

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS CAUSING THE DECLINE IN THE PARTICIPATION RATE OF UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA BENGKULU'S STUDENTS IN ON-DEMAND FACE-TO-FACE TUTORIALS (ATPEM) POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This study aimed to get the background of the trend of declining ATPEM participation after the pandemic by considering the dynamics of UT Bengkulu students' needs and preferences for face-to-face tutorial services in the context of changing learning patterns due to the pandemic. The decrease in student participation in tutorials, as the focus of this study, is an important issue because it can have a negative impact on student learning outcomes and experiences in PJJ. The research carried out a stratified random sampling technique involving the division of the population into several subgroups (strata) from 10 districts/cities in Bengkulu Province spread across 30 UT Bengkulu Service Centers and then select random samples from each stratum to be analyzed descriptively and quantitatively using regression analysis in order to see the influence of various factors on student participation in TTM Atpem. The results of this research are expected to provide valuable input for UT Bengkulu in designing strategies to increase student participation in face-to-face tutorial services like before the pandemic.

Key Words: ATPEM Participation, Face-to-Face Tutorials, Pandemic Impact, Student Learning Behavior, Distance Learning, Strategies to Increase Participation

1 Introduction

Universitas Terbuka (Open University), as a pioneering distance education institution in Indonesia, has historically relied on a blend of independent learning and structured academic support. One of the cornerstones of this support system is the Face-to-Face Tutorial (TTM), which serves as a vital link between students and educators in a learning environment characterized by physical separation. At the regional center of UT Bengkulu, TTM services, particularly Tutorials by Request (ATPEM), were in high demand before the global COVID-19 pandemic. From 2017 to mid-2020, UT Bengkulu consistently managed over 900 TTM classes each semester, indicating strong student interest and perceived value. This high demand was complemented by a community satisfaction index (IKM) score of 81.16, categorizing the service performance as "Good" and confirming its alignment with student needs (Kristanti, 2019).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, triggered a paradigm shift in educational delivery worldwide. Necessary social restrictions led to an abrupt transition to fully online learning models. At UT Bengkulu, TTM was largely replaced by webinar-based tutorials (TUWEB) to ensure continuity of learning. While this shift was met with initial enthusiasm, it also introduced new challenges, such as adapting to new learning management systems. More significantly, even after restrictions were lifted, TTM participation did not rebound. The average number of ATPEM classes between 2023 and 2024 dropped to approximately 164 per semester, a stark 57% decrease from the pre-pandemic era (SRS4G, 2024).

This decline presents a significant dilemma. Active participation in face-to-face tutorials is widely believed to enhance students' comprehension of course material, boost learning motivation, and ultimately improve academic success. The direct, synchronous interaction with tutors and peers facilitates clarification of complex concepts, provides immediate feedback, and fosters a sense of a learning community—elements that can be challenging to replicate fully online. The sustained low participation rates suggest that the pandemic may have permanently altered student learning behaviors and preferences, with online modalities like Online Tutorials (TUTON) and Course-Based Assignments (TMK) becoming more attractive due to their flexibility and perceived cost-efficiency (Mikaresti et al., 2021).

This study aims to identify and analyze the specific factors contributing to the decline in TTM participation among UT Bengkulu students in the post-pandemic landscape. By understanding the primary barriers—whether they are administrative, economic, or preferential—this research seeks to provide UT Bengkulu with evidence-based insights to formulate effective strategies for increasing student engagement. The central research question is: What are the primary obstacles preventing students from participating in TTM, and how can they be addressed to revitalize this crucial learning support service?

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Tutorials in Distance Education

Distance education, by its nature, creates a transactional distance between learners and instructors, which can pose challenges for engagement and comprehension. Tutorials are a fundamental pedagogical tool designed to bridge this gap. Moore and Kearsley (2012) describe tutorials as the essential "bridge" that facilitates interaction, which is critical for clarifying concepts, providing personalized feedback, and building deeper understanding. In the context of Open and Distance Higher Education (PTJJ) in Indonesia, tutorials are offered

in various formats—including face-to-face, online, and written correspondence—to support students in their independent learning journey.

The benefits of well-structured tutorials are extensively documented in academic literature:

- **Fostering Interaction and Community:** Tutorials provide a platform for meaningful interaction that is a key predictor of student success. Garrison's (2003) Community of Inquiry framework highlights the importance of social, cognitive, and teaching presence in creating effective learning experiences. TTM excels at building social presence, reducing feelings of isolation, and fostering a supportive learning community.
- **Guiding Independent Learning:** Echoing Holmberg's (2005) concept of "guided didactic conversation," tutorials empower tutors to facilitate reflection and critical thinking rather than merely transmitting information. This guidance helps students develop into more autonomous and effective learners.
- **Providing Effective Feedback:** As Hattie and Timperley (2007) established, feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement. Tutorials offer a prime opportunity for tutors to provide timely, constructive, and individualized feedback that guides student improvement.
- **Enhancing Comprehension of Complex Material:** Utilizing principles of multimedia learning, tutorials can employ various methods to explain difficult concepts in a more accessible manner. The interactive dialogue allows students to ask targeted questions and resolve specific misunderstandings.
- **Improving Success and Retention:** A positive correlation exists between tutorial participation and student success rates in distance education programs. Research by Belawati (2005) found that effective tutorials significantly increase course completion rates, underscoring their importance for institutional outcomes.

2.2 Factors Influencing Student Choice in Learning Support

Students' preferences for utilizing different learning assistance services are shaped by a complex interplay of personal, institutional, and contextual factors. Understanding these factors is crucial for designing a support system that is both effective and widely adopted.

- **Perceived Benefits and Quality:** Students are motivated to use services they believe will directly contribute to their academic success, such as improving their grades or deepening their understanding of the material. The perceived quality of the service,

including the competence of the tutor and the relevance of the materials, is a strong determinant of satisfaction and continued participation. High-quality e-learning services have been shown to positively correlate with student satisfaction and better learning outcome (Wijaya, E. Y., & Sudira, P., 2021).

- **Ease of Access and Administration:** The accessibility of a service is a critical factor. This includes not only the availability of clear information but also the simplicity of the administrative processes required to enroll (Saputra, A., & Dewi, R. S., 2022). Complicated or cumbersome registration procedures can act as a significant deterrent. Furthermore, flexible scheduling and user-friendly platforms are key considerations for distance learners who are often balancing studies with work and family commitments. The ease of accessing online platforms is a known driver of participation in blended learning environments.
- **Individual Motivation and Learning Needs:** A student's intrinsic motivation and specific academic needs heavily influence their decision to seek support (Amelia, R., & Putra, D. S., 2021, Firmansyah, F., & Lestari, P., 2024). Students struggling with course material or aiming for high academic achievement are typically more proactive in utilizing available resources. For some, the structured environment of face-to-face learning provides a motivational boost and facilitates easier interaction with educators.
- **Economic Considerations:** Financial factors play a decisive role, particularly for non-traditional students. While online learning can reduce certain costs, it introduces others, such as the need for reliable devices and internet connectivity. Face-to-face tutorials often incur additional expenses for transportation, accommodation, and materials, which can be a significant burden for many students (Yusuf, 2024).
- **Previous Experience:** A student's experience with a learning service shapes their future preferences (Oliver, R. L., 2020). A positive, supportive, and effective tutorial experience will encourage a student to participate again, whereas a negative one may lead them to disengage.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, amplifying the importance of flexibility, accessibility, and cost-efficiency. While the shift to online learning brought challenges like learning loss and unequal access, it also normalized digital learning and highlighted its benefits, such as time flexibility and the development of digital skills. Consequently, to

encourage a return to TTM, institutions like UT Bengkulu must address the obstacles that make it appear less flexible and more costly than its online counterparts.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach utilizing a survey method to gather data on student perceptions and experiences. The research design was twofold. First, a descriptive design was used to outline the current level of student participation in various tutorial services and to identify the primary factors influencing their choices. Second, a causal-comparative design was incorporated to analyze potential differences in these factors across various student characteristics (Fraenkel, et al., 2012). This combined approach allows for both a comprehensive overview of the situation and a nuanced understanding of how specific barriers affect different segments of the student population.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised all 9,643 active students enrolled at UT Bengkulu during the research period. To ensure a representative and statistically significant sample, a stratified random sampling technique was applied. This method involves dividing the population into relevant subgroups (strata), such as by program of study or geographic location, and then drawing a random sample from each subgroup. This ensures that the diversity of the student body is accurately reflected in the sample. The sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula, a standard method for determining sample size from a known population, which resulted in a target sample of 384 students.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was an online questionnaire administered to the selected sample. The questionnaire was designed to measure student perceptions regarding the factors contributing to the decline in TTM participation and their preferences among different tutorial models (TTM, TUTON, TMK). The instrument consisted of a series of closed-ended questions using a Likert scale, allowing respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements related to six key factors:

1. Perception of Service Benefits
2. Ease of Access to Information and Service Availability
3. Quality and Relevance of Learning Aid Materials
4. Individual Motivation and Learning Needs

5. Previous Experience with Learning Assistance Services

6. Economic Support and Supporting Facilities

The development of the questionnaire was grounded in an extensive literature review and refined through consultations with key stakeholders at UT Bengkulu, including the Director, the Learning and Exam Manager, and administrative staff involved with tutorials.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the quality and accuracy of the data collected, the questionnaire underwent rigorous validation processes. Content validity was established through expert judgment, where specialists in distance education and survey design reviewed the instrument for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Following this, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of students who were not part of the final research sample. The results of the pilot test were used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, ensuring that the questions were consistently understood and yielded stable responses.

4 Results

The analysis of the survey data provided a comprehensive overview of UT Bengkulu students' perceptions regarding the university's tutorial services. The findings reveal a generally positive view of the benefits offered by all three main services: Face-to-Face Tutorials (TTM), Online Tutorials (TUTON), and Course-Based Assignments (TMK). However, the data also clearly identified two critical barriers that specifically hinder participation in TTM ATPM in the post-pandemic era.

4.1 General Perceptions of Tutorial Services

Across the six factors measured, students generally reported positive perceptions. As shown in the descriptive statistics (Table 1), the average scores for most factors were high, falling into the "Good/High" assessment category. For instance, the factors of *Perception of Service Benefits* (3.95 average), *Quality and Relevance of Materials* (3.85 average), and *Individual Motivation* (3.95 average) all received strong positive ratings. This indicates that students recognize the academic value of the tutorial services and are intrinsically motivated to learn.

A closer look at the *Perception of Service Benefits* shows that TTM is perceived most positively, with an average positive response rate of 76.43%, slightly higher than TUTON (73.31%) and TMK (73%). Similarly, for *Individual Motivation and Learning Needs*, TTM again scored the highest in its ability to meet student needs (75.34%), compared to TUTON

(74.56%) and TMK (67%). This suggests that when practical barriers are set aside, students hold a strong appreciation for the unique benefits of direct, face-to-face interaction.

4.2 Identification of Key Barriers to TTM Participation

Despite the high perceived value of TTM, the data pointed to two specific items in the questionnaire where student responses were overwhelmingly negative. These items pinpoint the primary reasons for the decline in participation.

1. Ease of Access to Information and Service Availability (Factor 2): While most items under this factor scored well, item F7, which stated,

"The TTM ATPeM registration and administrative process is easy to do," received a very low average score of 2.5 ("Low/Bad"). A significant majority of students, about 65%, disagreed with this statement. This finding indicates that the procedural aspects of enrolling in TTM are perceived as complicated, confusing, or burdensome, creating a substantial administrative barrier that discourages participation. This contrasts sharply with the perception of TUTON and TMK, which students find easier to access.

2. Economic Support and Supporting Facilities (Factor 6): The second major barrier was identified in item F43, which stated,

"The cost of transportation and accommodation to participate in TTM ATPeM does not burden me." This item received a low average score of 2.6 ("Low/Bad"). An even larger majority, about 64% of respondents is disagreed, indicating that the additional costs associated with attending TTM are a significant financial burden. This economic pressure makes cost-free online alternatives like TUTON and TMK far more attractive, as they eliminate expenses related to travel and other incidents.

The starkly negative responses to these two items, F7 and F43, stand in contrast to the positive ratings on nearly all other aspects of the tutorial services. The table below summarizes the key findings.

Table 1: Summary of Key Negative Indicators for TTM Participation

	Item Number & Statement	Average Score	Assessment	Percentage of Students Disagreeing
Ease of Access & Availability	F7: The TTM ATPeM registration and administrative process is easy to do.	2.5	Low/Bad	65%
Economic	F43: The cost of transportation and	2.6	Low/Bad	64%

Support Facilities	&	accommodation to participate in TTM ATPEM does not burden me.
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Source: Adapted from research data analysis

The results demonstrate a clear disconnect. On one hand, students value the academic and motivational benefits of TTM more highly than other services. On the other hand, significant administrative and financial hurdles prevent them from accessing it. The post-pandemic learning environment has made students more sensitive to issues of convenience and cost, causing them to favor the more flexible and economically efficient models of TUTON and TMK, even if they perceive the pedagogical quality of TTM to be slightly superior.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study offer a clear and compelling explanation for the post-pandemic decline in TTM participation at UT Bengkulu. The core issue is not a diminished appreciation for the value of face-to-face instruction; rather, it is the presence of significant practical barriers that render TTM less accessible and affordable compared to online alternatives. The two primary obstacles identified—a cumbersome administrative process and a prohibitive financial burden—effectively outweigh the perceived pedagogical benefits for a majority of students.

5.1 Administrative Barriers as a Critical Deterrent

The finding that 65% of students perceive the TTM registration process as difficult is a critical insight. In a distance education system designed for flexibility, any point of administrative friction can become a major deterrent. This aligns with literature emphasizing that ease of access is a key determinant of service utilization. The complexity of registration likely clashes with the expectation of convenience that has been reinforced by the widespread adoption of seamless digital platforms during the pandemic. The establishment of UT Service Centers (SALUT) across Bengkulu province in 2023 can be interpreted as an institutional acknowledgment of these pre-existing administrative challenges. While SALUT aims to bridge the service gap, the survey results indicate that, for students, the process remains a significant hurdle. In contrast, the registration for TUTON and the automatic enrollment in TMK are integrated into the standard semester registration, making them frictionless alternatives that students naturally gravitate towards.

5.2 The Overriding Impact of Economic Factors

The second key finding, that is 64% of students are burdened by the costs of attending TTM, underscores the profound impact of economic realities on academic choices. For many UT students, who are often working adults balancing multiple responsibilities, the direct and indirect costs of TTM (transportation, accommodation, missed work, materials) are substantial. This finding is consistent with research highlighting financial constraints as a major factor in student persistence and engagement in higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic likely heightened students' sensitivity to these costs.

The contrast with online services is striking. TUTON and TMK effectively eliminate these variable costs, requiring only a stable internet connection and a device, the resources that, while not without cost, are often perceived as fixed or necessary for modern life. Therefore, TUTON and TMK are not just learning alternatives; they are economically rational choices in a post-pandemic world where flexibility and cost-efficiency are paramount. Students feel they have more control over their time and finances when engaging with online tutorials, a sentiment reflected in the data.

5.3 Reconciling Perception with Participation

An interesting paradox emerges from the data: TTM is perceived as the most beneficial and motivating service, yet it has the lowest participation. This suggests that the decision-making process for students is a practical trade-off. While they may ideally prefer the rich, interactive environment of TTM, the practical hurdles force them to opt for the "good enough" online alternatives that are far more convenient and affordable.

This situation calls for a strategic response from UT Bengkulu. Simply promoting the benefits of TTM is unlikely to be effective. Instead, the focus must shift to systematically dismantling the identified barriers. The university's effort to create a dashboard for centralized information is a step in the right direction, but more fundamental changes to the registration process and cost structure are needed to affect a meaningful increase in participation.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The decline in student participation in Face-to-Face Tutorials (TTM/ATPEM) at UT Bengkulu following the COVID-19 pandemic is not a reflection of students' diminished valuation of in-person learning. On the contrary, students continue to perceive TTM as a

highly beneficial and motivating learning support service. The primary causes of this decline are two critical and practical obstacles:

6.1.1 Administrative Complexity: A substantial majority of students (65%) find the registration and administrative processes for TTM to be difficult and burdensome, creating a significant barrier to access.

6.1.2 Economic Burden: The additional costs associated with TTM, including transportation and accommodation, are a major financial strain for 64% of students, making it an economically unviable option for many.

In the post-pandemic era, students increasingly prioritize flexibility, convenience, and cost-efficiency. As a result, online alternatives such as Online Tutorials (TUTON) and Course-Based Assignments (TMK) have become the preferred choice, not necessarily because they are pedagogically superior, but because they are free of the administrative and financial hurdles that plague TTM. To revitalize TTM participation, UT Bengkulu must therefore shift its focus from promoting the service's benefits to systematically removing these fundamental barriers.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed for UT Bengkulu to increase TTM participation:

6.2.1 Simplify and Digitize Administrative Procedures: The TTM ATPM registration process must be fundamentally re-evaluated and simplified.

- **Implement a One-Click Online Registration System:** Integrate TTM registration directly into the main student portal, making it as seamless as enrolling in TUTON.
- **Enhance Communication:** Utilize the SALUT network and the UT Bengkulu dashboard to provide clear, timely, and accessible information about TTM schedules, locations, and registration deadlines.
- **Automate Processes:** Reduce manual paperwork and take administrative steps wherever possible to minimize student effort and potential for error.

6.2.2 Develop Cost-Alleviating Strategies: To address the significant financial burden, UT Bengkulu should explore strategies to make TTM more affordable.

- **Subsidized TTM:** Investigate the feasibility of providing subsidies or financial aid to cover transportation costs for students from remote areas.

- **Strategic Location Planning:** Organize TTM sessions in locations that are more geographically centralized and accessible via public transport to reduce travel time and costs for the majority of students.
- **Hybrid Tutorial Models:** Offer a hybrid model that combines a limited number of essential face-to-face sessions with online components, providing the benefits of in-person interaction while reducing the overall cost and time commitment.

6.2.3 Enhance the Quality and Interactivity of Online Alternatives: Given the strong student preference for online learning, continuing to improve the quality of TUTON is essential.

- **Increase Synchronous Interaction:** Integrate more live webinar sessions, interactive Q&As, and group discussions within the TUTON framework to better replicate the engaging aspects of TTM.
- **Invest in Tutor Training:** Provide ongoing professional development for online tutors to enhance their skills in fostering engagement and building a sense of community in a digital environment.

By addressing these core issues of administrative ease and economic accessibility, UT Bengkulu can create an environment where students are able to choose their preferred mode of learning based on pedagogical needs rather than being constrained by practical barriers.

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