

## **Digital Fatigue and Cognitive Overload: Psychological Challenges in the Era of Cyber Education at Universitas Negeri Malang**

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### **Abstract**

The era of cyber education has brought significant changes to the world of education, especially with the emergence of hybrid learning models that combine online and offline methods. However, this transformation also poses psychological challenges for students, such as stress, anxiety, decreased learning motivation, and difficulty adapting to technology. This study aims to identify the psychological challenges faced by students in hybrid learning and provide strategic recommendations to support their mental well-being. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach (Self-Determination Theory) at the Department of Art and Design, State University of Malang. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and questionnaires. The analysis was carried out thematically to explore patterns of psychological challenges experienced by students. The results of the study show that students face three main challenges, namely difficulty in time management between online and offline learning, limited social interaction that affects learning motivation, and psychological pressure from high academic expectations. This study recommends a collaborative approach between lecturers, students, and counselors to create a psychologically friendly learning environment. These findings provide an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of student psychology in the era of cyber education and support the development of more inclusive education policies.

**Keywords:** student psychology, hybrid learning, cyber education, psychological challenges, mental well-being

### **INTRODUCTION**

The digital era has encouraged the implementation of hybrid learning that combines online and offline methods as an innovative approach in the world of education, including in the field of art design. Universitas Negeri Malang, as one of the leading universities in Indonesia, has adopted this system to provide greater flexibility and accessibility to students. However, in practice, hybrid learning for art design students presents unique challenges that affect the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process [1]. The practice-based field of design art often requires direct interaction, intensive guidance, and physical facilities that are difficult to replicate in online learning. This creates a gap between theory and practice that can affect student competency [2].

One of the main issues is the limited technological infrastructure that is evenly distributed among students. Not all students have adequate access to hardware, design software, and a stable internet connection, which are basic needs in hybrid learning [3]. On the other hand, online learning is often felt to be less than optimal in building social interaction and collaborative work, which are the essence of the creative process of design art. As a result, students tend to feel isolated, less motivated, and have difficulty developing visual communication skills to the maximum [4], [5].

In addition, hybrid learning also poses psychological challenges for art and design students. Academic pressure to produce high-quality creative work often clashes with time constraints and technical support in online learning. Students also face difficulties in receiving constructive feedback virtually, which can impact the process of self-reflection and development. This condition requires a more adaptive and inclusive teaching strategy to overcome various obstacles, so that art and design students at Universitas Negeri Malang can achieve their maximum potential in an increasingly digital education era.

Online learning, which was initially considered an innovative solution to increase the accessibility of education, turned out to have unexpected complex problems. One of the main problems is the low level of active student involvement during the learning process. In an online environment, many students find it difficult to maintain concentration due to the lack of direct interaction with teachers and peers. This factor is exacerbated by the presence of digital distractions, such as social media and device notifications, which can easily divert students' attention from the learning material.

Another problem that arises is the limited ability of technology to replace the dynamics of learning in physical spaces. In some fields of study, especially those based on practice such as art, engineering, and science, online learning is unable to provide an authentic learning experience. Reliance on simulation software or learning videos cannot fully replace the essential processes of creative exploration, hands-on discussions, and field practice. As a result, learners often feel less confident in the understanding and skills they gain online. Beyond the technical aspects, online learning also brings significant psychological challenges. Social isolation resulting from minimal face-to-face interaction can lead to stress, anxiety, and loneliness in learners. The pressure to adapt to new technologies and high academic demands often exacerbate these conditions. Not all students have equal access to devices and internet connectivity, creating a digital divide that impacts the quality of learning. These issues underscore the need for a more holistic approach to designing online learning systems, so that they do not only rely on technological innovation, but also consider the emotional, social, and psychological aspects of learners [2], [6].

Previous research studies on student psychology in the era of cyber education have been conducted by many researchers from various countries with various discussion focuses. For example, research by Chen exploring the impact of online learning on students' stress and anxiety levels during the COVID-19 pandemic [6]. The study found that the sudden shift from face-to-face to online learning led to a significant spike in students' academic anxiety, especially related to the difficulty of adapting to technology and the lack of social interaction. Meanwhile, it examined the relationship between intensive use of digital platforms and students' psychological well-being. The results showed that although technology provides flexibility in learning, excessive use has the potential to trigger digital fatigue, which affects motivation and concentration in learning [7].

Another study focused on the effects of virtual interactions in e-learning platforms on students' sense of social connectedness. They found that students who actively participated in online discussions had higher levels of satisfaction compared to those who were passive, because they felt more connected to their classmates and lecturers. In addition, they evaluated factors that affect students' mental health in the era of cyber education, such as task pressure, social isolation, and quality of internet access [8]. This study provides important recommendations for designing more humanistic learning platforms and supporting the balance between academic demands and students' mental health [9].

Overall, these studies highlight the challenges and opportunities faced by students in the era of cyber education, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach that not only emphasizes the technological aspect but also supports students' psychological well-being.

**Urgency of Research on the Psychological Impact of Students** The urgency of research on the psychological impact of cyber education is very relevant, especially amidst the massive transformation in the education system triggered by the development of digital technology and the global pandemic. The shift from traditional learning to online and hybrid learning has created new challenges for students, such as increased academic pressure, social isolation, digital fatigue, and other mental health issues. Research in this area is important to understand how changes in interaction patterns, learning environments, and access to technology affect students' psychological well-being.

The era of cyber education brings accessibility and flexibility in learning, but also has the potential to worsen the digital divide [10] [11]. Students with limited access to technology or inadequate internet connections are more susceptible to stress and frustration. In addition, the lack of face-to-face social contact can affect the sense of social connectedness, which is an important aspect of students' psychological and emotional development.

Research is also urgently needed to identify effective strategies to support the balance between academic demands and mental health. Data from various studies show an increase in anxiety, stress, and depression among students during the digital education era. Therefore, a deeper understanding is needed to develop interventions, policies, and learning platform designs that are more humanistic, inclusive, and oriented towards student well-being.

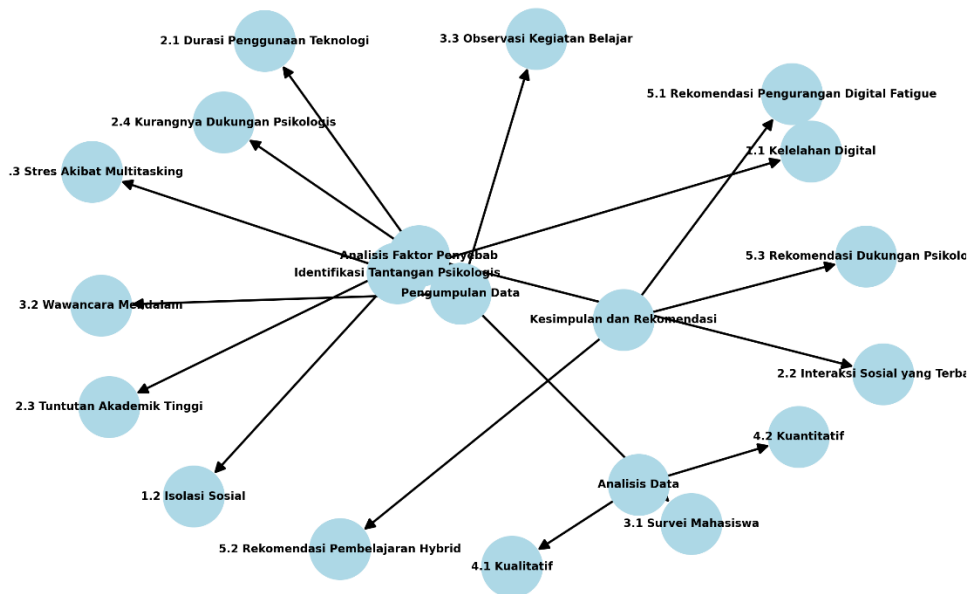
By highlighting the psychological impacts in this era, this kind of research not only helps students overcome the challenges they face, but also provides guidance for educational institutions, policymakers, and technology developers to create a healthier and more sustainable education ecosystem in the future.

The objectives of the study are as follows, (1) Identifying the psychological challenges faced by students in hybrid learning in the era of cyber education. (2) Analyzing the factors that cause psychological challenges in the era of cyber education.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore in depth the psychological challenges faced by students in hybrid learning. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a rich contextual understanding of students' experiences, especially in psychological aspects such as motivation, emotion, adaptation, and social interaction. This study is based on educational psychology theory and developmental psychology theory, such as Self-Determination Theory which emphasizes the importance of the need for competence, autonomy, and connectedness in supporting student well-being.

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**Figure 1. Self-determination theory research methodology**

Figure 1 shows the research data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with students, lecturers, and parents of students. Participant observation was conducted in online and offline learning activities to observe the dynamics of student interactions and behavior. Documents such as student reflection journals, academic reports, and counseling notes were analyzed to complement primary data. Data analysis used thematic analysis techniques with coding, categorization, and interpretation stages. The findings are linked to the Self-Determination Theory to evaluate how the hybrid learning environment meets or hinders the psychological needs of students. The results of this analysis are expected to provide in-depth insights into the factors that influence student psychology in hybrid learning as well as relevant intervention strategies to improve their well-being [12].

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Decy and Ryan [12], is a psychological theory that focuses on human motivation and psychological well-being. This theory highlights three basic needs that influence the optimization of individual psychological functioning, namely the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. These three needs are very relevant to understanding the psychological challenges experienced by students in hybrid learning in the era of cyber education [13].

First, hybrid learning often requires students to be independent in managing time, understanding online materials, and utilizing technology. This is directly related to the need for competence, where students must feel capable and confident in facing complex learning tasks. If these needs are not met, students can experience anxiety, demotivation, or even academic burnout [14].

Second, the need for autonomy is an important factor in hybrid learning that gives students more freedom to regulate their learning process. However, this freedom can be a challenge when students feel they do not get enough support from their teachers or learning environment. SDT helps explain how well-supported autonomy can increase students' intrinsic motivation, while undirected autonomy can lead to confusion and stress.

Third, hybrid learning often reduces the intensity of face-to-face social interactions, which can affect students' need for relatedness. SDT emphasizes that the need for positive

emotional relationships with others, such as peers and teachers, is essential for psychological well-being. The inability to meet this need in online learning can lead to social isolation and decreased motivation to learn.

By using Self-Determination Theory as a theoretical foundation, this study can effectively identify how hybrid learning affects the balance between students' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This theory also provides a strong framework for designing strategic recommendations in supporting students' psychological well-being in the era of cyber education.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In the era of digital education, students at Universitas Negeri Malang face significant psychological challenges, especially related to the phenomena of digital fatigue and cognitive overload in online learning. Digital fatigue refers to mental fatigue due to intense use of technology, such as engaging in online learning activities, video conferencing, and continuous digital communication. This results in decreased motivation, stress, and prolonged fatigue, because students have to adapt to the constant burden of information without sufficient rest time. Meanwhile, cognitive overload occurs when students receive more information than their brains can effectively process. In the context of online learning, cognitive overload occurs when students are faced with lecture materials, assignments, exams, and communications from various digital platforms simultaneously. This excess of information can cause confusion, difficulty in prioritizing material, and a decreased ability to absorb information properly. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, such as the large amount of information delivered at once, the loss of important direct social interactions, and the tendency to multitask which interferes with concentration. To overcome this problem, Universitas Negeri Malang can implement strategies to simplify materials, use more efficient technology, and provide space for students to rest and reflect on their learning. Time management skills training can also help students manage cognitive load and avoid excessive multitasking, making online learning more effective and comprehensive. The results of a study aimed at identifying psychological challenges in hybrid learning in the era of cyber education showed that students faced various difficulties, such as digital fatigue, stress due to excessive workload, difficulty in time management, and feelings of social isolation. These challenges were especially felt by students who were not used to online learning or who had limited access to technology and internet connectivity. In addition, the lack of face-to-face interaction with lecturers and classmates often created a sense of alienation (disconnection) which had an impact on learning motivation and mental health [4].

Analysis of the causal factors shows that these psychological challenges are influenced by several main things. First, the imbalance between online and offline components in hybrid learning often causes confusion and stress, especially for students who need more intensive study guidance. Second, limitations in technological infrastructure, such as unstable internet access and inadequate devices, are major barriers to an effective learning experience. Third, the lack of digital literacy makes it difficult for some students to optimally utilize learning platforms, thus exacerbating academic stress. Fourth, the lack of emotional and social support in the online environment increases the risk of anxiety, especially for students who tend to be introverted or lack self-confidence. The results of this study emphasize the need for a strategic approach that not only addresses technical obstacles but also pays attention to the psychological aspects of students. Recommendations in the form of strengthening digital literacy, more adaptive hybrid learning designs, and ongoing psychosocial support are expected to reduce the negative impacts of learning in the era of cyber education [15], [16].

Findings on students of the Department of Art and Design, State University of Malang related to learning in the era of cyber education indicate complex dynamics in the teaching and learning process. This study revealed that art and design students face unique challenges, especially in activities that require direct practice and intensive interaction, such as art studios, design workshops, and creative work evaluations. The transition to online or hybrid learning often causes gaps in mastery of technical skills, due to limited access to campus facilities, such as art laboratories or special equipment.

From a psychological perspective, students reported significant emotional distress due to the difficulty of expressing creative ideas optimally through digital media. Most students felt that virtual communication limited spontaneous interactions with lecturers and peers, which are usually sources of inspiration and collaboration in creating work. In addition, challenges in time management, heavy workloads, and feelings of social isolation were also reported to increase levels of stress and anxiety.

However, this study also found a positive side, where some students showed increased adaptability to digital technology, such as mastery of design software, online collaboration platforms, and the ability to work independently. These findings underscore the importance of more holistic support in art and design learning, including the development of more creative hybrid methods, increased access to technology, and the provision of psychological support to ensure a balance between technical challenges and students' mental well-being.

Students taking Graphic Design Production courses in the era of cyber education face a number of significant psychological challenges, mainly due to the technical complexity and creativity demands of the field [17]. One of the main challenges is academic pressure caused by the need to produce high-quality graphic work in a limited time. This process is often exacerbated by the need to use sophisticated design software, which requires a high level of digital literacy and solid technical skills.

In addition, students often experience digital fatigue due to the constant use of electronic devices, whether for projects, attending online classes, or communicating with lecturers and peers. The lack of face-to-face interaction in hybrid learning also creates feelings of social isolation, where students miss out on the experience of direct discussion and collegial critique that are essential for the development of creative ideas.

Another challenge is the lack of confidence in presenting work virtually, where they find it difficult to convey design concepts effectively through a screen. This situation is often exacerbated by concerns about the response of the audience or lecturer who feels less interactive than in a physical classroom setting. Students also report stress due to multitasking, because they have to complete design projects while fulfilling assignments from other courses in a busy curriculum.

Given this complexity, there is an urgent need to support students through a more inclusive and adaptive approach. For example, providing more intensive digital literacy training, integrating more flexible project-based learning methods, and strengthening psychosocial aspects through guidance or counseling. These efforts aim to reduce psychological stress, increase creative productivity, and ensure a more balanced and meaningful learning experience.

Facing the psychological challenges of students in Graphic Design Production courses in the era of cyber education requires a holistic approach that includes academic, technical, and psychosocial aspects. The first step is to strengthen students' digital literacy through intensive training focused on mastering graphic design software and other supporting technologies, so that they are more confident in completing assignments. In addition, flexible and collaborative project-based learning can be applied to provide space for students to manage their time better,

while reducing feelings of social isolation through active interaction in group discussions, work critiques, and creative brainstorming.

Lecturers also need to ensure that the workload given is proportional, with realistic and clearly scheduled deadlines, so that students can avoid stress due to multitasking. To increase the sense of connectedness and emotional support, regular consultation rooms both online and offline can be provided, along with a friendly and supportive learning community. Psychological support is also essential, by providing easily accessible counseling services and seminars on stress management and work-life balance. In addition, optimization of technological infrastructure, such as the provision of free software, design lab facilities, and support for tool loans, needs to be done to ensure that all students have adequate access to technology. With this approach, students can be more motivated and comfortable in facing challenges, so that they are able to produce quality work without sacrificing their mental health.

Research findings on students taking Graphic Design Production courses reveal various challenges related to technical, academic, and psychological aspects. One of the main findings is the difficulty in mastering complex graphic design software, especially for students who are exposed to the technology for the first time. This often causes academic stress, as they are required to produce high-quality work in a limited time. In addition, limited access to campus facilities, such as design labs and supporting equipment, adds to the barriers to the learning process, especially for students who rely on devices and software available on campus [17], [18].

From a psychological perspective, students reported experiencing digital fatigue due to the long duration of using electronic devices to complete projects, attend online lectures, and communicate with lecturers or friends. This condition was exacerbated by the lack of face-to-face interaction, which reduced the opportunity to get direct feedback or build spontaneous creative discussions. Some students also experienced time management difficulties because they had to complete complex design assignments at the same time as other courses, which often triggered stress and anxiety.

Other findings showed that students often felt less confident when presenting their work online, because they were worried that their design concepts would not be conveyed clearly or would not get enough appreciation. This concern was especially evident in students who were still in the early stages of developing technical and conceptual skills. All of these findings emphasize the need for a more adaptive learning approach, adequate infrastructure support, and more attention to students' mental health in Graphic Design Production courses.

Digital fatigue is a phenomenon of physical, mental, and emotional fatigue that arises from excessive use of digital devices, which is increasingly common in the era of cyber education. For students taking courses such as Graphic Design Production, this challenge becomes even more apparent, as most of their time is spent in front of a computer screen, working on designs, taking online classes, or communicating via digital platforms. This fatigue is often accompanied by physical symptoms, such as eye strain, headaches, and neck and back pain due to sitting in a static position for hours. In addition, they also feel mentally exhausted, due to the lack of variation in social interactions or refreshing physical activities.

One of the main factors that causes digital fatigue is the very high duration of technology use. Graphic design students are often trapped in a long routine, spending a lot of time in front of the computer using graphic design software, editing images, and completing projects. These activities require intense focus and attention, increasing physical and mental fatigue. Furthermore, many students also have to attend online lectures and work on other assignments at the same time, forcing them to do digital multitasking. This adds to the level of stress and fatigue, as they feel like they have to be constantly connected to the virtual world without enough time to rest.

In addition, online or hybrid learning often limits the direct social interactions that usually occur in the classroom. Losing the opportunity to have face-to-face discussions with classmates or receive direct feedback from lecturers makes students feel isolated. This feeling worsens emotional fatigue, as they are deprived of the social support that is essential for maintaining motivation and well-being. The loss of face-to-face interaction makes them feel less connected to the academic environment and reduces their sense of ownership of their learning process.

The impact of digital fatigue is wide-ranging, affecting not only students' academic abilities but also their mental health. Students who experience digital fatigue are at risk of burnout, which is characterized by decreased motivation, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of dissatisfaction with learning outcomes. This condition can progress to more serious mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression, especially if students feel overwhelmed by the many tasks and responsibilities they have to handle simultaneously. This physical and mental fatigue can also interfere with their productivity, so that the quality of the design work produced can decrease.

To overcome digital fatigue, several steps can be taken by both students and lecturers. Students are advised to manage their time wisely, using the 20-20-20 rule, which means that every 20 minutes, they should look away from the screen for 20 seconds to an object 20 feet away. In addition, it is important to maintain good posture and do light exercise to relieve physical tension. Lecturers can also design teaching materials by considering the duration of technology use and provide sufficient rest time between heavy tasks. With this approach, digital fatigue can be reduced, and students can remain productive and maintain their physical and mental well-being.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that digital fatigue and cognitive overload are significant psychological challenges for students at Universitas Negeri Malang in facing online learning. Digital fatigue caused by intense and continuous use of technology can reduce motivation, increase stress, and affect students' mental well-being. On the other hand, cognitive overload arises from the burden of too much information, which exceeds the brain's processing capacity, causing difficulty in absorbing and prioritizing learning materials. Factors such as multitasking, lack of direct social interaction, and time pressure also worsen this condition. Therefore, efforts are needed to reduce students' cognitive burden by simplifying materials, utilizing efficient technology, and providing time for rest and reflection. In addition, training in time management and stress management skills can be important steps to help students manage digital fatigue and cognitive overload. Thus, good management of these psychological aspects will improve the effectiveness of online learning and the quality of students' academic experiences at Universitas Negeri Malang.

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