

# SELAYAR ISLANDS REGION STUDENTS' ADAPTATION TO ONLINE LEARNING AT MAKASSAR OPEN UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

Learning in Indonesia has undergone a major transformation, particularly in the widespread implementation of online learning systems at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Open University (Universitas Terbuka) is a higher education institution that implements distance learning, reaching remote areas and even island regions, including Makassar Open University, which serves the Selayar Islands. The geographical and socio-economic conditions of the island region pose challenges for students in adapting to online learning. The purpose of this study is to describe the forms of adaptation of students from the island regions to online learning, identifying supporting factors, obstacles, and strategies in the adaptation process. The method used is qualitative, based on field data with descriptive analysis. The results show that students in the Selayar Islands face various challenges in online learning and successfully adapt through technical, cognitive, and social strategies. This adaptation is supported by time management skills, family support, good communication with teachers, online learning communities, and flexible policies from the institution. Limited internet access and devices encourage students to be more independent in learning, so the strategies adopted by students are utilizing public Wi-Fi and internet cafes, as well as SALUT for the learning process, and improving communication through platforms that allow access to weak internet networks.

Keywords: Adaptation, Online Learning, Selayar Island

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Indonesia is currently undergoing a major transformation, particularly in the implementation of online learning systems. This change has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced universities to shift from face-to-face learning to digital formats. Under current conditions, the development of information and communication technology in education is increasingly evident. One institution that has implemented distance learning since its inception is the Open University (UT), including UT Makassar, which covers island regions such as the Selayar Islands.

The Open University (UT) is a State University (PTN) that provides open and distance learning (PTJJ) higher education. UT provides various learning support services online, *synchronous*, and *asynchronous*. Definition of *Synchronous* is learning that occurs in a *real-time environment*

where instructors and participants can interact directly at the same time, for example, face-to-face tutorials where the schedule and location are determined by UT in addition, there are webinar tutorials that utilize Microsoft Teams in their learning, with a schedule that is also determined by UT. The definition of *asynchronous* learning is learning that is not *real-time*, allowing participants to access materials and participate in discussions without having to be with the teacher (more flexible, because it can be arranged by the students themselves)

However, the geographical and socioeconomic realities of the archipelago present unique challenges for students adapting to online learning. The Selayar Islands comprise a number of scattered islands, resulting in limited access to infrastructure, particularly internet access, technological facilities, and educational resources. This situation forces students and pupils in the archipelago to make various adaptations to optimally participate in online learning.

The Selayar Islands Regency is characterized by an archipelago, with settlements spread across the main island and smaller islands. This region comprises approximately 130 islands, presenting unique challenges for providing educational services and digital infrastructure, particularly internet connectivity. This situation presents obstacles for students in optimally participating in online lectures. Although the Open University has provided and even collaborated on various online platforms such as LMS, *Microsoft Teams*, and digital modules, its implementation is greatly influenced by local conditions in each region.

Therefore, it is important to examine in depth how UT Makassar students, particularly those in the Selayar Islands, have adapted to online learning. This adaptation process reflects a form of academic resilience that deserves attention from distance learning stakeholders.

The objectives of this study are (1) to describe the forms of adaptation undertaken by students from the Selayar Islands; (2) to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the online learning process they face; (3) to determine strategies that can be recommended to increase the effectiveness of online learning in the island region.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of students' subjective experiences with online learning. The focus of the study was UT Makassar students from the Selayar Islands, specifically those who had actively participated in online lectures in the last two semesters.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with 100 respondents, consisting of students from various study programs. In addition to the interviews, researchers also conducted observations regarding internet facilities and learning resources used, as well as a documentary

study of local government policies, academic reports, and literature related to online learning in the island region.

Data were analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing techniques. The analysis was conducted to identify the forms of adaptation undertaken by students, the obstacles encountered, and solution strategies.

### **3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Geographical Conditions and Educational Infrastructure in the Selayar Islands**

The Selayar Islands comprise the large island of Selayar and a cluster of smaller islands surrounding it. The entire administrative region is separated from the mainland of Sulawesi. Regional government documents and BPS publications for 2024-2025 indicate the number of islands is approximately 130. This geographic location presents significantly more complex challenges for access to education, particularly online learning, than in urban areas on the mainland of South Sulawesi. Furthermore, not all areas in the Selayar Islands have access to stable electricity, let alone adequate internet access. In some sub-districts, particularly those located far from the regency center, internet access is often completely unavailable. Students living in remote areas must travel to the sub-district center or even the regency town just to obtain adequate signal access. This illustrates the challenges of cross-island public services.

These infrastructure limitations are a crucial factor in determining the success of online learning. While many students already have hardware devices like laptops and smartphones, the quality of these devices varies. Some students still rely on low-spec phones that are not optimal for online meeting applications like Microsoft Teams, provided by Universitas Terbuka. Furthermore, internet connectivity remains patchy, especially in sub-districts far from the city center. Many students must travel to areas with stronger signal strength just to access initiation materials, discussion questions, or download assignments for tutorials and web meetings; they are forced to follow a set schedule. Furthermore, family financial constraints mean that not all students can easily afford sufficient internet data packages to attend all learning sessions.

This has an impact on the inequality of learning opportunities between students who live in city centers and those on small islands.

### 3.2 Forms of Student Adaptation

The adaptation of Selayar Islands students to online learning can be divided into three main dimensions, namely cognitive, affective, and technical.

**Cognitive Dimension** students from island regions like Selayar, this adaptation is crucial because island communities face limited infrastructure, unstable internet access, and minimal direct interaction with tutors/instructors. Students adapt by adjusting their study patterns to suit unstable network conditions. Some conditions are exemplified by students taking online tutorials preferring to download initiation and discussion materials at night when the internet signal is stronger. Students take the initiative to find solutions by using the internet at village offices, sub-district offices, or internet cafes, then studying the initiation materials independently or attending webinar tutorials at agreed-upon times. Furthermore, some students fully utilize the printed learning materials they receive for independent study by creating study schedules that fit around their daily activities. This independent study pattern ultimately trains them to be more disciplined in time management and more critical in compiling important notes that can be used as references for exams.

**Affective Dimension: Students** face quite challenging emotional situations. 35% of them feel frustrated and experience a decrease in motivation due to being unable to attend full tutorial sessions due to poor network connectivity. Others experience a decrease in motivation due to frequently being left behind in online discussions with lecturers or classmates. However, it is precisely in these circumstances that resilience is born (*resilience*). Students try to cultivate patience, calm themselves when disruptions occur, and find alternative ways to catch up on material. Student support and the role of SALUT (UT Service Center) in Selayar Regency as an extension of the Regional UT in the district/city are very helpful in assisting students to study together with students who are registered for the same courses and facilitating students in forming study groups. Thus, online learning, despite its limitations, still fosters solidarity and shared motivation.

**Technical Dimensions: Adaptation** is carried out through efforts to improve students' digital skills. Students who were previously unfamiliar with using the Microsoft Teams application and the silayar.ut.ac.id page used for Open University webinar tutorials as well as the e-learning page used for online tutorials, since becoming Open University students, are equipped for online learning delivered during LPKBJJ (Distance Learning Success Support Services) activities consisting of OSMB (New Student Study Orientation), PKBJJ (Distance Learning Skills Training), WT (Assignment Workshop) and KU (Exam Clinic). Students are required to

participate in these activities to ensure successful learning. In addition, students are required to study the material in the BMP (Main Material Book) because the Open University ensures that exam questions are sourced from student teaching materials.

### 3.3 Adaptation Supporting Factors

Despite facing various obstacles, there are a number of factors that help students adapt to online learning.

First, **time management** is the most crucial aspect of online or distance learning, as students must carefully plan their study schedules, dividing their time between work and learning activities, while also ensuring they maintain daily activities with family and neighbors. This aligns with Mahmudi and Fernandes' (2021) statement that time management is a fundamental skill that students must master when navigating distance learning.

Second, **family support** is a crucial aspect. Parents and close family members understand the students' difficult situation and try their best to help, whether by providing devices, internet data, or creating a home environment conducive to learning.

Third, **the role of lecturers or tutors in** understanding students' limitations is a significant supporting factor. Lecturers offer flexibility, for example, by granting extensions to assignments, or tutors providing consultations, Q&A services, or delivering slides through WhatsApp groups. While some island students experience network issues when using demanding applications, many still manage to access WhatsApp effectively. According to Wisdom (2020), Good interaction and communication between students and teachers is very important, especially in online learning.

Fourth, **social solidarity between students also** plays a crucial role. Students often help each other by sharing notes, discussing material in groups at a designated location, and some even lend their devices to their friends. This demonstrates that the spirit of togetherness and shared motivation remains strong within the student community in the island region.

Fifth, **flexible policies of the institution**, under certain conditions, students are given high flexibility to support the learning process. For example, there are various forms of learning assistance services that students can choose from (online tutorials, face-to-face tutorials, webinar tutorials, and course assignments).

Analysis shows that students from the Selayar Islands demonstrated a high level of adaptation to online learning despite various obstacles. Psychological resilience, creativity, and informal social networks were their primary assets.

### 3.4 Factors Inhibiting Adaptation

On the other hand, there are various factors that hinder the success of adaptation to online learning.

**First**, limited internet access. The geographical location of the archipelago results in uneven network quality across the scattered small islands. Students living in certain areas can participate in learning relatively smoothly, while those in other areas cannot access it at all. This situation creates a gap between students in terms of access to learning. According to Hatmo (2021) and Iswanto (2021), in learning, it is crucial to ensure equal access to technology for all students.

**Second** Device limitations: Some students still use older devices with limited memory, often experiencing problems opening learning applications. This aligns with Adawiyah et al.'s (2021) statement that technology access and availability are barriers and challenges to distance learning, especially in less developed regions.

**Third**, low digital literacy. Not all students are familiar with information technology, such as difficulties operating applications, uploading assignments to [silayar.ut.ac.id](http://silayar.ut.ac.id), or even accessing [elearning.ut.ac.id](http://elearning.ut.ac.id). This can add to the psychological burden for students, as they must learn new technology alongside other academic demands.

### 3.5 Student Adaptation Strategies

To face various challenges, students develop various adaptation strategies.

First, students can use public Wi-Fi facilities such as those at schools, village offices, or sub-district offices for free.

Second, students come to internet cafes (warnet) to access materials, discussion materials, and download assignments only, then do assignments at home and return to the warnet to upload answers to discussions and assignments.

Third, students rely on SALUT (Open University Service Center) in Benteng City. SALUT coordinates students with the same courses to be able to study together.

Fourth, students use WhatsApp as their primary communication medium between tutors and students. This app is considered the most data-efficient and more stable on weak internet connections.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Makassar Open University students from the Selayar Islands faced various challenges in online learning, particularly related to technology access and limited devices. However, they successfully adapted through technical, cognitive, and social strategies. This adaptation was

bolstered by family support, an online learning community, and the institution's flexible policies.

Limited internet access and devices have a direct impact on the quality of student learning. These limitations make it difficult for students to fully participate in tutorials and Tuweb, which ultimately leads to less than optimal understanding of the material. However, this situation also encourages students to be more independent in their learning, fostering various initiatives that emerge throughout the learning process.

Students' learning motivations varied, with some becoming more motivated by challenges and new knowledge, while others experienced a decline in enthusiasm due to technical obstacles. This clearly demonstrates that online learning has both positive and negative impacts on students. Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen digital infrastructure in island regions, improve students' digital literacy capacity, and provide ongoing institutional support for students from the 3T (third-third) regions to ensure more inclusive and high-quality distance learning.

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