THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' READINESS ON ONLINE LEARNING IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Since the COVID-19 outbreak had crossed the globe and wreaking havoc on people's life and health, almost all educational institutions were closed down temporarily and online learning has replaced previously conducted conventional teaching and learning in the classroom. However, the main concern here is to what extent the students are ready for this drastic change in their learning endeavors. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the readiness levels of online learning among foreign language students in selected higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Based on the results, it is reported that most Foreign Language students in Malaysia were ready for online learning with the highest score in the "computer and Internet self-efficacy" dimension but demonstrated the lowest score in terms of the "learners' control" dimension. The results further indicated that the students were very confident in their ability to search and gather information for online learning using search engines like Google and Yahoo. On the contrary, this group of students opined that they had less control in managing their online learning class as they were easily distracted by other online activities like messaging, gaming, and browsing the Internet.

Keywords: *Online Learning, Readiness, Foreign Language*

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The present study offers some new insights on the readiness of online learning in Malaysian context, especially for foreign language students in the Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. The "Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS)" designed by Hung et. al. (2010) is adopted to assess online learning readiness among foreign language students (i.e. FL). Specifically, the dimensions used in this scale are, namely, "computer and internet self-efficacy", "learners' control", "learning motivation", "self-directed learning" and, "online communication self-efficacy". Since the studies on the readiness among foreign language students had not been extensively explored before, the present research may help to fill in the gap in the area of study. The research led to a better understanding of students' perspectives as they transitioned from conventional face-to-face learning to full-fledged online learning during this COVID-19 pandemic, as well as online learning readiness in language learning. This research may also assist students in preparing their online learning accordingly so that they can better avoid certain obstacles and learn the language in an effective manner.

Research Objectives

This study is governed by these research questions:

RQ1: What are the levels of readiness among FL learners on online learning during the pandemic?

RQ2: Is there a significantly difference in gender and program levels in readiness for online learning.

RQ3: Is there significantly different in learning locations in readiness for online learning?

RQ4: Is there significantly difference in internet connectivity in readiness for online learning?

To date, there have been not many studies conducted to assess the readiness of online learning among Foreign Language students, especially in Malaysia. Although most studies on the readiness of online learning for the English language during pandemics have been covered, the same cannot be said for other foreign languages (Krishnapatria, 2020). Hence, there is an urgent need to examine the student's readiness and experiences in online learning, which may pose challenges to their learning performances.

Research Methodology

The FL students from UniKL and IIUM were requested to respond to an online survey based on the ORLS. The 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5) based on 18 items covering five dimensions (Hung et. al., 2010) is used in this survey. To meet the requirements of the research questions, the OLRS was moderately altered in response to the pandemic condition with permission granted by Hung et. al. (2010). Apart from five dimensions to measure the students' readiness, the questionnaire also includes demographic background such as gender, program levels (diploma/bachelor degree), learning location, and Internet connectivity. This quantitative study employed the purposive sampling method to selected respondents due to the current Movement Control Order situation. The Cronbach's alpha value is 0.906 and it indicated that all the 18 items are reliable for this study. The overall readiness for online learning was assessed using the composite means of the five dimensions of the OLRS adapted. For analysis purposes, the ANOVA was utilized to examine any significant differences in online learning readiness characteristics between different learning locations. In a separate test, an independent t-test was used to examine whether there is a significant difference in online learning preparation characteristics between the means of two groups: gender and program levels (i.e. diploma and bachelor degree).

Results

Based on the analysis, it is learned that “computer and internet self-efficacy” dimension is the highest OLR among FL students ($M=3.96$, $SD=0.715$), followed by “motivation for learning” ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.685$), “self-directed learning” ($M =3.58$, $SD = 0.715$), and “online communication self-efficacy” ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.765$). The lowest score for OLR dimension is “learners' control” ($M=3.33$, $SD=0.715$). There is no significant difference in terms of the overall readiness for online learning between genders with a p-value more than 0.05 for all dimensions. However, the results indicated that there was significantly difference between self-directed learning ($t(397) = -4.707$, $p=0.005$) with both program levels (i.e. bachelor and diploma). The mean value of the degree program level ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.565$) was higher than the diploma program level ($M=3.50$, $SD=0.631$) as illustrated in the finding. For the relationship between the readiness items and learning locations, there were no significant differences detected for all the dimensions. In term of the relationship between internet connectivity and the students' readiness, there was a significant difference between internet connectivity and computer, and “internet self-efficacy” ($F(3,215)=4.160$, $p=.007$), “motivation for learning” ($F(3,215)=5.042$, $p=0.02$) and “online communication self-efficacy” ($F(3,215)=4.480$, $p=0.04$) which is in line with Balci et. al. (2021).

Findings

It is concluded that FL students in Malaysia are mostly ready for full-scale online learning in which they have high levels of confidence in computer and Internet self-efficacy. Additionally, the study also found that Internet connectivity is one of the important elements of readiness pertaining to online learning (Callo & Yazon, 2020). Since this research was undertaken at the beginning of the students' transition to online learning, the outcomes of the students were not measured before and after the introduction of online learning. Future research should look into the relationship between online learning readiness and students' performance.

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Mohd Hafizul Ismail teaches at UniKL MIIT as a lecturer. He holds a Master Degree in Engineering Management from UniMAP, Malaysia and a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Korea University, South Korea. He also earned a Korean Language Certificate from South Korea's Seoul National University. He is currently teaching physics as well as Korean Language. Korean language, engineering management, and applied statistics are among his research interests.

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