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Rosmaliza Mohamed, Farina Tazijan, Muriatul Khusmah Musa, Y. Gatot Sutapa

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Online Self Access Language Learning Among SLLs in Malaysia and Indonesia Amid Covid 19 Pandemic

Rosmaliza Mohamed, Farina Tazijan, Muriatul Khusmah Musa
Department of English Language, Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Y. Gatot Sutapa

Universitas Tanjungpura (UNTAN) Kalimantan, Indonesia

Abstract

During this pandemic of Covid 19, learning face to face took a different turn. The higher institutions were obligated to resort to online learning. Academicians and undergraduates had to 'jump on the bandwagon and be ready without thorough preparation. The main aim of this study was to find out the Malaysian and Indonesian undergraduate students' (SLL) perceptions and behaviors related to self-access language learning. An online survey was conducted to collect the information from online and online distance learning students. A structural questionnaire link using survey monkey was sent to students through WhatsApp. The simple percentage distribution was used to assess the learning status of the study participants. From the study, results yielded that 70% of learners were involved in online and online distance learning actively. Most learners used smartphones during their online learning. Students face various problems related to depression anxiety, poor internet connectivity, and an unfavorable study environment at home. Students from remote areas and marginalized sections mainly face enormous challenges for study during this pandemic. This study suggests targeted interventions to create a positive space for study among students from the vulnerable section of society.

Keywords: Readiness, Self-access Language Learning, SLL, Online

Introduction

The closures of the educational institution due to the outbreak of COVID-19 led to an unprecedented impact on education. During the lockdown, undergraduates are instructed to teach through online learning platforms (Abidah et al., 2020). Raju (2020) argued that there is a need to adopt innovative teaching for continuing education and to overcome mental stress and anxieties during the lockdown. The outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in the digital revolution in the higher education system through online lectures, teleconferencing, digital open books, online examination, and interaction in virtual environments (Strielkowski, 2020, Kumar, 2020). The COVID-19 situation is ushering educational systems into a "new normal."

The crisis is becoming a turning point that directs educational institutions to new modalities of instructional implementation. This challenge calls for extensive preparation for changes in the educational landscape to ensure that the learning in higher education continues in this new period in human history.

In Universitas Tanjungpura (UNTAN) area, the challenging situation overcome during the Covid 19 pandemic involves extra creative performance from lecturers (Alive Lecturing from Home) and more from students, who not only have to adapt to new forms of learning but also to face many other circumstances that change their learning experience. Some students from UNTAN who are widespread in the West Kalimantan region find it difficult to study online at home (Learning from Home), which may also be related to internet network constraints and their socioeconomic conditions (Grant & Gedeon, 2020). In addition, because computers and Internet access are necessary to access lecture materials, this presents problems for students who come from remote areas and therefore, has a significant impact on their learning intention and achievement. Even in the West Kalimantan hinterland, some students do not have a decent place to study at home and an adequate internet connection. Furthermore, accessing the Internet, which is mostly done through smartphones, results in too high data costs. This, in some cases, exacerbates the situation for students spread across multiple regions to build their motivation, interests, and exploratory performance.

In Malaysia, all universities and schools were closed when Covid 19 lockdown was implemented in March 2020, and all students were forced to continue their studies online. Due to the impossibility of face-to-face teaching and learning throughout the epidemic, online learning proved to be the most effective method of continuing education. Even though various measures were taken by the universities and schools to accommodate the students' needs in coping with online classes, internet access was still a major problem, particularly in the remote and secluded areas in Sabah, Sarawak as well Peninsular Malaysia. Apart from limited access to the internet, students also had difficulty communicating with their lecturers, interacting with peers, and gaining access to laboratories (Selvanathan et al., 2020). In addition, a study carried out by Abdul Ghafar et.al (2021) involving Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) students reveals that students experienced moderate stress while studying online due to poor internet access, heavy academic workload, unconducive learning environment, assignment deadlines, and family issues.

A significantly positive impact of COVID-19 also reported learning efficiency and performance by adopting online learning strategies (Gonzalez et al., 2020). The online mode of the teaching-learning process is often discriminatory to poor and marginalized students. With this backdrop, the present study aims to identify the learning status, mode of learning, and problems (transition) related to study during this lockdown amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, the undergraduates were given no direct training or courses to learn how online learning is conducted. The readiness of the undergraduates is questionable. Many studies have identified the interplay between readiness and various factors. Bingimlas (2009) identified three factors that hinder the readiness of the students for technology integration, which are lack of confidence, competence, and accessibility to resources. On the other hand, Maimun et al (2017) underscored more particular factors such as skills, infrastructure, budget allocation, confidence, quality technical support, access to technology, teacher practices, the structure of education systems, and nature of the curriculum, and peer support system.

Literature Review

The Covid- 19 has affected and caused the largest disruption to the education system worldwide. Universities around the world were facing unprecedented challenges, including both the teaching committee and the students. Most universities in the world had already introduced a more flexible teaching and learning practice to make education accessible to all. Before this, Emergency Remote Education (ERE) was then introduced to shift traditionally face-to-face learning systems to blended learning or fully distance learning (Shin & Hickey, 2020).

The implementation of virtual or remote learning requires apt technology and attractive teaching materials to make learning more effective. Learning institutions are more concerned with teaching instruction, students' adaptation, and understanding of their lessons. Richards (2020) mentioned that students' academic achievement has dropped significantly in some parts of the United States, and failure rates in schools are skyrocketed due to mundane learning activities. Thus, he suggested teachers begin engaging online games and social media in their teaching and learning. Unlike traditional offline teaching, online teaching promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to self-direct, manage, and explore their learning. As a result, instructor-created teaching materials must pique students' interest in learning. This is critical because online lessons can cause visual fatigue, affecting students' enthusiasm for class, interest in studying, and motivation to attend online classes (Liu et al., 2021)

According to Ramlan et.al (2021), two-way interaction in class between lecturers and students is substantial in face-to-face learning. Students usually interact with others during group discussions and complete their assignments, presentations, and final year projects. COVID-19 has made this face-to-face interaction and physical teaching and learning not feasible. They identified some barriers that hinder the efficiency of online learning. Among the variables that demotivate students' engagement and interest in online learning are the absence of social interaction and unattractive teaching materials. In addition, a study by Azmat and Ahmad (2022) reveals that students' satisfaction with online learning is negatively influenced by the lack of social connections. It has become one of the most significant barriers to online classes, with potential psychological consequences for students. As a result of their lack of social interaction, students have grown accustomed to skipping classes and misusing technology. They became less focused and more prone to cheating.

As most researchers like Khan (2009); Milligan & Littlejohn (2014); Zimmerman (2000) mentioned, in the online learning settings, where the structure of an online curriculum is mostly automatic, students have more flexibility in deciding when, how, and with what content and activities they engage. This flexibility requires students to monitor and adjust their behavior and actions concerning the specific learning context. Students can be responsible for their learning, thus creating a self- readiness learner or a self-directed learner.

A self-directed learner tends to actively engage in the learning processes, such as acquiring information, planning, and evaluating the learning activities. Active learning strategies can increase students' participation and improve the learning process and performance (Freeman et al., 2014; Yilmaz, 2016). However, not much empirical evidence is available in the extent of literature regarding the impact of self-direct learning in the blended learning setting during the Covid -19 phase. To fill this gap, it is necessary to explore the impact of the self-readiness of the students during this unprecedented time. Therefore, this

study attempts to investigate the self-readiness of the undergraduate perceptions of online learning of language learning during the Covid-19 period.

Methods

The researchers initially applied for the Ethical Research Committee (REC) from UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang (UiTM CPP). Upon approval, the researchers collected the data corresponding to the quantitative research design of the research. First, the quantitative phase began as questionnaires through Survey Monkey that were sent to the undergraduates in UiTM CPP and Universitas Tanjungpura (UNTAN). A total of 141 students were asked to give their insights on their readiness for online learning.

The main purpose of the present study was to examine a group of Second Language Learners' readiness for autonomous self-access language learning. Readiness is defined as students' perceptions of their responsibility, their teachers' responsibility, and their decision-making ability in different aspects of language learning. Another purpose was to find out whether or not there is a relationship between students' responsibility perceptions and decision-making ability. The researcher used a quantitative research design to describe a large number of second language learners' (SLL) perceptions formally and objectively.

The research question was:

What are undergraduate students' perceptions of self-readiness in language learning during the covid 19 period? To fulfill these aims Chan, et al., (2002)'s questionnaire was used which specifically covers these areas. The original questionnaire consisted of four sections which are: a) responsibility, b) ability, c) autonomous activities (inside and outside of class), and d) motivation. However, for this study, the researchers used two sections of the questionnaire that are responsibility and ability. Only two sections were analyzed to answer the research question of this research.

The quantitative data gathered for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count and weighted mean. The research procedure is as follows:

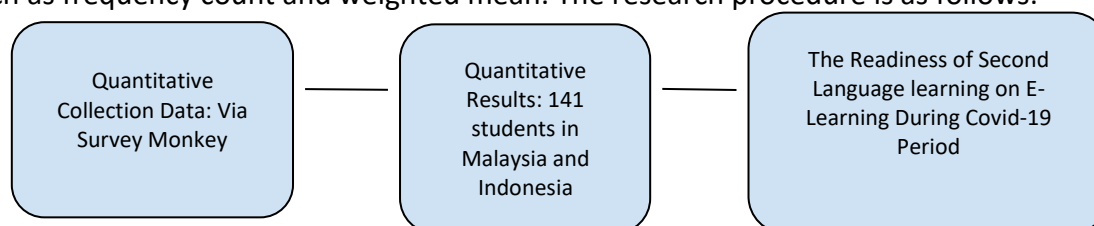


Figure 1. Research procedure of the study

The study involved 141 university students from the Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang and Universitas Tanjungpura, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The participants were selected based on purposive sampling because the purpose of the research was to focus specifically on second language learners (SLL) and the researchers did not intend to exclude any of these participants for this study.

Results and Discussions

Background of the Second Language Learners

The second language learners (SLL) who participated in this study were from diploma and degree students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang (UiTM CPP) and Universitas Tanjungpura (UNTAN), West Kalimantan, Indonesia. For the demographic data, the

questionnaire was distributed to 94 females, and 47 males aged 19 to 24 years old. The SLL had limited access to the internet when asked, where the majority (61.68%) stated they had limited internet access. Figure 2 depicts the numbers of second language learners with limited data.

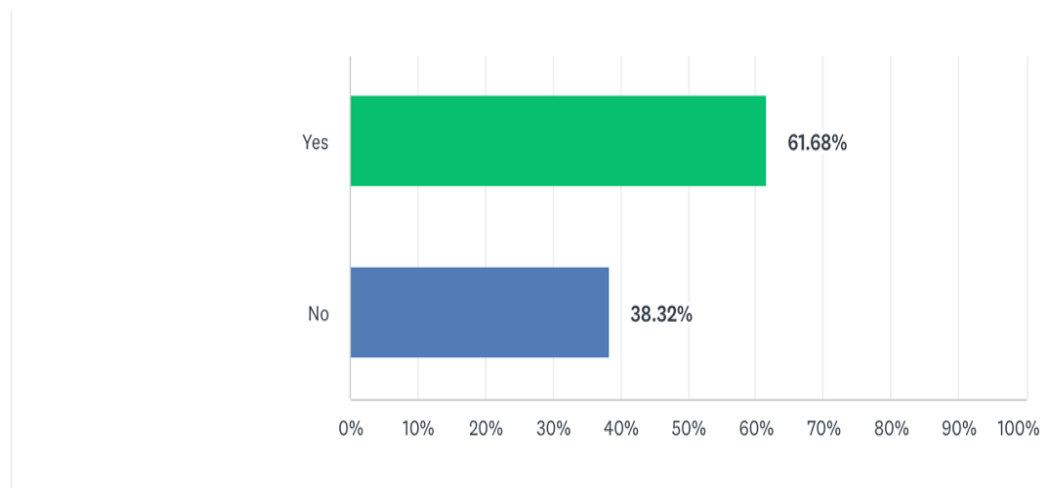


Figure 2. The numbers of second language learners with internet access.

Apart from that, the second language learners usually used their internet access at home while having their online classes with a majority of 91.59% access at home (Figure 3). Some of them accessed the internet outside (30.8%) of their homes such as the campus (6%), library (17.7%), work (16.6%), and café 24.3%). Most of them used broadband at home when asked.

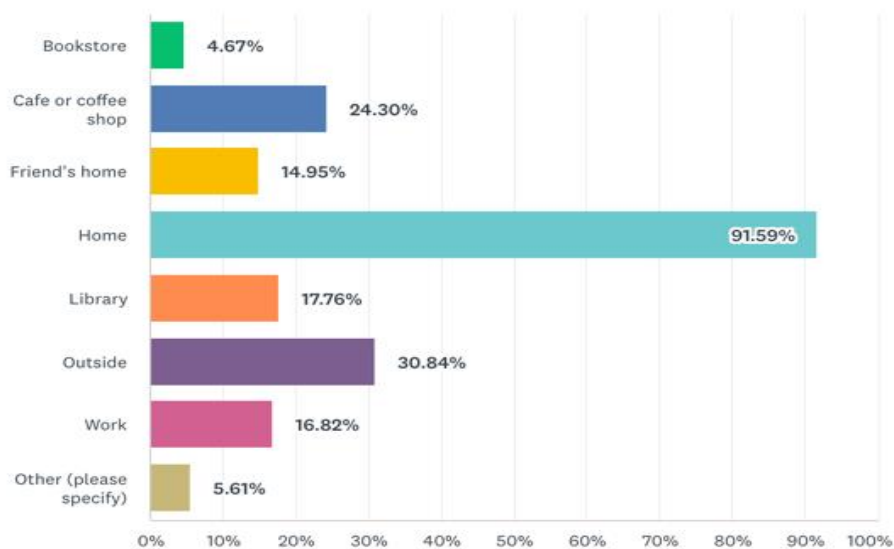


Figure 3. Preferences of venues for online learning

In the first section of the questionnaire, the participants were instructed to report their perceptions of the language learning process during the ODL learning. Figure 4 shows the SLLs' perception of their interest in learning the English Language during online learning. Most

students believed that the interest of them to learn English was stimulated mainly by 50 % and completely agreed by 38%.

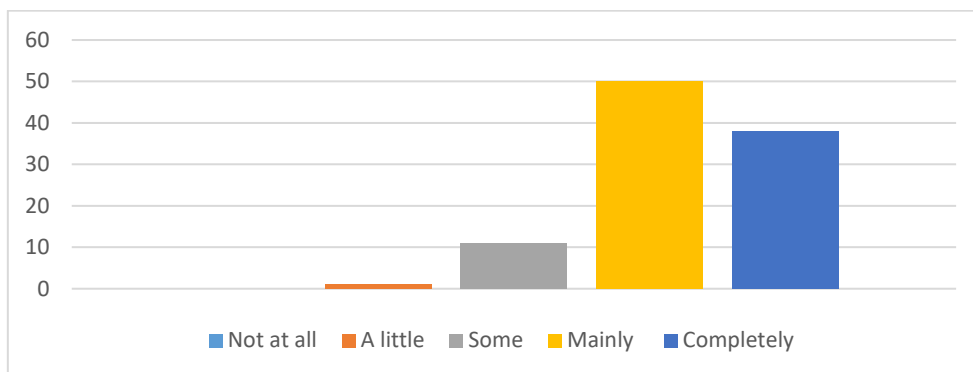


Figure 4. Perception of the language learning process during ODL

Second Language Learners Perceptions and Teacher’s perception.

The SLLs were asked to describe their perceptions during online learning. They were asked to gauge their perception of the teachers’ responsibilities. Below is the table that describes their perception.

Table 1

Description of the SLLs’ perception of their responsibilities and teachers’ responsibilities.

Questionnaire Items	Students’ perceptions of their own responsibilities in %			Students’ perceptions of their teachers’ responsibilities in %		
	Not at all / a little	Some	Mainly / completely	Not at all / a little	Some	Mainly / completely
1. Make sure you make progress during lessons	22.6	23.3	54.1	30.1	26.3	43.6
2. Make sure you make progress outside class	25.6	13.5	60.9	54.1	21.8	24.1
3. Stimulate your interest in learning English	20.3	24.1	55.6	32.3	23.3	44.4
4. Identify your weaknesses in English	23.3	15.0	61.7	41.4	18.8	39.8
5. Make you work harder	13.5	15.8	70.7	38.3	27.8	33.8
6. Decide the objectives of your English course	38.3	21.8	39.8	24.1	21.8	54.1
7. Decide what you should learn next in your English lessons	34.6	28.6	36.8	26.3	23.3	50.4
8. Choose what activities to use to learn English in your English lessons	35.3	25.6	39.1	24.8	22.6	52.6
9. Decide how long to spend on each activity	23.3	21.8	54.9	37.6	29.3	33.1
10. Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English lessons	44.4	16.5	39.1	28.6	18.0	53.4
11. Evaluate your learning	27.1	23.3	49.6	28.6	20.3	51.1
12. Evaluate your course	30.1	23.3	46.6	33.1	19.5	47.4
13. Decide what you learn outside class	18.8	14.3	66.9	49.6	25.6	24.8

From Table 1, SLL indicated Item 1 (making progress during lessons), Item 3 (stimulating their interest in learning), Item 11 (evaluating their learning) and Item 12 (evaluating their course) as a shared responsibility between lecturers and SLL for different areas of the language learning. Whereas, SLL gave solely responsibility to their lecturers in Item 6 (decide the objective of the course), Item seven (decide what you should learn next in your English

Lessons), Item eight (choose what activities to use to learn English Lessons, and Item 10 (Choose what materials to use to learn English in your English Lessons). These items were related to methodological aspects, planning, and management of the class activities. Items 2 (making progress in language learning), Item 4 (identifying their weaknesses,) Item 5 (working harder) Item 9 (deciding how long to spend on each activity,) and Item 13(what to learn outside the class) showed that students considered themselves responsible for different aspects of language learning.

Second Language Learners' perception of their decision-making ability in language learning.

The second section of the questionnaire investigated participants' perceptions about their ability to decide on different aspects of language learning. It aimed to establish students' readiness for autonomous language learning. Students ranked their responses on a five-point Likert scale from 0 (very poor) to 5 (very good). Table 4 shows the percentages of students' responses related to each question. For ease of interpretation, the "very poor" and "poor" categories and the "very good" and "good" categories have been combined.

Table 2

Second Language Learners' perception of their decision-making ability in language learning.

Section 2 items: Students' perceptions of their own abilities in learning English	Very poor / poor	Ok	Very good / good
14. Choosing learning activities in class	24.8	54.9	20.3
15. Choosing learning activities outside class	36.8	39.8	23.3
16. Choosing learning objectives in class	24.8	38.3	36.8
17. Choosing learning objectives outside class	29.3	32.3	38.3
18. Choosing learning materials in class	34.6	36.1	29.3
19. Choosing learning materials outside class	30.8	36.8	32.3
20. Evaluating your learning	21.8	34.6	43.6
21. Evaluating your course.	39.8	33.8	26.3
22. Identifying your weaknesses in English	13.5	38.3	48.1
23. Deciding what you should learn next in your English lessons	28.6	36.1	35.3
24. Deciding how long to spend on each activity	24.8	39.1	36.1

Most of the SLLs' responses clustered in the "ok" category of the scale. According to Chan, et al (2002), this category indicates that students had an average ability to handle their learning autonomously. Only items 17, 20, and 22 showed that students had a "good / very good" ability to do these activities. These items were: The ability to choose learning objectives outside the class, the ability to evaluate learning, and the ability to identify their weaknesses. The findings of this section reveal that participants could evaluate their language learning but they shared this responsibility with their teachers in the responsibility section. These findings show that despite being capable of evaluating their learning, SLLs still need support and help from their lecturers.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study and the review of the literature, there were several implications. First, these cells expressed an average level of ability in different situations of autonomous language learning mentioned in items such as choosing learning objectives outside the class and evaluating their learning. It seems reasonable to give them more opportunities to learn English based on their needs, such as providing them with situations where they have the freedom of choice to address their needs and interests.

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Corresponding Author

Rosmaliza Mohamed

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Email: rosmaliza225@uitm.edu.my

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