



Thinking Design Analysis as an Approach Psychology to Support Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Student mental health is an important concern in the modern world of higher education, especially in the face of various academic, social, and personal pressures. This research aims to analyze the concept of thinking design as a psychological approach to support students' mental health through learning based on the Massive Open Online Course platform. The research method uses an analytical descriptive approach by examining the implementation of five stages of thinking design in the context of psychology, including empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. Data was obtained from the MOOC learning experience as a result of a collaboration between Bina Darma University and Gadjah Mada University which focused on the application of thinking design to design mental health solutions. The results of the study show that thinking design is in line with the principles of humanistic psychology, providing a systematic framework for students to understand emotional states, identify sources of stress, and develop adaptive coping strategies. MOOC platforms have proven to be effective in democratizing access to psychoeducation by addressing geographical, financial, and social stigma barriers. This approach shifts the paradigm of psychological intervention from a pathological-reactive model to a proactive-preventive model that is more relevant to the needs of the digital generation. In conclusion, thinking design offers an innovative alternative in contemporary psychology practices that are flexible, creative, and user-centered to support students' mental well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of educational technology has opened up various new opportunities in supporting student welfare, especially in the aspect of mental health. Digital learning platforms such as *Massive Open Online Course* (MOOCs) now provide not only academic materials, but also a variety of self-development, stress management, and skills training programs that can be accessed flexibly according to individual needs. The presence of MOOCs has opened up access for students to various learning resources regarding self-development, mental health, and creative thinking skills that can be learned anytime and anywhere [1]. The platform allows students to learn a variety of innovative approaches, including *Design Thinking*, independently at an affordable cost [2]. Integration between MOOCs and thinking design from a psychological perspective, it can be an opportunity to develop innovative mental health support methods that are relevant to the student's current condition [3]. At the university level, MOOCs are starting to be widely used as a companion to formal learning as well as a space for independent competency development (*Self-paced learning*). Bina Darma University is one of the universities that has adopted a modern learning approach based on digital technology where students can take additional training related to innovation, creativity, self-development, and mental health [4].

Thinking design is a systematic and iterative approach to human-centered problem-solving [5]. This process starts with empathy, which is the ability to understand and share the user's feelings, experiences, and perspectives in depth. After the empathy stage, the process continues with problem exploration that analyzes and formulates the core

of the problem from the user's point of view [6]. The next phase is creativity, where individuals or teams actively generate various solution ideas through *Brainstorming* or other ideation techniques. The best ideas are then realized through *Prototyping* solution, which is to create a real, testable representation [7]. Finally, the entire cycle closes with an ongoing evaluation that tests the prototype with real users, gathers feedback, and uses those insights to iteratively refine the solution [8]. In the field of psychology, the thinking design can help individuals understand their emotional state, identify sources of stress, and create adaptive personal strategies [9]. The main strengths of the application thinking design In the personal realm is its emphasis on self-empathy, where individuals consciously explore and accept their deepest needs, emotions, and motivations without judgment [10]. Through the creative ideation stage, this process encourages individuals to come up with bold and diverse new solutions, which are further tested through the process *Prototyping* and fast testing. The end result is the ability to create adaptive strategies that are flexible, can be piloted on a small scale, evaluated based on results, and refined on an ongoing basis [11].

Approaches in psychology are no longer limited to traditional methods such as counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy (*Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*/CBT), or psychodynamic approaches [12]. Concepts that come from the field of innovation and problem-solving, such as *Design Thinking*, is starting to be widely used to support psychological well-being, especially in the context of education and self-development [13]. A study is needed that discusses how the concept of thinking design. It can be analyzed in the context of psychology, especially as a mental health support approach that is more creative, flexible, and relevant to the needs of today's students. Based on the background that has been explained, the formulation of the problem in this study is: (1) What is meant by the concept thinking design in the context of psychology? (2) How is the relationship between thinking design and student mental health?

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich insights and literature in the field of psychology, especially related to the application of *the concept of* thinking design as an approach that can be used in understanding and supporting students' mental health. The concept is extended into the context of psychology so that it can become a new reference in academic studies, especially in an effort to find a more creative, flexible, and relevant method of psychological assistance to the needs of today's society. This research can also be the basis for the development of more in-depth follow-up research, both theoretical and applicative, and has the potential to be a reference for students, lecturers, or other researchers who want to study the relationship between *design thinking*, digital-based learning, and mental health. Practically, this research provides direct benefits to students, institutions, and society. For students, the application of thinking design allows them to gain real experience in integrating psychological knowledge with digital innovation. Skills such as problem solving, user needs analysis, creativity, and *prototype design* become more targeted and relevant to the demands of the world of work. For educational institutions, this research helps to encourage the strengthening of technology-based learning ecosystems and improve the quality of academic programs through collaboration across universities, so as to have a real social impact.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study uses an analytical descriptive approach with qualitative methods to analyze the implementation of thinking design as a psychological approach in supporting students' mental health through the MOOC platform. The analytical descriptive approach was chosen because this study aims to systematically describe and analyze in depth the phenomenon of the application of thinking design in the context of digital-based mental health learning.

2.2 Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

Data were obtained from the MOOC learning experience as a result of a collaboration between Bina Darma University and Gadjah Mada University which focused on the application of thinking design to design mental health solutions, learning documentation that includes structured materials, interactive learning videos, evaluative quizzes, as well as collaborative discussion forums, and relevant scientific literature as a theoretical foundation. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation of the MOOC learning process, analysis of learning documents, and



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literature studies to examine theoretical concepts related to *design thinking*, humanistic psychology, and student mental health.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is carried out by identifying and describing each stage of thinking design (*empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test*) in the context of mental health learning, analyzing conformity with the principles of humanistic psychology, examining practical implementation, synthesizing findings with scientific literature, and drawing conclusions about relevance thinking design as an innovative intervention model. The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation and *member checking* with the reflection of learning participants.

2.4 Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) as a Learning Platform

Platform *Massive Open Online Course* (MOOC) is a digital learning model that opens up opportunities for participants to access learning from various institutions through an online system with a variety of materials, evaluations, and interactive discussion rooms [13]. The fundamental characteristic of MOOCs lies in the openness of access without geographical restrictions or formal educational backgrounds, designed to accommodate a massive number of participants without quota restrictions. The variety of materials includes video tutorials, interactive modules, quizzes, and case studies to accommodate various learning style preferences. Discussion forums facilitate interaction between participants, building an active learning community [14]. The development of MOOCs continues to integrate additional features such as project-based learning, gamification, and data analysis to monitor participants' progress in a timely manner *real-time*. The vision of MOOCs is to provide high-quality education that can be accessed by all walks of life without discrimination [15]. The mission includes the provision of interactive learning that actively engages participants, the integration of digital technologies in the educational ecosystem, competency development through application-based learning experiences, as well as collaboration with educational institutions and experts to provide high-quality courses. MOOCs function as a medium for delivering flexible material, a means of global collaboration, increasing digital literacy, and training independence in learning and skills *Problem-solving Adaptive* [16].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Description of MOOC Learning Implementation

Learning activities through the MOOC platform which were carried out within the framework of cooperation between Bina Darma University and Gadjah Mada University provided valuable experience in understanding the concept thinking design and its application in the context of mental health. This program is designed with a comprehensive self-learning approach, combining various learning elements such as structured materials, interactive learning videos, evaluative quizzes, and collaborative discussion forums. Through the series of learning activities, participants gained an in-depth understanding of how to approach thinking design can be used to identify psychological problems and design solutions that are truly human-centered [17].

During the learning process, participants learned five fundamental stages in *Design Thinking*, which includes *Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test*. Each stage is studied in depth through real-life case studies, situational simulations, as well as practical exercises oriented towards actual problem-solving. Evaluation of learning outcomes showed that participants succeeded in achieving several important competencies, including the ability to understand the importance of empathy in designing psychological solutions, the ability to identify and define mental health problems experienced by final semester students, the ability to generate various creative ideas as solutions to support mental health, the ability to develop *Prototype Simple strategy Coping* or media to support student welfare, as well as the competence to evaluate *Prototype* reflectively based on personal feedback. The MOOC platform also provides significant insights into how digital technology can be optimized to deliver psychological education more broadly, flexibly, and easily accessible to various groups. Thus, the results of these MOOC activities are not only limited to the improvement of theoretical knowledge alone, but also include the development of practical skills in designing innovative approach-based solutions thinking design [18].

3.2 Implementation of Thinking Design Stages in the Context of Mental Health

3.2.1. Empathy Phase: Understanding the User's Emotional Experience

In context thinking design Focusing on mental health or emotional well-being, the empathy phase is a fundamental stage that requires teams to intensively try to get into the user's emotional perspective and experience. The main goal of this phase is to identify and understand the main sources of psychological distress experienced by the individual. The empathy stage in the context of mental health is carried out by identifying various underlying psychological pressures, such as anxiety about the future characterized by excessive worry and uncertainty about future career, financial, or personal stability prospects, role conflicts in the family that reflect difficulties balancing the demands of various roles that often contradict each other, as well as mental fatigue or *Burnout* which is a condition of prolonged emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion due to intense and excessive stress. In-depth observation shows that the high emotional burden that a person often experiences occurs due to several crucial factors, such as a lack of social support in the form of a lack of networks that can provide emotional or practical assistance, and unpreparedness to face the demands of the surrounding environment. This cumulative condition triggers chronic stress, anxiety, and even mild depressive symptoms [19]. Through learning in the MOOC platform, the empathy stage is designed didactically to encourage participants to see mental health issues not just as disorders or pathologies, but as valid human experiences that require deep empathic understanding.

At this stage, participants learn to use a variety of empathy tools to identify and interpret complex emotions by understanding the nuances of feelings such as guilt, shame, or pent-up hope, adaptive and maladaptive behavior by identifying patterns of actions that users use to cope with stress, as well as psychological needs that are often not expressed verbally by knowing core needs such as the need for autonomy, validation, or connections that are often hidden behind their verbal complaints. By practicing empathy, the goal is to shift the focus from finding quick solutions to creating interventions that are truly rooted in the user's psychological and emotional reality. This approach is in line with the principle thinking design in healthcare design that emphasizes the importance of understanding the user experience in depth as the foundation of effective solution development [12].

3.2.2. Definition Phase: Formulating the Problem Holistically

The definition phase can be said to be a critical stage in thinking design where the team transforms the raw insights gathered from the empathy phase into a clear, focused, and actionable statement of the problem. It is the process of filtering the complexity of human experience into a specific focus to be solved. This approach is in line with the view that [20] which affirms that in the context of health, mental health problems should not be narrowly defined simply as the absence of disease, but should be viewed holistically. This holistic definition includes a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, as well as their ability to cope with stress, work productively, and contribute to the community. This holistic approach ensures that the designed solution will be comprehensive, not just addressing surface symptoms. Through the stage *defines*, the use of a design framework helps participants formulate *Point of View* (POV) which states that everyone deserves accessible, empathetic, and relevant psychological support so that they can manage their emotions healthier. This POV is the foundation for the development of solutions at the next stage.

3.2.3. Ideation Phase: Producing Creative and Innovative Solutions

The ideation phase is the stage thinking design dedicated to generating a large and diverse volume of solutions to the problem statements that have been formulated at the stage *defines*. At the heart of ideation is the principle of quantity over quality at the beginning, where judgment is suspended to allow for radical creativity and innovation. At this stage, solutions to support mental health are driven through practice *Brainstorming* and other creative techniques, such as *Lateral Thinking* which is known for seeking solutions through unorthodox and indirect approaches. The main focus in this phase is to answer the question "*How Might We*" derived from POV. Through the application of these methods, some innovative ideas have emerged to meet POV, including a stress-based digital module *self-guided therapy* which is a digital intervention solution using therapeutic principles such as *mindfulness* or narrative therapy in an easily accessible self-paced format, self-reflection workbook using CBT principles and



thinking design that integrate the cognitive structure of the *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* with principles of exploration, empathy, and prototyping to empower users to identify and challenge their own negative mindsets, as well as daily emotion recorder apps based on an empathic approach that goes beyond simple mood tracking by using empathetic language and asking users to explore the context behind their emotions, in line with the principles of humanistic psychology that values subjective experiences [21]. App-based development Mobile for mental health support in Indonesia also shows that the application of the thinking design able to produce solutions that are contextual and in accordance with the needs of local users [22]. These solutions show that the thinking design able to open up space for creativity and innovation in the field of psychology, especially in presenting interventions that are not only theoretical but also practical and relevant to the needs of each individual. This is reinforced by the findings that the implementation of the thinking design in designing an anxiety disorder management application, it can produce solutions that are more responsive to user needs.

3.2.4. Prototype Phase: Turning Ideas into Concrete Solutions

Deep prototype phase thinking design is the stage where the most promising ideas of the ideation phase are transformed into tangible physical or digital forms. The main goal is to create an initial representation of the solution that can be tested and evaluated by users as soon as possible. This stage is done by creating an initial design of the chosen solution, focusing on the representation of key aspects of the solution, rather than on technical perfection. Some examples *Prototype* developed in the context of mental health solutions including the initial design of the module *coping stress* which can be in the form of *Storyboard* steps, a simple PDF document, or even a narrative video containing breathing exercise sequences, guides *Journaling*, and techniques *Reframing* cognitive, an initial view of an emotion tracker app that may be a simple sketch or *Wireframe* on paper, or a basic feature flow created using digital tools that show how users interact to record their daily emotions [23], and *Template* self-reflection workbook which is a printed sample or *Mock-up* digital pages containing specific questions to identify the automatic thoughts, emotions, and behavior patterns that are the target of the intervention. The main principles in the prototype phase are *Fail fast, learn faster*. It is important to note that *Prototype* It doesn't have to be perfect or fully functional. Instead, the main goal is to present a concrete and low-risk solution. In *Design Thinking*, focus not only on creating the final product, but creating an initial representation so that it can be tested quickly. Planning process *User Interface* and *User Experience* The mental health services app also emphasizes the importance of continuous iteration and testing to ensure the resulting solution truly meets the needs of users [24].

3.2.5. Testing Phase: Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

The testing phase confirms that thinking design iterative, where participants understand that each solution must be tested, improved, and adjusted on an ongoing basis. Thinking design is a human-centered innovation framework designed to address complex problems by putting user needs at the heart of the solution [25]. This process begins with empathy, in which the designer uses qualitative psychology methodologies and ethnographic observations to understand hidden motivations, psychological pressures such as anxiety and *Burnout*, as well as the gap between what users say and what they do [26]. The insights from empathy are then transformed in the definition phase into a holistic problem statement, where the role of cognitive psychology is essential to counter biases such as *confirmation bias* and framing the problem on basic psychological needs, not just surface symptoms [27]. At the testing stage, *Prototype* Tested reflectively by the participants themselves by assessing whether the steps are easy to understand, whether the solution can help reduce emotional distress, what weaknesses need to be corrected, and how the results will be if applied in daily life. Feedback from these tests is used to fix, adjust, or even redefine problems, ensuring the final solution is not only feasible, but also relevant and emotionally effective.

3.3 The Relevance of Thinking Design in Contemporary Psychological Practice

3.3.1. Thinking Design as a Manifestation of a Humanistic Approach

Thinking design is not just a technical problem-solving methodology, but also a philosophy that is very much in harmony with the core principles of humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology supported by figures

such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow focuses on the innate potential of humans for growth, freedom of choice, individual dignity, and the pursuit of self-actualization [1]. This alignment makes DT in the context of psychology an empowering tool, not just a diagnostic. Thinking design in line with the principles of humanistic psychology through an emphasis on human potential and *agency*, where DT focuses on desirability or what human beings want and need over technical limitations, reflects the humanistic view that individuals are active agents capable of solving their problems and reaching their full potential. In addition, the central role of empathy in the first phase of DT requires practitioners to truly understand the subjective experience of the user, validating their feelings and worldview without judgment, which is a direct reflection of the concept *Unconditional Positive Regard* of Rogers, where empathy and acceptance are considered essential for psychological growth.

In the context of education or personal development, the DT approach helps students understand themselves and develop more adaptive psychological strategies. Students are encouraged to apply DT steps to their personal challenges by treating their lives as design projects that include empathy for the self by identifying and validating their own internal emotions, needs, and conflicts, ideating self-solutions by developing a variety of *Prototype Lifestyle* or strategy *Coping* creative, as well as testing and iterating by testing new strategies and learning from failures to achieve sustainable adaptation and well-being. Therefore, DT serves as a practical framework within which humanistic principles such as empathy, self-reflection, and the authentic pursuit of well-being can be transformed into tangible and structured actions [28].

3.3.2. MOOC: Democratizing Access to Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation refers to the process of providing information and understanding to individuals about mental health conditions, strategies and strategies. *Coping*, and the role of treatment. Traditionally, access to psychoeducation has often been limited by cost barriers, geographic location, and most significantly the social stigma attached to seeking psychological help [29]. In the modern context, *Massive Open Online Course* has emerged as a transformative platform to expand access to psychoeducation and early intervention. MOOCs provide a learning space that structurally addresses these barriers through flexibility where learners can set their own study schedules according to academic or job demands, low cost or even free that removes significant financial barriers, accessibility at any time with psychoeducational materials available 24/7 allowing individuals to seek information or help right at the time they feel vulnerable or in need, and stigma-free which is the most crucial psychological benefit where the anonymity offered by the platform *online* allows individuals to access material on anxiety, depression, or stress management without having to publicly acknowledge their problems or face stares from peers or professionals [30].

3.3.3. Thinking Design as an Innovative Intervention Model

Thinking design offers an innovative model of intervention in psychology because it shifts the focus from reactive pathological models such as treating pre-existing diseases to proactive and preventive models centered on people and experiences. DT provides a structured and tested framework to address the challenges often faced by traditional psychological services that lack of accessibility, relevance, and appeal to modern users. Application thinking design in healthcare has proven to be effective in developing interventions that are more responsive to the needs of users and improving the overall quality of healthcare [12]. This approach can be used for a variety of crucial purposes in the modern world of psychology such as designing mental health intervention programs that ensure programs are designed after going through a deep empathy process, improving the quality of digital psychological services which is key in creating a seamless and therapeutic user experience on digital services, developing mental health apps that ensure the app not only contains clinically valid content but also engaging and user-friendly, as well as creating engaging and easy-to-implement educational media that encourages engaging media design, is easy to understand, and most importantly encourages real behavior change. Thus, thinking design not only relevant in the field of technology, but also very significant for the world of modern psychology. DT provides the tools psychology professionals need to get out of the clinic and design interventions that are scalable, accessible, and relevant to the increasingly complex psychological challenges of the 21st century. It transforms the role of psychologists from mere treatment providers to architects of the well-being experience [28].



4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the thinking design approach has significant relevance as a method of supporting students' mental health in the context of digital learning through MOOC platforms. The integration of five stages of thinking design which includes empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test has been proven to provide a systematic framework for students to understand their own emotional state, identify sources of psychological stress, and design adaptive and personalized coping strategies. Learning through MOOCs as a result of the collaboration between Bina Darma University and Gadjah Mada University has succeeded in demonstrating that educational technology can be a medium for democratizing access to psychoeducation, overcoming geographical, financial, and social stigma that have been limiting conventional mental health services. The thinking design approach in the field of psychology is not just a technical methodology, but a manifestation of humanistic principles that place humans as active agents in the journey of their well-being. The application of this method shifts the paradigm of psychological intervention from a pathological-reactive model to a proactive-preventive model that is more relevant to the mental health challenges of the current digital generation. Thus, thinking design offers an alternative approach that is flexible, creative, and user-centered in supporting the psychological well-being of students.

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