

SURVIVING ODL: LANGUAGE LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has altered the students' need to learn language. They are expected to be independent in learning and able to comprehend and understand the lectures given through online learning. Traditional face-to-face learning has evolved to distance learning, in which digital technology works as a medium in designing and providing better learning perspectives and learning experiences to both students and lecturers (Rapanta et al., as cited in Ana Nurdini Sharin, 2021). All classes were conducted with integrating information and communication technologies (ICT), where students interact with the lecturer and other students via electronic devices, and lecturers provide them with some guidance and assistance (Anderson, 2011). For this study, as the DPA students enroll and adapt into online learning, the researchers sought to find these two research objectives:

- 1) To investigate the students' confidence in managing their language learning during online distance learning (ODL).
- 2) To determine the students' reliance on lecturers during ODL.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The online learning concept has started during the late 1990s implemented by The Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions and has been progressing by demand to reach global audiences and to meet the functionality, accessibility, and flexibility of learning in a long-term period (Azhari & Ming, 2015). Online learning has opened a new horizon of learning as it integrates virtual communication through the mobile platform in encouraging student participation, expectant of students' more significant learning experience, and solving the crisis for students and the institutional communities (Ana Nurdini Sharin, 2021). This is aligned with the autonomous learner's theory as those who can plan, organize, monitor, and evaluate their own learning (Sidhu, 2009). Hence, it explains that a good language learner should be independent in their language learning without relying on the lecturers. In becoming autonomous, students should be aware that their efforts are crucial for effective learning. They need to cooperate with their lecturers to monitor their progress during online learning. The idea is to enhance students' active participation in English language classes as well as to be more responsible in their learning process. This idea is supported by Raj (2011) as he stated that 'the aware learner' is the one who sees the relationship to what is to be learned, how to learn, and the resources available to take charge or control of learning. Under such learning, it is the student who becomes most active. The students are more accessible in the selection of every aspect of learning, and at the same time, they have more responsibilities to be accomplished.

However, some questions and worries arose as most students were struggling with online learning. Being an independent learner in an online English classroom has put more weight on students' capabilities and confidence. Students perceived online learning negatively as they felt unconfident in guidance when the feedback from the lecturer was delayed due to a lack of face-to-face interaction (Nabil Hasan Al-Kumaim et al., 2021). The students need lecturers' reviews and comments to engage in a functional and practical learning experience. Online learning has resulted in a lack of human interaction between students and lecturers, thus affecting their self-esteem. This notion is supported by Graham, Henrie, & Gibbons (2006) when they concluded that lack of human interaction is the biggest downsides of online education, affecting the students' contentment in learning and self-fulfillment (as cited in Ana Nurdini Sharin, 2021). Moreover, some students were dissatisfied as they could not express their feelings, which made them lose confidence in learning (Mahiswaran Selvanathan, Nur Atikah Mohamed Hussin, & Noor Alyani Nor Azazi, 2020). Azlan et al. (2020) also reported in their study that among the challenges faced by students during online learning are the lack of communication and interaction which has made the students to experience loneliness, exam, and assignments anxiety, as well as the need to have lecturer's approval in their learning process.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive case study and was conducted among first year Diploma students of Faculty of Science Administration and Policy Studies at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban. It is a requirement for first year diploma students in UiTM to enrol in ELC121 Integrated Language Skills: Listening. This design of this case study is single-case study that used the method of quantitative. The instrumentation used in this study includes a questionnaire. There was a total of 101 students Diploma in Public Administration (DPA) participated in the study. The data was collected starting from week 5 to week 8 of the semester. The duration of the data collection took about 3 weeks to complete. The data collection was done using Google Forms. The data collected from the questionnaire was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Students' Confidence in Managing their Language Learning

Item	Mean	SD
Planning	3.00	.551
Monitoring	2.64	.484
Organizing	2.80	.479
Evaluating	2.53	.544
Total	2.74	.411

Scale: 1=Not at all confident, 2= Fairly confident, 3= Confident, 4=Very confident

The findings in Table 1 showed that the overall mean score for the students' confidence in being independent in their language learning is 2.74 with the standard deviation of .411. This means that the students are fairly confident in becoming independent language learners. This may be due to lack of exposure and training; they somehow do not know what they must do to be one. These students were experiencing a shift from secondary school environment where it is more teacher-centered to a total online learning situation where they are expected to be

independent in their own learning. The findings also revealed that the students have low confidence in taking charge of their own learning. This was due to many reasons, for example, these students claimed that they do not acquire specific skills needed for them to be able to manage their own language learning.

Table 2: Students' Overall Reliance on the Lecturer in Language Learning

Item	Mean	SD
Reliance	2.91	.457

The findings gathered from the questionnaire revealed that these DPA students are reliant on their lecturers in language learning with a mean score of 2.91 with the standard deviation on .457. According to Table 3. The students are most reliant on their lecturers in terms of seeking guidance and advice regarding language learning. This is because they view their lecturers as the expert of the language. This finding appears to be like Januin (2007) findings, which stated that learners rely on teachers greatly in many aspects of learning English. She also stated that the learners failed to see that learning independently is the main contribution to language learning success. Looking at the findings gathered, the students are mostly dependent on their teacher in terms of seeking guidance and advice regarding language learning. This is due to their beliefs that their English teacher is the expert at learning languages.

Table 3: Students' Reliance on the Lecturers

Item	Mean	SD
I believe my teacher is an expert at learning languages.	3.28	.783
My own effort plays an important role in successful language learning.	3.22	.739
I need a lot of guidance in my learning.	3.18	.725
I like to seek advice from my lecturer regarding language learning.	3.02	.770
I ask my lecturer to explain when something is not clear.	2.98	.813
I would like more opportunities to learn on my own.	2.88	.739
I like my friends to check my work.	2.85	.880
I always take initiative when learning about something.	2.83	.642
I need my lecturer to show me how to learn.	2.77	.981
I like my lecturer to take full in charge of the language learning in class.	2.77	.909
I prefer to ask my lecturer the meaning of unfamiliar words.	2.62	.940
I depend on the lecturer to explain everything to me.	2.57	.851

Scale: 1= Not reliant, 2= Fairly reliant, 3= Reliant, 4= Very reliant

Thang and Azarina (2009) support this finding by stating that most learners are teacher-centered although they are not fully teacher-dependent. These learners prefer their teachers to be in-charge in telling them their mistakes, guiding them, and motivating them. Like DAP students, they are not fully reliant on their lecturer but only on certain occasions where they need help. The data collected showed that these learners desire the freedom and responsibility to decide on what, where, when, and how to learn instead of being told by their teacher. These students prefer to employ their own learning styles and strategies and would like to be allowed to work on their own first before they seek the lecturer's help. This finding is supported by Holden and Usiki (1995), Littlewood (2000) and Chan et al. (2002) which claimed that Asian students want to be active and independent in class although they perceive teachers as authority figures. DAP students claimed that they would try to solve their problem themselves first before seeking for the lecturer's help. However, based on the data gathered, it is showed that the

students, regardless of claiming themselves to be independent, are reliant on their lecturer when it comes to language learning. Students tend to surrender almost all responsibility to lecturers when they know that they can choose their own learning activities, setting their own objectives inside and outside the classroom, deciding how long to spend on each activity, and evaluating their own learning (Ustunluoglu, 2009).

5. CONCLUSION

This study presented evidence that students are struggling to be independent during online distance learning. Students are still trying to figure out ways to adapt to the pandemic and the new learning method of distance learning. Despite some challenges, this covid-19 pandemic has taught us that online learning is no longer an option but requires effective online instructional delivery and online interactive learning methods and resources (Ana Nurdini Sharin, 2021). The students' need for guidance and support is crucial as it helps them be more independent in learning. The ability to identify the students' need and expectations in online classrooms will help the university plan and structure a proper curriculum and syllabus, which would be fair and helpful for both students and lecturers. Lecturers need to motivate the students in developing their self-confidence and being able to work creatively during online learning as digital literacy and confidence are believed to provide positive effects for student motivation and wellbeing (Nabil Hasan Al- Kumaim et al., 2021). In addition, lecturers can also help to offer each student by providing adequate guidance and support, encouragement, positive feedback, and evaluations to help them achieve their confidence and be a better self-centred learner (Moore, 1989 as cited in Ana Nurdini Sharin, 2021). Students' acceptance of the new learning method is crucial in creating an effective learning environment (Amir et al., 2020). The transition from traditional to an online classroom requires in-depth study and research as to which extent online learning can be improved in a long-term period. Future studies need to be done to investigate the effective tools and methods to help increase the students' motivation in online learning as well as find ways to help them become more independent.

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