

## Teachers' Online Forum: An Online Interactive Forum for Sustaining Teacher Professional Development, by Universitas Terbuka

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### Abstract

During its 26th year (2011), Universitas Terbuka graduated its one millionth student; three-fourths of these alumni are teachers, mostly domiciled in remote areas of Indonesia where the supporting infrastructure for information and communication technologies is limited. This condition has restricted their access to quality educational resources. The development of an online forum for teachers aims to respond to this need, encouraging and facilitating the sharing and exchange of teaching experiences and expertise across the country, and serving as a repository for content in various media. Since its inception in 2010, over 50,000 viewers have visited the forum, and more than 1,000 are active members. A survey was conducted to explore and gain insight into the utilisation and management of the forum. Interviews amongst selected samples reveal that the forum serves more as an institutional content provider than as a medium for user-generated content.

*Keywords:* Universitas Terbuka, OER, teacher online forum, Indonesia

### Introduction: The Use of ICT Media for Education

Indonesia is located in the Oceania region of Southeast Asia, and comprises 17,508 islands (Government of Indonesia, 2012), organised into 33 provinces. Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country at 245 million, with population growth at one per cent per year. The GDP has increased significantly over the past five years, and the per capita income (PPP) is USD 3,000. In terms of public interest in using communication technologies, Indonesia has the world's second largest Facebook community, and mobile phone and smartphone usage is reported to be high.

The use of ICT for e-education in Indonesia started in 2002 when the Center for Information and Communication Technology for Education (Pustekkom), in

co-operation with the Directorate of Secondary Education and the Directorate of Vocational Education, developed an eLearning programme called “e-dukasi”. The objective of this programme was to improve the quality of education at the high school and vocational school levels through the use of the Internet. In addition, the Indonesian Telephone Company (PT Telkom) supported a number of institutions to mobilise eLearning penetration, such as the Office for the Research and Application of Technologies, Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers, Network of School Information, Detik.com and ICT Watch. At this preliminary stage, learning materials were developed for the subjects of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Electronics, and Information and Communication Technology.

For universities, in addition to meeting eLearning and e-education requirements, ICT has also been used to develop an electronic library network. The Indonesia Digital Library Network (IDLN) is a network of electronic libraries that initially comprised: (i) the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) central library (Digital Library), (ii) the Post-Graduate Study Library of ITB, (iii) the Research Institute of ITB, (iv) the Eastern Indonesia Universities Development Project (a Canadian International Development Agency project), (v) the University of Brawijaya Malang Central Library, (vi) the University of Muhammadiyah Malang Library, (vii) the University of Islamic Religion Library (supported by McGill University, Canada) and (viii) the Central Data Bank of the Science Institution of Indonesia (LIPI), Jakarta. The IDLN is meant to support efforts to improve the quality of university graduates and to increase information sharing amongst institutions of higher learning, as well as research institutions in Indonesia. This has encouraged more universities in Indonesia to launch projects on open educational resources (OER) and to expand the digital network. Another OER initiative is supported by the Ministry of National Education through the introduction of digital textbooks for primary and secondary schools, called Buku Sekolah Elektronik (Electronic School Textbooks). The Ministry purchases the copyrights for selected books to be shared with the public. This initiative is intended to provide more alternative resources for student learning.

At Universitas Terbuka (UT), some Internet-based media and forums were developed and presented to broaden and enrich student learning resources and services; they were also to some extent aimed at strengthening the process of student learning. Some of the services were provided online, including the Teachers’ Online Forum, one of UT’s online resources delivering educational discourses and practices. The forum offers OER mainly dedicated to teachers, whilst also being open to education practitioners, education observers and the public. In addition to providing general information concerning education issues, the online communication forum for teachers serves as the main student and alumni service of the portal. It encourages teachers and forum users to register, after which logging in to this forum allows active participation in discussions. Users can also view videorecorded teaching lessons or best practices presented by other teachers. The Faculty of Education hosts the Teachers’ Online Forum portal and continues to undertake research and development to improve and enrich it.

## About the Teachers' Online Forum

The Teachers' Online Forum (TOF) is a specialised portal through which teachers and other educators and educational practitioners can work on and share professional teaching methods and experiences. The Faculty of Education (FoE) started the development of the TOF in 2007. In 2010, UT launched the TOF through the National Forum for Teachers. UT continues to orchestrate the use of TOF sites through a series of seminars, teacher meetings and workshops. The university encourages staff and lecturers to contribute their professional expertise through the TOF, and motivates UT in-service student teachers to register and participate actively in the TOF as well.

In general, the TOF comprises three information packages, as shown in Figure 19.1. Firstly, TOF promotes university collections that were developed by FoE staff, relating to subject materials offered within the FoE curriculum. Secondly, the TOF offers links to governmental resources, including teacher-related official rules and references for education, online journals and databases, world educational organisations and teacher blogs. Finally, the TOF offers a Teachers' Communication Forum, which is explicitly devoted to teachers sharing best practices and which promotes innovations in classroom teaching and learning.

Figure 19.1: The structure of the TOF



The University Collections section of the TOF presents videos and lessons grouped into three categories: (i) learning and teaching laboratories, (ii) supplementary materials and (iii) teacher success stories on classroom teaching and learning. To enrich and maintain the online laboratory, UT lecturers are assigned to

conduct analyses on curricula and syllabi, as well as on modules as the main printed resources for students. Some content (conceptions, definitions, theories and models) are presented in the module and are designed to facilitate the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Many students consider this content very difficult and require further details to better comprehend it. To offer these students easier ways to reach the intended understanding, lecturers of the FoE have supplemented this content with streaming videos and other forms of interactive learning multimedia. Each medium contains three main presentation materials: (i) an introduction to issues that are to be discussed through the media, (ii) examples or cases of learning and teaching related to the intended concepts and (iii) explanation by connecting the examples or cases presented in the media presentations to the intended concepts. All UT students and registered viewers are eligible to observe and study these media.

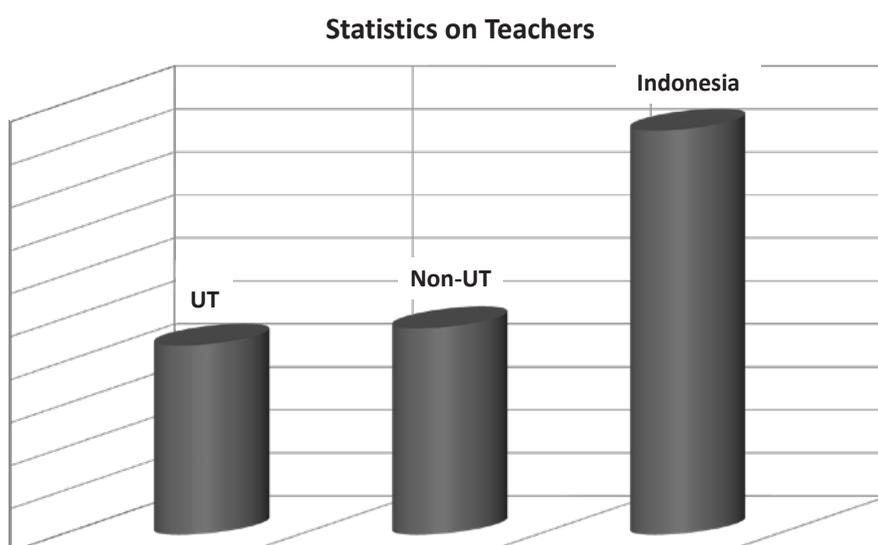
Through the Educational References section, teachers are provided with online resources containing up-to-date official rules and regulations, especially on teacher education, professionalism and appreciation (incentives). Information is provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Teachers are able to fully download and print the information because it is presented in PDF format. To offer teachers broader and international knowledge and experiences in education and learning practices, and in the use of ICT in education, the portal facilitates links to other online educational resources. These include: *Portal Garuda Dikti* (Higher Education Department Portal for Scientific Research Database), which presents scientific and popular references written by Indonesian scholars; *Pustaka Pendidik* (References for Educators), which provides lessons and best practices specifically for basic education teachers; *Curriki*, which allows educators and decision makers to participate as a global learning community; *Edutube*, which presents models and lessons on a variety of popular topics, in addition to education categories that include animals, biology, chemistry, guitar lessons, math, politics, space, computer science, food, technology and more; and UNESCO's *ICT in Teacher Education: Case Studies From the Asia-Pacific Region* materials on the use of ICT in Asia-Pacific education (UNESCO, 2008).

Finally, the Teachers' Communication Forum was designed to enable teachers and practitioners to interact and exchange their knowledge and information on educating children. The forum is designed around eight topics: Learning Strategies, Evaluation, Curriculum, Curricular Content, Educational Operations, Students, Research, and Comments or Suggestions. Each topic contains several suggested sub-topics considered popular issues for teachers to discuss and share through the forum. Teachers can simply log in to an intended sub-topic, follow and read discussions on the available issues or titles, and give comments to other forum users' responses in relation to the presented issues. Forum users can also suggest new issues that are pressing, interesting or educationally innovative. A forum user can also simply visit the forum and read available information without joining active discussions; however, we feel that this limits the forum user's opportunity to actively share and contribute to educational innovations via the forum.

## Usage of the TOF

The FoE of UT had originally adopted the mission to serve only students who were already actively teaching through an in-service teacher training programme. The Government of Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture required teachers to pursue a bachelor's degree whilst still actively teaching. Currently, a formal regulation stipulates that all teachers must possess at least a bachelor's degree, which has led teachers to enrol at UT to meet this professional requirement. As a result, students who are practising teachers dominate (at 80 per cent) the total number of UT students.

Figure 19.2: Teachers at and graduated from UT and other universities



National statistics from the Directorate of PMPTK (a directorate of the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for quality improvement of teachers and educational personnel) indicate that in 2009, UT graduates comprised almost 50 per cent of all 2,607,311 teachers in Indonesia (Figure 19.2, Directorate of PMPTK, 2009). UT has therefore sourced a large portion of national professional resources for improving the quality of teachers in Indonesia, which will in turn affect national school quality. This situation inspired UT to promote continuing services to teachers in Indonesia.

Through the TOF, driven by the Faculty of Education, UT has provided continuous professional development for teachers in Indonesia. Since its inauguration in 2010, the TOF has increased its collections to support innovations in professional teaching and learning, and to improve the quality of its development. Initially, certain barriers diminished the realisation of TOF, from both the teachers' and UT's point of view. For the teachers, working with information and communication technology (ICT) was still limited and somewhat of a novelty; conventional methods, such as offline meetings, symposia, regular face-to-face training and routine upgrading, were still considered best strategies for professional teaching and learning development. To some extent, this situation will influence existing teacher capacity and skills to maximise the use of ICT for

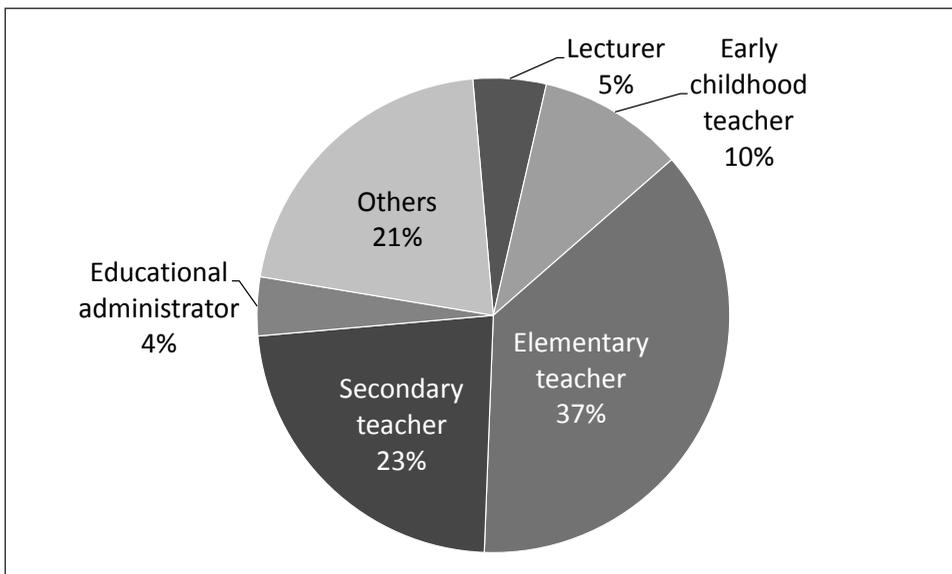
learning, limiting better and wider solutions for professional learning, teaching and innovation. And finally, the lack of infrastructure in many remote areas of Indonesia contributes to inadequate access to online services for teachers. In the meantime, from UT's side, some weaknesses are attributable to limited human resources to develop comprehensive content for the online forum with rich, innovative and satisfying materials.

Various programmes, including intensive training and workshops, were carried out to reduce this limitation. Some activities, such as content analyses, peer review and expert assessment of online forum materials, were conducted for quality assurance. Those programmes involved experts and qualified content writers from partnering universities and selected schools, and were effective in accelerating the development of printed and audio-video collections. Over 53 titles of streaming videos are now available in the university collection. In addition to programming such activities, the FoE assigned and trained academic staff to function as moderators of the online forum. The FoE invited lecturers, especially those whose academic backgrounds and expertise were on the theory and practice of classroom teaching and learning, to participate in online discussions, responding to questions and comments presented by forum users.

Since its inception in 2010, over 50,000 viewers have visited the forum, and more than 1,000 of them are active members, demonstrating success in the TOF design efforts. Figure 19.3 shows membership based on work status. There are six categories of members: early childhood teachers, elementary teachers, secondary teachers (junior and senior school teachers), lecturers, educational administrators and other professionals, plus the general public.

It is apparent from Figure 19.3 that participation is dominated by elementary teachers (37 per cent), followed by secondary teachers (23 per cent). Unexpectedly, non-teachers and lecturers also have a high participation rate. Twenty-one per cent of the participating members are professionals and others. This indicates that the online forum may provide wider benefits not only for teachers but also for those interested in learning about classroom teaching and learning.

**Figure 19.3: Profile of participating members of the online forum**



In efforts to continuously improve service quality, the FoE conducted case studies using field observations and online surveys. Field observations were focussed on content analysis (including participants' comments, opinions and suggestions) expressed throughout discussions; direct interviews were also randomly conducted with several participating teachers to address their comments concerning topics, materials and Web presentation quality.

In general, the studies showed that teachers were satisfied with the topics of discussion as designed and presented in the TOF. They asserted that the subject-driven materials of the university collections accommodated their needs for quality improvement in classroom learning and teaching practices. Additionally, most of the teachers accepted that the online forum helped them to meet friends from various schools environments with wider school communities and backgrounds in Indonesia.

Analyses and explorations of similar issues — such as children's difficulties in understanding a concept, and teachers' understandings of misconceptions presented by members based on a variety of classroom experiences —enriched teachers' viewpoints and perspectives on the issues. Above all, video presentations were seen as the favourite media. Some teachers suggested that downloading videos and presenting them in group discussions helped make it easier to understand problems. Several teachers offered to upload videos of their classroom practices. Besides promoting a real contribution to the quality of classroom teaching, presenting videos through the TOF could also be expected to elevate teacher reputation.

The results of the field observations were in general agreement with the online survey conducted by email. The FoE administered a membership database to enable staff to reach online members.

Table 19.1 shows the structure of the membership database. Short questions were emailed to all the members. Questions were grouped into four issues: (i) subject-driven contents, (ii) streaming videos, (iii) educational policy linkages and (iv) educational blogs.

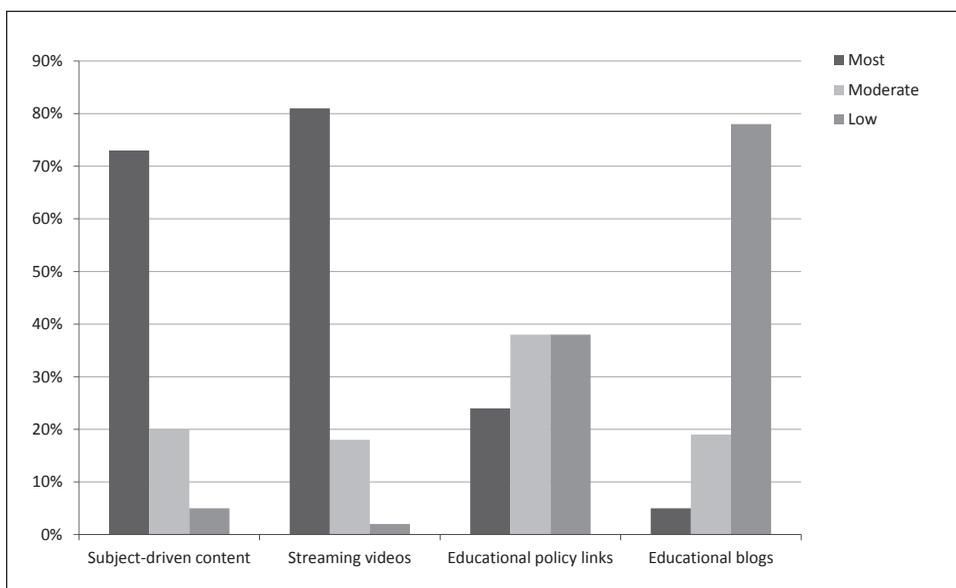
**Table 19.1: Structure of the membership database**

id	name	username	email	education	workStatus	institution	age	rovin	city	registerDate	lastvisitDate
163	Idha Novianti	anti	anti@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	UT	32	DKI Jakarta	Tangerang	2011-07-14 06:51:18	2011-11-22 04:06:30
170	daryusman	daryus	daryus7@gmail.com	S1	Dosen	Universitas Terbuka	25	DKI Jakarta	Jakarta	2011-07-15 08:38:20	2011-10-14 07:21:03
172	angga suotra	angga	angga2102@yahoo.com	S1	Dosen	UPBU UNIVERSITAS TE	26	Jawa Barat	BANDUNG	2011-07-15 10:46:49	2011-07-23 02:52:30
173	nana setiana	nana	nana.cinunuk@yahoo.com	S2	Dosen	upbji ut bandung	50	Jawa Barat	bandung	2011-07-15 11:07:22	0000-00-00 00:00:00
176	Nana	Setiana	dnansasetiana@yahoo.com	S2	Dosen	UPBU Bandung	50	Jawa Barat	Bandung	2011-07-15 14:07:33	0000-00-00 00:00:00
177	Dermanto S.S. Manurung	DermantoManurung	Xonia_Nauli@yahoo.co.id	S2	Dosen	FISIP Universitas Jendk	50 Tahun	Jawa Tengah	Purwokerto	2011-07-15 14:50:17	0000-00-00 00:00:00
180	soleh hadriyanto	soleh	soleh-hadriyanto@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	UPBU UT Bandung	53th	Jawa Barat	Bandung	2011-07-19 10:24:44	2011-07-19 10:41:51
250	Sri Sumiyati	sumi	sumi@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	Universitas Terbuka	49	Banten	Tangsel	2011-08-04 04:45:11	2011-10-26 07:59:32
251	Mery Noviyanti	Mery	meryn@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	Universitas Terbuka		Banten	Tangeran	2011-08-04 05:36:02	2011-11-28 04:39:46
253	Nunung Supratni	nunung	nunung@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	UT	36	Banten	Tangeran	2011-08-04 06:38:34	2011-10-25 06:49:14
256	Nurul Hidayat	nurul	nurul_unsosed@yahoo.com	S2	Dosen	Teknik Informatika Jur	38	Jawa Tengah	Purwokerto	2011-08-05 09:53:51	2011-08-05 09:56:00
260	Zulkifli Harahap	zulkifli	zulkifli@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	Universitas Terbuka	35 Tahun	Sumatera	Medan	2011-08-07 13:39:19	2011-08-07 14:30:40
275	doeti sulmayadi	doetisy@ut.ac.id	doetisy@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	UT	50	Banten	Tangeran	2011-08-10 02:20:40	2011-10-04 00:55:59
276	Drs. Suharno, M. Pd.	suharno	suharno@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	UPBU-UT Bandarlampi	53 Tahun	Lampung	Bandarlal	2011-08-10 04:45:26	2011-08-10 05:42:56
278	Lidwina S Ardiansih	lidwina	lidwina@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	Universitas Terbuka	36 tahun	Banten	Tangeran	2011-08-10 06:35:42	2011-11-15 08:55:32
282	Rina Astarka	astarka	astari@ut.ac.id	S2	Dosen	UPBU-UT JAMBI	32 tahun	Jambi	jambi	2011-08-11 02:32:35	2011-08-11 02:35:15

Questionnaires were addressed to seek members' perspectives on each main section of the TOF. Regarding each of the issues, members were asked four questions to which they responded either "mostly agree", "moderately agree" or "rarely agree". The questionnaire centred on questions relating to improvement of their knowledge and skills due to their participation in the online forum.

Figure 19.5 presents the results. Evidently, members were mostly in agreement that their exchange of ideas on subject-driven materials and streaming videos was useful for classroom quality improvement. Also, most members were reluctant to follow educational blogs presented in the TOF. Members gave “moderately agree” responses regarding their perspectives on the section about formal education regulations. This may be because members already had good access to such information using existing channels in their schools.

**Figure 19.5: Members’ perspectives on the online forum**



## Sustainability of the TOF

UT will continue to expand teacher professional development through the TOF. In 2012–13, the Faculty of Education plans to make greater efforts to develop streaming videos to highlight good teaching practices. Partnerships with more organisations and agents in IT practices and developments, both national and international, will be strategies to strengthen the TOF and to address wider content coverage, with more actual teaching issues for teacher quality improvement. Additionally, internal consolidation is envisaged to improve the strategy and mechanisms of moderating teacher communication forums, and other tasks associated with the quality of information, website links and networking.

In the meantime, UT is considering participating in licensing the TOF under a Creative Commons (CC) licence. Leaders at UT feel that CC will enable UT to share innovations and creativity with the world. It is accepted that CC develops and sustains legal and technical infrastructure that maximises digital creativity, sharing and innovation. Intensive socialisation on the use of the CC licences has been conducted through several formal and informal meetings and seminars. A team has been working on examining an appropriate CC licence for the TOF. A provisional draft has suggested providing opportunity for others to remix, adjust and build upon the available works non-commercially. The team has proposed to

use the Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA) licence. This is expected to allow open creativity in response to the works presented by the TOF, as long as creators credit works and license their new creations under the same licence.

## Conclusion

In Indonesia, the TOF has been providing alternatives for classroom quality improvement in teaching and learning. Wider acceptance is apparent from the extensive participant list, which includes teachers and other educational practitioners. This introduces a great opportunity for UT to maintain and improve the quality of presentations in the TOF, so as to strengthen its contribution to quality innovation for professional teachers and teaching practices. Licensing the TOF is considered critical and therefore is being explored by UT. A team has proposed registering the TOF under a Creative Commons licence. UT expects to offer more open participation and non-commercial creativity from users through using a CC licence.

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