

# Understanding Students' Online Learning Readiness towards Skill-based Hospitality Courses

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## ABSTRACT

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:  
10 January 2022  
Accepted:  
2 March 2022  
Published:  
27 April 2022

### KEYWORDS

Covid-19  
Skills-based Courses  
Online Learning  
OLRS Dimensions  
Hospitality Students

*The purpose of this study is to evaluate students' online learning readiness for the skills-based courses in the hospitality higher institution in Terengganu, Malaysia. A 20 items online questionnaire from the five dimensions of the Online Learning Readiness Scale: self-directed learning, computer/internet self-efficacy, motivation for learning, online communication self-efficacy, and learner control was adopted. Five hundred online surveys were distributed, and 482 respondents have been selected as the final sample size. A quantitative research method with convenience sampling and descriptive statistics was adopted to analyze the results using SPSS statistical software. The results revealed that computer and internet self-efficacy are students' highest average mean score, followed by online communication self-efficacy, motivation for learning, self-directed learning, and the lowest average mean score is learner control. Thus, overall scores indicated that students' online readiness for skills-based courses is at a medium level. Based on the statistical results, the study helps educators in hospitality higher learning institutions to engineer appropriate content and delivery methods for skill-based online learning courses. The study concluded by offering suggestions for future research to improve students' readiness towards skill-based online learning courses.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the internet has significantly changed the way we live our lives, online learning is becoming a norm for students ranging from elementary school to post-secondary education. It is commonly conducted in both synchronous and asynchronous environments (Jolliffe et al., 2012). When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, UNESCO (2020) reported that preschools, schools, and higher educational institutions had been closed in 172 countries, which affected 98.5% of the world's student population. In Malaysia, the government enforced Movement Control Order to increase social distancing and slow down the spread of the virus among the public. The pandemic has altered the educational plan in Malaysia. Students were instructed to return to their own homes as schools and universities were closed. To reduce close contact and mass gathering, the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia urged all higher education institutions to conduct online teaching (Malay Mail, 2020). Thus, most universities and colleges have turned to online learning to replace the conventional face-to-face learning system to maintain students' educational progress. This includes skill-based courses such as housekeeping, front office, and cooking. Although online learning seems a better option, educators have argued whether the approach is appropriate for practical-based courses. Concerns are raised about the course appraisals of the students' skills execution, such as the cooked food presentation, correctly utilizing a knife, and the foremost crucial part, the final product's standard taste (Rahmawati, 2021; Amin et al., 2021).

Previous studies have investigated the impacts of online learning on hospitality and tourism students. Mocanu and Deaconu (2017) examined 110 Hotel Management students in Pune, India, and found that online learning is ineffective for a practical-based course such as Hotel Management. Most of the students prefer face-to-face and hands-on practice during practical classes. On another hand, Baker and Unni (2019), in their cross-cultural study on the effectiveness of online courses in improving Asia and United States hospitality students' grades, stated that there was no significant difference in the efficacy between face-to-face and distance learning education. They argued that if online distance learning is the only option available, it can successfully replace the conventional face-to-face learning method. However, the students' online courses, either solely theory-based or combined with practical-based classes, were not clearly stated. Thus, a longitudinal study conducted by Hsu et al. (2017) explored the future directions of hospitality education and reiterated that students appreciated and preferred the current learning style through interactive classroom and community learning in the hospitality course offered. They reported that the lack of empirical studies on the program's curriculum design, the isolation of the program course and designers, and the highest conventional and limited teaching materials are among the weaknesses and opportunities in hospitality and tourism education that should be addressed accordingly (Maumbe, 2014; Murphy & Jongh, 2011; Weber et al., 2010).

Based on the above discussion, it is crucial that educators investigate whether their students are ready for skill-based online learning. The study is inspired by the work of Chung et al. (2020a, 2020b) who used 18 online learning student readiness (OLRS) items to examine online readiness among undergraduate students in Malaysia. The OLRS has five dimensions composed of computer/internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation for learning, and online communication self-efficacy. The respondents were students undergoing open distance learning and enrolled in at least two online courses. However, there was no specification on the courses selected for the study. The results were based on students' views and experiences while undergoing a human resource course for degree students and an economics course for diploma students. Since studies concerning students' readiness for skill-

based online learning are limited, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Have the students enrolled in any online courses, currently or in the past?
2. What is the university student's readiness for the online skills-based courses?
3. What is the highest dimension score in OLRs among hospitality students taking skills-based online courses?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Hospitality Educational Programme***

Many hospitality institutions have been established as demand arises from the hospitality industry with the core hospitality skilled graduates. In 1910, Westminster Technical College was established, followed by the opening of Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration in the US (Scott et al., 2008), the hospitality courses in Australian universities in the mid-1970s (King et al., 2003), and thousands of other hospitality institutions around the world. The trend is also evident in Malaysian as there is a significant growth of higher learning institutions' related to tourism and hospitality management programs (Nair & Whitelaw, 2008). As the number of these hospitality educational institutions increases, educators must understand the nature and the design of the hospitality curriculum. Researchers realized the importance of curriculum standards in hospitality education as they acquire a set of competencies and skills to prepare students to enter the workforce (Min et al., 2016; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). In many countries, hospitality programs must meet and comply with the standards accredited by a qualified agency or professional body. There are many hospitality educational institutions worldwide, and several hospitality program standards were formed to guide the curriculum design in different countries. For example, the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) in Malaysia was revised by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) to ensure that the hospitality programs offered by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) in Malaysia met an acceptable level of quality (MQA, 2019).

There are numerous degree programs offered by colleges and universities designed to serve the hospitality industry. A degree program in hospitality and tourism colleges is designed to offer job opportunities in many hospitality and tourism industries. There are hospitality skills-based courses under the technical and vocational education (TVE) that cater to hands-on teaching methods in providing students with specific technical skills. The vocational system refers to an organization's efforts to produce students with the knowledge and fundamental skills and prepare them to become skilled workers in the future (Laugho & Lillis, 1988). In the conventional culinary arts teaching method, instructors demonstrate skills, and students then practice the demonstrated skill in class. The chef-instructor provides feedback on the students' command of the practiced skill (Noe, 2005). As they emphasize technical skills and knowledge, these courses are distinctively TVE from the general education system. It is essential to create a collaboration between hospitality and tourism education and the needs of the hospitality and tourism industry to ensure the student employee transition works smoothly between these two stakeholders and prepare a successful intellectual workforce for the hospitality and tourism industry (Millar et al., 2010; Min et al., 2016). Therefore, the program's accountability, credibility, and effectiveness should be a concern among the stakeholders such as education providers, government, and students.

## ***2.2 Measuring Online Learning Readiness Scale***

The concept of OLRS was first proposed in the Australian vocational education and training sector (Warner et al., 1998). Since then, many researchers (McVay, 2000, 2001; Hung et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2003) have studied this concept, and various dimensions of this online learning readiness have been illustrated and validated. From the fundamental aspects of the ability to learn independently, confidence and capability in using the technological tools and face-to-face learning instructions (Tang & Lim, 2013), the assessment tools have been upgraded to evaluate the individual's technical experience and competency in using computers (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2003). Hung et al. (2010) expanded the McVay (2001) readiness study to the new dimensions of OLRS: self-directed learning (SDL), computer/Internet self-efficacy (CIS), motivation for learning (ML), online communication self-efficacy (OCS), and learner control (LC).

The learning domains are experiencing significant changes as higher-education institutions rapidly adopt the concepts and practices of e-learning (Hung et al., 2010). Nowadays, numerous universities, including Malaysia, offer web-based courses that complement classroom-based courses. Online courses give learners an array of benefits such as adaptability (Chizmar & Walbert, 1999), openings to work collaboratively and closely with instructors and other students from distinctive schools or across the world (Chen & Yang, 2014), and flexibility (Poole, 2000). These are some reasons why students need to be ready to learn online. According to Guglielmino and Guglielmino (2003), students' readiness to learn online can be evaluated through the individual's technical experience and internet and computer literacy (Schreurs et al., 2008). In this manner, it is imperative to know the student's involvement in online learning course enrolment before a conclusion can be distinguished on online learning students' readiness, particularly for the skills-based courses.

### ***2.2.1 Self-Directed Learning***

Self-directed learning refers to the learner's initiative with the responsibility to plan, implement and evaluate the learner's own effort (Premkumar et al., 2013). Benson (2011) has described how SDL has been used as a model to promote self-control in the learning process while allowing students to reach the learning goal by interacting with peers outside the classroom. In an online learning setting, educators must be proactive in guiding potential students to determine whether they are ready to take an online course. Lin and Hsieh (2001) found that successful online learners know what to decide best when taking the online course and efficiently follow the class based on their own pace and readiness for existing knowledge and goals. Lin and Hsieh (2001) reported that self-directed learners are usually more active in learning tasks such as completing classroom tasks, reading online learning material, planning, and evaluating learning milestones. Chung et al. (2020a) employed SDL to examine students' ability to plan their studies, seek assistance when faced with problems, manage time, and set up learning goals and expectations towards learning goals and expectations performance. They revealed that students would only seek assistance when facing problems while learning online and know how to manage their time well. However, it was also stated that students could not set up online learning goals. A study conducted by Samsuri et al. (2014) on the students of three schools in Shah Alam, Selangor has revealed that students enjoy online learning compared to traditional face-to-face learning because of the flexibility in planning and selecting the courses either guided by the instructor or through self-study. Thus, they also responded that e-learning had given them the flexibility to learn at their own time and wherever they wanted.

### ***2.2.2 Computer and Internet Self-Efficacy***

Computer and internet self-efficacy are related to technical skills involving computers and the internet (Peng et al., 2006; Keramati et al., 2011). Chung et al. (2020b) reported that a lack of technical skills such as managing software for online learning is among the main challenges students face online. Since online lessons are delivered via technology-enhanced devices, students must be competent and ready to deal with computers and the internet. Hong and Kim (2018) stated that the students' technology-related skills, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes using the technological concepts are the OLRs dimensions used to meet the course learning goals and outcomes.

### ***2.2.3 Motivation for Learning***

Motivation has substantially impacted learners' attitudes and learning behaviors in educational research and practice (Fairchild et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation for learning can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that intrinsic motivation is a critical element in the social, physical, and cognitive development of inherent interests that grow in knowledge and skills. It is commonly associated with higher-quality learning, better learning strategies, a lower dropout rate, and greater school enjoyment (Czubaj, 2004). On the other hand, Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to extrinsic motivation as a behavior to achieve a specific reward, such as getting a higher grade on exams and earning awards and prizes. They identified that learners in an online setting had significant freedom to determine their learning path, which might benefit learners with intrinsic motivation. Yang et al. (2006) found evidence that motivation is positively related to how learners perceive each other's presence in online courses. Saadé et al. (2007) noted that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation played an essential role in the success or failure of online learning. Mocanu and Deaconu (2017) stated that students' motivation increased as the internet created an opportunity to see what is happening in different parts of the world. As Singh (2014) described, students' characteristics like motivation and self-discipline are significant contributors to online learning effectiveness. Hung et al. (2010) proposed that the ML dimension includes students' openness to new ideas, motivation to learn, self-improvement, and sharing ideas with peers and instructors. This has been adopted by Chung et al. (2020a), who found that undergraduates in a Malaysian university agreed that they are open to new ideas when learning online, motivated to learn online, learn from their mistakes, and are willing to share ideas with others.

### ***2.2.4 Online Communication Self-Efficacy***

Since there is no face-to-face interaction between lecturers and students, online communication has become the only way for students to communicate with their lecturers and other classmates (McVay, 2000). Thus, the author also stated that lecturers should provide interactions and communication opportunities in web-based learning to reflect and internalize what students have learned by posting questions and sharing their opinions and emotions between instructors and peers. Similarly, Roper (2007) suggested that successful students fully utilize online activities, engage with students and instructors, work with other online students, ask questions, and use feedback and encouragement to stay motivated. Hung et al. (2010) proposed the online communication self-efficacy dimension, encompassing idea delivery, student confidence level, and participation in online discussion as crucial for students' online readiness level.