation of offline PKBJJ, ROs also need to prepare back-up LCD players at LPKBJJ venues and place ICT that understands the device well. You also need to prepare an adequate quota if WiFi availability is limited. To overcome the constraints of limited space, LPKBJJ activities can be carried out in several terms.

Constraints on student readiness are actually obstacles that require more mainstream handling. One of the readiness of students needs to be pursued by providing high motivation about the importance of participating in LPKBJJ. So regardless of the conditions, if students are ready to receive material, then the objectives of LPKBJJ can be achieved properly. One of the RO circulates filling forms to provide time options for students to take part in LPKBJJ. This is a good effort, because students can attend activities according to their time readiness.

Constraints in the material delivery can be overcome by providing LPKBJJ materials to be studied independently. However, this method also requires control, so that students really learn the material provided. One of the efforts that has been developed by the Center for Student Learning Support is to provide an LMS page that contains LPKBJJ materials for students to study asynchronously. The control given is giving quizzes to ensure that students learn the material in the LMS. This method has been implemented by several ROs, but has not yet become part of the mandatory activities.

The existence of constraints does not mean that it becomes a barrier for UT to continue to provide the best service for students, including new students. The obstacles to implementing LPKBJJ

should be a trigger for UT to find the best solution or the lowest risk, so that new UT students really understand the learning system at UT and are ready to study well.

4 CONCLUSION

LPKBJJ activities are services for students that must be followed by all new UT students. In semester 2022.1, all ROs have carried out LPKBJJ activities, which are held in both online and offline modes. Although LPKBJJ is mandatory for new students, not all UT students take part in this activity.

The constraints that occur in the implementation of LPKBJJ are quite diverse, including constraints in socializing LPKBJJ activities to students, technical constraints on implementation which include the stability of the internet network, adequate devices, and the availability of offline classrooms, constraints on student readiness, especially for working students, and obstacles full delivery of material for LPKBJJ participants. Solutions to existing constraints can be sought, among others by urging students to provide correct biodata and be actively involved in ROs social media; increase the capacity of the internet network, prepare adequate equipment or determine locations for offline LPKBJJ implementation in strategic places; provide intensive motivation to students regarding the importance of LPKBJJ in supporting the learning process; up to UT's efforts to organize the LPKBJJ system in an asynchronous mode to help students achieve all LPKBJJ materials.

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