The impact of online class on foreign language acquisition of college students

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Abstract: AB English Language students need to go through foreign language courses. This phenomenological study explored the experiences of AB English Language students at UM Tagum College on the impact of online classes on their foreign language acquisition. There were seven participants for in-depth interviews and seven for one focus-group discussion as data sources. The results reveal that students experienced internet connectivity issues, preferred a face-to-face class, found the platform convenient, and saw the environment as relaxing. In addition, the data showed that students' responsibilities were practiced, implemented time management, learned different learning strategies, and showed a positive mindset for students' experiences coping with online language learning. Lastly, for the students' insights, they learned independently, possessed the right mindset, gained benefits for future travels, and various language-learning virtues were found. Thus, online classes are vital to students' foreign language acquisition.

Keywords: Distance learning, Educational technology, Foreign language acquisition, Language learning, Online class

1. Introduction

College students taking courses related to language learning are commonly required to learn the basics of a foreign language. By this, students are expected to be exposed to utter words and phrases and learn the basics of the writing system of a particular language. Face-to-face classes play an important role because face-to-face interaction and the right language learning environment are required for successful language acquisition. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, emergent circumstances hastened every country's response to the terrifying consequences. Thenceforth, education was severely impacted, and online classes were adopted abruptly during the urgent closure of campuses. However, online language teaching has already gained popularity, which is influenced by the advancement of technological tools in communication (Jansem, 2021). Along with its popularity, some issues have risen in education as students began to experience common issues such as connection issues, issues with resources, and time management issues. Unnoticeable issues that each student encountered also emerged, such as a lack of motivation, a short attention span, and an inability to process the information provided.

Though it gives convenience as they learn in the comfort of their homes, it appears to have several disadvantages, including a lack of social interaction, immediate or delayed feedback, and online distractions. This only proves that new types of learning activities, instructional tactics, and assessments have all been influenced by online teaching. To sum it up, the sudden changes have resulted in different outcomes (Bali & Liu, 2018). In Ilongga, Ashipala, and Tomas' study (2020), it was stated that by enhancing

teaching through innovative technologies and pedagogies, online learning remains one of the most potent enablers and accelerators for realizing higher education studies in Namibia, a country in southwest Africa. Still, the success rate of students studying through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) remains very low due to some problems like IT-related challenges; lecturer time-related challenges, and institution-related challenges. In the Philippines, Barrot, Llenares, and del Rosario conducted a study, and the findings revealed that college students' online learning challenges varied in type and extent. Their most difficult challenge was related to their home learning environment, while their least difficult challenge was technological literacy and competency (Barrot, 2021).

2. Literature review

In this study, the theories of Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory and Moore and Kearsley's three-component model of distance learning interaction were used. Stephen Krashen's SLA theory states that comprehensible input is critical for second language acquisition, and interaction can enhance fluency and second language acquisition (Krashen, 1987). The second theory used is Moore and Kearsley's model of interaction between distant learning. In this, they argued that educators should allow three types of interaction in a distance learning environment: a) learner-content, b) learner-instructor, and c) learner-learner (Moore, 1989).

Meanwhile, Paul and Jefferson (2019) stated that more students want to complete their coursework online. Due to the widespread use of online classes as a teaching method for college students today, there is a need to understand how online courses influence or affect students' foreign language acquisition at UM Tagum College. An immediate response to the prevalent problem of online language learning at UM Tagum College is needed, particularly given the abrupt shift to online classes. There have been studies on the effectiveness of online classes in learning. Butnaru, Nita, Anichiti and Brinza (2021) emphasized that there is something about the effectivity of online classes in learning and learner satisfaction with the abrupt shift from traditional approaches and that the learners' reaction depends on various factors, such as their proficiency in using online tools, their ability to technically access online courses, and the instructors' manner in delivering instruction.

Furthermore, Basar, Mansor, Jamaludin and Alias (2021) discovered that the students' ability and comfortability to use computers were high. Still, motivation in online learning was low, the ability to work in a group was moderate, and conventional teaching or face-to-face was necessary for their education.   In addition to learning new information and skills, students must be prepared to be mature citizens and responsible individuals. Future graduates will only be equipped with the knowledge and abilities necessary to support societal advancement in this way—by launching new companies, developing new professions, coming up with novel solutions to problems, working in multicultural environments, and so forth (Genelza, 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were the Bachelor of Arts in English Language students from UM Tagum College aged 20 to 24, male or female, who had taken Nihongo and Mandarin subjects during the pandemic, where the teaching mode was online. For the in-depth interview, Creswell (2013) suggested that a phenomenological study should have three to ten participants. Thus, the researchers have chosen seven (7) participants for the in-depth individual interview. On the other hand, for the focus group discussion (FGD), Van Eeuwijk and Angehm (2017) said that the typical size of a focus group discussion is 6 to 12 participants. For that suggestion, the researchers chose seven (7) participants for the focus group discussion. The total number of participants was fourteen (14). Additionally, UM Tagum College, the school where the study was conducted, is stated to offer online lessons as a medium of education and courses in foreign languages, implying that they had participants for the study.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments used to collect the data were in-depth individual interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). The researchers used Google Meet for individual interviews and focus group discussions

as the face-to-face interview was impossible because of the pandemic. To contact and do the interview, the researchers sent Google Meet links to the participants and interviewed them virtually.

3.3. Design

This study is qualitative, and the researchers used a phenomenological approach to collect the data. Phenomenology is a research method that seeks to capture the essence of a phenomenon as seen by those who have witnessed it. According to Qutoshi (2018), the findings of a phenomenological study broaden the mind, improve ways of thinking about a phenomenon, and allow researchers to see ahead and define their position through an intentional analysis of lived experiences. The data gathered was used to create a snapshot of online classes' role in foreign language acquisition. Furthermore, this design revealed how online courses shaped, contributed to, and influenced students' language acquisition. It would also assist researchers and readers in understanding the influencing factors of online courses in foreign language acquisition as individuals shared as contributors to language learning in any way.

3.4. Procedure

For the research procedure, the researchers wrote a letter for approval to conduct the study at UM Tagum College. After working on the needed parts, they proceeded to data gathering. They then asked for the participants' permission to participate in the data-gathering process, as their consent was required to cooperate in the study. The interview was then conducted on different days, based on the availability of the participants. The ethical principles established by general research ethics were examined in this study. As a result, the participants were made aware of all the research steps. Participants were always respected since they were more important than the study. The respondents were advised that their participation in this study was voluntary and would not affect their lives as students or individuals, including their families. The participant's personal information was not sought; therefore, confidentiality was provided.

4. Result and discussion

The result covered the interview description from both the in-depth and focus-group discussion participants and the implications that emerged. For the students' experiences in online language learning, four (4) significant themes emerged from the data: internet connectivity issues, preference for a face-to-face class, the convenience of the platform, and a relaxing environment.

Table 1: List of Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of Students in Online Language Learning

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Internet Connectivity Issues	• The internet connection is slow; catching up is hard. • The main problem with the online classes is the internet connection. • I cannot hear the teachers very well. • It can destroy something like the quality when you take an online class.
Preference of Face to Face Class	• Learning a foreign language is not ideal for me, especially when learning a language online. • You cannot see how she enunciates the words. It isn't easy. • You cannot quickly contact your teacher, unlike face-to-face.
The Convenience of the Platform	• We can see our quizzes, our examinations, and scores in real time. • It's user-friendly. • You can use other resources on YouTube. • I usually use my mobile phone since it is more convenient for me. • Easier to use Google Meet and user-friendly.
Relaxing Environment	• I don't have that kind of high level of anxiety. • Ma'am is very kind. • I feel comfortable when learning takes place in a context where I don't need to expose myself socially.

Internet connectivity issues

As a lower-middle country, the Philippines is also a country with a slow internet connection. In the Philippines, internet connectivity is still an issue. Despite the government's increased efforts to improve internet access, current Internet and mobile phone penetration rates are significantly below target, which is thought to be due to institutional rigidities (Azcarraga & Peña, 2019). This issue is consistent with the

findings of Agung, Surtikanti, and Quinones' study (2020), which identified three significant challenges in conducting online learning: the availability and sustainability of an internet connection, the accessibility of teaching media, and the compatibility of tools used to access the media. According to the study's findings, accessibility is still the most critical factor influencing the success of online learning.

Preference of face to face class

Face-to-face classes have been a tradition for a long time, so the abrupt change shocked all students and adjusting proved difficult due to everyone's different circumstances. As a result, during the pandemic, online learning became a new challenge for students and teachers (Yuzulia, 2021). Research also revealed that students had an adverse reaction to the program, which mainly relies on online teaching and learning. Students still prefer face-to-face instruction and learning. It also shows that most students believe that face-to-face instruction enhances their grasp of the material, pass rate, and communication with their peers (Mashifana, 2020).

The convenience of the platform

As the pandemic forced every student to shift from what they used to into a new modality, it became very challenging to adapt. So, to reduce student loss, online platforms provide various tools to facilitate conducting online interactive classes. Online education platforms enable information sharing and class activity coordination (Martin-Blas & Serrano-Fernández, 2009). Furthermore, online education proved convenient for students because they can access online materials 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Stern 2018; Cabendario, Gleyo, Piolo & Muico, 2023).

Relaxing environment

Learning should occur in an environment where students can focus and feel that they are in an excellent place to acquire and absorb every lesson successfully. As a result of the pandemic forcing them to learn in their own homes, because they were not permitted to go to public places, the environment in which they attended their online classes changed dramatically. There may be negative changes, but one of the positive changes is the learning environment. It allowed students, especially those socially awkward ones, to become more active as they perceived that they no longer needed to engage personally and socially.

Moreover, Hannay and Newvines' (2006) research found that students prefer distance education because it allows them to balance their other commitments more easily. In addition, their respondents also believe that in the distance learning environment, they achieve higher quality educational outcomes. They do not think they are sacrificing a good education for the convenience of distance learning. The students continued to share coping mechanisms with online language learning. Four (4) essential themes emerged from the responses. These are being responsible as a student, effective time management, learning strategies, and a positive mindset.

Table 2: List of Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of Students in Online Language Learning

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Being Responsible as a Student	• I just do some self-study. • I can freely watch it on YouTube. • Deadlines are near so I should study for the exams. • To set up goals and to get things done.
Effective Time Management	• I study in advance. • Manage our time on specific dates. • Set schedules for when I should study everything.
Learning Strategies	• I open my notes during the discussion. • I also look for other resources. • I read some supplemental materials. • I always have my notebook where I can jot down everything.
Positive Mindset	• I am motivating myself. • I have this connection within myself motivates me every day. • Confidence is the key at the end of the day. • So you have to be diligent to memorize many things. • Strive hard to learn more about that language.

Being responsible as a student

Learning has been shown to benefit from personal responsibility and accountability (Macaskill & Denovan, 2013). Such students' inner learning promotes individuals' feelings of agency, which can support their long-term growth and development (Fishman, 2014). Students know that the quality of their experience depends on more than just the resources offered to them; it also depends on how much time and involvement they put into their coursework. Learning is improved when people take ownership of it because it is not left to chance. As passive consumers of knowledge, students have a personal commitment to their education. Furthermore, according to Anderson and Prawat (1983), people who feel in control are more likely to be in charge of their education. However, as Soilemetzidis et al. (2014) stated, Institutions must actively promote and guarantee effort, engagement, interaction, and active deep learning. This cooperative effort and sense of responsibility between students and institutions can help facilitate a meaningful learning experience. Other authors have discovered that such relationships are efficient and essential for learning to flourish over time.

Effective time management

Effective time management is one of the most essential abilities a student should have as an online learner. It is simpler to accomplish goals the better a student is at managing time. Since everyone has the same number of hours in a day, it is not how much time a student has that matters but how effectively a student uses it (Miller, 2021). Students manage their time by using time management techniques, completing learning lessons in advance, and extending the time for learning tasks. These coping mechanisms are linked because time management frees up time for additional responsibilities. According to Joubert (2020), students should create a schedule of the chores they must complete to enhance their time management abilities, including planning for class activities and allocating more time for learning assignments. She underlined the necessity for students to commit to incorporating their online coursework into their weekly schedule.

Learning strategies

This study's participants used a self-directed learning technique. Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as a person's initiative in the learning process, whether alone or with the assistance of others. People make decisions on how to use resources and learning approaches during this process and also fully know their learning needs and goals. Self-directed learning converts students into learning agents who decide how to achieve their learning objectives.

Borrowing educational materials is also a coping mechanism that helps students deal with distance learning. Since course assignments require laptops or computers, enlisting the assistance of family members and other close friends who are available right away is a typical coping strategy (Akomaning & Boateman-Osafo, 2021). Enhancing student control over what is taught in class and producing positive academic outcomes are the results of teaching the curriculum subject and being proficient in the language used for instruction. These factors increase the learner's exposure to and opportunity to understand the material of instruction (Genelza, 2022).

Positive mindset

Viewing education as a universal common good as per the United Nations in the year 2020, students constantly strive to survive and exhibit constructive behaviors to overcome the challenges of distance learning. Action is an antidote to hopelessness while perceiving success is the antidote to stress and difficulties. Different ways of coping mechanisms as a collection of versatile tools were used to ward against burnout actively. Furthermore, managing is a practice employed by an individual to defend themselves against unpleasant stimuli that could cause stress and anxiety (Berjot & Gillet, 2011). In the study, coping was defined as a method or approach used by the participants to effectively handle challenging circumstances related to distant learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the students also expressed their insights on online language learning, and these four (4) primary themes emerged, including; learning independently, the right mindset, benefits for future travels, and language learning virtues.

Table 3: List of Major Themes and Core Ideas on Insights of the Students in Online Language Learning

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Learning Independently	• Always have alternative ways to learn on their own. • It would be best if you stood on your own. • Only you can somehow uplift yourself by learning a different language.
The Right Mindset	• Exert some effort to learn. • I always think of it as something enjoyable, so I trick myself into learning more. • You need to set your mindset and try to expect the worst, like learning it. • It would help if you have the proper mindset that you can do this.
Benefits for Future Travels	• It is something you can use if you ever plan to travel abroad. • Use it to make new friends. • I can use the language when going to a specific country. • I can use it in my future career.
Language Learning Virtues	• The more you are exposed to the language, the more you can absorb the language. • To be patient in learning a foreign language • Just simply love the language

Learning independently

According to Jati's (2018), teachers interested in learning more about learning applications and technology and incorporating it into their teaching practices will discover opportunities for how technology can genuinely benefit the teaching and learning process. Thus, if students can explore appropriate learning technology, distance and a lack of physical teachers will not be an issue. Considering the findings of Nagauleng and Waris' (2022) study, revealed that during the covid-19 pandemic, students learn independently using learning-teaching materials offered by English teachers. Students also use media such as YouTube to assist them in understanding the material that teachers present. Students claim that independent online English learning is ineffective because they struggle to understand the materials. Although students use technology to aid in the learning-teaching process, it is inadequate due to unstable internet connection and limited internet quotas.

The right mindset

Language acquisition is a complex skill that requires effort and a significant amount of time to master. Carol Dweck's (2006) description of the role that mindset plays. Her 40 years of research into the topic demonstrated that motivational variables are more important than cognitive ones for achievement, as the "New Psychology for Success" is now widely recognized in education and beyond encouraging a "growth mindset" or gradual approach to the goal of the teachers in the classroom or for oneself (the involvement of the students) encouraging students to persist in the front of difficulties. Consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Viña, Mamalampay, Mascud, Liscano and Quiones (2022), who discovered that students had a growth attitude and that motivation, criticism, environment, and effort all played a role in their English language acquisition.

Benefits for future travels

Bilingualism is a highly valued skill, especially for those who speak English as a second language. Most businesses rely on non-language workers to handle their translation and interpretation needs (Inman, 1985). This aligns with Marian and Shook's research (2012), which highlights the numerous advantages that bilingualism offers to society. It enables you to connect with people from different cultures who you wouldn't otherwise be able to communicate with, as well as learn about their cultures through their language. These findings also align with Masgoret and Gardner's study (2003), which underscores the importance of language proficiency for foreign language instructors working overseas, individuals seeking temporary employment abroad, and employers responsible for selecting and training potential employees.

Language learning virtues

Exposure to various languages has been critical to human development for millennia. Children in multilingual situations usually see who speaks which language, who understands which material, and with whom they may converse. This exposure to a diversity of linguistic conditions produces expertise not only in language learning but also in comprehending other people's opinions. It offers the fascinating prospect

that early exposure to various languages may benefit the development of the social-cognitive abilities necessary for efficient communication (Pearson, 2011).

Understanding one's worth as a person was required for understanding one's identity as a learner. According to studies, the human capacity to learn can be defined as a sort of consciousness distinguished by specific values, attitudes, and dispositions, as well as lateral and temporal connectedness. This awareness has multiple dimensions, all of which are relevant to the process of developing a learning identity. They also enable the student to become aware of and appropriate what is valuable, as well as translate onto the core values promoted by learning communities. Being aware of one's worth is necessary for becoming a learner and discovering and connecting with what is valuable (Crick & Wilson, 2005). Moreover, Genelza (2023) stressed that instructors and the educational setting need to be aware of students' strengths and weaknesses for them to comprehend an individualized learning area.

5. Implications for the practice

The findings are significant for students in their future academic research, for teachers to understand their students' needs, for administrators on how they can improve their services, and for stakeholders in developing and supporting programs to counteract the changes brought about by online classes. Since the AB English Language students are required to go through Foreign Language courses, this study might serve as their basis if they ever plan to conduct their academic research related to foreign language learning.

In addition, they can make their coping mechanisms when dealing with foreign language courses online in the future. As to the teachers facilitating their students' learning objectives, this study might serve as a guide for them to effectively impart the knowledge and adjust their conduct based on students' preferences since blended learning is still being used. The findings could also be utilized by the administrators to improve the support that they can offer to their current and future stakeholders, who will impart as well on developing the programs.

6. Implication for future research

This research focused on AB English students at the UM Tagum College who experienced online foreign language learning during the pandemic in the said school, so future researchers may listen to the voices of other students in the same situation from different locales. Moreover, the researchers only aimed at the impact of online classes on the language acquisition of the learners, so it is recommended that other researchers focus on different aspects such as its impact on vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, sentence structure, and many others.

7. Conclusion

Online classes have advantages and drawbacks in foreign language acquisition. The researchers concluded that the participants were highly likely impacted negatively as they found out that all of the participants had not fully acquired the foreign language they were learning. Although some participants could pronounce essential words of Nihongo and Mandarin, they could not construct sentences, pronounce uncommon words, write characters, identify sentence structures, and use what they have learned in real life. The findings revealed that while virtual classes have a variety of tools designed to provide learners with compelling content, reinforcement, interaction, and real-time feedback during online sessions, comparing their effectiveness to that of traditional classes is frequently tricky, particularly when it comes to language learning, as the latter requires comprehensible environment input, face-to-face interaction, and constructive criticism to improve the learning process. Having these things analyzed helped to lay the groundwork for effective language learning through online instruction. Certain limitations also emerged during the interview, and these are some circumstances over which the researchers have no control. Researchers interviewed on an online platform faced issues such as slow internet connection, background noise and distractions, lack of motivation, visual cues, reduced attention, and difficulty verifying identity.

8. Funding

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