



## THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT DURING ONLINE LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

*Students' engagement can be defined as how much time, commitment, and effort is devoted to the learning process. Students' engagement is an important element in learning because it is a factor that affects academic success. During the emergency online learning due to covid-19 pandemic, some problems emerged because of the lack of learning engagement. This descriptive study was aimed to find out the problems faced by the students and the lecturers during the online learning as well as the tips to build learning engagement. The study was carried out in July 2020 to the students and the lecturers of Harapan Bangsa University. The data obtained from questionnaire and semi structured interview showed that although the implementation of online learning has been good, there were still some problems to be solved. Moreover, learning engagement was absolutely required during the online learning. It is expected that the result of this study may be useful for lecturers in designing the effective online learning and also for the students in understanding their role during the learning process.*

**Keywords:** *students' engagement, online learning, covid-19*

### INTRODUCTION

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, people are now faced with a new era, namely the New Normal. New Normal is a new order, habit, and behavior based on adaptation to cultivate a clean and healthy life (Ministry of Health, 2020). At this time, people have to get used to new life patterns such as wearing masks, hand washing habits, social distancing, changing working hours, and online learning.

The online learning system has actually existed for a long time and has been implemented by several institutions. However, when face-to-face teaching and learning activities are eliminated and all educational institutions are required to

carry out online learning, it does not mean that online learning can run smoothly without any obstacles. The students and the lecturers need to adapt to this immediate switch. The students are required to be autonomous learners. In addition, the lecturers' limitation in mastering Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is also an obstacle because it makes the teaching preparation process take longer.

However, online learning is not merely about the use of ICT in learning, but also about the interaction between teachers and students in this learning process in which involves ICT (Dixson, 2015). The engagement between lecturers and students in online learning, as well as other learning methods, is an important element because it is an

indicator of a learning process and self-development (Toro-Troconis, Alexander, & Frutos-Perez, 2019). Student engagement can be defined as how much time, commitment, and effort is devoted to the learning process (Kahn, Everington, Kelm, Reid, & Watkins, 2017; Ma, Han, Yang, & Cheng, 2015).

Engagement to learning includes three elements, namely behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement includes students' active participation in the learning process, such as accessing material, doing assignments, and so on. Emotional engagement is defined as students' affective attitudes towards lecturers, classmates, and the class itself. Cognitive engagement is about how students relate the knowledge gained to prior understanding and how students feel they need the material (Buelow, Barry, & Rich, 2018; Pellas, 2014).

Student engagement is an important element in learning because it is a factor that affects academic success (Buelow et al., 2018; Dixson, 2015; Hew, 2016). Students who have behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement tend to have higher achievement than students who undergo online learning only for graduation requirements. Good interaction between students and teachers will help students actively participate in online learning. Furthermore, active student participation will produce a deeper impression for students in interpreting the learning obtained.

Student engagement to learning can be influenced by several factors, such as students centred and collaborative learning methods, interactions between students and teachers, and learning environments such as media and facilities that support learning (Kahn et al., 2017). In online learning, this engagement problem becomes a very significant factor because lecturers and students do not meet face to face but use technology

as an intermediary, allowing the obstacles to be experienced to be even greater. Therefore, a good communication between lecturers and students and choosing the right media are highly required (Buelow et al., 2018; Hew, 2016). Several studies have shown that the use of social media can facilitate communication between students and teachers (Kahn et al., 2017). In addition, choosing the right learning method and platform also plays a role in the success of learning. It is expected that the lecturers can apply learning methods that suit the needs of students and consider existing limitations. Furthermore, technical problems such as networks and internet data should also be considered so that the learning activities may be fun and does not burden the students too much.

Considering the importance of the engagement between students and lecturers in the learning process, the knowledge about learning engagement is necessary to be understood by both the lecturers and the students. For lecturers, educators should understand that learning is a process of receiving, processing, and producing so that in designing learning it is necessary to consider several things such as student needs, student backgrounds, and student involvement. Learning as a process means that students' understanding is not obtained instantly, but it takes time and effort to digest the knowledge gained. In addition, teaching is not only about providing material but also guiding students to understand the material so that even though learning is done online, interactions must be maintained properly. Meanwhile for students, students should be aware that the subject of learning is the students themselves, so that students should be active in obtaining knowledge and trying to understand it. Furthermore, online learning is highly depending on students' motivation, how students manage their learning strategies, and students' independence in learning. Thus,

for the success of online learning, the students and teachers' understanding of learning engagement is definitely needed.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive research that describes the importance of students' engagement as well as providing some tips obtained from the lecturers' experiences during online learning. Descriptive research is defined as a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon studied. The object studied in this research is learning engagement. The data was obtained from questionnaire distributed to students as well as lecturers and some semi structured interviews conducted to some lecturers.

This study was carried out in July 2020 at Harapan Bangsa University. The participants of this study were classified into two groups, student group and lecturer group. The sample for student group was taken from Undergraduate of Nursing Students. Meanwhile, the sample for lecturer group was taken randomly.

As mentioned above, the instruments used in this study were questionnaire and interview. The purpose of this study was to find out the obstacles experienced by the students and the lecturer during the online learning as well as to get some tips about how to build learning engagement during online learning.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on a survey conducted on students at Harapan Bangsa University, some of the most common obstacles were internet connection (71,4%), internet data (57,1%), and assignments (28,6%). Meanwhile, from the lecturers' side, the obstacles faced include the lack of

monitoring of students' understanding because online communication, of course, cannot be as optimal as direct or face-to-face communication.

Although there were still many obstacles, the students stated that they were satisfied with the online learning conducted at University of Harapan Bangsa so far (64,3%) and they preferred to have Blended Learning later when the pandemic has overred (57,4%).

Related to learning engagement, the students said that overall, the communication between lecturers and students during this online learning was good. However, the tight schedule and the number of assignments with strict deadline made them difficult in managing their time and more focused on the assignment submission rather than the knowledge mastery itself. From the lecturers' point of view, they mentioned they had to do hard effort to monitor the students' progress one by one. Moreover, the lecturers were required to keep reminding the students to keep on track, specifically related to assignment submission and students' active participation.

Considering some problems above, at the end of the interview the lecturers were asked to give suggestions or tips based on their experiences during online learning related to how to manage online learning especially in building learning engagement. Here is the summary of the tips.

### 1. Train lecturers in online learning

The first thing that must be prepared before implementing online learning is to train lecturers about online learning. Online learning is something new for some lecturers. Therefore, before plunging into it, lecturers need to know what and how online learning is. In addition, trained lecturers will increase the students' trust toward the course. Furthermore, it will motivate students to learn.

### 2. Rethink the lecture format

What is meant by rethinking the lecture format is to review the syllabus and lesson plans that will be used. We need to consider which topics or activities can be delivered online and which cannot. Activities that cannot be done online include activities that require special equipment that is only available in laboratories and activities that require students to visit certain places that were closed during a pandemic. For those kinds of activities, we need to change them into the other activities that possible the be done online. Or the other possible solution is by postponing it to the next semester activities and take the materials from next semester to be taught this semester as the exchange.

3. Choose the platform or media

Several important things to consider in choosing a platform or media include educators who must know the platform well so that they can operate it optimally. In addition, the platform must be easily accessible to both educators and students. The purpose of choosing a platform or media is to facilitate interaction and communication between educators and students.

4. Be organized

The next tip is to organize the lecture page neatly so that it makes it easier for students to understand the lecture. We recommend that the lecture page be able to properly communicate the identity of the course, learning objectives, rundown meeting, assignments and evaluations that must be done. Examples of components of online learning pages include covers, opening greetings, course identities, topics per meeting, as well as what to do in each meeting such as forums, video presentations, quizzes, and attendance.

5. Welcome the students

Welcoming students is very important in building student engagement with lectures. At least once a semester it is necessary to hold an online meeting between students and teachers so that they can meet face to face. The purpose of this online meeting is to establish closeness between students and teachers, to explain the lecture syllabus, and as a sharing platform for students. In this meeting students can share the problems they face during online learning and their hopes for the next lecture. It is hoped that from this sharing session, educators can design learning according to the needs of students.

6. Set the goals

When the teacher explains the lecture syllabus, the lecturer should ensure that students really understand what they are going to study, what they have to do, what their rights and obligations are and the conditions that must be met to be able to pass from this lecture.

7. Chunk it!

Chunk it means Organizing the topic of each meeting in concise and clear information. Meetings that only focus on one specific point will be easier to understand than meetings that cover several points. This is because the student's ability to concentrate on something is very limited, generally not more than 20 minutes. More than that, students need to refresh their minds for a moment before continuing learning. Therefore, a short video presentation is recommended.

8. Vary and gamify the activities

To avoid boredom in online learning, interesting and varied activities are needed, for example by making video presentations that are interesting and not monotonous, by making quizzes with various types of questions and interesting feedback if students can achieve certain grades, the use of free

online learning games such as kahoot, quizlet, and others.

9. Monitor the progress and give feedback

Monitoring the progress of learning is something that is often forgotten by lecturers because they are too busy in preparing the learning itself. Giving feedback to students is very important to motivate students so that they can do better in the next assignment. At least once a week, educators need to monitor student learning progress so that if there are problems they can be immediately identified and resolved. In essence, good communication is needed to keep lecturers and students connected to each other.

10. Encourage self-assessment

Self-assessment is an individual review performed to identify elements that can be improved or exploited to achieve certain predefined goals. In order to assess themselves, students must set their own targets for the activity, for example a quiz. After working on the quiz and it turns out that the results have not met the target, the student must retake the quiz until he can reach the predetermined target. Therefore, lecturers need to facilitate online learning with quizzes that can be done repeatedly. The more Exercises are taken, the deeper understanding is gained.

11. Be flexible

One of the advantages of online learning is that it is flexible, which means learning is not limited by time and place. To facilitate this, lecturers need to develop a timeline when the materials and assignments can be accessed by students. Give a grace period, for example 1 week for each meeting.

12. Update your content

The last tip is to always update the content of the lecture. Topics that have been used for years may be strange to current students and are no

longer relevant. By using topics that are up to date and relevant to students' backgrounds, it will be easier for students to understand the material presented and easier to be involved in discussions.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, it is undeniable that adjustment and self-reflection are still required to provide high quality teaching and learning. Although the implementation of online learning has been good, there are still some problems to be solved. Learning engagement is one of the important elements in learning because it can determine students' academic success. Learning engagement can be built when there is active participation from the lecturers and the students in the learning process. Some tips above can be applied to motivate the students to be active learners.

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