

**STRENGTHENING EXPERIENCE-BASED LEARNING IN DISTANCE
EDUCATION OPEN UNIVERSITY IN THE ERA OF SOCIETY 5.0****Djoko Sri Bimo¹, E'em Kurniasih²**¹Universitas Terbuka, Surakarta²Universitas Terbuka, Semarang

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of higher education in the era of Society 5.0 demands the integration of intelligent technology with a human-centered approach to learning. The Open University as a distance education institution is required not only to provide wide access, but also a meaningful learning experience through an experience-based learning approach. This study aims to analyze the strategy of strengthening experience-based learning in the Open University distance education system and its impact on student engagement and learning achievement. The research uses descriptive qualitative approach with literature study method and Digital Learning Policy Analysis. The results showed that the integration of Learning Management System (LMS), interactive online tutorials, case-based projects, and the use of collaborative technology can increase student active participation and strengthen the construction of experience-based knowledge. In addition, tutor support as a reflective learning facilitator is a key factor in building adaptive academic interactions. In the context of Society 5.0, strengthening experience-based learning encourages the creation of a digital learning ecosystem that is inclusive, flexible, and oriented to the development of 21st century competencies. Thus, this strategy strengthens the position of the Open University as a pioneer of innovative distance education and responsive to the dynamics of technology and the needs of society.

Keywords: PJJ, Universitas Terbuka, Masyarakat 5.0, Transformasi, Digital.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology within the framework of Society 5.0 places humans as the center of innovation based on artificial intelligence, big data, and cyber-physical connectivity. In the context of Higher Education, this transformation demands a learning model that is not only adaptive to technology, but also capable of building meaningful and contextual learning experiences. The concept of Society 5.0 as introduced by the Japanese government emphasizes the integration of intelligent technologies to improve the quality of human life (Fukuyama, 2018). Therefore, distance education needs to shift the paradigm from simply distributing digital materials to experience-based learning that encourages reflection, collaboration, and real problem solving.

Universitas Terbuka (UT) as the pioneer of distance education in Indonesia has a mandate to expand access to higher education through an open and flexible system. UT's module-based learning Model, online tutorials, and Learning Management System (LMS) have undergone significant transformations in the past decade. However, the challenges of distance learning are not only related to access, but also to student engagement and learning experience. Moore and Kearsley (2012) assert that the quality of distance education is largely determined by the interaction between students, materials, and tutors. Thus, the reinforcement of

experience-based approaches becomes relevant to increase the depth of learning in systems that are based on technology.

The experience-based learning approach is rooted in experiential learning theory which emphasizes cycles of concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). In a digital context, learning experiences are not limited to physical practices, but can also be built through virtual simulations, interactive case studies, collaborative projects and online reflective discussions. Cutting-edge research shows that experiential learning in a digital environment can improve students' intrinsic motivation and critical thinking skills (OECD, 2021). Therefore, the integration of this approach in the UT distance education system is becoming an important strategy to respond to the demands of 21st century competencies.

On the other hand, the implementation of experience-based learning in distance education requires a structured learning design, adequate technological support, and the role of the tutor as a facilitator of reflection. Anderson (2020) states that an effective digital learning ecosystem should blend content, pedagogy, and technology synergistically. In Practice, UT has developed various innovations such as webinar tutorials, interactive discussion forums, as well as student local context-based project assignments. This step shows a shift from text-based learning towards more participatory and applicable learning. However, the systematic strengthening of the experience-based approach still requires a comprehensive conceptual and strategic review.

Based on this description, This article aims to analyze the strategy of strengthening experience-based learning in Open University Distance Education in the era of Society 5.0. The analysis focused on the integration of digital learning design, the role of tutors, and the use of interactive technology in improving the quality of student learning experience. This transformation is in line with the demands of higher education oriented towards flexibility, inclusiveness and continuous innovation (World Bank, 2022). By strengthening the experiential dimension of distance learning, UT is expected to build a more human-centered academic ecosystem as well as responsive to global technological developments.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to the design of literature studies and conceptual analysis to assess the strengthening of experience-based learning in the distance education system of the Open University in the era of Society 5.0. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon of digital learning in depth and contextually within the framework of the transformation of Higher Education (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The Data was obtained through the study of higher education policy documents, institutional reports, scientific publications, and international reference sources related to experiential learning and distance education. The analysis was conducted by identifying the main themes related to digital learning design, tutor-student interaction, as well as the integration of technology in supporting the learning experience.

Furthermore, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to find conceptual patterns that are relevant to the experience-based learning model in an online environment. The analysis framework draws on Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory which emphasizes cycles of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation, as well as distance education theory which highlights the importance of interaction in digital learning (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). The validity of the study was strengthened through triangulation of literature sources and comparison of study results with digital learning implementation practices at the Open University. With this approach, the

research produces strategic recommendations based on theory and practice to strengthen students' learning experience in a technology-based distance education system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The strengthening of experience-based learning in distance education of the Open University (UT) must be understood as a pedagogical transformation that goes beyond the mere digitization of learning materials. Within the framework of Society 5.0, education is required to integrate intelligent technology with a human-centered approach that places students as active subjects in the learning process (Fukuyama, 2018). UT as an open educational institution has the advantage of flexibility of access, but the main challenge lies in the quality of the learning experience of students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, strengthening the experience-based approach is becoming a key strategy to ensure that distance learning is not only administrative, but also transformative.

Theoretically, experience-based learning has its roots in Kolb's (2015) experiential learning model which emphasizes cycles of concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In the UT context, concrete experiences can be realized through students' local context-based projects, actual case studies, and digital simulations. Reflection stages are facilitated through online discussion forums, reflective journals, and tutor feedback. Conceptualization occurs when the student relates the experience to the theory in the module, while active experimentation arises in the application of advanced solutions or projects. This cyclical integration reinforces the depth of learning over a lecture or text-based approach alone.

Interaction becomes an important element in strengthening the learning experience. Moore and Kearsley (2012) identified three main types of interactions in Distance Education: Student–content, student–teacher, and student–student interactions. In the UT System, these three forms of interaction are facilitated through LMS, webinar tutorials, as well as online group discussions. However, the quality of interaction largely depends on the design of learning activities. Without an experience-based approach, interaction can potentially become a technical formality. Therefore, learning design must lead to collaborative problem-based learning, contextual case studies, and project-based tasks so that interaction results in meaningful learning.

UT's digital transformation also needs to be understood in the perspective of the online learning ecosystem. Anderson (2020) emphasizes that the effectiveness of online education is determined by the balance between pedagogy, technology, and organization. UT has developed a structured online tutorial system, a digital question bank, as well as multimedia-based interactive materials. However, to strengthen experience-based learning, it is necessary to integrate reflective features such as peer assessment, interactive simulation, and learning analytics to monitor student engagement in real-time. The integration of these technologies supports the personalization of learning that is a key characteristic of Society 5.0.

From a student's perspective, an experience-based approach increases intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership of the learning process. The OECD (2021) states that active and participatory learning has been shown to increase knowledge retention as well as critical thinking skills. In the context of UT, students who are mostly active workers require learning that is relevant to their professional experience. Therefore, project-based tasks linked to the work context or social environment of the student become an effective strategy to strengthen the learning experience while increasing academic relevance.

The technological aspects in Society 5.0 open up new opportunities for UT to develop immersive learning experiences. The use of artificial intelligence, academic chatbots, and material recommendation systems can support adaptive learning. The World Bank (2022)

emphasizes that the digital transformation of Higher Education requires the integration of data and technology to improve the quality of academic services. In this context, UT can leverage learning analytics to identify students at low risk of participation and provide experience-based interventions, such as collaborative assignments or online mentoring.

However, the implementation of experience-based learning in distance education is inseparable from structural and cultural challenges. The first challenge is the readiness of tutors in designing and facilitating reflective learning. The Tutor no longer acts as a presenter of the material, but as a facilitator of discussion and mentor of reflection (Anderson, 2020). The second challenge is the student's digital literacy gap, which can affect the effectiveness of the use of interactive technology. Therefore, the strengthening of tutor capacity and digital literacy training are integral parts of the transformation strategy.

In the institutional dimension, strengthening experience-based learning needs to be integrated in the Curriculum Policy and evaluation system of UT. Curricula should be designed around learning outcomes that emphasize 21st century skills such as collaboration, creativity, and problem solving. Kolb (2015) emphasizes that experiential learning must be followed by systematic reflection in order to produce deep learning. Therefore, the evaluation is not only based on Written exams, but also projects, portfolios and written reflections that measure the process as well as the learning outcomes.

In addition, an experience-based approach contributes to the strengthening of the academic identity of UT students. In distance education, students often feel isolated due to the lack of physical interaction. By building collaborative project-based digital Learning Communities, a sense of academic community and solidarity can be enhanced. Moore and Kearsley (2012) assert that a sense of connectedness is an important factor in the success of distance education. Strengthening the digital learning community is part of the strategy to enrich the student experience.

Overall, the strengthening of experience-based learning in UT distance education in the era of Society 5.0 reflects the transformation from a knowledge distribution model to an experience construction model. The integration of smart technology, reflective learning design, and the role of tutors as facilitators are the main foundations in creating human-centered learning. This transformation not only improves academic quality, but also strengthens UT's position as an adaptive distance education institution to the global dynamics and needs of a digital society. Thus, experience-based learning becomes a key strategy in realizing higher education that is inclusive, flexible, and oriented to the development of future competencies.

The transformation of higher education in the era of Society 5.0 demands a paradigm shift from learning based on knowledge transmission to learning based on experiential construction. The concept of Society 5.0 introduced by Japan emphasizes the integration of intelligent technology and human-centered values in all aspects of life, including education (Fukuyama, 2018). In this context, The Open University (UT) as a distance education institution has a strategic position as well as great challenges. Flexible open education systems allow broad access, but such flexibility risks producing shallow learning if not accompanied by meaningful pedagogical design. Therefore, strengthening experience-based learning (EBL) is a fundamental need, not just additional innovation. This approach allows students to build knowledge through concrete experiences, critical reflection, and contextual applications, so that distance learning remains relevant in an increasingly complex digital ecosystem.

Epistemologically, EBL has its roots in David A.'s theory of experiential learning. Kolb viewed learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). In distance education, this cycle faces challenges due to the absence of direct physical interaction. However, digital technology is opening up new spaces to bring these experiences to life through simulations, virtual case studies, community-based projects, and online reflective discussions. The main argument in the

context of UT is that experiences do not have to be physical; they can be social, cognitive, or digital. Thus, online learning is not synonymous with passive learning. On the other hand, when properly designed, it is capable of producing a more contextual and personalized learning experience than a conventional classroom.

The interaction dimension in distance education is the key to EBL's success. Moore and Kearsley (2012) identified three main types of interaction: student–content, student–teacher, and student–student. In UT practice, all three are facilitated through Learning Management System (LMS), online tutorials, and discussion forums. However, the effectiveness of such interactions depends on the design of learning activities. Interactions that are merely administrative questions and answers do not produce meaningful experiences. Therefore, learning design should be directed to problem-based learning, collaborative inquiry, and contextual project tasks. In Society 5.0, digital interaction is not just communication, but a space of collective construction of meaning. By utilizing collaborative and reflective features, UT can strengthen the quality of student learning experience even without physical face-to-face.

Furthermore, the transformation of UT pedagogy should be placed within the framework of contemporary online learning theory. Anderson (2020) emphasizes the importance of a balance between pedagogy, technology, and organization in creating effective online learning. Without a solid pedagogical Foundation, technology becomes only a means of material distribution. Therefore, the integration of EBL in the UT System requires alignment of curricula, tutor training, as well as the development of technological features that support active reflection and experimentation. For example, the use of learning analytics can help tutors monitor student engagement and design experience-based interventions. Data on discussion participation, module access frequency, and task completion patterns can be the basis for learning personalization.

From the student's side, strengthening EBL contributes to an increase in intrinsic motivation and learning autonomy. The OECD (2021) shows that active and contextual learning improves knowledge retention as well as critical thinking skills. The characteristics of UT students who are mostly active workers are actually an advantage in the implementation of EBL. Their professional experience can serve as a rich source of learning. Workplace-based project assignments, field practice reflections, and local case studies allow students to integrate theory with the realities of life. Thus, learning becomes relevant, applicable and oriented towards solving real problems.

In the context of Society 5.0 technology, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and adaptive systems opens up the opportunity for reinforcement learning experiences. The World Bank (2022) emphasizes that the digital transformation of higher education must utilize technology to improve quality, not just access. UT can develop academic chatbots to support rapid consultation, a material recommendation system based on learning preferences, as well as interactive simulations to enrich concrete experiences. The use of immersive technologies such as virtual labs or augmented reality also has the potential to improve the quality of the experience, especially in study programs that require applicative practice.

Nevertheless, the implementation of EBL in distance education is not without challenges. First, the readiness of the tutor becomes a crucial factor. Tutors must have digital pedagogy competencies as well as the ability to facilitate critical reflection. Anderson (2020) asserts that the role of teachers in online learning is shifting from material deliverers to facilitators and mentors. Without adequate training, tutors tend to maintain the traditional lecture pattern even if it is in digital format. Second, the gap in student digital literacy can hinder active participation. Therefore, the strengthening of digital capacity and technical support is becoming an integral part of the EBL strategy.

From an institutional perspective, strengthening EBL requires integration in curriculum policies and evaluation systems. Written exam-based evaluation alone does not adequately measure the depth of the learning experience. Kolb (2015) emphasizes the importance of reflection as part of the learning process. Therefore, the assessment system at UT needs to adopt digital portfolios, collaborative projects, as well as reflective journals as authentic evaluation instruments. Authentic assessment allows students to demonstrate applicative skills and conceptual understanding simultaneously. This reformulation of the evaluation system will strengthen UT's academic legitimacy at the national and global levels.

The socio-emotional aspect is also an important dimension in EBL. Distance education is often criticized for its lack of a sense of community and connectedness. Moore and Kearsley (2012) mentioned that the sense of connectedness affects the success of online learning. By building a collaborative project-based digital learning community, UT can increase students' sense of ownership of the learning process. Reflection forums, small group discussions, and online mentoring enrich students' social experiences. In Society 5.0 which emphasizes human-centered values, this social dimension becomes a strategic element in strengthening the quality of learning.

Argumentatively, the strengthening of EBL in UT distance education is not only a response to technological developments, but also a strategy to increase the competitiveness of institutions. Global Higher Education is moving towards flexible, personalized, and competency-based learning models. The OECD (2021) emphasizes that the future of higher education depends on the ability of institutions to integrate pedagogical innovations with digital technologies. By adopting EBL systemically, UT can strengthen its reputation as a pioneer of adaptive and progressive open education.

In the end, the strengthening of experience-based learning in UT distance education in the era of Society 5.0 represents a structural and cultural transformation. The integration of intelligent technology, reflective learning design, tutor training and evaluation reformulation are the main foundations of change. This transformation not only improves academic quality, but also strengthens the social relevance of higher education in the face of global challenges. With a human-centered approach supported by adaptive technology, UT has the potential to become a distance education model that is not only inclusive and flexible, but also transformative and oriented to the development of future competencies.

CONCLUSIONS

Strengthening experience-based learning (EBL) in Distance Education Open University (UT) in the era of Society 5.0 is a strategic step to ensure that digital transformation is not only oriented to access, but also to the quality and depth of learning. The integration of digital technology with an experiential pedagogical approach allows students to build knowledge in a reflective, contextual, and applicable way. In this framework, technology serves as an enabler, while learning design becomes a determining factor in the effectiveness of the academic process.

EBL reinforces the relevance of distance education to the needs of the world of work and contemporary social dynamics. The heterogeneous characteristics of UT students and most of them have professional experience have become the main capital in the implementation of experience-based learning. Through contextual projects, reflection on practice, and digital collaboration, students can integrate theory with empirical reality in greater depth. This approach also increases intrinsic motivation, learning autonomy, and critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Nevertheless, the successful implementation of EBL requires systemic support. The readiness of tutors in facilitating reflective learning, reformulation of the evaluation system

towards authentic assessment, and strengthening infrastructure and digital literacy are the main prerequisites. Without a comprehensive institutional transformation, technological integration risks becoming mere administrative modernization without substantive changes in pedagogical practice.

Thus, the strengthening of EBL at UT is not only a response to the technological development of Society 5.0, but also a representation of the commitment to higher education that is human-centered, adaptive, and oriented to the development of future competencies. This transformation positions UT as a distance education institution that is not only inclusive and flexible, but also transformative and globally competitive.

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