Roles of ICT for effective Tutor Support in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT :

Tutors are an important character in order to provide effective open and distance learning. This paper will explore the personal experience of an OUM tutor in utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities in supporting the tutors' multi-roles. The paper will look at the use of ICT by a tutor in 3 stages namely pre-tutoring, tutoring, and post-tutoring.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Open and Distance Learning, Effective tutoring.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tutors play an important role in supporting and optimizing learning for the open and distance learners. In order to meet various expectations from the learners from an open and distance learning (ODL) institution like OUM, it is essential for tutors to imagine the learner's experience of ODL from their perspective: as to '*think like a learner, then act like a teacher*' (O'Rourke, 2003). According to Mitra (2008), for quality contact-based tutoring in ODL, multi-roles are envisaged for an effective and efficient tutor namely the pedagogical or intellectual role; the social role; the managerial; the organisational role; and the technical role. The technical roles here refer to utilising and maintaining ICT for learner support.

Basically, a tutor's involvement in tutoring for a particular semester could be divided into 3 stages namely: pre-tutoring, tutoring, and post-tutoring. All these stages require tutors to fully make use of all the ICT resources available to meet the expectations of various parties i.e the

Pre-tutoring stage is the most beginning phase whereby the tutors are assigned to a particular course prior to the physical meeting with learners in the face-to-face tutorials. This stage includes the preparation of tutors to meet the learners for the first face-to-face meeting. This phase will normally take place before the commencement of a semester or on the first week of the semester.

Tutoring stage begins when tutors meet the learners to provide a total of ten hours tutorials divided into three sessions for mini semester and five sessions for normal semester. The duration of this stage will be normally 8 weeks for mini semester and approximately 14 weeks for normal semester.

While *post-tutorial stage* commences after the last face-to-face tutorial session up to the final examination takes place.

2.0 THE PRE-TUTORING STAGE

Before the semester begins, a tutor

needs to sharpen their ICT skills, which includes the ability in handling basic office applications i.e. Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, internet surfing skill as well as information retrieval skill.

During this stage, it is good to activate the online interaction on the myLMS discussion forum by providing the learners some basic information about the tutor himself/herself. This may includes a welcoming message (as shown in Figure 2.1) as well as providing the learners contact information for academic consultation purpose by posting an announcement from the tutor (as shown in Figure 2.2). The welcome message could serve as the icebreaker as well as to "warm-up" the learners to course that they are going to learn on a particular semester.
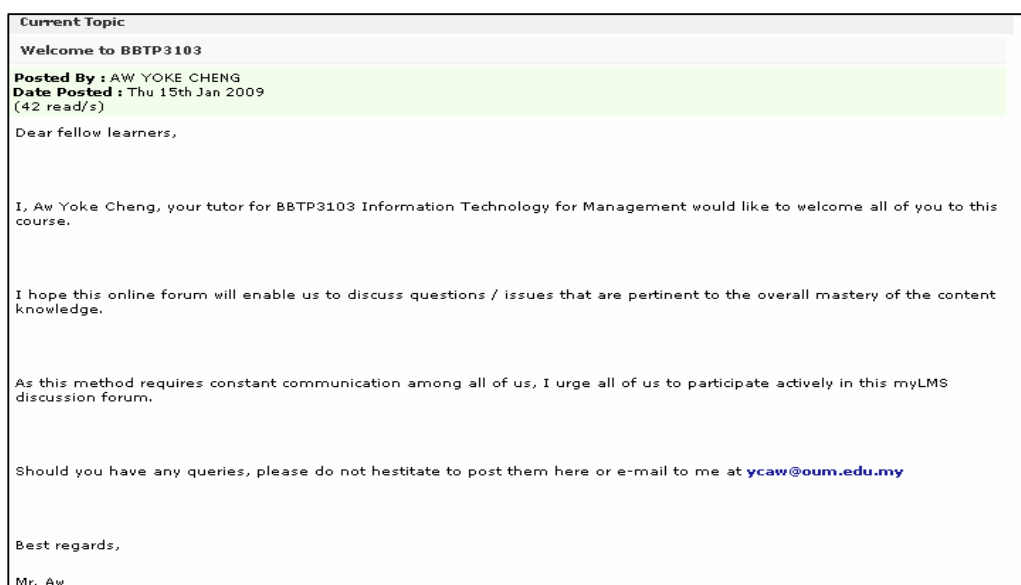

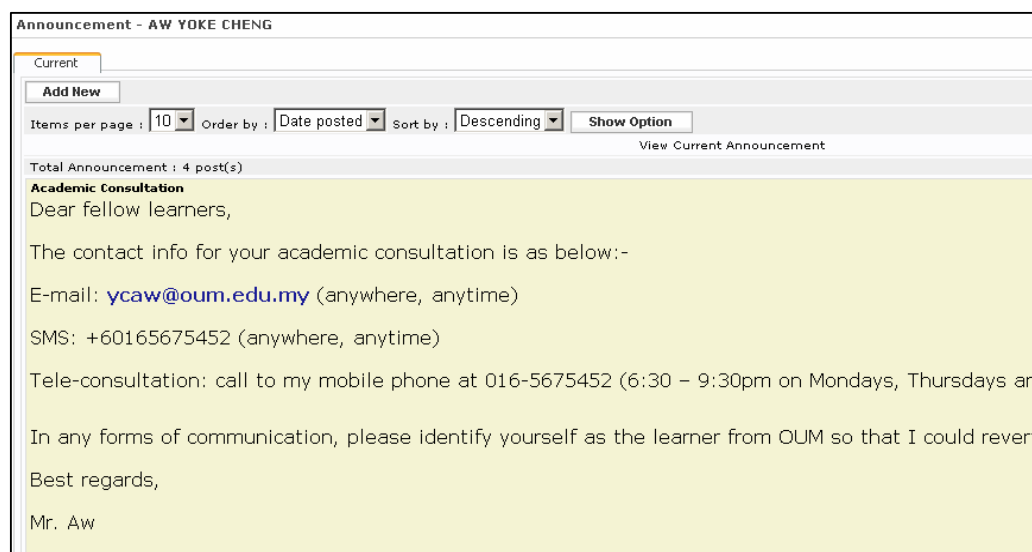Figure 2.1: A snapshot of the welcome message from a tutor.

Figure 2.2: A snapshot of an announcement posted on myMLS about a tutor's information on Academic Consultation.

It is also good for the tutors to know who their Subject Matter Expert (SME) is so that tutors could use this platform to address matters related to the course to the SME using the tutor-SME platform under the same myLMS.

3.0 TUTORING STAGE

During the tutoring stage, it will be important for tutors to reinforce the use of available ICT resources at OUM which includes the myLMS, myGMail, myLibrary and the i-radio for the learners to maximize their learning experience.

3.1 Digital resources

During the face-to-face tutorials, a tutor could provide some useful weblinks related to the areas of the course for learners to browse to the internet to acquire up-to-date information. A tutor could also suggest some additional readings from the resources available at the TSDAS (Tan Sri Dr. Abdullah Sanusi) digital library by referring the learners to certain e-books and e-journals.

3.2 Posting of announcements

To keep the learners informed, posting of announcements on academic as well as on the administrative matters could be done via myLMS (as shown in Figure 3.1). This serves as assistance to the administration at the learning center as a reminder for the learners.

AW YOKE CHENG
Thu, Jan 15, 09

Thursday, January 15, 2009 · Permanent

Date and venue for the upcoming tutorial classes

Dear all,

Kindly make sure we refer to the latest announcement posted by the administrators of our learning centre (En. Izral & Pn. Suhada) to ensure we meet at the correct dat

Thanks,

Regards,

Aw

[Source: http://lms.oum.edu.my/modules/announcement/viewann.php?catalog=B03&annID=18273&module=myorg]
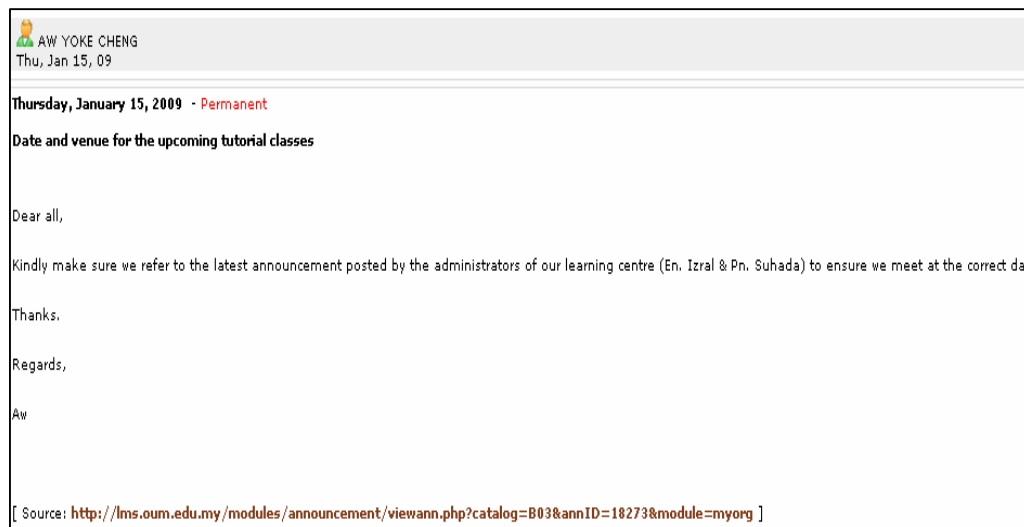
Figure 3.1: A snapshot of an announcement posted by a tutor on an administrative matter.

3.3 Online tutoring

This require tutors to fully utilizing the available ICT resources at OUM i.e. myGMail and myLMS forum.

MyGmail is usable in asynchronous communication that may be to a learner or to a group of learners and learners can choose when to reply. Sometimes, instead of posting their questions openly on the myLMS forum, learners may find it more conformable to send e-mails to the tutor's GMail, where tutors could render their assistance to learners on case-by-case basis.

MyLMS discussion forum is the form of asynchronous discussions that allow learners to join in and express their views at any time. Other than answering the questions posted by learners, a tutor could also post certain topics or current issues

related to the areas that have been taught during the face-to-face tutorials as to stimulate collaborative online learning among the learners (as shown in Figure 3.2). The topics may not require definite answers instead it could be something that is industrial relevance, which the answers could be open-ended. Tutors could also use this avenue to clarify any doubts pertaining to the written assignment given to the learners.
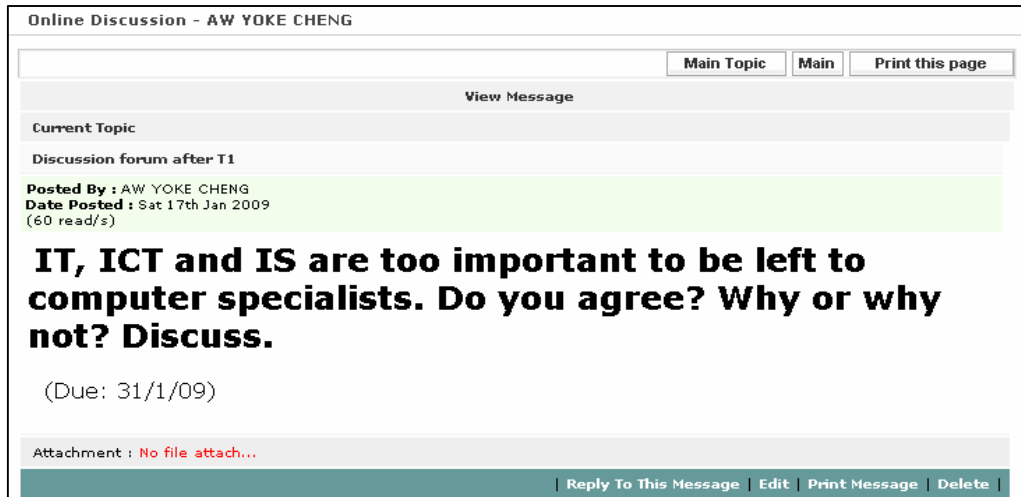

Figure 3.2: A snapshot of a topic posted by a tutor on the myLMS forum

3.4 Monitoring the online participation

MyLMS provides a useful tool to track the number of posting done by the learners under the cares of the designated tutor for a particular course (as shown in Figure 3.3). This is very useful for tutors to monitor the progress of learners' participation. This will allows tutors to identify the groups of active and passive learners on the myLMS forum and necessary action could be taken to encourage the passive learners to be more active. This could be done by addressing it to the learners during the face-to-face tutorials. The five marks allocated for online participation could serve as motivator. The tutor may also outline their expectations on both quantity (frequency) and quality (creativity, contribution and maturity of thinking) of their messages posted on the myLMS discussion forum.

As a tutor, it will be a surprise if ones discover some learners who are passive during face-to-face tutorials could be active participants on the my LMS discussion forum.

User Fullname	Student ID	Tutorial 2 Discussion	Tutorial 3 Discussion	Tutorial 4 Discussion	Tutorial 5 Discussion	Tutorial 1 Discussion	Assignment	General	Message Post by User	Total Message
AIDA AZLINA BINTI MUSTAPAT	780601086154	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	82
ANUSHA A/P KRISHNAN	861020595262	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	7	82

Figure 3.3: A snapshot of a tutor's myLMS Online Discussion Monitoring tool.

4.0 POST-TUTORING STAGE

The role of tutor will not just end after the face-to-face tutorials have over. The tutors are expected to provide marks on the learners' formative assessments. Also, the tutors are still shouldering their responsibility to get the learners prepared for their final examination. The myLMS forum could still be an active platform of tutors and learners communication as this moment will be very critical for tutors to clarify any doubts pertaining to the subject matter as well as to minimize examination anxiety among learners.

4.1 Managing learners assessment using Online Marks Entry System (OMES)

It is a tutor's responsibility to provide timely feedback to the learners on their formative assessments, which consists of quizzes, online participation, and written assignment. For this, a tutor need to familiar with the web-based tool provided by OUM namely Online Marks Entry System or OMES in short (as shown in Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: A snapshot of a tutor's OMES menu.

Other than to provide grades for assessment, the marking process also serves the purpose to generate comments in order to provide feedback. As such, for the written assignment by learners, the tutors need to diagnose and highlight the weaknesses or mistakes so that it could allow learners to seek for ways to improve themselves. A sample comments by a tutor on a learner's written assignment is shown in Figure 4.2.

4.2 Final examination preparation

In order to prepare learners to their final examination, tutors may refer the learners to the past examination papers, which is located as one of the i-Tools of the TSDAS digital library. A features write-up on the 15th issue of the Tutor Connexxions by Aw (2006) could be the reference in providing some tips for effective preparation of learners for final examination.

No	Student ID	Student Name	Q1 (3%)	Q2 (5%)	Q3 (20%)	Q4 (5%)	Q5 (2%)	Submit Date - From Student	Comments
19.			1.5	3	15	3	1.5	15/11/2008	Introduction: Too brief. You may consider to provide brief information on the background of the company (nature of business, vision, mission and objective) and a brief history of the information technology department. Information management: Too brief. You may consider how the manager ensures that his organization receives an accurate, timely and reliable information. Information technology: Too brief. You may consider to elaborate on how the managers manage those IT components. Knowledge workers: Too brief. You may consider to discuss how the manager manages knowledge workers using effective people management. Conclusion: OK but you have not include the interview transcript.

Figure 4.2: A snapshot of a tutor's comments on a learner's written assignment

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5.0 CONCLUSION

There are a lot of ODL collaborations among learners and tutors that could take place using ICT. Learners could engage other learners and their tutors in ways that simply not possible without the presence of ICT. Effective tutoring could only be possible if everyone of us are committed in utilizing the available ICT resources.

Note: OUM is the proprietary owner of the myLMS portal, OMES and Tutor Connexxions.

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