

Psychological Well-Being of New College Students during Online Learning

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Abstract: Digital transformation during of the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly increased in many sectors, particularly in higher institution. Online learning is among the pandemic consequences which becomes a new norm in the current education mode. It produces a variety of challenges, especially to new college students as they are required to adapt such novel learning environment. Psychological well-being generating as an individual's assessment of one's feelings and abilities to adapt and optimize self-potential in encountering new challenges, becomes crucial for new students in managing such challenges during the virtual learning. The objective of this study is to explore the psychological well-being of new students during online study. A qualitative approach utilizing literature review was employed to gain insights from existing studies. This work identified the psychological well-being dimensions (i.e., self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and purpose in life). It is discovered that high level of psychological well-being is practically beneficial for new students in managing challenges during the virtual learning. Thus, this study is theoretically essential in the debates of psychological well-being, specifically in the consideration to the new university student issues. An Islamic perspective on such psychological well-being is also discussed in this work, which is vital to produce new light to the Islamic psychology literature.

Keywords: University Student, Online Learning, Psychological Well-Being



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1. Introduction

The whole world is currently being attacked by the Covid-19 virus outbreak. Indonesia is among the countries affected by the outbreak. A government appealed to the public to conduct social restrictions (social distancing) as an effort to reduce the occurrence of direct human contact because the transmission of the virus is easy to appear through human contact. Social restrictions have been enacted to all sectors, including the education sector. One of the social distancing efforts performed by the education sector is to conduct teaching and online learning activities. Online learning is distance learning providing teaching materials and interactions which is organized through internet technology intermediaries (Kemendikbud, 2020).

Online learning activities are implemented based on the Circular Letter of the Ministry of Education No. 15 of 2020 on the Guidelines for Organizing Learning from Home in the Emergency Period of the Spread of Covid-19. In the circular, it was notified that the objective of learning from home is to ensure the fulfillment of student's right to acquire education services during the Covid-19 emergency, to protect the citizens of the education unit from the adverse effects of Covid-19, to prevent the spread and transmission of Covid-19 in the education unit, and to ensure the fulfillment of psychosocial support for educators, learners and parents of learners.

The continuing process of online teaching and learning activities possesses its challenges for educators and learners. Teaching and learning activities which are frequently completed in the classroom face-to-face turned into online media such as zoom, google meet, WhatsApp, google classroom, and others. Educators and learners own a personal responsibility to utilize technology so that they are able to pursue the continuity of online learning. It is in accordance with the Director-General of Higher Education, Nizam (2020) who stated that in this pandemic period, educators encounter a challenge which is in developing creativity in technology use in terms of knowledge transmission and how to ensure learning remains well conveyed.

Meanwhile, the challenge for students in this pandemic period is to train and instill learning habits independently through various online classes or webinars. Furthermore, students are also taught to be able to cooperate in solving problems encountered when learning online. For new students, it is certainly not something that can be performed easily because they also possess their challenges in the adjusting learning process to the new learning situations at the college level.

New students own the opportunity to experience unpleasant things in the early days of college due to the different demands from before the pandemic outbreak. Some research results present the existence of various obstacles experienced by students in attending the online learning process, ranging from technical constraints to internal problems. Some of the technical obstacles encountered by students in online learning are the condition of the internet network which is not stable (particularly for students who live in rural areas), difficulty to purchase internet quotas, not punctual in obtaining lecture information due to inadequate internet access and gadgets which are frequently errors. (Dyla et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the problem that commonly occurs in students during online learning is the occurrence of physical discomfort and feelings. These discomforts encompass eye ache and back pain due to staying in a long period of time in front of the screen of phone and laptop, feeling excessive anxiety, particularly when experiencing delays in submitting assignments, disharmonious relationships in the family that make students stressful to be in the house and find it difficult to capture lecture material due to lack of motivation when performing online learning. (Dyla et al., 2020; Gunawan A, & Bintari, D. R, 2021). In another study, it is also discovered that the most prevailing psychological problem experienced by students due to online learning is anxiety (Uswatun et al., 2020).

As described in the paragraph above, being a freshman possesses many challenges to encounter, particularly in this pandemic period. Santrock (2002) explained that new students possess challenges to encounter the new environment. They will meet and interact with new friends from different backgrounds and regions. Moreover, they also possess challenges requiring an adjustment at the same time, which is in terms of becoming new students and performing online learning. The process of adaptation in lectures conducted by new students is an essential phase because it can predict two important things, which are, the resilience of new students and academic performance (Baker & Siryk, 1984 in Crede & Niehorster, 2011). Various challenges and obstacles happening certainly interfere with the condition of the psychological well-being of new students. Psychological well-being is crucial because it is one of the protective factors in the initial adjustment process of lectures (Angela et al., 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Mendoza-denton et al., 2014).

Psychological well-being is an assessment organized by individuals regarding their ability to survive and optimize their potential in various aspects of life, particularly when encountering challenges and life changes (Ryff, 1995). Psychological well-being conditions can be perceived through an individual's acceptance and understanding of his strengths and weaknesses, possessing positive relationships with others, being able to overcome various difficulties, actively participating in the surrounding environment, owning a purpose in life, and having the desire to develop themselves. Therefore, psychological well-being becomes essential for new students in encountering challenges and obstacles in the online learning process.

2. Literature Review

Ryff (1989) explained that psychological well-being is a condition in which a person is not solely free from mental stress but also other aspects of life. Psychological well-being is a state of potential development possessed by a person characterized by 6 characteristics, which comprises of being able to value himself positively including being aware of self-limitation (self-acceptance), being able to establish and maintain positive relation with others, able to build individual strength and personal freedom (autonomy), able to create the context of the surrounding environment so that it can satisfy one's own needs and desires (environmental mastery), possessing a life goal that brings together the efforts and challenges encountered (purpose in life), and possessing a dynamic of learning throughout life and sustainability that develops personal growth (Ryff, 1989). In other studies, psychological well-being is classified

into several aspects, which are spiritual aspects (purpose in life), social aspects (positive relation with others), and cognitive aspects (autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery) (Bornstein et al., 2003; Perez, 2012).

Psychological well-being possesses an essential role for new students in encountering various challenges and obstacles in online learning. The lower the psychological well-being in freshmen, the more symptoms of emotional mental disorders experienced and vice versa (Triwahyuni, A & Prasetio, C. E, 2021). New students with low psychological well-being are more prone to suffer from symptoms of mental disorders such as always feeling anxious, loss of self-worth, decreased cognitive ability, decreased energy, and the emergence of physical symptoms due to psychological problems in the first year of college. Hence, it will influence on how they solve the challenges and obstacles. Meanwhile, new students with high psychological well-being tend to be better in overcoming the obstacles encountered. They tend to be more flexible, resilient, efficient at solving problems, and more committed to achieving success rather than focusing on avoiding failure (Freire et al., 2019; Zacova et al., 2005; Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Based on the results of the research displayed above, new students with high psychological well-being are more likely to possess the ability to encounter various challenges and obstacles in the online learning process. A freshman with high psychological well-being is a student who is able to interpret himself positively in determining on how he is able to encounter the challenges and obstacles experienced in online learning. Meanwhile, new students with low psychological well-being are students who interpret themselves negatively, hence, they are less able to determine how they can encounter the challenges and obstacles experienced in online learning. How to resolve students when overcoming obstacles in the new lecture world is closely associated with solving problems that are commonly conducted. Students with high psychological well-being, particularly in the dimensions of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth tend to use three adaptive problem-solving strategies, which are positive reappraisal, support-seeking, and planning (Freire et al., 2016).

Self-acceptance and environmental mastery are the most powerful dimensions in predicting psychological disorders which affect the condition of psychological well-being. Thus, it is important to conquer for new students in the first year of their studies (Triwahyuni, A & Prasetio, C. E., 2021). If they possess the ability to accept themselves and confidence in mastering their new environment, students will be able to overcome the challenges and obstacles encountered in online learning. Self-acceptance is associated with on how students are able to realize their advantages and disadvantages and to keep being positive in perceiving them.

Meanwhile, environmental mastery is related to the student's belief to be able to create the environment around him meet his needs. These two conditions make new students encountered with various challenges and obstacles in performing online learning optimistic in solving them. Despite the obstacles, students possessing high positive self-acceptance and confidence to manage the environment are able to rapidly identify ways to conquer their difficulties by employing the advantages and resources in the environment so as not to make them down and cause the occurrence of psychological disorder symptoms. However, in other research results, it was discovered that the dimensions of positive relations with others and purpose in life also

produce the most powerful influence in determining psychological well-being (Ecep et al., 2021).

Positive relations with others are associated with students' ability to establish and maintain social relationships and obtain social support. Hence, it is essential for students in encountering various challenges and obstacles in performing learning online. Purpose in life is related to students' feelings towards meaning and confidence in themselves in undertaking their life. Having a purpose in life is able to help students to survive in overcoming various challenges and obstacles during the online learning.

3. Method

This study utilized a qualitative approach through the application of a literature review to gain insights from existing research. A thorough examination of relevant scholarly articles, books, reports, and other pertinent publications was conducted to investigate the topic of psychological well-being in the specific context of new college students' experiences during online learning. The literature review encompassed a comprehensive search and analysis of sources that focused on psychological well-being, new college students, and online learning. Additionally, the article delves into the Islamic perspective on psychological well-being, offering a distinctive and significant contribution to the field of Islamic psychology literature. This exploration of the Islamic viewpoint provides fresh perspectives and valuable insights into comprehending psychological well-being and its implications for new college students within the online learning environment.

4. Results and Discussion

In Islam, understanding well-being should first comprehend the human nature in accordance with the concept of Islam. The Qur'an is the whole thing to Islam, the holiest and most believed in the purity in it. Every Muslim believes that the Qur'an is a guidance in all teachings of Islam, particularly about human life and well-being, both in the world and the hereafter (Joshano, 2013 in Joshano, M. & Weijers, D., 2019). In the Qur'an, it is stated that man was created in the best possible way, as stated in *surah At-Tiin* verse 4 which says "Truly, we have created man in the best form". Moreover, with Allah's (God) perfect creation, man was provided the title of God's representative on earth (Q.S. *Al-Baqarah*: 30). As God's representative, man possesses the power to maintain all His commandments and stay away from all his prohibitions.

The goodness (*fitrah*) which God provides to the men will encourage them to be pious, devote himself to Allah and all His will and follow His Sharia. It is in accordance with His word in the Qur'an *surah Ar-Ruum* verse 30 which explains that man was created by God with the *fitrah* (nature) of religious instincts which is the religion of tawhid. However, in Islam, it is also recognized that human nature possesses the bad side. Based on the Qur'an, humans are prone to conduct sinful behavior, having a natural tendency to be forgetful, ignorant, selfish, and disobedient.

As stated in *Surah Al-Ahzab* verse 72, it is explained that man is unjust and foolish. Islam recognizes that there are external influences that reinforce the negative potential of man, encompassing environmental pressures and satanic disturbances. Satan is portrayed as another creature (entity) existing everywhere, powerful, and constantly attempts to disturb man by

seducing him out of divine guidance in order not to obey the God. Given the innate negative potential of humans amplified by external evil influences, men are considered as having the potential to be the lowest, most despicable creature on Earth in the Qur'an (Joshano, 2013 in Joshano, M. & Weijers, D., 2019).

The well-being discussed in the Qur'an is different from the well-being discussed in secular literature. In Islam, any aspect of well-being which is not based on the Qur'an such as the attainment of material wealth or the abundance of positive emotions is admitted as a false conception of well-being. Islam defines well-being as a good life, based on humans' role. In the Qur'an, worshiping and serving Allah is a special role and the ultimate goal of men. Thus, the definition of prosperity is when a human is entirely devoted to God.

The pious potential of man and the prophetic guidance which has been exemplified is able to support human function. Meanwhile, following the evil side of human nature and succumbing to Satan's temptations will thwart human's role. The process begins from within, the disposition bestowed by The Most Wise and Loving God upon His servants to help them attain the best servants. To achieve this requires a pattern of activity which lasts a long time following the spiritual nature of men as regulated in sharia. On this basis, only a life well lived objectively and following the teachings of the Qur'an is considered well-being (Joshano, M. & Weijers, D., 2019).

Furthermore, the Islamic conception of well-being also possesses a subjective side. The subjective aspect of well-being is not as essential as the objectivity of Islam. Joshano (2013 in Joshano, M. & Weijers, D., 2019) asserted that the ideal subjective state in Islam is a state of calm and contentment, bestowed by Allah upon a Muslim based on robust religious faith and relentless benevolent activity.

There is a power competition in human nature. The demonic power that strongly drives a man to commit evil and the power of faith which constantly urges man to seek God. In the Qur'an, these forces are frequently referred to as "selves". The evil self is called the self-ruling evil (*Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah*) (Q.S. Yusuf: 53). The nature of *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah* is negative, having unkind potential as opposed to personal and social well-being. Furthermore, another human trait which is closely associated with *fitrah* (nature) is blaming, denouncing, or blaming oneself (*Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama*). It is conscience, the inner voice awakened against the self that likes to rule evil.

The clash between the bossy and self-blaming aspects of human nature generally causes internal imbalances, anxiety, and guilt because the evil aspects of human nature are recognized and fought, both before and after the inappropriate actions performed. Without the vigilance from the human nature aspect of *Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama* (self-blame), man may succumb to Satan's temptations and commit inappropriate acts without feeling guilty afterward. The aspects of *Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama* are considered spiritually superior to those of *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah*. Life in the internal imbalance occurring within the self, due to the battle between *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah* and *Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama* is better than the life dominated by *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah*. The battle which happens would eventually defeat *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah*. Thus, aspects of *Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama* are presented positively in Islamic teachings (Joshano, 2013 in Joshano, M. & Weijers, D., 2019).

To obtain the desired tranquility, the wicked self must be effectively shackled and silenced. The peacefulness of self-blame must immediately follow the tranquility of silencing the evil self; when one has godly intentions and constantly behaves appropriately, there is no need to blame oneself. There will be calmness in the lack of an internal conflict between the evil self and the self-blaming. In the Qur'an, when a Muslim reaches this balance, Allah bestows a much-desired state of mind upon him, called a peaceful, or calm self (*Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna*) through absolute devotion to Allah. This state is described as an internal assurance resulting from the awareness of a person's full dependence on God and having God's pleasure over the life. This full sense of well-being is only available to those who have polished their nature in this way. A solid sense of contentment with whatever God wills is included in the condition of well-being (i.e., whatever happens in life). Worries regarding the outside world are believed to be completely forgotten in these conditions (Joshanloo, M. & Weijers, D., 2019).

Therefore, well-being concept based on the Qur'an is *Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna* which is a peaceful or calm state of self-obtained through the absolute devotion to Allah. *Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna* is a settled feeling of satisfaction over whatever Allah wills in his life. If a person has devoted himself only to God, he possesses a strong religious faith or is also understood as a religious person.

In some studies, well-being and religiosity are variables which are frequently examined to observe the relationship. In a study conducted by Fitriani, A. (2016) regarding the role of religiosity in enhancing psychological well-being, it was unveiled that the high level of psychological well-being is implied by the high level of religiosity. Religiosity is the internalization of religious ideals in a person's heart and speech regarding religious teachings, which is subsequently manifested in daily acts and behaviors. Psychological well-being is a person's appraisal of his or her ability to live his or her life and maximize potential in numerous areas, particularly when confronted with obstacles and life transitions.

Referring to well-being in an Islamic perspective, new students undergoing online learning will be able to encounter the challenges and obstacles if the internal state of himself does not experience combat or in a balanced internal state that provides rise to calmness (*Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna*).

Furthermore, students will not perform anything that will harm themselves or blame themselves afterward. For instance, when a new student cannot perform the assignments provided by the lecturer because he does not understand it and also does not possess supporting facilities (laptop and internet). New students will make every effort to complete the tasks assigned by lecturers with the resources available to them; this will occur as a result of Allah's grace for the mind that he desires via his devotion to God as a whole, so that he feels tranquil, peaceful, or calm. (*Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna*).

On the contrary, the new student who has not completely surrendered himself to God, he still owns an imbalance in him. There is a clash between the self who commands evil and the self that blames himself. Hence, the new student is unable to identify a sense of calm in him that will help him in encountering challenges and obstacles in the online learning process.

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, psychological well-being possesses an essential role for new students to be able to encounter challenges and obstacles in the online learning process, particularly the dimensions of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and purpose in life. Freshmen with high psychological well-being are commonly more flexible, resilient, efficient at solving problems, and more committed to achieving success than focusing on avoiding failure. In another sense, new students with a high level of psychological well-being are more likely to be able to deal with a variety of challenges and hurdles in the online learning process.

Meanwhile, in their first year as students, new students with low psychological well-being likely to experience emotions of constant anxiety, loss of self-worth, lower cognitive ability, decreased energy, and the onset of physical symptoms as a result of psychological problems. Such that, new students with low psychological well-being possess a harder time dealing with the different problems and obstacles that arise during the online learning process.

In Islam, to be able to understand well-being should first recognize the concept of human nature perceived by Islamic perspective. In the Qur'an, there are three aspects of human nature, *Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah*, *Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama*, and *Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna*. According to Islam well-being can be characterized by the presence of tranquility in a person or called *Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna*. A person feels well in himself through the absolute devotion to God (Allah). With his absolute devotion to God, one is able to obtain an internal assurance in the form of a sense of peace, tranquility, or calm, which is well-being in Islam.

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