

## Exploring Student Experiences Using Digital Learning Platforms in Higher Education

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### Abstract

The development of digital technology has driven a transformation in the higher education system, particularly through the use of digital learning platforms as the primary medium in the teaching and learning process. This study aims to explore students' experiences in using digital learning platforms in higher education and identify the benefits and challenges they face during the learning process. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation of students who actively use digital learning platforms in their lectures. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. The results show that digital learning platforms provide positive experiences in the form of easy access to learning materials, flexibility in time and place of study, and increased student independence in managing the learning process.

### Keywords

Digital Learning Platform, Digital Transformation of Education, Higher Education, Online Learning, Student Experience



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## INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes to various sectors of life, including higher education. The digital transformation that has occurred in recent decades has encouraged universities to integrate technology into the learning process to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of education. One form of

digital transformation implementation in higher education is the use of digital learning platforms or Learning Management Systems (LMS), which enable lecturers and students to conduct teaching and learning activities online or in a hybrid format. Platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas, Microsoft Teams, and various other learning applications have become an essential part of the modern education ecosystem. The presence of digital learning platforms has not only changed the way lecture material is delivered but also the interaction patterns between lecturers and students, as well as how students access and manage academic information (Neyarasmi & Mardatillah, 2025).

The use of digital learning platforms has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced educational institutions worldwide to shift from face-to-face learning to technology-based learning. Although most universities have now returned to offline learning, the use of digital platforms remains strong, as they are considered to offer numerous benefits in supporting academic activities (Raprap, 2025). Digital learning platforms allow students to access materials anytime and anywhere, submit assignments online, participate in virtual discussions, take quizzes, and interact with lecturers and fellow students without the constraints of time and space. This flexibility makes learning more accessible and supports the concept of lifelong learning (Ihsan et al., 2025).

However, the successful implementation of a digital learning platform depends not only on the availability of technology but also on the user experience, particularly of students as the primary users of the system. Student experience in using a digital learning platform is a crucial aspect because it can influence levels of satisfaction, learning engagement, academic motivation, and learning outcomes (Najjar & Oktasari, 2023). This experience encompasses various dimensions, such as platform ease of use, quality of learning content, interaction with lecturers, quality of system services, technology accessibility, and student perceptions of the benefits gained from using the digital platform. If students have a positive experience, they tend to be more active in participating in learning and utilizing available features. Conversely, a negative experience can lead to low participation, decreased learning motivation, and even resistance to the use of technology in education (Aprianto et al., 2025).

Various studies have shown that although digital learning platforms offer many advantages, students still face various challenges in using them. Some of the obstacles frequently encountered include limited internet access, technical system issues, lack of digital literacy, less user-friendly interface designs, and poor quality of social interaction in online learning environments (Hamidah et al., 2025). Furthermore, not all students have the same ability to adapt to new technologies. Differences in social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and technological experience can influence how students utilize digital learning platforms. Therefore, a deep understanding of student experiences is essential to identify factors that support or hinder the effective use of digital learning platforms in higher education (Laksito, 2022).

In the context of higher education, student experience is not only seen as an indicator of user satisfaction but also as a crucial component of the quality of educational services.

Universities are currently required to create student-centered learning environments, so student voices and experiences need to be considered in the development of digital learning systems (Purwoko & Rosyanafi, 2025). Through a comprehensive understanding of student experiences, educational institutions can evaluate and improve their platforms to more optimally meet user needs. Furthermore, information about student experiences can inform policymaking related to technological infrastructure development, improving lecturers' digital competencies, and developing more effective and inclusive learning strategies (Tambunan et al., 2024).

The rise in the use of digital learning platforms also demonstrates a paradigm shift in the learning process. Students are no longer passive recipients of information but rather active learners responsible for their own learning (Mutiarra et al., 2026). Digital platforms provide a variety of learning resources that enable students to explore material independently, collaborate with peers, and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, this paradigm shift also demands that students be prepared to manage their time, develop learning strategies, and utilize technology productively. Therefore, students' experiences interacting with digital learning platforms are a relevant issue to examine to understand how technology can support or hinder the learning process (Himmawan, 2025).

In Indonesia, the adoption of digital learning platforms in higher education continues to increase in line with technological developments and digital transformation policies in education. The government, through various education digitalization programs, encourages higher education institutions to utilize technology to improve the quality of learning. However, the success rate of digital platform implementation varies across institutions. Some universities have successfully integrated technology effectively, while others still face various challenges related to infrastructure, human resources, and user readiness. This situation indicates that student experiences using digital learning platforms can vary depending on the institutional context, user characteristics, and the quality of the system used (Malay et al., 2025).

Based on this description, research on students' experiences using digital learning platforms in higher education is crucial. This study aims to explore in-depth how students interpret, perceive, and experience the use of digital learning platforms in their academic activities. By comprehensively understanding student experiences, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of digital learning studies and provide practical recommendations for higher education institutions in improving the quality of technology-based learning services. The results of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for educational policymakers in designing more effective, sustainable, and student-oriented digital transformation strategies, as the primary users of higher education services.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to deeply understand students' experiences in using digital learning platforms in higher education. The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study focuses on the subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings given by students to the use of digital learning

platforms in the learning process. Through this approach, researchers seek to explore various experiences experienced by students, both positive and negative, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the realities of learning technology use in higher education environments.

The research subjects were active students who had used digital learning platforms during their studies. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting participants deemed to have relevant experience and knowledge relevant to the research focus. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of digital learning activities, and documentation in the form of screenshots, learning notes, and other supporting documents. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to provide participants with the opportunity to explain their experiences more broadly and in-depth. The data obtained were then transcribed and systematically organized to facilitate the analysis process.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The researcher identified key themes emerging from interviews and observations and then grouped them based on similarities in meaning and experiences shared by the informants. To ensure data validity, the study employed source and method triangulation techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checking with several informants to ensure that the data interpretations aligned with their shared experiences. With these procedures, the study is expected to produce valid and credible findings that provide an in-depth overview of students' experiences using digital learning platforms in higher education.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation analysis with students using digital learning platforms at universities, several key themes emerged that reflect students' experiences utilizing learning technology. These themes include ease of access to learning, flexibility in time and place, increased learning independence, quality of academic interactions, technical and infrastructure constraints, digital academic burden, and students' hopes for the future development of digital learning platforms.

### **Ease of Access to Learning Materials**

The research results show that most students significantly benefit from the ease of access to learning materials provided through digital platforms. Students stated that all lecture materials can be accessed in one integrated system, facilitating the learning process. The storage feature for materials in the form of documents, videos, presentations, and links to learning resources allows students to access information at any time according to their needs. Students also stated that having material archives on digital platforms helps them review learning delivered by lecturers. While in conventional learning, students often lose notes or have difficulty retrieving missed material, through digital platforms, all materials can be easily accessed. This condition increases the effectiveness of the learning process because students

have the opportunity to repeatedly understand the material at their own pace (Syafiuddin et al., 2024).

These findings indicate that digital learning platforms serve as knowledge repositories that support continuous learning. Ease of access to information is a key factor driving student acceptance of technology and enhancing the quality of their learning experience.

### **Flexibility of Time and Place in Learning**

The second theme that emerged was learning flexibility. Nearly all informants stated that digital learning platforms provide freedom to organize their study time and location. Students are no longer entirely dependent on physical classrooms because various academic activities can be conducted online. This flexibility is considered very helpful, especially for students with additional activities such as organizations, part-time jobs, or other social activities. They can access materials, complete assignments, and participate in academic discussions without having to be on campus. Furthermore, students who live far from their universities experience greater benefits because they can save time and transportation costs (Bey et al., 2025).

From a modern learning perspective, flexibility is one of the key advantages of digital learning. Research shows that students tend to feel more comfortable when given the freedom to set their own learning pace. This aligns with the concept of student-centered learning, which places students as the primary actors in the learning process.

### **Increasing Learning Independence and Responsibility**

The research results show that the use of digital learning platforms encourages students to become more independent in their learning. Students are required to manage their learning schedules, understand the material independently, and complete assignments by the deadlines specified in the system. Most informants admitted that they experienced difficulty adjusting to the platform when they first started. However, over time, they became accustomed to seeking additional learning resources, prioritizing tasks, and developing more effective learning strategies. Students realized that successful learning in a digital environment depends heavily on self-discipline and responsibility (Nisa et al., 2023).

These findings indicate that digital learning platforms serve not only as a means of delivering material but also as a means of developing students' soft skills. Time management, digital literacy, online communication, and independent learning skills are competencies that are increasingly developed through the use of digital learning platforms.

### **Academic Interaction between Students and Lecturers**

Despite the conveniences offered, research findings indicate mixed experiences regarding academic interactions. Some students found that discussion forums, video conferencing, and chat rooms on digital platforms helped improve communication with lecturers. Students could ask questions without having to wait for the next face-to-face meeting. However, some informants also revealed that interactions in digital learning often felt less personal than in traditional learning. Some students found it difficult to understand lecturers' expressions, body language, and spontaneous responses when learning was

conducted online. As a result, the academic relationships they developed sometimes felt more formal and limited (Williyan, 2023).

This situation demonstrates that the success of digital learning is determined not only by technology but also by the quality of communication between lecturers and students. Digital platforms need to be supported by learning strategies that foster active, collaborative, and meaningful interactions to optimize the student learning experience.

### **Technical Barriers and Digital Infrastructure**

One of the most frequently emerging themes in this study was technical and infrastructure challenges. Students reported various obstacles such as unstable internet connections, system disruptions, login difficulties, and limited learning support devices. Students from areas with limited internet access faced greater challenges than those in urban areas. Network disruptions often caused delays in participating in online lectures, uploading assignments, and accessing learning materials. Some students even reported experiencing stress when facing technical issues as assignment deadlines approached (Aziz et al., 2024).

These findings demonstrate that digital transformation in education requires not only user readiness but also adequate infrastructure support. Disparities in technology access can impact the quality of students' learning experiences and potentially create inequities in access to educational services.

### **Academic Load in a Digital Environment**

The study also found that some students felt an increased academic burden after using digital learning platforms. Students reported that lecturers often assigned more assignments than in-person learning, assuming students had more time to study at home. In addition to the increased number of assignments, students also had to adapt to different platforms for each course. Using multiple applications simultaneously often caused confusion and increased academic pressure. Some students reported experiencing digital fatigue due to prolonged use of computer or smartphone screens (Pujiono et al., 2025).

This phenomenon demonstrates that the digitalization of learning needs to be balanced with learning designs that balance academic activities and student well-being. The use of technology should facilitate the learning process, not add to the burden on students.

### **The Influence of Digital Platforms on Learning Motivation**

Research has found that digital learning platforms have varying effects on students' learning motivation. Some students feel more motivated by interactive features like online quizzes, learning videos, gamification, and discussion forums, which make the learning process more engaging. However, others experience decreased motivation due to a lack of social interaction and a monotonous learning environment. They find it easier to become distracted when studying online than when attending face-to-face lessons. A less conducive home environment is also a factor that affects students' concentration and motivation (Gumay et al., 2025).

These results indicate that learning motivation in digital environments is influenced by a combination of technological factors, the learning environment, and individual student

characteristics. Therefore, universities need to develop digital learning models that can increase active student engagement.

### **Student Expectations for the Development of Digital Learning Platforms**

The final theme emerging from this research was students' expectations for the development of digital learning platforms. Most informants desired a system that was more stable, easier to use, and integrated with various other academic services. Students also hoped for improvements in the interface design to make it more user-friendly and easier to navigate. Beyond technical aspects, students hoped for platform training for lecturers and students to ensure a more effective learning process. They also desired more interactive features to support collaboration, group discussions, and more intensive academic communication (Anthonio et al., 2024).

These expectations demonstrate that students are not only technology users but also those with expectations regarding the quality of digital education services. Therefore, student input needs to be a crucial part of the evaluation and development of digital learning platforms in higher education.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the use of digital learning platforms in higher education provides diverse experiences for students, both in terms of benefits and challenges. Digital learning platforms have been shown to increase ease of access to course materials, provide flexibility in the learning process, and encourage student independence in managing their academic activities. Students feel that learning technology allows them to learn more flexibly without being limited by space and time, thus supporting the creation of a learning process that is more adaptive to individual needs.

In addition to providing various benefits, this study also identified several obstacles that impact students' experiences using digital learning platforms. These obstacles include limited infrastructure and internet access, technical system issues, reduced social and academic interaction, and increased workloads that can potentially lead to digital fatigue. Differences in students' digital literacy levels and learning environments also influence the effectiveness of digital learning platforms in supporting academic activities.

Overall, the success of implementing a digital learning platform is determined not only by the sophistication of the technology used, but also by institutional readiness, faculty competence, infrastructure quality, and students' ability to adapt to the digital learning environment. Therefore, universities need to continuously evaluate and develop the platforms they use, taking into account the experiences and needs of students as the primary users. Thus, digital learning can be an effective tool for improving the quality of higher education, strengthening student engagement, and supporting a more innovative, inclusive, and sustainable learning process.

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