Chapter 3

Open and Distance Learning in Asia:
A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is committed to making higher education open to all Indonesians. All efforts are directed to address and maintain UT's openness, flexibility, and accessibility. As a result, UT successfully provides higher education to about 600,000 students who come from various social and economic backgrounds. Due to limited ICT infrastructure in Indonesia, UT still uses printed materials as the main learning media, supplemented with various non-printed materials. UT also provides learning support in the form of face-to-face and online tutorials, digital libraries, and other online resources. The advancement of ICT and greater public access to the Internet has allowed students to have easier access to UT's programs and services. The remaining challenge for UT is balancing the quality of materials and learning supports for different students with different learning circumstances. It is very important for UT that no potential students are marginalized due to their lack of access to certain technologies. Nevertheless, it is envisioned that UT will increase the utilization of ICT in its future system.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the largest archipelago countries in the world with a population of over 240 million. A rapid increase in population has been the big challenge for the Indonesian government.

The challenge has been most significant in the educational sector, where the increased population means increased needs for schools and teachers, as well as universities and lecturers. Therefore, the most important concern for Indonesia is to find an alternative mode of education that will be

accessible and affordable for its people. Distance education increases access to higher education, especially for people who face barriers related to demographic, economic, or time factors. For such individuals, distance learning can be the most appropriate solution to address the concern.

Indonesia started using a distance-learning system in 1955 with the establishment of a correspondence diploma program for preparing schoolteachers. However, it was not until 1981 when two distance-learning projects were started to give in-service training to secondary and tertiary level teachers that the distance learning system was widely utilized. These programs were established as *crash programs* for teacher training to keep up with the demand for additional teachers. Subsequently, the needs for upgrading the skills of those teachers could only be met through a distance learning system—face-to-face training was too expensive and finding teachers for further training was difficult. These programs later formed a part of the Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka (UT) in 1984.

UT is a state/public university that was given three main mandates by the government:

1. Widen access to higher education, especially for recent high school graduates
2. Train more students in areas required for economic and cultural development
3. Upgrade primary and secondary school teachers to enable them to obtain full degrees

Accordingly, UT was established to be a flexible and inexpensive university, focused on serving people, who for various reasons, including lack of funding, rural isolation, and full-time employment, do not have the opportunity to attend conventional face-to-face higher education institutions. In other words, UT was designed to be an open and distance education institution which offers:

- No limitation on student completion time and no dropout system is applied

- No limitation on high school graduation time, unlike conventional (face-to-face) universities, effectively removing any age limitation
- Year-round registration
- Flexible phase, place, and time to study
- Multimedia learning materials, including print, audio and video CDs, radio, and television, computer-assisted instruction, and Internet materials.

UT has a vision to *become a world quality open and distance higher education institution in producing academic programs, as well as in implementing, developing, and disseminating information on open and distance higher education* (Strategic and Operational Plan 2010-2013). The missions of UT are to:

1. Provide access to world quality higher education for all levels of society through the implementation of programs using an open and distance higher education system,
2. Conduct research and develop an open distance-education system
3. Utilize and disseminate scientific and institutional research results to respond to national development needs

The university's Head Office (HO) is in Tangerang, which is located in the southern suburb of Jakarta. Figure 1 shows the 37 Regional Offices (RO) throughout Indonesia. Institutional policies such as those for quality assurance are centrally managed from the HOs, while ROs, among others, and are responsible for carrying out the daily operational activities, including maintaining UT local partnerships in their respective areas of service. With this policy, student academic services mainly take place in the ROs.

UT offers almost 1000 courses in Economics, Political and Social Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Teacher Training and Educational Sciences, and Graduate Programs. While

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