

## Thai Students Perspective of Online Learning Media during Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The present qualitative study explores the perceptions of seven Thai undergraduate students in a university on the online learning medium when the COVID-19 pandemic hit this country. Semi-structured interviews were created to clarify the students' viewpoints on online learning medium. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the transcriptions of the data collected from the online interviews. The study elicits three significant data themes that are connected to the research questions: the Thai students' perception towards the online learning medium, their preference on the online learning medium, and the problems faced by them along using the online learning medium and the solving. Findings showed that the using of online learning mediums helped Thai students in lecturing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most preferred online learning medium they use is WhatsApp application, followed by Google Meet as the second choice. They prefer WhatsApp to other online learning mediums or applications since it is stable, cheap, and easy to use. They also re-studied the lecturer's explanation everywhere and anytime. The research found some problems students faced while using Google Meet or Zoom; the most common problem they faced was an unstable connection. While excessive internet data usage was another obstacle faced by them. To solve those problems, they frequently moved to another place providing free Wi-Fi or asked their friends or family to share the hotspot.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the corona virus or Covid-19 outbreak that started in December 2019 in China has spread across the globe and become a world pandemic, it has forced world governments to implement various policies to prevent the spread of the disease (Han, etc, 2020). Public places, including schools and universities, are closed to avoid the spread of the virus. In education, schools and universities were closed, and students were required to study from home. During this period, teaching and learning processes were carried out by implementing e-learning or online learning. The change of learning model from face-to-face to online in higher education requires the use of appropriate and supportive online learning media to facilitate the learning process.

The selection of appropriate online learning media affects the effectiveness of learning and has a good effect on students' understanding (Lusiana, 2020). Therefore, research on the selection of online learning media is needed to determine the effectiveness and usability of certain online media platforms in learning. Synchronous and asynchronous learning media during the pandemic are often used for the continuity of knowledge transfer in higher education. In the teaching and learning process, a lot of web-based applications are used. The tools or platforms used in online education include: social media, video conferencing, and learning management systems (Amin, F. M., & Sundari, H. 2020). These applications are often used in online classroom instruction. Google Meet is one of the most popular video conferencing tools used in online education. Most students have experienced this online learning for the first time. Some of them feel satisfied because they get interaction in online classes, motivation delivered directly by teachers, adequate course structure and facilities, and so on. All of these they get when using online learning media through video conference (Baber, 2020). One application that is also a video communication service is Google Meet. This application is very helpful especially in conditions like this where we are required to maintain distance in order to avoid the Covid-19 virus. For students, educators, or workers who work from home, this application is very helpful because we can easily join through live video or video conferencing even though we are in our respective homes. The interface provided by Google Meet allows users to meet face-to-face directly and effectively, but it is also very lightweight and fast. The management is not difficult and can be followed by many participants (Singh & Soumya, 2020). Among the various asynchronous learning media, Whatsapp application that is often used as a communication tool as well as online learning.

The effectiveness of online learning media as a learning method needs to be prepared comprehensively by looking at the technological readiness and diversity of learner backgrounds (Traxler, 2018; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). This is so that

all learners can understand the material and narrow the achievement gap (Vygotsky, 1978). The existence of differences in culture, language, geography is one of the reasons researchers are interested in making Thai students who are studying at one of the universities in Indonesia as the subject of this study. This focus adds to the rarity of research that discusses the perceptions of foreign students, especially Thai (Pattani) who are studying in Indonesia, towards online learning media (Ferdiansyah, Supiastutik, & Angin, 2022).

In general, Thai students at UIN KHAS Jember use the Pattani language of Southern Thailand, one of the provinces whose majority population is Malay Muslims (Republika, 2020). In terms of social media, they are more familiar with social media such as Line than Whatsapps as a medium of communication. Based on data published by Data Reportal (2023), Line is the most widely used instant messaging application by Thai people. Differences in language, culture and the use of social media need to be crucial factors to be taken into account in choosing online learning media for students with different backgrounds (Liu et al., 2020). The goal is to unravel the inequality among students in understanding the material with certain online learning media.

Many online learning media are used in online learning such as video conferences, LMS and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp applications (Husna, Nida. etc. 2023.). In their implementation, lecturers use various online learning media such as WhatsApp application, LMS, GoogleMeet, Google Class Room and Zoom. The variety of media used is influenced by the conditions of communication media infrastructure (information and communication technology) and the capability of using technological media. The variety of online learning media used by only relying on work contract agreements which are generally carried out by consensus has an impact on differences in understanding the material with different learning media. This condition is increasingly difficult because of the lack of students to directly communicate face-to-face with lecturers when they get difficulties in lectures. So it needs further investigation to see which media tends to be effective for students who have different language and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, each of these online learning media has advantages and disadvantages, and therefore lecturers and students need to adjust accordingly.

This study aims to identify Thai students' perspective of online learning media used by lecturers at UIN KHAS Jember during the pandemic. In addition, this study also seeks to identify the obstacles faced by Thai students in online learning and solutions to overcome them. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of the online learning process at UIN KHAS Jember, especially for international students.

There are many e-learning media that lecturers can use in teaching during this pandemic, such as social media, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, LMS, Zoom Meeting, Google Classroom, and other E-learning applications (Sakkir, G., Dollah, S., & Ahmad, J. 2020). In its application, online learning is divided into two types. Hrastinski mentioned there are two types of online learning, namely asynchronous and synchronous online learning.

Asynchronous online learning media means not at the same time. It means that students can access the material anytime and anywhere, not necessarily when the educator gives the material. They can freely carry out and complete their assignments according to a predetermined schedule. Asynchronous e-learning is generally facilitated by media such as e-mail and discussion boards/forums (Hrastinski, S. 2008). Thus media such as Blog, Whatsapp Group, Google Class, and Moodle are included in the asynchronous media category.

As for synchronous E-learning, it is a method where educators and learners conduct learning at the same time. It allows real and direct interaction between learners and teachers mediated by video conferencing applications (Hrastinski, S. 2008). The roots of synchronous e-learning are derived from three main influences: class, media, and conference. There are two components in synchronous e-learning: time and interaction. On the basis of these components, Khan defines synchronous e-learning as "The interaction of participants with instructors over the Web in real time.

Among the various asynchronous learning media, WhatsApp application is the most widely used application by students and lecturers. WhatsApp is one of the most widely used social media applications than Facebook, Skype, Snapchat, BBM, Line, Instagram, and WeChat. Speroff (2016) states that, WhatsApp is a mobile messaging application that uses the internet to send messages. It allows users to communicate with others by storing the phone numbers of other users who have been verified as their WhatsApp account in their internal phone memory. Alshammari, Parkes, and Adlington (Alshammari, R., Parkes, M., & Adlington, R. 2017) stated that WhatsApp can take the role of the teacher as a facilitator in the teaching and learning process. Teachers can use all the features in WhatsApp to support the learning process. There are several features that WhatsApp has that can help during the online learning process, including: Messages, WhatsApp voice and video calls, Photos and Videos, Documents, Group Chats, WhatsApp on Web and Desktop, End-to-end Encryption and Voice Messages.

Most students have experienced this online learning for the first time. Some of them feel satisfied because they get interaction in online classes, motivation delivered directly by teachers, adequate course structure and facilities, and so on.

All of these they get when using online learning media through video conference (Baber, H. 2020). One application that is also a video communication service is Google Meet. This application is very helpful especially in conditions like this where we are required to maintain distance in order to avoid the Covid-19 virus. For students, educators, or workers who work from home, this application is very helpful because we can easily join through live video or video conferencing even though we are in our respective homes. The interface provided by Google Meet allows users to meet face-to-face directly and effectively, but it is also very lightweight and fast. The management is not difficult and can be followed by many participants (Singh, R., & Soumya, A. 2020).

## **METHODS**

This qualitative study adopts the interpretative approach to explore the experiences of Thai students studying in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic, guided by social cultural theory (MA, Q. In Ferdiansyah, etc. 2020). This shift from face-to-face to online learning—in their online classes—presents students with new experiences to engage in. These vary according to the type of dynamics that may be emerging. This research, therefore, drew on semi-structured interviews to collect data about participants' backgrounds and academic, cultural, and psychological experiences.

This study involves Thai students studying at a university in East Java, Indonesia. The recruitment of participants in this study was carried out by the Thai Student Line group of 32 students. Thai students who were interested in participating in this study were asked to voluntarily contact the researcher privately through Whatsapp private messages. Of the 32 Thai students, fifteen students were ready to become participants in this study without coercion.

Data collection was conducted through written interviews sent through Google Form, followed by semi-structured interviews conducted online using WhatsApp and Google meet applications and continued with offline interviews at the UPB office. This was aimed at finding out Thai students' perceptions of effective online learning media, media preferences and what obstacles they face and their solutions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the problems and objectives previously described, this research aims to find out Thai students' perceptions of online learning media, their online learning media preferences and the obstacles they face and their solutions. This data were analyzed by content thematic. The goal of this thematic method is to identify issues and experiences based on established themes and to comprehend

"what is being told" as opposed to the story's framework (Fullana, etc 2014). So the following data can be presented by researchers through interviews that have been conducted. There are 3 indicators related to perception, namely the usefulness of online learning media, the convenience of learning media, and the effectiveness of learning media. The preferences for online learning media, obstacles and solutions are also presented in the explanation below:

## **Thai Students' Perception of Online Learning Media**

### *The Benefits of Online Learning Media*

In the interviews conducted related to students' perceptions of online learning, there are several narrations related to the benefits of online learning media as described below:

*"....we really need whatsapp, line, g-meet or zoom to study during this pandemic ..."* (Participant 4)

*"...line is very useful for communicating with friends regarding this online learning.."* (Participant 3)

*"...online learning media makes it easy for me and my friends to attend lectures even though I am not on campus.."* (Participant 4)

*"...when the lecturer gives a lecture assignment, learning media such as whatsapp and LMS make it easy for me to submit the assignment.."* (Participant 2)

*"...whatsapp makes it easy for me to get material sharing from lecturers and friends during this pandemic ..."* (Participant 6)

*"...when we have to present lecture topics, google meet really helps us during this pandemic ..."* (Participant 7)

*Whatsapp is very easy and convenient to use...."* (Participant 12)

*I use whatsapp because it is very helpful for understanding the material....*(Participant 14)

*Zoom meeting and whatsapp are very good. But whatsapp helps more not only in lectures but also in daily activities.."* (Participant 15)

When participants were asked about the benefits of online learning, the participants said that the online media offered and used by several lecturers in learning provided many benefits, including making it easier for them to attend lectures even though they were not on campus. in addition, the media offered by several lecturers were also useful for them, both in terms of attending lectures and when submitting assignments. Among the media used are WhatsApp, Line, Googlemeet, Zoom and LMS applications. Of the several media used, there are several media that are easy to use in collecting assignments, such as WhatsApp and LMS applications, but when making presentations, participants said Google meet and WhatsApp applications were two online learning media that were more

helpful despite the many problems faced by students regarding the use of Google meet.

### *Learning Media Convenience*

Regarding the convenience of learning media used by lecturers, five participants gave the following remarks:

*“...during the pandemic did not allow me to go to Indonesia, so learning media such as whatsapp, google meet, zoom, LMS are very helpful for me to be able to keep up with lectures ...” (Participant 3)*

*“...studying using online media is very convenient because I can do it anywhere and anytime...”((Participant 5)*

*“...distance does not limit me in attending lectures because lecturers use whatsapp and google meet during lectures ...” (Participant 4)*

*“distance learning is very effective when using the zoom application or whatsapp...” (Participant 12)*

*“Whatsapp or zoom meetings are very easy to use and save internet quota” (Participant 14)*

From the interviews conducted, it was found that the participants liked the learning media provided and used in terms of learning. the participants felt comfortable with the media in learning because they could access it anywhere and anytime. the media helped them not to go to campus, they could learn from anywhere and anytime not limited by distance and time and did not require them to be in a class. With the existence of media in learning, it makes it easier for participants to follow the training from anywhere.

### *Effectiveness of Online Learning Media*

Using media in learning has an effective and efficient impact on learning, because participants who are located in distant places can still attend lectures at the campus. as stated by several participants below:

*“...lectures using whatsapp and google meet are very effective because they can be done anywhere and anytime...” (Participant 1)*

*“...lectures using google meet and whatsapp are very flexible ...” (Participant 2)*

*“...online courses with whatsapp and google meet make me more independent ...”(Participant 6)*

*“...I have gotten used to studying on my own since studying using this online media ...” (Participant 3)*

*“Whatsapp helps me understand the lecturer's material...” (Participant 9)*

*“I prefer Whatsapp because it is not difficult to learn (Participant 11)*

From the results of interviews related to student perceptions of online learning media above, it can be concluded that online learning media is very much needed and useful during the Covid 19 pandemic. Students stated that they were

greatly helped by the existence of this online learning media because even though they were not present in the classroom they could still take part in online learning. It also makes them comfortable in doing learning because they are not required to be present and gather directly in the classroom because the situation does not allow it. Learning media from provides a sense of comfort and security for students in conducting online learning. The effectiveness in learning is also felt by students while doing online learning by using online learning media. Because it can be done wherever and whenever they want to do it.

Based on the results of interviews regarding student perceptions of online learning media, researchers conducted another interview to explore more detailed data. In this case, the research resulted in 3 thematic analyses of participants' narratives, namely learning media preferences, learning challenges faced by students and solutions that have been faced during online learning. Related to the existing problems, the researcher divided them into several themes, namely problems related to information and communication technology, online learning problems, and language-related problems. Out of 32 Thai students, 15 participants were interviewed related to these themes.

### **Online Learning Constraints: Language Constraints**

Language is a means of communication between fellow humans in conveying ideas or intentions. However, when the person being spoken to has a different culture or language, then humans will find misunderstandings between participants. This happened with participants who came from Thailand while studying in Indonesia. In general, Thai students at UIN KHAS Jember use the Pattani language of Southern Thailand, so when attending lectures, participants feel confused and miscommunication often occurs. As described by the participant below:

*".....I often do not understand the language of the lecturers when they explain the material, because for me they are too fast in explaining the material..."*

**(Participant 7)**

*".....sometimes I don't understand what certain words mean...."*

**(Participant 2)**  
*".....I often feel unclear about some terms because the voice falters...."*

**(Participant 5)**  
*".....weak signals greatly affect the clarity of the language delivered by lecturers and friends who are presenting. So if I use google meet, I have to make sure the signal is good and the quota is sufficient, so that the language conveyed by the speaker is clearly captured by me."*

**(Participant 10)**  
*".....sometimes the use of informal language makes me confused, especially when using google meet, I can't take a pause to understand it. When using WA I have plenty of time to study or ask other friends."*



*“.....presenters who use formal and standard language really help us understand the material, even though using google meet media we can understand if the language is standard and formal and not too fast.” (Participant 3)*

*“....using google meet or zoom media makes me have to be extra hard to listen well to what the lecturer or presenter says. Because sometimes the words are mixed, sometimes mixed Javanese or slang, so I don't understand. Plus if the voice is soft klop.” (Participant 13)*

Based on the results of the interview above, it is found that some participants found obstacles related to the language used. Although Thailand and Indonesia are both Malay races, the language used is certainly different, so that when participants carry out their studies in Indonesia they have difficulty understanding Indonesian because it is different in some terms or words. So, when participants attended lectures in Indonesia, especially at UIN Jember, they experienced confusion regarding the language used. The data above shows that participants experienced confusion in understanding the explanation given by the lecturer, especially when the lecturer explained the material quickly. In addition to some terms that were not understood, participants also experienced obstacles when they found the lecturer's voice stuttering or soft in explaining lecture material.

### **Solution to Challenges Faced**

When participants encountered problems in terms of language, they did several activities as described below:

*“.....sometimes I open google translate to find words or terms that I don't understand.....” (Participant 2)*

*“.....I usually ask my friend to ask the lecturer to repeat the explanation, because I don't dare to ask the lecturer directly...” (Participant 7)*

*“.....when I listen to the lecturer explain the material, I borrow my friend's notes....” (Participant 5)*

*“...I look for materials on the internet that use language that I understand...” (Participant 15)*

*“...I often ask seniors to help explain things back to me...” (Participant 11)*

*“I immediately open google translate.” (Participant 12)*

*“My friend usually translates immediately if I ask for help when I find difficult words.” (Participant 8)*

The data above shows that participants open google translate in understanding the explanation from the lecturer because there are several terms or words that are not understood. In addition, participants also asked their friends to ask the lecturer, this proves that participants feel insecure or afraid when they want to ask the lecturer due to language differences.

Based on the data analysis above related to Thai students' perceptions of online learning media, it can be found that Thai students give a positive perception of online learning media. They think that the use of online learning media during the Covid-19 pandemic is very helpful for them to still be able to attend lectures even though they are not on campus safely. This information and communication technology-based media really helps them because it makes it easier for them to learn online.

Suwarsito dan Harjono (2010) argue that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is very helpful to support the online learning process. The online learning process requires technology to make the learning process achievable by the school components. As Cakrawati (2017) said that students find the use of online learning platforms or media useful and user-friendly for them to communicate among their friends and teachers even outside the classroom. Muhammad (2012) mentioned that online learning media facilitates the online learning process when teachers want to deliver learning materials and also with students who receive the materials themselves. The use of media is an important part, especially in online learning class. This is reinforced by Gomez (2016) who states that the use of Schoology, Zoom app, Whatsapp and so on makes it easier to give instructions and provide learning information.

## CONCLUSION

Thai students have demonstrated a positive perception of online learning, recognizing its potential to enhance their educational experiences, particularly for those residing in remote regions. They appreciate the flexibility and accessibility that online platforms offer, allowing them to participate in lectures and engage with course materials from various locations.

Among the available online communication tools, WhatsApp emerged as the preferred choice for Thai students. They found WhatsApp to be more user-friendly and reliable compared to other platforms, citing its signal stability, privacy features, and the ability to use it seamlessly alongside other activities.

Despite these advantages, language barriers remain a significant obstacle for Thai students during online learning. The use of a foreign language, such as Indonesian or English, can present challenges in understanding course content and actively participating in discussions.

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