

Qualitative of College Student Engagement During Online Learning for Indonesian Students

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Abstract

College student engagement is a sense of student engagement in carrying out their learning in terms of academics (expecting good learning outcomes), emotional (curiosity and a feeling of fun participating in class), cognitive (having good self-regulation skills, wanting challenges in learning), and behavior (full attendance and active involvement in class). As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, learning systems around the world have been affected until they suddenly change from face-to-face to online learning. This change in the learning system makes students need to adapt again. In this process, college student engagement becomes a challenge that must be faced. The purpose of this research is to provide an overview of college student engagement during the 2 years of online learning. The total participants in this study were 291 students who had filled out a survey containing open-ended questions. The data in this study were analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 to code and categorize responses. The result is that there is a change in academic engagement to be effective in collecting assignments and being flexible, the grades are also good but not accompanied by understanding the material. In behavioral engagement, attendance is more awake but there is no involvement or activity. In cognitive engagement, there is a new strategy in learning, namely recording and adaptation because it is the responsibility of the learner. Lastly, in emotional engagement, students feel bored, lazier and more stressed during online learning because they cannot meet directly with lecturers and friends.

Keywords: college students, online learning, student engagement, Covid-19.

1. Introduction

Covid-19 has become a major topic that has stolen all the attention of people around the world for the past two years. Covid-19 was identified as a new variant of a pre-existing virus, namely severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) (Nicola et al., 2020). Humans who previously had the freedom to gather with family and friends without restrictions or go anywhere without any restrictions and rules. Now, humans are forced to quickly adapt to this new situation without warning or preparation. The emergence of Covid-19 has had a huge impact on various fields of human life.

In this study, the researcher wants to focus on one of the fields that has a very large and important role in human life, named education. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), around 80% of students worldwide have been affected by COVID-19. Even though two years have passed, students in the world, especially Indonesia, are still affected by partial or complete school closures. The main impact of Covid-19 is

that the learning system that initially met face-to-face on campus in class became only through screens at home. As well known, home cannot be a supportive place for most of the time students should use to study well. Disturbances that arise at home will be more and more difficult to control than on campus.

- College student engagement is the determinant of study success
- Online learning makes changes to college student engagement
- The score is getting better but the understanding of the material is getting worse
- Self-discipline is an important factor in maintaining engagement
- Interaction with friends and interaction with lecturers directly are the two things that students want the most

The result of the adaptations that students need to undergo, Zhang et al. (2021) stated that student engagement is a challenge that must be faced due to the transition to online learning. This is also supported by Lee et al. (2019: 985) that “students tend to be less engaged in e-learning than face-to-face learning because there is less interaction between students and teachers”. Appleton et al. (2008) stated that student engagement is considered to be something that requires more attention when in higher education. The higher the level of education, the greater the role of student engagement in learning success (Fredericks & McCloskey, 2012).

According to Appleton et al. (2006), there are four dimensions of college student engagement, namely behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and academic engagement:

1.1 Academic engagement

Academic engagement was previously an integral part of behavioral engagement. However, academics were then separated into those that were more focused on learning activities and behavioral to general behavior in academic and non-academic activities. According to Appleton et al. (2006), academic engagement consists of activities that lead to academic results. The activities in question are the accuracy of task collection, homework assignments, and the accumulation of Semester Credit Units. All behaviors related to academics and their level of completion are included in academic engagement (Waldrop et al., 2018). In this dimension, all behaviors or activities described can still be observed directly.

1.2 Behavioral engagement

According to Groccia (2018), a student can engage in behavioral engagement if he has participation, effort, and a great intention to be active and involved in the learning process and activities on campus. In this dimension all behavior can still be observed directly.

Behavioral engagement can be defined in three ways (Fredericks et al., 2004). First, this definition refers to student behavior that is obedient to both school rules and class rules such as attending class, doing assignments, and not creating procrastination problems (Waldrop et al., 2018). The second definition refers to behaviors that are shown to show their presence in the classroom such as actively asking questions, trying to do assignments, answering questions, paying attention, and concentrating (Appleton et al., 2008). However, in subsequent research, behavioral engagement is separated into behavioral engagement itself and academic engagement (Fredericks & McCloskey, 2012). The second definition that becomes the place of separation, namely the effort to do the task and the accuracy of the collection finally falls into the category of

academic engagement. The third definition refers to active behavior to participate in activities or events on campus. These definitions are not restricted to academic or non-academic activities. If it is still related to activities on campus or even outside campus for community service, it will be included in behavioral engagement.

1.3 Cognitive engagement

The discussion in the cognitive engagement dimension leads to the future orientation of students. Students like the challenges given in every academic and non-academic activity from lectures. Students do more than set standards and continue to expect challenges (Trowler, 2010). In cognitive engagement, the discussion is about students' coping methods when experiencing difficulties, goal-setting, values that underlie students' attitudes and behavior (Fredericks et al., 2004; Appleton et al., 2006). The topic of discussion in this dimension cannot be observed directly because it comes from each individual. The discussion includes the purpose of life and the values adopted in life.

1.4 Emotional engagement

According to Fredericks et al. (2004), the discussion of emotional engagement is closely related to the mood of the day and the emotions of students during lectures. Emotions that include emotional engagement are interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and worry. The topic of discussion in this dimension cannot be observed directly because it comes from each individual. Both academic and non-academic activities are followed by a high sense of interest, a sense of being considered a member of a community, and a sense of enjoyment and without coercion in participating in all these activities (Trowler, 2010). In this dimension, the discussion is about whether students like or not with lecturers, bored or interested students with learning, likes or dislikes university, and feels happy or sad about university. In this dimension there is also a discussion of students' social relationships with teachers and peers (Waldrop et al., 2018).

2. Method

2.1 Participants

This study was a qualitative survey that involved 291 college students: 100 males (34.4%) and 191 females (65.6%). Researchers divided the age categories of participants into five age groups, namely 18-19 years, 20-21 years, 22-23 years, 24-25 years. Out of the five age groups, the highest frequency of participants was the age group of 20-21 years as many as 154 people (52.9%). With 52.9%, this means that half of the participants in this study came from the age group of 20-21 years. Furthermore, the age group that has the lowest frequency is 24- 25 years as many as 5 people (1.7%) only. Based on the demographic data displayed from the duration of online learning, the researchers first divided them into three categories, namely participants who had undergone online learning for more than 2 years, ranging from 1-2 years, and participants who had just undergone online learning or accumulated online learning under one year. From the data obtained, the most participants experienced online learning 1-2 years with 232 people (79.7%).

2.2 Instrument

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative type of research. Qualitative research is research that focuses on in-depth and thorough understanding usually from natural/reality backgrounds in society and is characterized by the absence of the use of numbers (Howitt, 2016).

After the data was collected, the researcher used an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to process and analyze the data. Science is an approach that describes a person's life from the point of view of his social world (Frost, 2011).

Data was collected using a survey containing open-ended questions by distributing forms online. Data dissemination was carried out from January 2022 to February 2022. The questions were “What is the difference between online learning and offline learning? What are the difficulties during online learning and offline learning? A real example of the difference? The reasons underlying the behavior?”

The analysis was carried out by assigning a theme to the participant's response with codes for the topics discussed by the participants. Then, the codes were categorized based on the theoretical dimensions of college student engagement using MAXQDA 2020 with the help of data visualization from the word cloud.

3. Findings and discussion

In the results of data analysis obtained from a survey using MAXQDA 2020, the themes that emerged from participant responses to open questions in the survey were divided into four dimensions of college student engagement, namely behavioral engagement, academic engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement.

3.1 Academic engagement

In the thematic analysis of academic engagement, it was found that indicators that often appeared in response to open questions were asked, namely understanding of the material (64.1%), focus on attending classes (49.8%), explanation of material (26.3%), doing assignments (21.6%), practicum courses (15.1%), behavior during exams (10.8%), collection of assignments (7.3%), and course values during online learning (6.6%). A more complete visualization can be seen in Figure 1.

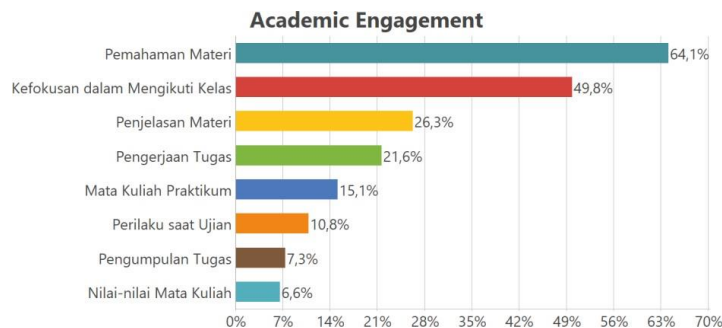


Figure 1. Academic engagement thematic description of college student engagement

In the academic engagement dimension, things and activities that fall into this dimension, such as completing all assigned assignments, timely submission of assignments, and time invested in completing education, get good grades so that you pass each course (Appleton et al. 2006). Based on the analysis, it is known that most of the participants experience difficulties during online lectures, especially in understanding the material as stated that “The reason is because they find it difficult to understand the material during online lectures” (Participant 99). The student also added that some courses that were already difficult in nature became increasingly difficult to understand during this online learning.

Still related to understanding the material, one of the factors that determine whether or not a material can be understood is the level of concentration or focus of the students themselves. This theme is the second most discussed theme by students. They themselves realized that the challenge of staying focused during online learning was very difficult, namely that it was “a bit more difficult to concentrate” (Participant 263). Students also mention this as a drawback of online learning.

“There are some clear shortcomings in online learning, the main one being the lack of focus between learning-learning units. From this lack of focus, such as not being able to get a clear explanation due to an inadequate internet connection, will be able to create a significant learning loss.” (Participant 110)

In addition to the place, a good explanation of the material will result in a good understanding of the material as well. According to students, explanations of material by lecturers during online learning still require different methods of explanation. Some lecturers only read from PPT, as conveyed by students, namely “Lecturers only read PPT” (Participant 70). There are also those who apply the learning method with students independently first understanding the material by making PPT, then presenting it in front of the class, as stated that “compared to lecturers who explain the material, some lecturers prefer students to present and explain the material themselves” (Participant 22). The learning method applied is called asynchronous teaching, which is a way of teaching when the lecturer records the lesson first and disseminates it to students in the form of a video. This is very compatible with the online learning system and allows student participation in different places and times. Teaching this way offers flexibility, but the problem as well as the challenge is the lack of social interaction, communication, feedback from lecturers, and requires commitment, motivation from students, and the need for lecturer guidance in learning (Ahshan, 2021). The right online learning system to keep students engaged is still in the trial-and-error phase. As stated by Muthuprasad et al. (2020) in his research that the teacher’s first instinct when suddenly changing to online learning was to imitate a face-to-face learning system but by using technology for online learning.

Most of the participants in this study did not turn on the camera and did not take the initiative to start turning on the camera. In addition to causing less interaction, it is also known that turning on the camera during online learning makes students more productive and engaged with lectures. Another learning system that is an option to increase student engagement is with small groups (Sayad, 2021). The division of students into small groups and divided into breakout rooms makes the scope of interaction smaller. Some students stated that they were embarrassed to communicate in online meeting rooms because they were listened to by all class members. So, dividing into smaller groups can be an option.

3.2 Behavioral engagement

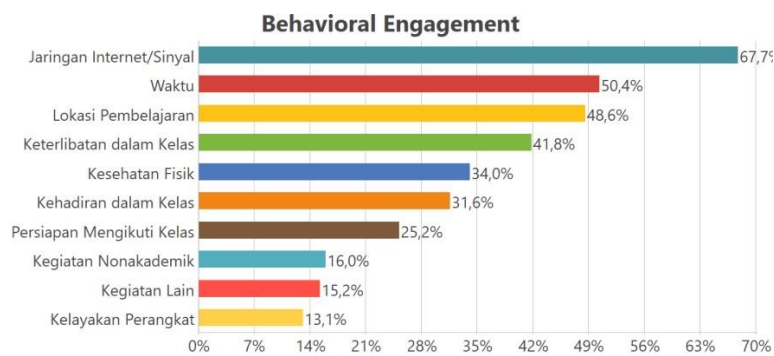


Figure 2. Behavioral engagement thematic description of college student engagement

In the thematic analysis of behavioral engagement, it was found that indicators that often appeared in response to open questions were asked, namely internet/signal network (67.7%), time (50.4%), learning location (48.6%), involvement in class (41.8%), physical health (34%), class attendance (31.6%), preparation for class (25.2%), non-academic activities (16%), other activities (15.2 %), and the feasibility of the devices used during online learning (13.1%). During this online learning, almost all students who filled out the survey answered that they had difficulties with this internet signal/network, as stated by participants, “internet network and connection and rotating power cuts” (Participant 117). There are also areas where the house is already basically a bad signal so it will be very difficult in this online learning, as stated by the participant “in some areas there is still a lack of internet access which is a necessary requirement in supporting online lectures” (Participant 177). This is the same as stated in his research by Akyildiz (2020).

During this online learning period, students feel that one of the advantages is that flexible time is not as rigid as offline, as stated that “you can do it flexibly at anytime and anywhere” (Participant 241). As told by students, “not all students can express their opinions directly during online learning because of the many factors that cause this to happen, namely the decrease in student enthusiasm due to boredom, too many assignments that are always given by lecturers and others” (Participant 137) and “Online often overslept, onsite couldn’t sleep in class. Online often eat while in class, onsite cannot eat in class” (Participant 247). The excerpt from the participant’s story is as follows: “If there is a class schedule in the morning, I usually wake up and get ready to go to campus, and leave early in the morning. Now when I go online, I usually wake up later in the day and when I start class, I follow it lying down” (Participant 163). However, more and more students consider online learning to be flexible and relaxed, which requires less time, and actually makes it too easy for students, so that finally students who have never been late for class in face-to-face lectures become late for this online learning. Waking up late was the reason that the students cited as the reason, as described, “skipped morning class because I was sleepy” (Participant 226).

3.3 Cognitive engagement

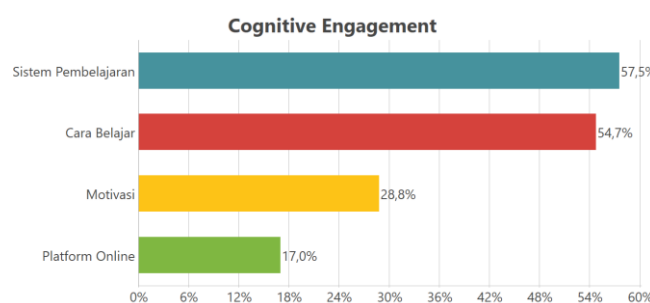


Figure 3. Cognitive engagement thematic description of college student engagement

In the thematic analysis of cognitive engagement, it was found that indicators that often appeared in response to open questions were asked, namely the learning system (57.8%), learning methods (54.7%), motivation (28.8%), and platforms. online (17%). The changing learning system makes students also adapt their way of learning in attending classes. With online learning, it is easier to access sources of discussion and lecture material on the internet and this can be done simultaneously with lectures and while seeking additional explanations. In addition, students stated that with online learning, they could find new learning methods. This is stated in the following excerpt from the story by Participant 83:

“For me personally, this online activity makes it easier for me in lectures because I can study more independently, besides that I can also use a laptop for a long time so that in that time I get used to using it. I also became accustomed to accessing platforms to read journals, besides that I became able to use several applications used for digital content creation.”

As a positive impact, adaptation of the way students learns and this online situation is used for things that benefit students as well as in understanding the material, namely recording or learning records. Recording can be a video from the lecturer who directly gives it, it can also be a voice recording which is mostly recorded by students. With this recording, students become more relaxed, not afraid to miss the material. In fact, there are students who leave their lectures, only enter the meeting room because they think they can study at another time, not necessarily at that time because there is a learning recording. This learning recording also helps students very well in doing assignments and understanding the material better because it can be repeated. This can be seen in the snippet of the story as follows: “can repeat the learning video, because usually lecturers provide learning video recordings” (Participant 247), “can watch video records because the network is less stable so that during class they cannot listen to the lecturer’s explanation properly, because of the intermittent sound” (Participants 176, 11-12), “a very prominent advantage is that we students can repeat the material that has been discussed by the lecturer in the previous class because the class has been recorded” (Participant 268). In accordance with the conditions described in this study, lecturers may record so that they can repeat it all the time. By being able to play the video several times and replay it, it can reduce cognitive load (Donham, 2022).

3.4 Emotional engagement

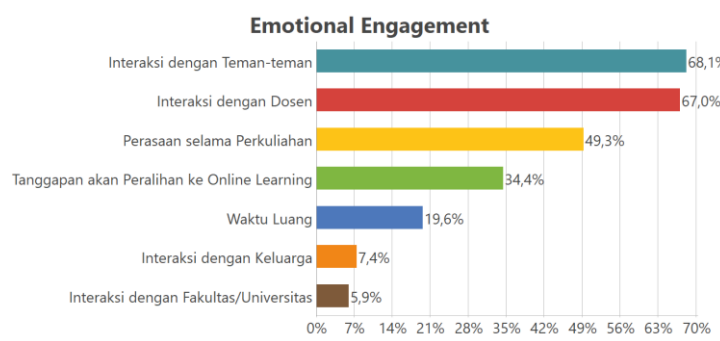


Figure 4. Emotional engagement thematic description of college student engagement

In the thematic analysis of emotional engagement, it was found that indicators that often appeared in response to open questions were asked, namely interaction with friends (68.1%), interaction with lecturers (67%), feelings during lectures (49.3%), responses to switching to online learning (34.4%), free time (19.6%), interaction with family (7.4%), and interaction with faculty/university (5.9%).

It is important to evaluate the affective outcomes of student engagement, such as student satisfaction, which reflect student attitudes. Student satisfaction indicates students' perceptions of their learning experience and is considered an important indicator of student outcomes as well as for evaluating the effectiveness of the online learning process. Student feelings during online learning and student satisfaction are one of the main factors that will determine student behavior during online learning (Sayad, 2021). Although helpful in times of pandemic some forms of distance education lack interaction between students and instructors which is very problematic. In the case of distance education, it is stated that students have been required to become independent learners more than the traditional system (Akyildiz, 2020). This is in accordance with what is described in the research. Students find it difficult to find time to discuss

or simply re-discuss the material that has just been explained, as stated, “for example, during online lectures we can work together with friends when there are lessons that are difficult to understand but when online, we can’t directly discuss the lessons we don’t understand” (Participant 99) and “it’s hard to find time for discussion with friends” (Participant 73).

In terms of social life, students want direct interaction not only through screens, as stated that “social life is different, during face-to-face lectures we meet people such as friends, lecturers, and others directly so that we have direct interaction with them, but when online learning everything switches to mobile or via the internet” (Participant 96). Students also feel that by meeting in person they can make friends with more people, not just one class but with younger siblings or older siblings, as stated that “other than that face-to-face maybe can get to know more friends than online learning” (Participant 91). Students said that it was quite difficult to reach or interact with lecturers in this online period, apart from obstacles such as signals, meetings via screen or chat, it was very different from physical meetings, as stated that “it is difficult to ask lecturers/friends for material if online” (Participant 75), “online lectures are very different from offline, the main difference is that the learning atmosphere in the classroom is at home and only limited via chat/call and so on, so that interaction with friends and lecturers becomes less” (Participant 75), and “not meeting friends, difficult to reach lecturers (where internet connection is often constrained online), online learning is constrained by weather and house conditions” (Participant 74).

At first, students responded positively to online learning, felt like a vacation, made it comfortable and felt effective because they studied at home, as it was said that “personally, by studying online, I am happier, more comfortable, more effective, and even a bit fat” (Participant 35).

However, over time, most students began to complain about this learning system. Starting from being lazy to listen to lectures, choosing to just lie down, and being dismissive of lectures. This was conveyed by the participants as follows: “when online learning it feels lazier to listen to lectures” (Participant 96), “I feel lazier when I study because I am only at home, the impression becomes more condescending to the lecture class” (Participant 73), and “sometimes online lectures make me bored and bored” (Participant 50).

4. Conclusions

This study focuses on describing college student engagement after the last 2 years of studying with an online learning system. Students show a fairly good adaptation from offline learning to online learning. Initially, both students, lecturers, and universities were still looking for the right system because of sudden changes so that learning was still less effective. After 2 years, many alternatives have been found to make online learning more effective. Students and lecturers have also adapted to existing online platforms.

However, the results of this study show that initially online learning was fun because it was flexible, it could be carried out anywhere, anytime, had more leisure time, and even felt like a “vacation”. Currently, students say that they need direct interaction with friends and lecturers. Students need motivation from friends and lecturers in learning so as to make learning more interesting and not boring. In fact, it is not uncommon for student responses to state that they prefer to sleep than listen to the lecturer’s explanation.

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