

THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF FACE-TO-FACE VS. WEBINAR TUTORIALS FOR DISTANCE LEARNERS AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This research examines the two tutorial models provided by Universitas Terbuka (UT) to facilitate student learning. Face-to-face tutorials refer to in-person learning sessions held in physical classrooms, where an instructor is physically present to guide and interact with students. In contrast, webinar tutorials are distance learning sessions conducted remotely through web-based platforms, allowing students to participate in tutorial activities virtually. This study aims to analyze the advantages and limitations of the two tutorial models, namely face-to-face and webinar, in meeting the diverse learning needs of distance learners at Universitas Terbuka. The research was conducted at Universitas Terbuka Bandar Lampung, during the Tutorial period from April to June 2024. This study employed a qualitative approach through a literature review and interviews with stakeholders at Universitas Terbuka. Data was collected regarding student profiles, learning style preferences, and their experiences with face-to-face and webinar tutorials. The findings indicate that face-to-face tutorials offer immediate interaction and feedback, which is beneficial for students who prefer hands-on learning. However, this format is limited by specific location and schedule requirements. On the other hand, webinar tutorials provide greater accessibility and flexibility, suitable for students with scheduling or location constraints. Although the interaction between students and instructors is more limited, the online platform enables the use of multimedia resources and interactive features to enhance the learning experience. By offering both tutorial options, Universitas Terbuka can cater to the diverse needs of its heterogeneous student population.

Keywords: Distance learning tutorials, face-to-face tutorials, webinar tutorials, Open University students

1 INTRODUCTION

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a higher education institution that offers open and distance learning education. UT students are expected to engage in self-directed learning. Students studying through distance education are required to be independent in addressing any learning challenges they encounter. The learning process occurs without the necessity of attending campus. Self-directed learning demands that students take the initiative in their studies. This learning can be

conducted individually or in groups, whether in study groups or tutorial groups (Budiarmo, Muchtar, Soro, & Mardiana, 2022).

UT provides a learning assistance program known as the Tutorial program. The Tutorial is a support service offered to students with the aim of reinforcing their self-directed learning outcomes. In Tutorials, learning activities are conducted under the guidance of a Tutor who acts as a facilitator. Tutors assist students in their learning activities and facilitate discussions. Tutorial activities include discussions on topics that are considered difficult and important for students' understanding. Among the topics covered are issues related to student performance (practicals or lab work) both inside and outside the tutorial classroom, as well as problems concerning the application of knowledge in daily life; these are some of the competencies or key concepts taught in the course material related to the challenges faced by students during their study of the Learning Materials. UT categorizes its Tutorial services into several types, including Face-to-Face Tutorials (TTM), Online Tutorials (Tuton), Webinar Tutorials (Tuweb), and Tutorials via Radio and Television. Students can participate in these tutorial services based on the guidelines set by their respective study programs regarding the courses they are enrolled in. In field tutorials, various issues and challenges arise (Baruah, 2018 ; Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 1991 ; Roblyer, 1999).

In recent years, the landscape of education has undergone a significant transformation, driven by advancements in technology and the increasing demand for flexible learning options. Distance education, particularly in the context of the Open University, has emerged as a viable alternative to traditional classroom-based learning. This shift has brought about diverse instructional methods, notably face-to-face tutorials and webinar-based sessions. While both formats aim to enhance the learning experience, they offer distinct advantages and face unique challenges (Lynch & Dembo, 2004 ; McGivney*, 2004).

Face-to-face tutorials provide an opportunity for direct interaction between educators and learners, fostering a sense of community and immediate feedback. These sessions often facilitate deeper engagement and collaborative learning, essential elements for student motivation and success. Conversely, webinar tutorials leverage technology to offer convenience and accessibility, allowing learners to participate from various locations without the constraints of travel. This flexibility can be particularly beneficial for individuals balancing work, family,

and academic responsibilities (Dewatisari, 2022 ; Dewatisari, Suprijanto, & Abdurachman, 2023 ; Yusuf et al., 2017).

Despite their respective strengths, both formats present challenges that can impact the effectiveness of the learning experience. Face-to-face interactions may be limited by geographical constraints, while webinars can suffer from technological issues, lack of personal engagement, and difficulties in maintaining participants' attention (Mikaresti & Nurmalia, 2022; Reyna, Todd, & Hanham, 2020). This paper aims to explore the advantages and challenges of face-to-face versus webinar tutorials for distance learners at the Open University, contributing to the ongoing discourse on optimizing educational practices in a digital age. By analyzing these two approaches, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform future instructional design and support the diverse needs of distance learners (Dewatisari, 2022).

Universitas Terbuka Lampung is one of the service units in the region with a large number of students. The tutorials managed by UT Bandar Lampung are divided into two types: face-to-face tutorials and webinar tutorials. Both types of tutorials contribute 50% to the final grades of students (Sugilar, 2020). In the even semester (2024.1), UT Bandar Lampung has 1,385 tutorial classes, comprising 415 face-to-face tutorial classes and 969 webinar tutorial classes. The face-to-face tutorials and webinar sessions are conducted over the course of eight meetings in accordance with the established schedule. To participate in the face-to-face tutorials, students from the University of Lampung (UT Lampung) are required to attend the designated tutorial locations. In contrast, for the webinar tutorials, students must access the Microsoft Teams link provided by the university. The aim of this research is to observe and analyze the challenges associated with both tutorial schemes, focusing on their strengths and weaknesses.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a qualitative approach, combining a literature review with interviews conducted at Universitas Terbuka Bandar Lampung. From April to June 2024, data was collected from students, instructors, and UT staff who act as regional managers regarding their experiences and preferences related to both tutorial models. The sample included diverse student profiles to capture a wide range of perspectives.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative research conducted at Universitas Terbuka Bandar Lampung revealed several key insights regarding the experiences and preferences of students, UT staff, and instructors concerning both tutorial models: face-to-face tutorials and webinar tutorials. Data collected from interviews indicated distinct advantages and disadvantages associated with each model, shaped by individual learning styles and contextual factors.

Historically, distance education has evolved from correspondence courses to modern online learning environments. Face-to-face tutorials provide direct interaction, while webinar tutorials leverage technology to facilitate remote learning. Studies suggest that the effectiveness of these models can significantly depend on students' learning preferences and individual circumstances (Moore & Kearsley, 2012 ; Wanstreet, 2006).

3.1 Face-to-Face Tutorials

Face-to-face tutorials allow for immediate feedback and social interaction, which can enhance learning outcomes. Research indicates that students often benefit from the personal engagement found in traditional classroom settings (Jiang et al., 2020). However, these sessions can be geographically and temporally restrictive, limiting access for some students.

Participants indicated that face-to-face tutorials provided a conducive environment for hands-on learning and immediate interaction. Students appreciated the ability to engage directly with instructors and peers, which fostered a sense of community. However, logistical constraints such as travel distance and fixed schedules were significant limitations.

3.1.1 *Evaluation results from students*

Students reported that face-to-face tutorials facilitated better communication and interaction with instructors and peers. This immediate feedback loop was crucial for clarifying concepts and fostering collaborative learning. The physical classroom setting provided a structured environment that helped students stay focused and engaged. Many participants noted that the presence of an instructor encouraged accountability and commitment to their studies. A significant challenge identified was the difficulty some students faced in attending in-person classes due to geographical distances, transportation issues, and scheduling conflicts with work or personal commitments. The number of face-to-face classes was limited, which constrained student options and availability, making it difficult for some to find suitable times that fit their schedules

3.1.2 Evaluation results from instructors

Based on instructors in Face to face tutorials, students expressed a preference for face-to-face tutorials due to the immediacy of interaction with instructors and peers. The ability to ask questions in real-time and engage in discussions was seen as a significant benefit, enhancing understanding and retention of material. Many students appreciated the structured learning environment of in-person classes, which helped them stay focused and motivated.

The disadvantages of this tutorial is the physical presence of an instructor served as a source of accountability. Some students reported challenges related to travel and scheduling conflicts, which made attending in-person sessions difficult. This was particularly true for those balancing work or family commitments. The fixed schedule of face-to-face tutorials was seen as a limitation, as it does not accommodate varying personal schedules and learning paces.

3.1.3 Evaluation results from UT Staffs

Based on interviews with the staff at the University of Lampung (UT) responsible for tutorials, the advantages of face-to-face tutorial activities include more directed sessions that are easier to monitor by supervising staff, as they can directly observe the active tutorial activities, the equipment brought by the tutor, and the attendance rates of both tutors and students. However, the disadvantages include challenges in providing qualified tutors in remote areas or districts, as it can be difficult to find tutors with expertise relevant to the subjects being taught. Tutors must meet the minimum requirement of holding a master's degree that is aligned with their undergraduate education. Many tutors opt to teach online tutorials because they can do so from any location with internet access, eliminating the need to travel to designated tutorial sites. Additionally, forming a single class can be challenging, as at least 20 participants are required for a class with the same course, while students often reside far apart.

3.2 Webinar Tutorials

Webinar tutorials offer flexibility and accessibility, accommodating students who may have work or family commitments that prevent them from attending in-person sessions (Simonson et al., 2019). Additionally, the use of multimedia resources can enrich the learning experience, although interaction may be less personal compared to face-to-face settings.

In contrast, webinar tutorials were praised for their accessibility. Students highlighted the convenience of participating from home, which allowed for greater flexibility in managing their studies alongside other commitments. Although the interaction in webinars was perceived as

less engaging, the integration of multimedia and interactive features helped keep students motivated.

3.2.1 Evaluation results from students

Webinar tutorials offered significant flexibility, allowing students to participate from various locations without the need for travel. This aspect was particularly beneficial for those juggling multiple responsibilities. The availability of recorded sessions enabled students to review the material at their convenience, accommodating different learning paces and styles. Many participants highlighted issues with technology, including unreliable internet connections and unfamiliarity with the online platforms. These challenges often disrupted the learning experience. Students expressed that webinars sometimes lacked the interactive quality of face-to-face classes, leading to decreased engagement. The virtual format made it easier for students to become distracted, which impacted their focus and participation.

3.2.2 Evaluation results from instructors

Webinar tutorials were favored for their flexibility, allowing instructors to attend sessions from any location. This model proved especially beneficial for those with significant time constraints or geographical barriers. Participants noted that webinar formats often included recorded sessions, providing students the opportunity to revisit lectures and materials at their convenience, thus supporting diverse learning needs.

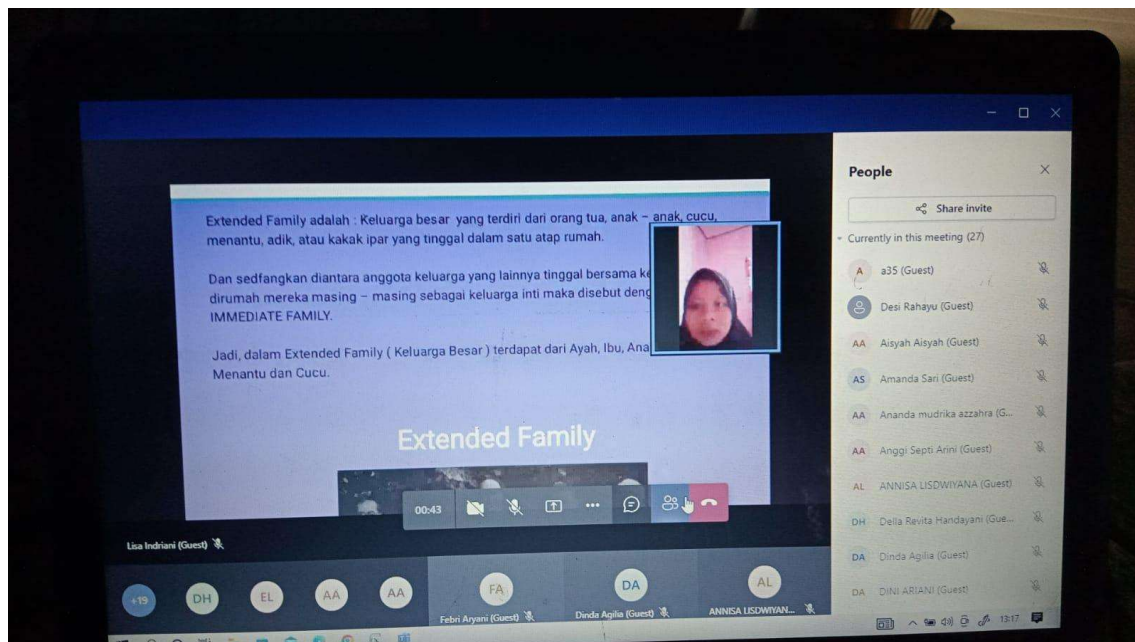
The instructors identified technical issues as a significant drawback. Connectivity problems, software glitches, and varying levels of digital literacy among participants hindered the learning experience. A common concern was the lack of engagement in webinar formats. Students felt that the virtual environment sometimes led to distractions and a diminished sense of community compared to face-to-face interactions.

3.2.3 Evaluation results from UT Staffs

According to UT staff, webinar tutorials offer advantages such as the ability to gather students taking the same course into one webinar class, despite their geographical distances. This format allows for the assignment of tutors with appropriate competencies for the subjects regardless of location. However, webinar tutorials present difficulties for monitoring through Microsoft Teams, as students often become distracted by other activities during the tutorial sessions. Additionally, students frequently turn off their cameras, citing connectivity issues as a reason.



Figure 1. Face to face tutorial



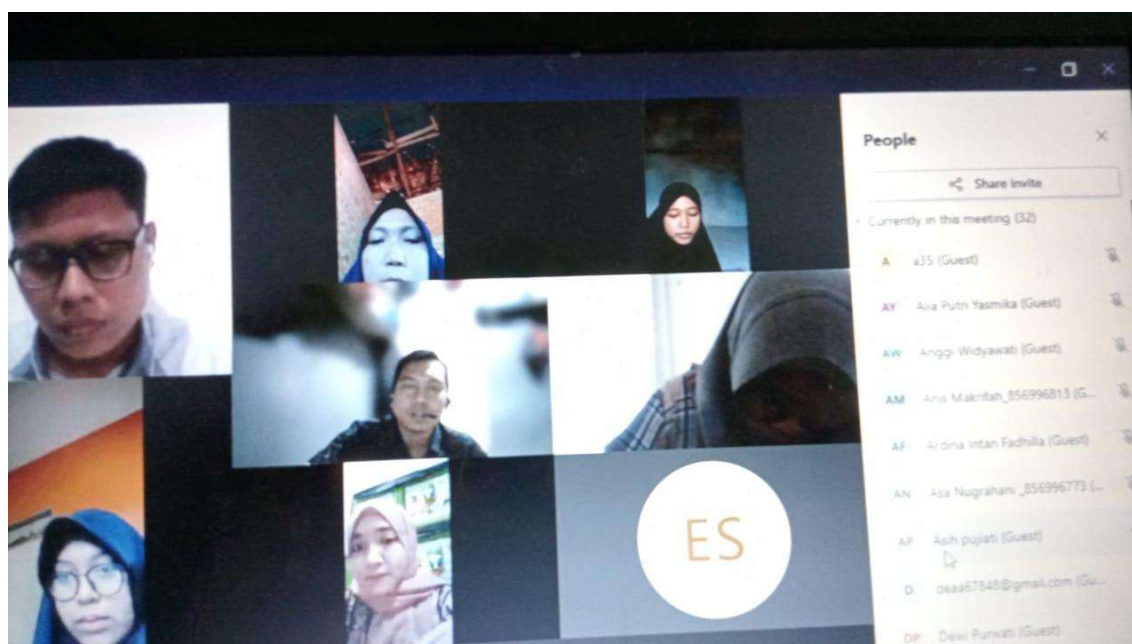


Figure 2. Webinar Tutorial

The findings underscore a clear dichotomy between the strengths and weaknesses of each tutorial model. Face-to-face tutorials excel in fostering interaction and providing a structured learning environment, yet face challenges in accessibility and availability. The physical and psychological distance between instructors and students in online courses can create this feeling of alienation and disconnectedness. Compared to traditional face-to-face courses, students' perceive a lack of (Simonson, Zvacek, & Smaldino, 2019) social presence and interactions in online courses. Students who manage to persist in online courses report a higher level of sense of connectedness and presences (Dewatisari et al., 2023 ; Wanstreet, 2006). Studies have found that students' sense of social presence and instructor presence in online courses influence their overall perceptions of learning and students who perceive a lack of social interactions and instructor presence are more likely to withdraw and fail (Bowers & Kumar, 2015).

In contrast, webinar tutorials offer flexibility and accessibility but struggle with technical issues and maintaining student engagement. To enhance the educational experience at UT Bandar Lampung, a blended approach that combines the advantages of both tutorial schemes is recommended. Incorporating interactive elements into webinars, such as live Q&A sessions and breakout discussions, could help bridge the engagement gap. Additionally, providing robust technical support and resources for both students and instructors can mitigate the technological

challenges faced in online learning environments (Budiarmo et al., 2022 ; Mikaresti & Nurmalia, 2022b ; Wanstreet, 2006).

The gap between students and tutors or lecturers in distance education can be bridged through learning support mechanisms such as online and face-to-face tutorials. Given that distance education students often study far from their primary instructors, tutorials can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation, while also fostering interpersonal relationships among peers. This aligns with the findings of Dillon, Gunawardena, and Parker (1992), who reported that communication among students can reduce feelings of loneliness (Dillon, Gunawardena, & Parker, 1992). Similarly, Angelaki and Mavroidis (2013) noted that interactions between tutors and students, as well as among students themselves, can help mitigate these feelings of solitude. Smyth et al. (2012) emphasized that interactive activities in face-to-face learning environments enhance student engagement with peers, promoting strong connections that can lead to more effective learning (Angelaki & Mavroidis, 2013 ; Summerville, 2000)

Conversely, Moore, Warner, and Jones (2016) found in their study of graduate students in agricultural and extension courses that some distance learners may not prioritize student-to-student interaction. While some students are positive about engaging with peers, others appear more focused on course content than on building or participating in a classroom community. Furthermore, the study indicates that the material being studied often requires reasoning and analysis, suggesting that tutorials can be beneficial for students in achieving desired learning outcomes. This achievement can be facilitated through interactions between tutors and students, as well as among students themselves, using question-and-answer and discussion-based learning models. In face-to-face tutorial sessions, interactions extend beyond just tutor-student or student-student engagement; tutors utilize the subject matter as a medium to facilitate learning by encouraging students to explore various literatures for enrichment (Adji & Suciati, 2019.)

This research highlights the complex landscape of tutorial delivery at Universitas Terbuka Bandar Lampung. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both face-to-face and webinar tutorials is essential for optimizing student learning experiences. Future studies could further explore innovative solutions that integrate the best practices of both models to enhance educational outcomes. This research underscores the importance of providing multiple tutorial formats to address the diverse needs of distance learners at Universitas Terbuka. Both face-to-

face and webinar tutorials have distinct advantages and limitations that can impact student learning experiences. By continuing to evaluate and adapt these models, UT can enhance its educational offerings and better support its students in achieving their academic goals.

4 CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that while face-to-face tutorials excel in providing immediate interaction and fostering community, they are constrained by geographic and scheduling limitations. Webinar tutorials, on the other hand, offer a flexible alternative that can accommodate diverse student needs but may lack the personal touch found in in-person sessions. By offering both models, Universitas Terbuka can effectively cater to its heterogeneous student population, supporting a variety of learning preferences

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