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Comparing the Experience of Pre-Service Teachers in the First and Final Semesters in Online Learning Using a Focus Group Study

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, online learning has become the innovation and an alternative virtual education adopted by universities, due to campus closures. The sudden adoption of the innovation without prior preparation and training causes the ineffective implementation of online learning in most institutions. Based on this description, insufficient information is available regarding the experiences of the student population, which are the most affected by online learning in higher education. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding their numerous abilities to provide a good online learning program. Using a qualitative focus group study design, data were obtained through the focus group discussion (FGD) on 58 and 52 teachers, which were divided into 10 study groups during the first and final semesters. The results showed that both groups had similar and different experiences, regarding lecturers' ability to effectively perform online learning. According to the experience of the participants, the lecturers with pedagogical and social-personal skills were able to emphasize and encourage the attractiveness of online learning. In addition, some of the differences highly depended on the specific indicators of the two aspects. These results are expected to provide a framework for university lecturers and administrators, towards implementing the learning process.

Keywords

COVID-19, focus group study, higher education, online learning, pedagogical and social-personal skills, pre-service teacher

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Comparing the Experience of Pre-Service Teachers in the First and Final Semesters in Online Learning Using a Focus Group Study

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Since the outbreak of COVID-19, online learning has become the innovation and an alternative virtual education adopted by universities, due to campus closures. The sudden adoption of the innovation without prior preparation and training causes the ineffective implementation of online learning in most institutions. Based on this description, insufficient information is available regarding the experiences of the student population, which are the most affected by online learning in higher education. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding their numerous abilities to provide a good online learning program. Using a qualitative focus group study design, data were obtained through the focus group discussion (FGD) on 58 and 52 teachers, which were divided into 10 study groups during the first and final semesters. The results showed that both groups had similar and different experiences, regarding lecturers' ability to effectively perform online learning. According to the experience of the participants, the lecturers with pedagogical and social-personal skills were able to emphasize and encourage the attractiveness of online learning. In addition, some of the differences highly depended on the specific indicators of the two aspects. These results are expected to provide a framework for university lecturers and administrators, towards implementing the learning process.

Keywords: COVID-19, focus group study, higher education, online learning, pedagogical and social-personal skills, pre-service teacher

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused basic changes in the educational sector, specifically in the institutions' learning process, causing a very quick adjustment from offline to online learning platforms (Bhaumik et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2020; Coman et al., 2020; Khalil et al., 2020; Simamora, 2020). This rapid change has led to chaotic and uncomfortable experiences for most of the academic community, namely university managers, lecturers, and students (Al-Karaki et al., 2021; Vaskivska et al., 2021). Besides the lecturers experiencing anxiety, stress, and burnout (Banton & Garza, 2023; Evanoff et al., 2020), the learning performances of students are also negatively affected by the shift to online education (Serrano Sarmiento et al., 2021). From this context, the students often encounter increased stress due to sudden changes in the learning environment and are more prone to depression, tiredness, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization (Liu et al., 2022; Simic et al., 2021).

Similar to the universities in other countries, the Indonesian government has reportedly implemented full online learning since mid-March 2020, through the ministry of education and culture (Agung & Surtikanti, 2020). Irrespective of this condition, the management system accessibility is still the main obstacle (Sobaih et al., 2020), with most institutions not completely ready to implement the learning process (Coman et al., 2020). This is because of the expensive costs incurred during the development phase, compared to offline education (Bahasoan et al., 2020). Students are also found to experience many obstacles, with Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) and Gonzalez-Ramirez et al. (2021) exhibiting numerous challenges during online learning, such as inadequate implementation skills, slow internet connection, physical conditions (e.g., eye strain), concentration difficulty, financial problems, anxiety, and boredom (Stephan et al., 2019). Due to these difficulties, most of them do not want to continue using the learning process (Chung et al., 2020). Despite this, those with specific characteristics still have better learning experience, compared to offline education (Muhammad, 2020).

Although several studies have attempted to examine online learning in higher education, only a few of them explored the experiences of the students most affected by the digital educational system. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the online learning patterns of students and the kind of lecturers needed for the provision of a meaningful educational experience. By using a qualitative focus group study design, more detailed perceptions are provided from student experiences, accompanied by the consideration of each participant's unique context and the performance of complex analyses through multiple perspectives. The participants are also allowed to be study partners, a data collection procedure emphasizing the enhancements of the subjects' perspectives. From this context, the results provide a framework for lecturers and higher education managers to implement online learning, based on the perceptions of the end users, namely students.

Literature Review

A great variation was also observed in the boundaries of online learning, according to a previous literature analysis, where it was initially found to use a management system or digitally upload text and PDF as student academic materials (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Based on the development of interpretation, online learning is defined as the variational use of the internet to asynchronously and synchronously increase the interaction between teachers and students (Curtain, 2002). Some equivalent terms are also embedded in the interpretation of the educational process, for example, mobile (Alhassan, 2016), blended (Palalas et al., 2015), distance (Anderson & Dron, 2011), open, web-based (Costa et al., 2012), and computer-mediated learning (Anaraki, 2004; Cojocariu et al., 2014). These describe the digital activities and tools used in learning, to achieve the set educational goals. In this process, many components such as the technology, pedagogy, and assessment guides are involved (Aparicio et al., 2016), regarding the global accessibility of educational content (Blayone et al., 2018). Based on these various definitions, the important elements in online learning include technology, time (synchronous and asynchronous), access, interaction opportunities, physical distance, and traditional comparisons.

As a substitute for traditional classes, online learning is enabled for the interactive communication and collaboration between lecturers and students, with various limitations experienced during campus closures (Cacheiro-Gonzalez et al., 2019). Online learning is becoming a trend and entering the mainstream, as it contributes to expanding educational accessibility to a wider community (Gallagher & LaBrie, 2012). It also promises many benefits and uses (Castro & Tumibay, 2021) regarding learning outcomes' financing, flexibility, and effectiveness (Lorenzetti, 2013). In this condition, many adult learners enjoy the flexibility provided by online learning when they are instructed to balance their studies and work (Bell &

Federman, 2013). The learning process is also a major component of global education (Singh & Thurman, 2019), showing that universities are capable of using synchronous and asynchronous digital platforms (Farros et al., 2020). Based on the synchronous platform, "live" interactions are often allowed between lecturers and students, for example, audio and video conferencing, web chat, etc. Meanwhile, the asynchronous platform involves delaying the interaction time between the educational personnel, for example, E-mail, previous video recordings, discussion forums, and so on (Finkelstein, 2006). In this case, these various platforms are important modalities for universities, to help carry out online learning (Evans, 2011; Khalil et al., 2020; Ridgway et al., 2007).

Many previous studies reportedly attempted to explore online learning in universities, with most of them focusing on determining the barriers, readiness, impact, and influential factors of the educational service. According to Baticulon et al. (2021), these barriers were examined from the perspective of 3,670 medical students in the Philippines, as a developing country. In this condition, only 41% of them were found to be physically and mentally capable of using online learning. This proved that five obstacles were encountered by participants, namely technological, individual, domestic, institutional, and community barriers. Agung and Surtikanti (2020) also performed an analysis on the same topic, with three main obstacles encountered by the language students at the Pamane Talino Indonesia School of Teacher Training and Education. These included internet connection availability and sustainability, teaching media accessibility, and tool suitability to access media. Based on Gonzalez-Ramirez et al. (2021), the impact of changing online learning was also examined on students' psychological wellness at the School of Education and Health. The results indicated that social relationships with peers and lecturers decreased during the online learning process. This decrease was accompanied by a decrease in students' social connections, motivation, and mental health. Another report proved that online learning became boring from the first two weeks and increased student anxiety, specifically among those whose parents had low income and were not in the mood to study due to many assignments (Irawan et al., 2020). The lack of direct interaction between students and instructors was also another problem encountered in developing countries such as Pakistan (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). In addition, more challenges were observed, including difficult accessibility and connectivity, as well as inadequate communication and interaction between educational personnel and peers (Aboagye et al., 2020). Increased training costs, isolated feelings, and technology gaps were also some challenges reported by other study experts (Castro & Tumibay, 2021).

To understand students' online learning readiness, two other studies were subsequently conducted, with Chung et al. (2020) investigating this factor at two digital course institutions in Malaysia. Through a survey of 399 participants, female and degree students were observed to be more prepared and satisfied with the learning experience, compared to male and diploma students. However, more than half of the participants preferred direct learning to online education. Blayone et al. (2018) also investigated the digital readiness profile of students in Georgia and Ukraine, regarding this learning process. Using the survey of 150 participants, most students in both countries were not ready to participate in some online learning activities. Another study also examined students' satisfaction with these learning platforms, where comfortability was often derived through google hangouts and classroom, as well as LMS (Learning Management Systems) (Almusharraf & Khahro, 2020). This was in line with Baber (2020) and Herguner et al. (2020), where online learning satisfaction was influenced by class interactions, motivation, lecture structure, instructor knowledge, facilities, and positive attitudes. According to Yudiawan et al. (2021), the factors influencing the success of online learning were mapped and tested at Islamic Religious Universities in West Papua, Indonesia. From the results, the quality of lecturers and the system had the highest influence (94.2%), with diversity and institutional services having no significant effect. In addition, an empirical study

was widely carried out using a systematic literature review method (Pei & Wu, 2019; Redmond et al., 2018; Singh & Thurman, 2019; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2020).

Although several studies attempted to examine online learning in universities, only a few of them explored the experiences of the students most affected by digital educational practice. Therefore, this study aimed to explore pre-service teachers' experiences and perceptions of their lecturers in online learning. The report on students' perception of lecturers is important, due to the essential role of educators in the success of online learning (Baber, 2020). The behavioral aspects of lecturers or instructors are also the important variables affecting the quality and outcomes of the learning process in higher education, for example, the ability and intensity of communication (Alawamleh et al., 2022; Baticulon et al., 2021) and face-to-face interaction (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Therefore, this study aimed to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding their numerous abilities to provide good digital learning experiences.

The early (2nd semester) and final (6th semester) semester students are two groups with different experiences regarding online learning. From this context, the early group experienced 100% online learning with no encounter recorded for offline education during their time as pre-service teachers. Meanwhile, final semester students experienced both learning methods. This explains that they had experienced offline learning for two full semesters before adopting online education since March 2020. These experience differences allow both student groups to have distinct perspectives on the aspects of learning, leading to comfortability. Therefore, this study aims to identify the similarities and differences between early and final semester students, to develop a perspective regarding the effects of experience distinction on the assessment of lecturers during online learning in higher education.

The Role of the Study Authors

The five study authors are lecturers in the Faculty of Education, which emphasize various issues related to learning, training, and development for pre-service teachers. In this analysis, the authors encountered a similar phenomenon, regarding the digital education of pre-service teachers by appropriate lecturers. They were also actively involved in the study and data analysis process. From this context, the first, second, and third authors were involved in planning the study, paper writing, as well as data collection and analysis. Meanwhile, the fourth and fifth authors played a role in reviewing, providing critical notes, and revising the paper toward perfection. Furthermore, the study is motivated by the confusion experienced by most teachers in higher education during online learning. This sudden change has led to the inability to determine the appropriate pattern for implementing the digital education method. Based on these descriptions, the knowledge of the specific factors contributing to the success of online learning is expected to greatly assist teachers in higher education, by improving their teaching quality. The results obtained are also anticipated to provide an overview for higher education teachers in building communication with students during online learning. This should be accompanied by the prioritization of important elements greatly impacting students' digital education and the provision of the necessary treatments supporting the success of the learning method.

Methodologies

Study Design

This study used a qualitative focus group study design, which was selected for its ability to provide a broad explanation from the participants (Throuvala et al., 2019), as well as to

facilitate shared thoughts, feelings, and attitudes (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). It also sought to analyze the in-depth interpretation of a specific problem (Mohajan, 2018). Furthermore, the main interest of a qualitative researcher is to understand and generate the interpretations constructed by the study. Through these philosophical assumptions, this study aimed to explore the interpretation of participants' experiences in communicating with their lecturers during online learning in the pandemic period. In the initial and final semesters, data were obtained from the pre-service teachers undergoing online learning at the higher education for four full terms. These complete semesters emphasized the campus closure period in March 2020 until the data collection time.

Participants

Participants were pre-service teacher-students studying the Elementary School Education program at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Using the purposeful sampling technique, a total of 110 participants were selected, containing 58 and 52 students in semesters 2 and 6 (first and final semesters), respectively. This value met the criteria of code and meaning saturations, as described by Hennink et al. (2017). From a previous study, code saturation was achieved at nine interviews, where various thematic issues had been identified. A total of 10 FGDs were conducted for the early and final semester students, with the members contained in both groups ranging from five to six participants. The demographics of these participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Student Semester	Sex	Respondent	Percentage	Total
First semester	Male	4	3,64	58
	Female	54	49,09	
Last semester	Male	6	5,45	52
	Female	46	41,82	

Data Collection

The data were obtained through group discussion forums (FGD), where participants were selected due to their ability to explicitly generate information through information (Pope & Mays, 1995). They also provided opportunities for individuals to build on other members answers, leading to the creation of new ideas (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Moreover, FGDs provided more time for participants to reflect on their respective opinions (Krueger, 2014), with the explanation process being digitally recorded with their consent. This study was regulated by a focus group guide developed after conducting a literature review (Kitzinger, 1995), to explore students' experiences of lecturers during online learning. Despite using these guidelines, "listening actively and requesting many interviews were still important regarding the knowledge of participants" (Seidman, 2006, p. 15). FGDs also produced sufficient information to understand the analyzed phenomenon (Throuvala et al., 2019).

Data Analysis Technique

The data obtained were systematically analyzed by categorizing and comparing the FGD results of the two groups, that is, the pre-service participants in the first and final

semesters (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This analysis was carried out through the following two stages, (1) the data were categorized into the first and final groups, where each dataset was thoroughly analyzed for the realistic perception of the story. It was also accompanied by several systematic readings, noting assumptions, keywords, perspectives, and attitudes (Smith et al., 2009). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), data analysis was "a complex process involving the thorough assessment between concrete and abstract concepts, inductive and deductive reasoning, as well as description and interpretation". In this process, common threads were found in participants' stories, such as contrasting experiences and connective themes (Fraser, 2004). Besides, side comments were also provided for the identification of possible themes and sub-themes. After analyzing the transcript, the acquired themes were combined and grouped to obtain a clear participants' perceptions, and (2) A comparative assessment was carried out on the analytical results of each generated theme and sub-theme from the two groups. This led to the observation of two similar themes in the initial and final semesters, namely pedagogical skills and social-personal skills, respectively. In these themes, four common sub-themes were subsequently observed, that is, "delivery of clear and easy material" and "interactive," as well as "relaxing & fun" and "pleasant personality" for pedagogical skills and social-personal skills, respectively. Meanwhile, the slight difference depended on the addition of several sub-themes in both themes.

Results

This study aimed to explore student experiences with lecturers during online learning, while also comparing the pre-service teachers in the initial and final semesters. The results determined two similar main themes, namely pedagogical skills and social-personal skills, although the difference depended on a few sub-themes between the two student groups. The data coding comparison is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Comparison of Coding Data

Participants	Theme	Sub-theme	Total Participants
First-semester Pre-service teachers	Pedagogical skills	Submission of material is clear and easy to understand	22
		Non-stressful lectures	16
		Interactive	10
	Social- personal skills	Relaxing and fun	18
		Friendly	10
		His personality is fun	10
Final semester Pre-service teachers	Pedagogical skills	Submission of material is clear and easy to understand	13
		Interactive	8
		Do not provide much work	6
		Provide good grades	5
	Social- personal skills	Understanding student conditions	17
		His personality is fun	14
		Motivate students	13
		Relaxing and fun	5

The Similarity of Pre-Service Teacher Experience in the First and Final Semesters

Pedagogical Skills

In the pedagogical skills, similar experiences were observed between the initial and final semester participants. The delivery of clear and easy-to-understand material and the interactive sub-themes were importantly stated by the pre-service teachers, that is, 22/10 and 13/8 statements in the initial and final semesters.

Submission of Material is Clear and Easy to Understand

The lecturers easily and clearly conveying learning materials was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme by the participants (22 participants), due to being supported by the following codes, (a) easy to understand, (b) clear, (c) detailed, (d) not confusing, as well as (e) concise and clear. Through FGD, the statement of a final semester pre-service teacher (R15) is observed as follows:

In online learning, lecturers are often expected to explain easy-to-understand materials. Maybe this is also experienced by friends because online learning is sometimes more difficult because students cannot discuss more freely like offline learning time.

In this process, similar answers were also expressed by an initial semester student (R9) as follows:

The most important thing in my opinion is a lecturer who can convey the material clearly. For example, is Mr [name of lecturer], in Zoom lectures, the material is easy to understand.

Interactive

The interactive lecturer was the second sub-theme mentioned by the two participants' groups. The following codes supported this, (a) easy to contact, (b) interactive with students, (c) fast response, (d) responsive, (e) interactive invitation, (f) feedback provision, and (g) adequate communication. Through FGD, one of the initial semester participants (R24) stated that:

An enjoyable experience for me in online learning is when the lecturer can communicate well, hence, the class becomes fluid and not stressful.

Similar experiences were also shared by many other participants as follows:

I am happy with Ms. [lecturer's name], based on the ease of communication with students, through Whatsapp or other available media. (R16)

Adequate interactions during lectures provide the opportunities for students to ask questions. (R1)

Lecturers are interactive; hence, they can build a good learning atmosphere. (R8)

Social-Personal Skills

Based on a personal aspect social-personal skills, the pre-service teachers in the first and final semesters also had similar experience. This clarified that lecturers with pleasant personalities, as well as relaxed and fun sub-themes were frequently stated during online learning, that is, 10/18 and 14/5 statements in both groups, respectively.

His Personality is Fun

The possession of a pleasant personality was also a sub-theme mentioned by 10 participants, which was supported by the following codes, (a) pleasant lecturers, (b) interesting explanation, (c) interesting material presentation, (d) not boring, (e) sleepless atmosphere, and (f) interesting. In FGD, R3 is explained as follows:

Lecturers need to have fun and interesting qualities, due to the stressfulness of the pandemic period. The tasks are many, and sometimes the schedule clashes with other activities.

This was in line with the statements of other participants, for example:

Fun lecturers really helped me while learning online. (R7)

Alhamdulillah, although learning online, most of lecturers are fun, hence, they do not get bored even though they are online. (R18)

Lecturers who enjoy online learning, in my opinion, are those who are interesting and serious but also relaxed. (R10)

Relaxing and Fun

This experience was noted by both pre-service teachers in the first and final semesters, with 18 and 5 statements observed for both groups, respectively. It was also supported by the following codes, (a) relaxed, (b) fun, (c) serious and relaxed, (d) relaxed and disciplined, and (e) interesting teaching process. Based on FGD, the statement of a student (R23) is observed as follows:

What I hope for during online learning is lecturers who teach in a relaxed manner but can motivate students. It is a delight that many lecturers in this institution have these qualities, for example, Mr. [name of lecturer] when teaching is relaxed but students understand.

Differences in the experience of the first and final semester participants

Pedagogical skills

These pre-service teachers also had different experiences in both pedagogical skills and social-personal skills professional and personal aspects, despite the various similarities being observed. In the first semester, a sub-theme was highly stated by 16 participants, namely "Do not stress," explaining that the experience was not stressful. Those in the final semester also

preferred the lecturers that did not provide many assignments, although they produced good grades, regarding the perceptions of 6 and 5 participants, respectively.

First Semester:

Non-Stressful Lectures

This sub-theme was an interesting experience for participants during online learning, which was subsequently supported by the following codes, (a) not tense, (b) not scary, (c) relaxed class atmosphere, and (d) cheerful atmosphere. From FGD, a first semester participant (R20) stated the following:

I like online learning because lecturers teach without straining the class. For example, Mrs. [name of lecturer] and Mr. [name of lecturer] when teaching through zoom, there is humor, hence, the class is not tense.

Final Semester:

Based on the professional aspect, the final semester participants preferred lecturers who did not provide many assignments, although they produced good grades (6 and 5 statements) and gave good grades (mentioned by 5 participants). The sub-theme that did not multitask was supported by some codes, namely (a) not many assignments, and (b) not only with assignments. Meanwhile, the cheap value variable was supported by the following, (a) good grade provision, and (b) unselfish towards grade provision.

Not Providing Many Assignments

The lecturer who did not provide many assignments was one of the important aspects of the online experiences supporting final semester pre-service teachers. In this condition, almost all lecturers were reported to provide assignments during the early periods of the COVID-19 outbreak, leading to the high stress level and heaviness of students in lectures. However, the trend was observed to change during the final semester. Besides the provision of assignments, lecturers also conducted more synchronized learning through various platforms. Based on FGD, a final semester participant (R28) stated the following:

Lecturers I expect are those who do not only give assignments as was often done in the early days of COVID-19, resulting many students are stressed. However, lecturers conduct more lectures through Zoom, Google Meet, or e-learning when other media are unavailable.

Give Good Grades

This sub-theme was frequently stated by the final semester participants, indicating that many students whose lectures were oriented towards cumulative achievement index were still observed. Through FGD, one of these participants (R25) stated the following: "I think giving good grades to lecturers is important because a high GPA is also important as alumni."

Pedagogical Skills

According to the pedagogical skills, some differences were also observed between the pre-service teachers in the first and final semesters. In this process, the sub-themes of "friendly lecturers," as well as "understanding" and "motivating" students' conditions were observed for both groups, with 10, 17, and 13 statements, respectively.

First Semester:

Friendly Lecturers

This theme was supported by the following codes, (1) friendly, and (2) not rude (keep the image). In this process, friendly lecturers had the following characteristics, (a) open to communicating with anyone, (b) not far from students, and (c) like to communicate and greet. Based on FGD, one of the pre-service teachers in the first semester (R 19) stated the following:

I like friendly lecturers; hence, they do not scare students. For example, Ms. [lecturer's name] and Mr. [lecturer's name], sometimes before teaching they greet students one by one, often even talking about student problems outside the material. I think it is also important that students feel cared for.

Final Semester:

Understanding Student Conditions

This sub-theme was frequently stated by the final semester participants (17) and supported by several codes, namely understanding student conditions, constraints, circumstances, and limitations. Through FGD, R10 stated the following:

My experience in online learning that ultimately can increase my motivation in learning is that lecturers understand my condition. For example, the condition of the internet network is not connected, hence, if lecturers see an off-camera student they not angry because knowing that my internet signal is bad.

Based on the results, network constraints were mostly encountered by students during online learning, indicating the need for lecturers with high and classified understanding levels. Besides this, other students also expect lecturers to understand their academic abilities, with the following stated by R17 through FGD:

Lecturers need to understand the condition of students, for example, the simultaneous lateness to zoom meetings should be highly comprehended, as this is likely due to many unforeseen circumstances.

Motivate Students

In online learning, students often need motivation from various parties due to encountering many challenges. Most of the final semester pre-service teachers preferred lecturers with motivational capabilities during the learning process. The sub-theme was supported by the following coding, namely (1) motivating students, (2) triggering motivation, and (3) uplifting. Through FGD, one of the participants (R19) stated the following: "Besides

delivering varied material, ideal lecturers also need to motivate student learning in online education, for the achievement of greater outcomes, which requires a higher effort.”

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the experience patterns of the pre-service teachers in online learning during the COVID-19 outbreak. Based on the comparative analysis between the first and final semester participants, some similar and different aspects were observed in describing the ideal lecturer during the learning process. The similarity aspect was observed at the “theme” level, where the pre-service groups expect the ideal lecturer to emphasize two features, namely the pedagogical skills and social-personal skills. Meanwhile, the differences depended on the several sub-themes supporting the two themes. In the first semester group, the professional indicators of the ideal lecturers included clear material conveyance, relaxed, interactive, and cheerful, regarding the statements of 22, 16, 10, and 10 participants, respectively. Besides this, those in the final group also included the delivery of easy-to-understand materials, interactive, did not provide many assignments, and good great value, concerning the perceptions of 13, 8, 6, and 5 members. According to the personal aspect, the first-semester group stated that the ideal lecturer was relaxed, fun, and friendly, through 18 and 10 participants, respectively. However, the statements in the final semester included understanding students’ conditions, pleasant personality, motivation, and relaxation, concerning the perceptions of 17, 14, 13, and 5 participants. Based on these analyses, the following results were obtained and evaluated:

Firstly, both pre-service teachers in the first and final semesters agreed that the ideal lecturer needs to have pedagogical skills and social-personal skills. In pedagogical skills, these educators need to possess the ability to adequately master and convey their knowledge to students. However, social-personal skills were observed as the standard of character and personality possessed by a person. In this condition, personality describes the unique psychological qualities influencing an individual's behaviour, thoughts, and feelings (Roberts & Jackson, 2008), leading to the increased effectiveness of the educators' works (Holmes et al., 2015). The unity between pedagogical skills and social-personal skills was also the main requirement supporting online learning in universities. In addition, professionalism had three essences, namely (1) having a specific scientific capacity according to the field, (2) providing services to others, and (3) having moral and ethical standards (Bair, 2016; Heck & Ambrosetti, 2018).

Secondly, both pre-service teachers in the first and final semesters agreed that the abilities of lecturers to interactively deliver clear and easy-to-understand online material was an important indicator of their pedagogical skills. The ability to convey material clearly and easily was a pedagogic competency that all professional educators should master. According to Law No 19 of 2005 concerning Indonesian Teachers and Lecturers, all professional university educators were required to have four competencies, such as pedagogic competence, which mastery helps in the following, (1) understanding students more deeply, (2) designing learning, (3) implementing learning, (4) designing and evaluating learning, and (5) developing students (Suyatno et al., 2021). Despite communication being an important part of pedagogic competence, inadequate interaction was still a challenge in online learning (Coman et al., 2020; Firmansyah et al., 2021). This finding was in line with most of the previous reports showing that interactive communication was an important online learning factor. In the classroom, the interaction between lecturers and students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Alawamleh et al., 2022; Baber, 2020; Baticulon et al., 2021; Dumford & Miller, 2018), as well as the communication skills (Slimi, 2020) also affected academic experience during the learning process. In addition, these interactive and communicative abilities activated several supporting variables in online

learning, such as student involvement (Brown et al., 2022; Martin & Bolliger, 2018) and participation (Hussein et al., 2020).

Thirdly, the experienced similarity between the first and final semester participants occurred in the social-personal skills. In this condition, all the pre-service teachers agreed that the cheerful, relaxed, and fun sub-themes were two important indicators of a lecturer during online learning. This suggested that lecturers with pleasant personalities, as well as who were relaxing and fun were mentioned positively by 24 and 23 pre-service teachers, that is, 10/14 and 18/5 in the first and final semesters, respectively. These results suggest that the main problems encountered during online learning such as were psychological aspects such as stress (Heo & Han, 2018; Kumalasari & Akmal, 2022; Sukdee et al., 2021), anxiety and depression (Fawaz & Samaha, 2021), as well as boredom (Esra & Sevilen, 2021), were important concerns for students. To reduce setbacks, students expected their lecturers to be able to relax and interestingly teach online. This was in line with most previous reports, where a pleasant educator had an impact on the following, (1) enjoyment and comfort of classroom learning (Becker et al., 2014; Suyatno et al., 2022; Suyudi et al., 2021), and (2) students' positive emotions (Goetz et al., 2013). It also fostered better student motivation and learning outcomes (Keller et al., 2014). In addition, the results strengthened Benekos and Benekos (2016) and Miron and Mevorach (2014), where most of the expected lecturers characteristics were fun, interesting, and motivating.

Fourthly, the differences between the experience of the first and final semester participants depended on several additional indicators in lecturers' pedagogical skills and social-personal skills. In the pedagogical skills, the first semester teachers emphasized educators who did not cause tension as an important indicator in online learning. Meanwhile, the honorary teachers in the final semester highly focused on lecturers who did not provide many assignments and cheap grades as social-personal skills. According to Irawan et al. (2020), many assignments were found to lower the mood of students' online learning participation during COVID-19. Regarding the social-personal skills, the first-semester teacher also focused in 10 friendly participants, with those in the final session mostly emphasizing lecturers who understood (17 participants) and motivated (13 participants) the conditions of students. The final semester pre-service teachers were found to have undergone online learning in universities for four full sessions, due to the campus closure effected from March 2020 until the data collection period. This explained that they had attended offline lectures for a full semester, accompanied by two meetings in the next session. However, teachers in the first semester had just completed online lectures at universities for one full semester, accompanied by several meetings in the next session. The difference in experience also provided different perspectives on their online learning needs, with pragmatic aspects such as teachers not providing many assignments and grades easily, becoming a source of concern for final semester students regarding pedagogical skills. For the early group, more emphasis was placed on the personality and communication patterns of teachers, with interaction comfortability being considered their most important need. This difference indicated that an individual's experience was found to shape different perceptions in online learning (Richmond & Zacks, 2017; Vernon, 2017). These results provide useful information for teachers, regarding their patterns of understanding the needs of each student from different semester levels, due to their similar and distinct needs.

Although several studies have attempted to examine online learning in higher education, only a few of them explored the experiences of the students most affected by the digital educational system during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results, the perspectives of students in describing lecturers provided meaningful experiences in reinforcing the recommendations (Kuhlee & Winch, 2017) on the importance of teacher professionalism. This should not be interpreted as a universal value because the indicators of professionalism

often vary in different contexts. Moreover, the perceptions of the involved pre-service teachers highlighted the importance of two important online learning competencies, namely pedagogical and social-personal skills. These two indicators, for example, were quite different from the determinants of previous studies, which always provided technological skills (Baran & Correia, 2014; Guasch et al., 2010; Mehrotra et al., 2022; Palloff & Pratt, 2011). These results provided a framework for relevant parties, specifically university lecturers and administrators. For lecturers, the will to continuously develop themselves is very important in this era, as different situations are found to often require distinct needs. Meanwhile, the curriculum and experience obtained when in the universities were not designed for the situations and conditions presently encountered. Lecturers are also required to understand the dynamics of student experience because different encounter levels often potentially provide distinct perceptions and needs. Individual professional development (Cutri et al., 2020) is the key for lecturers to carry out online learning, which is effective, interesting, fun, and related to students' feelings. Based on the university administrators, the design of lecturers' self-development programs was very important, regarding the possession of adequate pedagogical skills and social-personal skills, which were close to the description of their students. The self-development program oriented to pedagogic, social, and personality competencies also acquired an adequate portion, as most of ideal lecturers' indicators were highly oriented to both features in online learning.

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