EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICE CENTRES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

Open Distance Education (ODE) students are required to be independent learners. Students in the Early Childhood Education Teacher (ECET) programme are teachers who are trying to improve their academic qualifications to obtain a bachelor's degree that is linear with their work. Therefore, they study while working. In this process they need help in the learning process. One of them is the UT Service Centre. The satisfaction of students who are members of UT service centres in the region is described in this article. This research was conducted on students of the Early Childhood Education Teacher Programme at Universitas Terbuka. A total of 64 respondents are members of the UT Service Centre. The research used a survey method. A questionnaire was distributed through the G-form platform. The results showed that most of the respondents were dissatisfied with the UT service centre. This was especially the case in relation to teaching materials, online tutorial guidance and funding. However, in terms of individualised services and availability of internet facilities and networks, they expressed satisfaction. The recommendations where the organisation of the UT service centres must be improved and be geared towards the provision of services to students from entry to graduation.

Keywords: effectiveness, student service center, ODE, ECE Teacher Program

1   INTRODUCTION

Students who pursue higher education at universities that use distance learning systems must have greater independence compared to face-to-face universities. This is based on the fact that in a distance learning system there is a distance between the teacher and the student. This distance is bridged by the media so that the learning process can take place in accordance with the predetermined learning objectives (Sembiring, 2013). This is also the case for students on the Early Childhood Education Teacher (ECE Teacher) programme at Universitas Terbuka (UT). They are required to carry out various processes related to their lectures independently. Being independent in this case does not mean doing everything alone, without the help of others. But doing each lecture activity with their own initiative (Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023) This means that students must take the initiative and be pro-active in their search for and acquisition of the information they need.

As a university implementing open and distance education, UT needs to establish collaborations with partners from different institutions, both educational and non-educational. One of the most encouraged collaborations is with institutions that can help and serve students who are scattered in different parts of the region. These institutions include the UT Service Centre (abbreviated in Indonesian as SALUT). SALUT is located in different regions and becomes an extension of the UT region in serving its students. Service support in distance education should include infrastructure, availability and competence of human resources, availability of Internet networks and service strategies in addition to the provision of facilities by the institution (Genc Kumtepe et al., 2018; Gil-Jaurena, 2014); Gil-Jaurena, 2014; Usun, 2004). The management of student services can be facilitated by the organising institution or by partners such as internet service providers, peer support and financial institutions (Dacanay et al., 2014; Morgan & Tam, 1999; TALAN, 2021). At UT Indonesia, a partner called SALUT can provide one of these student support services.

Preliminary interviews with four students who had come to the Open University Centre office by chance revealed that they had come because they did not know where to complain about their problems. They also did not know how to find the information they needed. The four students came to find solutions to their problems. Their problems were not related to course content but to administrative procedures. The problems were: 1) they wanted to know whether they had passed or not, 2) some of their grades were not coming out but they did not know why, 3) they could not enter the tutorial application, 4) they came to apply for a certificate as an active student. During the interview it was finally revealed that the student had joined the study group and SALUT in the area where he lived. Based on the results of this short interview, the researcher was then interested in finding out how effective the services of SALUT are for the students who are members of it. This effectiveness will be examined in terms of the opinions of the students, especially the students of the ECE Teacher Programme, which is under the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education - UT.

2   METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a survey technique, with data collected through a questionnaire containing six open-ended questions about students' satisfaction with the UT service centres they attended. The questions included: 1) Describe the reasons for joining SALUT; 2) Is your participation in SALUT effective in relation to the lecture process at UT; 3) List any dissatisfaction with SALUT services and explain why; 4) List your satisfaction with SALUT

services and explain why; 5) Describe the obstacles you faced during your membership in the UT service centre. The population, sample and respondents were a total of 64 students who are members of SALUT in UT Purwokerto (SALUT Tegal and Cilacap), UT Jakarta (SALUT Bekasi and Cibinong) and UT Samarinda (SALUT Balikpapan). The sampling technique used is census and purposive random sampling. The choice of sampling technique is because the number of ECE Teacher Programme students who are members of SALUT is not large. Almost all ECE Teacher Programme students prefer to be members of study groups. Data collection was carried out between June and August 2023. The collected data was then transcribed, sorted according to the similarity or dissimilarity of the answers. It was then tabulated and narrated.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented in two components, namely the identity of the respondents and the results of the interviews. The identity of the respondents is presented in Table 1. While the interview data are presented descriptively.

3.1 Identity of respondents

Identity data are presented in Table 1 below .

Tabel 1 Reponden Identity

Aspec/Item	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	2	3
Female	60	97
Age		
<17 years	0	0
18-25 years	13	20
26-35 years	34	53
36-50 years	17	27
>50 years	0	0
Domicile distance		
1-5 km	2	3
6-10 km	15	23
11-16 km	11	17
16-20 km	24	38
>20 km	12	19

The data in Table 1 show that ECET UT students are dominated by women. This is very reasonable because the majority of women are identical to children and tend to be considered more hardworking and caring (Rumpoko & Diana, 2022). The respondents in this study were

on average over 17 years old. This is very reasonable because in Indonesia, high school graduates are generally 19 years old and ECET-UT students must have at least one year of teaching experience in ECE. Therefore, if we assume that they graduated from high school and then taught for one year, they are 20 years old. The average age of these respondents is mostly in the range of 26-35 years with an average teaching experience of more than 4 years. While the age range of 18-26 years was 20% and the range of 36-50 years was 27%.

3.2 Survey results

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire with six open-ended questions. The questionnaire was sent to the specified respondents, namely UT ECET students who are members of the UT Service Centre. The respondents were from UT Purwokerto (SALUT Tegal 16 persons and Cilacap 4 persons), UT Jakarta (SALUT Bekasi 23 persons and Cibinong 19 persons) and UT Samarinda (Salut Balikpapan 2 persons). All questionnaires distributed were returned and processed.

3.1.1 Reason for visiting a UT service centre (SALUT)

All respondents gave one answer to this question. After editing and grouping, the responses were ranked by the highest number of votes. The responses are as follows.

Table 2 Reasons for UT Service Centre membership

No	Respond	Frequency	%
1.	No computer equipment at home, UT service centres offer the use of computers free of charge	23	36
2.	Internet coverage in home and school is very weak. Internet signal at the UT Service Centre is very strong and good and can be accessed freely according to students' needs.	20	31
3.	Needs assistance with non-academic services like: registering for each semester, printing payment invoices, printing exam cards, printing exam scorecards, finding exam venues and lecture schedules.	16	25
4.	Need guidance on academic services, such as: finding study resources, finding articles to answer coursework questions, asking seniors who are also members of the UT service centre for material.	4	6
5.	Invited by friends from other departments	1	2

The data in Table 2 show that the reasons given by most students for choosing to become a member of the UT service centre were non-academic. The most important reason is not having

a computer and not having an Internet connection at home. Computers and Internet networks are the most important tools for supporting students' lecture activities in distance education. Academic reasons for ECET UT students seem to be reasons experienced by only a small number of students, i.e. only 6%. This shows that ECET UT students choose to attend UT service centres for non-academic reasons. However, this reason is important for students who attend higher education at institutions using distance learning systems. (Soontornchai & Sungsri, n.d.; Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023) (Dapena et al., 2022; Puspitasari & Listyarini, 2018).

3.1.2 *Effectiveness of participation in the service centres of the UT in relation to the lecture process at the UT*

There were only two responses to this second question: effective or ineffective. A total of 58 respondents indicated that their participation in the ut service centres was very effective. In contrast, five respondents indicated that their participation in the ut service centre was not effective.

Respondents who responded that it was effective indicated that the effectiveness they felt was in the types of services to which they related:

a. Ease and freedom to use the computers and internet available at the UT Service Centre office. They can use the Internet with unlimited quota without having to pay quota fees. They can also use the computers at the UT Service Centre office whenever they need. This allows them to concentrate on their assignments and follow online tutorials more easily.

b. The fee they pay each semester of IDR 500,000-650,000 per semester is comparable to the services they receive from the UT Service Centre. They get friendly service and wholehearted help from the staff, and they can use the equipment available to students freely, including paper if they want to print out lecture notes.

c. Five respondents stated that they felt it was effective because the UT service centres are open seven days a week, from morning to night. On average, the UT service centres are open until 22:00 each day.

Respondents who indicated that it was not effective said that they did not really use the services provided by the UT Service Centre because their residence was far from the UT Service Centre. So they only use it at the beginning and end of the registration period, to register for semester packages and to print out test results. Therefore, they feel very ineffective because

they pay fees to the UT service centre while the services they receive are minimal. However, they do not want to give up their membership because the UT Service Centre always sends them important information about lectures via WhatApps or email.

Based on these responses, it appears that although a small number of UT ECET programme students consider their participation in UT service centres to be ineffective, they still need them. This is in line with Dapena's opinion that in distance learning it is very important to work with partners who support the implementation of learning (Dapena et al., 2022). Xue E, et al stated that the quality of the training is good. One of the reasons for this is the presence of supporters in the implementation process (Xue et al., 2022).

3.1.3 *Dissatisfaction with UT services and reasons for dissatisfaction*

The types of services provided by UT service centres that respondents considered unsatisfactory were quite varied. Each respondent was allowed to give more than one answer. The responses were then grouped into two types of services, namely non-academic services and academic services. The responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Types of services considered unsatisfactory

No	Type of Services
A.	NON AKADEMIC
1.	When students need help, management and officers are not in the office.
2.	The number of officers is low, especially during the registration period. This causes long queues.
3.	Not clean and tidy in the computer room
4.	The lavatories are not clean and the water is not running.
5.	The size of the car park is not big enough
6.	The size of the place of worship is too small
7.	There is no special room for counselling, so the counselling is carried out in the room for general worship.
B.	AKADEMIC
1.	There is no printed Book of Principal Materials.
2.	Not all officials understand the academic problems students face, so there is no solution

Based on the answers given by the respondents, it seems that what's unsatisfactory about the services provided by the UT Service Centre is mostly non-academic. This actually corresponds

to the guidelines of the UT Service Centre, which is to support the teaching and learning process so that students can study smoothly (Pandiangan et al., 2021). One of the requirements of the guideline is that service centres of higher education institutions should have more non-academic services. Moreover, Grigorievna noted that student satisfaction with education is supported by good facilities and infrastructure (Grigorievna, 2019). Meanwhile, Usun in his article (Usun, 2004) stated that non-academic services in the form of learning support are very important for distance learners.

3.1.4   Satisfaction with services provided by UT service centres and reasons for this

The respondents' satisfaction with the UT service centres was directed towards non-academic satisfaction. The answers given tend to be almost uniform. This response is shown in Table 4

Table 4 Types of services that students are satisfied with

No	Type of Services
1.	Internet signal fast and smooth
2.	Computer equipment with the latest applications
3.	Room is air-conditioned and comfortable for study/work
4.	Free mineral water provided
5.	Service time is quite long, even if students come before closing time, they will still be served.
6.	Officers are very friendly and responsive in helping students who come

The answers given by the respondents refer to the comfort they feel when visiting the UT Service Centre. Therefore, the condition of the UT service centre office or the infrastructure available was the main reason for their satisfaction with the type of service. This is in line with several studies on support services in ODL. These indicate that the infrastructure of ODL support partners really helps students to study well (Brown et al., 2013; Genc Kumtepe et al., 2018; Usun, 2004).

3.1.5   Barriers to participation in SALUT

The main obstacle faced by students during their time as members of the SALUT is the difficulty in dividing their time between work, busy housewife life and visits to the SALUT. They find it difficult to find the time to come to the UT Service Centre. Another obstacle is students who live far from the SALUT. They need 2-3 hours to reach the UT Service Centre

office. Another obstacle is the problem of fees or contributions as a member of the UT service centre. This is because their income as ECE teachers is limited. So they have to save quite a lot in order to be able to pay their tuition fees and also the study fees.

4 CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and analysis carried out, the participation of ECET-UT programme students in the UT service centre is quite effective and helps to facilitate them in the lecture process. Although in the process, satisfying services lead more to the type of non-academic services. Each student has their own experience of the conveniences and obstacles of being a member of the UT Service Centre. Overall, the existence of UT service centres is quite necessary for distance learning students, especially for ECET-UT programme students. Recommendations that can be conveyed based on the results of this study are that UT service centres provide supportive facilities and infrastructure that can make students comfortable while in their offices.

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