

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN FACING THE DIGITAL ERA IN KENDARI: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

TANTANGAN DAN PELUANG PERGURUAN TINGGI SWASTA MENGHADAPI ERA DIGITAL DI KOTA KENDARI: STUDI DESKRIPTIF

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of digital technology, higher education institutions worldwide face challenges in integrating technology into the educational process. However, private universities in Kendari still encounter various barriers in optimally utilizing digital technology. This study identifies the knowledge gap regarding the application of digital technology in higher education, particularly at private universities in Kendari, which are constrained by inadequate infrastructure and limited digital skills among faculty and students. This research used a descriptive qualitative research design, with in-depth interviews conducted with five informants who are experts in education and technology. The findings show that, despite significant challenges, digital technology offers great opportunities to expand access and improve the quality of education, especially through e-learning platforms and online learning. The implications of this study provide practical insights for private university managers to develop more effective technology strategies to enhance educational quality and the utilization of technology in the future.

Keywords: Digital education; Education infrastructure; Private universities; Digital challenges; Educational technology

ABSTRAK

Seiring dengan pesatnya perkembangan teknologi digital, perguruan tinggi di seluruh dunia menghadapi tantangan dalam mengintegrasikan teknologi dalam proses pendidikan. Namun, perguruan tinggi swasta di Kendari masih menghadapi berbagai hambatan dalam memanfaatkan teknologi digital secara optimal. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi gap pengetahuan terkait dengan penerapan teknologi digital dalam pendidikan tinggi, khususnya di perguruan tinggi swasta di Kendari, yang masih terkendala oleh infrastruktur yang tidak memadai dan keterbatasan keterampilan digital di kalangan dosen dan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam terhadap lima informan yang berkompeten di bidang pendidikan dan teknologi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun ada tantangan signifikan, teknologi digital menawarkan peluang besar untuk memperluas akses dan meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan, terutama dengan menggunakan platform e-learning dan pembelajaran daring. Implikasi penelitian ini memberikan wawasan praktis untuk pengelola perguruan tinggi swasta dalam merumuskan strategi teknologi yang lebih efektif guna meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dan pemanfaatan teknologi di masa depan.

Kata Kunci: Digitalisasi pendidikan; Infrastruktur pendidikan; Perguruan tinggi swasta; Tantangan digital; Teknologi pendidikan

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, the development of information and communication technology has had a significant impact on various sectors, including the education sector. The use of digital technology in education opens up various opportunities to improve the quality of learning, expand access, and modernize teaching methods. Globalization and technological advances have forced educational institutions to adapt to rapid changes, where the application of information technology has become an urgent need (Ambarwati et al., 2021; Subroto et al.,

2023). Therefore, universities around the world, including in Indonesia, face challenges to integrate technology in the teaching and learning process. This digital transformation not only affects the curriculum and learning methods, but also new ways of interacting between lecturers and students.

Private universities in Indonesia, including those in Kendari, have an important role in providing quality higher education. However, private universities in Indonesia often face various challenges in facing the digital era. Some of the main challenges faced by private universities are limited infrastructure, digital skills of lecturers and students, and budget problems for technology development (Hasanah & Sukri, 2023; Subroto et al., 2023; Tuhuteru et al., 2023). In Kendari, although there are private universities that have begun to adopt digital technology, many still have difficulty in integrating technology with effective learning. This creates an inequality in the quality of education between private universities and public universities, especially in terms of the use of digital technology.

In addition to the existing challenges, technological developments also offer great opportunities for private universities in Kendari. By utilizing online learning platforms and technology-based learning management systems, private universities can expand access to education to students in remote areas. Digital technology also allows for flexibility in learning, where students can access lecture materials anytime and anywhere (Ajiatmojo, 2021; Riku, 2022; Robianto, 2020). In addition, the use of digital technology in learning can improve the quality of learning with more interactive and multimedia-based methods. Therefore, it is important for private universities to take advantage of this opportunity to improve the quality of their education and competitiveness in the digital era.

However, despite the great opportunities, the implementation of technology in private universities has not run without a hitch. Many universities are still limited in terms of mastery of technology by lecturers and students. Lack of understanding of digital technology is often the main obstacle in the digital transformation process in universities (Dito & Pujiastuti, 2021; Hasanah & Sukri, 2023). This is a special challenge for private universities that have limited resources, both in terms of budget and human resource skills. Therefore, efforts are needed to improve digital literacy among lecturers and students so that they can make the most of technology.

This research will explore the challenges and opportunities faced by private universities in Kendari in adopting digital technology (Subroto et al., 2023; Tuhuteru et al., 2023). The main focus of this research is to explore the perceptions of university leaders, lecturers, students, and information technology managers regarding various issues related to digital transformation in universities. With a qualitative descriptive approach, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics that occur in private universities in Kendari, as well as provide recommendations to increase the use of technology in learning.

It is undeniable that although digital technology has become an integral part of the global education world, its application in private universities in Kendari still faces various challenges. Not all private universities in Kendari have adequate infrastructure to support optimal digital transformation. Some universities have not even fully utilized information technology in the learning process, although there is awareness about the importance of technology adoption. In addition, not all lecturers and students have enough digital skills to utilize e-learning platforms or other technology-based learning systems. This problem exacerbates the gap between public universities and private universities, which makes the quality of education in some private universities disproportionate to the demands of the digital era.

It is also undeniable that although there is a great opportunity in utilizing technology to improve access and quality of education, there are not many private universities in Kendari that can take full advantage of this opportunity. Many private universities have not been able to provide sufficient technology training for lecturers and students, so their ability to access

and use digital technology is limited. It is not uncommon to find internet network instability that hinders the online learning process, so that opportunities to improve the quality of education through digital technology are hampered. In addition, not all private universities in Kendari have a clear and strategic policy in integrating technology in their curriculum and learning methods (Hakim & Abidin, 2024; Sulaiman, 2024; Sunandi et al., 2023). This causes the application of digital technology in higher education in Kendari to not run effectively.

In addition, although there have been efforts to introduce digital technology, not all parties in private universities in Kendari are ready to face this change. Many technology managers still face obstacles in the procurement and renewal of the infrastructure needed to support digital learning. It is not uncommon to find obstacles in terms of limited budgets, which slow down efforts to develop more sophisticated technology that is in line with today's educational needs (Fikri et al., 2021; Kurniawan & Zarnita, 2020). In fact, most private universities in Kendari do not have a strong digital culture among staff and lecturers, which causes the application of digital technology to be less than optimal. Thus, although the challenges and opportunities of digital are enormous, its application is still limited and unevenly distributed across private universities in Kendari.

The importance of this research lies in efforts to identify and overcome the challenges faced by private universities in Kendari in adopting digital technology in education. Although the development of digital technology has provided great opportunities to improve the quality of education, many private universities are still hampered by the limitations of infrastructure, digital skills, and uneven technological culture (Emeilia & Muntazah, 2023; Sulastri & Sylvia, 2022; Tayo et al., 2021). This research is urgent because it provides deeper insights into the factors that hinder the optimal application of digital technologies, which in turn can reduce the gap in the quality of education between private and public universities. The findings of this study are very relevant because they provide solutions to the problems faced, as well as provide concrete recommendations for private universities in Kendari to be able to take advantage of technological opportunities more optimally, while overcoming various existing obstacles. Therefore, this research aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by private universities in Kendari in facing the digital era, with a focus on the application of technology in learning. This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the obstacles faced by leaders, lecturers, students, and information technology managers in private universities, as well as how they utilize digital technology in improving the quality of education. In addition, this research also aims to develop strategic recommendations that can help private universities in Kendari optimize the use of technology, so that they can be more prepared and adaptive in facing rapid technological developments in the world of education.

The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of policies and strategies for the implementation of digital technology in private universities in Indonesia, especially in Kendari. The findings obtained will provide a clear picture of the factors that affect the success or failure of the application of digital technology in higher education. Thus, private universities in Kendari can formulate more appropriate strategic steps in facing the increasingly developing digital era.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design to describe the challenges and opportunities faced by private universities in Kendari in facing the digital era. Qualitative descriptive research was chosen because the main purpose of this research is to deeply understand the experiences and perceptions of informants related to the implementation of digital technology in higher education. This approach allows researchers to explore more extensive and detailed information about the context and conditions that exist in private universities in Kendari. Data obtained from in-depth interviews with informants are considered sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of the issues at hand. This design is in accordance

with the research objectives that focus on contextual understanding without attempting to generalize the results.

The instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview, which is designed to collect qualitative information from informants involved in the decision-making process related to the use of technology in universities. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow researchers to obtain more flexible data, while facilitating follow-up questions relevant to the topic being studied. Five competent informants in the field of education and technology at Kendari private universities were selected to provide in-depth insights into the application of digital technology. All interviews are conducted face-to-face or online, depending on the availability and preferences of each informant. The interview process was conducted in Indonesian to ensure a clear understanding between the researcher and the informant.

The research procedure begins with the selection of informants based on predetermined criteria, namely individuals who have knowledge or experience related to technology implementation in private universities in Kendari. After the informants are selected, interviews are conducted with the aim of exploring their perspectives regarding the challenges and opportunities that exist. The data collected was then analyzed thematically, by identifying patterns that appeared in the informant's responses. The analysis was carried out by organizing the interview data into relevant themes, which allowed the researcher to draw in-depth conclusions about the issue being studied. All procedures are carried out by following the principles of research ethics to maintain the confidentiality and comfort of the informant during the interview process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Research Results

This research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by private universities (PTS) in Kendari in adopting digital technology, as well as the strategies implemented to deal with it. Based on the results of interviews with five informants who have direct experience in this field, various challenges that need to be overcome immediately are found so that private universities can optimize the use of digital technology in the education system.

The main challenge faced by private universities in Kendari in adopting digital technology is the limitation of adequate infrastructure. Dr. A.R., Chancellor of XYZ University, mentioned that "the lack of adequate digital infrastructure, both in terms of hardware and stable internet networks, is a major obstacle." In addition, the Rector also revealed that private universities must face difficulties in building a digital culture among lecturers and staff. This also affects the effectiveness of technology implementation in learning. The same thing was also conveyed by M.S., a lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering, who stated, "The biggest challenge is the lack of technical skills among some students, which makes it difficult for them to use e-learning platforms."

Problems related to unstable internet access are also a significant challenge. D.A., a student of the Management Study Program at XYZ University, explained that "the problem of unstable internet connection, especially when attending online lectures with long durations, often hinders the smooth learning process." This illustrates how technical obstacles beyond the control of university managers can affect the quality of online learning. On the other hand, R.H., Head of the Information Technology Division of XYZ University, added that "limited budgets for hardware procurement and system updates" are a major obstacle in ensuring optimal IT infrastructure. According to him, although universities have made efforts to provide technical support, continuous training is still needed to improve the technical skills of lecturers and students.

However, despite the various challenges, there are a number of opportunities that can be taken advantage of by private universities in Kendari. Dr. A.R. stated that digital technology

provides "great opportunities in terms of wider access to learning, especially for students in remote areas." Additionally, the use of e-learning platforms allows private colleges to "accommodate a variety of student learning styles," which can enhance the overall learning experience. This is in line with the statement of Prof. Dr. B.T., an educational technology expert, who revealed that "the biggest opportunity is to expand access to education through online or hybrid learning, which allows students from various regions to access quality education without being limited by distance."

Another opportunity identified is improving the quality of academic interaction and collaboration through technology. D.A. highlighted that "with technology, I can learn more flexibly and get additional materials that help me understand difficult topics," which shows how technology can support the development of deeper learning. Further, Prof. Dr. B.T. emphasized that technology allows students to engage in "international research and collaboration," which can broaden horizons and improve the quality of research in private universities. Therefore, the use of technology can open up opportunities to strengthen academic and research networks.

In the future, private universities in Kendari have plans to further increase the application of digital technology. Dr. A.R. revealed that his university plans "to collaborate with technology partners to strengthen IT infrastructure" and develop training programs for lecturers and students to be better prepared for the demands of the digital world. In this regard, R.H. explained the measures that his university has taken, including "increasing server capacity and ensuring a more stable internet connection." In addition, the university also works with technology service providers to "optimize the system and reduce the possibility of interruptions" during online learning. Periodic training conducted by the information technology division is also one of the strategies to prepare all parties involved in the digital learning process.

Overall, although private universities in Kendari face considerable challenges in facing the digital era, the opportunities that exist can be used to improve the quality of education. Digital technology allows for more flexible and accessible learning for students from various locations, and encourages academic capacity development through online platforms. Therefore, private universities in Kendari must continue to strive to strengthen digital infrastructure and improve technical skills among lecturers and students in order to compete in the increasingly developing digital era.

This research identifies the challenges and opportunities faced by private universities (PTS) in Kendari in facing the digital era. Based on interviews with five competent informants in the field of higher education and technology, the results of the study show that there are several obstacles that must be overcome as well as opportunities that can be used to optimize the use of digital technology in higher education in Kendari. These findings are relevant to support the improvement of the quality of education and technology management in private universities, especially in facing the challenges of digital transformation.

One of the biggest challenges faced by private universities in Kendari is the limitations of digital infrastructure. This was conveyed by Dr. A.R., Rector of XYZ University, who stated that "the lack of adequate digital infrastructure, both in terms of hardware and stable internet networks, is a major obstacle." Limited access to this technology worsens the quality of learning, both in the form of online learning and the use of e-learning platforms that require optimal connectivity. In this regard, R.H., Head of the Information Technology Division at XYZ University, added that "limited budgets for hardware procurement and system updates" are also a significant obstacle in optimizing existing infrastructure. This problem hinders private universities from providing facilities that are suitable for digital learning needs, which can support the success of technology-based academic programs.

Another technical problem faced is technical skills that are still limited among lecturers and students. According to M.S., a lecturer in the Faculty of Engineering at XYZ

University, "The biggest challenge is the lack of technical skills among some students, which makes it difficult for them to use e-learning platforms." This shows that although private universities in Kendari are trying to implement technology in learning, most students are not used to using digital devices to the fullest. D.A., a student of the Management Study Program, also highlighted this obstacle by stating that "at first I found it difficult with the e-learning platform because there were many features that I did not understand." This indicates that efforts are needed to improve digital literacy among students and lecturers so that learning can take place more effectively and efficiently.

In addition, the problem of unstable internet connectivity is also one of the significant obstacles, especially in online learning that requires consistent internet access. D.A. stated that "the problem of unstable internet connection, especially when attending online lectures with long durations, often hinders smooth learning." This shows that although technology has been adopted, inadequate internet infrastructure in some areas can reduce the effectiveness of using e-learning platforms. Researchers also found that many students in remote areas face difficulties in accessing online learning, which has the potential to hinder equality in access to higher education in the digital era.

Despite these challenges, there are great opportunities that can be taken advantage of by private universities in Kendari in facing the digital era. Dr. A.R. revealed that "digital technology opens up great opportunities in terms of wider access to learning, especially for students in remote areas." This reflects the great potential for private universities to reach students from various regions that were previously hampered by geographical limitations. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. B.T., an expert in educational technology, added that "the biggest opportunity is to expand access to education through online or hybrid learning, which allows students from different regions to access quality education without being limited by distance." By utilizing digital technology, universities can increase educational inclusivity and provide wider opportunities for students who are in hard-to-reach areas.

In addition, digital technology also has the potential to improve the quality of interaction in learning. D.A. mentions that "with technology, I can learn more flexibly and get additional materials that help me understand difficult topics." This shows that with the right use of technology, students can deepen their understanding of the material being taught, as learning becomes more adaptive to individual needs. M.S. also added that the use of technology allows learning to be more interactive and accessible anytime and anywhere, which can increase the effectiveness of learning. Therefore, although there are still obstacles that must be overcome, digital technology provides an opportunity to improve the quality of learning and provide more options for students to explore the material more deeply.

In the future, private universities in Kendari plan to overcome this challenge by strengthening technological infrastructure and improving digital skills among lecturers and students. Dr. A.R. stated that his university plans to "collaborate with technology partners to strengthen IT infrastructure" and develop training programs for faculty and students to better prepare them for the demands of the digital world. In this regard, R.H. explained the steps that have been taken by the university, such as "increasing server capacity and ensuring a more stable internet connection" to support the smooth running of online learning. These measures demonstrate the university's commitment to improving the quality of learning and strengthening the existing technology support system.

Table 1
Challenges and Opportunities of Private Universities in Kendari in Facing the Digital Era

Aspects	Challenge	Chance
Infrastructure	Hardware and internet network limitations	Greater access to learning, especially for remote areas
Digital Skills	Lack of technical skills among lecturers and students	Learning is more flexible and adaptive
Internet Connection	Unstable internet connection	Use of technology to improve the quality of learning
Technology Implementation	Lack of digital culture among staff and lecturers	Utilization of e-learning platforms that support various learning styles

The table above summarizes the challenges and opportunities found in this study. Despite the many challenges that must be faced, the opportunities that exist, especially in improving access and quality of learning, are significant. By optimizing the use of technology, private universities in Kendari can take advantage of the digital era to improve the quality of education and expand their reach to students from various regions.

The study reveals that although private universities in Kendari face major challenges in terms of infrastructure and digital skills, there are a number of opportunities that can be leveraged to strengthen the education system. With the more optimal use of digital technology, such as e-learning platforms and online learning, the quality of education can be improved. Therefore, private universities in Kendari need to focus on strengthening infrastructure and developing digital skills for all parties involved in the learning process.

3.2. Research discussion

The results of this study provide an overview that the main challenge faced by private universities in Kendari in adopting digital technology is the limitation of adequate infrastructure. According to the results of interviews with a number of informants, this problem is the main obstacle in implementing technology-based learning. Therefore, strengthening digital infrastructure is a crucial first step to overcome the existing gap. Hardware limitations and unstable internet networks hinder the learning process (Alfiyanto & Hidayati, 2022; Yusuf & Sodik, 2023). Seeing the importance of a strong infrastructure to support the digital education process, optimal infrastructure is the main foundation for the success of digital transformation in higher education institutions (Nordin et al., 2023; Nuraeni et al., 2024).

In addition to infrastructure, the results of this study show that limited digital skills among lecturers and students are one of the significant challenges. This is directly related to the gap found in previous research, where the development of technical skills is still a major obstacle in the application of educational technology in private universities. On the other hand, the opportunity to overcome this gap is through the development of sustainable technology training programs for lecturers and students, as is done by XYZ University by collaborating with technology partners to provide intensive training. Improving digital skills among teachers and students has a significant influence on the effectiveness of technology-based learning (Astutik & Hariyati, 2021; Warsiyah et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important for private universities in

Kendari to implement training strategies that focus on improving technical skills to support the successful use of technology in learning.

Furthermore, the problem of unstable internet connection is also a significant obstacle in the implementation of online learning at private universities in Kendari. Researchers found that this problem not only hinders smooth learning, but also has the potential to exacerbate the gap in access to education between students in urban and remote areas. Given the limitations of internet infrastructure in some regions, private universities must develop alternative solutions, such as the use of offline learning platforms or technology that does not rely too much on a stable internet connection. The use of accessible educational technology without high dependence on internet connections to overcome the problem of limited infrastructure in certain areas (Arifin et al., 2022; Sutrisno & Syukur, 2023; Ulimaz, 2021). Thus, although internet connection remains a major challenge, the use of alternative technology can be one effective solution.

This research also reveals great opportunities in the use of technology to expand access to education, especially for students in remote areas. Digital technology can allow students in remote areas to access quality education without being limited by distance and time. The biggest opportunity lies in the use of online or hybrid learning that provides greater flexibility (Nastiti & Hayati, 2020; Subroto et al., 2023). This has become very relevant given the fact that currently, access to quality education is still limited by geographical factors in many regions of Indonesia, including in Kendari. Online learning allows for more inclusive learning and is accessible to anyone, anytime, without being hindered by location (Ningsih, 2020; Wuwung et al., 2021). Therefore, the application of an online or hybrid learning model in private universities in Kendari can strengthen the accessibility of education in areas that were previously difficult to reach.

Another opportunity found in this study is the ability of technology to improve the quality of academic interaction and collaboration. The use of technology in learning can improve interactivity, provide time flexibility, and support deeper learning, which is essential for ensuring the success of the learning process. Collaborative learning facilitated by technology can enhance the learning experience by allowing for more intensive discussions, exchange of ideas, and the development of deeper understanding (Anita et al., 2022; Arifudin et al., 2019; Robianto, 2020). Therefore, the application of digital technology to improve academic collaboration and interaction in private universities in Kendari can have a positive impact in improving the overall quality of education.

Overall, although the challenges faced by private universities in Kendari are quite large, the results of this study show that with the right use of technology, the existing gap can be minimized. The development of digital infrastructure, the improvement of technical skills, and the use of technology to increase access and interaction in learning can provide effective solutions. In this case, the commitment of universities to collaborate with technology partners, hold training, and optimize the digital education system will be the key in facing challenges and taking advantage of existing opportunities. The right application of technology can have a significant impact on the quality of education and student learning experience (Dito & Pujiastuti, 2021; Sunandi et al., 2023). Therefore, private universities in Kendari need to continue to strive to overcome this challenge with a more planned and technology-based strategy to realize a higher quality and inclusive education in the digital era.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that private universities in Kendari face a number of challenges in adopting digital technology, including limited infrastructure, low digital skills among lecturers and students, and unstable internet connectivity problems. However, this study also found that there is a great opportunity that can be used to improve the quality of education through the application of digital technology.

Some of the opportunities that can be used include expanding access to education with online or hybrid learning, as well as increasing academic interaction and collaboration through technology. The implementation of the right strategies, such as strengthening digital infrastructure, technical skills training, and increasing support for digital learning, can overcome various existing obstacles. Overall, digital technology has significant potential in improving the quality of education in private universities in Kendari, provided that strategic steps are taken to overcome existing challenges.

The findings in this study have important theoretical benefits, especially in developing an understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the adoption of digital technologies in private universities. This research contributes to enriching the literature on digital transformation in higher education, especially in the context of private universities in areas with limited infrastructure such as Kendari. In practical terms, these findings provide useful insights for university managers in formulating more effective managerial strategies to improve the application of digital technology. By addressing existing challenges, private universities can optimize technology-based learning, which will ultimately improve the overall quality of education. The researcher also acknowledged the limitations of this study, especially related to the limited number of samples and the focus only on private universities in Kendari. Therefore, future research can expand the scope and sample to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation in private universities in other regions in Indonesia or even other developing countries.

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