Probing Digital Media Usage
at State Islamic Colleges in North Sumatera;
from Advantages to Challenges

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Abstract

Utilizing digital media platforms have been obligated for all educators including lecturers to face the educational development. However, there are still many lecturers who are not familiar with their advances and not ready with their usages in teaching. The objectives of this study are to see types of digital media platforms applied by the lecturers and to know advantages derived and challenges faced. The research was done with descriptive qualitative method and 13 English lecturers from the State Islamic Colleges in North Sumatera were chosen purposively as research respondents. To get the data needed, questionnaires were distributed and interviews were done to respondents. To analyze the questionnaires data, the frequencies as well as percentages were counted, and data reduction, description, display, and conclusion were done to analyze interview data. This study found WA Group is the most preferred platform by the lecturers in blended learning followed by Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, and Quizizz as well as Kahoot. Then, it is revealed that digital media help learners to have lots of interaction with peers and digital media also can motivate lecturers to develop their teaching professionalism. Finally, this research gives some contribution mostly to students and lecturers about types of digital media as well as the advantages of using digital media in teaching and learning process and it informs some challenges faced by students and teachers in making use of the digital media.

Keywords: *Advantages; Challenges; Digital; Islamic Colleges; Media; Probing; Usage*

Introduction

The roles of digital media in teaching are very crucial and have been proved by amount of people like teachers (Al-farizi & Suherman, 2019), researchers (Hikmah, 2019), and other educators (Fadlilah, 2022). However, there are still problems happening during its implementation. Most of the teachers have less willingness and effort to use creative and innovative digital media in teaching (Diamantis, 2022). Then, good and available internet access is really needed in making use of digital media and not all schools or campus can facilitate it (Haleem, Javaid, Asim, & Suman, 2022). In addition, digital media are still seen expensive things that not every teachers can afford them(Fatira et al., 2021).

Regarding the use of digital media in the research sites, three Islamic colleges including UIN (State Islamic Colleges) Sumatera Utara, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary, and STAIN Mandailing Natal are three colleges that have been using digital media in implementing blended learning, specifically, English Education Program in those three colleges also have applied it. Preliminary interview was conducted to the heads of the three English Education Departments. It is said that blended learning is used as a solution to the limitation of university facilities in which there are no enough numbers of classrooms to facilitate number of students who study there. Then, Siregar, the head of English Department in one of the colleges, (2024) said that blended learning must be carried out with 80 percent face to face and 20 percent online learning in the forms of assignment, projects and other off-campus tasks. In addition, Pratiwi (2024) said that when the lecturers cannot teach for certain reasons; blended learning is implemented to cover the missing lecture.

Moreover, based on the result of previous study and interview with the three heads of English Department in the three Islamic colleges, some problems happened during blended learning implementation. Some lecturers still have limited knowledge and capacity in making use of digital media in teaching and learning process as well as they didn't obey the rules set by the faculty related to blended learning. The problem occurred because the campus still rarely conducts socialization, training, and workshop to develop digital media use in teaching. Therefore, the ways of implementing blended learning is still limited to certain application like *email, WhatsApp group*, and *Google Meet*.

Based on that fact, the research was carried out to know about how blended learning implemented is, types of digital media used in implementing it, roles and advantages of digital media in blended learning, and problems as well as challenges faced by the lecturers in using digital media in blended learning. This research was conducted in English Department of State Islamic Colleges in north Sumatera namely UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan, and STAIN Mandailing Natal. Conducting the research in the three colleges is due to fact that UIN Sumatera Utara is the oldest Islamic college and regarded as the most advanced one in using technology like the digital media. Then, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan and STAIN Mandailing Natal are still

categorized as the new college. With this reason, it is assumed that there will be rich findings derived from the research.

Related to the previous studies, there have been a lot of research done to prove and to investigate them. The first is an investigation on the importance of digital media in learning process (B & Gani, 2023)which found that the use of digital-based learning media is able to increase learning independence (Mahrani, Falatena, & Wahyunengsih, 2022), learning dares to be more student-centered which causes them to be able to show responsibility(Tristiana, 2024), autonomy in learning and greatly influences the learning process between teachers and students (Sukaryanti, Nasution, Indria, & Hadi, 2021). The second is a research by (Suryani, 2016) about the utilization of digital media to improve the quality and attractiveness of the teaching which revealed that through using digital media, teacher could teach more joyfully and using digital learning media can also improve the learning to be more attractive.

Then, the third study was done by (Suganda, 2022) investigating the use of digital media to improve students' literacy in English learning in Junior High School, and it was proved that digital media used to deliver material can take place effectively to improve students' literacy in learning so that it can run according to educational goals. Moreover, a study done by (B & Gani, 2023) aims to see the benefits of digital learning media as an alternative solution for student learning, as well as to describe the urgency of using digital learning media and the readiness of teachers to use learning media, and found that digital media can provide various conveniences for teachers and students to carry out learning.

All the research mentioned above used qualitative method and interview as the research instrument. Then, the research sites were in the context of secondary schools. In addition, all of the previous studies explored the advantages of digital media in learning which are seen from the students' and teachers' perspectives and most of the focus is limited on their potential usage. In fact, there is no research mentioned above exploring types of digital media and challenges faced by the teachers and students in making use of digital media. In short, there is a gap seen from the research design, and most of the studies were conducted in the context of secondary school and rarely done in higher educations.

There are three research questions that become points to be discussed in this study covering types of digital media used in teaching, what advantages are derived, and what challenges are faced. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to investigate types of digital media used in teaching, to explore advantages that are derived, and to know challenges faced by the lecturers in making use of digital media. As the novelty of the research, this study used mix method as a research design applying questionnaires and interview as research instrument. Then, the novelty is also seen from the research respondents who were derived from higher education lecturers, and finally the novelty is related to the aims which are to explore types of digital media used, advantages derived, and challenges faced by the lecturers.

Method

This research was done with descriptive qualitative method and 13 English lecturers at English Department of UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan, and STAIN Mandailing Natal were chosen as research respondents. The respondents were chosen using purposive sampling which means the respondents who frequently and rarely apply digital media in teaching were selected as data sources. To recruit the purposive respondents, the researcher did interview to the Heads of English Department in the three research sites and asked them for choosing the respondents.

Two techniques of data collections were used in this study i.e. questionnaires and interview. The questionnaires in the form of online, semi structured, and multiple-choice questionnaires were given to 13 respondents, then interview was done to validate the answers. The interview was done face to face to 8 respondents and through video call to 5 respondents. The questions were about types of digital media used by the lecturers in teaching, advantages derived and challenges faced. In considering the respondents' reputation, this study used codes (the initials of the names) in data description.

To analyze the data, percentages and frequencies from the questionnaires data were counted and Mile's and Huberman techniques were used in analyzing interview data covering data reduction, data description, data display, and data conclusion.
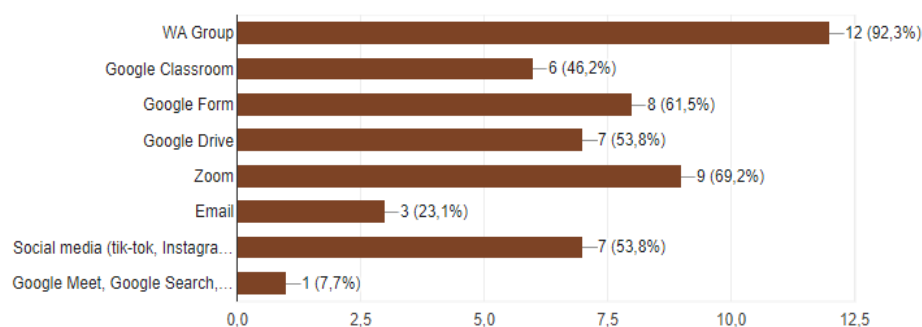
Results

What Are Types of Digital Media Platform Used in Teaching and Learning Process?

To get the data related to this research question, questionnaires followed with interview were given to the 13 English lecturers as research respondents. The actual answers from the respondents was described below:

7. Platform media digital apa saja yang digunakan dalam pengajaran?(berilah tanda centang pada platform yg digunakan)

13 jawaban

Platform	Value
WA Group	12 (92,3%)
Google Classroom	6 (46,2%)
Google Form	8 (61,5%)
Google Drive	7 (53,8%)
Zoom	9 (69,2%)
Email	3 (23,1%)
Social media (tik-tok, Instagra...	7 (53,8%)
Google Meet, Google Search,...	1 (7,7%)

From the chart it is seen that there are some types of platform of digital media that can be chosen by the respondents in the questionnaire including WA group, Google classroom, Google form, Google Drive, Zoom, Social media and Email. Related to this part, this research found that 92.3 % (12) respondents used WA Group, 46.2 % (6) used Google classroom, 61.5 (8) used Google form, and 53.8% (7) used Google drive, 69.2% (9) used Zoom, 23.1 % (3) made use of Email, 53.8% (7) used Social media, and 7.7 % (1) also applied Google Meet and Google Search in teaching. The description to the respondents' answers can be seen in the figure below.
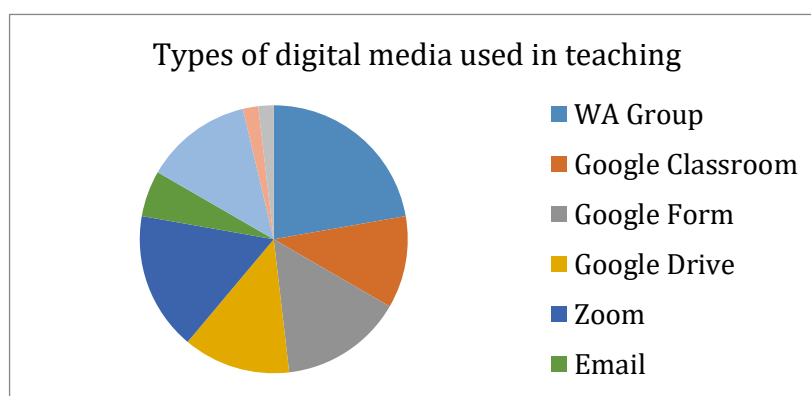

Figure 1. Types of digital media used in teaching

The finding shows that almost all of the respondents used WhatsApp group which means it is familiar to be used by the lecturers in teaching. Then, half of the respondents used Google Classroom, Google Drive, Google form, social media, and Zoom. In addition, there are only small numbers of the respondents used Google Meet and Google search.

This research conducted interview to one of the respondents who used WhatsApp group in teaching to deepen the data related to reasons of using it. The interview was done to ESH (a lecturer in UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan), and she stated some reasons of choosing this platform. WhatsApp Group is very useful and easy to access; it is very fast in giving information to students, all of the students also have it in their mobile phone. Then, the lecturers do not need much time to open and share every teaching there like learning materials, media, resources and other information. In addition, the platform supports real time chats between teachers and students. This communication is perfect for clearing up doubts, sharing quick updates, and providing timely feedback. Moreover, creating group chats on WhatsApp is great for projects, discussions, and peer learning.

Furthermore, related to the use of Social media, one of the lecturers (RP) in STAIN Mandailing Natal states that every student has social media in their mobile phone, and they open it every day. She reported that she sometimes ask students to make a project based learning using social media. For example, she asks them to record their presentation in certain subject, they have to upload the presentation

in YouTube application, so people can watch, like and comment their presentation. It will motivate them to have good English skills because the presentation will be watched by other people.

Another interview result was also derived from another lecturer (SM) from UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan, and it was known that using Quizizz can make learning more creative and fun because it provides various topics and levels of difficulty, it also has lots of features that can increase students' motivation in learning like the use of images and videos. Furthermore, from the interview with (SRS), it was known that using Google form has many advantages in teaching. It saves the times in doing some surveys and tests that can be modified with many types of questionnaires demanded. It also can help lecturers to recap responses provided by learners

What Are the Advantages of Digital Media in Teaching?

The research revealed that digital media offered some advantages for lecturers in teaching. The actual answers given by the respondents in the questionnaires is stated below.
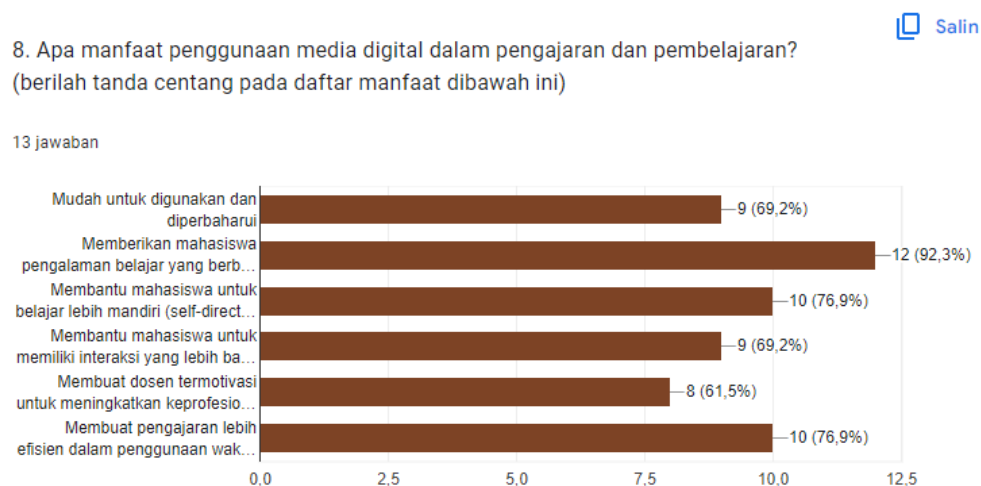
The questionnaire shows that 92.3 % (12) of respondents agree that digital media offer students' new experiences of learning using technology. Then, 76.9% (76) of respondents agree that teaching and learning will be more effective and efficient using digital media and it makes students more self-directed in learning. In addition, 69.2 % (9) of respondent states that digital media helps learners to have lots of interaction with peers and it is easy to use and able to update. Finally, 61.5 % (8) of the respondents agree that teaching using digital media can motivates lecturers to develop their teaching professionalism. The description of the respondents' answers can be seen in the figure below.
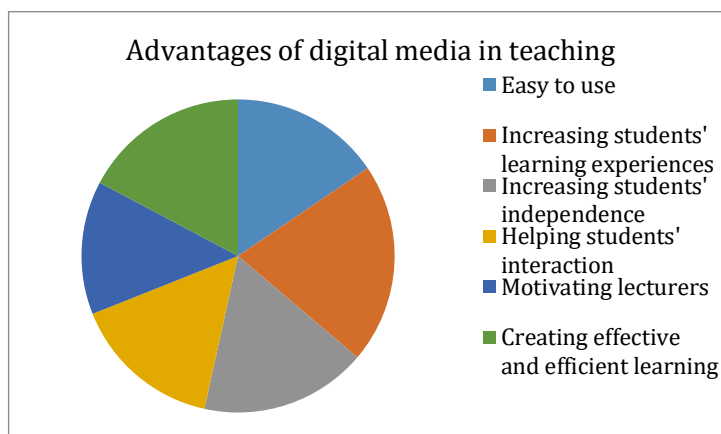
Figure 2. Advantages of digital media in teaching

To deepen the finding related to the advantages of digital media; interview was conducted to some respondents. One of the respondents (SDS) from STAIN Mandailing Natal said that digital media in teaching can make classes more open, flexible, and engaging, leading to improve class instructions. Another advantage is that the use of digital media can promote teacher competence and help teachers develop new perspectives and apply knowledge. In addition to the previous answer, SM from UIN Syahada said that digital media platforms provide a vast repository of educational content, including articles, videos, and tutorials, making it easier for students and educators to access diverse learning materials.

What Are the Challenges or Problems Faced in Making Use of Digital Media?

Digital media have some advantages, yet lecturers face some challenges in applying them in teaching and learning. The respondents' answers are seen in the chart below:

From the questionnaire, it was known that there are also some cases happening during its implementation. It was found that 84.6 % (11) of respondents agree that some of digital media platforms used in teaching cost much money to

use them. Then, 76.9 % (10) agree that some students are not familiar with the media and it makes them not ready to use the media applied by the lecturers. In addition, 53.8 % (7) of the respondents agree that campus doesn't have enough facilities supporting the use of digital media in teaching and learning process. Furthermore, 23.1% (3) of the respondents agree that the campus doesn't support the lecturers to develop their teaching professionalism as well as the lecturers do not have enough time to develop their teaching using digital media. In other words, the lecturers' time is very limited in learning the digital media use. The description of answers can be seen in the figure below.
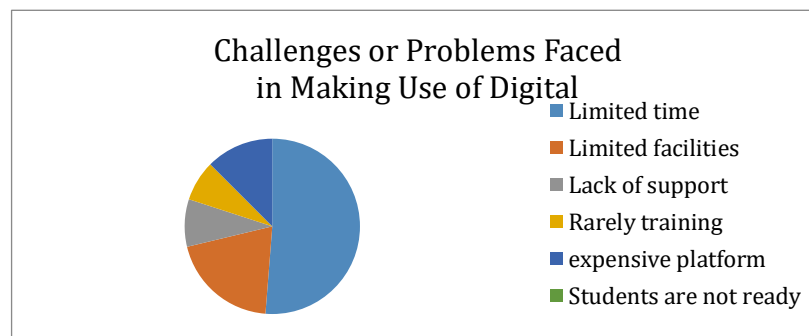

Figure 3. Challenges faced in using digital media in teaching

An interview was conducted to some lecturers related to this discussion, one of lecturers (SRS) from UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan said that teachers' problems in utilizing digital learning media include: 1) Teachers are accustomed to use conventional learning models without utilizing learning media. 2) The use of digital-based learning media is still low. 3) Insufficient Information and Communication Technology learning facilities 4) Lack of government support in improving the quality of Human Resources to utilize Information and Communication Technology in teaching and learning activities. In line with the previous argument, an English lecturer (AH) from STAIN Mandailing Natal stated there are some challenges faced by the lecturers in using digital media i.e. lack of interest of a teacher in learning IT (Information Technology) and designing digital learning media, lack of teacher knowledge about IT media, the electricity and Wi-Fi at campus are not normal, and there is no obligation on the part of the campus for lecturers to teach using IT

Discussion
Types of Digital Media Platforms Used in Teaching

This research reveals that lecturers got advantages from using some kinds of digital media platforms like WhatsApp, Google Form, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Google Drive, Zoom, Social media, Kahoot and Quizziz.

WhatsApp

Most of the lectures used WhatsApp in teaching which means that they see WhatsApp as an effective digital media platform to be used in teaching due to its potentials. From this finding, it can be also implied that WhatsApp is quite popular among the lecturers and students and it is also easy to apply. Then, comparing to other platforms and application, the lecturers and students get more advantages from making use of it.

In line with this ideas, other researchers agree that WhatsApp Group is very useful and easy to access (Ko, 2018); it is very fast in giving information to students (Chew, Jones, & Turner, 2008), all of the students also have it in their mobile phone (Purnomo, Syafitri, & Raflesia, 2022). Then, the lecturers do not need much time to open and share every teaching there like learning materials, media, resources and other information (Maseli, 2019). In addition, the platform supports real-time chats between teachers and students. This communication is perfect for clearing up doubts, sharing quick updates, and providing timely feedback. Moreover, creating group chats on WhatsApp is great for projects, discussions, and peer learning. This is in line with the ideas proposed (Supeno et al., 2019) stating that there are four advantages of WhatsApp group online learning, they can be used as collaborative tool, free and easy to use, can be used segmentatively for lecturer, and it has the capability to publish the assignments.

Quizizz

From the research findings, it is also known that Quizziz is one of the digital media platforms used by the English lecturers. It is regarded as one of the interactive media or application that can create interactive quizzes integrated with learning material (Dr Shaheen Parveen & Shaikh Imran Ramzan, 2024). Then, it can also measure the increase in student competency by calculating the difference between the posttest and pretest. Quizizz also can make learning activities more varied by strengthening the material to measure student understanding, finally Quizizz can be integrated with the LMS of choice, such as Google Classroom, Schoology, and Canvas. In line with this ideas, Aditiyawarman et al (2022) found that there are some advantages of using Quizizz in teaching including increasing student enthusiasm during the process learning increases because Quiziz is one of the online learning media contains games, and increasing students' ability to understand questions independently.

Google Classroom

In addition, Google Classroom is also one of digital media platforms that are seen potentials to be used in teaching and learning process. This study proves that google classroom is not really implemented dominantly in teaching. Many reasons can be underlying this fact. Perhaps, the lecturers still have limited information and knowledge about using it. Then, students are also not encouraged to have google classroom during the lecture.

However, Google Classroom is actually good due to its strengths. Using Google Classroom is more effective in terms of saving the learning material, and every user can access it anytime. Related to this argument, there are six points of the advantages or learning process through Google Classroom, they are easy to use, save time, cloud-based, flexible, free and mobile friendly (Tristiana & Kayyis, 2022). The first is easy to use, this is related to how applying the Google Classroom. It is very easy to use because the network to access Google Classroom more easily, so the students and the lecturer can access it whenever and wherever they are.

The lecturer is easy to attach or display the material and the discussion can do in comment column. The second is saving time. Google classroom is designed to save time, it is integrating and automates the use of other Google apps, including documents, slide, and spread sheet. The lecturer and the students can do another activity while teaching and learning on Google Classroom. The lecturer will be easy to grade point, scale, keyboard navigation for entering grades, sorted by the name to save the lecturer's time.

Regarding the types of digital media that are frequently used by the lecturers, there are still many platforms which are more effective and interesting to be used like kahoot and quiziz, yet the lecturers only use some common platforms like WA Group and Zoom. This means that the lecturers have limited knowledge toward the development of digital media.

The Advantages of Digital Media Platforms Used by the Lecturers in Teaching

The research finding proved that lecturers got some advantages from utilizing the digital media in teaching and learning process. The most advantages found in this research are the fact that digital media give students new experiences of learning using technology. It means that digital media let the students to use and take advantages from the media (B & Gani, 2023) like the use of technology in learning (Widiara, 2018). Then, digital media also helps the students learning using various kinds of platforms like quizzes (Klein, 2023), zoom (Sahoo & Bhattacharya, 2021), kahoot, etc.

The research also revealed that digital media makes students more self-directed in learning. It means that using of digital media boosts the English language proficiency (Rachman, Simamora, & Hidayati, 2021), and reduces the levels of cultural stress and academic difficulties. The digital media helps students easy to find some learning resources, flexible to do the task, and quickly to search information needed in learning. This is similar to arguments proposed by Purba et al, (2021) saying that digital learning is a large collection of computers in networks that are tied together so that many users can share their vast resources. Moreover, Kuntari & License (2023) also perceived that using digital media has now become common place to make it easier for teachers to carry out the learning process, so school can maximize its efforts even more utilize digital learning media as facilities and infrastructure learning. Digital media also can provide various conveniences for teachers and students to carry out learning.

The Problems and Challenges Faced in Using Digital Media

Related to the challenges faced by the lecturers in incorporating digital media in EFL classroom, there are some problems found including limited facilities that can support the media use such as low internet access. This is in line with the research findings done by Salam et al (2023) stating that teachers faced challenges such as lack of competence, deficient teaching materials, and inadequate digital teaching skills when attempting to integrate technology into their classroom. Limitations of infrastructures, such as low internet bandwidth and a scarcity of devices available in their schools were also reported as additional contributing challenges (Mustafa, Nguyen, & Gao, 2024).

Furthermore, this research proved that digital media platforms used in teaching cost much money to use them, which means the lecturers do not have available money to afford some platforms used, and they have to pay much money to use it continuously. In addition to the previous phenomena, the study also showed that some students are also not familiar with the platforms (Sartika, Suyidno, & Akbar Wiguna, 2024) used by the lecturers, so using the digital media platforms are sometimes challenging for students (Anderson, 2019). It means that using some platforms of digital media are difficult to understand and learn them need more times (Sharma et al., 2024).

Moreover, the fact that campus doesn't have enough facilities supporting the use of digital media in teaching and learning process is also one of challenges faced by the lecturers in using digital media. It means that campus doesn't support the lecturers to develop their teaching professionalism (Maeda & Juma, 2023) as well as the lecturers do not have enough time to develop their teaching using digital media. In other words, providing facilities to support teaching (Bankov, Kuritsyna, Retivina, Rodkina, & Chikova, 2021) and learning process is not a priority for the institutions, so the lecturers cannot teach as professional as needed (Weerapperuma, Nawinna, & Gamage, 2024).

Finally, the low ability of teachers in applying information technology, economic factors of parents, unstable internet networks, and the absence of information technology training provided by the school are also some problems faced in implementing digital media in teaching. On the other hand, over time teachers are able to implement digital learning independently (Buckingham, 2007) and adapt to the surrounding environment and understand the various characteristics of students in utilizing digital in learning.

Regarding the contribution from this research, this study sees that there are many important information, facts, and unexpected findings that will become references for lecturers and policy makers in the faculty in developing the instructional policies like the use of digital media. It is a fact that not many lecturers are familiar with the use of digital media, thus the rectors, deans, even head of departments should hold many workshops about digital media in teaching to help lecturers to improve their professionalism. Then, there should be rules that manage the implementation of digital media in teaching, so every lecturer will be

monitored and guided in terms of making use of digital media.

Conclusion

Implementing blended learning in teaching and learning process is an obligation that is decided by the policy makers in State Islamic Colleges in North Sumatera. However, there have not been any rules made by the campus related to how the blended learning is conducted by the lecturers. Related to the frequency of blended learning, it is concluded that comparing offline and online learning, offline learning is still dominants done by the lecturers, and there is only about 20% of online learning implemented.

Again, there have not been any specific rules made by the campus related to the percentages of online learning in blended learning. Regarding the types of platforms used in blended learning, it can be concluded that WA Group is the most preferred platform by the lecturers in blended learning followed by Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, and Quizizz as well as kahoot. It is also concluded that blended learning is implemented dominantly for giving some assignment to students, for sharing the learning material, and for giving a lecture.

Related to types of platforms of digital media used, the research concludes that almost all of the respondents used WhatsApp group. Then, half of the respondents used Google Classroom, Google Drive, Google form, Social media, and Zoom. In addition, there are only small numbers of the respondents used Google Meet and Google search. The research concludes that digital media give students new experiences of learning using technology. Then, teaching and learning will be more effective and efficient using digital media and it makes students more self-directed in learning.

In addition, digital media helps learners to have lots of interaction with peers and it is easy to use and able to update. Finally, teaching using digital media can motivates lecturers to develop their teaching professionalism. Finally, it is also concluded that the most dominant problems faced in using digital media is the fact that digital media platforms used in teaching cost much money to use them. Then, some students are not familiar with the media. In addition, campus doesn't have enough facilities supporting the use of digital media in teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the campus doesn't support the lecturers to develop their teaching professionalism as well as the lecturers do not have enough time to develop their teaching using digital media

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