

# NURSING STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN AN ONLINE LEARNING COURSE

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## ABSTRACT

*To improve the quality of online learning in Indonesia higher education, Faculty of Nursing (FoN), Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH) supported by the Directorate of Higher Education in Indonesia that known as DIKTI developed an online course named Family Nursing. The course is a community nursing course in regard with the care of family nursing and it discusses the concept of family, family health, and the concept of a wellness family. The course was developed to achieve the mission of equitable access to information, relevance, and improvement of the quality of higher education throughout Indonesia, especially in nursing education. The online course was offered in one private nursing school in Jakarta area that never had any online course nor using online learning method in the delivery of their subjects. The aim of this report was to describe students' experiences in an online course. This paper reports on the evaluation work of one semester online/blended learning project funded by DIKTI. Sixty-five students, who experienced the online/blended learning method for the first time, were enrolled in the online course. The students have agreed to fill an evaluation online form after their mid semester exam. The evaluation form consisted of closed- and open-ended questions. This report revealed that most students (> 70%) agreed that their experience on the online (blended) learning was positive. However, it should be noted that, a quarter of students (27-28%) had less motivation to do the independent learning and perceived that the online learning was a learning experience that lack of support in developing their critical thinking. Several important themes further emerged including students' issues (lack of knowledge and motivation), teaching-learning process issues (lack of facilities and clarity) and academic staff issues (minimal feedback and different perceptions between academic staff and students). Though online/blended learning can be employed to support nursing and healthcare education, there is limited appreciation of students' experience and the use of e-learning. Context is also being considered as an important part when applying the online/blended learning, thus, this report provides a new understanding of students' opinions on their first experience when engaging with online learning at a private nursing school. This report further provides a number of inhibiting factors continue to affect the student experience.*

**Keywords:** *Nursing Students' Experience; Online (Blended) Learning*

## INTRODUCTION

An advance technology has transformed teaching and learning process from traditional learning to online learning. Traditional learning and online learning have now been combined in learning practices and is known as blended learning. Online learning continues to be a growing trend in educational uses of technology in Indonesia, including in nursing education. Using internet as media of online learning, the potential of using technology to deliver

widely distributed, creative, innovative learning to students across distances and at times suit individual needs is increasing (Kenny, 2001).

Dalhem & Saleh (2014) described that internet-based learning is a combination of content and instructional methods delivered via computers to facilitate a building knowledge and skills and assists acquisition of knowledge by both offline and online interactive strategies. Several studies have shown that

online learning produced positive benefits (Dalhem & Saleh, 2014; McCutcheon, Lohan, Traynor & Martin, 2015), but also at the same time has its challenges (Betihavas, Bridgman, Kornhaber, & Cross, 2016). The benefits include meeting the learning objective, improving the communication skills with colleagues and patients and increasing administrative skills (Dalhem & Saleh, 2014; McCutcheon, Lohan, Traynor & Martin, 2015) and exposing nursing students to other kinds of technology such as searching literature bases.

On the other hand, challenges from both faculty and students are faculty inexperience in teaching using blended learning method, students struggle to adjust to the online learning and from the operational concern such as internet access and classroom availability. This report aims to describe students' experiences in a blended course, using online as well as offline strategies, that was developed in one private nursing school in Jakarta that never had any online course nor using online learning method in the delivery of their subjects. The course was conducted through an online learning combined with weekly face-to-face meeting to facilitate discussion regarding the topic delivered.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In order to determine whether the development of the online course project led to project improvements, the evaluation assessed the student perceptions of the online (blended) learning experience. Sixty-five students in one nursing school in Jakarta, Indonesia, were enrolled in an online course – family nursing, from September 2017 to January 2018. It was the students' first-time experience in using blended learning method.

To evaluate the quality of the learning process, students were given an evaluation form in the middle of the semester. The evaluation form consisted of closed and open-ended questions. Evaluating the learning resources by surveying students is considered part of teaching practice, thus it does not require a submission for ethical approval (Betihavas, Bridgman, Kornhaber, & Cross, 2016). However, students were asked for their agreement before filling the online evaluation and understood that the evaluation participation is voluntary.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 shows that most students (> 70%) agreed that there were benefits of their online learning experiences. However, it should be noted that, a quarter of students

(28.4%) stated that online learning is less supportive for the development of the students' critical thinking.

Tabel 1. Students Perceptions of an online learning course

Students Response	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Online Learning		
Encouraging students to learn	75.4	24.6
Students should have their own motivation to success	94.6	5.4
Providing many resources to support the students' learning	75.7	24.3
Providing many activities to develop students' critical thinking	71.6	28.4
Facilitating the learning of the students with various learning styles	83.8	16.2
Lecturers provide appropriate resources for learning	83.8	16.2
Lectures provide accurate feedback	75.4	24.6
Lecturers provide clear topic and instructions on each assignment	79.8	20.2

Three main themes were emerged from the students' opinions for the improvement of the online learning, in this case, family nursing course (Table 2). The three themes related to students' issues, learning process' issues and lecturers' issues.

Table 2. Themes Of The Study

Theme	Sub theme	Example of the students' statement
Students' issues	Lack of self-motivation	<p>“Melalui pembelajaran ini, mahasiswa tidak dengan sungguh- sungguh belajar karena tidak semua mahasiswa yang memiliki fasilitas yang memadai”</p> <p>(Through this learning, the students do not really study because not all students have adequate facility)</p>
	Lack of knowledge	<p>“Karena susah dimengerti kalau online”</p> <p>(It is difficult to understand since it is online learning)</p> <p>“Proses belajar seperti ini membuat mahasiswa mau belajar tapi sedikit kurang dimengerti karena kurangnya informasi yang ditunjukkan dan tidak semua mahasiswa bisa membuka moodle karna kuota terbatas”</p> <p>(This learning process makes students want to learn but a little less understanding because of lack information shown and not all students can open the Moodle because of limited internet data).</p>
Learning process' issues	Lack of facilities	<p>“Menurut saya hanya saja fasilitasnya yang kurang memadai dalam mata kuliah ajaran ini...”</p> <p>(In my opinion it's just the lack of facilities in this course...)</p>
	Unclear process	<p>“Keterangan mengenai tugas lebih dirincikan, karna terkadang berbagai banyak pendapat hingga terkadang kurang tepat dalam mengerjakan tugas”</p> <p>(The description of the assignment should be more details, because sometimes there were different opinions amongst the students, which resulted in inappropriateness when undertaking the assignment.</p>

Lecturers 'issues	Minimum feedback	<i>"Feedbacknya saja yg perlu di tingkatkan dan penjelasannya lebih rinci dan lebih mendalam lagi"</i> (it is only the feedback that needs to be improved as well as the explanation to be more detailed and more profound)
	Varied perceptions	<i>"Semoga kedepannya kalau ada penugasan tidak ada salah persepsi pemikiran lagi"</i> (Hopefully, there will be no more misperception in the next assignment)

As described in the table above, the students as the respondents mentioned that there were students' issues during the online learning such as lack of self-motivation and knowledge. The students also recognized that they faced lack of facilities and was unclear about the assignment given. In regard with lecturers' issues, the students identified that the assignment feedback were minimum, and they experienced some different perceptions between the students and lecturers.

Based on the results, it appears that the implementation of this blended course was generally running well, although there were some obstacles that were faced both by the teaching team and the students. The setting of the project was in a private nursing school, where students and tutors experienced online learning using the online learning management system (Moodle) for the first time. Thus, the first challenge encountered was their motivation to learn (> 90% agree). In addition, the change of the learning system from teacher-centered to student-centered becomes an obstacle for the lecturers and students. This

condition might occur in the world of education, as a previous research stated that although lecturers and students realize the importance of the online learning in nursing education, but with the transition in their learning systems, they seem still resistant to such changes (Betihavas, Bridgman, Kornhaber, & Cross, 2016).

## DISCUSSION

This project evaluation revealed both benefits and challenges related to the transition from a traditionally face-to-face nursing program to a blended design. The results of the student opinions surveys highlight the importance of their first learning experiences using a mix of learning activities. In this study, more than 70% of students agreed that the online as well as face-to-face activities were worthwhile. However, a quarter of the students (24-28.4%) perceived that the online learning might not influence their critical thinking and motivation to learn. Even though during face-to-face meeting the academic staff could facilitate

discussion that might enhance critical thinking, lecturers did not meet students' expectation to give feedback and clear direction about the online assignments. In addition, academic staff feedback on their learning was important. McGowan and colleagues argued that a successful online (blended) experience needed students and academic staff preparations including: pre-work done for class that supports learning and the live class experience fosters student-teacher engagement (McGowan, Balmer, Chappel, Dickerson, & Lubekjo, 2014).

This study further revealed some suggestions to improve the online (blended) learning. The students realized that it is crucial to improve their self-motivation and knowledge since the learning requires students' active learning. On the other hand, the students also suggested that the availability of the facilities and academic staff were also important. A previous study supports these students' opinions that students were more engaged and motivated when encouraged by instructors (McLaughlin, Roth, Glatt, Gharkholonarche, Davidson, Griffin, & Mumper, 2013; Mehrdad, Zlfaghari, Ahrani, Eybpoosh, 2010) by carefully planned and facilitated the learning activities which lead to foster independent learning. It is also needed of

the students' confidence in using a computer, quality of the evaluation instrument, and the online learning materials to gain the effectiveness of an online-learning (Kala, Isaramalai, Pohthong, 2010).

As described in the findings, the students stated that they lacked motivation and unable to understand the material given from the online learning. It may have related to their previous experience which they never exposed to any online learning that requires students to be independent in their learning. Mehrdad and colleagues further explained that traditional learning more effective in students' motivation and independency while online learning was more effective in independency and capability (Mehrdad, Zlfaghari, Ahrani, Eybpoosh, 2010). It is considered as a method that can motivate students as they feel attracted to be in class and able to understand more as the course is delivered directly by the lecturer (Mehrdad, Zlfaghari, Ahrani, Eybpoosh, 2010). Meanwhile, online learning gives students the opportunity to use their ability in using computer literacy by downloading educational material and be independent to learn whenever they want. This project, however, was conducted using online as well as traditional method of teaching

because it is acknowledged that students need time to be familiar with the method used in teaching.

This project did not assess the students' computer literacy. Thus, involvement in this online learning would not guarantee computer skills improvement. This is supporting a previous report by Posey and colleagues (Posey & Pintz, 2017). However, it is worth noting that the students gain some new skills for learning using a Moodle system (Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2009). An author stated that online learning helps students to have deeper understanding as they tend to be independent to gain more information related to the course (Mehrdad, Zlfaghari, Ahrani, Eybpoosh, 2010).

Educator as a facilitator in blended learning can be effective if the educator provides a safe environment for students and able to adapt the unpredictable situations in the teaching-learning process (Hsu, 2012). Moreover, the shift from a traditional-teacher centered learning into student-centered learning might be perceived by the students as an additional work (Hsu, 2012; Posey & Pintz, 2017) and lead to dissatisfaction (Hsu, 2012).

Though this study provided new understanding regarding students' first experiences in an online (blended) learning

using qualitative data, more respondents who experience online learning for the first time are needed, so to represent nursing students in Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this report, there were benefits and challenges that were experienced by the students in the online learning course. In other words, the change from a traditional classroom to an online (blended) learning approach in nursing program can be challenging. It is noted for educators to promote the blended learning course, as it promotes students' independent learning. This requires careful planning, time and resources to develop a high-quality (online) blended learning course. The educators should also provide an attractive and encouraging environment for students to motivate them in their independent learning.

Students and/or teaching team who are familiarized to a traditional arrangement may struggle taking more responsibility for their own learning-teaching process. However, there is an indication that online (blended) learning add value to the educational experience.

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