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## ANALYSIS OF ONLINE STUDY AND FACE-TO-FACE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS IN CURRENT EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

Self-paced learning through online study is regarded as a prominent way in elevating students' independence in learning process. Through online learning, students are expected to become autonomous individuals who are able to make choices based on rational reflections and having a strong sense of personal values and beliefs. At the end, those values would be critical added attributes that potential employers seek from their future employees. This paper is aimed at investigating the core values that online learning program offers. The paper also scrutinizes challenges and opportunities of online learning at higher education institutions in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Online Study, Learning Process, Indonesia.

### 1. Introduction

The issues of online learning discussed by educational practitioners throughout the world become an interesting point to be analyzed at the current time as most, if not all, educational institutions in the world are offering various worldwide online studies and degree programs. Some educational practitioners claim that self-paced learning through online study is the best panacea for the people having limited time to go to weekly classes (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007). Some others contend that self-paced learning through online study with online degree programs is a drawback in the higher education

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era, as it may bring a deleterious tendency toward academic dishonesty (Lanier, 2006).

Proponents of online study approaches have persuasively proposed various benefits of this teaching-learning paradigm. They attempt to reform education systems to make them accessible to all people throughout the world. In order to enable learners to participate easily in this new study paradigm, comfortable internet access, updated computer programs, continuous online communication and mentoring are among the promises of convenience they offer (Dabbagh & Bannan, 2005; Shih *et al.* 2003). Through this flexibility, education has the potential to reach

everyone in every corner of the globe. A student who has access to and is supported by technical devices from a different nation, for instance, can sit at home to study and attain a high quality education from a well-known university in the world without having to spend his valuable time in the country where the university is located.

Many other criticisms of online education, especially online degree programs, have been addressed by educational experts who disagree with online study. The promise of online education to be the next generation in empowering higher education has been regarded as a hoax. This is due to the degradation of quality inherent in this study approach (Carr-Chellman, 2005). In some other studies, in addition, there is also an indication that as many as one-third of students have technophobia or fear of technologies such as computers or other online learning equipment (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007). All these concerns have been debated seriously by both the pros and cons of this study. Each of them attempts to provide various analyses about the benefits and weaknesses of the study in order that stakeholders of both study approaches have a free choice. Then they may freely decide which study approach matches their times and circumstances.

## 2. Building a Better Individual

As a matter of fact, the notion of autonomy is the key perpetual element that can be traced back from this online study. Autonomous learners are characterized as independent, able to make choices based on rational reflection and having a strong sense of personal values and beliefs. All these qualifications are the core skills that should be owned by the individuals seeking a job in the future as the employers will not

“hold the employees’ hands” to show them how to do some things (Vaughan, 2005). According to Tait and Knight (1996), the skills of value that an independent or autonomous learner can develop and enhance include:

- a. The ability to identify problems and work creatively towards solutions;
- b. The ability to reflect and build on knowledge as it is accumulated;
- c. Skill in working with others and appreciation of the benefits of collaboration;
- d. A willingness to see and benefit from a learning opportunity wherever it presents itself;
- e. The ability to take risk and do, not just to plan, and;
- f. An ability to continue to learn from learning.

These salient characteristics not only serve them well on a personal level but it will also contribute to their future or current employment. Research undertaken through the Quality in Higher Education (QHE) suggests that the above skills are of major importance to employers when considering employment of applicants (Tait & Knight, 1996).

These characteristics, indeed, should be shaped since the time students study at primary schools. They need to be actively trained and guided how to work independently. Problem solving skills should be introduced to students in order that they are able to form their mind working on this issue. As soon as they have learned all these skills, they will be the people who have strong personality and adequate proficiency to be involved in any work atmosphere.

## 3. Preparing Students for the Workforce

One of the ultimate targets of education is to prepare students for the workforce. By studying independently, students require autonomous skills

that enable them to apply positively in the workforce. Cognitive skills such as questioning, analyzing, searching for appropriate source of information, innovative discussion, and synthesis of information become unarguably among the significant skills for a continuous active career. Strategic skills like formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes will determine an individual's success within the organization (Brockett & Heimstra, 1991; Cavanaugh, 1993). For some extent, all these valuable skills may not always be obtained from traditional classroom oriented study especially in third world countries like Indonesia. This is due to several fundamental factors such as culture, way of life, and even the way people value others.

In Indonesia, traditional teacher-centered educational approach is still overwhelmingly practiced throughout the regions. Teachers are regarded as a superpower figure particularly when they are in classrooms. Teachers are the only people who have authority in classrooms who can act and do as "they like". The Indonesian culture in some parts embraces the power of seniority in which the juniors must honor the seniors. This is also applied in the teaching-learning process. We still remember when we were at elementary and secondary schools how our teachers taught.

The most common way of teaching at this level was the teachers chose a topic of a subject, wrote on the board, and then we copied all the written materials into our books. After we finished writing, the teachers elaborated main points of the topic, and then if there were any questions, we could ask. Dialogue or discussion was very rare between teachers and peers.

Educational transformation involved only one dimension, teachers as the focal people. Students were educated to listen to what teachers said, and receive information from what teachers illuminated. Students almost have no right to question or criticize teachers, as for some extent criticizing and questioning teachers in any way are regarded as impolite. This gave us, most Asian students especially from Indonesia, a lack of rationalizing and creative thinking ability.

Discussion, other creative thinking formulations, and searching materials independently became a sparse simulation in my previous study systems. In fact, students will achieve more when the teaching mode moves from lecture to class discussion, to learning activities that involve active participation such as simulation exercises or other group projects (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004). I was shocked when the first time I studied in the United States, my first course required me to work independently. I took an online course where all communication, discussion and meeting formats were online. At that time we had no idea how we could get all our work done online. We did not know what Blackboard and Web CT are. Our lack of understanding on all of these technological devices, in fact, has driven us to be lagged far behind.

This reflection is a life experience that we can associate with the ideas of online study in preparing students to be more independent. The story tells us how students may be disoriented with all technologies advancement, and how they can be frustrated and less innovative when they are not taught to be autonomous students. This situation will be more challenging when students are involved in a real work environment after accomplishing their study. At this stage, they are required to be more proactive, innovative, and to have more bright ideas in dealing with all tasks to envision future organizational missions.



#### 4. Discussion

##### a. Online Education in Indonesia

According to Tadjuddin (2000) the Indonesian government with its limitedness has a serious effort in promoting information and communication technologies in the educational world. In response to this program, the government through the national educational department introduced online educations which were hosted in several big universities as the pilot project. The targeted cities of this host educational online project are Jakarta, the country capital, Bandung, Surabaya, Jogjakarta and Makassar (Borneo). Unfortunately, due to the limited budget allocation to this program, this praiseworthy program becomes a nice preamble that ends without any success.

According to a current research (Sharma, 2005), the success of applying technologies to support online study in third world countries are affected by four fundamental elements: inadequacy of telecommunication infrastructure, high cost of technological devices, lack of qualified technicians, and high maintenance costs. Indonesia today is facing a serious economic difficulty to work with all the above factors. In the implementation of the technological based education, the government still needs to provide electrical power to all schools, provide adequate computers, internet connections, and enough information and communication technology experts at least to all schools at the district level.

##### b. Current Harnesses of Information Technologies in Indonesia

A research published by Belawati (2000) indicates that among the top 25 countries of internet users, Indonesia ranks 21. The total of internet utilization throughout the country,

however, is limited to less than two percent of the whole population. The sole factors of this internet harness in community are various, ranging from economic problems, internet availability, technological deficiency, to technological oriented illiteracy.

In Indonesia, internet and telephone connections are still expensive and they become a luxury commodity and not all people can afford. Most internet users can only be found in big cities. This condition is tragic, but this is the reality. While most people are discussing the use of sophisticated devices such as cellular phones, email, and internet to accelerate their business transactions and activities, there are uncountable people living in a very miserable condition. They have no food to eat, no water to drink, and even no shelter to stay in. These powerless and marginalized people have never thought about all these sophisticated technological devices as the crucial parts of their lives. They never dream about the internet usage for tomorrow in their lives.

Moreover, in educational practice, internet usage in Indonesia is still at the beginning stages. In 2002 alone it is estimated that the internet is only used approximately in 2500 educational institutions in which 80 percent were secondary schools and only 20 percent higher educational institutions (Nugroho, 2002). All these educational institutions are actually located in big cities, especially in Java islands. Some educational institutions located outside of Java islands, in contrast, hardly ever used internet in running their programs. Sadly, they only have several computers to run administrative programs. They never have internet link at libraries as the significant tool to search and browse the needed articles or other related reading materials and books.

Although there is no actual data on the use of computers at educational institutions, experiences proved that the use of internet and computers is merely for administrative purposes. Several schools, particularly private universities located in large cities, have in the last few years developed World Wide Web connections as a promotion and communication link between students and lecturers, between students and students, and between university staff members and other stakeholders who want to harness the programs. There are a few schools that utilize internet in the teaching-learning process, but they are international education institutions branches.

#### c. Some Constraints on Online Study in Indonesia

Due to the need to compete with international educational quality standards, the Indonesian government has attempted to empower education as the fundamental key point. Government has also put a blueprint in the national curriculum that all schools throughout the country should impose computer and information system courses. Unfortunately, though the government has already stressed this program, the use of information and communication technology as the integral part of the teaching-learning process at schools is still lacking. The use of internet and other technology and information systems to facilitate the teaching-learning process always became a topic of any seminar and discussion rather than a tangible action.

To enable students and community to access the internet, the government needs to provide the information and communication systems' infrastructures throughout the regions.

When the number of internet providers increases, the possibility of getting a better price and better services are more likely because the internet companies will give a reasonable price as they attempt to attract as many consumers as possible. As a result, more private bodies can afford to operate internet kiosks even in rural areas.

Furthermore, if the internet cost is affordable, all educational institutions will be able to purchase internet providers to run their educational programs broadly. This may also enable the educational institutions to provide good computer laboratories equipped with internet connections by which students may explore, search, and browse various valuable articles and materials related to their study. They may also be able to communicate with their peers and teachers instantly. If the internet connection can reach all education institutions and community centers, then the intention of national government to provide online education can be possible. But if this digital device is still regarded as a luxury commodity, only some elite communities can access it, then the government's notion to run online education remains a mysterious dream.

Providing internet access at these community centers may eventually accelerate the number of internet users and generate their skills to work with this "new technology". The availability of internet access at schools, in addition, will enable teachers to harness the technology in their pedagogical and instructional activities. As soon as the internet connections can be accessed at every school and university, perpetual online study can be implemented.

The fulfillment of all those aspects indeed will not affect a significant alteration in the intention of implementing online education,

unless the government has designed a strategic plan for the use of internet in educational programs. The development of online study in rural areas in Indonesia is far more challenging than in big cities. Open access has not been met for online learning yet, as so many people do not have computers or access to internet at home or in other public places such as libraries, schools, and other central locations/learning centers.

Another significant problem lies on the availability of human resources with sufficient competence and motivation. The third major problem is technology infrastructure that may prevent the efficacious use of other appropriate technological devices. The last one is the lack of strategic planning and coordination between central and regional government. They also mention that the lack of the strategic planning and coordination between national and local government may bring a detrimental impact on level of achievement and cost effectiveness.

To this end, the Indonesian government must have a clear concept to empower the communities, especially those who live in rural areas. The government must allocate an adequate budget to build educational buildings, their facilities and infrastructures which are equipped with complete teaching-learning equipment including computers and internet access. Government must also have clear strategic planning, good coordination at the national level and regional communication. Capacity building, including professionalism in planning and management, is also important to be taken into a serious consideration by both national and local government in this country.

## 5. Conclusion

It is unarguable that the advancement of technology has enabled people to discover new

study approaches and has driven them to a world where they can do one additional task without having to sacrifice other routine activities. Online study has proved that by using internet and other information technologies it has enabled instructors in one place to deliver learning and training experiences to learners located in other places, sometimes continents away (Bedard, Hawkins & Frechtling, 2004). Its flexibility, convenience, freedom, and self-dependent issues are regarded as the outstanding values of this study's approach.

Academicians who disagree with the self-paced learning through online study, however, believe that the online study has neglected the opportunity of marginalized and powerless community to acquire knowledge, as this study mechanism requires sophisticated technological devices and forces them to have adequate technology mastery. They also ascertain that online study is not always the best choice for those who have not engaged in any work opportunities as only a handful of employers and companies will hire them. The reluctance of employers to hire online graduates is due to its graduates' qualities who lack practical and hands-on training and skills.

Finally, from the discussion above, we may acknowledge that the online learning is not the sole best panacea for all the ills healing educational wounds particularly in third world countries like Indonesia. But we cannot also say that online learning has not always worked. "Sometimes the human and technological infrastructure necessary for its success was not present. It requires both trained personnel and technology that is appropriate, affordable, and accessible" (Sharma, 2005. p.63). Online learning will be very worthwhile and will work well if it is supported by adequate hardware and



software availability. It will be very helpful if its access reaches all community members who are in need, but it will be futile if it will continue to serve the same elite populations and ignore the powerless and marginalized. All those things will be true, and increasingly true, as far ahead as anyone can see.

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