Readiness for Online Learning Among Foreign Language Undergraduates in a Private University in Malaysia

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Abstract: Increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia forced the authority to enforce the Movement Control Order since March 2020. This order requires students in Malaysia to remain at home while learning via distance and online learning modes. This study aimed to assess the readiness of Foreign Language (FL) students in Malaysian private universityy in transition from face-to-face learning to online learning. This study employed quantitative research whereby the data was collected from 120 FL students using an online questionnaire. Computer/internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation of learning, and online communication self-efficacy are the five variables used to assess online learning readiness (OLR). The findings showed that most FL students are ready to learn online during the pandemic. Results show that the computer/internet self-efficacy the most significant OLR variable. According to the results, students were confident in obtaining any information on the internet and using the online learning platform in their studies. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research adds to fundamental understanding of students' perceptions on shifting from face-to-face learning to online learning, as well as examining online learning readiness in language learning setting.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Foreign language, Online learning readiness, Online learning readiness scale

1. Introduction

According to real-time COVID-19 data updated by Worldometer, (2021), the total number of recorded cases worldwide reached 143 million by the end of April 2021, with the United States leading the way with over 32 million cases, followed by India with over 15 million. Indonesia (3.98 million), the Philippines (1.85 million), and Malaysia (1.57 million) were the top three COVID-19 affected countries in Southeast Asia. The COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia began in early January 2020 and worsened steadily over the next four months. Since October 2020, the number of confirmed cases has been steadily increasing. In order to manage infections and reduce disease spread, the Malaysian authority enforced the Movement Control Order (MCO), which requires residents to wear a face mask in public and maintain a social distance between them throughout districts and states. Immunization

campaigns were also ongoing in the hospital and vaccination centre to flatten the COVID-19 infection curve (Sallam, 2021).

This pandemic has a detrimental impact on the global economic development and social events, particularly in education (Ismail et al., 2021; Ming et al., 2021). After educational facilities all across the world were temporarily shut down, online learning gradually overtook regular classroom lessons as the primary medium of instruction. While online teaching allows for the continuation of teaching and learning while minimising the impact on student's academic progress, there are several challenges to overcome when putting online learning into practice (Raju et al., 2021). During the unplanned and ad-hoc transition from face-to-face learning to online learning, both lecturers and students might feel detached and unsure about their expectations for the future of online learning (Krishnapatria, 2020). On the student side, many from various communities, particularly in rural Malaysia, have been found to lack access to the internet, have sluggish internet connectivity at home, or do not have compatible learning devices (Nassr et al., 2020).

Since the pandemic compelled lecturers to adopt online learning, the implementation of this online learning must be further explored, particularly in terms of readiness of the students to embrace effective online learning for their teaching and learning (T&L) process. Thus, it's also vital to know student's perception of online learning so that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can design the ideal online curriculum and instruction possible in the face of the pandemic. It's critical to look into students' readiness and experiences with online learning since it could provide a challenge to their learning engagements and performance (Ismail et al., 2021; Ming et al., 2021; Nassr et al., 2020). Few studies have studied on the readiness of online learning in the language learning process in Malaysia. However, all the study was conducted to investigate the readiness of English learners for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, while other foreign languages, including Korean and Mandarin, have yet to be thoroughly investigated (Allam et al., 2020; Rafiee & Abbasian-naghneh, 2019). Therefore, this research was carried out to see if FL students enrolled in Malaysian private university were ready to learn online, as well as to assess what is their strength and weakness in online learning readiness.

The research provides a fundamental insight of students' perspectives during an initial transition to full online learning and discusses the aspects that increase language education's readiness for online learning. Thus, this study will be useful in the fields of language acquisition and online education, particularly in the event of a pandemic. It will help students organize their learning based on the findings so that they may avoid potential mistakes and learn the language more effectively, especially in an online setting. The findings can also help faculty offer suitable training initiatives for students taking the course online. Finally, this study complements the literature's body of knowledge about foreign language students' online readiness.

2. Literature Review

Online learning, sometimes referred to as e-learning, virtual learning, or remote learning, is a type of teaching offered via a digital device to support in the T&L process. This concept is made up of three parts: (a) the platform is a computer-based device like a laptop, desktop, tablet, smartphone, or virtual reality (VR); (b) the T&L materials presented are sentences in verbal or printed form and/or graphics like graphics, images, images, motion graphics, or video; and (c) the instructional goal is to cause specific changes in the student's behaviour and attitude. (Mayer, 2019). Since the mid-1990s, online learning has been widely employed in academia. Since then, numerous HEIs have embraced and integrated this learning into their curriculum design, including the University of North Texas in 1995 and Stanford University in 2005 (Mayer, 2019). Even though online T&L has been around for a long time, the effectiveness of online learning towards students' performance is still lacking and many lecturers was hesitated to use online T&L due to a lack of exposure and training on the online learning teaching methodology (Sia & Abbas Adamu, 2021). Although it makes life easier, e-learning takes 5.5 times as long to design as classroom courses (Prabawangi et al., 2021). Albeit it had some significant limits, online learning was without a doubt the best solution for this social distancing situation.

Technology is increasingly used in language learning since it can improve information retention and engagement (Duong et al., 2021). However, according to Chung et al., (2020), online learning cannot substitute direct human contact or the level of social interaction available in a classroom. These concerns have a significant impact on students, who think something is missing during online learning

sessions compared to a traditional face-to-face T&L, resulting in reduced student engagement and involvement, and a poor learning experience. According to the researchers, students may benefit from online learning, but there are downsides. Accessibility & flexibility (Rafiee & Abbasian-naghneh, 2019), time efficiency, teamwork, and the ability to connect with individuals across physical boundaries are all advantages and benefits of online learning (Hung et al., 2010). Meanwhile, according to Prihastiwi et al., (2021) online learning has transformed teacher-centred learning into learner-centred learning. Active learners will be able to improve their knowledge through synchronous or asynchronous lessons in this type of learning method. As a result, learners must be psychologically and physically prepared to adopt online learning in order to actively participate in their language learning process.

While online learning is a great way to communicate language knowledge by providing a variety of related videos, blogs, and tutorials, Shahzad et al., (2020) contend that it is not capable of fully developing and imparting all language talents to learners. This argument is supported by Karuppannan & Mohammed, (2020) who discovered that a variety of factors influence online language acquisition among language learners, including teaching technique, psychosocial characteristics, language abilities, and the language proficiency. They argue that learning a language is insufficient without mastering any of its four skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening, all of which may be learned efficiently through face-to-face contact in the classroom. When the lectures were delivered online during the pandemic, Lau et al., (2020) discovered that students had great difficulty learning to spell the word and had many challenges improving their spelling talents. To date, quite a few research on online learning have been undertaken in language learning particularly English during the pandemic. The results of a recent study on students' readiness for online learning has sparked a vigorous discussion. This includes two separate research on students' perceptions of online learning in Indonesia (Krishnapatria, 2020) and Malaysia (Mad et al., 2020). While most students were positive about online learning, they still favoured face-to-face T&L in both studies. When researching Iranian EFL students, Rafiee and Abbasian-naghneh, (2019) found a positive relationship between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, online learning encouragement, and online communication self-efficacy in terms of language learners' acceptance and readiness for e-learning. They perceived enjoyment had no effect on language students' acceptance and readiness for online learning.

The term 'online learning readiness' (OLR) is not novel, and numerous research have been carried out to better comprehend the readiness for online learning and how it influences students' learning (Hung et al., 2010; Naji et.al. 2020). According to Warner et al., (1998), three factors affect students' readiness for online learning: 1) their choice for online platform for learning over face-to-face T&L ; 2) their confidence in using online platform for learning, particularly their knowledge and expertise in using the internet and computer-mediated platform; and (3) their ability to engage in self-directed learning.. The Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS), established by Hung et al., (2010), is a quantitative scale that analyses a student's readiness for OLR. This scale was chosen for this study due to its multidimensional structure and the relevance of the discovered characteristics for online learning. The scale has five components that encompassed all areas of online learning readiness: 1) computer/internet self-efficacy, 2) self-directed learning, 3) learner control, 4) Motivation for learning, and 5) online communication self-efficacy. This scale was utilized for this study, with a few modifications. More extensive explanations of the OLRS dimensions used in this study can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Explanation on OLRS dimensions

Dimensions	Explanations
Computer & Internet self-efficacy	Students are comfortable in their ability to use MS Teams platform in their FL online learning. Students are also comfortable in collecting information on the internet about new information in FL.
Self-directed learning	The ability of the students to develop their FL learning objectives and study plan. Students also can manage time well and seek help when having difficulty with the subjects. Apart from that, students exhibit a high standard for their FL learning performance.

Learner control	Students can control their learning progress and not be disturbed by other internet activities like messaging and social media surfing. They have also reviewed the class materials based on their needs.
Motivation for learning	Students are eager to learn a new thing on online platforms. They are receptive to new concepts and enjoy sharing their thoughts with others. On top of that, the students are open to learning from failure.
Online communication self-efficacy	Students are confident in their ability to communicate openly about the FL with others using an online platform like email and online discussion. Students are also comfortable using text messaging to express themselves line emotions and humor. Students comfortable posting and answering questions in the online forums.

3. Methodology

The respondents were requested to answer the 18 items of the Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS) ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Upon consent from Hung et al., (2010) the OLRS utilized in this study was slightly changed and updated in response to the pandemic circumstances. The questionnaire includes demographic information such as gender, learning locations, internet access levels, and the five dimensions of OLRS. The questionnaire was then generated in Google Docs and disseminated over an email and online communication platform (WhatsApp's). Given the country's current state of movement control, this was done to ensure that the study reached as many people as possible.

A total of 120 students from UniKL MIIT who were enrolled in FL subjects this semester took part in the study. In April 2020, the university commenced full-scale synchronous online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. MS Teams, as well as the Learning Management System (UniKL VLE), are two of the most important online platforms for teaching and learning. Korean Language and Mandarin are offered as elective courses at UniKL MIIT, and students must choose one of the subjects available. For this study, a convenient sampling method was used because students enrolled in the FL classes as an elective subject for this semester are easily accessible and available (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). For statistical analysis, the data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

The OLRS' composite reliability was tested before moving on to the next data processing stage. The reliability test becomes more significant when the Cronbach alpha value approaches 1.0. The internal reliability of multi-item questionnaires is closely related to the reliability of the findings (Joseph, 2008). Even though that the OLRS is a validated questionnaire with scale reliability of 0.727 to 0.871 (Hung et al., 2010), and Chung et al., (2020) tested it to be between 0.841 and 0.911, it is necessary to analyze its reliability in the scope of the current research. This study's alpha score was 0.822, showing that the scale's different facets were all consistent. This value was also higher than the 0.70 recommended value (Joseph, 2008).

4. Result and Discussion

After a comprehensive follow-up, 120 students completed the survey and were deemed to be valid for further examination. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the respondents. The details included gender, FL subjects, learning location and internet connectivity level. Among the responders, there were 78 female students (65.0%) and 42 male students (35.0 %). In terms of FL subjects that the students take for this semester, 82 (63.8%) of them are taking Mandarin subjects while 38 (31.7%) are taking Korean Language Subjects. The majority of respondents (n=91, 75.8 %) lived in town while attending online courses. 22 (18.3%) students went back to their hometowns in a rural area, while the others (n=7, 5.8%) stayed at the UniKL hostel. In order to access to online courses, they must be able to connect to the internet. The data revealed that the majority of respondents (n=98, 81.7%) rated internet connectivity as "very good" or "good.".

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic background	Variables	n	%
Gender	Male	42	35.0
	Female	78	65.0
FL Subjects	Mandarin	82	68.3
	Korean	38	31.7
Learning Locations	Home in town area	91	75.8
	Home in rural area	22	18.3
	University hostel	7	5.8
Internet Connectivity	Very good	38	31.7
	Good	60	50.0
	Average	21	17.5
	Poor	1	0.8

The five-point Likert scale is transformed into a mean-level scale. In order to assess the level of student's readiness, the researchers divided the level of readiness into three categories which are: low, moderate and high as per Table 3.

Table 3. Mean score range

Mean Score	Readiness Level
1.00-2.33	Low
2.34-3.67	Moderate
3.68-5.00	High

The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of the participant's responses to each item are shown in Table 4. The mean score ranges from 3.17 to 4.14, indicating that the majority of FL students are ready to learn online during the pandemic. The FL students had the highest level of computer/internet self-efficacy (M= 3.99, SD= 0.641) Furthermore, the study indicate that FL students had a high level of confidence in their ability to find and gather material for online learning using search engines like Google and Yahoo during full-scale online learning. The following top-ranked variables were motivation for learning (M = 3.75, SD = 0.688), self-directed learning (M = 3.59, SD = 0.619), and online communication self-efficacy (M = 3.43, SD = 0.757). These findings are similar to those of Chung et al., (2020) and Hung et al., (2010), who discovered that students were similarly ready for online learning. Rafique et.al., (2021), also found that computer self-efficacy was important for online learning and was strongly linked to students' readiness.

Table 4. OLR Mean and Standard Deviation Score

ID	Dimensions/Items	M	SD
CIS	Computer/Internet self-efficacy	3.99	.641
CIS1	I feel confident in using MS Teams as an online learning platform.	4.01	.733
CIS2	I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning.	3.80	.729
CIS3	I feel confident in using the Internet (Google etc.) to find or gather information for online learning	4.14	.770
SDL	Self-directed learning	3.59	.619
SDL1	I carry out my own study plan.	3.61	.759
SDL2	I seek assistance when facing problems with my online learning.	3.78	.884
SDL3	I manage time well.	3.17	.901
SDL4	I set up my learning goals	3.55	.849
SDL5	I have higher expectations for my learning performance	3.87	.755
LC	Learner control	3.32	.642
LC1	I can direct my own learning progress.	3.45	.787
LC2	I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, Internet surfing).	2.73	.985
LC3	I repeated the online materials based on my needs.	3.78	.772
MFL	Motivation for learning (in an online context)	3.75	.688
MFL1	I am open to new ideas.	3.78	.824
MFL2	I have the motivation to learn.	3.58	.949
MFL3	I improve from my mistakes.	3.83	.781
MFL4	I like to share my ideas with others.	3.80	.872
OCS	Online communication self-efficacy	3.43	.757
OCS1	I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion) to effectively communicate with others.	3.67	.853
OCS2	I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humour) through text.	3.43	.914
OCS3	I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions	3.20	.943

Despite this, learner control remained the lowest-ranked OLR dimension, with a mean score of 3.32 (SD=0.642). According to the findings by Naji et al., (2020) and Hung et al., (2010), FL students viewed learner control as a lower-rated OLR dimension than other dimensions. Students believed they had less influence over their online class. This is most likely owing to the fact that online learning varies from traditional face-to-face learning in that there is a larger chance of interruption, such as students playing computer games, browsing the web, and chatting or messaging with their friends during online sessions. Prabawangi et al., (2021) also found that students' concentration levels dropped during an online meeting and they tend to conduct academically irrelevant activities during the online learning session.

5. Conclusion

Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced education to be performed remotely for more than a year, education at all levels has been practicing online learning using technology and digital tools. Many studies have been undertaken in this period to study students' perspectives of how to cope with online learning, but very few of these studies are emphasis on foreign language students. The objective of this study was to assess if FL students were prepared to learn online during the pandemic. In conclusion, FL students at Malaysian private university have a moderate to high level of readiness for online learning. Based on the data, we discovered that FL students have a high computer and internet self-efficacy. Despite the fact that previous research by Siron et al., (2020) have found that online learning exposes students to technology anxiety, particularly computer anxiety, this study found that having more computer experience boosts self-efficacy and reduces computer anxiety in students, particularly during the pandemic. Since the students expressed a desire for more control over their online learning environment, course instructors should continue to engage each student in task-based online group discussions. This may encourage students' participation in targeted language learning while discouraging other distracting online activities like chatting, texting, and gaming.

The outcome of this study provides additional knowledge that FL students at UniKL are ready and believe that online learning technology enables them to engage in interactive study and learning. Additionally, this study confirms prior results that consumer readiness for technology is a significant factor influencing consumer acceptance of new technologies such as online learning, particularly in emerging nations such as Malaysia's higher education sector. This research is beneficial in the field of online language learning, especially in the event of a pandemic. This is a baseline study in the context of Malaysian FL students that will open up new opportunities for future researchers to explore. Using the OLR scale developed by Hung et al., (2010) this study looked into FL students' readiness for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. FL students' perspectives on aspects that may aid their readiness for the emergency switch to synchronised online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown are presented in this study. Continuing research is needed to ensure that students' learning abilities and perspectives for online learning improve and remain constant throughout time.

6. Suggestion for Future Research

Because of the limitations of this study, it can make some recommendations for further research. First, this study was conducted with a small group of undergraduate students, and the survey responses could not be generalised to represent the perspectives of all students taking the course online from various disciplines. Second, because this study was conducted at the start of the students' transition to online learning, it did not compare the students' pre-and post-survey responses following the implementation of full-scale online learning. Future studies should investigate the link between online learning readiness and academic performance. Future research could also look into any moderating factors that influence students' readiness to learn online. These findings could help our local universities build policies and guidelines for online teaching and learning, leading in graduates who are well-prepared to fulfil the expectations and aspirations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0).

7. Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 carried out the fieldwork, prepared the literature review and overlook the write-up of the whole article. Author 2 wrote the research methodology, did the data entry and statistical analysis. Author 3 was in charge of fine-tuning the instruments employed as well as overseeing and revising the overall paper's write-up.

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