International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Higher Education

Journal Homepage: https://ijmshe.com/index.php/pub/index

Research Article

Examining The English Language Learning Practices Of Distance Education Learners

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Article Info

A b s t r a c t

This study sought to determine the experiences of English language learners on distance learning education, the coping mechanisms they employ on encountered difficulties, and insights can be gained from the results of the study. The study used qualitative and utilized a descriptive research design wherein the data is collected in the form of words rather than number. The study used interview and a validated interview guide questionnaire to gather data. The respondents of this study were English major learners who developed learning practices during distance learning in University of Mindanao-Matina, Panabo, and Tagum. Based on the outcome of the study, English major learners developed their learning practices and coping mechanisms despite of all the problem they faced during distance education.

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1. Introduction

Reading is a vital life skill that underpins academic success and effective societal participation. Despite its importance, reading practices and competencies among pupils in the Philippines have been affected in the context of distance education, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. Students often struggle with proficiency due to weak foundational skills and the challenges unique to online learning environments (Qadir & Al-Fuqaha, 2020; Tao & Gao, 2022; Zou et al., 2021). Technical difficulties, limited learner participation, and suboptimal online experiences further exacerbate these issues, highlighting the need for more effective strategies to address these gaps.

Language learning is an active process that begins at birth and continues throughout life. Learners acquire language as they use it to communicate thoughts, feelings, and experiences, establish relationships, and make sense of the world. This process can be especially complex in the context of distance education, where students may not receive the same level of interaction and immersion as in traditional classrooms. Nonetheless, research suggests that early literacy experiences at home significantly enhance vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, laying a solid foundation for future language acquisition (De Gracia et al., 2023; Chen, 2024; Teale et al., 2020)

Various studies have explored the challenges encountered by teachers and learners in the implementation of distance education. However, few have examined the specific English language learning practices of distance education students, especially in the Philippines. This gap underscores the need for focused research to identify the practices and strategies that promote language learning success in virtual settings. Shamir-Inbal & Blau (2021) Stites et al. (2021), and Sutarto et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of parental and teacher support in fostering students' interest in reading and literacy development, even within the constraints of online learning environments.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of English language learners in distance education, focusing on their reading practices, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the challenges they encounter. By exploring these aspects, the study aimed to shed light on the factors influencing language learning outcomes and offer actionable recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of distance education. Specifically, it sought to investigate the socio-demographic characteristics, reading habits, and home environments of students, while also examining how these variables intersect to shape their reading competencies.

The respondents of this study were English language learners enrolled in the University of Mindanao's campuses in Matina, Panabo, and Tagum. A qualitative research design was employed, involving interviews with 12 participants—four from each campus. These participants were selected to provide a diverse perspective on the experiences and challenges faced by distance learners in mastering English language skills. The findings revealed insights into the reading behaviors and environmental factors influencing literacy development, offering practical guidance for teachers, parents, and future researchers to address the unique demands of distance education.

2. Materials and Methods

The researcher adopted a qualitative design to examine individuals, groups, communities, or institutions relevant to the study. This approach utilized multiple data sources, such as observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documents, ensuring that all participants shared

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a unifying factor directly or indirectly connected to the research question. After collecting data, the researcher analyzed it to identify common themes and patterns. The study was conducted at the University of Mindanao campuses in Matina, Panabo, and Tagum, with English language learners as the respondents. The researcher primarily sought to investigate English language learning practices in the context of distance education, focusing on the obstacles students encountered and the strategies they employed to overcome them. Using a qualitative methodology and a validated interview guide questionnaire, the researcher collected, organized, and analyzed data to provide a thorough description of the phenomenon.

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to select participants from the English major students enrolled at UM-Matina, UM-Panabo, and UM-Tagum. The selection process involved the researcher's assessment and recommendations from the institution's head to ensure diverse representation and enhance the study's validity. Data were collected through a validated interview guide questionnaire that included questions on the challenges encountered during distance learning and the coping strategies used by the participants. This instrument underwent validation to ensure its reliability and relevance to the research objectives.

Data collection followed a systematic process. The researcher secured permission to conduct the study by sending letters to the adviser and the deans of UM-Matina, UM-Panabo, and UM-Tagum. After receiving approval, the researcher identified and contacted students enrolled in English major courses to confirm their willingness to participate. Interviews were then scheduled at mutually convenient times, considering the availability of the participants. The interviews were conducted in a structured manner using a validated interview guide and were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Through this process, the researcher gathered comprehensive responses about participants' experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms related to distance learning.

The researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis, which involved reading the transcripts, identifying patterns, and deriving themes relevant to the study. The data were organized into categories based on similarities, and recurring themes were refined iteratively to ensure they captured the essence of the participants' shared experiences and perspectives. This method provided a detailed understanding of the difficulties faced by students in distance learning and the strategies they employed to address these challenges. To ensure the study's validity, the researcher applied Guba and Lincoln's (1985) concept of trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The validated questionnaire ensured the reliability of the data, reflecting the participants' responses without manipulation and providing a strong foundation for the study's findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The English Language Learner's Experiences in Distance Education

Table 1.a. presents the major themes and core ideas on the experiences of English language learners. The theme requiring technological devices, good connectivity, and educational application software, organizing needed materials before online classes, preparing physical appearance for class, using learning styles and habit, developing independent learning, learning by own pace, engaging in group study, boosting confidence, multitasking, developing time management on distance learning education.

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Table 1.a. Experiences of the English language learners

Major Theme	Core Ideas
Requiring technological devices connectivity, and educational application software	- Using electronic devices like good phones, tablets, and laptops - Having stable internet and data connection - Downloading online platforms like Google meet, Discord, and Messenger
Organizing needed materials before online classes	Preparing things like notebook, table, and pen
Preparing physical appearance for class	Looking presentable before the class starts
Using learning styles and habits	Studying previous lesson Reading advance Checking reviewers and to-do list Downloading materials needed
Developing Independent Learning	Answering and discussing own questions Discovering own way of preferences and style of learning Generating ideas while self-learning
Learning by own pace	Owning the time Sufficient time to think
Engaging in Group Study	Studying is a way of bonding with friends Being with a group means having a companion
Boosting Confidence	Able to survive online classes Passing the activities on time Increasing grades (transition from low to high)
Multi-tasking	Eating while reviewing notes Being present in class while studying for the next subject
Developing Time Management	Doing the responsibility as a child and as a student Weighing and prioritizing tasks

3.2 Learners' Challenges During Distance Learning

Table 1.b. presents the major themes and core ideas about learners' challenges during distance learning. The theme requires a poor internet connection and relies on connectivity, health-related issues, and difficulty in self-learning through distance learning education.

Table 1.b. Learners' challenges during distance learning

Major Theme	Core Ideas
Poor Internet Connection	In a place without stable connection Bombarded with stuffs to do because of poor connection An electric outage means having no internet connection
Relies on Connectivity	Academic performance is dependent in internet connectivity Unable to submit activities on time

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Health-Related Issue	Gadgets causes eye damage Loaded activities that causes mental breakdown
Difficulty in Self Learning	Hard to Comprehend No companion Surrounded by distractions

3.3 Coping Mechanism They Employ During Distance Learning

Table 2 presents the major themes and core ideas on the Learners' challenges during distance learning. The theme requires employing self-learning strategies, engaging to self and personal motivation, enjoying mental health break, and intensifying set goals.

Table 2. Coping mechanism they employ during distance learning

Major Theme	Core Ideas
Employing Self-learning Strategies	Learning the usage of technology
	Adopting techniques and strategies
	Setting time in all activities
	Getting to know the easiest ways
	Recording the whole session
	Creating plans
Engaging to Self and Personal Motivation	Thinking positively
	Adopting changes
	Focusing on target goals
Enjoying Mental Health Break	Having time to rest
	Setting own timeline
	Playing relaxation music
	Expressing feelings through writing
Intensifying Set Goals	Just go and never give up
	Always think positive
	Hard work pays it all

3.4 Development of Distance Learning

When distance learning does not exist, learners had their normal life, wherein they attend school, have their face-to-face classes, and can talk and see their classmates and teachers personally and not virtually. They can also easily ask their teacher or professor some questions after discussion and not wait for days before their questions are answered.

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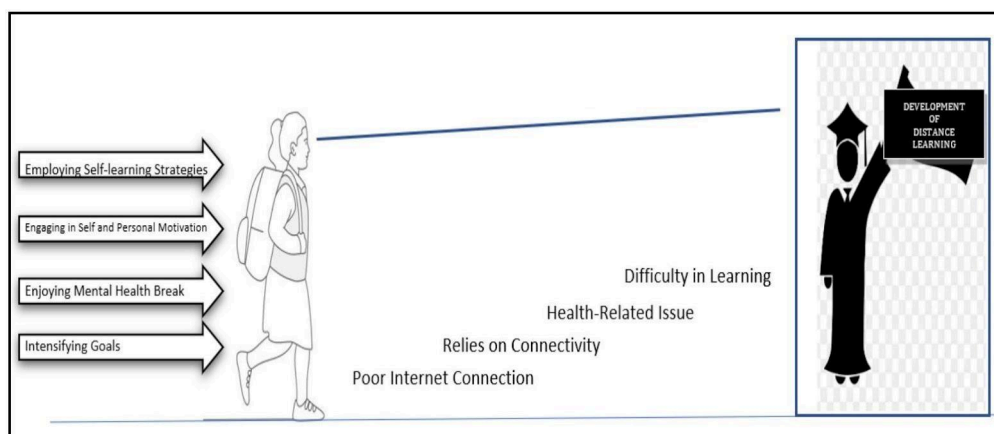[*]Corresponding Email: cmmolina@usm.edu.ph

Figure 1. Development of Distance Learning

4. Discussion

This study examined the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms employed by English language learners during distance education. It focused on themes such as the use of technology, study habits, independent learning, and coping mechanisms, revealing the interplay of these factors in shaping the learners' academic performance and overall well-being (Al-Kumaim et al., 2021; Lindsay et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

English language learners highlighted several practices that facilitated their learning during distance education. To ensure effective participation, learners needed access to technological devices, stable internet connections, and educational application software. For instance, participants mentioned using devices such as laptops and smartphones, supported by stable internet and applications like Google Meet and Zoom. Preparing fully charged devices and backup data were emphasized as critical strategies to avoid interruptions (Agormedah et al., 2020; Basar et al., 2021; Haleem et al., 2022).Learners also organized study materials and maintained their physical appearance for online classes. Participants reported routines such as preparing notebooks

and wearing formal attire to stay focused and presentable during classes. Furthermore, learners developed independent study habits, such as taking notes, researching online, and experimenting with effective techniques for understanding lessons. Independent learning was seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for personal growth. Distance learning allowed learners to study at their preferred times and locations, offering flexibility to balance academic and family responsibilities. For example, some participants appreciated the opportunity to study in comfortable settings like their homes (Berry & Hughes, 2020; Budhrani et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020).

The study identified several challenges faced by learners during online education. Inadequate access to high-speed internet significantly hindered participation. Weak signals often led to missed classes, incomplete assignments, and disrupted assessments, impacting academic performance. Prolonged screen time caused eye strain, headaches, and other physical discomforts. Additionally, learners reported mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and stress due to overwhelming workloads and deadlines. The lack of direct

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teacher interaction made it hard for some learners to comprehend lessons fully. Environmental distractions further compounded these difficulties, especially for those needing structured guidance (Balanga & Cabuquin, 2024; Edwards, 2021; Yan & Pourdavood, 2024).

Learners employed various strategies to manage the demands of distance education. Students adjusted to online education by organizing materials, creating study routines, and employing effective time management techniques (Biwer et al., 2021; Paliwal & Singh, 2021; Wolters & Brady, 2021). Participants emphasized the importance of self-motivation and positivity in overcoming challenges. Setting personal goals and maintaining a determined mindset helped them navigate difficulties. Taking breaks was a crucial coping mechanism to manage stress and regain focus. Learners highlighted the importance of prioritizing their health alongside academic responsibilities. Establishing clear objectives and working towards them systematically provided a sense of purpose and direction, motivating learners to persevere despite challenges (Dörnyei & Henry, 2022; Philippakos, 2020; Wulantari et al., 2023).

5. Conclusions

English language learning practices in distance education require access to technological devices, reliable internet connectivity, and appropriate educational application software. Preparation is essential, including organizing necessary materials before online classes, ensuring physical readiness before sessions, and utilizing effective learning styles and habits. Learners must also develop independent learning skills, the ability to learn at their own pace, and engage in group studies to enhance knowledge, perception, and critical thinking. Key skills such as time management, multitasking, and self-confidence are vital for success in this setting. Time management is particularly significant, as learners juggle quizzes, projects, exams, and household responsibilities. Many

The study demonstrated that distance education requires learners to develop digital literacy, organizational skills, and resilience. Although socio-demographic factors like internet access and living environments posed significant challenges, the findings highlighted the critical role of personal motivation, parental support, and adaptive strategies in enhancing learning outcomes (Alamri et al., 2020; Major et al., 2021; Manca & Delfino, 2021).The need for institutions to provide resources and emotional support to learners was also emphasized.

While distance learning offers flexibility, it also presents unique challenges that affect learners' academic performance and well-being. This study underscores the importance of fostering supportive environments, improving technological infrastructure, and encouraging self-motivation to help learners succeed. Ultimately, the ability to adapt and develop coping mechanisms plays a vital role in navigating the complexities of distance education (Bozkurt et al., 2020; De Villa & Manalo, 2020; Green et al., 2020)

learners benefit from group work, which broadens their understanding and perspectives. However, common challenges include poor internet connectivity, health-related issues, and difficulties with self-directed learning. To cope with these challenges, learners often employ strategies such as self-learning, personal motivation, mental health breaks, and goal-setting. Leisure activities also play a crucial role in helping learners relax and manage stress, which ultimately improves their academic performance and results.

With the rapid development of technology, distance learning has become increasingly popular. Some argue that this trend could lead to the eventual decline of traditional schools.

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However, learners without internet access at home face significant barriers, including challenges with completing assignments and communicating with teachers and classmates. Additionally, appropriate dress and preparation for virtual classes are important to maintain a conducive learning environment. Students are expected to review lessons and be prepared for class discussions. The heavy workload, combined with family responsibilities, often leads to stress and mental health challenges among learners. Managing these issues is crucial for academic success. Many learners adopt effective time management strategies, such as creating daily activity lists, to balance their responsibilities. These practices not only enhance their academic performance but also cultivate a positive outlook toward achieving their goals.

Based on the findings and analysis, several recommendations are made. Learners should prioritize time management and develop multitasking skills to prepare for future professional environments where these abilities are essential. They should also recognize the importance of technology in education and integrate it into their learning practices, even in face-to-face classes. Future researchers could explore the differences in learning practices between distance education and face-to-face classes, as well as evaluate their impact on academic performance. By addressing these areas, learners and educators can enhance the effectiveness of distance learning and support the overall development of students.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

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