“It’s beyond gadgets and laptops”: Remote learning during Covid-19 pandemics
Lesson learned from Sampoerna University, Indonesia
Dorita Setiawan, PhD
Sampoerna University, Sampoerna University

Abstract

When the Covid-19 crisis hit in early 2020, schools and campuses are abruptly closed. Learning from home as the result is the only avenue for schools to keep the learning going. Students, teachers, and parents are struggling in holding off-school classes. Internet connection is deemed to be the biggest barrier in distance learning. However, this paper will reveal that technology infrastructure is not the only major challenge in distance learning in Indonesia. Psychosocial and mental health problems appear to be concerned. Using the data from students and instructors survey, the data reveals several elements policymakers overlook in viewing issues around remote learning during the pandemics.

This paper discusses a specific case of Sampoerna University students in dealing with remote learning during the Covid-19 emergency. To assess the effectiveness of remote learning as well as to identify problems during off-campus learning, a survey on distance learning experience is conducted. The respondents are students of Sampoerna University, who live across Indonesia from Sumatra to Papua. The survey was conducted between mid-May and June 2020. The data may not be generalizable to all students, yet applicable to those with similar characteristics.

As an American University in Indonesia, Sampoerna University has been implementing synchronized learning between offline and online learning through its Learning Management System (LMS). However, when the pandemics hit, Sampoerna University with no exception must deal with similar issues as any other educational institution. With its students spreading from Sabang to Merauke, Sampoerna University must assure that the learning process still takes place. Some of the policies made by the institution are to provide internet package for students who have difficult access to the internet, to relocate students who are in remote villages to city centers with a better internet connection, and to distribute hard drive to those without it.

However, data showcases that pandemics come with unexpected concerns. Mental health concerns have been skyrocketed amongst students as the counseling hotlines are crowded with students crying for help. Loneliness, poor time management, and competing priorities between family and school-works are some concerns students listed in the survey.

Therefore, even though, the survey shows that students consider that learning is still much needed during pandemics. Technology infrastructure such as internet connection and gadgets does not suffice in supporting students’ learning during the crisis. The survey reveals that psychosocial issues are the most concerning factors for students during pandemics. The paper suggests that when it comes to distance learning during corona emergencies, schools must take a holistic approach to find ways to assess students and support their learning. The survey also recommends that risk communication of Covid-19 is urgently needed to balance the benefits of communication in reopening schools and campuses.

Keywords: Covid-19, distance learning, psychosocial impacts