

Research article

The Effect of Online Learning on International Freshmen's Academic Exposure: A Case Study

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Abstract.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted all aspects of our lives including educational practices. The social distancing and restrictive movement policies have forced institutions across the globe to shift from conventional to online learning methods. This makes the learning process more difficult, not just for regular students but also for international freshmen. This study aimed to evaluate the effects of online learning on international freshmen's academic exposure. Qualitative research was done using a single case study of an international freshman at Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia who due to the pandemic had to begin the session with online classes. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using Zoom meetings and documentation. The interview was focused to find out students' approach toward online learning and academic exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic while the documentation was done to know the results of academic exposure. It was found that the students had a cultural shock in terms of language and network connection. Therefore, the authors recommend the universities to provide a supportive environment to freshmen and the students to work on their adaptive capability for such situations.

Keywords: academic, freshman, online learning, student, case study

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1. Introduction

The Pandemic COVID-19 has made the learning process at the University change to online learning, community activities are limited, including all modes of transportation. International freshman students have not been able to visit the country where they will study because of the policy set by the government of each country. All higher education institutions are forced to change new education methods immediately, from traditional becomes distance learning [1]. This Pandemic also forced the lecturers and the students to deal with standard "New Normal" life in the education field [2]. This becomes unusual learning, all interactions are limited only through the virtual so that the adjustment and acculturation process is hampered. Academic assignments both individually and in groups occur with limited interaction and weak friendship bonds. This


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condition makes International freshmen students difficult to interact with their friends, language, culture, and new learning systems, especially if the freshman student has never visited the country where she or he will study. They are also forced to experience technology.

Research conducted by Bi on Chinese freshmen studying in America said that International freshman student who had just entered college was more prone to depression and anxiety [3]. One of the things that trigger this is the language problem [4] which will affect the way of communication and interaction between students and lecturers [5]. International freshmen students will find some difficulties, especially in the learning process during the Pandemic COVID-19. This study will investigate the effects of online learning on International freshman student's academic exposure.

2. Methods

Qualitative research is used in this method by using a single case study. This becomes a case single case study because it is for the first time Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya (Unusa), Indonesia doing online learning on International freshman student that has not ever come to Indonesia. The data was collected by using deep interviews through Zoom meetings and documentation. The documentation is got from an academic transcript (Table 1). The interview is aimed to look for the information related to how the student deal with online learning, culture, and academic exposure during Pandemic COVID-19, and the documentation is aimed to know the result of academic exposure. The subject of the study is KN (Not real name), student of Nursing and Midwifery Faculty of Unusa. She comes from Timor Leste and still stays in her home country. The interview was done by using English language to avoid miss perception while conveying a message. The correspondent author used data collection, data reduction data display, and conclusion for analyzing the data.

TABLE 1: Interview Guideline.

No.	Variable	Indicator
	Online Learning	Learning Method
		Dealing With Online Learning
		Culture
	International Freshman Student	Identity
		Freshman Student's International Exposure
	Academic Exposure	Class Environment
		Academic Result

3. Discussion

The results shown in this point have been through several steps including collecting the data and reducing the data (Table 2).

TABLE 2: General Description of Respondent.

No.	Indicator	Respondent
	Name	KN (Not real name)
	Birthday	March 27 th , 2001
	Study Program	Nursing
	Grade	1 st
	Faculty	Nursing and Midwifery Faculty
	Age	20 years old
	Sex	Female
	Country	Timor Leste
	Mother Language	Makasae and Tetun

KN is a freshman student in Nursing and Midwifery Faculty majoring Nursing Study Program. She comes from Timor Leste and she has not come to Indonesia.

Before doing the study, the first author had done pre-observation through an online learning class towards the subject of the study. In the Nursing Communication subject, it was found that she is difficult to understand the sentence arrangement of the lecturer during the class. She is hard to arrange the sentence when she wants to speak. She has to deal with regular class because there has not been provided International class in Unusa.

While joining online learning class, the International freshman student got so many obstacles such as internet connection and language barrier.

“What I feel, the most difficult learning method is online learning, because I have to look for an Internet connection that often lost in my area.”

She tried to deal with language limitations by exercising frequently with her friend while she joined online learning. According to the interview result, KN does not speak in her college country but by using her mother language.

“I have to practice interacting with my friends’ culture frequently. I am sure it becomes my habit.”

And this is the first time for KN to join online learning even in her home country. She also never joins an International program before.

“I have not joined online learning before and this is the first time for me to join online learning and it is directly to abroad.”

She told to the interviewee that she experienced culture shock while joining online learning for the first time but now she has been dealing with it.

"Yes, I ever experienced culture shock when I joined online learning for the first time, I was confused with the language, I confused with the learning method that is used in my class. But now I have been dealing with it"

KN explained that she tried so hard to learn the language where she is studying.

"I learn so hard almost every day the language where I am studying right now."

Related to her experience in class, she has known her friend although she has not got an opportunity to meet face to face.

"Yes, I have known my friend."

When she got a group assignment from her lecturer, KN tried to communicate with her friends through WhatsApp Group and Zoom Meeting.

"We did it through WhatsApp Group and Zoom Meeting."

Because she got difficulty in language, it affects her GPA in her final exam in the first semester.

"I only got 3.45 for my GPA."

The result showed that KN had to struggle and cope with the learning method due to unstable internet connection in her area, this was the biggest problem due learning process because it was influenced her learning process and her emotional state, another problem was a language barrier, because she is in regular class not in international where the learning process delivered using the native language. It makes her take some time to understand. The situation was harder when she has to cope with the culture of how her friends speaks and interacts with each other.

Online learning has grown globally and been one hot topic to discuss because it's become a mainstream education method [6] a study showed that there were three major obstacles in the online learning process; internet connection, teaching method, and compatibility of tools to access the media [7] another challenge that International students faced due to online learning was motivation and academic performance [8] it's also related to the speed of students adaptation to the online learning process.

Class environment related to academic exposure, besides of the way of communication, due to the language barrier they were quieter than domestic students [9]. Writing problems have occurred also due to assignment [10] in this case KN has to write in the Indonesian Language meanwhile KN's mother language is Makasae. All the problems and challenges faced by International freshman students affect their Grade Point Average as a result of the academic process.

4. Conclusion

Internet connection, language barrier, and culture are affected by academic exposure and student adjustment during the online learning process. One of the problem solutions to these problems is a peer to peer support strategies online, to help international freshman student to minimize the shock culture.

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