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The puzzle of how higher education learning does in post-COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has exhibited a significant impact on higher education learning. Campus closure or social distancing has been handled by University management, in limited or emergency situations. However, the pandemic has also provided extraordinary lessons learned for the sustainability of higher education in Indonesia. During the post-pandemic period, online learning or blended patterns can be carried out enthusiastically. This paper emphasizes that post-pandemic learning should be strengthened by an evaluation process and a level of satisfaction. The quality assurance mechanism is carried out systematically, especially ensuring the evaluation of online learning and taking continuous improvement actions. The evaluation process is complemented by a customer satisfaction survey involving students, lecturers, and admin staff to ensure the mechanism meets standards. Students should get a favorable atmosphere to involve in learning with the support of adequate lecturer competence, communicative tutorials, easy-to-understand online platforms, and proper class management.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed many implications in educational learning, particularly higher education. Throughout the early 2020 to mid-2022 period, energy and thoughts were devoted to back up University learning to survive, amidst the pressure of the transmission of the COVID-19 virus in the University community. When the spread of the virus peaked, campuses had to stop learning activities overshadowed by social distancing rules that limited the mobility of the campus community. Higher education management has taken marked initiatives to respond to the change in learning to online classes and the supporting processes that moved through paperless, remote interaction, to support the achievement of learning outcome (Pandey et al., 2022). The adjustment took place smoothly and steady in many learning activities, with its dynamics within the limited abilities of either the lecturers, students, technology instruments, or learning media. Health or vocational education showed a lot of behavior response because the substance of learning requires guidance and skills of practice, which may not meet its goals in online classes.

In the post-pandemic period, online classes will be a primary and significant choice. For theoretical learning material, online class learning is still considered to be effective, supported by the ability and independence of students to review their learning (An, 2021). Experience of working in administration tasks, the availability of learning media platform,

information technology infrastructure, and adjustment initiatives during a pandemic are valuable assets for how this will become a primary concern for higher education learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. This may require a comprehensive set of HR competencies, an online platform design, communication skills, classroom management, and effective use of resources for supporting the blended learning efficiently (Huang et al., 2021).

It is acknowledged that learning during the pandemic is able to support higher education programs. However, one should truly question the extent of the effectiveness of study from home during this pandemic. Another question is whether it is true that online learning will become a basis in the post-pandemic period. The experience of implementing learning during a pandemic provides valuable lessons. We have gone through how learning activities suddenly changed, online learning activities became urgent, lecturer-student communication turned inconvenient, or management made flexible decisions with acceptable solutions. The experience during these two years of the pandemic (early 2020 to mid-2022) may be considered an emergency, but on the other hand it provides real advantages. Fortunately, management and procedures during a pandemic can be a valuable experience to be utilized and optimized in learning mode during a post-pandemic time (Pandey et al., 2022). This can guide elaborating the extent of the learning process and effectiveness that will occur in post-pandemic (Yoo et al., 2021). Experience during the pandemic can be a new approach to formulating the future of education and ensuring sustainable education in complex and uncertain atmosphere (Huang et al., 2021).

LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

University Management

The issue of online learning is a huge challenge that leads to the needs of introducing digital platforms in all learning programs as well as enabling digital technology to share the knowledge. This requires institutional changes and resources, as well as University's support to provide facilitation, managerial, or training needs for admin staff (Szopiński & Bachnik, 2022). This experience provides leadership capable of transforming change into positive and useful values for overseeing the post-pandemic period (Nugroho et al., 2021).

Based on experience during the pandemic, post-pandemic measures should require more focus on implementing a flexible curriculum, learning across study programs/universities, creative internship programs, entrepreneurship programs, or recognition of community social activities by students. Before the pandemic, in 2019, the Indonesian government launched the Independent Learning Independent Campus (*Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka/*MBKM) program which became a reference for higher education management to recognize various student activities that are aligned with the curriculum. This program is very relevant to be the safety valve of higher education during pandemic. However, the University management is required to carry out evaluation mechanisms to ensure standards of learning activities are met, such as instructional objectives, student involvement, and other aspects of the curriculum (Szopiński & Bachnik, 2022).

When the pandemic first spread-out in China, many international students then returned to their home countries, including Indonesia. While they were waiting for the pandemic to end, students could continue their studies or even transfer their studies to Indonesian universities. This cooperation provides managerial experience for the development of University collaboration and increasingly complex education management.

Blended learning experiences will be an alternative choice, adjusting the needs of the parties according to the achievement of learning outcomes. University management needs to identify online or offline learning modes, which provide motivation for independent learning, student satisfaction and achievement of learning participation (Dai & Qin, 2021; Huang et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2021). To provide convenience for implementing online tutorials, the University pays attention to the availability of online platform, lecturer competencies, good communication, class management, and effective use of resources (Huang et al., 2021).

Online learning in universities has been known for a long time. The pandemic stimulated higher interest in online classes in the student admission. University management can acquire the demand for online classes, especially for programs or fields of management and business, or other social sciences, by developing administrative and learning applications that provide social media interaction and student engagement. This online class education is expected

to support more revenue for University (Szopiński & Bachnik, 2022).

Meanwhile, the spread of COVID-19 may not have completely stopped. University management still requires anticipatory measures to reduce the incidence of similar infectious diseases on campus (Shah et al., 2020). To ensure the safety of the campus community, it is necessary to implement strict health protocols (Fernanda et al., 2021) or regulate social activities among students on and off campus, including suppressing post-holiday transmission, supported by the test-trace-isolate-quarantine rules (Ashcroft et al., 2022; Gillespie et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2018).

Lecturer

Lecturers are the forefront of implementing online learning and academic activities on campus. It is not easy to manage learning changes, curriculum adjustments, implementation of learning media platforms, and their various implications for lecturers' relations with students. Lecturers demonstrate a variety of responses to manage these changes. A study showed that only 13.6% of professors prefer online courses and half (52.3%) want to return to offline courses (Kim et al., 2020). This is probably due to the rather low ability of lecturers to adapt to online learning platforms, not preparing online learning media (modules, audio, video or other visual aids), or perceiving that online learning is unable to meet the target learning outcomes. It must be acknowledged that immersion is significantly higher in offline classes for both theoretical and practical subjects. Also, the interaction between lecturers and students is significantly greater in offline classes for both theoretical and practical courses (An, 2021).

On the other hand, lecturers may face psychological problems in front of the camera when learning online using video platform. The online class atmosphere, for a lecturer, can disrupt the hierarchical power paradigm that he/she gets in conventional classes (Hemy & Meshulam, 2021). This can disturb lecturers and make it difficult to accept the presence of online learning. Meanwhile, a study (Yuan et al., 2021) found that the image and sound of lecturers in video platform have a positive relationship with student involvement, learning satisfaction and enjoyment, while they have a negative relationship with student boredom. Instructor image is positively related to student achievement. The study suggested that video-audio media planning is integrated with instructional design enable to assist online video course development.

The attitude of lecturers towards online education regarding the usefulness and advantages felt by lecturers is a strong indicator that they accept it (Szopiński & Bachnik, 2022). This is an important point, which determines the success of online education. Therefore, this is a challenge for University management to support lecturer involvement. Lecturers need to obtain a variety of training and information about learning information technology and educational administration in general. It is hoped that the achievement of online learning will provide the same level of knowledge and competence as conventional learning.

Student

The success of online learning is determined by the extent to which students receive learning material. In the process of online video courses, success is determined by student satisfaction or attitudes toward online class delivery (Pandey et al., 2022). Psychologically, students feel the presence of a faceless lecturer showing better performance. However, the appearance of lecturers' faces also increases student satisfaction and excited interactions during online tutorials (Yuan et al., 2021).

Student engagement shows high interest during online video learning. A study (Kim et al., 2020) showed that students find satisfaction during the online course and 62.2% of them prefer the online course to the offline course. Meanwhile, 84.3% of students wanted online learning after the pandemic. The student have a positive perception of communication, technical or tutorial methods, and is enthusiastic about sending assignments or exams on schedule. This happens because students show independence in reviewing their learning (An, 2021). Students are also able to motivate themselves to add their learning time, adapt their individual learning styles, and repeatedly review video lectures (Huang et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, it was also found that low engagement of student during online video learning. Studies (Szopiński & Bachnik, 2022) showed that students absent themselves in video learning, or delay in submitting assignments and exams due to technical difficulties or reasons beyond the student's control. Many factors influence student obstacles in online learning, including limited internet connections, low

socio-economic conditions of students (Nugroho et al., 2020), or political factors faced by international students (Szopiński & Bachnik, 2022).

Fundamentally, students have different capabilities in studying and receiving learning material apart from socio-economic factors. Students who are less able to absorb learning material, less involved, or for other reasons, need to get offline tutorials to catch up for their learning. Offline meetings open lecturer-student interactions to shape cognition, affection and behavior in learning aspects. The blended learning approach is a way out or a solution to the weaknesses or obstacles to online learning, and can trigger students' self-learning motivation (Huang et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2021). Furthermore, students need a comfortable atmosphere through adequate lecturer competency support, communicative tutorials, easy-to-understand online platforms, and proper class management (Huang et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This paper provides an optimistic view that online learning or blended patterns can be carried out in the post-pandemic period. Even though many obstacles were found during the pandemic, the two years' experience is considered to have provided a lot of lesson learned on how to manage change and provided a way out for better online learning implementation. The significant improvements have occurred including: (i) adjustments to University management related to curriculum, learning across study programs/universities, use of online learning platforms, or adjustments to learning administration; (ii) lecturers are able to adapt to changes in curriculum, learning methods and use online platforms; (iii) students are able to take part in online learning with various limitations, and generally wish to continue online learning after the end of the pandemic.

What is of concern during the post-pandemic period is related to the process of evaluating and satisfying online learning. University management should carry out a steady and periodic quality assurance mechanism, especially ensuring online learning evaluations and taking continuous improvement actions. The evaluation process is complemented by a customer satisfaction survey involving students, lecturers, and admin staff to ensure content and mechanisms meet online learning program standards.

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