Strengthening Student Engagement: How Student Hone Their Soft Skill Along Online Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic?

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to know how student hone their soft skill along online learning during Covid-19 pandemic. It is a descriptive research, applied through interview and questionnaire survey among 15 students taken Leadership Class, Academic Year of 2020-2021. This study has discovered by providing group discussion session, lecturer has generated enthusiasm for learning and student's interaction during online learning. To enhance students' soft skill along online learning, it is found by optimizing the usage of media and method of learning; up to date SLP, integrated the LMS with Whatsapp function through Collaborative Learning. Students are schooled by submitting mind mapping sub-subject task, class discussion, FGD team discussion, PPT submission and oral presentation in specific time limit every meeting. It is provided from up to date case studies in every meeting that help students in providing the practitioner's view, hone critical thinking, presentation and public speaking skills.

Keyword: Student Engagement; Online Learning; Collaborative Learning; Soft Skill

INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has led to temporary school closures in most countries around the world, affecting over 60% of the world's student population (UNESCO, 2020). The slogan "suspending classes without suspending learning" (EDB, 2020) became a good boosting spirit for finding ways to facilitate students' learning at home.

Why we need to keep learning going? Because of through learning on education, the development of human capital in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes can be formed. Albano (2012) and Othman (2012) emphasize that the employability asset consists of knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs). With globalization there is a big wave of change in the skills demand by employers. Most employers today look for soft skills rather than academic achievement as the primary criteria for the election of employee (Ismail et al., 2011). According to Al-Mamun (2012) soft skills is crucial for the enhancement of employment performance and career prospects. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are confronted with the challenge of producing graduates who meet the needed skills of employers. Therefore, the development of soft skills in a study plan is extremely needed. 21st century graduates are required to be equipped with skills that include in a set of diverse areas for examples collaboration, critical

thinking, leadership, communication, group decision- making, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, team motivation skill, social skills, understanding of diversity, responsibility, accountability and others.

Providing teamwork skills is becoming increasingly crucial for preparing them to succeed in today's complex and knowledge-driven economy and society. Effective teamwork requires knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) in a set of diverse areas including leadership, communication, group decision-making, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, team motivation, social skills, understanding of diversity, responsibility and accountability. Instructors use teamwork not only in class projects that aim to mimic real-life problems but also as a learning paradigm (collaborative learning). The accreditation boards, such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), require evidence that students are acquiring teamwork KSAs. In real life, employers continuously rank the ability to work in a team setting as among the most important attributes that they look for in new graduates.

The expansion of online education has brought new challenges for teaching and assessing teamwork KSAs. One of the concerns is that online programs emphasize technical skills but overlook the professional skills development of students to some degree (Pienaar et al., 2015; Barberà et al., 2014). Researchers discuss that integrating teamwork into online classes can increase students' teamwork KSAs as well as their satisfaction with online learning experiences (Biasutti, 2011; Myers et al., 2014). Meanwhile, employers are still have negative perceptions about online programs which the students lack soft skill compared to offline learning. This pre-notion is not grounded in empirical data, as the literature lacks studies comparing soft skills of face-to face and online students. However, it should be noted that several studies suggest that face to-face soft skill training programs are more effective than online ones (Piyawan et al.,2016).

Researchers discuss that integrating teamwork into online classes can increase students' teamwork KSAs as well as their satisfaction with online learning experiences (Biasutti, 2011; Myers et al., 2014). In online classes, collaborative learning and teamwork can help to reduce the sense of social limitation, which is one of the factors contributing to the low retention rate among online students (Baker et al., 2016), increase students' successes (Kurucay and Inan, 2017) and promote students' engagement with the course content, which is another predictor of dropouts in online programs (Choi and Park, 2018). Effective teamwork can also promote critical thinking in online classes (Tseng and Yeh, 2013).

Questions of the study

Although delivering learning content online is associated with numerous advantages, online classes often face skepticism. The issue of how to effectively engage students in online courses raises more questions than answers. Moreover, due to special circumstances happened nowadays, Covid-19 pandemic need special treatment to keep student vibrant and optimistic about their study. Online classes need efficient strategies to provide effective learning experiences to the learners (Chen et al., 2010). The following research questions guided the study:

(1) How lecturers generate enthusiasm for learning and student's interaction during online learning?
(2) How student hone their soft skill along online learning?

To answer the two research questions, a thorough and systematic search of relevant literature was conducted.

Literature Review

The situation with the COVID-19 outbreak outdared universities all over the world and compelled them to shift from traditional learning mode to online teaching and learning overnight (Dhawan, 2020). Universities faced challenges such as accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, readiness and management of quality. Martin (2020) stressed on the importance of quality management program and continuous development for the success of online learning and preparing everyone to be ready for any interrupted situation. Dhawan (2020) stated that The World Economic Forum reported there was a need for people to be ready for challenging circumstances, as the COVID 19 pandemic enforced many of them to change the way they perceive education. Ayebi-Arthur (2017) illustrated that by the example of New Zealand when seismic activities happened and the educators tried to overcome the barriers, they suggested robust Information Technology infrastructure as a prerequisite for online learning.

In fact, in the time of COVID 19, educators had not been concerned much about the quality of education rather they were busy with the adoption of online learning (Martin, 2020; Mhlanga and Moloi, 2020). The name of educational institutions was under inquiry. They had to maintain the quality of education and performance in the interrupted circumstances. Dhawan (2020) stated that each of these educational institutions was trying to find a suitable alternate to manage these challenging situations. Technical difficulties, students' and teachers' barriers, and preparedness were of many reasons for making the shift was challenging (Al Meajel and

Sharadgah, 2018; Parkes et al., 2014). Therefore, educational institutions should innovate solutions to deal with the challenging context during the COVID 19 period (Liguori and Winkler, 2020). Taken an example, China was the first country to deal with this overnight shift from offline to online classrooms that was, educators had changed their instructional methodology to deal with new circumstances and adapted to the situation of uncertainty (Yen, 2020). To face difficult circumstances, the educational institutions prepared a complete guide for students and instructors to ease the matter and helped everyone to access to online LMSs platform (Yen, 2020). Why we need the online platform like LMS? Because we need to make sure, students still could hone their soft skill. According to Al-Mamun (2012) soft skills is crucial for the enhancement of employment performance and career prospects.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative Learning (CL) has been proven to promote soft skills (Lee and Lim, 2012). Previous literature (Hennessey and Dionigi, 2013) and this study preliminary findings show that CL has been widely implemented in teaching and learning. Then again, question arises as to why students' mastery of soft skills is reported to be low. This indicates that although CL is implemented widely in the teaching and learning process, it does not often naturally happen in a group. Andresen (2009) stated that the evaluation of students' contributions in group work encourage them to participate actively in group activities. This is also helpful in overcoming the free rider issue which is often mentioned by previous researchers (Mohamad et al., 2013). Here arises the importance of online platform for the facilitation of CL environments. Research by Sancho et al. (2011) showed that CL promotes the development of soft skills. However, if collaboration does not happen in a group, the development of soft skills will not happen. Therefore, educators must properly design their online platforms to make sure that it can facilitate Online Collaborative Learning (OCL). Some studies indicated that online learning is proven to be more effective than traditional learning (Nurbiha, 2012). Hangman and Almekinders et.al. (2003), while suggesting the interweaving of soft skills in existing courses, describe two processes which were designed to integrate soft skills development in different academic settings. Encouraging lessons and insights for learning participation have also been presented by them.

Learning management System (LMS)

Many countries have introduced such curfew and lockout protocols from the outset to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic (Alawamleh, 2020). Educational entities have been shut down in Indonesia since the end of March, 2020. Therefore, universities have resorted to

continuing lectures online through various platforms. Obviously, this has an effect on communication as communicating virtually differs from face-to-face communication.

One of Online platform is Learning Management System (LMS). Each institution has its own LMS to manage the learning environments. In Andalas University, the LMS is named i-learn. LMS provides communication and collaboration that are featured in discussion boards or forums. LMS has been reported to be incapable of supporting interaction and communication and therefore this has led educators to utilize other applications as a replacement for a built-in discussion forum in LMS such Social Networking Sites (SNSs). The example of SNSs are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc. This also confirms the weaknesses of i-learn itself. I-learn has own discussion or forum features, but it is not real time basis and hinge on the network circumstances and number of user. Under the conditions of covid-19 pandemic, it's totally online learning, number of users increase significantly, this LMS often collapses. Of course, it might not effective for learning process. Mostly many researchers in the field of education have looked into the potential of adapting SNSs in their teaching and learning process (Marijana et al., 2011). This has left a gap in the body of knowledge on how SNSs can be integrated into LMS platform to facilitate Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) which would promote the development of soft skills. Therefore, with the signal availability problem as stated, then the study to propose effective online learning environment that can facilitate Collaborative Learning is significant. This point of view is supported by studies conducted by Petrovica et al. (2014), Thoms and Eryilmaz (2014), Iahad and Rahim (2012) where integration of LMS with SNSs functions can increase the quality of online learning. To provide the effective online learning environment, Whatsapp is chosen as SNS platform to bridge this weaknesses. Whatsapp is everyone's SNS, it is user friendly, and embedded by some features supported for learning such as Whatsapp Group (WAG) that can be utilized as media to have small group discussion (SGD), Voice Note to vocalize the presentation or opinion, Document-Picture-Video Attachment for sharing information and materials, and the important thing is real time basis. In details, WAG is divided into two categories; WA Class Group and WA Group (FGD team). There are one WA Class Group for all students and three WA Groups (FGD team) that consist of 5 students each.

In first meeting whether offline and online learning, Semester Learning Plan (SLP) will be presented to students about department learning outcomes, subject learning outcomes, sub-subject each meeting, media of learning, learning method, assessment, references, the lecturers. So, students have clear guideline about the whole semester for the subject. Every meeting, lecturer find the attractive method to generate the enthusiasm of student for involving them

into learning process. Before class, students should prepare and upload the mind mapping for the current subject into ilearn. For avoiding plagiarism and having some effort for reading and writing, the mind mapping should be in hand-writing format. It is aimed to make student in tune or having the big picture of the current subject that will be discussed. After taking 30 minutes discussion in WA Class Group, lecturer provide Case Study to be discussed in team in separate WA group (FGD team). This is effectively generate students' level of activity in discussion. Also it eases the individual assessment whether the student involve in FGD team discussion or not. More less one hour in FGD team discussion, alternately the students in one group prepare the PPT and also the oral presentation by utilizing Voice Note (VN) in Whatsapp app or they could use voice recorder also if its bigger data.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive research design is applied through interview and questionnaire survey which were conducted online due to the pandemic of the Covid-19. It is resulted because everyone has to stay at home; instead of distributing physical copies to the students inside the campus.

Data Collection

Population and sample for this survey is only limited for student who take the author's class which is the M1 - Leadership Class - Odd Semester - Academic Year of 2020-2021, consist of 15 students. As mentioned before, the instrument of data collection are interview and online questionnaire. Creation of appropriate survey items stems from previous literature. Some of our survey items can be selected from the existing scales from prior studies. Further, some items may be developed from discussions on the relevant topics from different pieces of literature (Lewis et al., 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of survey result

The interview started with basic questions about Semester Learning Plan (SLP). "Have the Semester Learning Plan (SLP) for Leadership Subject been given at the 1st online learning meeting, by uploading it to LMS - i-learn?" Out of 15 students, 93.3% of the students answer Yes.

Related to the first question, followed by this question. "What are the advantages of SLP?" 80% of students recognize SLP get to know the subject learning outcomes, 73.3% of students

also recognize SLP get to know the lecture material, 66.7% of students get to know the references, and 73.3% of students get to know the composition in assessment. It means all of four aspects above are recognized as SLP's advantages for students.

Furthermore, "Has the SLP - Leadership Subject currently accommodated the needs of online learning?" 100% students agree that SLP has accommodated the needs of online learning.

Next questions, "What are the obstacles in online learning?". All the students answer the main obstacles in online learning is network problem. Meanwhile the other obstacles are non-user-friendly platform and limitation in data package at the same percentage level which are 93.3% each. 60% students answer difficulty having class on schedule.

Additionally, the question is going about learning process. "Do lecturers try to generate enthusiasm for learning and student interaction in online learning?" Out of 15 students, 100% were Yes. It means all of the students agree that lecturer need to try generating enthusiasm for learning and student interaction in online learning.

Followed by next question, "What has been done by lecturers to generate enthusiasm for learning and student interaction in online learning?" Here is the answer of every students about how to generate enthusiasm in online learning.

Table 1 Answering for "What has been done by lecturers to generate enthusiasm for learning and student interaction in online learning?"

What has been done by lecturers to generate enthusiasm for learning and student interaction in online learning?
Maximalize the learning process, utilizing learning facilities are also the key point to motivate online learning; internet accesability
Giving assignment
Giving direction to understand the subject
Providing FGD to generate the activeness
Giving assignment in every meeting
Sharing advices and giving relevant case study
Greeting, Say Hi and Giving attention
Lecturer has provided support and motivation
Greeting and giving the attention and remind to keep healthy
Giving group discussion assignment, review previous subject
Giving assignment
Giving deadline for group discussion assignment in course hour
Utilizing Zoom Meeting, discussion and providing relevant case study
Providing discussion session and respect students' opinion
Providing FGD to generate the activeness

A lot of the students share similar argumentations; some students agree that lecturer should provide group discussion session.

Due to the online learning situation, "In leadership subject online learning, determine the level of platform usage as follow: [Zoom, LMS in Economic Faculty - ilearn, WA Class Group (All Students), WA Group (FGD team)]".

80% of students answer they mostly spend their online learning by utilizing the SNS platform which is WA Group FGD team (small groups for students doing group discussion). 67% of students recognize WA Class Group and LMS – ilearn are utilized at the same time in online learning. Despite of it, 26,7% students said that Zoom is rarely used along the online learning.

Continued by the question: "In leadership subject online learning, what are the advantages by getting online learning? [More independent in learning, Active in discussion, more creative, increasing the IT skill, flexibility in location]". 93% students agree, the advantages of online learning create them more independent in learning. 86.7% students agree they are more creative, also 86.7% agree in increasing the IT skill, 73.3% agree generating the activeness in discussion and 73.3% and 73.3% students agree by having online learning in leadership subject, they are having flexibility in set the location for learning.

"By utilizing LMS platform – ilearn, does all information needed could be updated in ilearn?". The answer of this question is ranking by scale 1 up to 5; Not agree up to definitely agree. The students' answer are 6.7% less agree, 26.7% neutral, 53.3% agree and 13.3% definitely agree. It means 66.7% student agree by utilizing the LMS platform – ilearn, all information needed could be updated.

Followed by this question: "WA Class Group is used to bridge communication and real-time based information updates, is this platform optimal to accommodate this?". The answer of this question is ranking by scale 1 up to 5; Not agree up to definitely agree. The students' answer are 60% agree and 40% definitely agree. It can be concluded that 100% student agree WA Class Group could bridge communication and real-time based information updates.

Furthermore, the next question: "WA Group - FGD team are used to facilitate students more active in discussion, able to think solutions, get all students to prepare PPT and do presentations (in Voice Notes) for each case study at each meeting. Is this platform optimal to accommodate this?". The answer of this question is ranking by scale 1 up to 5; Not agree up to definitely agree. The students' answer are 13.3% neutral, 46.7% agree and 40% definitely agree. It can be concluded that 86.7% student agree WA Group - FGD team accommodates optimally to facilitate students more active in discussion, able to think solutions, get all students to prepare PPT and do presentations (in Voice Notes) for each case study at each meeting.

Lastly, the question is about: "Do you think that the leadership subject online learning SLP (the media used such as LMS-ilearn, WA Class Groups, WA Group (FGD team), and up to date case studies at each meeting) help students in providing the practitioner's view, hone critical thinking, presentation skills, and public speaking skills?". The answer of this question is ranking by scale 1 up to 5; Not agree up to definitely agree. The students' answer are 6.7% neutral, 40% agree and 53.3% definitely agree. 93.3% students mean the majority of them agree that the leadership subject online learning SLP (the media used such as LMS-ilearn, WA Class Groups, WA Group (FGD team), and up to date case studies at each meeting) help students in providing the practitioner's view, hone critical thinking, presentation skills, and public speaking skills.

Discussion of survey results

To begin with, the SLP is the basic rules that should be provided and it is confirmed by students having positive advantages and it has been uploaded in the first meeting of the leadership subject in LMS-ilearn. It mean everyone can access and understand what is the requirement and the standard of this subject. Collaboration skills need students to participate and share information with others also. Traditionally, students used technology to do research. But they have different ways of sharing the information. In the conventional way, students can print or bring softcopies when meeting in face-to face. However, in online learning, students easily share the knowledge through forum in LMS. They can send a file or link in forum. It can be concluded that online platform can assist to improve student collaboration skills.

Second, majority of the students agree the main obstacles in online learning is network problem. Frankly speaking, in all sudden of online learning, the infrastructure has not been settled down. Network availability in area is uneven. Big city provides more bandwidth, but it is different in suburb, rural and remote area. Online learning by taking the video meeting will cause network problem, it is ineffectively because of repetition of material as the effect of in out video meeting, cost incremental of internet usage, audio and video lagged. To overcome this problem, this subject has facilitated by using LMS-ilearn integrated with Whatsapp. Even though LMS-ilearn has some problems related low capacity and server down, the real-time communication is better by optimizing Whatsapp application. Everyone has Whatsapp, it is cheap and fast. All aspects to facilitate the communication are available.

Third, all of students agree that lecturer need to try generating enthusiasm for learning and student interaction in online learning. This goes with Chapman and Van Auken, (2001) who revealed that Instructor guidance and feedback on team processes is an important factor

affecting students' teamwork attitudes. Therefore, online instructors / lecturer should be more proactive in engaging with the students. For example, Noguera et al. (2018) describe an agile project management approach in which the instructor becomes a member of student teams as the team facilitator. Peer evaluations performed at multiple milestones of an online project can also promote more effective instructor involvement in online teamwork. The findings was supported by Simsek (2011) where educators should identify best practice in online learning that at least can be good as face-to-face learning. The failure of OCL is because the platform cannot provide similar platform as traditional in facilitating collaborative learning (Strømman, 2015). Swan (2002) stated that "as long as the quality of instruction is delivered over distance it was as good as the quality of traditional education, and there would be no significant difference in learning between them".

Forth, to answer the question about how student hone their soft skill along online learning. The majority of students agree that the leadership subject online learning SLP, the media used such as LMS-ilearn, WA Class Group, WA Group (FGD team) help them to hone their soft skill. Students are induced their soft skill by doing class discussion, FGD team discussion in specific time limit every meeting. This tense is provided from up to date case studies in every meeting that help students in providing the practitioner's view, hone critical thinking, presentation skills, and public speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

Having this pandemic situation for sure no one has prepared ideal guideline to do online learning. The learning process should be go along this situation. Despite of the condition, in term of learning process should keep growing and customized based on the basic of subjects itself and current situation. Leadership subject will focus on emphasizing students to understand the importance of the role of leadership in realizing the organizational success. After studying this course, students are expected to know how the difference between leaders and managers is, in addition to understanding how leaders establish organizational policies and develop linkages between organizations and their followers. Furthermore, students are also expected to understand how to build relationships with existing stakeholders and make changes in the organization. This subject needs up to date case study to cultivate students' understanding and give them different situation to understand deeply.

This study has discovered by providing group discussion session, lecturer has generated enthusiasm for learning and student's interaction during online learning. To strengthen student engagement, enhancing students' soft skill along online learning during Covid-19 pandemic,

this study found by optimizing the usage of media and method of learning; up to date SLP, integrated the Learning Management System (LMS) – ilearn with Whatsapp function through Collaborative Learning. Students are induced their soft skill by doing mind mapping sub-subject task, class discussion, FGD team discussion, PPT submission and oral presentation in specific time limit every meeting. This tense is provided from up to date case studies in every meeting that help students in providing the practitioner's view, hone critical thinking, presentation skills, and public speaking skills.

Online instructors / lecturer should be more proactive in engaging with the students. Along with the research by Simsek (2011) where educators should identify best practice in online learning that at least can be good as face-to-face learning. A lot of obstacles remain the online learning due to pandemic Covid-19. But the right of students need to be facilitated and provided. The right to get the learning and hone their soft skill is full filled by the lecturers keep trying to explore and mix & match the methods and media of teaching, so that the class remains effective. For sure it is never ending improvement. By considering several factors that can influence Online Collaborative Learning, student's soft skills can be enhanced.

Furthermore, the study was confined to Leadership Class only; wider results could have been obtained if data were collected from more classes with various subjects.

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