

Students' Problems in Learning Online during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, online learning is popular in many covid 19 - infected areas because covid 19 has emerged in recent years. The purpose of this research is to look into the difficulties that students faced when learning online. Thirty students from different universities in Mekong Delta took part in the interviews via Google Form. The results showed that online learning presents numerous challenges to students. The most significant challenges they faced were doing group work, unstable network connection and lack of study materials. Based on these typical difficulties, the researchers provided some learning and teaching methods to make online learning more effective.

Keyword: *Covid-19 epidemic, Problems in learning online, Online learning difficulties*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the Covid 19 epidemic is raging in most of the world, making it impossible for students to attend school and study as they once did. Online learning has been implemented and is also the most effective method for students to keep up with the curriculum; however, because online learning has only been implemented in recent years, students are not accustomed to this new learning method and face numerous difficulties when learning online. The purpose of this research is to look into the difficulties that students at universities in the Mekong Delta face when learning online.

Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following question:

What are the difficulties that the students at universities in Mekong Delta face when learning online?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of online learning

Online learning is a method of education that is also called E-learning. Students learn using electronic technology and media in a totally virtual environment. Use electronic lectures and essential software so that lecturers can send visuals and audio, as well as ask questions and solve problems for students to learn online. According to Guri-Rosenblit (2005), online learning is the use of electronic media for a variety of learning purposes that range from add-on functions in conventional classrooms to full substitution for the face-to-face meetings by online encounters. It can also be used to replace a traditional lesson with an online meeting. Desmond Keegan (1995, pg. 7) gives the most thorough definition. He says that “*distance education and training result from the technological separation of teacher and learner which frees the student from the necessity of traveling to a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained*”. It represents the transfer and sharing of knowledge between teachers and learners, and removes the limitations of time and space.

2.2 Students' difficulty in learning online

Technical difficulty

For online students, a reliable internet connection is the key because the internet is a very important and necessary factor for students in online learning. The student need to have a stable internet connection so they can access the classroom. As a result, online learning can affect the psychology of learners when the connection is unstable, the connection is poor, the machine touches the circuit, or the keyboard and mouse do not work, cannot turn on the camera in the previous presentations in class, and the microphone can't pick up the voice when giving speeches, suggestions, etc., so it's easy to create boredom and lack of concentration in learning.

Difficulty with adaptability

Switching from traditional classroom and face-to-face instructor training to computer-based training in a virtual classroom makes the learning experience entirely different for students. Instead of the traditional way of learning by passive listening and taking notes in notebooks, it is now replaced by discussions, online classrooms or meetings, taking time to get acquainted and update information through the school's system, submitting assignments, taking online tests, editing and doing homework through Word, Powerpoint, etc. This is a new learning model with time constraints and lack of classroom structure, which can present unexpected challenges. Students with a "traditional" mindset find it difficult to adapt. However, you need to accept the new learning situation with a ready, happy, and enthusiastic attitude to get a good study result.

Difficulty in communicating with the teachers

When learning online, the interaction between teachers and students is very important. Exchanging online lessons will make it difficult to convey knowledge as effectively as when learning in person in class. Especially the practical lessons. Besides, many students speaking at the same time will lead to a disturbance in the class. Especially, for foreign language classes, online learning will become more difficult because poor internet connection will lead to audio problems that can hardly hear what the teacher says.

Difficulty in doing group work

Besides the difficulty of communicating with teachers, it is also difficult to do when group work is online. Students cannot discuss face-to-face when teachers assign group assignments during online lessons. Nowadays, with the development of technology, working online is quite popular. Besides the benefits, working remotely is one of the most ineffective ways of teamwork. This is one of the typical difficulties of teamwork in the technology age. Even if you can see each other face to face, face-to-face and face-to-face interaction is always more effective than meeting each other on screen. Sometimes, it is this that will make the interaction and exchange less meaningful. The effectiveness will decrease markedly over time. And at some point, a meeting is just a formality. Meanwhile, face-to-face meeting helps us to capture and receive signals from others through more methods, from words, eyes and gestures. This helps us understand each other better and work together much better.

2.3 Previous studies

Phan (2020) conducted a study to find out the feelings of students in Ho Chi Minh City about online learning. The research was carried out by online survey method using LMS (learning management system). The number of survey participants totaled 2225 students. Research results show that the majority of students clearly state the difficulties they face when learning online, some feedback gives suggestions to improve the system, and etc, and this study also reported that the number of students having difficulty with the internet is quite high, the connection is unstable, the power is out, the connection speed is poor. These are the main reasons why online learning becomes difficult and also the reason why many students lose attendance marks. In addition, students also feel that online learning is ineffective and not easy to absorb because they have not yet adapted to the new way of learning and are not used to self-study.

Hoang (2021) carried out research on online learning experience at RMIT and University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City. The research paper wants to focus on many benefits of online learning, and in the future will attract more students interested in online learning. By means of focus group interviews with a total of 20 undergraduate students, the study explored students' experiences and views on online learning, as well as limitations that need to be overcome in the future. The result of the research is that students will find it difficult to work in groups because they do not know each other first, which will create a fear of teamwork and they delve deeper into tools and techniques to make online learning less daunting.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

In this study, the participants were 30 students from different universities in Mekong Delta. Their ages ranged from 20 to 22. Most of them had learnt online at home during the time of Covid-19 epidemic.

3.2 Instrument

To collect the information for this study, we interviewed the students with 6 questions about difficulties in online learning. The purpose of the interview was to discuss students' feelings when studying online, technical difficulties they had when learning online, and how the online environment caused difficulties for them in study.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Students' attitudes towards learning online

In general, most of the students found it difficult and inconvenient to study online. With the subjects that were difficult to study, it made them unable to keep up and limits their understanding.

"I feel that learning online will be difficult because I don't bring my laptop home and necessary study materials" (Male, English Translation)

"Online learning gives me a lot of free time because I don't have to go to school and can be more comfortable to listen to lectures. However, it is also not a good thing because it is very difficult for me to follow the confusing specialized lessons".(Male, English Translation)

However, there was one student who found this method of learning enjoyable. She was happy when staying with their family instead of being bored when staying at the boarding-house. She said:

"At first, I was happy to be back with my family, now I'm also happy because I don't have to spend money on food, accommodation, and car rides". (Female, English Translation)

Although the students had difficulties, all of them admitted that they will try to improve and adapt themselves to this teaching and learning method.

"No problem" (Male, English Translation)

"For me, it's a little bit, but even so, I have to improve myself. In the future, I think that I may continue to study online" (Female, English Translation)

4.2 Students' difficulties in learning online

After collecting the interview data from the participants, the researchers classified them into groups according to the types of difficulty they faced.

Students' technical difficulties

There were twenty-five students who had technical problems. Their Internet connection was too weak while taking the test, made them worry about their study results and they were often unable to access the class while in the learning process.

"Learning online doesn't cause much difficulty for me, but the difficulty I face is taking exams or midterms online due to unnecessary technical errors in the network or even due to computer crashes". (Male, English Translation)

"I think it will be difficult during the learning process I often get thrown out and have a hard time rejoining class". (Female, English Translation)

Moreover, downloading too many documents also affected their phones.

"Yes, because I have to download a lot of documents". (Female, English Translation)

Students' difficulties in communicating with the teachers

There were twenty students who said that online learning was very difficult in terms of teachers. They also recognized that the teachers themselves had difficulty in teaching; as a result, students' absorption was limited.

"In my opinion, learning online is already difficult because it is difficult for lecturers to convey knowledge as well as for students to acquire that knowledge." (Male, English Translation)

In contrast, there were five students who thought that the teacher's teaching method to convey information to students through online learning was very effective. They thought that teachers were very enthusiastic and it was easy for them to understand the lesson. Besides, they could review the lesson via audio file.

"Yes, I have". (Male, English Translation)

"Yes. For my school, the teachers are very enthusiastic, easy to understand and have recording files for students to review". (Female, English Translation)

Students' difficulties in exchanging ideas

In general, nineteen students thought that it was very convenient to contribute and exchange ideas in online learning. Besides, with just a simple action of turning the microphone on, they were able to confidently ask questions or state their opinions in class.

"I find this very convenient, for myself, I can confidently ask questions so that the lecturer can answer all my questions". (Male, English Translation)

"Yes. Just turn on the mic and say". (Female, English Translation)

However, there were eleven students who said that they sometimes had difficulty in contributing and exchanging ideas when learning online.

"Sometimes I have a hard time". (Male, English Translation)

Students' difficulties in doing group work

Twenty-two students had difficulty in working in groups when studying online. They felt that learning online made them become limited in terms of interaction, especially during presentations.

"Yes, it's harder to interact online". (Male, English Translation)

"I also have some difficulties especially when giving presentations". (Female, English Translation).

However, the other students thought that it was not difficult to working in groups online. Moreover, online teamwork also helped them saved more time.

"No problem". (Male, English Translation)

"No, because online group work can video call to exchange and save more time. (Female, English Translation).

5. CONCLUSION, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

After conducting this research by analyzing the collected data, the researcher finally figured out the difficulties in online learning of the students at universities. In general, their difficulties consisted of technical difficulty, difficulty communicating with the teacher, difficulty exchanging and contributing ideas, and difficulty in doing group work.

5.2 Pedagogical implications

Through the research results, the researcher found that online learning is not easy for the students. Therefore, the researcher would like to suggest some implications for teaching and learning. For teaching, the teachers need to teach the lessons in more details so that students can better understand the lessons and the instruction better. Moreover, they should guide the students how to work in group when learning online. For learning, the students need to be more attentive and take notes carefully. In addition, the members in a team should support each other to overcome the obstacles they must face in learning online.

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