Issues on Academic Writing Consultation: Alternative Online Platforms for Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

During the global pandemic, academics have experienced a challenging transition period that affects the learning process, leading to disruption in adjusting the existing learning modes. More specific problems faced by graduate students upon the research consultation and writing scientific reports from theses, dissertations, to papers for publication. This descriptive research aims to demonstrate the practicality of the available online platforms for the academic writing supervision for graduate students during the pandemic. Data were collected by distributing online questionnaires and in-depth interviews to the postgraduate students from all study programs of postgraduate school at one public university attending manuscript clinic workshops conducted by the researchers. Student's submission was examined as an indicator of the success and practicality of the offered platforms. Two online platforms are believed able to effectively accommodate the scientific consultation process for the graduate students as an effort to complete the academic writing. This research is expected to provide alternative solutions in overcoming issues on scientific writing consultation among graduate students during the pandemic and basis for university principals for upcoming policy related to online academic writing consultation.

Keywords: Online flatform, Academic writing, Alternative solutions

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is to elaborate the use of online conferencing platforms for academic writing consultation among the graduate students during the global pandemic, whom have been forced to work from home as the implementation of social restrictions due to global pandemic of Coronavirus. The global pandemic of Coronavirus disease (covid-19) has emerged since December 2019 in China, several countries have declared emergency to deal with the widespread of the virus. In Indonesia, the first case was confirmed in early March 2020. Since then, the number of cases in Indonesia has increased exponentially, forcing the government through relevant ministries was taking actions by declaring the pandemic as national emergency. In order to slow down the spread of the virus, government issued some policies like large-scale social restrictions (PSBB), including the closure of major activities like schools and universities across Indonesia [1] [2].

Due to the issuance of ministerial regulations for social restrictions for educational activities to curb the spread of the virus, the education in Indonesia has experienced a new period of transition, where all educational activities and lectures should be carried online instead of classical face-to-face mode. In the context of tertiary context, the sudden transition leads to challenging session for academic writing consultation which requires intense direct consultation between graduate students and the supervisors; academic writing consultation such as thesis, dissertation, and article, is one of the severely-hit academic activities by the transition due to the global

pandemic of covid-19. Some issues have emerged when having research writing consultation during the pandemic such as lack of depth of analysis and loss of focus of the research.

In order to deal with the condition among graduate students in conducting academic writing consultation during the pandemic, it is necessary to provide an alternative solution to overcome the issues. Online conferencing platforms become the imminent solution among academicians in order to have direct consultation and discussion. Two of several popular online conferencing platforms in Indonesia are Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet; they are among top five best-selling video conferencing applications in Indonesia and is included in the application category that can be used practically for online meetings from home [3-4], which is suitable for public during working from home due to the large-scale social restrictions by global pandemic. Additionally, the two online conferencing platforms are included in the 14 best applications for web video conferencing globally. [5]

This research focuses on the use of mentioned online conferencing platforms for research writing consultation for graduate students in terms of their practicality. In relation with the practicality, it is important to identify the practicality of the mentioned online conferencing platforms which is to support the process of online academic consultation and solve the issues among the graduate students.

1.1. Related works

In order to transfer the information and messages between teachers and students, it requires learning media which is believed to stimulate thoughts, feelings, attention and the willingness of students so that the media may encourage the learning process [6]. The role of the teachers as educators is to provide and use as effective and efficient as applicable learning media in order to achieve the goals of learning. Most research has suggested that the use of computers as a learning medium to stimulate thoughts and encourage interest in the material being taught helps students learning better; these studies, however, have not discussed the use of computer in the context of online learning [7], rather computer as personal device. In addition, studies indicate that the use of computer as a learning medium has been utilized through interactive whiteboard technology to improve students' abilities, but not in the context of wider online information and technological network [8].

For the more recent study on the use of online collaborative learning activities supported by cloud computing has examined 29 literatures related to learning management systems. It shows that cloud

computing systems have been supportive to the learning process. The use of cloud computing has been limited to collaborative content rather direct online conferencing platform [9]. Furthermore, the use of a learning management system for writing an article has been used more often by instructors in order to overcome issues of distance learning, but not discussed the preferable platforms used as the medium for the teaching of academic writing [10].

It could be initially concluded that further integration between collaborative online learning and online conference platforms is needed for further application during the crisis currently. Research on the effectiveness of peer collaborative writing shows positive trend despite it requires better support and qualified resources. The use of online and direct supporting media with peer collaboration has not been presented [11]. Current practice of the use of collaborative writing activities is the use of *chatbots* in messaging feature on Facebook application; this feature, however, does not support direct communication with video and audio [12]. The expected research in order to bridge the gap in academic consultation during the pandemic could be in the form of supported feature by using direct audio and video library which has not been discussed comprehensively [13].

The other study has focused on the evaluation of the effectiveness of a virtually delivered quality improvement (QI) program to improve supervision management for distance learning [14]. Such research using a comparative reflection approach was carried out using video conferencing for intercultural knowledge, but it has not yet explained in detail the practicality of the media used and what platform is used [15]. The study is expected to provide the parameter and detail application which is preferable for academic activities during the crisis.

The next research examines virtual reality in learning which still needs development. The system is possible to support visualization and interaction in a process, but studies on the integration between the virtual reality and video conferencing and its practicality have not been presented [16]. Current research proposes the integration between communication system using telephone networks for video conferencing, but particular video conference platform which is preferable has not been discussed and it might be difficult in terms of practicality during the pandemic. In this article, current technological advances need to be addressed in order to show the preferable conference platform and become adaptive with current condition [17]. From the studies that have been conducted, studies on the practicality of video conferencing platforms for online academic article consultation need further elaboration.

2. METHOD

This is a descriptive quantitative research to obtain information about participants' perception towards the practicality of the online conferencing platforms for the online academic writing consultation during the pandemic. There were two selected online conferencing platforms chosen for this research, namely Zoom cloud meeting by Zoom Video Communication, Inc. and Google Meet by Google. The rational for the selection of the two platforms is the popularity and practicality based on the market currently [3] [4] [5], which would be assessed and elaborated more in terms of the effectiveness for the online consultation for graduate students.

There were 143 participants involved in this research; they were graduate students, both Master's Degree (S2) and Doctoral Degree (S3) students of postgraduate school at one public university in Surabaya. The participants involved in this study were those who have registered and submitted their draft of the research articles subject to be projected for either Master's thesis, Doctoral dissertation, and academic article for reputable journal which becomes the partial fulfilment of graduation. In addition, the participants were required to have self-assessment based on the manuscript checklist in order to attend the manuscript clinic workshops for further academic writing consultation and data collection.

Data were collected by distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews which were both conducted online. The distribution of the instruments was done right after the workshop sessions on academic writing and publication by using the two selected platforms. The workshop sessions were managed by the task force under the coordination of the academic affairs of the postgraduate school, of which the members are the researchers of this study. Descriptive data were analyzed by using SPSS version 23 by presenting the frequency, percentage, and average identification results of the practicality of the online academic writing consultation using the two selected platforms, e.g. Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the pandemic has hit several sectors, including education sector, several countries around the world have been forced to adapt with new condition to accommodate the academic activities. Several online platforms have been chosen and promoted in carrying out learning activities from primary to tertiary education levels, including for the supervision of academic writing. From several options for the online platforms for academic activities, the

most popular platforms preferred by Indonesian society are Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet, which become the focus of this study.
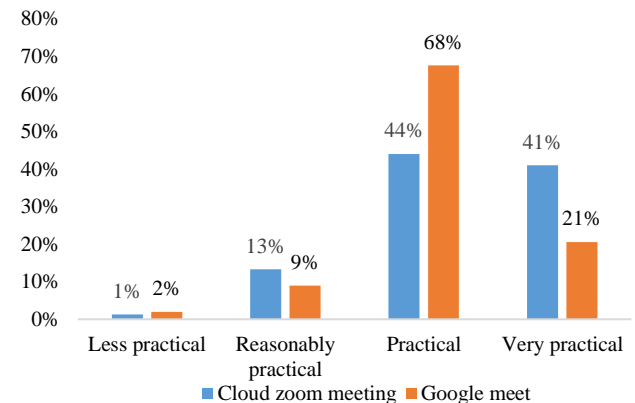

Figure 1 The use of Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet for online writing consultation in terms of practicality

The results of the research presented in Fig. 1 show that the practicality of two platforms, namely Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet, in relation with the instructions during the online supervision process of scientific articles among the graduate students. In terms of practicality, both Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet shows practical usage with most of the participants gave shared percentage ranging from 85% to 89% of positive responses on both platforms, either they are practical or very practical. Very minor participants of less than 3% gave suggestion that the selected platforms are less practical for writing consultation.

Google Meet is considered as a very simple digital platform for online communication and online meetings which can be utilized for learning activities. On the other hand, in terms of practicality, Zoom cloud meeting offers additional features which are believed to be more user-friendly [21, 22]. The main advantage of Zoom is the ability to record and save the online sessions safely without requiring additional other or third-party software or application. This feature is believed to give benefits for the users, as stated in several research in relation with data protection [23]; in more specific for graduate students, they are able to repeat the recorded discussion with the supervisors and speakers as well as among participants on their own devices [24].

In terms of platform navigation, Zoom and Google Meet both offer similar features, with each platform has its own strengths and weaknesses [21]. Fig. 2 shows that the presence of navigation features are considered easy to operate during the online tutoring process. More than half the participants believe it is easy to operate and use both online platforms, with

Google Meet is slightly better than Zoom cloud meeting with 62% of positive responses. In addition, around 25% of participants shared similar responses on both platforms that they are very easy to navigate for consultation.

During the pandemic where academicians are forced to transform the learning activities from classical to online learning, many believe that it is just a matter of adaptation and transition. Online learning is considered feasible to implement as the presence of several platforms [26-8]. As stated in this study, in terms of the easiness of platform navigation, majority of the respondents gave positive attitudes toward the use of online platform, such as sharing media and face-to-face online communication through spotlight feature. For instance, Zoom has 'Raise Hand' feature which allows the participants to indicate they are to ask questions or give responses during the discussion so the host can unmute the selected participants; this feature does not exist in Google Meet [29].
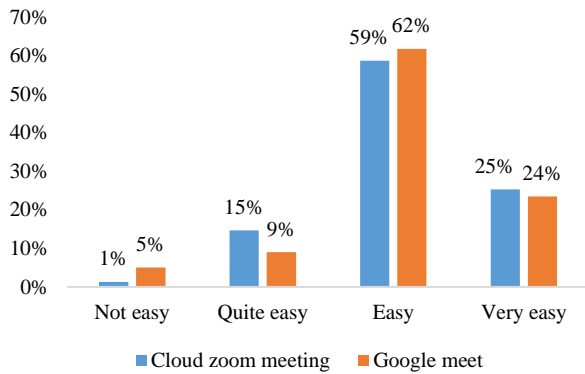

Figure 2 The easiness of navigation access provided by Zoom and Google Meet
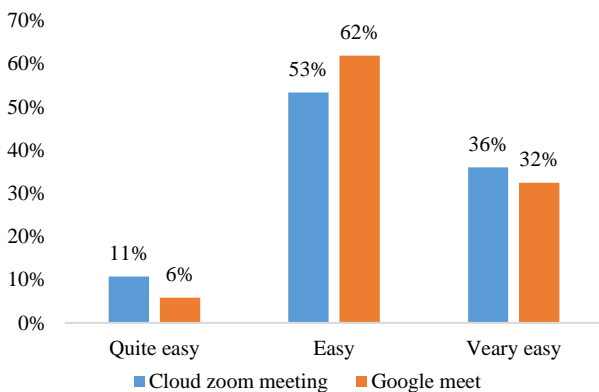

Figure 3 Terms and Menus provided by Zoom and Google Meet

One indicator that the online learning should be easy is that students are able to access the online learning platforms anywhere (independently and autonomously) to learn and interact with the instructors

and other students [30]. In relation with the independent aspect, online learning platforms should have easy-to-understand terms and menus for the users.

In terms of the ease of understanding the menus and terms during the online supervision process of the academic writing, Fig. 3 shows that more than half of the participants suggested that the menus and terms of the two online platforms are easy to understand. Moreover, one third of the participants claimed that the terms and menus provided by the selected platforms are very easy to follow. Only 11% of Zoom users and 6% of Google Meet users indicated difficulty in understanding the menus of the platforms in the context of online consultation.

In terms of practicality, the three aspects indicate that current online conferencing platforms have surpassed previous platforms, namely Skype, Adobe Connect, Microsoft Teams, and few more. Zoom cloud meeting has even emerged as a clear winner teaching-learning programs based on online video conferencing [31]. Current platforms allow users to experience the easiness in terms of practicality, navigation to operate and share, and understanding the menus. Due to the benefits, it is believed that online consultation during the pandemic would not hinder the process of academic writing for the graduate students.

4. CONCLUSION

During the global pandemic of covid-19, several sectors have been forced to adapt to a new condition including educational process. Academicians are required to transform their habits from classical setting to online mode where direct and instant communication is still needed to optimize the academic consultation process. Two online conferencing platforms emerge, e.g. Zoom cloud meeting and Google Meet, to provide alternative platform to accommodate academic writing consultation for the graduate students. The two platforms are proven to show benefits in terms of practicality, navigation to control and operate including share materials and feedback, and menus to control the platforms to meet the needs of academic consultation. These benefits surpassed the previous trend of online conferencing that current platforms are suitable for academic context, including academic writing consultation for graduate students.

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